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Title The Hill Cumorah Pageant: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract Almost every summer since 1935, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has staged a pageant at the Hill Cumorah. This article starts with the history of the pageant from its beginnings in the 1920s as a Cumorah Conference of the Eastern States Mission convened by mission president B. H. Roberts and held at the Smith Family Farm. Details about the pageant's move to the Hill Cumorah as well as scripts, directors, music, costumes, props, set design, lighting, and choreography are included. The author concludes with the details of retiring the original script after 50 years of use and of the challenges of producing and revitalizing the new pageant while maintaining its purpose as a missionary tool.

Mission president B. H. Roberts addresses a group of missionaries on the Hill Cumorah during a "Cumorah Conference" of the Eastern States Mission in the 1920s. Courtesy of Palmyra Bean Packer.

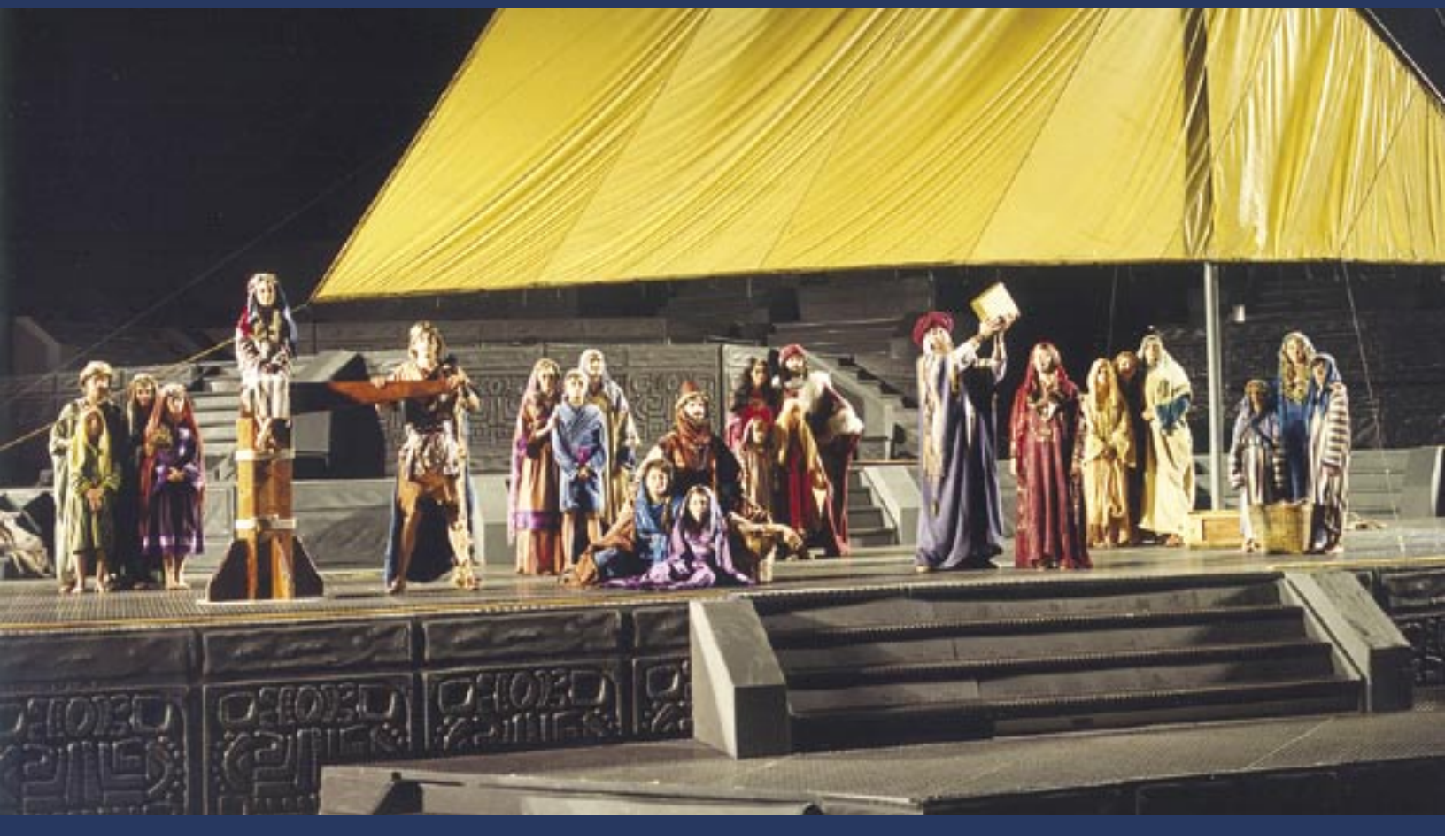
THE HILL CUMORAH PAGEANT:

GERALD S. ARGETSINGER

Almost every summer since 1935, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has staged a pageant at the Hill Cumorah. Missionaries originally presented these as part of the "Cumorah Conference" of the Eastern States Mission, which was convened annually to coincide with the July 24th Pioneer Day celebration marking the day when Brigham Young first entered the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. The tradition of the Cumorah Conference was begun in the early 1920s when the mission president, B. H. Roberts, and a group of missionaries traveled from New York City to the newly acquired Smith Family Farm to celebrate Pioneer Day. Part of that celebration included the acting out of scenes from the Book of Mormon and church history.

Over the next decade, the Cumorah Conference expanded to a three- or four-day event and included missionaries serving in both the eastern states and Canada. The program expanded to include sermons, athletic events, a Hill Cumorah pilgrimage, and a variety of entertainment programs to which the public was invited. On September 21, 1923, episodes from the life of Joseph Smith were acted out at the Smith Family Farm, the Sacred Grove, and the Hill Cumorah, marking the centennial of Joseph Smith's first visit by the angel Moroni. Permission to use the hill was granted by its owner, Pliny T.

A scene from the present-day Hill Cumorah Pageant: Lehi and his family sail to the promised land. All photos in this article courtesy of the author unless otherwise noted.



A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Sexton. "Footprints in the Sands of Time," a play by John W. Stonely that celebrated the restoration of the gospel, was presented at the Smith Family Farm, honoring the centennial of the church in 1930, to an audience of 200. As part of the annual Palmyra celebration at the Smith Farm, the final pageant was presented on July 23, 1934, by a cast of 30.

The church acquired the Hill Cumorah in the early 1930s, and in July 1935 the Palmyra conference events were moved to the hill. That summer, as part of the dedicatory exercises of the Angel Moroni Monument, "The Book of Mormon in Song, Picture, and Story" was presented, featuring vocal selections by such eminent soloists as Margaret Romaine, formerly of the Metropolitan Opera. For the first time, trumpeters played from the crest of the hill, a tradition that still marks the commencement of the Hill Cumorah Pageant. The theme for the 1936 conference was "America's Witness for Christ," and the conference featured a historical pageant, "Truth from the Earth," adapted by Oliver R. Smith and Meryl Dunn from the works of O. V. Whitney and C. W. Dunn. Mission president Donald B. Colton announced plans to make a pageant at the Hill Cumorah an annual event. Even though there was no specific script, the intent was to present a pageant of quality that would quickly gain recognition as "America's *Oberammergau*."[1]

The next year was the pivotal year in the development of the pageant as we know it. President

Colton appointed a "New York Committee" composed of H. Wayne Driggs, Roscoe A. Grover, Ira J. and Beatrice Markham, William L. Woolf, and Oliver R. Smith. They were responsible for developing an appropriate script for presentation at the hill. Until then all programs had depicted scenes from both the Book of Mormon and church history. In 1937 the two themes were separated and two outdoor dramas were presented. "The Builders," by Oliver R. Smith, about the Mormon handcart pioneers, was performed on Saturday, July 24. A Book of Mormon play taking its title from the previous year's theme, "America's Witness for Christ," by H. Wayne Driggs, an English professor at New York University, was performed on Friday, the 23rd, and again on Sunday, the 25th. This script, with occasional modifications, became known as *the* Hill Cumorah Pageant and was presented annually, excluding the war years, for 50 years, from 1937 to 1987. Its purpose was to depict the Book of Mormon as the fulfillment of Bible prophecy and as a testimony of Christ's divinity. The dramatic structure was chronological, generally following the tradition of the American community pageant, which was to depict independent scenes related to a theme. That first year, it included six episodes from the Book of Mormon: "The Prophet Abinadi," "Alma the Younger," "The Sons of Mosiah," "Samuel the Lamanite," "Signs at the Crucifixion of Christ," and "Christ's Appearance to the Nephites."

As missionaries grappled with staging the first production of "America's Witness for Christ," a new missionary with theatrical experience easily solved some staging problems. His name was Harold I. Hansen, and he was quickly named a codirector of the pageant, working with Joseph W. Williams under the supervision of Oliver R. Smith. There is some confusion regarding the responsibilities of persons working on the pageant prior to World War II. Interviews conducted by pageant researchers Charles W. Whitman (1967) and Randy V. Hansen (1978) verify that involved individuals have extremely different recollections.[2] These differences reflect an early rent between the New York Committee and the Utah production personnel that continued for decades. These differing opinions seem to stem from two primary concerns. First, during the early years of the pageant, participants ignored precise theater terminology. Therefore, published credits in advertising, newspaper, and even pageant programs are vague. Second is the fact that over time, the name Harold I. Hansen came to be synonymous with the Hill Cumorah Pageant, dwarfing all others who contributed. His involvement has taken an almost mythical stature. The situation is best characterized by the description of the American Revolution's history in the musical *1776* (Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards, 1964):

> John Adams: . . . I mean, what will people think?
> Ben Franklin: Don't worry, John. The history books will clean it up.
> John Adams: It doesn't matter. I won't appear in the history books, anyway—only you. Franklin did this, Franklin did that. . . . Franklin smote the ground, and out sprang George Washington, fully grown and on his horse. Franklin then electrified him with his miraculous lightning rod, and the three of them—Franklin, Washington, and the horse—conducted the entire Revolution all by themselves.

To the admiration of many and the chagrin of others, Harold I. Hansen seemingly conducted the entire Hill Cumorah Pageant by himself.

The Wood and Hansen Years

In April 1939, J. Karl Wood was interviewed by David O. McKay, then second counselor to President Heber J. Grant, and called to direct the pageant, the first time a theater professional was brought in from outside the mission to oversee the production. Wood was the director of the Logan (Utah) Pageant Society and, according to his family, was interviewed by President McKay specifically about "directing" the pageant. Wood's call was extended by a letter from Stephen L Richards, which adds to the confusion, stating only that Wood was being called to "help out" with the pageant. Wood, who had known Hansen for years, invited him to return after his mission, and the two worked together, dividing producing, technical, and directing responsibilities through 1941, the final year of production before the pageant was suspended for the duration of World War II. The predominant perception is that Hansen served as the artistic director and that Wood served as the technical

Crawford Gates (far right in blue sweater) conducts a recording session in the Tabernacle with the Utah Symphony and Tabernacle Choir. Gates's original score was used for the Hill Cumorah Pageant from 1957 to 1987.

director during these years. The other view is that Wood was the artistic director and Hansen worked under him. Programs from the 1939–41 pageants add to the confusion because theater terminology is not specific and there is disagreement regarding the meaning of printed credits. It seems reasonable to conclude that Karl Wood was in charge of the pageant. He was called to work at Cumorah and worked with Driggs to revise the script for the 1939 production. It is also reasonable to assume that Hansen returned to Cumorah at the invitation of his friend Karl Wood because of his experience in staging the pageant. Having someone on hand who was instrumental with past productions is a primary method of ensuring continuity. Wood's expertise was in the area of technical theater and producing, while Hansen's was in casting and directing actors. Newspaper accounts list both as directors of the pageant and depict the two working side by side on both directing and technical projects.

In 1946, when mission president Roy Doxey revived the pageant, Harold I. Hansen was called as the pageant's artistic director, a position he filled for the next 30 years. During those years he oversaw script revisions, incorporating episodes depicting King Mosiah, Alma, Ammon and King Lamoni, General Moroni and the title of liberty, and an exciting destruction scene that preceded Christ's appearance at Bountiful. Hansen also worked to ensure that the pageant incorporated advances in technology, such as the development of unique water curtains and the computerization of stage lighting. Harvey Fletcher, inventor of stereophonic sound, designed, built, and installed a system that utilized state-of-the-art, five-track recording techniques. Another of the most significant modifications came in 1957 when Crawford Gates, then a graduate student at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, composed an original score for the pageant, which was recorded by the Tabernacle Choir and the Utah Symphony Orchestra. This was then mixed with recorded vocal characterizations and sound effects. That master recording was used through the final performance of the original pageant in 1987.

Winds of Change

The release of Harold Hansen in 1977 necessitated several changes in the way the pageant was produced. His role as producer/director was divided into two separate positions. Jack Dawson, a retired television producer, was called to serve as the pageant producer. Jack Sedarholm, one of Hansen's assistants, was called to serve as the artistic director. Sedarholm found himself stuck between a rock and a hard place. Because of his friendship and constant contact with Hansen, Sedarholm felt obligated to maintain the pageant organization and production as it was. Even so, together Dawson and Sedarholm made two major contributions to the pageant.

First was the upgrading of the costumes. Until this time, the pageant had never been designed. In 1937 costumes were borrowed from a closed

Burning of Abinadi ca. 1960 (left) and 1988.

General Moroni and the Title of Liberty ca. 1975 (left) and ca. 1982.

Broadway biblical extravaganza, *The Eternal Road*. Wood brought costumes with him from the Logan Pageant Society, and his wife, Phebe, designed and made other costumes. During the Hansen years, costumes were borrowed from the theater department at Brigham Young University. These often reflected what was available rather than what was historically accurate clothing. For example, pumpkin hose and tights from a production of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* were used for a few years as part of the costumes for Alma the Younger and the four sons of Mosiah. In other years, more appropriate costumes came from the BYU production of Peter Shaffer's *Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

After Hansen was released, BYU reclaimed all of its major costumes, presenting a challenging problem for preserving a theatrically exciting production. Rochester costume designer Gail Argetsinger was called to design and supervise the construction of appropriate spectacle costumes for the production. She approached the assignment by studying what Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican studies reveal about ancient American dress. The experts at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC, also came to her aid in determining what people might actually have worn in American civilizations dating from about 600 BC to AD 400. Argetsinger was allowed to peruse their vast collection, and she also visited other collections of clothing from North and South American native civilizations. When she was called to design appropriate costumes, she was also instructed not to tie any part of the pageant directly into any specific known civilization.

Combining her research with a flair for theatricality, Argetsinger and an army of Relief Society sisters provided costumes for over 600 characters and actors. The impact of that work led the producer and director to embark on what was to become a revitalization of the artistic components of the entire pageant. As the new costumes were used extensively for publicity, it was noted that the poor-quality crepe-hair wigs and beards detracted significantly from the costumes' effectiveness. As a result, the wardrobe mistress, Barbara Williams, was sent to

Gail Argetsinger designing pageant costumes, about 1982.

Mormon, Moroni, and plates ca. 1975 (left) and 1988–present.

New York City to learn the art of crafting hand-ventilated beards and wigs. Argetsinger and Williams worked together on pageant costumes and hair for almost 20 years.

The second major contribution of Dawson and Sedarholm resulted from the 1973 visit by church president Harold B. Lee. He remarked that it was time to phase out missionaries' participation in the pageant. As a result, the cast now consists entirely of church members, primarily families and single adults, who converge from all over the world to participate in the "pageant experience," a unique opportunity that is much like a youth conference during rehearsal week and a missionary conference during performance week.

During the years of missionary participation, the focus of the production team was the show itself. When the missionaries were not onstage as actors, they helped with construction and practiced their missionary dialogues. The member-oriented cast found themselves with hours of time, waiting between rehearsal responsibilities. Dawson focused much of his attention enhancing the system of study groups that had been practiced at Cumorah for years. When the pageant was a program of the Cumorah mission, missionaries were the primary actors and technicians. BYU coeds came from Provo to provide the one required female actor and the masses for the crowd scenes. These sisters were organized into study groups that prepared them to mingle with the audience, answering questions and taking referrals. They also ensured that everyone involved enjoyed a unique spiritual experience. It being a missionary program, everyone was expected to be in appropriate missionary dress the entire time they were at Cumorah. Men wore white shirts and ties, and women wore dresses and hose.

Under the new pageant organization, there was no real justification to maintain missionary dress for entire families during the week of hard work and rehearsals. It was clearly a serious burden, particularly for mothers, to maintain Sunday dress for entire families. Dress standards were modified to "appropriate work and recreation clothing" for all work crews and for the cast during rehearsal week, Sunday dress went into effect when the pageant opened to the public. Study groups were changed to "cast teams" and were divided into groups following the same format used in church Primary and youth programs. Cast members continued to study Latter-day Saint church history and the Book of Mormon, and they were taught a "welcoming dialogue" to introduce the audience to the production and invite them to receive a copy of the Book of Mormon. Activities expanded to a speakers' bureau and Scouting and athletic programs. The success of this was verified by scores of letters written by participants proclaiming the "pageant experience" as one of the finest experiences participating families had ever had.

Lund Johnson was called as artistic director for 1986 and 1987, the final two years of the original pageant. Reflecting his southwestern background, he added a golden palomino to the title of liberty scene and directed the 50th anniversary production. When the original script was retired after 50 years, it was the last representative of a lost art form: the American community pageant. Times had changed, and communities had stopped producing founder's day and Fourth of July pageant celebrations, the tradition from which "America's Witness for Christ" had developed. The audience was now accustomed to films and television and could not understand a presentation of unrelated "scenes on a theme." The time had come to completely rework the pageant at Hill Cumorah for a modern audience.

Following Priesthood Principles

For the first time a pageant presidency received that calling through priesthood lines of authority. This significantly shifted responsibility for the production from Utah to the Cumorah region. Following priesthood leadership principles, the pageant

Samuel the Lamanite, 1988–1997.

presidency was able to solve many of the problems that grew out of specific interests among pageant personnel. Instead of a theater organization reporting to a bureaucratic system of church committees, the priesthood organization provided clear lines of authority for all aspects of production. President Roger Adams, with counselors Jerry Meiling and Gerald Argetsinger, handled the logistical end of the production, including such things as selecting cast members, housing, local arrangements, permits, and budget. Charles Metten, a BYU theater professor, was called as artistic director with the additional responsibility to oversee the unified artistic creation of all aspects of the new pageant.

Orson Scott Card was assigned the responsibility to write the new script that would become the foundation for all other artistic decisions. He was instructed to make the script accessible to a modern audience, targeting the non-scripture-reading, non-Mormon young adult. Card accomplished this by presenting episodes from the Book of Mormon as a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is the first script produced by the church wherein the narrative is in a dialogue form that incorporates modern English; the only characters repeating direct quotations from scripture are angels and Jesus Christ. The running time of the new pageant is 1 hour, 15 minutes, approximately 40 minutes shorter than the previous version, allowing families to return home at a reasonable time. A final point of interest is that the older script features the conversion of the Lamanites, while the new script focuses on the story of the Nephites. This change subtly instructs the modern audience that the pageant's message is not just for those who are not Christian; even though viewers may have the Bible, it is necessary to have the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and priesthood authority as provided by the restoration.

The new script required a new score, so Crawford Gates was again called to compose music for the Hill Cumorah Pageant. For the few similar scenes, such as the nativity, he created new arrangements of established musical themes; for the new scenes, he composed fresh motifs. Finally, the new pageant was scored as motion pictures are, with the music playing continually, underscoring all dialogue and special effects. Eric Fielding designed the new settings and properties, creating seven individual stage units that, when viewed from the audience, create the impression of an ancient Maya temple erected on the side of the hill. Modern lighting shines out from 10 towers that flank the stage, utilizing almost 500 instruments that provide constantly changing patterns of illumination.

Finally, Gail Argetsinger was asked to continue as the costume designer, ultimately replacing all old pageant costumes with over 1,500 costumes specifically designed for the new production. Rodger Sorensen assisted Charles Metten with the preproduction work, and Michael Campbell received a call to create new choreography for the production. Campbell achieved a remarkable transformation by starting with dance appropriate for 600 BC Jerusalem and ending with dance indicative of AD 400 Mesoamerica. As the Book of Mormon civilizations evolved from ancient Jerusalem to Mesoamerica, their dance evolved from one civilization to the other. Metten directed the voice actors, the recording of the special effects, and the mixing of the voice, special effects, and music sound tracks. He also directed the 1988–89 productions at Cumorah, taking responsibility for the initial evaluation and revisions, working closely with Salt Lake offices and the pageant presidency, firmly establishing the new production.

A Test of Faith

Producing the new pageant in 1988 provided everyone involved with some real tests of their faith. It seemed as though everything that could go wrong did go wrong. It reminded the pageant presidency of the story of Gideon as recorded in Judges, chapter 6. Gideon was leading an army of over 30,000 warriors into battle against the Midianites. But the Lord did not want Gideon's people to boast because of a victory, taking claim for the defeat of their enemy. Ultimately, the Lord reduced Gideon's troops to a mere 300 warriors. When they defeated the Midianites, they knew that their victory was due solely to the Lord. In a similar manner, by the time the new pageant opened on July 22, 1988, everyone knew that its success was due solely to the Lord.

Charles Metten and assistant directors work with model of the set, production week, July 1988.

To grasp the magnitude of producing the new pageant, it is important to understand that a typical Broadway musical requires at least two years for development. That includes script writing and revisions; the composing and arranging of music; the designing and construction of sets, "properties" (such as metal plates, weapons, and spoils of war), costumes, and lighting; and finally the casting and rehearsing of the actors. Most elements of the new pageant were developed in less than one year and many in less than six months. Not only did a new, complex, state-of-the-art spectacle have to be conceived and designed, but it was being produced in a setting that was not conducive to this type of creation. Instead, it was being created from the ground up, in the open air, at an active historic site. The pageant's development involved all phases of theater in addition to a wide array of church committees and General Authorities at all levels, many of whom were already very supportive of the pageant. After all, this was the flagship pageant of the church presented at one of the most important historical sites of the restoration. The committees and departments were responsible for such things as historic sites, visitors' centers, pageants, building and construction, maintenance, and history. Under perfect conditions, it could have been considered a miracle that the new pageant was even performed in front of a live audience. The difficult bureaucratic and production routine was exacerbated by the fact that 1988 was one of the rainiest summers ever for the Hill Cumorah Pageant.

Some of the more spectacular challenges began with the recording of the music. Crawford Gates had to compose and arrange the music in time for a recording session scheduled over a year in advance with the Tabernacle Choir, the Salt Lake Children's Choir, and the Utah Symphony Orchestra. There were three days set aside in the Tabernacle for this recording session. If any of those days were missed, it would be impossible to reschedule recording time. Recording time schedules were also strictly controlled by the rules of the Salt Lake Musicians Union, which specified break times and set limits on the amount of time musicians could work each day.

Just prior to the recording dates, Marion G. Romney, president of the Quorum of the Twelve, passed away. His funeral was set for the second of the three days. One-third of the recording time disappeared. As the second, and final, recording day neared its end and it seemed as though they just might be able to complete the recording, a major problem occurred. The drum head for a special instrument required for the final number would not fit on properly. Nothing the percussionist did seemed to solve the problem. Finally, at the last moment, the head slipped into place and the orchestra began the number. Just as the final note faded away, the union steward blew his whistle signifying the end of the recording session. The musicians immediately applauded, gathered up their instruments, and walked away. They had succeeded by seconds.

In a related incident, when Eric Fielding was contracted to design the set for the pageant, the church assumed that he would be on-site for its construction. Following standard theater procedures, the designer is not responsible for construction, and Fielding assumed that his work was completed when his designs were accepted. Acceptance came slowly. As the project snailed its way through the Church Office Building, it came to a complete stop with the building committee, which determined that the designs did not meet specifications for church stages. Significantly, those specifications were established for permanent indoor stages and not for temporary outdoor events. When it became clear that this delay could actually prevent the pageant stages from being manufactured in time for the July opening, an emergency meeting was arranged for all involved committee heads.

It was finally agreed that the stages were, instead, platforms. As platforms, they satisfied all specifications. The designs were finally given the stamp of approval and were submitted for construction bids. By now, all theatrical construction companies were well into their summer of 1988 production schedule, so no one would even consider bidding on the project. It was late March, and the enormous seven-stage configuration had to be completed in time for construction on-site and rehearsals for a July 22nd opening performance. Once again, an unusual solution was found. The Morton Thiokol Corporation, north of Salt Lake City, was sitting idle because of the *Challenger* space shuttle disaster. The company agreed to manufacture the stages. Again, no one was contracted to be on-site for the assembly. When the finished pieces of the set were dumped at the Hill Cumorah like a gigantic, scrambled erector set, there was no one to supervise its construction. There was no equipment, just a few ladders, hand tools, and a crew of roughly 30 young men, ages 17 to 22, ready to put things together. In a panic, phone calls were made, and finally Morton Thiokol agreed to send an engineer to supervise construction of the set.

Work crew assembling the new set, 1988.

All of the pieces for the set were delivered to the hill with the exception of "stage three," which contained the apparatus for the ship-at-sea scene. Because of the hydraulic system required to operate the raising, lowering, and rocking of the "ship," the stage was built in Utah and shipped by truck to New York. Unfortunately, when the truck reached Ohio, it was stopped at the border for three days. It was too

large to receive a permit to travel through Ohio. At Cumorah, the set was going up, the cast had arrived, and rehearsals were under way. Opening day loomed closer and closer, but stage three was nowhere to be seen. The large hole where stage three was to be installed was filling up with water because of the incessant rain. Negotiations for special permission to transport the stage through Ohio failed. Finally, the truck had to travel around Ohio, arriving at Cumorah on Tuesday, just three days before opening. A crane was hired to move it into position on the hill. The enormous crane moved onto the base of the rain-soaked hill and began to lift the heavy stage from the truck. As the stage was maneuvered into position, the crane sank into the mud, obscuring much of the multi-tiered stage. When the crane was finally removed two days later, it was discovered that stage three had been installed backward.

To add insult to injury, the hydraulic-driven ship could rise out of the stage, but it refused to roll back down. It had been tested on the dry cement floor of a factory, but not in the outdoor conditions at Cumorah. At the pageant site, it also became evident that the ship unit was too dangerous to use regardless of its condition. The rocking motion caused sharp metal edges to pass by each other like giant scissors. If an actor accidentally fell, there would be no way to avoid injury. Reluctantly, the decision was made that actors were to "pretend" that a ship was being tossed to and fro by gigantic ocean waves.

The rain continued. Part of Eric Fielding's design included a beautification of the actual hill. Thousands of square feet of sod were ordered to cover the bare dirt left after the initial grading. However, no money was budgeted to lay the sod. The youth of the Rochester New York Palmyra Stake were ultimately enlisted to lay the sod. It was unrolled in strips up and down the hill. As the rain poured, the newly laid sod slowly slid down the hill. Stakes were finally required to fix it in place.

The electricians installing the lighting equipment on the 10 light towers were all experienced workers in the dry western states. They neglected the ramifications of placing transformers and connection boxes on the wet, grassy hillside of Cumorah. Four days before opening, lightning struck the hill and burned out all of the major theater lighting equipment. Calls were made all over the United States in order to secure replacement equipment, which was installed piecemeal as it arrived—on newly constructed, and grounded, platforms above

Symbolic battle between Nephi (left) and Laman (right).

the wet grass. When the pageant opened Friday night, it was the first time it had been performed with lighting.

Hour after hour of rehearsal time was washed away by the rain as the cast sat under the protective cover of the study shelter. On Thursday morning, sitting and watching the rain pour down, Jerry Meiling leaned over to me and asked, "How long do you think it will rain?" I paused, thought, and really noticed that everyone's spirits were up. I had that peaceful feeling when you know the Spirit is with you, so I answered, "I don't know, but it doesn't matter." Jerry paused, smiled, and said, "That's a good answer."

By the afternoon of opening day, most of the problems had been resolved at least enough to allow us to know that we could stage a production for people to see. The audience streamed in, the largest pageant audience in years. The opening processional really moved the audience, and the show ran smoothly. The Spirit was strong, and we knew that the pageant was open only because of the hand of the Lord. The next day, the heavens opened and it poured. As it came close to curtain time the second day, lightning struck the light towers again, but this time no equipment was damaged. It was clear that it was too dangerous to continue with the production. For only the seventh time in 51 years, the show was canceled due to rain. This was very hard on the cast, some of whom were sobbing and asking, "Why?" The fact that Gordon B. Hinckley was in attendance removed much of the anxiety. He noted that, in spite of the rain, more referrals were collected that night than opening night, and he gave permission, this one time, for the pageant to be performed on Monday night in order that those who had traveled thousands of miles would have the opportunity to see it. The rains of 1988 turned out to be a tremendous blessing in disguise. Because of the storms, all of the weaknesses inherent in the extensive new project were made manifest. This occurred at a time of great interest in the project. Because the weaknesses were clearly seen by everyone, it was a priority to find the ways and means to solve the problems in order to ensure a quality production for years to come.

Emphasizing the Spiritual

Gerald Argetsinger was called to serve as artistic director for the years 1990 through 1997. He was given the charge to keep the pageant vibrant and to coordinate its evolution as it settled in for a long run. He and his team of associate directors continued to discover new and more effective ways to stage the production in order to tell its story in a clear and exciting manner. Argetsinger worked closely with Rick Josephsen, a motion picture special effects director, who was called to serve as the pageant's technical director. They worked to imagine, design, and create an ever-increasing array of special effects that supported the theatricality of the pageant. These included a remarkable storm at sea with rain and lightning striking "the Lehi ship," sending its sail frayed and flying in the wind; angels that suddenly appeared and disappeared; fire and brimstone in the destruction scene enhanced by the appearance and eruption of a volcano; a new method for creating water curtains that more beautifully displayed the vision scenes; and augmented flying effects for the descending Christ both for his appearance at Bountiful and again at the end of the play, first appearing and descending from 30 feet above the stage and ascending back into the heavens, finally flying almost 50 feet toward the audience.

As the pageant presidency worked with the artistic team during the maturation process, attention continually focused not only on the artistic quality of the production, but also on the overall experience for the participants, as well as on the success of the pageant as a missionary tool. They learned two important lessons. As the spiritual quality of the experience was enhanced, both the aesthetic quality of the show and the quantity and quality of missionary referrals increased. Although it is obvious that a balance is necessary, it became clear that taking time for the participants' spiritual development and service was more effective than requiring more time for rehearsal. Almost 3,000 referrals were generated in 1997, 10 times greater than the 250 referrals gathered in 1988. The positive response to missionary contacts was also significantly higher.

The development of the spiritual experience for cast members led directly to the second important lesson, the realization that the spirit with which an artistic work is created is communicated to the audience of that work. When every member of the cast and crew strove to improve their own testimonies and spirituality, the impact of the performance was enhanced for each member of the audience. There is a symbiotic relationship between these

various components. For example, as the quality and detail of the costumes improved, it became necessary to provide the cast with appropriate dressing room facilities. The lack of these facilities required that crowd costumes had to fit over street clothing because there was no place to privately change. When dressing rooms that provided for changes were constructed, they allowed the designers to create more appropriate and detailed costumes. Wearing beautiful costumes, of course, has allowed the cast members to greet the audience before production, providing an up-close view of what would later be seen onstage. Naturally, the audience was open to the approach of costumed characters, often asking to have their photos taken with cast members and more eagerly listening to their invitation to receive a complimentary Book of Mormon. When people filled out referral cards, they knew that they would be visited by missionaries who would deliver the book. Since the missionaries were no longer involved in the production, they were usually able to visit referrals within days, instead of weeks, also improving the quality of the contact.

Nephi and the plates.

Embracing the Pageant

The Hill Cumorah Pageant has become a major media event, drawing almost as many people of other faiths as Latter-day Saints. As the pageant has matured into a more professional production, promotion has also become more professional. Public relations experts Bert Linn and Richard Ahern expanded media coverage from local newspapers to the *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer,* and *Good Morning America*. This increased tenfold the number of bus tours adding the pageant to their itineraries. When Donny Osmond and his family participated in the 1997 cast, hundreds of newspapers across the country chronicled the event, substantially increasing attendance. As a public relations tool, the pageant is credited with changing the attitude of people within the Cumorah area from antagonistic to positive.

The most notable change occurred in 1991 when local service organizations were invited to provide snacks and meals to pageant visitors. The offer was accepted by the Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis service organizations, which have turned the pageant into their primary annual fund-raising event. Because of their involvement, the community no longer views it as someone else's pageant, but as "our pageant." Its acceptance by the community was demonstrated when it was given a full page in *The Image Is Rochester* (1997), by Gabe Dalmath and G. R. DeFranco, a book describing notable achievements in the Rochester, New York, area. The contributions of the pageant are also chronicled in the mass-market book *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (1999), by Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling. As a missionary tool, cast members circulate among the thousands of visitors who attend each performance, greeting them and extending invitations to receive copies of the Book of Mormon. Most converts in the region credit the Hill Cumorah Pageant as one of the significant experiences in their conversion process. As a spiritually enriching activity for Latter-day Saints, participants value it as one of the finest events in which their families can participate.

The Argetsingers were released from their pageant callings at the conclusion of the 1997 production. By that time, Gail had designed and constructed over 3,000 costumes. It is humbling to realize that much of the revitalization of the pageant stemmed directly from the impact of her first pageant costumes 19 years before. In 1998 Rodger Sorensen became the pageant's eighth artistic director. Under his direction, it continues to evolve, remaining the flagship pageant of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Discourses, 14:330–31; 15:182–83; 16:57; 17:30–31; 17:281; 19:218. Another source for Pratt's accounts is supposedly the *Quorum of the Twelve Minutes,* 6 May 1849, but I have not been able to confirm this. Brigham Young's record of that date, however, is interesting to note: "I met with President Willard Richards and the Twelve on the 6th. We spent the time in interesting conversation upon old times, Joseph, the plates, Mount Cumorah, treasures and records known to be hid in the earth, the gift of seeing, and how Joseph obtained his first seer stone" (*Manuscript History of Brigham Young,* 6 May 1849, Church Archives). See also *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* 6 May 1849.

2. Most of the cave accounts mention Oliver Cowdery as a participant. Although Cowdery is not formally on record as having shared this experience in speaking or writing, there is one obscure line from Cowdery that might refer to the cave experience. In describing his feelings about the Hill Cumorah, Cowdery wrote, "In my estimation, certain places are dearer to me for what they *now* contain than for what they *have* contained" (*Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate,* October 1835, 2:196; emphasis in original).
3. It is interesting that his account differs from the others regarding the exact location of the cave, and yet it should be remembered that Whitmer's statement "not far away from that place" may have been referring to the exact place where the plates were found, and therefore the cave, which was nearby, could have still been in the hill proper. Another possibility is that, for some reason, Whitmer was thinking of Miner's Hill, which is just north of the Hill Cumorah and was said to feature a cave dug by Mormons; see Cameron Packer, "A Study of the Hill Cumorah: A Significant Latter-day Saint Landmark in Western New York" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2002), 59–62.
4. For a review of these missing records, see Monte S. Nyman, "Other Ancient American Records Yet to Come Forth," *JBMS* 10/1 (2001): 52–61.
5. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses,* 16:57.
6. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses,* 19:218.
7. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 19:39.
8. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 19:37.
9. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 19:38.
10. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 19:38.
11. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 19:39.
12. *Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith,* 217.
13. Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses,* 4:105.
14. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses,* 4:105.
15. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses,* 4:105.
16. See also Jeffrey R. Holland, "Therefore, What?" (address given at the 2000 CES Conference, Brigham Young University, 8 August 2000), 2; and Leslie A. Taylor, "The Word of God," *JBMS* 12/1 (2003): 52–63.
17. Account 10, by Orson Pratt, also mentions an angelic guardian.
18. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal,* 11 December 1869, 6:508–9.
19. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball: An Apostle, the Father and Founder of the British Mission*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1945), 15–17. See also Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 2:5; George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses,* 13:104; 16:193; and *Wilford Woodruff's Journal,* 7:622.
20. It is also interesting to note that when Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith on 21 September 1823 and revealed the existence of the Nephite record, "he informed [Joseph] of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, *sword,* and pestilence" (Joseph Smith—History 1:45). Perhaps the sword in the cave symbolized that these judgments were at hand.

The Hill Cumorah Pageant: A Historical Perspective
Gerald S. Argetsinger

1. *The Passion Play of Oberammergau* is the world's most enduring and famous play depicting the Passion of Jesus Christ. It has been presented regularly since AD 1634 in Bavaria.
2. Charles W. Whitman, "A History of the Hill Cumorah Pageant (1937–1964) and an Explanation of the Dramatic Development of the Text of *America's Witness for Christ*" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1967); Randy V. Hansen, "Development of the Cumorah Pageant" (honors thesis, Brigham Young University, 1978); Walter E. Boyden, "The Road to Hill Cumorah" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1982); Gerald S. Argetsinger, "Cumorah Pageant," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:347.

Designing Costumes for the Hill Cumorah Pageant
Rory R. Scanlon

1. See Margot Blum Schevill, *Costume as Communication: Ethnographic Costumes and Textiles from Middle America and the Central Andes of South America in the Collections of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University, Bristol, Rhode Island* (Bristol, RI: Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University, 1986), 9.
2. See Ralph Whitlock, *Everyday Life of the Maya* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), 44–46.
3. "There is a tendency by some Christians to assume too much from archaeology. Sometimes the words *confirm, prove, authenticate,* and *substantiate* can be employed. It can be proved that historical conditions were such that Solomon could have been as powerful a king as the Bible says he was; but it does not prove that God gave Solomon wisdom. It can be fairly well substantiated that there was a census when Jesus was born; but this confirmation hardly proves his divinity. No archaeological evidence will ever prove the atonement. It must be recognized that there is a clear separation between historical and theological proof." Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 20.
4. John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992).
5. Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon* (Orem, UT: S. A. Publishers, 1989).
6. See John L. Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon Mapped," in his *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985).
7. See Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *Indian Clothing before Cortés: Mesoamerican Costumes from the Codices* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 9–14.
8. See Ralph Whitlock, *Everyday Life of the Maya* (New York: Dorset Press, 1976), 43.
9. See Henry F. Lutz, *Textiles and Costumes among the Peoples of the Ancient Near East* (New York: G. E. Stechert and Co., 1923), 70. For more contemporary information, see Florence Eloise Petzel, *Textiles of Ancient Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt* (Corvallis, OR: Cascade Printing, 1984), 21–28.
10. See Anawalt, *Indian Clothing before Cortés*, 209–14. Also see Margot Blum Schevill, *Costume as Communication* (Bristol, RI: Mark-Burton, Inc., 1986), 13.
11. See Federico Kauffmann-Doig, *Ancestors of the Incas: The Lost Civilization of Peru*, trans. Eulogio Guzman (Memphis, TN: Wonders, 1998), 108–17. See also Raoul D'Harcourt, *Textiles of Ancient Peru and Their Techniques,* trans. Sadie Brown (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1974), 3.
12. See Patricia Rieff Anawalt, "Textile Research from the Mesoamerican Perspective," *Beyond Cloth and Cordage: Archaeological Textile Research in the Americas,* ed. P. B. Drooker and L. D. Webster (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 2000), 214.
13. See Michael D. Coe and Justin Kerr, *The Art of the Maya Scribe* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 97.
14. See Mormon 1:8–9; Jacob 1:14.

A New Beginning for the Pageant: 1948 to 1951
Harold I. Hansen

1. J. Karl Wood was called to direct the Hill Cumorah Pageant in 1939.
2. Thorpe B. Isaacson, in Conference Report, October 1949, 156.
3. Thorpe B. Isaacson, in Conference Report, October 1949, 156–57.

"Hail, Cumorah! Silent Wonder": Music Inspired by the Hill Cumorah
Roger L. Miller

1. "An Angel from on High," *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 13; hereafter *Hymns.*
2. Latter-day Saint children might also think of one of their favorite songs: "The Golden Plates Lay Hidden," *Children's Songbook of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 86.
3. On summer evenings in July and August, thousands gather on the slopes of the Hill Cumorah to