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Looking Forward to 25 More Years of FARMS

This is an excerpt from a dinner speech that FARMS founder John W. Welch gave to members of the FARMS Development Council on 19 March 2004.

An evening like this, which begins our commemoration of the 25th anniversary of FARMS, makes me think back to our founding days in 1979. Keeping alive the memory of foundation stories, of creation accounts, is part of keeping on track for the future.

It was exactly a quarter of a century ago that three lawyers (Lew Cramer, Clark Waddoups, and I) were driving up Sixth Street in Los Angeles to get on the Harbor Freeway on our way home. I was practicing tax law at the time, and in retrospect I think it no accident that I had developed some expertise in organizing and advising tax exempt organizations. I was about to file the articles of incorporation for a new foundation that could make Book of Mormon research available to people all over the world and that could facilitate the good work of promising Latter-day Saint scholars. Well, all we needed was a name. As we pulled onto the freeway, the name “FARMS” was hatched. It got a good laugh at first, but none of us could forget it, nor has the general public.

FARMS was built on several values and principles: on fulfilling real needs; on dreaming and exploration; on unselfishness and generosity; on goodwill, faith, cooperative independence, commitment to quality, and reliability; on productivity and service; and on true sincerity. These values and principles remain in place today and will carry FARMS into its next quarter century.

Why are 25 more years of FARMS needed? For one thing, the original needs that called for the creation of FARMS still exist, and with the world’s information explosion, those needs are more pressing than ever.

In 25 years FARMS has seen great success: the FARMS newsletter, research updates, papers, books, videos, research projects, journals, reviews,

and conferences reach thousands of people. But these items should reach millions.

Hundreds of students have been trained and employed, building a new generation of Latter-day Saint researchers. But these numbers should be in the thousands.

Our gathering of information, outreach programs, membership services, and answers to frequently asked questions have been outstanding. But there is much more work yet to do.

Our donors and volunteers have made all of this possible, often miraculously so. But the work has just begun.

We continue to expand our robust Web site and database of readily available information. Major research projects on Abraham, Alma, the New Testament, Mesoamerican chronology, chiasmus, and the Dead Sea Scrolls are partway finished and need acceleration.

Nibley Fellows (a host of rising scholars whose postgraduate education is supported by the Institute) are growing in expertise. An organization called the Student Society for Ancient Studies has been formed at Brigham Young University. The next generation needs to be nourished and nurtured.

A line of publications is coming down the pike. The beautiful *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* has a backlog of submissions that would justify publication three times, not just twice, per year. Unfinished additions to the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* remain to be published. John Sorenson still has files full of materials to be processed. Work is yet to be done by Royal Skousen on the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon, to mention only a few.

Latter-day Saint religious studies programs are springing up at various universities, notably at Claremont Graduate University and Utah State University. One must wonder, Who will teach the Book of Mormon at such institutions?

People still suggest that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon as a pious fraud, that he somehow formulated the story and then dictated it to Oliver Cowdery. But just imagine the challenge of not only memorizing the 30 names that appear

in the genealogy at the beginning of the book of Ether, but then repeating those 30 in exactly the opposite order, in the process of telling the history of the Jaredites in the body of that book!

In the February 2004 issue of the *Ensign*, President Gordon B. Hinckley said of the Book of Mormon: “The evidence for its truth, for its validity in a world that is prone to demand evidence, lies not in archaeology or anthropology, *though these may be helpful to some*. It lies not in word research or historical analysis, *though these may be confirmatory*. . . . Reasonable people may sincerely question its origin; but those who have read it prayerfully have come to know by a power beyond their natural

senses that it is true” (“Four Cornerstones of Faith,” 6; emphasis added). As it has always been, the purpose of FARMS in its next 25 years is not to take the place of spiritual testimony, but to create a helpful, confirmatory atmosphere in which the spirit of truth may breathe.

Where will the Lord take this work in the next 25 years? We can no more answer that question today than we could have predicted in 1979 the extraordinary experience of FARMS in its first quarter century. But if the next 25 years are anything close to the first, it promises to be an extremely interesting, valuable, and gratifying time. I am eager to see what the future will bring. 📖

FARMS Celebrates 25 Years of Research

To celebrate our 25th anniversary, FARMS is holding a banquet on 22 October 2004 at Thanksgiving Point, Lehi, Utah. The evening will start with a reception at 6:15 p.m., followed by dinner at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are \$50 per person. Call us at 1-800-327-6715 for reservations and further details.

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History of Eastern Christianity

The final lecture in the series, on 31 March, was by Bishop Mar Bawai Soro of the Assyrian Church of the East. Six years ago, Bishop Soro was instrumental in helping to open a dialogue between CPART (part of the Institute) personnel and ecclesiastical authorities overseeing the archives of the Vatican Apostolic Library in Rome. This led to an agreement between Brigham Young University and the Vatican authorizing CPART to digitize 28 ancient Syriac documents from the library’s excellent collections.

Bishop Soro began his lecture by acknowledging the strength of his ties with BYU and CPART and then gave a brief history of Eastern Christianity from its origins in the Judeo-Christian tradition as developed in Mesopotamia. Syriac Christianity stemmed from Jerusalem after the destruction of the temple in AD 70, he said. In Syriac Christianity one can find a cultural, spiri-

tual, linguistic snapshot of the same society that Jesus and his apostles experienced. In the third and fourth centuries, Aristotelian logic, philosophy, and ethics began to be translated into Syriac in Syria and northern Mesopotamia by the Syriac Christians. After the rise and establishment of Islam, a number of the caliphs became interested in Greek philosophy and absorbed vast quantities of Greek learning into Arabic, often by Christian translators. Later in the Middle Ages, Greek philosophy, augmented by Arabic learning, was introduced to the West in translations from Arabic to Latin, leading to the European Enlightenment.

He concluded by noting two events that are bringing the scattered Christians of Syriac persuasions together. First is a 30-year-old initiative of the Archdiocese of Vienna called Pro Oriente—a dialogue between the Western and Eastern Churches. The second is the BYU initiative with the Vatican library, making ancient Syriac Christian manuscripts available for study by scholars all over the world. 📖