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Gordon B. Hinckley, *right*, of the Church Radio, Publicity and Mission Literature Committee, examining a 35mm film with his former mission president, Elder Joseph F. Merrill, *center*, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Hinckley and a cadre of other young multitasking enthusiasts were responsible for pioneering various forms of media and for establishing a culture in which slide shows, radio plays, exhibits, and cinema would be used in Church education and publicity. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

THE SECOND WAVE:

HOME CINEMA (1929–1953)

The Second Wave differed from the First in various respects. For instance, by the 1930s the global film industry was well past its primitive pioneer era, and, within Mormonism, the increased sophistication of Second Wave films reflects this progress. In addition, technical advances (principally sound, but also color) renewed enthusiasm about the medium, both generally and among the Latter-day Saints. While this optimism did propel institutional and independent Mormon filmmaking toward some major projects, the decade of the 1930s—and to a lesser extent the 1940s—has generally been described for its lack of Mormon film production. Such a perception, however, does not give full credit to changes and growth in underlying areas of Mormon cinema that created a sustainable cinematic culture that would last throughout the ensuing years. Indeed, the 1930s and 1940s were decades in which both the mainstream film industry and the LDS Church itself reinvented the relationship between Mormonism and cinema.

Due to Hollywood's adoption of the Hays Production Code and the aforementioned loss of Mormonism's sensationalism, mainstream depictions of Mormonism changed radically to the positive in the 1930s. But an even more important and enduring change in the Second Wave was the domestication of film by the LDS Church and within Mormon culture. This was a time when all aspects of the medium—distribution, exhibition, and ultimately production—were integrated into Mormon social life and institutionalized by the Church itself. After these decades it would be impossible to understand or imagine The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the Mormon experience apart from its films.

The term "Home Cinema" is borrowed from Home Literature, a genre that appeared about 1880 when Latter-day Saints began to consciously develop their own literary tradition that glorified locally made (generally in Utah) didactic writing. But Home Cinema harks back not just to Home Literature of the 1890s but to the Home Industry effort of the 1850s, a movement that emphasized domestic production among Latter-day Saints over trafficking with Gentiles. In the First Wave, Church leaders had been more than satisfied to outsource their major film productions to professional firms, but in this era—with the demise of the anti-Mormon film, the financial restrictions of the Great Depression, and the improving public image of the Church at large—they apparently felt confident in slowing

Key Films of the Second Wave

- *The Message of the Ages* (1930, USA, stage director George D. Pyper/film director unknown, length unknown). Short film resulting from a failed attempt to film the Church's entire centennial pageant.
- *Corianton: A Story of Unholy Love* (1931, USA, director Wilfred North, about 90 minutes). Large-scale theatrical adaptation of the Orestes Bean play based on a Book of Mormon story.
- *Brigham Young* (1940, USA, director Henry Hathaway, 114 minutes). First large-scale positive Hollywood film on Mormon subject matter, significant for its shift from the anti-Mormon films of the silent era.
- *Where the Saints Have Trod* (1947, USA, director Frank S. Wise, 70 minutes). The largest film made at Deseret Film Productions, this was the Church's flagship film for the 1947 Utah state centennial.
- *Church Welfare in Action* (1948, USA, director Eric Larson, 30 minutes) and *The Lord's Way* (1948, USA, director Judge Whitaker, 22 minutes). These two films, produced in California through a cooperative effort between the Church and Walt Disney, were crucial in the decision to create a motion picture department at BYU.
- *Wagon Master* (1950, USA, director John Ford, 85 minutes). Classic Hollywood western noted for its humanistic portrayal of Mormons.
- The temple endowment film (1955, USA, director Harold I. Hansen, length unknown). This first introduction of film to temple worship revolutionized LDS temple construction and placement and, ultimately, Church demographics across the globe.

down, thinking smaller, and establishing production in-house. Production efforts were modest and depended on a few multitasking personalities such as Frank S. Wise and future Church President Gordon B. Hinckley, men who took an artisanal approach to filmmaking's complex technical processes. Indeed, by recognizing film's industrial core, we can see Home Cinema as the last vital manifestation of the Home Industry movement begun over eighty years earlier. With the coming of the railroad and the growth of Salt Lake City as a regional crossroads, the economic home industries inevitably waned by the close of the nineteenth century, but the cultural home industry of film extended into the twentieth century attempts by Latter-day Saints to produce domestically, cultivate their own identity, and resist outside influences.

With the fire on Wednesday, October 23, 1929, the Church lost the Clawsons, and with Black Tuesday six days later on October 29, it soon lost what little financial ability it had to replace them. The decade of the 1930s was therefore the only period in which the Church had no official filmmaking organization. Instead, missionaries, Church employees, and others developed innovative and influential new approaches to making and using film and other media. Through developments in filmstrips, radio, and an internal motion picture distribution and exhibition network, the Church in this period not only created a permanent outlet for Mormon films that has remained in place until the present, but formed the infrastructure for an entire internal film industry. It would be upon these footings that an institutional Church film studio could be established at BYU in 1953.

MAINSTREAM DEPICTIONS OF MORMONS

A Kinder Hollywood under the Production Code

In the Second Wave, Church leaders did not feel the same compelling need they did in the First Wave to produce positive films about the faith in order to counter prejudicial mainstream depictions. To the delight of Latter-day Saints, Hollywood would do this for them. American movies underwent significant content changes with the introduction of the Hays Production Code in 1930. LDS Church leaders, like many across the country, had spoken out against Hollywood indecency since at least the Fatty Arbuckle scandal that erupted in 1921–22. That scandal had sensationalized the allegedly immoral lifestyle of movie stars and was a catalyst for a nationwide conservative backlash against Hollywood. The Production Code was a manifestation of this and put in place industry-wide self-censorship

to avoid the likelihood of stricter government regulation of movies. By March 1930, American filmmakers had removed most of what was deemed immoral and indecent in Hollywood's product, much to LDS Church leaders' satisfaction. Among the regulations the studios adopted were stipulations against misrepresenting faiths or ministers of religion. Certain stereotypes suddenly evaporated from American cinema—among them, the lascivious Mormon elder, the power-hungry Mormon patriarch, and those ticket-selling nubile victims of forced polygamy. It became nearly impossible to treat Mormonism from any of the standard exploitative angles. The only apparent anomaly of any importance was a low-budget sexploitation potboiler called *Polygamy* based on the modern polygamist colony at Short Creek, Arizona. This was released without approval of the censors in 1936 and was later re-released twice, first as *Child Marriage* (possibly 1939) and again as *Illegal Wives* (1945).⁵⁶

The Code, however, also nixed positive depictions of polygamy and organizations that endorsed it, thus essentially removing any depiction of Latter-day Saints—positive or negative—from the screen. When they did appear in mainstream films, Latter-day Saints became something of a cipher, more generally referred to by their geographic origin than their religious beliefs. Monogram's western *The Man from Utah* (1934) epitomized this new mode of representing Mormons cinematically. In it a young John Wayne plays John Weston, a straight-laced hero who is continually referred to by his state of origin, though the film never mentions this state's dominant religion. He saves the day, in part, because of his sobriety, apparently a reference to the Church's increasingly prominent Word of Wisdom. Throughout the film, Wayne's upright character is a far cry from the vampiric missionaries of the previous decade. Other films of the 1930s were more or less variations on this theme, with Mormonism a covert yet positive force. Newsreels and travelogues began to feature positive mentions of the Church in the 1930s, especially regarding the development of the Church's welfare efforts during the Depression.

Occasional productions featured minor characters who were overtly Latter-day Saints, but more often wild rumors circulated about potential large scale Mormon-themed productions with names such as E. B. Derr, Tom Keene, James Cruze, and even Cecil B. DeMille attached. Finally, in 1938 an independent western called *The Mormon Conquest* premiered in Kanab, Utah, though it evidently never showed again. Lost today, it remains one of the great mysteries of the Second Wave. In the ensuing years of the Second Wave, Hollywood films with Mormon subjects tended to conflate the Church with Utah and to praise the all-American qualities of this beleaguered religion. Mormons were remade into representative

Americans and their history an example of American values triumphing in the West. This happened most successfully with two westerns—one a great commercial success, the other a great critical success in American film history.

The Major Features: 1940–1950

Without question Twentieth Century Fox's *Brigham Young* (1940) was the highest-profile film on Mormonism yet. Church historians and authorities, including Heber J. Grant himself, were involved extensively in the project. *Brigham Young*'s plot follows the Saints from their persecutions in Nauvoo to the establishment of Great Salt Lake City. Though this technically constituted the chief storyline, a disproportionate amount of screen time was spent on a love affair between the Mormon scout Jonathan Kent and a non-Mormon girl named Zina Webb. These romantic roles were played by Tyrone Power and Linda Darnell, not coincidentally the studio's top stars at the time. Brigham Young was played by the unknown



Vincent Price as Joseph Smith on trial in a scene from *Brigham Young* (1940). Behind him, *center*, sit romantic leads Tyrone Power and Linda Darnell; Dean Jagger as Brigham Young waits behind them ready to make his presence known. Courtesy Perry Special Collections, BYU.

Dean Jagger, a stage actor making his film debut. The film was directed by Henry Hathaway but is generally considered a product of Fox's chief Daryl Zanuck, who was so committed to it that it was one of the last big-budget films before the war, with production costs of \$1,850,000.

President Grant released a heartfelt statement of gratitude after a private screening, and the film opened August 23, 1940, as mentioned earlier, with the largest premiere in American history to that point. Though the war obscured some box office information, it appears that the film grossed about \$4 million. On the eastern seaboard, the subtitle *Frontiersman* was added to downplay the religious elements, and it was consistently viewed as a parable on modern Judaism more than a denunciation of nineteenth-century mobocracy. In the ensuing decades, some Latter-day Saints have come to disapprove of the film's dramatic license, but *Brigham Young* must be seen in its historical context. After decades of disappointing and failed projects and with the silent anti-Mormon films fresh in many minds, *Brigham Young*, even with its fictional elements, was a public relations victory of the highest order.

The only other mainstream cinematic depiction of Latter-day Saints that decade was MGM's 1946 western *Bad Bascomb*. Falling between a prestige picture and a B-film, this production featured Wallace Beery as the titular bad man who stows away in a Mormon wagon train to escape a posse. Eventually he is beguiled by a young Mormon orphan played by child star Margaret O'Brien, and he turns against his partner to save the Mormons. Though essentially unknown today, *Bad Bascomb* reaffirmed the new positive, if doctrinally vague, depiction of Latter-day Saints. Though actual religion hardly plays into the picture at all, casting the popular O'Brien as the Mormon girl who wins over the baddest outlaw in the country said something indeed about the new social respectability Latter-day Saints enjoyed after World War II.

It is less surprising, then, to find Mormons featuring prominently in one of the most humanistic films ever made, John Ford's *Wagon Master* (1950). Although its scale could not equal that of *Brigham Young*, it deserves to be remembered as one of the greatest of Mormon films. After the war, Ford's new independent company, Argosy Pictures, formed a contract with RKO to create three films: *The Fugitive* (1947) and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), both with defined subject matter, and a film called *Wagon Master* on a yet unspecified subject. While shooting *Yellow Ribbon* in central Utah, Ford's son Patrick, a screenwriter, met some LDS horsemen, which led to the *Wagon Master* story being created around the Hole in the Rock expedition that some of the horsemen's ancestors had participated in. Though Patrick and his cowriter, Frank Nugent, had to



Elder Wiggs (Ward Bond) faces off against the Clegg family in this still from the climax of *Wagon Master* (1950). John Ford's critically acclaimed western rejected Mormon stereotypes in favor of sympathetic depictions. Courtesy Perry Special Collections, BYU.

research Mormonism intensively, John Ford seemed to understand the Mormons instinctively. “These are the people I want,” he said. His depiction was accurate. By contrast, the Mormons’ odd Puritan outfits were the invention of RKO chief Howard Hughes, who held the purse strings.⁵⁷ The story, set in the 1880s, tells of a southward-bound pioneer company, their non-Mormon wagon masters, and the misfits, outcasts, and outlaws they encounter along the way. The traditional cinematic allegations against the Church are raised and thrown out immediately, as the Mormon leader Elder Wiggs states, “We’re not a big party, son. We’re just a handful of people sent out to mark the trail and prepare the ground for those who will come after us,” thus humanizing the entire Mormon camp. This explicitly equates them with the other downtrodden groups they encounter, most notably the Navajo. As one critic observed, “Probably the best rendering of [Ford’s] cultural equivalence comes in *Wagon Master*, when the Mormons and the Native Americans each confront and tolerate the mysterious other, locking arms and circling a flickering campfire in a Navajo dance.”⁵⁸ A small film by Ford’s standards, *Wagon Master* was shot in late 1949

and premiered May 6, 1950. Despite favorable reviews, it met only modest box office success in America, as Ford expected. It was quickly praised in Europe, however, and has since become regarded as one of Ford's greatest, if smallest, films. Within Mormonism, *Wagon Master* remains a largely undiscovered diamond.

In contrast to the success of films like *Brigham Young* and *Wagon Master*, smaller-scale productions simply could not get off the ground. This was true not only for independent films made by the Latter-day Saints themselves but also for Edward Finney, a veteran Hollywood producer who was not LDS. In the spring of 1950, he announced a six-reel documentary about a reenactment of the Mormon Battalion by the Sons of Utah Pioneers. Called simply *The Mormon Battalion*, this film was made from his personal finances and depicted the "troops" marching and celebrating in San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino, with speeches by government and Church leaders, including President George Albert Smith, who would die less than a year later. Finney gave a few showings and anticipated extensive interest from the Mormon communities in Utah and California, but despite Church participation Finney soon felt indifference from Mormon and non-Mormon viewers alike—later reporting that Church members did not even attend his screenings. He thus decided to expend no further effort but had the prescience to carefully store the print and later donate a copy to the Church. Finney's effort is noteworthy as an attempt outside of the institutional Church—and even Mormon culture—to create an unpretentious artisanal film within a domestic, if ad hoc, distribution system.

These positive Hollywood Mormon films suggest that Mormonism, by way of popular cinema, was gradually beginning to be domesticated into mainstream culture—at least within popular mythology of the American West.

MORMONS AND THE MAINSTREAM INDUSTRY

At Home in the Industry

During the two decades of the Second Wave, many Latter-day Saints also made themselves at home in the film and entertainment industry. The Church was larger in southern California than in any other area outside the Mormon heartland.⁵⁹ Many Church members worked in the entertainment industry, and some (like Wetzal Whitaker) would eventually become major participants in Church-related filmmaking efforts. Some continued to write and direct, but others began to gain prominence in lesser known

areas of filmmaking, such as Lionel Banks, head of Columbia Studios' art department for seven years, or Nancy Bakke, who designed costumes for MGM. Most prominent among these was Eric Larson, one of Disney's leading animators for several decades. Character actor Moroni Olsen was among the best-known LDS thespians to enter the field in this period, and Laraine Day and Rhonda Fleming gained national prominence as leading ladies in mid- to high-level films.⁶⁰

Similar to Harvey Fletcher and Philo Farnsworth in the First Wave, some Latter-day Saints in the Second Wave made careers within the technical and administrative side of the film and broadcasting industries. Rosel H. Hyde worked his way up the ranks in the new Federal Communications Commission during the 1940s; he was twice appointed FCC Chairman, by Eisenhower in 1953 and again by Johnson in 1966. His religion occasionally came under fire—tobacco companies cried foul, for instance, when their advertisements were banned during his second term—but it generally won him respect. He oversaw much of the growth of American television and satellite networks, as well as the introduction of color signals and the creation of the National Television Systems Committee (NTSC) video standard, which has defined video production and editing in the Western Hemisphere for generations.⁶¹

The developing film industry was not restricted to Hollywood, to the United States, or to traditional narrative films during these decades. At least one Mormon who began his career in this period would contribute importantly to film traditions running counter to mainstream cinema. In 1945 Colin Low, a young LDS animator, joined the fledgling National Film Board (NFB) of Canada; in retrospect he could be described as one of the most important Mormon filmmakers in the history of cinema. A native of the Mormon colonies in Alberta, Low progressed through the ranks in both animated and documentary films within the legendary Unit B, the NFB's vanguard organization. Low's first documentary, *Corral* (1954), set on the Mormon ranches in Cochran, garnered international recognition and awards.

Low's contributions to animation and large-format filmmaking were remarkable, but it is perhaps most appropriate here to describe his consistent charitable worldview exhibited through his social documentaries. These identified social problems, focused on underprivileged minorities, and even allowed such groups to make their own films in their own voices. Notable in this regard was the Fogo Island series (*Winds of Fogo* [1970], *A Memo from Fogo* [1972], etc.), twenty-eight films produced and sometimes directed by Low as part of the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program. Challenge for Change used film in local communities as an

instrument for social change. A film depicting the people and problems of a community would be shown to that community to facilitate constructive criticism about the issues it depicted.

Over the course of his sixty-year career, Low demonstrated an understanding that filmmaking is a stewardship, an empowerment that requires the filmmaker to strive to bless and even empower others. Low's innovative and award-winning work has an aesthetic deeply informed by Mormon theology, and the lack of critical appreciation among Latter-day Saints for his work is astounding. Low has been broadly recognized as a pioneer, but ironically not among Mormons.⁶²

INDEPENDENT MORMON FILMS

In the Second Wave, Mormon-themed films by Latter-day Saints unfortunately found little commercial success, akin to the absolute failure of Edward Finney's *The Mormon Battalion* and even the lukewarm reception given *Wagon Master*, a film made by one of the most popular directors in the world. It would be many years before positive films on Mormonism would be commercially viable. It was not until the Fourth Wave and the ubiquity of television, for instance, that independently produced documentaries about the Mormon experience found commercial success. And it was not until the Fifth Wave that the same proved true of independently produced narrative films. Indeed, the Second Wave actually began with the complete failure of yet another Mormon-made independent theatrical feature film, *Corianton*.

Corianton

At the outset of the Second Wave, events like the coming of sound and the prospect of the Pioneer Film Company's studio in Salt Lake City must have infused optimism into prospective Mormon filmmakers. It was apparently on this momentum that one group announced the production of a large-scale adaptation of Book of Mormon material, *Corianton*. The film was the brainchild of Lester Park, who had been prominent in Utah's film industry for more than two decades. In 1929 he took the lesson of *All Faces West* to heart and determined to create not only the first talking Mormon picture but a musical spectacular. Hence, like many producers of the time, he turned to the stage, deciding to adapt the 1902 play *Corianton* by Orestes Utah Bean. The play itself was adapted from an 1889 B. H. Roberts story published in a Church periodical as one of the first contributions to the Home Literature movement. All three versions of

the story fictionalize two Book of Mormon stories: Corianton's mission to the Zoramites, wherein he is seduced and later repents, and his father Alma's encounter with the anti-Christ Korihor around the same time.

Park saw this as the ideal property to usher in the sound era within Mormonism, and in late 1929 he and his brothers formed the Delaware-based Corianton Corporation and proceeded to raise capital and accrue talent. Park was producing with Wilfred North directing, and Bean himself was on board. The greatest attraction for the film—what the *Deseret News* called its prime “movie star”—was the Tabernacle Choir, secured after extensive negotiations with the General Authorities.⁶³ In addition, the film's scope

was ambitious, to say the least, with massive sets by archeological expert Joseph Physioc, a huge cast, and so forth. The Roman costumes are somewhat revealing, emphasizing the fact that Corianton's story is virtually the only one in the Book of Mormon with any sex in it. The film's subtitle was changed from *An Aztec Romance* to *A Story of Unholy Love* to promote this same provocative element. Loaded with sex and scripture, *Corianton* had all the ingredients for a huge success, at least according to the formula exemplified in recent scriptural epics like Cecil B. DeMille's 1923 *The Ten Commandments*.

Thus the Park brothers were armed with the tried and true formula of the “sex and sand” biblical epic of the 1920s and the novelty of a soundtrack featuring articulate stage dialogue and Mormonism's most prominent musical group, but what they failed to foresee was the depth of the Great Depression and its effects on their internal finances. Despite their claims in the papers, the company was troubled financially and appeals for funds proved fruitless. The film missed its initial goal of an April 6, 1930, release, and while company stock was suspended in May 1930, by late 1931 the film was ready for screening. *Corianton* premiered on October 1 in Salt



A rare production still from *Corianton*, in which Zoan ze Isobel (Theo Pennington) is apparently luring the naïve missionary Corianton (Eric Alden) into a political plot to destroy the church. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Lake City and ran for at least two weeks, evidently to enthusiastic crowds. However, the Corianton Corporation ran into trouble in New York State for mingling stockholder's money with a separate enterprise belonging to board member Napoleon Hill. Stock was suspended on April 4, 1932, for failure to pay taxes, and by 1933 Bean had the Parks in court, the result being that *he* was jailed for five days for contempt of court. Though Lester Park surely did not purposely commit fraud, the public embarrassment—and legal trappings—caused the film to be completely withdrawn and swept under the rug. As with *Riders of the Purple Sage*, this removal was absolute: all negatives, prints, and other materials disappeared so completely that most historians have claimed *Corianton* was never even completed. In 2004, however, BYU Motion Picture archivist James D'Arc located a 16mm print and has digitally restored it, one of the most exciting developments in Mormon film history.⁶⁴

The Parks' *Corianton* and Finney's *The Mormon Battalion* almost twenty years later both demonstrated that in the Second Wave there was not enough interest to support a commercial Mormon film industry; as mentioned, it would not be until 2000 that such films would start to be financially viable. Although *Corianton* was not the first Mormon feature film made completely independently of the Church—a title that goes to *The Life of Nephi* in 1915—it was nevertheless a milestone in the history of Mormon film. Hopefully, as the restored version brings *Corianton* once more to public knowledge, a more appropriate critical appraisal will assess its aesthetic merits and place it within what has by now become a long and varied tradition of adapting the Book of Mormon to the silver screen.

Home Movies as Home Cinema

One way to understand the dynamics of the Second Wave is to see a general movement by Latter-day Saints away from large film productions intended for mass commercial exhibition toward small, inexpensive productions intended for local congregations or home viewing. The work of amateur filmmakers, though far from flashy, constitutes an important hallmark of the Second Wave. Amateur filmmakers of this period would imitate the Clawson brothers of the First Wave, and their experiments yielded new approaches to film that have resonated throughout Mormonism in the ensuing years.

Amateur films of this period, somewhat like the Clawsons' earlier work, were generally short visual artifacts without soundtracks, focused around the filmmakers' personal activities or geographical locations, and were intended mostly for private exhibition. Some were genuine home movies as we understand the term today, including important footage

shot by the adult children of J. Reuben Clark, Anthony Ivins, and David O. McKay—the last including a privileged look at the Swiss Temple dedication in 1954. On a trip to Yellowstone Park, Reed Smoot's daughter filmed him feeding a bear. In contrast, other Saints made quite polished productions, such as two silent films on pioneers and modern temples shown at the Brooklyn Ward on March 30 and 31, 1936. Mormon film enthusiasts of this period were remarkably willing to make amateur movies that they believed would serve Church objectives—at their own cost and entirely without Church oversight or support.

Among these was James H. Moyle, who became president of the Eastern States Mission in 1929. He quickly began a groundbreaking public relations campaign that would eventually influence such projects throughout the entire Church. Primary among these efforts was a 16mm moving picture of ancient American ruins shot by Moyle himself for use in presenting the Book of Mormon. Missionary Joseph Smith Peery came under Moyle's influence, and upon his 1933 release he purchased a car and a camera and traveled to Church history sites in an effort to make a film that could be used throughout the Church, although Depression era finances kept David A. Smith of the Presiding Bishopric from distributing it.⁶⁵

Peery and Moyle were not alone in sensing the potential of film for Church purposes. Many others worked independently of one another in applying film to Mormonism. Principal among these were Wilford C. Wood, a well-known LDS historian and collector who began shooting silent 16mm footage to augment his work on historic sites, and LaMar Williams, a young man who began by shooting events such as the laying of the Idaho Falls Temple cornerstone in 1940. From the 1930s into the 1950s, other amateur cinematographers shot footage of many Mormon subjects: the entire construction process of the chapel in Washington D.C. from 1930 to 1933; Church leaders in Hawaii, the eastern United States, and elsewhere; missionaries and members in South Africa, Japan, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, and Sweden; Harry S. Truman visiting BYU; a longitudinal record of a Maori congregation in New Zealand; and other events.

It is interesting to note that during the Second Wave more people were working unofficially than were working officially within the Church to create motion pictures for LDS public relations purposes, a trend that has possibly continued to the present. This was also true within the realm of radio, although the Church continued to develop KSL. Developments by the institutional Church and independently operating members continued to expand Mormonism's media infrastructure, which in turn would become a significant factor in the Church's eventual return to film production.

INSTITUTIONAL FILMS

The Message of the Ages (1930)

In 1930, at the very outset of the Second Wave, President Heber J. Grant personally shifted the focus of Church filmmaking from mammoth commercial productions in the mold of *All Faces West* to much more modest fare that could be shown outside the marketplace, in Church meeting-houses, to an audience already versed in the tenets of LDS doctrine. The Church's centennial that year provided the perfect opportunity to do so. It occasioned positive attention from various newsreel companies, and Church members were equally sanguine about using film as part of the celebration. B. H. Roberts, who had of course created the source material for *Corianton*, "dreamed of a major motion picture with a script built upon one or more of the epic civilizations portrayed in the [B]ook [of Mormon]."⁶⁶ Roberts was also a great proponent of Church historical pageants—an



The Salt Lake Tabernacle in full regalia, including a specially built stage, for the Church's 1930 centennial performance of *The Message of the Ages*. The well-established tradition of Mormon pageantry made film a natural outlet for historical commemoratives. Attempts to adequately illuminate the Tabernacle for filming failed. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.



A still from the filmed pageant *The Message of the Ages* (1930), moved outdoors to the steps of the Utah State Capitol Building. By 1930 the image of the handcart was well entrenched as the symbol of what the early Saints had to suffer and endure in order to establish Zion. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

event he held at the Joseph Smith farm in Palmyra in 1923 had eventually led to the creation of the pageant at the Hill Cumorah—and it was another historical pageant that President Grant would turn to in 1930.

As part of the centennial celebrations that year, Grant authorized the production of a large-scale pageant called *The Message of the Ages*, directed by George Pyper, and staged inside the Tabernacle itself. This event, which was presented around the April conference, was a tremendous success, prompting Grant to transform it into a movie that all the Church and world could see. Grant had long advocated the use of technology to build goodwill toward the Church, particularly since the 1912 anti-Mormon films, and he now became excited by the new technologies for motion pictures that made possible both color and synchronous sound.

Color cinematography was cutting-edge technology, and painstaking efforts were made inside the Tabernacle until the Technicolor technicians convinced Grant there simply wasn't enough light for the massive three-strip process. Rather than give up, he moved the entire production outdoors to the steps of the State Capitol Building where portions, though not the entire production, were shot in color with synchronous sound, thus making it the first LDS sound film. It was distributed as a Pathé newsreel but probably proved prohibitively expensive to show in LDS meeting-houses outfitted for silent projection alone. Consequently, it joined *All Faces West* as an ambitious project to promote Mormonism that achieved only lukewarm results.

In 1931 and again in 1934, sound footage was shot of General Authorities addressing the camera, along with the first known footage of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, but this too proved an unwieldy method, and official Church efforts at motion picture production halted for more than fifteen years, though President Grant remained proactive throughout the period.⁶⁷

Home Broadcasting: Independent and Institutional Radio and Television

Mormon broadcasting developed on several fronts in the Second Wave. At Brigham Young University, the physics department had been fostering student interest in radio since the 1920s, culminating in T. Earl Pardoe's creation of KBYU in 1939, the first collegiate radio station west of Chicago. Experiencing significant growing pains, the station continued to develop throughout the 1940s until it legitimized itself to the administration and became a permanent BYU institution. Meanwhile, the Church's fledgling radio station in Salt Lake City, KSL, expanded its Church-related programming beginning in the late 1930s under the direction of Gordon B. Hinckley. Hinckley created extensive series such as *The Fullness of Times* (begun in 1941), a nineteen-hour history of the Church that he described as the most comprehensive radio program ever made by a church.⁶⁸ Others produced radio programs as well, but the most important broadcaster would soon become the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

In 1929 KSL became affiliated with NBC, and on Monday, July 15, at 3:00 p.m., it began broadcasting programs with music by the Choir and spoken thoughts—initially just announcements—by various hosts. By June 1930 this position was taken over by future Apostle Richard L. Evans, and the broadcast, now at CBS, finally took the form of *Music and the Spoken Word* in 1936. This weekly program has continued uninterrupted on both radio and television and today is the longest-running program in the history of both media. Because of its longevity and its immense broadcast range, it is also undoubtedly the most important broadcast program in the history of the Church; for millions of people across the globe the Mormon Tabernacle Choir is the Church's most recognizable symbol.⁶⁹

With such extensive experience in audio broadcasting, it was not difficult for the Church—KSL in particular—to make the transition to television after World War II. At the April 1948 general conference, a signal was sent by wire to nine sets around Temple Square—hence “thousands saw television for the first time.”⁷⁰ Broadcast television began in Utah that same month and was immediately put to use by Church members: In May Primary General President Adele Cannon Howells adapted the radio program *The Children's Friend of the Air*, begun in 1946, to television, calling it *Junior Council*. This weekly program, which lasted until at least 1954, featured, like the radio version, a procession of local children saying hello, displaying their pets, and discussing good morals. It was not until June 1, 1949, that KSL-TV officially went on the air, and general conference was



SOMETHING NEW—An innovation of conference were the television broadcasts. Seen adjusting the television cameras to photograph the speakers is Ben Burdett. KSL transmitting technician.

This photograph from the April 10, 1948, *Church News* accompanied a story about filming general conference for limited broadcast via wire to television sets on Temple Square.

publicly telecast for the first time that October, marking yet another new era in Church communications.⁷¹

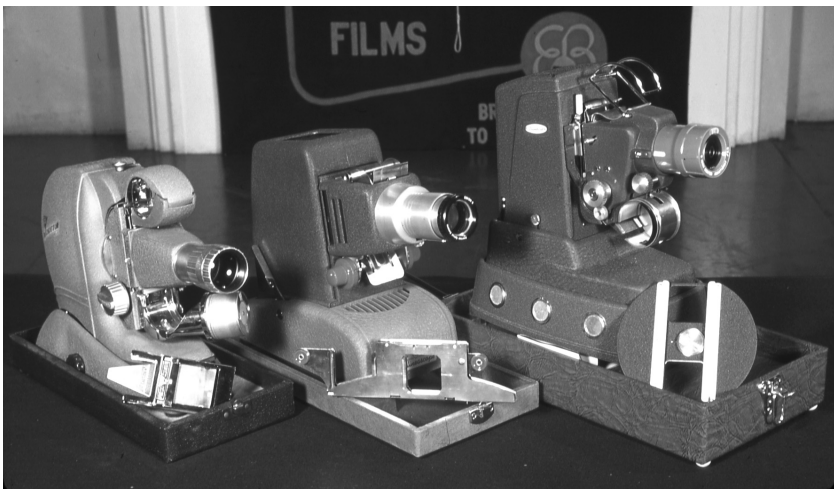
At BYU, meanwhile, prospects for television and motion pictures were slowly moving forward. Since the 1920s, faculty had been interested in filmstrips and motion pictures; in 1933 they purchased their first 16mm camera and shot their first footage—of a football game, appropriately. That same year BYU had the rare honor of purchasing the first roll of color 16mm film produced by the Eastman Kodak Company. All of these factors led many people to push for television and film instruction, and in 1952 new university president Ernest L. Wilkinson appointed a Radio and Television Committee. Not only did this eventually lead to the creation of KBYU television as an important outlet for Church films, but more

immediately it helped create the atmosphere that would lead to the establishment of the Motion Picture Department in January 1953.

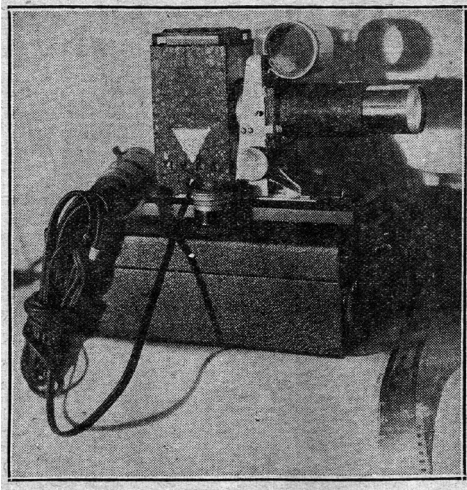
Home Media: Filmstrips

The signature innovation for LDS media in the Second Wave was the filmstrip. While somewhat quaint today, this medium was revolutionary in its day, quickly proving its effectiveness and becoming a dominant instructional medium for both members and prospective converts. Unlike conventional movies, filmstrips were cheaply produced and could be exhibited through small and relatively inexpensive projectors easily transported by teachers or missionaries for both home and church settings. This visual medium became so central to the missionary program, Sunday School, and other Church organizations during the Second Wave that it would be completely natural for Latter-day Saints to graduate to using motion pictures for the same purposes once the technology became fiscally practical.

A cousin to motion pictures, filmstrips actually grew out of a common ancestor, the illustrated magic lantern lectures that had been an enormously popular Victorian entertainment and lecture method. By the 1930s, when some LDS missionaries, such as James Moyle, were beginning to dabble in motion pictures, others were virtually the last people still



Portable filmstrip projectors made audiovisual presentations an integral part of LDS missionary work by the 1940s. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.



This photograph, which accompanied an article by Gordon B. Hinckley in the May 2, 1936, *Church News*, amply demonstrates what he termed “the romance of a celluloid strip.” The illustrated lecture, he averred, allowed missionaries to present the gospel in an intriguing and dignified manner. “Without the odium of propaganda, it catches the interest of the listener.” It also, not insignificantly, made the missionaries more mobile and versatile than when they used magic lanterns.

using actual magic lanterns. The lanterns were incredibly bulky and heavy machines that used large and fragile glass slides, so it is not surprising that throughout the 1910s and 1920s missionaries in Iceland (1911), the Eastern States (1913), England (1921), California (1923), and elsewhere had therefore begun ad hoc efforts aimed at using the much more economical alternative of 35mm filmstrips, advancing the images one frame at a time. These 35mm filmstrips proved so successful they were adopted on a Church-wide level on October 18, 1930, when Bishop David A. Smith, First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, announced the creation of a filmstrip that showed external evidences to prove the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. In March of the next year, the Church Department of Education released a ten-reel strip—405 photos—on modern Church history, and thus a movement was launched that would last over fifty years and produce hundreds of titles.⁷²

In January 1935, missionaries in Wales premiered the lantern-slide lecture *Joseph Smith—An American Prophet*, which became immensely popular in Britain. European Mission President Joseph F. Merrill quickly ascertained how effective such visual lectures could be and assigned one of his assistants, Gordon B. Hinckley, to return home and persuade the First Presidency to supply more filmstrips and audiovisual materials. Hinckley met with President Grant and his counselors on August 20, 1935, but did not know that his previous mission president and family friend, John A. Widtsoe, had been working with Bishop Smith on a Church publicity committee for over a year. For the previous few months, Widtsoe had been asking for a paid employee, and when Hinckley appeared, he pounced. The Church replaced Widtsoe’s committee with the new Radio, Publicity and Mission

Literature Committee, asking Hinckley to become its executive secretary. Though the group included six Apostles, including Widtsoe, Hinckley did the bulk of the work under the guidance of chair Stephen L Richards. Hinckley went to work writing scripts and overseeing the distribution of filmstrips, radio plays, and other media. Because of these efforts and the microfilming of genealogical records, by 1936 he reported that the Church was the largest user of film stock outside of the federal government.⁷³

Though interested in motion pictures, Hinckley did not have time to learn the craft. This would wait for the arrival of Frank Wise from England. A native of Bournemouth, Wise was working in the British film industry when he met the missionaries in 1937. He moved to Utah in 1939 and, after being influenced by Hinckley and other returned missionaries from England, was baptized that October. He immediately joined forces with Hinckley—they even shared an office—helping primarily with the technical aspects of the filmstrip work, beginning with the creation of a system to mass produce Kodachrome filmstrips, which eliminated the costly process of painting the celluloid by hand. The duo's filmstrips grew longer and of a higher quality, introducing recorded narration and a variety of topics. They shot some motion picture footage with their personal finances, but soon World War II precluded any further work in that direction.⁷⁴ When the war ended, full-fledged institutional film production began again after a seventeen-year hiatus. During that interim, the motives and methods for Church media had realigned to serve the Church's educational programs and missionary work, effectively creating a demand that would help bring about a renewal and expansion of Church film production.

Home Distribution and Exhibition

While filmstrips evolved from being an experimental medium to becoming a staple of Church instruction and proselytizing, the Church was also evolving its use of motion pictures and the infrastructure that would support them. The exhibition of films in church buildings, as noted earlier, began during the First Wave as an effort to provide suitable recreation alongside other activities sponsored by the Church's Mutual Improvement Association. Ten years later, in 1929, film exhibition in LDS church buildings had become a prominent characteristic of American Mormon culture, even without the organizing guidance of the Social Advisory Committee.

A few stakes followed the example of those that had earlier built amusement halls by creating and operating working motion picture theaters entirely for Church-sanctioned exhibition. One example is the Fountain Green Theatre, run by the Fountain Green Ward of the Moroni (Utah) Stake

from 1929 to 1935. A better-known example, the Sharon Community Educational and Recreational Association (SCERA) in Orem, Utah, was begun as a sort of amusement committee by the Sharon Stake in 1933 in response to a request by the First Presidency for local leaders to oversee community recreation. The organization almost immediately became a state-registered nonprofit cooperative, and funds for a swimming pool were raised from film screenings; these became so popular a cinema was also built. Though this theater, which still operates today, was not completed under Church auspices, it was built on Church-donated land and still maintains the “family friendly” atmosphere that inspired its initial construction.⁷⁵ Since 2005 it has appropriately been the home of the LDS Film Festival.

Despite the prevalence of films being shown in LDS buildings, exhibition was at first unorganized. This changed in the Second Wave as the purpose for exhibiting films shifted from social enrichment toward instruction in the history, doctrines, and programs of the Church—a gradual change that would not culminate until the Church eventually created and supplied its own films. This evolution of purpose was prompted at least in part by the success of filmstrips serving various Church needs, by a growing recognition among Church leadership of the potential of film for



A film projection training session. For many decades, this training was as common for LDS young men as enrollment in Scouting or MIA. Training often took place as young men journeyed to Salt Lake City for general conference. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.



The shelves at Deseret Book Company in the 1940s, lined with 16mm films ready for distribution to Church units. These were approved mainstream films. It would not be until the 1950s that institutional films would be produced and added to the Church's distribution network. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

education (not merely recreation), and by a shift in the entities that oversaw the use of film in the Church. The Mutual Improvement Association had provided some direction after the Social Advisory Committee dissolved in 1922, but in the Second Wave, the Sunday School took over and reoriented the use of film, and Deseret Book was organized as a distribution system to bring motion pictures approved for Church programs to LDS congregations. Both organizations profited from the leadership of A. Hamer Reiser, who had been involved with Church films since 1921.

The Sunday School began to improve and standardize Church film exhibition facilities in 1932 under the leadership of Sunday School Superintendent (and future Church President) David O. McKay. He instructed Reiser, then serving as the Sunday School General Secretary, to strike a deal with Electrical Research Products Incorporated to outfit all three hundred wards in the Church with 35mm projectors (McKay had witnessed a demonstration of their projection equipment at a Rotary Club meeting). Reiser began experimenting with showing educational films in meetinghouses, and, like his close mentor McKay, grew passionate about their pedagogical potential. For the time being, attempts to create original motion pictures proved too costly, so Reiser focused on filmstrips while at the same time creating a working library and film projector service throughout the Sunday School.

Reiser continued to perfect the Church exhibition infrastructure when in 1942 he was named general manager of the Deseret Book Company. In this capacity, he struck a deal in 1945 with the Bell and Howell Company for 16mm films and equipment similar to his 1932 agreement with Electrical Research Products Inc. for 35mm projectors. Under Reiser, Deseret Book became a vast film rental house, with hundreds of educational and entertainment titles available—not one of which was produced by the Church. By 1951 the liaison with Bell and Howell had placed projectors with 1,200 wards, stakes, and missions: an efficient—and unprecedented—distribution and exhibition network was firmly in place.⁷⁶

Deseret Film Productions

Such a vast undertaking caused Church leaders to pay closer attention to what was being shown. Hence, on January 3, 1948, Reiser announced that the First Presidency had created an LDS Film Council, with Reiser himself as chairman, to “appraise motion pictures and decide upon their suitability for entertainment and teaching purposes



A “Mobile Service Laboratory.” Deseret Book employees used this van to visit each unit as often as possible, delivering films and inspecting, cleaning, and repairing projection equipment. LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

for the various organizations of the Church.”⁷⁷ The Council proved quite generous in their recommendations, recognizing the different maturity levels within the Church. They assumed responsibility over Deseret Book’s rental program and undertook to maintain the film equipment throughout the wards. They even sponsored the production of films. This was done not directly by the LDS Film Council but through Deseret Book. The Church-owned book retailer was already the Church’s distributor of non-Church films; now, through its arm Deseret Film, it would implement the production of institutional films.

By the close of World War II, the need was clear for the Church to at last produce its own films, and Reiser was convinced that Deseret Book was the place to do it. He thus undertook two experimental projects with Frank Wise in 1945: the filming of Heber J. Grant’s funeral service on May 18 and a more structured documentary entitled *Christmas with the General Authorities*.⁷⁸ In 1946 Reiser hired Wise full time to become the entirety of Deseret Film Productions, where he began literally from scratch—his first task was building benches to sit on. Probably his most important effort was the filming of Church leaders, first in their offices and then at general conference. Technically adapting the Tabernacle to filming was a difficult and controversial endeavor, with the most notable addition being a foot-square periscope emerging from the floor forty feet in front of the pulpit. This allowed Wise to film from the basement, despite the hazard of incoming orange peels from well-meaning conference attendees. He quickly added a remote control system, a second camera, a shock absorption system, larger magazines, and two light bulbs—on the pulpit and organ pipes—to synchronize both cameras with a buzz on the soundtrack. From 1946 to 1953 he filmed at least seventy-five complete talks, with another forty-five done by 1967, at which point the process had been completely taken over by television.⁷⁹

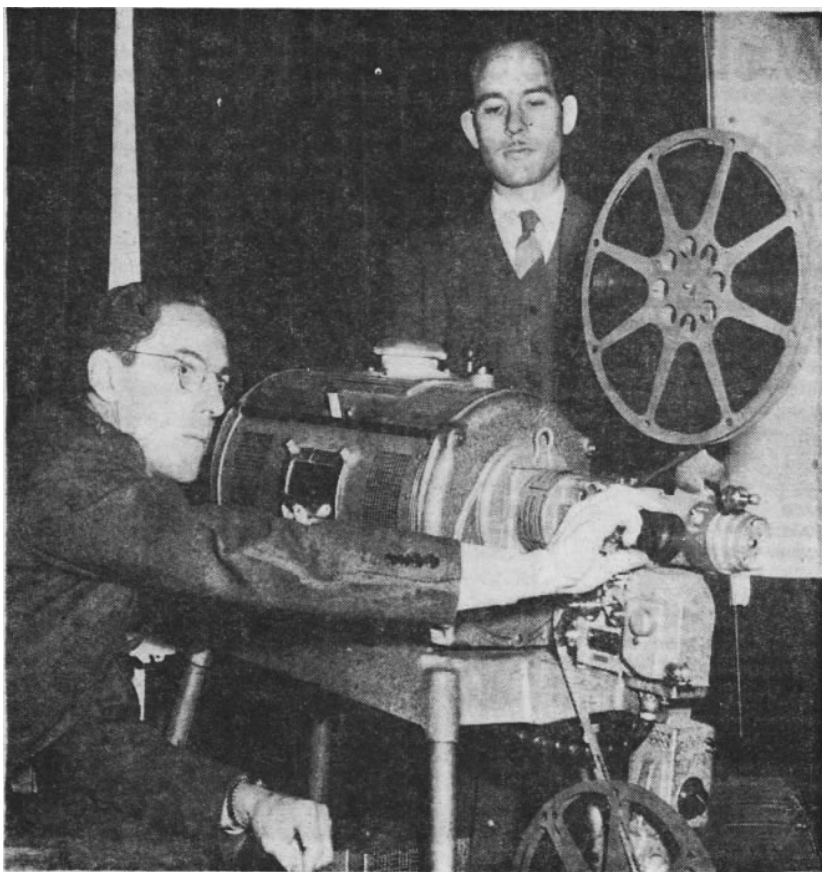


PERISCOPE EXPERIMENT SUCCEEDS

Frank Wise, film production director for Deseret Book Company, pictured behind his periscope arrangement beneath the floor of the Tabernacle. His films of the First Presidency giving their conference addresses are approved and ready for distribution.

Church News, February 12, 1950.

The Utah Centennial Year was celebrated in 1947 (events were planned under a committee chaired by David McKay), and as the festivities approached, Deseret Film Productions, now firmly established with LaMar Williams assisting Wise, was enlisted to create a film intended to launch the entire year's celebrations. The seventy-minute *Where the Saints Have Trod* was made entirely by these two men in the summer of 1946. It featured Church President George Albert Smith and thirteen other people on a tour along the Mormon Trail, arriving in Salt Lake City on July 24. The movie premiered in January 1947. Wise and Williams followed this with *Tribute to Faith*, a shorter film about the making and dedication of



GIVE PREVIEW OF FILM—Frank Wise and La Mar Williams, of the Deseret Film Productions, ready their equipment for the first preview showing of the two-reel sound and color film which tells the story of President Smith's trek across the Pioneer trail last summer.

Church News, January 4, 1947.

the This Is The Place Monument, and a fifteen-minute piece called *Centennial Scout Camp* about a celebration among Utah's Scouts.

The centennial occasioned other productions as well. LaMar Williams and Gordon Hinckley made a motion picture for the Missionary Committee called *Pioneer Trails*, which followed a similar geographical course through Church history. This probably marks Hinckley's entrance into full-fledged motion picture production. Mormon filmmaker Sullivan Richardson filmed the Sons of Utah Pioneers' entire reenactment trek in July 1947 in the twenty-minute film *This Is the Place* and also made the documentary *Valley of Triumph* about Salt Lake City, a condensed version of which was shown at the Bureau of Information at Temple Square, the first of many films shown at LDS visitors' centers.

The centennial proved a huge success, and by its end Deseret Film Productions was a secure and efficient, if small, enterprise. Money was not forthcoming, however, and Williams had to be transferred to another department to justify payroll. Frank Wise pressed on essentially alone. As mentioned, in 1948 he edited some discovered footage of the Clawsons into *Latter-day Saint Leaders: Past and Present*. This was followed in May 1949 with *Temple Square*, Deseret Film's first attempt at a fictional film with actors, setting early events in Church history within the framework of a tour of Temple Square. The film also includes footage of the Tabernacle Choir in the Tabernacle, overcoming the nineteen-year-old problem of lighting the immense choir area by using a series of sixty one-foot battens lined with spot bulbs and hung "with some difficulty." The Choir, appropriately, sang the Hallelujah Chorus.⁸⁰

Institutional Church film production had arrived—not leading the way, but complementing the Church's homemade and now robust network for distributing and exhibiting media. What remained was the next logical step—the formal creation of full-scale production facilities to supply a steady stream of Church-made films to the faithful.

Wetzel Whitaker and the Welfare Films

As filmstrips had proven, Church media was effective not just for the faithful but for those outside the religion who might respond positively to the LDS message through audiovisual media. While Deseret Film Productions was beginning its output of films directed mainly to believing members (*Temple Square* probably being the most notable exception), prominent Church leaders were actively exploring means to expand the audiences and uses for film, and they went to the heart of Hollywood to do it.

Church authorities had been greatly impressed with the government's use of film during World War II, both for training and for promoting its

view of the conflict. The thought that similar productions could be made to promote the Church's new welfare program induced Apostles Harold B. Lee, Mark E. Petersen, and Matthew Cowley to tour the Walt Disney Studios, where they were hosted by a young LDS animator named "Judge" Wetzel Whitaker. Born in Heber City, Utah, on September 30, 1908, Whitaker earned his nickname because of his stern appearance as a boy. During the visit he suggested that he and other Latter-day Saints might be able to make a film if the Church paid for materials; he later described this as "kind of a rash offer."⁸¹ After deliberation in Salt Lake, the General Welfare Committee accepted. Walt Disney approved the project with a promise to help however needed, and as one film turned into two, Whitaker eventually enlisted help from his brother Scott, Eric Larson, and numerous others in the area. Work commenced in October 1946 and continued for two full years.

Halfway through the process, Whitaker, weighed down by the responsibility, felt prompted to seek a special blessing from his stake patriarch. In this blessing he was told that "the time will come when you will be called to an assignment which will literally revolutionize the teaching methods of the Church. Thousands of people throughout the Church will know of the work you will do and will bless you and those associated with you."⁸² The anxiety subsided enough for the work to progress. Eric Larson

took charge of the film *Church Welfare in Action* and Whitaker *The Lord's Way*. The former film was completed on October 3, 1948, a thirty-five-minute documentary on what the welfare system was and how it functioned. *The Lord's Way*, finished a month later, gives two fictional case studies of Church welfare and includes animated sequences lifted from the earlier *The Grasshopper and the Ants* (1934), a film (from Disney's popular Silly Symphony series) that promoted personal industry. Though Whitaker found the premiere for the General Authorities nerve-racking, both films were well received: David O. McKay went so far as to tell Whitaker these were the best films to ever come out of Hollywood. They



President David O. McKay is about to perform a second take in this segment from *The Los Angeles Mormon Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1957). LDS Church Archives, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

were put into distribution by the following April and were shown for many years. More importantly, they indicated to several Church leaders, McKay perhaps foremost among them, that there was a need for a greater Church-sponsored filmmaking effort than was available through Deseret Book.

A Sacred LDS Film: The Endowment

Although the creation of a filmed version of the endowment ceremony for use in LDS temples began in 1952, the film was not completed until 1955; it can rightly be seen as the apex of Home Cinema. This film is an integral part of the holiest of LDS rites; it is shown in a Church edifice where not even all Latter-day Saints are allowed (let alone outsiders); the content of its script is believed to have been given through revelation; and the various versions of this film throughout the years constitute what is undeniably the most-screened picture in the history of Mormon cinema. Its production process also pertained to Home Cinema, with a small group of faithful Church members, having no industry assistance at any stage, filming within the walls of the Salt Lake Temple itself. Also, it is obviously the most didactic film the Church has ever produced.

The live endowment ceremony in LDS temples included an important dramatic component requiring scenery and a rather large cast, effectively restricting the construction of temples to areas where there were enough Saints to both attend and conduct services. As the new Church President, David O. McKay felt impressed to build smaller temples in areas where fewer LDS members lived, starting with Bern, Switzerland, but he needed a method to present the endowment in *multiple* languages with *fewer* temple workers than traditionally required. A committee was formed, but again the responsibility fell principally upon Gordon Hinckley, who characteristically enlisted Frank Wise. Their solution, predictably enough, was to use motion pictures in various languages with only a few temple workers present. Films visually replaced the painted murals on temple walls that had served as scenery, and single projection rooms replaced a series of themed rooms through which temple patrons normally made procession.

With a dedication date of September 11, 1955, looming for the Swiss Temple, Hinckley set about producing the films, which were actually directed by Harold I. Hansen. The majority of production took place, as mentioned, in the large Salt Lake Temple assembly room. A huge set was built, which involved lifting large pieces through the windows with heavy tackle, and an anonymous crew worked entirely as volunteers. After the English language film was approved, versions were completed in French, German, Dutch, Finnish, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian, requiring not just new casts but also new translations. Due to the sacred nature of

the film, Hinckley made special arrangements for no non-LDS laboratory personnel to develop the footage, and when he personally took the prints to Switzerland he felt divinely assisted in avoiding having to screen it for customs officials. After a great deal of work installing the equipment in the temple and checking each language version for bugs, the dedication took place and a very ill Hinckley suddenly found himself serving as projectionist—the temple engineer had not yet been endowed. President McKay praised Hinckley's indefatigable efforts at the following October conference, and two and a half years later, in April 1958, he called him to be an Assistant to the Twelve.⁸³

Most Church members believe Hinckley's role was not coincidental. Soon after he became Church President in 1995, he too felt impressed to cut temple sizes once again and reduce staff. The endowment film has been remade at least four times, always under Hinckley's supervision. Later versions have included minor changes in content but also reflect the addition of music and increases in technical proficiency, budget, and production design.⁸⁴

Film could not have made itself more intimately at home with Latter-day Saints than within the most sacred rites of an edifice they call the House of the Lord. The cultural and religious consequences have been far-reaching. Adapting the endowment ceremony to film actually made possible a global transformation of LDS temple worship. Like Muslims seeking Mecca, far-flung Mormons previously aspired to a once-in-a-lifetime journey to Salt Lake City (or to one of only a half-dozen temples located in the Western U.S. and Canada) in order to complete the final ordinances Latter-day Saints believe necessary for their salvation and exaltation. The filmed ceremony changed that, making possible not just the spread of smaller temples to remote areas, but more frequent temple worship by more Latter-day Saints. Given the centrality of the temple to the LDS faith, there is a direct connection between this use of film and the vitality of worldwide Mormonism. Moreover, efforts by Church Presidents McKay and Hinckley to promote film—which go back to the 1930s when McKay was Sunday School Superintendent and Hinckley was the newly returned missionary who became the driving force in the new Radio, Publicity and Mission Literature Committee—were not incidental but central aspects of their Church service.

The BYU Motion Picture Department

The creation of a movie studio of their own was inevitable for Latter-day Saints, given Second Wave developments. By the early 1950s, multiple factors had come together to allow for the creation of a large-scale institutional filmmaking entity, eventually to be placed at Brigham Young University.

These factors included the widespread use of 16mm film stock; the Church's domestic film distribution network and the subsequent need for product; the success of filmstrips, Deseret Film Productions, and the welfare films initiated at Disney; developments at BYU in their audiovisual instruction and library holdings; and, crucially, the ordination of David O. McKay as President of the Church. The diverse ways the Church had already used film suggested only a greater need for home productions in the future.

Locating production facilities at Church-sponsored Brigham Young University made sense for many reasons—the instructional nature of Church films, the prospective use of media in the university, budding efforts at BYU in broadcasting, and, eventually, a pool of talent in the university community from which to draw for all aspects of production. Creating a BYU motion picture studio seemed as much part of the destiny of the university as of its hosting institution. Interestingly, this development may have been linked as much to missionary work as to educational purposes.

On May 8, 1952, shortly after BYU President Ernest L. Wilkinson had created the aforementioned Radio and Television Committee, Weston N. Nordgren, Provo bureau chief for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, sent Wilkinson a highly researched, twelve-page, single-spaced memo that seems prophetic today. Nordgren, whose wife was one of Wilkinson's secretaries, had lived in Southern California and had nurtured an avid interest in the movie industry; he had also written articles for the *Improvement Era* promoting missionary work. His vision was to use movies to spread the gospel. How his proposal influenced Wilkinson is not clear, as the university was already developing plans to become more involved in filmmaking, but in sending his recommendations to Wilkinson, Nordgren did have the encouragement of Elder John A. Widtsoe, his former mission president in the British Isles. Nordgren proposed three projects that would better equip BYU to carry out the work of the Church. In order of importance, they were: (1) to transfer all film, radio, and television work of the Church from Salt Lake to Provo, establishing a motion picture studio on BYU campus; (2) to establish a three-month missionary training course along with a mission home or dormitory for newly called missionaries; and (3) to construct a temple on what had always been called Temple Hill, where the current campus was then taking shape. In his memo he also recommended a television station and included specific information about creating a Department of Motion Picture, Radio, and Television Arts.

About this same time another BYU committee headed by W. Cleon Skousen, who had worked on the welfare films, was organized to investigate the possibility of creating a studio on campus. While planning continued at BYU, Judge Whitaker, on leave from Disney, entered separate

discussions with Church leaders in Salt Lake City. In October 1952 a meeting was held with Presiding Bishop Joseph L. Wirthlin, Whitaker, Wilkinson, and the BYU finance committee, at which the decision was made to establish the Department of Motion Picture Production the following January. Whitaker was asked to head the project and create the studio. After some deliberation he recalled the blessing he had received four years earlier and everything came into focus. He resigned from Disney and began work at BYU on January 3, 1953.⁸⁵

Second Wave Reprise

In the Second Wave, movies made a permanent home among the Latter-day Saints. Outsiders portrayed Mormons more sympathetically, and in turn Latter-day Saints warmed to film—working in the film and television industry, experimenting with the medium, innovating film subjects and technologies, and generally domesticating the medium for themselves and their faith. Independent features, such as *Corianton*, failed at the box office. The Church withdrew from feature film production during this period almost entirely and instead developed an effective alternative medium, filmstrips, whose success conditioned Latter-day Saints and their leaders to using audiovisual media. In a similar way, the Church's expanding distribution network and exhibition facilities conditioned its members to enjoy and expect motion pictures to come from the Church for various purposes in a variety of settings (even before institutional films were supplied to wards). This infrastructure—a construction of social patterns as much as any logistics for delivering or projecting films—was a more significant creation in this era than the films made, as were the evolving purposes for visual media and broadcasting identified by Church auxiliaries and leaders. Current and future Church Presidents (Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, David O. McKay, Harold B. Lee, and Gordon B. Hinckley) played primary roles in the promotion and development of Church filmmaking for use across Church programs, in proselytizing, and even in LDS temple worship. All of this culminated quite naturally in the creation of a full-scale motion picture studio at Brigham Young University to supply the quickly expanding demand for film within a church completely committed to its numerous applications.