



7-31-2004

A New Beginning for the Pageant: 1948 to 1951

Harold I. Hansen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Hansen, Harold I. (2004) "A New Beginning for the Pageant: 1948 to 1951," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 13 : No. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol13/iss1/10>

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

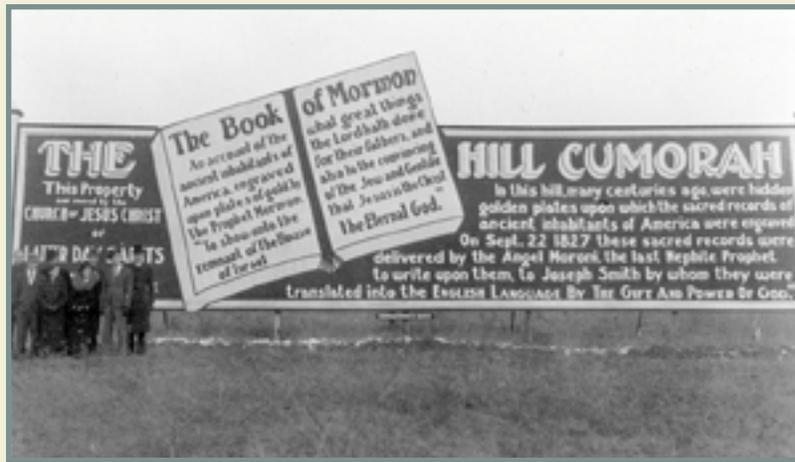
Title A New Beginning for the Pageant: 1948 to 1951

Author(s) Harold I. Hansen

Reference *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13/1-2 (2004): 88-97, 171.

ISSN 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

Abstract Harold I. Hansen directed the Hill Cumorah Pageant from 1937 to 1977 (excluding the years 1943-47 when the pageant was suspended for the duration of World War II). He passed away in 1992. This article is an excerpt from his unfinished history of the pageant. His narrative includes details of his efforts to revive the pageant in 1948 and mentions the assistance of Bishop Thorpe B. Isaacson of the Presiding Bishopric, who visited the pageant in 1949. Because of his visit and recommendation to the First Presidency, the pageant was again established as an annual event and moved from an Eastern States Mission activity to a church-recognized production. Hansen includes a statement of support from President David O. McKay and reminiscences of Elder Richard L. Evans, the missionaries, and Harris Cooper, who provided lighting for the production for many years.



A NEW BEGINNING FOR THE PAGEANT: 1948 TO 1951

HAROLD I. HANSEN

Harold I. Hansen directed the Hill Cumorah Pageant from 1937 to 1977 (excluding the years 1943–47). He passed away in 1992. The following excerpt from his unfinished history of the pageant is published here for the first time, with minimal editing. —Ed.



Photo of Harold I. Hansen courtesy of Betty H. Gibbons.

Opposite: An early billboard marking the Hill Cumorah as a tourist destination. Photo courtesy of Palmyra Bean Packer.

THE HILL CUMORAH PAGEANT was a memory in the spring of 1948. The last performance had been in the summer of 1941. Since then I had finished my PhD and was teaching summer school at the University of Iowa. My life and my career were beginning to take shape.

Then I received a phone call from a man who identified himself as Roy Doxey, president of the Eastern States Mission. He simply said, “Brother Hansen, we are expecting you to come and revive the pageant this year.”

“That isn’t possible,” I replied. “I can’t possibly come back. I have a full teaching load.”

“Well, you’ll have to do it,” he said.

“Why don’t you get Brother Karl Wood?”¹ I suggested. I was a little bit shocked when he said that he had already tried to get Brother Wood.

I explained that I had just signed my first contract, and I was not popular with the department chairman, E. C. Mabie, because of the stand I had taken regarding the Sabbath. At Iowa it was customary to have the major dress rehearsal on Sunday. I had said at the beginning, “I cannot do it, Mr. Mabie. My church meets in Cedar Rapids.” Cedar Rapids was the closest branch, and we took the electric train on Sunday morning. All of the meetings were bunched in the morning, and then we would

return home in the afternoon. So E. C. Mabie and I had reached an agreement: I would go to my meetings in the morning, and he would see that dress rehearsals started in midafternoon. From then on, Mr. Mabie called me “preacher.”

At any rate, I had no intention of tackling Mr. Mabie about leaving campus during my first term of teaching to go to Palmyra for the pageant. President Doxey suggested that we meet in the mission office in Philadelphia. The office had been moved there from New York City.

Again I said, “I can’t do it. It’s too far to come and still keep my schedule here.” He indicated that he would call again tomorrow. He called the next day and said, “The Brethren have given me permission to meet you in the mission home in Chicago. Will you come there and meet me over the weekend?”

I agreed but told him, “It will be lost time. You must not get your hopes up.”

So I took the train to Chicago and met him. He was very persuasive. He frankly surprised me with the keen understanding he had of the pageant and its value. He tried very hard to understand my problems and to get me to understand what was in his mind. He was not abrasive or rigid, but I finally had to tell him again that, with Mr. Mabie’s attitude, I thought it was impossible. At that he seemed almost

exhausted but asked, “Do I have your permission to call him?”

I responded, “Yes, but don’t be surprised at anything he says.”

I returned to Iowa City and was in my classroom teaching Monday morning when one of the secretaries came from the main office with the message that “the Boss” wanted to see me after class. (We all called Mr. Mabie “the Boss.”) So I went to see him, and I admit I went with some fear and trembling. A trip to the Boss’s office was much like a trip to the woodshed at home. It is humorous now because I know him in a very different way, but then I was concerned. I knew why I was meeting with him, but I didn’t know what to expect from him.

I went in. He invited me to sit down and asked, “Now what’s this stuff about a religious pageant in western New York?”

I tried to explain the best I could what the pageant was and its relationship to the church. He looked at me a second and said, “Well, don’t you think you’d better go do it?”

I was so shocked that all I could get out was, “But Mr. Mabie, my classes. What’ll I do?”

Without hesitation, he resolved the problem. “We will cover your classes until you’re through and come back.” He continued, “You know, when I think of the way we have moved Sunday rehearsals so you can go to church . . . What’s the matter? Your church is asking you to do something. How can you refuse when I’m making it possible?” I didn’t have a single defense—not a single defense. I was done. So I made the arrangements as to when I would leave and when I would return.

I went to the hill to revive the pageant but found that it was to be a bigger job than I had thought. I was fortunate to have President Doxey’s help and cooperation in putting things back together. Everything had disappeared as far as physical property was concerned. We found parts of the stages built into the walls of chicken coops. Some costumes and props had just been thrown away to make the storage space available for things that seemed more important at the time.

President Doxey appointed a very mature elder, Elder Dwight Dixon, as the work crew director. (Years later Dr. Dwight Dixon, a physicist, joined the faculty at Brigham Young University.) A marvelous group of 18 elders, who were strong physi-

cally and spiritually, were also appointed to the work crew.

The crew had moved into a terrible old broken-down farmhouse, known as the “old Bennett farm,” at the south end of the hill by the time I arrived. They had put it together as best they could to live in that year. Elder Dixon, in his report, described the shower that they installed:

A shower was constructed by placing three oil drums near the well with a pit under them in which a fire was built each evening to heat the water. A hose was used to fill the drums and conduct the water to the shower below the old shed. This arrangement was satisfactory excepting that the drums should be mounted a few feet higher so that the pressure at the shower house will be a little greater.

When I arrived in Palmyra, Elder Dixon picked me up and brought me to the farmhouse. As we stopped in front, he said, “I don’t think you’ll mind living here. It’s really not too bad.”

Trying not to hurt any feelings, I said, “Oh, I’m sure it will be fine.”

Elder Dixon’s sense of humor wouldn’t let him stop at that. As he took my old, beat-up luggage out of the car, he couldn’t resist adding, “It matches your luggage perfectly.” (To top it all off, as I left pageant that year, the work crew gave me a new set of luggage that they had all chipped in to buy for me.)

After I moved in with the crew and we began to talk about the pageant, one realization struck me: I was the only one who had ever seen the pageant. None of the crew had seen it. All they knew about what should be done they had gotten from the 1941 work crew’s report.

Elder Dixon and the crew began to rebuild the three basic stages on the hill. The first was near the bottom and was 12 feet deep and 40 feet wide. The second was located farther up the hill, and the third was about three-fourths of the way up the hill. These upper stages were about 10 feet deep by 30 feet wide.

I began to worry about sight lines. The crowds in the past had overflowed our efforts to seat them. Many brought their own chairs and put them at the ends of the rows of seats. So in order to improve the sight lines for those people, we took out about a dozen trees and widened the staging area.

Another challenge was acquiring costumes for the pageant. The costumes that had been borrowed

in Logan, Utah, had been returned, and many of the costumes that had been created for the earlier pageant had been thrown away. So I reestablished contact with Ann Neddo of the Logan Pageant Society and arranged to rent the costumes we had previously used.

As in past years, for lighting we turned to Harris Cooper, owner of Cooper Lighting and Decorating, Syracuse, New York. Elder Dixon had negotiated the rental of the dimmers and lighting equipment from him. The lighting instruments that the mission had purchased remained but had rusted from the humidity. Harris considered them obsolete, but Elder Quinton Klingler, who had been assigned to assist Harris with the lighting, was able to fix all of them for use in the pageant. The routine of stringing the cable and hanging and focusing the lighting instruments was somewhat delayed because Harris's equipment was being used in another production and didn't arrive at the hill until four days before the pageant was presented.

Elder Dixon found the old sound system at the Martin Harris Farm and moved it out to the hill, but it wouldn't work. Elder Burns Black, who had been a radioman in the navy, finally got it working. But just before the performances it quit again, and we had to rent an amplifier. It still didn't work all that well. The whole system was too small and frequently overdriven, which caused the sound to be distorted.

As the balance of the missionaries arrived, I began work with the cast. The usual casting procedure brought back an old problem: trumpeters opened and closed the pageant— were there four missionaries who could play the trumpet strong enough to be heard? Indeed there were: Elders Allen Cook, Kelsey Chatfield, Kjar Willey, and Harold King. The Lord continued to call elders with the skill to play the trumpet each year until the pageant was finally recorded.

One of the big visual changes we made in 1948 was in the façades that covered the newly constructed light towers. These two towers were 10 feet by 14 feet at the base and were 20 feet tall. They were constructed on concrete-block bases. Betty, my wife, designed and helped construct and paint these huge façades. The top of each façade stepped down, and there was a three-dimensional Aztec head about two-thirds of the way up. The work crew constructed a scaffolding from which the heads could be mounted and painted. The façades were

very imposing, and the trees that had been planted on the hill much earlier still had not grown to any great height. The façades not only masked the light towers but helped to mask the offstage areas as well.

The crew acquired two army surplus tents to store tools and materials in during the construction period. Then during dress rehearsal and performance days, these tents were converted into dressing rooms. The smaller, 16' x 16' tent was set up just north and east of the sound booth for use as the women's dressing room. The larger, 16' x 32' tent was set up on the other side of the acting area just south of the south tower and used as the men's dressing room. This was a great improvement but was still very primitive.

With the technical aspects of the pageant moving along well and the cast in rehearsal, the crew turned its attention to providing seating for the audience. They borrowed 650 planks (16-foot two-by-tens and two-by-twelves) from lumberyards in Palmyra, Pittsford, and Canandaigua. The crew built special two-by-four end supports. Holes were dug with grubbing hoes to hold the supports, and then a short length of pole was driven into the ground for the middle support. The crew felt that this would provide seating for about 7,000 people, even though the press releases announced that we had seating for 10,000.

All of the parking was planned for the east side of the highway. Two entrances were provided: one near the concrete culvert and the other farther south across from the farm. For overflow, a road to the south pasture was laid out.

Elder Clifford Young, then an Assistant to the Twelve, attended the mission conference and the pageant. He was very interested in what we were doing. Both he and his wife were writers, which gave them a feeling for some of the frustrations I was having with the script.

As the pageant closed, the press reported that over 80,000 audience members had seen it during the three nights. I didn't have much time to savor the spirit that was always there. I returned immediately to my classes at the University of Iowa and finished my summer contract. In the fall I went back to my position at Utah State Agricultural College, but the pageant was never far away from my thoughts. President Doxey and I corresponded most of the winter on different matters concerning the next year's pageant. One of the matters was the construction of more suitable living quarters for the

work crew. A 20' x 50' building to be constructed on the back side of the hill was agreed upon and constructed before preparation for the pageant began. It was designed to provide sleeping quarters, kitchen and restroom facilities for the work crew during pageant time, and storage for pageant materials during the remainder of the year. It began as the "pageant house" but, of course, has had some remodeling and has been known by other names over the years. During the latter years, it became known as the "cook shack" since it was used as a kitchen and dining room for the work crew.

The 1949 pageant was scheduled for August 18–20, and George Q. Morris had been appointed to replace Roy W. Doxey as mission president. Even with a change in president, things began much the same. I had a few ideas from the year before that I wanted to introduce into the pageant.

I had wanted almost from the beginning to bring Joseph Smith as a character into the pageant as a unifying element. The need for changes that would aid audience understanding of the story and the message of the pageant had been discussed. I felt that by using Joseph Smith and the angel Moroni as narrator-characters, I could both clarify the story and strengthen the message.

After I arrived at the hill in 1949, I asked the work crew to make some visual changes. We used the same basic stage arrangements as before, but I had them add a 12' x 12' section to the first stage and a 10' x 16' section to the third stage. In enlarging the acting area of the third stage, it was also necessary to change the backing units. I decided to remove the large pyramid as a backing unit and replace it with a disc similar in design but larger than

the other discs behind the third stage. The wall behind the first stage also had to be extended toward the audience. With this extension to the first stage, I also widened the opening some 45 feet.

I had felt a need for a visual focus during the crucifixion scene, but I didn't want to depict the scene with people on the crosses. It seemed wrong to me. So I had three wooden crosses erected near the top of the hill. These crosses were very rustic and were lit during the scene to provide visual focus while the music built the climax.

Although we had talked the year before about buying our own lighting equipment so we could do the lighting ourselves, we didn't receive enough budget to do it right. So it seemed wise to hire Harris Cooper as we had done in previous years. I was worried as always by the small amount of time Harris spent at the hill. I tried as best I could to work out a lot of the details by letter before he arrived. It helped some, but he still flew from Syracuse, New York, to rehearse lights nearly all night. Although not a member of the church, he was most cooperative in supplying the latest lighting equipment and technical know-how to light the pageant in a very professional manner.

That year, Bishop Thorpe B. Isaacson, second counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, arrived at the hill while preparations were under way. He came out on the hill and began to talk with me about the pageant. He seemed genuinely interested. It made me feel marvelous. So when he asked, "Are there things that I can help you with?" I felt he was sincere.

I said, "Well, Bishop Isaacson, look around you. I'm absolutely ashamed of the buildings. Some of these old buildings don't even have any paint on them."



Harold Hansen with one of the pageant's performers.

When the pageant was in performance and the lights were aimed only on what we wanted to be seen, things didn't look too bad. But in the daylight hours when people were able to see everything, the surrounding area looked shabby and run-down.

I went on, "We really don't have any paint to put on some of these stages, and I don't have any budget to buy it with."

"What do you need most?" he asked.

"A lot of green paint," I answered.

With that he got in his car and went into Palmyra himself. He came back with gallons of green paint. We immediately started to apply it to everything that didn't move and some things that did. When we finished, I at least wasn't as ashamed of our surroundings as I had been.

It was fortunate that these things were done, because for the first time in the pageant's history, an actual performance (on Thursday, August 18) was televised and broadcast by WHAM-TV from Rochester. The mission shared the cost with the TV station, and the broadcast won us a lot of attention that year.

Bishop Isaacson stayed for the presentation of the pageant. In his talk at the October general conference of that year (1949), he spoke of the pageant, which was a marvelous lift for me because there had not been much official church notice of the pageant before that. Several things had touched Bishop Isaacson, and he mentioned them in his talk. He was impressed with the faith of the missionaries:

At nine-ten every night those missionaries were asked to assemble at a certain wooded spot on Hill Cumorah, behind one of the large scenes, in the darkness. There was that great audience out in front, not knowing what was going on, but there those missionaries . . . huddled together, praying to the Lord that he would bless that pageant, that it would go forward without any interruption and that the audience would partake of the spirit of the pageant.

I remember the first night it started to rain about six o'clock. There was some concern whether or not it would prevent presentation of the pageant. It is all outdoors: the stage, the audience, and the scenes. I remember shaking hands with two fine young missionaries who had their pageant costumes on, and I said to them, as I shook hands with them, "I hope the rain will not spoil the pageant."

One of them looked me straight in the eye and he said, "Oh, Bishop, don't worry, the rain will not spoil the pageant. Nothing will spoil the pageant, because the elders of this mission have united our faith and called upon the Lord to bless this pageant that the message would go forward to the thousands of people who assemble to witness it."

Now some may call that simple faith, but I call that most beautiful, most humble faith. By the time the pageant was ready to start, the storm had ceased and the stars were out bright.²

He also commented on another experience the missionaries had told him about:

The last night the [sound] technician became very much concerned that the loud-speaking system might not continue to operate, and he told the missionaries [assisting him] he did not know what to do. There was that great audience of thousands of people. They could not follow the pageant without the loud-speaking system functioning, because some of the audience were a block away from the Hill and from the scenes. But as he became more concerned, all he would have needed to do was to ask those missionaries, but he did not do that, so they took it in their own hands. They went out behind that truck in the wooded section of Hill Cumorah, and as we would expect, those missionaries knelt down and prayed that the Lord would see to it that the loud-speaking system would continue, and the loud-speaking system did continue until the pageant was over.

That kind of faith is the kind of faith that we have been hearing about the last few days here. That is the kind of faith that draws men close to God, their Eternal Father.³

He concluded that when the 30,000 people who were watching saw the trumpeters turn toward the statue of Moroni and play "An Angel from on High," they couldn't have helped being touched. He then said something that I have heard repeated over and over during the years I was at Cumorah: "It was one of the most thrilling yet touching experiences of my life."

I had not been aware until later that the First Presidency had asked Bishop Isaacson to go to Palmyra and "determine whether or not it [the pageant]

should continue.” Bishop Isaacson reported to the First Presidency that the pageant should be “continued, expanded, increased and improved.”

It was then that the annual presentation was again established, and it moved from an Eastern States Mission activity to a church-recognized production. I was very pleased that what we were doing was found to be acceptable by the Brethren.

I returned to Logan and my position at Utah State. I hadn’t been home two weeks when we had the dates set for the 1950 pageant. I needed permission from the college to be absent during the period that I was to be gone to the pageant. I approached Franklin S. Harris, who was president at that time, for permission to go to Palmyra to direct the pageant. He responded on January 4, 1950, with the following:

As I have said to you personally, I believe that this is a very fine assignment, and we all congratulate you on it. We shall be glad to give you leave during this period. This is becoming a national and even an international affair. Your fine work is in large measure responsible for the excellence of the performance. We are very proud of you.

After I received this permission, a change occurred in the presidency of the college. I felt the need to go back again, and I received the same permission from the new president, Louis L. Madsen.

That year I tried a new idea in casting the voices that worked and saved precious time at the hill. A circular was sent out to all of the missionaries asking those who were interested in being the voice for one of the roles to record one of several passages of scripture and send it to me in Logan. By listening to the recordings, I was able to pick the voices I would use on the microphone in the sound booth.

A problem that had been with us from the beginning was the echo from the barn on the farm across the road. In March, trees were planted in front of the barn. At the same time, the fields across the road from the Bureau of Information were cleared to make additional parking space. We had known for two years that we needed more parking but couldn’t get it in place until now.

Although we did some things early, a crisis occurred in 1950 that couldn’t have been avoided by anything we might have done before the pageant. As had been our tradition, we had arranged for the costumes from the Logan Pageant Society. Ann

Neva took care of the packing and shipping in Logan. She always packed the costumes well and had them out in plenty of time. We had received notification that they had been sent, but they didn’t arrive. I grew concerned and inquired. She put out the normal traces, but the costumes couldn’t be found. No one could find them. I immediately made inquiries of the New York costume companies. Their prices were just out of reason. I was acquainted with members of the church in Philadelphia and contacted them to see if they could do any better with the national costume company there, but to no avail. The lowest quote we were able to get was \$6,000, at a time when the entire pageant budget was little more than \$3,000.

At noon on the Monday before the pageant’s Thursday opening, I sought out President George Q. Morris and presented my dilemma. His response was almost immediate: “Well, what is there to prevent us from making our own costumes?”

I responded, “That’s what we’ve wanted to do all along, but we don’t have enough time.”

In his calm wisdom, he went right to the heart of the matter. “You don’t have any costumes now. We just don’t have enough money to rent them. I don’t know how we can possibly find the ones that are lost.” He paused and then asked, “Is there a way to make them?”

“Well, say that we could. Where will we get the money for the material?” I asked.

After a few phone calls to Rochester, Canandaigua, and Newark, President Morris gave us permission to try it. By 1:00 p.m. that day, the lady missionaries, headed by Sister Ethel Horspool, who prior to her mission was a designer for Ogden Knitting Mills, were sent to buy material. We decided that all we could afford was cotton. They were told that the material should have stripes that run vertically and be as colorful as possible.

You remember that the sisters went on their missions at a little older age then, and as I remember, there were one or two who were on short-term missions. As a consequence, we had several sisters who had trained in home economics and some who had experience as a result of employment. We were able to organize shifts of sisters with one or two of these sisters with more experience in charge.

A costume shop was created in the Bureau of Information garage and on the driveway in front of it. The work crew set up cutting and sewing tables

out of sawhorses and planks. The members and nonmembers in Palmyra, when told of our plight, brought their personal sewing machines. Others said, "Cut them out and pin them. We'll sew them." The impossible was under way.

The loss of the costumes and our valiant effort to beat the clock turned out to be a publicity director's dream come true. The New York press jumped on this human interest story. Even Lowell Thomas, during his nationwide CBS radio newscast, gave a nightly report on how we were doing.

We worked six-hour shifts around the clock. Besides the costume crews, we also had a crew making hats, papier-mâché helmets, and Indian headdresses. While the missionary haircuts were right for modern American missionaries, they were wrong for Book of Mormon and Bible characters and had to be covered up. Some of the elders decided to sew the hems on their own costumes and did such a good job that they were put to work on the crews.

By Wednesday at 9:00 p.m., when the dress rehearsal was scheduled, we had sewn over 600 yards of material and completed over 200 costumes. The dress rehearsal began with only one costume piece missing. That was a hat for Alma the Younger.

Two blessings resulted from this emergency. First, I can't remember having a cast that was closer and more diligent. Second, at last we had our own costumes for the pageant.

The day after the pageant opened, the lost costumes were discovered in Newark, New Jersey, having been sent there instead of Newark, New York, as they were addressed. They were returned to Logan.

Elder Herman Black was the head of the work crew and had recognized, as I had, that during rehearsals not all of the missionaries were involved

all the time. Nothing had been very effective in putting that time to productive use except in 1948, when the missionaries were sent out to advertise the pageant. Elder Black organized gospel discussions led by mission leaders, scripture study, and periods for construction of visual aids. He also scheduled programs in neighboring communities where the musical skills and talents of the missionaries were presented. These activities put the time of the missionaries to more productive use and became a very

natural part of the pageant experience, along with the testimony meetings in the Sacred Grove.

In 1951 the Korean War had reduced the number of missionaries in the field. Rumors began circulating that the pageant wouldn't be held. But President David O. McKay had just been sustained as president of the church, on April 4, 1951, at the death of President George Albert Smith. President McKay had earlier become a close friend of the pageant and was one of its staunchest supporters. He quickly dispelled these rumors in his statements for the press:

We can easily overcome the missionary problem, but there are other features about the Pageant I intend to discuss with my associates

before we can make a final announcement on whether it will continue each year.

There is nothing amateurish about it [the pageant]. It was a professional production and a great deal of credit is due Dr. Harold I. Hansen of the Utah State Agricultural College, who directed the presentation, and to the missionaries who took part.

President McKay's reference to "features" he intended to discuss pointed to the inadequacy of the facilities at the pageant to serve the large crowds



Pageant director Harold Hansen inspects costumes in Brigham Young University's theatre department.

attending. The water supply had been exhausted. Many of the visitors could not find accommodations. The press reported that over 30 carloads of visitors were forced to spend the night in their cars on the pageant grounds. The traffic was too much for the existing highway and parking. The audience for the three nights had exceeded 90,000, and Sheriff Thompson from Ontario County indicated that hundreds of cars had to be turned away on the final two nights.

While these problems were real, they had to be solved outside of the pageant organization. Inside the pageant we had some of the same problems that had plagued us almost from the beginning. We tried again to solve the problem of the sound. We were able to get permission to obtain a whole new sound system, one similar to that of a radio studio. It had three turntables with 12-inch arms; a control console with all of the channels, preamps, mixers, and so forth; and power amps that would drive 10 speakers. This new equipment, which was set up by Elder D. R. Hale, helped the quality of the sound a lot, but it wasn't long until we knew we still didn't have the problem solved.

We used the costumes we had constructed the year before. We did build a few more for the lead characters that needed more than we had been able to give the year before. They included King Noah and King Lamoni.

The lighting was the same as before. Harris Cooper supplied the bulk of the lighting equipment. While Elder Merrill L. Bennion supervised a major part of the work, Harris was there to do the final touches and rehearse the cues. He was a young Jewish man and a perfectionist. There were over 100 dimmer cues, and the follow spots (manually operated spotlights that follow a performer onstage) had their own list of cues as well. The follow spots had a peculiar habit of freezing up at the most inopportune times. They would be working perfectly one moment and then freeze the next. I remember that when one such moment occurred, Harris shouted at the operator. The elder leaned over the edge of the tower and explained that it had

frozen again. Harris told him how to fix it, and then turned to me and said, "I feel so awful. I just shouted at him. I have never worked with so many young people who have given themselves so completely as they do, and then I shout at them. Why did I shout?"

I told him, "Just because you're human, Harris."

One of the most marvelous stories that occurred during those years happened with Harris. The full-time elders who had been assigned to work with Harris on lights began to discuss gospel questions while they were working. They got to quoting scriptures to make their points. Harris was the type of person that caused you to forget completely that he was not a member of the church. His speech was clean, he was very open, and so forth. Well, the elders started to discuss Hebraic Israel. The direction the discussion was going disturbed me because Harris was Jewish, as was his family. They were actively practicing their religion. I was very upset because I felt that the discussion could destroy the relationship that I had with this very fine man. But the elders, completely oblivious of Harris, were going right on with their discussion. One elder started to say something that was not as it should have been, and I interrupted him by saying, "Elder, you're hurting me terribly. You're forgetting that I have a Jewish grandmother."

That ended the discussion, but I soon started hearing right and left, "Did you know Elder Hansen has a Jewish grandmother?" But it didn't end there. Harris brought his whole family to the pageant and, in introducing me to his mother, said, "Mother, do you realize that Elder Hansen has a Jewish grandmother?"

I quickly said, "Well, it's not quite like that, Mrs. Cooper. I remember hearing that the fur-

thest relative is at most a 32nd cousin. So I feel safe in saying that I have a Jewish grandmother."

The Jewish grandmother rumor followed me for about 20 years. But at least it took care of the problem at the time, and I avoided offending a valued friend.

President McKay, as he had always been, was an inspiration to all of us connected to the pageant.



The Hansens at the Hill Cumorah Bureau of Information.

His wise counsel had saved us on several occasions. About this time, the pageant gained another friend in Elder Richard L. Evans. One of the first things that I had to arrange through him was the dates for the 1952 pageant. I received a letter dated December 18, 1951, from President George Q. Morris in which he agreed that we had a problem with the pageant dates of August 14–16 because of their being so close to the August 19 opening of the local fair. There was a feeling that the limited accommodations would be overtaxed by both events. So I went to discuss it with Elder Evans in Salt Lake City, and he agreed that we should move the dates to August 7–9. We called President Bryant Rossiter of the Rochester New York Stake, and he agreed to the change. But Elder Evans was quick to add, “Nothing of this can get out yet. I must check with President McKay.”

I challenged his need to check with President McKay by saying, “President McKay won’t know when the pageant is.”

“That’s true,” he answered, “but when it comes out that it’s been changed, I’ll be in his office explaining why it was changed and why he wasn’t told.”

He then started to try to find a way to get some time with President McKay. Elder Evans indicated that he knew the president was about to go to California for a rest, and he tried to get to him on the phone. He got President McKay’s secretary, whom we all lovingly called the “Iron Curtain” because you couldn’t get past her. He didn’t get through, nor could he find out when President McKay was leaving. So he called President McKay’s son, who said, “If you find out, please let us know. We can’t find out either.”

With this, he sent me to meet Betty and the girls, who were waiting for me in the lobby of the Hotel Utah. He said as I left, “I’ll keep trying to find a way, but if all else fails, I’ll call him after he gets to California. I hate to, but I’ll do it if necessary.”

As I reached the lobby, there was President McKay shaking hands with my two daughters. He

didn’t know who they were. It was the man’s disposition and nature. He saw those two young girls, and when they smiled at him, he went over and shook their hands.

I rushed back to Elder Evans and told him, “If you ever want to see President McKay, just let me know.”

“What’s this?” he asked.

I answered, “He’s coming out of the hotel now.”

He got up and said on his way out, “I’ll go down and meet him.”

We laughed a number of times about how, if he wanted to see the president, he should let me know. I could arrange it. That started a relationship that was a blessing in so many ways for me. Elder Evans was very conscious of the pageant’s material needs as well as spiritual needs. He was interested in the housing conditions. Where were participants living? Whom were they staying with? How were they eating? What were the participants doing while another group was rehearsing? There were occasions when time was wasted. All of these things were meaningful to him and seemed to come to his mind, even during the period between pageants. I would suddenly get a phone call from him because he had thought of this or that and wanted to know what I thought. I was able to present ideas to him, and there were many that he could approve immediately. If he thought it to be a viable idea, he would endorse it.

After he had been called to the Quorum of the Twelve, he told me that we would have Elder Mark E. Petersen working with us too. I was overjoyed at the prospect of working with two such tremendous individuals who had such a gentleness, compassion, and love toward people. I always felt their deep sense of appreciation for what I was doing. They couldn’t help enough. The help always came in a very positive way. Working with those two brethren was a sheer joy. 📖

- 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.
- 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).
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 16:57.
 - Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:218.
 - Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:39.
 - Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:37.
 - Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:38.
 - Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:38.
 - Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:39.
 - Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith*, 217.
 - Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:105.
 - Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:105.
 - Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:105.
 - 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.
 - Account 10, by Orson Pratt, also mentions an angelic guardian.
 - Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 11 December 1869, 6:508–9.
 - 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.
 - 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
- 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.
 - 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
- 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.
 - See Ralph Whitlock, *Everyday Life of the Maya* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), 44–46.
 - "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.
 - John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992).
 - Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon* (Orem, UT: S. A. Publishers, 1989).
 - 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).
 - See Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *Indian Clothing before Cortés: Mesoamerican Costumes from the Codices* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 9–14.
 - See Ralph Whitlock, *Everyday Life of the Maya* (New York: Dorset Press, 1976), 43.
 - 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.
 - See Anawalt, *Indian Clothing before Cortés*, 209–14. Also see Margot Blum Schevill, *Costume as Communication* (Bristol, RI: Mark-Burton, Inc., 1986), 13.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - See Michael D. Coe and Justin Kerr, *The Art of the Maya Scribe* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 97.
 - See Mormon 1:8–9; Jacob 1:14.
- A New Beginning for the Pageant: 1948 to 1951**
Harold I. Hansen
- J. Karl Wood was called to direct the Hill Cumorah Pageant in 1939.
 - Thorpe B. Isaacson, in Conference Report, October 1949, 156.
 - Thorpe B. Isaacson, in Conference Report, October 1949, 156–57.
- "Hail, Cumorah! Silent Wonder": Music Inspired by the Hill Cumorah**
Roger L. Miller
- "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*.
 - 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.
 - On summer evenings in July and August, thousands gather on the slopes of the Hill Cumorah to