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Essay

A Genealogical Turn: Possibilities for Mormon Studies and Genealogical Scholarship

Amy Harris

THERE IS A GROWING SCHOLARLY FIELD, crucial to Mormon studies, that scholars of Mormonism have yet to engage with: the history of genealogical practices. Mormon studies contains a robust and mature literature on the history of temple theology and the importance of kin to Mormon teachings.¹ The connections between this flourishing scholarship and genealogical practices are largely missing, however. Scholarly history of genealogy is currently enjoying a rebirth—a renaissance that comes at a fortuitous time for Mormon studies. It brings with it possibilities of mutually beneficial conversations. Without these

1. Gordon Irving, “The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830–1900,” *BYU Studies* 14/3 (Spring 1974): 291–314; Samuel M. Brown, “The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44/1 (Spring 2011): 1–52; Jonathan A. Stapley, “Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37/3 (Summer 2011): 53–117; Samuel M. Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37/3 (Summer 2011): 3–52; Ryan Tobler, “‘Saviors on Mount Zion’: Mormon Sacramentalism, Mortality, and the Baptism for the Dead,” *Journal of Mormon History* 39/4 (Fall 2013): 182–238; Danny L. Jorgensen, “Early Mormon Marriage, Family, and Networks of Kinship: Begets and Horizontal Genealogy in the Case of the Later Cutlerites at Nauvoo,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, 34/1 (Spring/Summer 2014): 127–50; Kathleen Flake, “The Development of Early Latter-day Saint Marriage Rites, 1831–53,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41/1 (January 2015): 77–102.

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conversations, the history of genealogy, including Mormon genealogical practices, will develop without any contribution by those trained in Mormon history and culture. With these conversations, scholarship on Mormonism and on genealogy, as well as LDS Church writings on genealogy, will benefit.

There are three strands of scholarship relevant to Mormon genealogical practices. Current scholarship about genealogy, when it discusses the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, invariably encounters Mormonism's genealogical project and attempts to situate it within the larger framework of Western genealogical practices. Recent scholarship on early Mormonism has offered a varied and rich discussion of Latter-day Saint temple rituals and beliefs about kinship's mortal, spiritual, and eternal ramifications. Also, LDS Church institutional publications about genealogy (meaning work produced by the church or by authors and institutions affiliated with the church) have provided narrative accounts of temple work and institutional histories of the church's official genealogical activities. None of these strands of inquiry, however, have systematically engaged with one another. Such historiographic isolation is no longer sustainable; the lines of inquiry have matured to a point where they need to be braided together to illuminate both the history of genealogical practices and the development of Mormonism. Samuel Otterstrom noted in 2008 that "the academic literature has only scattered references to the importance of genealogical research within the theology of the Church."² The moment is ripe to fill the gap Otterstrom identified—to use the history of genealogy to expand and enhance scholarship about Mormonism and to use Mormon studies scholarship to enhance scholarship on genealogical practices. Bringing those two fields together can also inform genealogical publications authored by, or affiliated with, the church. This essay suggests places where literature on genealogical practices and Mormon studies scholarship can enrich

2. Samuel M. Otterstrom, "Genealogy as Religious Ritual: The Doctrine and Practice of Family History in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," in *Geography and Genealogy: Locating Personal Pasts*, ed. Dallen J. Timothy and Jeanne Kay Guelke (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 139.

one another. It then suggests ways that such fortified scholarship can fruitfully contribute to LDS Church publications on genealogy.

Possibilities for Mormon studies

Though there were occasional histories about the genealogical profession written in the first half of the twentieth century, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that professional genealogical and library publications began to tell a thorough history of American genealogy.³ Most of these accounts were straightforward narratives about the shift from elite families' genealogies in the eighteenth century to the more professional and popularizing genealogy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴ These decades also saw a flurry of historical scholarly activity around family history, meaning both a history of families and genealogy. There were some early and useful entries into this field. In particular, Robert M. Taylor's excellent work on the parallel rise of family reunions and genealogy in post-Civil War America asserted that such activities represented "a kind of mini-social movement, . . . a moral crusade among middle-class white Protestants, who . . . sought to comprehend their [changing] situation and control their future."⁵ Unfortunately, this and other works did not generate a long-lasting historiographical tradition. Aside from Taylor, scholarly work on genealogy was largely confined to pedagogical models for incorporating genealogy into social history curriculum.⁶ The connected work of historical demographers using

3. Lloyd DeWitt Bockstruck, "Four Centuries of Genealogy: A Historical Overview," *RQ* 23/2 (Winter 1983): 162–70.

4. Walter Lee Sheppard Jr., "A Bicentennial Look at Genealogy Methods, Performance, Education, and Thinking," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 65 (March 1977): 3–15.

5. Robert M. Taylor Jr., "Summoning the Wandering Tribes: Genealogy and Family Reunions in American History," *Journal of Social History* 16/2 (Winter 1982): 22.

6. Anthony Wagner, *Pedigree and Progress: Essays in the Genealogical Interpretation of History* (Chichester, England: Phillimore, 1975); Robert M. Taylor and Ralph S. Crandall, eds., *Generations and Change: Genealogical Perspectives in Social History* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

family reconstruction to understand historical populations was also held up as a place for fruitful connections with genealogists, but the initial enthusiasm from genealogists for collaborative work did not catch on with historians and did not survive beyond the early 1980s.⁷ Despite the waning of scholarship exploring the history of genealogy after the 1980s, in the last dozen years it has experienced a revival.

Neither the 1970s/80s nor current strand, however, has entered the historiography on Mormonism. However, recent literature on historical genealogical practices offers many potentially rewarding avenues for Mormon studies scholars. Current scholarship sees Western genealogy's expansion in the early nineteenth century as tied to the rise of a more inclusive and democratic society and a gradual turning away from genealogy's earlier elitist and racist propensities. For example, Michael Sharpe's 2011 *Family Matters* offers a narrative account of English genealogy largely concentrating on institutional trends and detailing genealogy's increasing professional status and expanding popularity.⁸ Similarly, François Weil's 2013 *Family Trees* describes a history of American genealogy that consistently included more groups of people, more professional standards, and more access to documents.⁹

Other scholars have emphasized genealogical influence on the development of national, political, and social identities across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, Karin Wulf argues that what she terms "genealogical literacy" was intertwined with systems of social and political power, creating a genealogical worldview that shaped early American law and religion; Francesca Morgan teases out how gendered political and religious construction of genealogical knowledge reified social hierarchies; and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

7. Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Genealogy in the 'Information Age': History's New Frontier?," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 91 (December 2003): 260–77.

8. Michael Sharpe, *Family Matters: A History of Genealogy* (Barnsley, Yorkshire, UK: Pen and Sword, 2011).

9. François Weil, *Family Trees: A History of Genealogy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

and Margaret Bendroth assert that historical and genealogical knowledge were crucial to northern Protestant social formation in the early republic.¹⁰

These works cover the time before the founding of Mormonism, but their work is about the world that produced Joseph Smith's family and many early converts from New England. There is much to explore about what their arguments mean for understanding early Mormon genealogical thought. Scholars of early Mormonism have traced the religious language of adoption and family—but none have considered American genealogical practices' influence on Mormonism's appeal or development. Wulf's and Morgan's work inspires questions about how much early Mormons' participation in a culture that already inculcated genealogical literacy supported their enthusiasm for proxy work for the dead.¹¹ Ulrich's work could inspire work about how early LDS converts' material cultural practices of genealogy carried over or changed after their encounter with Mormonism. According to Bendroth, nineteenth-century mainline Protestantism moved away from seeing history as central to faith. Did early Mormons' sense of history and memory transform in different ways than mainline Protestants' did, owing to genealogical practices? In a similar vein, Susan Tucker's work on New Orleans could be used to situate genealogical practices in the South that may have complemented, or perhaps contrasted with, Mormon practice. She argues for genealogy's ability to perpetuate and

10. Karin Wulf, "Bible, King, and Common Law: Genealogical Literacies and Family History Practices in British America," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 10/3 (Fall 2012): 467–502; Francesca Morgan, "Lineage as Capital: Genealogy in Antebellum New England," *New England Quarterly* 83/2 (June 2010): 250–82; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Creating Lineages," in *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England*, ed. D. Brenton Simons and Peter Benes (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002), 5–11; Margaret Bendroth, *The Spiritual Practice of Remembering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013); Bendroth, *The Last Puritans: Mainline Protestants and the Power of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

11. Karin Wulf, *Lineage: Genealogy and the Politics of Connection in British America, 1680–1820*, forthcoming.

generate cultural renewal, but it remains an open question whether it functioned in the same way for Mormons.¹²

Scholarship about genealogy explicitly connects with Mormonism once it covers the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Recently Morgan has argued that early Mormonism's genealogical impulses were informed by a democratic and universalist approach that other American genealogists did not adopt for several decades.¹³ Alternatively, while Morgan detects genealogy's nineteenth- and twentieth-century democratic flavor, Philip Barlow has argued that it was precisely democracy's ability to "fracture" families that made Joseph Smith's revelatory conceptions of eternal, expansive kinship so appealing.¹⁴ These ideas are not necessarily mutually exclusive—Mormonism could have been attractive because it fostered both egalitarian impulses and bolstered family ties. How it did so via genealogical practices could be explored further.

While early Latter-day Saints were influenced by their cultural milieu, they did not engage with the genealogical establishment. Early Mormons performed proxy temple ordinances based not on genealogical research but on personal knowledge of deceased family and friends.¹⁵ While professional American genealogists, mostly centered in the Northeast, were arguing for rigorous and academic standards from at least the 1840s, Mormons were not preaching genealogical practices as much as they were rewriting the importance of genealogical literacy. This raises questions about why the burgeoning discipline of genealogy did not attract numerous nineteenth-century Mormons interested in connecting to their kin. This can be explained in part because early proxy temple work did not require genealogical research;

12. Susan Tucker, *City of Remembering: A History of Genealogy in New Orleans* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016).

13. Francesca Morgan, "Nation of Descendants: Mormon Genealogy in US History," unpublished manuscript, 2017, copy in possession of the author.

14. Philip L. Barlow, "To Mend a Fractured Reality: Joseph Smith's Project," *Journal of Mormon History* 38/3 (Summer 2012): 28–50.

15. Richard E. Turley, "The Latter-day Saint Doctrine of Baptism for the Dead," BYU Family History fireside, November 9, 2001, <https://cfhg.byu.edu/pdf/firesides/2001-11-09.pdf>.

ordinances were performed for deceased friends and immediate family or by adoption. Undoubtedly the mid-century exodus from Nauvoo and the struggles to establish communities in the Intermountain West also played a dominant role. Also, genealogical research was not essential to temple worship; once the Latter-day Saints settled in Utah, other than baptisms, proxy ordinance work for the dead was not available until the completion of the St. George Temple in 1877 and adoption theology emphasized linkage to LDS priesthood holders more than to biological kin.¹⁶

Though adoption sealings continued after the dedication of the St. George Temple, its construction made available, for the first time, all temple ordinances for the deceased (excluding those of African descent). Church members flooded the temple with proxy work for their ancestors and friends. In 1877 alone there were over thirty thousand baptisms for the dead and over thirteen thousand endowments for the dead. That final figure for ancestor-based temple work would more than match the total number of adoption sealings that would occur over the next sixteen years.¹⁷ This suggests that while the church was not substantively supporting genealogical research in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and even as adoption work continued, rank-and-file members' genealogical knowledge and desire flourished. Wilford Woodruff's 1893 revelation that shifted LDS temple ordinance priorities away from adoption to a focus on one's own ancestors increased this effort among members, but there was not immediately an official churchwide effort to facilitate rigorous genealogical practices.

16. Gary Bergera, "The Earliest Eternal Sealings for Civilly Married Couples Living and Dead," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35/3 (Fall 2002): 41–66; Lisle G. Brown, "'Temple Pro Tempore': The Salt Lake City Endowment House," *Journal of Mormon History* 34/3 (Fall 2008): 1–68; Samuel Brown, "The Early Mormon Chain of Being," *Dialogue* 44/1 (Spring 2011): 1–52; Richard E. Bennett, "'The Upper Room': The Nature and Development of Latter-day Saint Temple Work, 1846–55," *Journal of Mormon History* 41/2 (April 2015): 1–34.

17. Richard E. Bennett, "'Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept': Reflections on the 1877 Commencement of the Performance of Endowments and Sealings for the Dead," *BYU Studies* 44/3 (2005): 38–77.

Even when LDS genealogy missionaries were sent east in the 1880s and 1890s to research their family lines, there was not a sustained engagement with or interest in the genealogical establishment and profession.¹⁸ LDS leaders were engaged in women's rights activism and encouraged advanced academic and artistic training for Latter-day Saints, but they did not facilitate such a meaningful connection with professional genealogical training.¹⁹ They did not see a need for such interaction, for as François Weil put it, "impressive though they were, the [genealogical] programs developed by the church were meant for the church and its higher goals" and not for the broader genealogical community.²⁰ The reasons for this disconnect deserve further analysis from Mormon studies scholars.

Though Woodruff's revelation spurred the creation of the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU, now the Family History Department of the church), it is striking that it was individual members' passion for genealogy and its connection to LDS theology that sustained the effort in a quasi-official capacity.

Accounts about early twentieth-century genealogy within Mormonism do not explore much beyond Susa Young Gates's personal efforts. In a 1991 *BYU Studies* article, and in a 1994–95 book-length issue of that journal titled *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, authors Jessie Embry, James Allen, and Kahlile Mehr remarked on Gates's tireless efforts in the early twentieth century to build a systematic and rigorous approach to genealogical work and temple ordinance indexing, highlighting her comment that she would "provoke the brethren" to greater involvement with genealogical labor.²¹ Strikingly, Embry and Allen's

18. James B. Allen, Jessie L. Embry, and Kahlile B. Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* (special book-length edition), *BYU Studies* 34/2 (1994–95): 39–40.

19. Thomas W. Simpson, "Mormons Study 'Abroad': Brigham Young's Romance with American Higher Education, 1867–1877," *Church History* 76/4 (December 2007): 778–98; Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 44.

20. Weil, *Family Trees*, 178.

21. Jessie L. Embry and James Allen, "'Provoking the Brethren to Good Works': Susa Young Gates, the Relief Society, and Genealogy," *BYU Studies* 31/2 (Spring 1991): 115–38; Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*.

account suggests that central church leadership and LDS wards and stakes were at best uninterested in, and at worst resistant to, a church-wide effort at genealogical education. Attributing this obstacle not to “genealogy per se” but to the “continuing question of whether church headquarters should impose any classwork upon local Relief Societies,” their argument raises questions about how genealogy connected with debates about gender and central versus local church governance in the twentieth century.²² Genealogy did not permanently settle into church structures until the 1920s and 1930s. In the same period, however, temple worship was central to Mormonism.²³ To date there is no in-depth analysis of these two trends—genealogy and temple worship—let alone their connections or disconnections with turn-of-the-century genealogy beyond Mormonism.

Also underexplored is what the first and second manifestos meant for genealogical practices among members, especially as they were issued near the same time the church discontinued adoption sealings and biologically based sealings took precedence. The stretch from the 1890s until the church microfilming program in the late 1930s is a complicated story about not only the end of polygamy but also LDS Church-sponsored genealogical activities and members’ genealogical understanding that has much to offer current scholars of Mormonism.

Possibilities for genealogical scholarship

There are also implications for the history of genealogy as it grapples with various strands of Mormon scholarship. Numerous additional scholarly fields have touched on Mormon genealogy in ways that

22. Embry and Allen, “Provoking the Brethren,” 125.

23. Samuel Brown, “A Sacred Code: Mormon Temple Dedication Prayers, 1836–2000,” *Journal of Mormon History* 32/2 (Summer 2006): 173–96; Richard Bennett, “Wilford Woodruff and the Rise of Temple Consciousness among the Latter-day Saints, 1877–84,” in *Banner of the Gospel: Wilford Woodruff*, ed. Alexander L. Baugh and Susan Easton Black (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 233–50.

Mormon studies scholars could further illuminate. How Mormon genealogical systems compare with other kinships systems and how they interact with racial and gendered practices are just two areas where Mormon studies scholars could further the conversation about genealogy. Scholars of memory, art, archival practices, public history, and cultural anthropology have all touched on genealogical practices in general and Mormonism in particular.²⁴ Specifically, they have analyzed various kinship systems and how Mormon genealogy fits within, or outside, those systems. They offer intriguing insights and critiques about Latter-day Saint genealogical practices, particularly the effort—currently embodied in FamilySearch’s Family Tree—to create one large family tree and to account for all of humanity (or at least the portion of humanity for whom records survive). In doing so, many quote extensively from Donald Akenson’s 2007 *Some Family: The Mormons and How Humanity Keeps Track of Itself*. While Akenson’s discussion of the different ways humanity has organized genealogical knowledge is insightful and his point about Mormon genealogical logic is intriguing, his understanding of LDS genealogical practices is sometimes

24. Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann, eds., *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies* (Toronto: University Toronto Press, 2010); Julia Creet, “Hypermnesia and the Genealogical Archive,” in *Travelling Concepts: Memory*, ed. Nancy Pedri (Amsterdam: Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis Press, 2003), 59–72; Tucker, *City of Remembering*; Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia P. Buckler, eds., *The Scrapbook in American Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Hannah Mary Little, “Genealogy as Theatre of Self-Identity: A Study of Genealogy as a Culture Practice within Britain since c. 1850” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2009), <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/1434/1/2009littl1phd.pdf>; Jerome de Groot, “The International Federation for Public History Plenary Address: On Genealogy,” *Public Historian* 37/3 (August 2015): 102–27; Alex Shoumatoff, *The Mountain of Names: A History of the Human Family* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985); Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “The Genesis of the Family Tree,” *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 4 (1991): 105–29; Eviatar Zerubavel, *Ancestors and Relatives: Genealogy, Identity, and Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: Shame and Privacy in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

problematic and often inaccurate.²⁵ Given that so many others rely on Akenson, this has led, unintentionally, to some unsophisticated analyses that conflate crowd-sourced and undocumented family trees with official church temple practices and record-preserving efforts but do not fully explore the implications of either aspect. Therefore, this portion of the conversation about Mormonism has largely been surrendered to those not extensively trained in Mormon history and practice.

This does not mean Akenson and others have not raised interesting questions for scholars of Mormonism. One scholar described the Mormon genealogical effort as “a daring feat, a continuing and seemingly always advancing act of genealogical imperialism.”²⁶ And another argued that LDS “use of religion-based information and technologies implicitly frames genealogical research in a narrative of salvation” and, via the church’s online databases and record collections, imposes that frame on non-LDS users.²⁷ If these statements are accurate, how they came to be needs to be traced by scholars trained in Mormon studies.

Scholarship about genealogy would benefit from further engagement with other aspects of Mormon historiography. In particular, scholarship about race within Mormonism has much to offer scholars of genealogy. Armand Mauss’s 2003 *All Abraham’s Children* insightfully demonstrates how racial attitudes became embedded in temple practices (and who could participate in them) and therefore had genealogical implications.²⁸ He masterfully links a discussion of racial identity to GSU policies and practices. While scholars of genealogy have traced the general American trend to embed within genealogy racist attitudes and racial identity following the Civil War, they have also seen such practices waning during the last half of the twentieth century.²⁹ How

25. Donald Harman Akenson, *Some Family: The Mormons and How Humanity Keeps Track of Itself* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007).

26. Tucker, *City of Remembrance*, 27.

27. Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 85.

28. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

29. Weil, *Family Trees*, 112–42.

do Mormon understandings of race and its connections to temple and genealogical practices inform or complicate that story?

Gendered aspects of genealogical practices and LDS women's history also offer potential lines of productive inquiry. Tucker and Morgan's recent work has begun to explore these ideas by addressing how women's control over genealogy and kin-keeping more generally is a place of power and influence.³⁰ Morgan also underscores the important role LDS women played in the early twentieth-century development of Mormon genealogy. In many ways, LDS women were the bedrock of genealogical record keeping via the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, the Relief Society, and Susa Young Gates's steady leadership in both organizations' genealogical activities. Gates also influenced early twentieth-century American genealogy beyond Mormonism.³¹ Despite the shift to priesthood quorum oversight of genealogy in the 1930s and the incorporation of the GSU into the church organization in the 1940s, genealogy gathering and record keeping remained, and remains, largely a female domain within Mormonism. Little of the literature on LDS women's history touches on this history or recognizes its importance. Institutional accounts of LDS women's history similarly miss women's participation in, and even leadership of, church genealogical programs. The official introduction to the history of the Relief Society, *Daughters in My Kingdom*, does not mention any genealogical activities from the 1910s and 1920s, even as it details the Relief Society's efforts to provide welfare services, build a hospital system, and continue the struggle for suffrage—the former two activities later adopted by the church much as genealogy was.³² LDS women's history could speak to this gap in genealogical scholarship and could push it to consider the gendered aspects of genealogical practices within and beyond Mormonism.

30. Tucker, *City of Remembrance*, 152–56; Francesca Morgan, “Chatty Old Lady,” unpublished paper, 2017.

31. Tucker, *City of Remembering*, 25–26.

32. *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011).

Possibilities for institutional publications

Beyond scholarly conversations, there is more than just an academic debate at stake for Mormon studies and the history of genealogy. A Mormon studies enriched by engagement with genealogical scholarship has implications for LDS (and non-LDS) genealogical practices. Parallel to genealogical scholarship and academic scholarship on Mormonism are various institutional accounts of genealogy. These official church publications, or publications by church-affiliated entities, have focused on narrative accounts of record keeping and preservation, submission of family trees, and temple work and building. *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, an institutional history of the GSU, remains the most detailed account of LDS genealogy. In many ways, Allen, Embry, and Mehr told a story that matched the story of Western genealogy told by recent historians. Similar to the history traced by Sharpe and Weil, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* traces Mormonism's official efforts to expand genealogical research and record preservation and to improve the accuracy of the genealogical records kept by members. Though it did not generate sustained scholarly production about LDS genealogy, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* is quoted extensively by scholars of genealogy and is echoed or cited in other church publications.³³

Other church or church-affiliated authors and journals have produced numerous accounts about Mormon genealogy. Church Educational System manuals, Sunday School manuals, Gospel Topics essays, *Revelations in Context* essays, and FamilySearch.org have all produced official or quasi-official accounts of Mormon genealogy. Many of these sources provide a detailed account of Joseph Smith's revelations about work for the dead, but they often stop there, or skip forward to consider current genealogical practices, without considering the long-term implications of those revelations nor the changes in how those revelations were implemented in genealogical practices over the ensuing two

33. Lisa Olsen Tait, "Susa Young Gates and the Vision of the Redemption of the Dead: D&C 138," *Revelations in Context*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, August 14, 2015, <https://history.lds.org/article/susa-young-gates-vision-of-redemption>.

centuries.³⁴ This is not their job, of course, but Mormon studies scholars could bring genealogical scholarship together with institutional histories in ways that would be useful, accessible, and meaningful to authors of institutional publications.

Given the church's interest in publically engaging with its history, and given the rigorous scholarship about that history, it is crucial that the world of genealogical practices be brought into that work. As historical scholarship has informed the work of the Church History Department, so too could scholarship on genealogy inform the practices of FamilySearch. The church has implicitly, and increasingly explicitly, created a narrative about all of human history that has drawn attention from outsiders who need more context for the history and purpose of such a project. One unintended consequence of the record-preservation efforts of the church is that the Granite Mountain Records Vault, where all those records are stored, has become a de facto repository of humanity's history from the last five hundred years.³⁵ Over time, that unintended consequence became more celebrated until the development of FamilySearch Family Tree in the early 2000s and its official launch in 2013 established it as an overt goal. Family Tree is crowd-sourced and open to anyone who creates a free account, partly in the hopes to "organize the family tree for all of God's children."³⁶ Because of such ambitious genealogical goals, the LDS Church has attained, in one observer's opinion, "authority over the past."³⁷ Mormon studies scholars who provide history and context for this development do a service

34. David L. Paulsen, Kendel J. Christensen, and Martin Pulido, "Redeeming the Dead: Tender Mercies, Turning of Hearts, and Restoration of Authority," *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20/1 (2011): 28–51.

35. Shoumatoff, *Mountain of Names*, 288–93; Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 256.

36. Russell M. Nelson, "Generations Linked in Love," *Ensign*, May 2010, 91–94; Christine Kenneally, "The Mormon Church Is Building a Family Tree of the Entire Human Race," *NewRepublic.com*, October 14, 2014, excerpted from Christine Kenneally, *The Invisible History of the Human Race: How DNA and History Shape Our Identities and Our Futures* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

37. Tucker, *City of Remembrance*, 134.

to both genealogical and Mormon historiography as well as a service to authors of church publications.

There is also a large non-LDS practitioner audience who would benefit from such work. The church's genealogy project draws upon millions of volunteers. The 3.45 million contributors to FamilySearch.org's crowd-sourced Family Tree in 2016, whether Mormon or not, participate in the Mormon genealogical project.³⁸ Additionally, the non-Mormon genealogical world puts enormous weight on LDS practices. As one observer put it, "The LDS Church is central to a national culture of genealogy, and ultimately an international one, because it has allowed access to large collection of records."³⁹ A story about genealogy buttressed by a greater connection to Mormon studies would provide a greater context for non-LDS users of LDS genealogical products and systems.

Conclusion

This review has hopefully exposed some areas where Mormon studies could connect with, test, and respond to the existing literature on genealogical practices—and potentially find places to offer a more illuminating story. There are possibilities to situate Mormon genealogical teaching and practices within narratives about genealogical activities and to simultaneously complicate the story about those activities. Scholars interested in family history will have a better sense of Mormon genealogical practices, and in this way Mormonism could become an illuminating prism through which to test scholarly assertions about Western genealogy and genealogical knowledge more generally. Similarly, for scholars of Mormonism, an understanding of broader considerations within genealogical history (both that produced by scholars and that produced by the LDS Church) will help place teachings about

38. Diane Sagers, "FamilySearch 2016 Year in Review," *FamilySearch Blog*, January 4, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/blog/en/familysearch-2016-year-review/>.

39. Tucker, *City of Remembrance*, 27.

temples and eternal kinship into a context of lived genealogical practice. Knowing how Mormonism reifies or refutes the existing literature on genealogy is a story worth telling.

Amy Harris is an associate professor of history at Brigham Young University and an accredited genealogist. Her book *Siblinghood and Social Relations in Georgian England* (Manchester University Press, 2012) explored sibling relationships and their connections to political and social ideas of equality. Her most recent publication, “Early Mormonism’s Expansive Families and the Browett Women,” will appear as a chapter in the forthcoming *Mormon Women’s History: Beyond Biography*, by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. She currently directs the Family History Program at BYU.