Scott C. Esplin

6

Wilford Woodruff: A Founding Father of the Mormon Academies

The journals of Wilford Woodruff provide a unique glimpse into the life and ministry of the fourth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Elder Matthias F. Cowley wrote that, as a historian, Woodruff's "frankness of his expressions, his care for details, and his conscientious regard for the truth made him, perhaps, the best chronicler of events in all the history of the Church."[1] Especially interesting are the annual synopses he created, summarizing the important events of his life. The synopsis for 1895 provides, in Woodruff's own words, a summary of his significant accomplishments:

> From the beginning of my ministry in 1834 until the close of 1895 I have traveled in all 172,369 miles; held 7,655 meetings;

Scott C. Esplin is an assistant professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University

> preached 3,526 discourses; organized 51 branches of the Church and 77 preaching places; my journeys cover England, Scotland, Wales, and 23 states and 5 territories of the Union. My life abounds in incidents which to me surely indicate the direct interposition of God whom I firmly believe has guided my every step. On 27 distinct occasions I have been saved from dangers which threatened my life. I am the father of 17 sons and 16 daughters. I have a posterity of 100 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren.[2]

From the record, it is evident that President Woodruff recognized God's hand in his life and valued both the work of the Restoration and the importance of family.

However, as Elder Cowley observed, "[Wilford Woodruff's] journal reveals not so much what he himself was thinking about the events concerning which he wrote as what others thought about them. In that respect they reveal wonderfully the spirit of the times in which he lived."[3] Again, in this regard, the 1895 synopsis offers insight into what accomplishments President Woodruff and his nineteenth-century counterparts considered important. Emphasizing both public and private service, Woodruff himself reflected, "For twenty-one years I was a member of the legislative assembly of the Territory of Utah. In 1875 I was appointed historian and general recorder of the Church and held that position until 1889. On the completion of the Temple at St. George in 1877, I was appointed its President by Brigham Young. Upon the accession of President Taylor, I became President of the Twelve Apostles; and in April 1889, I was sustained at the general conference as President of the Church."[4]

Most students of Church history readily associate these historical details with the life of President Woodruff. However,

concluding the list of significant accomplishments, Woodruff added, "By my direction the General Church Board of Education was founded in 1888 to direct the Church system of academies, high schools, and colleges, which has resulted in a great perfection of the organization."[5] What of this additional responsibility? What role did he play in the founding of Church education? How should his accomplishments be viewed in conjunction with the more familiar educational roles played by Brigham Young, Karl G. Maeser, and others? In short, how could President Woodruff claim to be one of the founding fathers of Latter-day Saint education?

WILFORD WOODRUFF AS STUDENT

Wilford Woodruff's preparation for organizing the Church school system stems from his own early educational background. A native of Connecticut, he began his common schooling in the town of Northington before moving with his family to Farmington. In Farmington, he continued in common school until the age of fourteen, reaching the modern equivalent of eighth grade. His studies included grammar, spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and the Bible.

Following the completion of common school, Wilford, together with his siblings Thompson, Philo, and Eunice, continued their schooling at the Farmington Academy. The school was established in 1815 when, among others, Wilford's uncle Ozem signed on as one of the incorporators. Forerunner to the Utah model that Woodruff would later champion, the Farmington Academy was an institution supported by a private endowment and tuition that provided advanced education for children from Farmington and the surrounding communities. Course offerings included studies

in chemistry, mineralogy, algebra, geometry, natural philosophy, rhetoric, history, surveying, Latin, and Greek. Wilford studied at the academy sporadically for four years, ending his formal schooling at age eighteen. Of Wilford's training, biographer Thomas G. Alexander observed that his "uncommon formal education for a nineteenth-century youth when a few years was the norm . . . made [Wilford] one of the best educated of nineteenth-century Mormon leaders and better educated than any nineteenth-century LDS church president except Lorenzo Snow, who had attended Oberlin College."[6]

Though his formal schooling ended at eighteen, Woodruff continued to value education. Foreshadowing his own desire to educate Mormon youth, he later recalled, "Character principles & sentiments which are formed from age of eighteen to twenty-five are generally so deeply planted in the heart, that they controll their future lives & remain with them through life whether they be good or evil."[7] Indeed, a personal desire to be educated continued with him later in life, as one biographer observed during Woodruff's service as president of the Eastern States Mission in the late 1840s:

> His belief in progress and education led him to examine, read, and collect a number of books, to attend a variety of lectures, and to visit prominent sites. He commented favorably on the introduction of the blackboard, approved new plans for school construction, and applauded the addition of recreational facilities (he called them "pleasure grounds") to the schools. He commented on the latest textbooks and forwarded a selection to Salt Lake. He read and reflected positively on current self-help books such as William A. Alcott's *The Young Man's Guide* and Jason Whitman's *The Young Lady's Aid*. On

the other hand he expressed predictable dislike for spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis's *Revelation*.[8]

An interest in education even followed him home from the mission field. On the date of his arrival home, November 27, 1850, the *Deseret News* reported he returned "with nearly two tons of school books."[9]

Back in Salt Lake City, Woodruff continued his interest in education. As a prominent Church leader, he was appointed to the board of regents for the University of Deseret and served in the territorial legislature, where he championed education. Of these involvements, Alexander observed, "Woodruff seems to have been largely uninterested in most of the proposals before the legislature except education which became one of his consuming interests during the 1850s. In the 1854–55 legislature, Woodruff and Orson Pratt served as the Council's committee on education, and Woodruff gave a number of talks promoting public schools."[10] Charged with overseeing education because of his assignment on the board of regents, Woodruff recorded the attendance rates and number of schools in central and southern Utah in 1855.[11]

While observing schools throughout the territory with Brigham Young, Woodruff also took advantage of speaking opportunities to encourage education. His journal entry for January 24, 1854, records, "I spent the day at home with my children & in the evening I delivered a lecture upon the subject of education in the school house of the 19th ward."[12] Later the same year, he delivered addresses on education to the thirteenth and seventeenth wards.[13] On December 19, 1854, Woodruff recorded, "I spent this day in the Legislature And at night I delivered a lecture to some 60 young men who had assembled at the 16[th] ward for the purpose of forming [a] Philosophical society. I spoke upon

the subject of Education. The meeting was in the school house. I felt the importance of this subject."[14]

While encouraging members throughout the Church regarding education, Woodruff also looked after his own family's scholastic pursuits. An involved parent, he reported in his journal on February 2, 1854, "I spent the day in school with my Children."[15] Woodruff also participated in home schooling, as recorded on January 21, 1854: "I commenced a school this morning in my family with my own children."[16] Similar entries follow throughout the year, including one where he comments, "I spent the time in school with my children. I attended meeting in the 14[th] ward with the Children on the 8th & had a good time. We are now holding meetings in the different wards through the city with the Children. We get all the children over 8 years of age together & learn them to pray & speak of the things of God and it is having a good influence."[17] Summarizing his feelings on the involvement of parents in education, Woodruff concluded, "Their is a great responsibility resting upon the parents towards their Children."[18]

Woodruff's educational interests during the middle of the nineteenth century expanded beyond support of formal public education and home schooling. Like others of his time, he pursued a form of self-education. By 1854 Wilford was a member of a library association in Salt Lake and had begun reading the writings of Benjamin Franklin. In early 1855, he took lessons on English grammar and Spanish. These intellectual pursuits led Woodruff to a formal association with others who shared his interests. On December 19, 1854, he met with other interested intellectuals to form a philosophical society, which they later named the Universal Scientific Society—an organization of eighty men and one woman, interested in "every law, truth, and principle belonging to art, science, or any subject that might benefit God, angels, or

men."[19] Woodruff also served as the society's president. Evidence of the broad scope of the society, lecturers, and subjects included:

> George D. Watt and [Wilford] Woodruff on the Deseret alphabet; John Hyde on natural philosophy; George A. Smith on chopping wood and Saracen history; William W. Phelps on the ten tribes of Israel; John Lyon on poetry; Thomas Hawkins on conserving natural resources; David Candland on public opinion, determining personal character through various methods including phrenology, and the Crimean War; Jonathan Grimshaw on music; Darwin Richardson and William France on genetics; Gilbert Clements on disciplining the mind; Orson Pratt on the planets; Almon W. Babbitt on American government; [Wilford] Woodruff on home manufacture and horticulture; and William Paul and Brigham Young on architecture.[20]

Woodruff's other associations included serving as director of the Deseret Theological Institute and assistant reporter for the Deseret Typographical Society. His interests also expanded into the arts and humanities as he attended meetings of the Polysophical Society during the mid-1850s. He also helped organize the Horticultural Society of Utah, serving as its president while emphasizing agricultural developments throughout the territory. These efforts led to association with horticulturalists across the country and, by one account, "seventy-one different kinds of apples together with a variety of apricots, peaches, grapes, and currants growing in his garden on the temple block."[21]

To these temporal pursuits Woodruff added the spiritual, encouraging family and friends to be productive citizens and faithful Saints. This blending of temporal and spiritual matched his philosophy of education:

> Our children should not be neglected; they should receive a proper education in both spiritual and temporal things. That is the best legacy any parents can leave to their children. We should teach them to pray, and instill into their minds while young every correct principle. Ninety-nine out of every hundred children who are taught by their parents the principles of honesty and integrity, truth and virtue, will observe them through life. Such principles will exalt any people or nation who make them the rule of their conduct. Show me a mother who prays, who has passed through the trials of life by prayer, who has trusted in the Lord God of Israel in her trials and difficulties, and her children will follow in the same path. These things will not forsake them when they come to act in the kingdom of God.[22]

Indeed, serving in the kingdom of God seems to be the end goal of education for Wilford Woodruff. He concluded, "Our children should be prepared to build up the kingdom of God. Then qualify them in the days of childhood for the great duties they will be called upon to perform."[23]

Wilford Woodruff as Educational Founder

Education, for President Woodruff, was simply a component of the larger kingdom of God, for which everything good contributed to its advancement. Elder Cowley observed:

> The spirit of Wilford Woodruff was pre-eminently missionary in every aspect of his life. If he raised fruit, it was in fulfillment of a mission to promote an industry. When he sat in the legislative halls, he regarded his work as a grand mission for the establishment and spread of the principles of civil government.

> It all made him an enthusiastic worker. If he farmed, he did it as much to teach others how to farm as to obtain a livelihood from it. With him, all life and labor was a mission. It was all in the spirit of a teacher and he was conscientious in the extreme about what and how he would teach.[24]

Thomas Alexander summarized this expanded spiritual worldview: "Woodruff embraced the belief that God had planted his kingdom both in heaven and on earth, that he guided it through prophecy and revelation, and that those committed to building his kingdom must do so in social, economic, and political life as well as in traditionally religious service and belief."[25] Educating Latter-day Saint youth, in Woodruff's mind, advanced the kingdom of God.

Appreciating Woodruff's educational endeavors first requires understanding the historical context of education in Utah. Before the arrival of the railroad, the LDS Church dominated all aspects of public education. School and ward boundaries overlapped, with the bishop responsible for supervising the school. Ward schools were, in a sense, public because they reinforced the values of the community. However, in nearly every case, these values were also those of the dominant faith.[26] In most cases, Church facilities served the dual function of places for worship on Sunday and schools on weekdays. This overlapping between the secular and the spiritual is evident in the frequent references in Woodruff's journals to his involvement with his children in school. For example, on February 15, 1854, he recorded, "I spent the time in school. Attended the children meeting in the evening. Near one hundred were present & prayed & spoke & sung."[27]

In the 1860s, organization and direction of these "ward" or "public" schools shifted to the cities and counties, with

superintendent elections at the city, county, and ultimately territorial levels. With the arrival of a larger non–Latter-day Saint population in the 1870s, these schools, with Mormon control of curriculum, hiring, and facilities, began to be opposed. An early battle centered on the use of Church buildings for public schools when courts determined that public taxes could not be used for Church-owned property.[28] Likewise, curriculum control was also placed in the hands of elected rather than ecclesiastical officials. An 1866 act of the territorial legislature provided that the territorial and county superintendents must decide which textbooks could be used in schools. Opponents of the Church used the act to press the removal of LDS texts from the curriculum.

During this time period, Church leaders including Wilford Woodruff spoke out strongly against attacks on Mormon curriculum. The conflict intensified when the federal government stepped up efforts to crush Mormon control of Utah, especially President Woodruff's notion of it as the kingdom of God. In 1880, U.S. president Rutherford B. Hayes declared, "The Territory is virtually under the theocratic government of the Mormon Church. . . . To destroy the temporal power of the Mormon Church is the end in view. . . . Laws must be enacted which will take from the Mormon Church its temporal power. Mormonism as a sectarian idea is nothing; but as a system of government it is our duty to deal with it as an enemy to our institutions and its supporters and leaders as criminals."[29] These and other sentiments created the antipolygamy crusade, an effort that negatively impacted education in the territory.

While convenient for generating public support, the antipolygamy battle evidently involved political and economic control as much as it did cohabitation. Territorial chief justice Elliott F. Sandford summarized the concerns with Mormon lifestyle: "We

care nothing for your polygamy. It's a good war-cry and serves our purpose by enlisting sympathy for our cause; but it's a mere bagatelle compared with other issues in the irrepressible conflict between our parties. What we most object to is your unity; your political and commercial solidarity; the obedience you render to your spiritual leaders in temporal affairs. We want you to throw off the yoke of the Priesthood, to do as we do, and be Americans in deed as well as name."[30] Though polygamy was the rallying cry, power was the underlying issue.

In 1882 the federal government attempted to break the grip of Church influence on Utah society by establishing the five-member Utah Commission and placing territorial control in the hands of federally appointed governors and commissioners. The formation of the Utah Commission was followed by the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887, a bid to break the Church of its temporal power. Members were disenfranchised and the Church as a corporation was dissolved. Church property valued at over fifty thousand dollars was confiscated. Proceeds derived from the sale and rent of Church properties were returned to the territory for the benefit of common schools.[31] The act went so far as to abolish the territorial superintendent of district schools. Removing control of the office from the Mormon electorate, federal overseers appointed a commissioner to the position, empowering him to "prohibit the use in any district school of any book of a sectarian character or otherwise unsuitable."[32] For these reasons, antipolygamy legislation and the history of education in Utah are linked. Congressional mandate remade educational administration of territorial schools, restricted sectarian curriculum, and reapportioned local funding, causing Church leaders to respond dramatically.

The Church dug in its heels. Leaders like President John Taylor responded with contempt to the opposition: "We have no

fault to find with our government. We deem it the best in the world. But we have reason to deplore its maladministration. . . . We shall abide all constitutional law, as we have always done." He continued. "But while we are Godfearing and law-abiding, and respect all honorable men and officers, we are no craven serfs, and have not learned to lick the feet of oppressors, nor to bow in base submission to unreasoning clamor. We will contend, inch by inch, legally and constitutionally, for our rights as American citizens . . . and plant ourselves firmly on the sacred guarantees of the Constitution."[33] Ultimately, opposition also included avoiding arrest. Like other prominent Church leaders, President Woodruff went into hiding (in his case, moving south to St. George), and the Church subsequently lost control of public schools.

With the death of President Taylor in 1887, Wilford Woodruff, as President of the Quorum of the Twelve, stepped into the educational conflict in Utah and the Church quickly countered with a plan of its own. At the April 1888 general conference of the Church, the membership sustained the first General Church Board of Education. Woodruff sat as board president, assisted by ecclesiastical and educational leaders Lorenzo Snow, George Q. Cannon, Karl G. Maeser, Horace S. Eldredge, Willard Young, George W. Thatcher, Anthon H. Lund, Amos Howe, James Sharp, and George Reynolds. On June 8, 1888, Woodruff wrote to the presidents of each of the thirty-two stakes in the Church, outlining the intentions of the new board:

> Dear Brethren:
>
> A meeting of the General Board of Education was held today, and the subject of the educational interests of the Latter-day Saints was taken into consideration and discussed

> at some length. . . . It was felt by the Board that, to begin with, there should be one Stake Academy established in each Stake, as soon as practicable. We feel that the time has arrived when the proper education of our children should be taken in hand by us as a people.
>
> Religious training is practically excluded from the District Schools. The perusal of books that we value as divine records is forbidden. Our children, if left to the training they receive in these schools, will grow up entirely ignorant of those principles of salvation for which the Latter-day Saints have made so many sacrifices. To permit this condition of things to exist among us would be criminal.[34]

Response to the call was swift, as boards were organized and academies founded. Within fourteen months, twenty of the twenty-one stakes in Utah complied.[35] By the end of 1891, all but four of the thirty-two stakes in the Church had an operating academy.[36] In some cases, schools began within four months of President Woodruff's call. Academies founded during this initial era of growth included:

Alberta Stake Academy (October 19, 1891)
Bannock Stake Academy (November 22, 1888)
Bear Lake Stake Academy (October 16, 1888)
Beaver Stake Academy (October 29, 1888)
Box Elder Stake Academy (December 29, 1888)
Cassia Stake Academy (December 25, 1888)
Davis Stake Academy (June 28, 1890)
Díaz Academy (September 24, 1891)
Emery Stake Academy (September 15, 1890)
Juab Stake Academy (July 12, 1890)
Juárez Stake Academy (July 12, 1890)

Malad Stake Academy (July 3, 1890)
Maricopa Academy (October 9, 1895)
Millard Stake Academy (October 29, 1888)
Morgan Stake Academy (November 24, 1888)
Oneida Stake Academy (October 29, 1888)
Panguitch Stake Academy (October 30, 1888)
Parowan Stake Academy (April 12, 1890)
Rich County Academy (September 17, 1891)
Sanpete Stake Academy (October 18, 1888)
Sevier Stake Academy (December 12, 1888)
Snowflake Stake Academy (December 25, 1888)
St. George Stake Academy (November 1, 1888)
St. Johns Stake Academy (December 25, 1888)
St. Joseph Stake Academy (February 10, 1891)
Summit Stake Academy (November 19, 1888)
Uintah Stake Academy (December 18, 1888)
Wasatch Academy (October 25, 1890)
Weber Stake Academy (December 18, 1888)

Though President Woodruff called Karl G. Maeser to serve as general superintendent of the Church Schools, Woodruff continued to have an influence on Church academies. Communication was frequently directed to him regarding the appointment of principals and especially in seeking financial support for the endeavor. In some cases, President Woodruff directed board secretary George Reynolds or superintendent Maeser to respond on his behalf. In other matters, however, Woodruff involved himself directly. For example, when the St. George Stake Academy questioned the initial suggestion of Nephi Savage as principal, President Woodruff responded personally to the concern. When asked about a building, he replied:

> Respecting your building further particulars ought to be furnished before we can give you a plan. There should be a definite idea as to the extent of the patronage you expect for the institution, the number of scholars to be accommodated, etc. You mention 200, is this the maximum number that you intend to provide for? What is the character of the land upon which you intend to build? Will it admit of a basement?, etc. Please give all the particulars you can so that an architect can form some idea of what is wanted.[38]

In other correspondence, Woodruff comments on James Talmage's appointment as principal of the Salt Lake Academy, the building of an academy building in St. Johns, Arizona, the establishment of a committee overseeing music instruction in the academies, and the founding of a ladies' department charged with developing "a course of instruction as would assist our lady teachers in the important duties that devolve upon them."[39] From this and other correspondence, it is evident that President Woodruff remained involved in Church school decisions.

Although President Woodruff supported academy efforts, he had to respond negatively to some requests for Church financial assistance because the antipolygamy crusade caused financial difficulties, curtailing the growth of the academy program. Describing the Church's inability to help with building projects, President Woodruff wrote the Tooele Stake Board of Education:

> You doubtless are aware that the Church has found it necessary to surrender a large amount of property to the Receiver, in order to put an end to the unpleasant proceedings that were in progress to secure this property. This leaves us cramped for means, especially as we have very many calls made upon us that are connected with the present attack upon us, and

which call for the defensive operations by us. The same causes of which you speak—the loss of stock by the severity of last winter, and the prospect of light crops through the drought of the present summer—which bear so hard upon the Saints in your Stake, operate in the same manner upon us and our income. The Church feels the stringency of the times, and we do not receive anything like sufficient in the shape of tithing to enable us to meet our current expenses. The Council of the Apostles found it necessary some time since to stop making appropriations for our meeting-houses, placing the applications on file, to come up in their order when our circumstances will be more favorable to consider and grant them. We found ourselves compelled to take this position, because of the lack of funds to meet further appropriations. At the same time there is a feeling of liberality in the breasts of the brethren concerning schools. The cause of education, as is now proposed under the direction of these Boards, is one that lays very near to the hearts of the brethren, and they feel willing to strain a point to render aid, as soon as we can see our way clear to do so.

It may be that you will find public-spirited citizens among yourselves who may be willing to advance funds, upon proper security, to complete your building. If you could do so, it would be much better than to depend upon the Church in the present condition of the Church finances.[40]

Ultimately, both general and local sources of financial aid dried up. Faced with the financial downturns of the early 1890s, Church members found it difficult to send their children to tuition-supported private schools, and public support for Church schools waned. As financial difficulties mounted, Levi Savage's

account of dwindling public support for the St. George Academy seems to typify the entire movement:

> They sayed President Woodruff told them make a preaching turn throug the Stake, and take a vote of the people of the several wards, and thus acertaine whether the people wished to sustain the academy or not. At the close of the meeting Pres. Cannon said we would take a vote of the people if some one would make a motion. There was a hesitancy; Seeing the authorities of the Ward nor any one else was inclined to make the motion, I (Levi Savage) motioned, that the Academy of St. George Stake be sustained. It seemed as tho the vote was megar, not spirited, but there were no opposing votes. . . . I was sorry to see the indifference shown to the Academy.[41]

Eventually, this school closed in 1893 because of financial failure.

The closing of the St. George Stake Academy was emblematic of the other academies attempted in this era. One by one, the schools initiated by President Woodruff closed throughout the mid-1890s. Others limped along, hoping for better times. In 1898, Karl G. Maeser wrote to the Oneida, Bear Lake, Bannock, Cassia, Summit, Uintah, Sanpete, Parowan, and Emery Stake Academy boards, "In consequence of the comparatively small amount placed at the disposal of the General Board of Education for distribution among our church schools, the General Board has found it impossible to make any appropriations for any Stake Academies during the present calendar year. You will please notify your Board of this decision, so that its plans for the ensuing academic year can be shaped accordingly."[42] A year later, board secretary George Reynolds wrote the struggling Weber Stake Academy, "I am sorry I can send you no encouraging word. Nearly all the church schools tell me they will have to

close at the end of the present school year if they do not receive more help. I presume it is certain that the college in this city will close with the present semester, and the institutions in Provo and Logan both talk the same way, if help from some quarter is not obtained."[43] His prediction proved true. Of the nearly thirty academies begun Churchwide between 1888 and 1895, less than half survived the decade.[44] Only six received financial support from the Church during 1899, the first year of President Lorenzo Snow's administration.

Ultimately, only the largest, most established, or most determined of President Woodruff's 1888 academy attempts survived. George Reynolds wrote the stake president in Thatcher, Arizona, summarizing the state of the program: "The appropriation to the General Church Board of Education by the Church for the present calendar year (1899) has already been divided up. I fear it will be a number of years before anything will reach you from that source. So small are the amounts divided that the Colleges at Logan and Salt Lake City both talk of closing, and at the Brigham Young Academy many of the teachers are arranging to work on a missionary basis."[45] Continuing the theme, he wrote leaders in Rexburg, Idaho, about the financial constraints: "At a meeting of the General Church Board of Education held today it was decided that by reason of the present condition of the finances of the church no pecuniary assistance could be rendered the Academy of your Stake during the present calendar year (ending Dec. 31, 1899) and I am free to confess that personally I see very little hope for any financial assistance coming from the general funds of the church for some years to come. Whatever you do educationally for the present will have to be done without any hope of the church being able to relieve you of any financial responsibilities you may incur."[46] By the end of the decade, most of the academies were closed.

THE RELIGION CLASS MOVEMENT

Although the academy system struggled during President Woodruff's later years, a second educational endeavor enjoyed more lasting success. Having established a system of religious and secular instruction for secondary-age students, President Woodruff next turned his attention to the elementary level. Concerned about the lack of religious influence in public primary schools, President Woodruff observed:

> To lessen this great evil, and counteract the tendencies that grow out of a Godless education, the Church schools of the Saints have been established. But while these accomplish great good, the sphere of their usefulness does not cover the entire field. There are many places where Church schools cannot, at present, be established; and also many Saints in those places where such schools exist who, for various reasons, cannot send their children thereto. For these causes we have deemed it prudent to suggest to the various local authorities other measures which, while not occupying the place of the Church schools, will work on the same lines, and aid in the same work in which the Church educational institutions are engaged.[47]

These other measures included appointing a teacher in each ward "to take charge of a school wherein the first principles of the Gospel, Church history and kindred subjects shall be taught."[48] These daily, after-school classes for elementary students became what has been termed the religion class program.

The establishment of the LDS religion class program holds a unique spot in the history of American education, being "America's first experiment in providing separate weekday religious training for public school children. . . . Not until 1906 did other religious groups experiment with such a program."[49] Additionally,

the program was a unique educational success for the Church during the era. While the Church academy system floundered due to financial pressures of the late nineteenth century, the religion class program, using volunteer teachers and vacant public school classrooms, flourished. The movement quickly expanded, growing from an early participation of 19 stakes, 706 officers and teachers, and 14,538 pupils in 1897–98 to its peak of 89 stakes, 4,581 officers and teachers, and 61,131 pupils in 1926–27.[50]

Like stake academies of the era, religion classes received central support and direction from President Woodruff and general Church leadership. Quarterly conferences were required, as was the keeping of minutes, records, and reports, all of which were submitted to Salt Lake City. Licenses to teach in the system were likewise granted by the General Board. Eventually, the Church even published formal readers to be studied in the various grades and supplemented the instruction with monthly columns in the *Juvenile Instructor*, aiding local leaders and informing them of the progress of the program.

In spite of Church support, the religion class organization faced some of the same challenges as the academy program. Though outliving their founder by nearly thirty years, religion classes faced competition from other Church programs. From its inception, the program had been in competition with the Primary organization, which also met on weekday afternoons. Held on different days, the programs were administered by separate boards and staffed by different teachers, but they served the same pupils. Similar conflict existed with the weekend Sunday School program.

In 1929 the Church Board of Education ended the duplication, merging the religion class system with the Primary, the latter becoming the weekday educational administrator of religious

education for elementary students. On May 29, 1929, the First Presidency informed local stakes about the change:

> Please be advised that we have approved the recommendations of the General Church Board of Education that the Primary and Religion Classes of the Church for the children of the elementary grades of the public schools, kindergarten to the sixth grade inclusive, shall be consolidated and the work be carried on under the auspices of the Primary Association which, it has been decided, shall hereafter be known as the Primary-Religion Class of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This organization is given the responsibility of conducting week-day classes in religion for the children of these elementary grades, in general about ages five to twelve inclusive.[51]

Like the Churchwide academy system envisioned by President Woodruff, his after-school religion classes for elementary students were eventually discontinued. Though the two systems met the same fate, the religion class movement was not without its accomplishments. Most significantly, the religion class program served as a forerunner to released-time seminary and institute courses for students Churchwide.

LEGACY OF WILFORD WOODRUFF'S EDUCATIONAL ATTEMPTS

In spite of the apparent failure of the academies and the discontinuance of religion classes, the contribution President Woodruff made to education should not be forgotten. His Church academy efforts left a lasting legacy on education in the region. As financial times improved during Joseph F. Smith's presidency, many

of the Woodruff-era academies reemerged, better positioned to serve the educational needs of Church members. These schools, together with a handful that survived throughout President Woodruff's administration, formed the backbone of the Church educational system for the first three decades of the twentieth century. When the Church finally divested itself of them in the 1920s and 1930s, many survived by being transferred to state hands. Most became public high schools in the Intermountain West. Several former academies, including present-day Brigham Young University, Weber State University, Dixie State College, Snow College, the College of Eastern Arizona, Brigham Young University–Idaho, the LDS Business School, and the Juárez Academy, continue to influence thousands of students today.

Importantly, the organization of education undertaken by President Woodruff also continues to affect the Church worldwide. The Church Board of Education he formed still directs the educational efforts of the Church. Together with the academies and religion classes, the system was a forerunner to the modern Church Educational System, an endeavor that guides the spiritual and secular education of over 700,000 youth.[52]

The emphasis President Woodruff placed on education, gained from his own personal background, maintained Church influence on Latter-day Saint youth during an era of significant transition for the Church. Summarizing that transition, Thomas Alexander wrote:

> A man for his season, Woodruff shepherded Mormonism out of a morass of persecution and isolation. He marked the path which led the Latter-day Saints to come to terms with the separation of the temporal and the spiritual and to acceptance and respectability; and he reclaimed and deepened the

> reservoir of spiritual water that nourished the Saints through trying times. . . . Relatively well-educated, well-read, and well-traveled, Woodruff combined a creative mind, practical inventiveness, and physical vigor with a sense of personal piety unsurpassed by any nineteenth-century Mormon leader. Woodruff blended formally educated but rough-hewn intellectual gifts only slightly less acute than Orson Pratt's with unswerving dedication rivaling Heber C. Kimball's. . . . These qualities facilitated his leadership as he guided Mormonism competently through the transitional experiences of the 1880s and 1890s.[53]

This transition included the establishment and preservation of the Church educational system, for which many of us, including those of us educated or employed by its modern-day successor, are grateful.

NOTES

1. Matthias Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), v.
2. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff*, vi.
3. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff*, v–vi.
4. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff*, vi.
5. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff*, vi.
6. Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 13–14.
7. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 15–16.
8. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 153.
9. *Deseret News*, November 27, 1850, cited in L. E. Young, "Education in Utah," *Improvement Era*, July 1913, 877–94.

10. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 169.
11. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 169.
12. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898 Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983–85), 4:242; January 24, 1854.
13. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 4:295; December 13–15, 17, 1854.
14. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 4:295–96; December 19, 1854.
15. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 4:243; February 2, 1854.
16. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 4:241; January 21, 1854.
17. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 4:249; February 8–11, 1854.
18. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 4:249; February 8–11, 1854.
19. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 170.
20. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 170–71.
21. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 174.
22. G. Homer Durham, ed., *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946), 267–68.
23. Durham, *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, 268.
24. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff*, 364.
25. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, xiii.
26. Frederick S. Buchanan, *Culture Clash and Accommodation: Public Schooling in Salt Lake City, 1890–1994* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1996), 439–40.
27. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 4:249–50, February 15, 1854.
28. Marguerite Cameron, *This Is the Place* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1939), 200.
29. William Henry Smith and Charles Richard Williams, *The Life of Rutherford Birchard Hayes, Nineteenth President of the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 2:225.
30. Cited in Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 182–83.

31. Frederick S. Buchanan, "Education among the Mormons: Brigham Young and the Schools of Utah," *History of Education Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 441.
32. Buchanan, "Education among the Mormons," 441.
33. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 23:65–67.
34. Wilford Woodruff to the Presidency of St. George Stake, June 8, 1888, cited in James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–1971), 3:167–68.
35. John D. Monnett, "The Mormon Church and Its Private School System in Utah: The Emergence of the Academies, 1880–1892" (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1984), 121.
36. Brett Dowdle to Scott C. Esplin, e-mail, June 5, 2008. Research for the *Education in Zion* exhibit (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2008). The four stakes without academies by 1891 were the Kanab, Maricopa, San Juan, and San Luis Stakes. The Maricopa Academy (Mesa, AZ) began in 1895, and the San Luis Academy (Manassa, CO) opened in 1907.
37. William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton, *Readings in L.D.S. Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 3:337–38. Enumerating the total number of stake academies is problematic. Early LDS educational histories, including M. Lynn Bennion's *Mormonism and Education*, list twenty-two. Expanding the number, Berrett and Burton in *Readings in LDS Church History* count thirty-four. Explaining the difference, Berrett and Burton state, "Various historians have listed the Church Academies and the supposed dates of their founding. These lists show certain discrepancies. The differences arise from the fact that some academies, started on a Stake basis, in response to the request of the First Presidency in 1888, did not operate continuously due to lack of funds and proper facilities. Some were revived by direct Church appropriations, while others were wholly discontinued. Only 22 of the academies had school buildings especially erected for school purposes." *Readings in L.D.S. Church History*, 3:336. Berrett and Burton present evidence for

twelve additional schools based on Church correspondence with appointed principals. Recently, researchers at BYU preparing a university exhibit on Church education in 2008 identified as many as fifty-seven schools operated by the Church following President Woodruff's 1888 directive. Thirty-five of these schools were called stake academies. In addition, twenty-two other secondary schools existed, often called seminaries because a corresponding academy already existed in the stake.

38. Wilford Woodruff to James G. Bleak, August 31, 1888, correspondence, St. George Stake Board of Education records, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
39. Wilford Woodruff to Laura Foot, February 10, 1890, correspondence, Church Board of Education letterpress copybooks, Church History Library.
40. Wilford Woodruff to Hugh S. Gowans, August 20, 1888, correspondence, Church Board of Education letterpress copybooks, Church History Library.
41. Levi Savage Diary, September 8, 1891, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
42. Karl G. Maeser to J. E. Hickman, April 5, 1898, correspondence, Church Board of Education letterpress copybooks, Church History Library.
43. George Reynolds to L. F. Moench, March 3, 1899, correspondence, Church Board of Education letterpress copybooks, Church History Library.
44. Berrett and Burton, *Readings in L.D.S. Church History*, 3:337.
45. George Reynolds to Andrew Kimball, March 7, 1899, correspondence, Church Board of Education letterpress copybooks, Church History Library.
46. George Reynolds to Thomas E. Ricks, February 10, 1899, correspondence, Church Board of Education letterpress copybooks, Church History Library.
47. Wilford Woodruff to Stake Presidents, October 25, 1890, cited in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 3:196–97.
48. Wilford Woodruff to Stake Presidents, October 25, 1890, cited in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 3:197.
49. D. Michael Quinn, "Utah's Educational Innovation: LDS Religion Classes, 1890–1929," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Fall 1975): 379, 387.

50. Quinn, "Utah's Educational Innovation," 385.
51. Heber J. Grant, Anthony W. Ivins, and Charles W. Nibley to Presidencies of Stakes, May 29, 1929, cited in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5:267.
52. "Church Educational System Annual Information Update," Church Educational System (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 3.
53. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 331–32.