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Historical Data about Presidents of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Michael D. Taylor

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One of the desirable outcomes of a mature organization is the accumulation, over time, of historical information about the organization. That information can be retained or disseminated by the organization according to its policies, or the information can be used by individuals or groups with interests or ties to the organization.

From its inception, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been vitally concerned with historical information about itself (see D&C 21:1). By commandment received on the day the Church was organized, the Lord said, “A record shall be kept.”¹ The Church has been very diligent in the past 170-plus years in fulfilling this inspiring charge. In fact, perhaps few organizations have been as concerned or as diligent in accumulating information about themselves as has the Church of Jesus Christ. An interesting study would be one that compares the amount and variety of information accumulated about various ecclesiastical organizations in the world. I think the Church would fare extremely well in such an investigation.

Many action verbs can be used to describe the activities that potentially take place associated with Church historical information. Such action verbs as keep, record, accumulate, gather, store, retrieve, chronicle, report, enter, post, write, transcribe, itemize, collect, gather, amass, assemble, and compile are examples of verbs associated with the keeping of historical information. Other action verbs such as examine, analyze, apply, employ, use, manipulate,

and utilize are examples associated with the processes of doing something with the historical information after it is accumulated.

For the past several years, I have enjoyed gathering information about the Church and compiling this information into chart and table form. The process has taken on the flavor of a hobby, and I often find myself wanting to share the results of my work with other interested individuals.

A significant part of my gathering and compiling of Church-related information deals with the General Authorities of the Church. As I have learned more about these faithful Brethren and the service they have so unselfishly rendered to the Lord and His Church, I have strengthened my testimony by looking at their examples—and I have felt even more keenly that others might be interested in my endeavors. My perspective is that every fact and detail relating to the Church and its leaders, even if seemingly trivial, is important and can build faith.

I am pleased to share with readers of the Religious Educator three tables I have assembled containing information about the Presidents of the Church. Although the information in the tables

TABLE 1

Ages of Prophets When Sustained as Church Presidents,
Listed by Descending Age

Prophet	Age When Ordained	Date Ordained	Birth Date
Joseph Fielding Smith	93 years 6 months	23 Jan. 1970	19 July 1876
Howard W. Hunter	86 years 6 months	5 June 1994	14 Nov. 1907
Ezra Taft Benson	86 years 3 months	10 Nov. 1985	4 Aug. 1899
Gordon B. Hinckley	84 years 9 months	12 Mar. 1995	23 June 1910
Lorenzo Snow	84 years 5 months	13 Sept. 1898	3 Apr. 1814
Wilford Woodruff	82 years 1 month	7 Apr. 1889	1 Mar. 1807
Spencer W. Kimball	78 years 9 months	30 Dec. 1973	28 Mar. 1895
David O. McKay	77 years 7 months	9 Apr. 1951	8 Sept. 1873
George Albert Smith	75 years 2 months	21 May 1945	4 Apr. 1870
Harold B. Lee	73 years 3 months	7 July 1972	28 Mar. 1899
John Taylor	71 years 11 months	10 Oct. 1880	1 Nov. 1808
Joseph F. Smith	62 years 11 months	17 Oct. 1901	13 Nov. 1838
Heber J. Grant	62 years	23 Nov. 1918	22 Nov. 1856
Brigham Young	46 years 7 months	27 Dec. 1847	1 June 1801
Joseph Smith	26 years 1 month	6 Apr. 1830	23 Dec. 1805

is available through various other sources, I know of no source that presents the information in the way I have presented it in the tables.

Initially, the information in the tables might appear to be somewhat menial. However, I have found that examining the information thoroughly and pondering its possible implications produces relevant insights that strengthen testimony and increase understanding. I think teachers of the restored gospel might be able to use the information in their teaching for those purposes.

Table 1 shows the ages of the Presidents of the Church when they were called to be Church President—listed by descending age. For reference purposes, I have also included the date each prophet was ordained as President.²

Table 2 shows the same information as in table 1 except the information is listed according to succession of the Presidents of the Church.

Table 3 shows the time each prophet served as President and the dates of his service—listed according to decreasing time of ser-

TABLE 2

Ages of Prophets When Sustained as Church Presidents,
Listed in Succession

Prophet	Age When Ordained	Date Ordained	Birth Date
Joseph Smith	26 years 1 month	6 Apr. 1830	23 Dec. 1805
Brigham Young	46 years 7 months	27 Dec. 1847	1 June 1801
John Taylor	71 years 11 months	10 Oct. 1880	1 Nov. 1808
Wilford Woodruff	82 years 1 month	7 Apr. 1889	1 Mar. 1807
Lorenzo Snow	84 years 5 months	13 Sept. 1898	3 Apr. 1814
Joseph F. Smith	62 years 11 months	17 Oct. 1901	13 Nov. 1838
Heber J. Grant	62 years	23 Nov. 1918	22 Nov. 1856
George Albert Smith	75 years 2 months	21 May 1945	4 Apr. 1870
David O. McKay	77 years 7 months	9 Apr. 1951	8 Sept. 1873
Joseph Fielding Smith	93 years 6 months	23 Jan. 1970	16 July 1876
Harold B. Lee	73 years 3 months	7 July 1972	28 Mar. 1899
Spencer W. Kimball	78 years 9 months	30 Dec. 1973	28 Mar. 1895
Ezra Taft Benson	86 years 3 months	10 Nov. 1985	4 Aug. 1899
Howard W. Hunter	86 years 6 months	5 June 1994	14 Nov. 1907
Gordon B. Hinckley	84 years 9 months	12 Mar. 1995	23 June 1910

vice.

I have prepared scores of tables and charts through which I have pulled together in succinct form all kinds of historical information about the Church of Jesus Christ, and some of this informa-

TABLE 3

Tenure in Office of Church Presidents,
Listed by Decreasing Length of Service

Prophet	Tenure as President	Dates of Service as President
Brigham Young	29 years 8 months	27 Dec. 1847 to 29 Aug. 1877
Heber J. Grant	26 years 5 months	23 Nov. 1918 to 14 May 1945
David O. McKay	18 years 9 months	9 Apr. 1951 to 18 Jan. 1970
Joseph F. Smith	17 years 1 month	17 Oct. 1901 to 19 Nov. 1918
Joseph Smith	14 years 3 months	6 Apr. 1830 to 27 June 1844
Spencer W. Kimball	11 years 10 months	30 Dec. 1973 to 5 Nov. 1985
Wilford Woodruff	9 years 5 months	7 Apr. 1889 to 2 Sept. 1898
Ezra Taft Benson	8 years 7 months	10 Nov. 1985 to 30 May 1994
Gordon B. Hinckley	7 years on 12 Mar. 2002	12 Mar. 95 to present
John Taylor	6 years 9 months	10 Oct. 1880 to 25 July 1887
George Albert Smith	5 years 11 months	21 May 1945 to 4 Apr. 1951
Lorenzo Snow	3 years 1 month	13 Sept. 1898 to 10 Oct. 1901
Joseph Fielding Smith	2 years 5 months	23 Jan. 1970 to 2 July 1972
Harold B. Lee	1 year 6 months	7 July 1972 to 26 Dec. 1973
Howard W. Hunter	9 months	5 June 1994 to 3 Mar. 1995

tion will be shared with readers of the Religious Educator in future issues. If you have any questions or suggestions, please send them to Michael Taylor at mdtaylor@attbi.com.

Notes

1. See D&C 10:81–83; 21:1; 47:3; and 85:1 for instances when the Lord gave commandments associated with the keeping of historical records associated with the history of the Church.

2. The word “ordained” in the column headings for both tables 1 and 2 implies “ordained and set apart.” For some of the Presidents, the Church Almanac gives only the dates of “sustaining.” In the case of Joseph Smith, he was sustained as the first elder of the Church on 6 April 1830.