



2023

Recorded in Heaven

Scott Hales

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

 Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hales, Scott (2023) "Recorded in Heaven," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 62: Iss. 1, Article 4.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol62/iss1/4>

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

Recorded in Heaven

The Testimonies of Len and Mary Hope

Scott Hales

Len and Mary Hope were African American Latter-day Saints who joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Alabama (Len in 1919, Mary in 1925) and later raised their children in Cincinnati, Ohio. The Hopes' story was recently featured in *Saints, Volume 3: Boldly, Nobly, and Independently*, introducing the couple's experiences as Black Latter-day Saints in the early twentieth century to Church members around the world.¹

In *Saints*, the Hopes' story ends in 1949, while the couple still lived in Cincinnati. In February 1952, however, the Hopes moved to Salt Lake City and purchased a home in Millcreek at 893 E 3900 S. The home was a "ramshackle, miserable thing," but with the help of some friends in the city, they were able to "make it habitable" and turn it "into quite a nice home."²

1. This article benefits from the research of Joseph R. Stuart, whose foundational research on Len and Mary Hope can be found in the biographical entries for the couple in the University of Utah's Century of Black Mormons database (<https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/welcome>). Additionally, I am grateful for the research and guidance of Jed L. Woodworth, who conducted much of the research on the Hope family for *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 3, *Boldly, Nobly, and Independently, 1893–1955* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022). Lisa Christensen, Brooke Jorges, and Jed L. Woodworth also contributed to the transcription of the ca. 1952 recording of Len and Mary's testimonies.

2. Marion D. Hanks, interview by Jessie L. Embry, May 18, 1989, 9–10, MSS OH 1147, Marion D. Hanks Collection, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Len Hope, in "Utah Death Certificates, 1904–1965," Salt Lake City, 1952, image 1869, citing series 81448, Utah State Archives Research Center, Salt Lake City. The death certificate provides the Hopes' address and a "length of stay" of "8 mo." at that

Among these friends was future General Authority Marion D. Hanks, who had met the Hopes when he served as a missionary in the Cincinnati Branch in 1942. He had hosted the couple in Salt Lake City once before, in the fall of 1947, when they came to the city to reunite with friends and attend the semiannual general conference of the Church. Hanks remembered the Hopes as “remarkably good and sweet people.” He described Len as “a gentle, modest, moderate quiet God-loving, grateful man,” adding that “Mary was very like him.”³

In a 1989 interview with Jessie L. Embry about the couple, Hanks recalled making a “wire tape” of their testimonies in 1947. After Hanks’ death in 2011, his family donated his papers to the Church History Library in Salt Lake City. The Marion D. Hanks Collection (MS 31743) does not contain a 1947 wire tape of the Hopes’ testimonies among its various “family audio recordings.” However, the collection includes a ¼" × 600' reel-to-reel audiotape and three audiocassettes of a recording of the Hopes bearing testimony. These tapes are undated, but a note on the back of the reel-to-reel recording identifies it as an “extra copy” of the Hopes’ testimonies. In the recording, Len asserts that “President [David] O. McKay is a true prophet of God.” Since McKay did not become president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints until April 1951, the recording was likely made by Hanks after the Hopes moved to Utah. While it is possible that Hanks recorded the Hopes in 1947 as well, the absence of an earlier recording in his collection suggests that he simply misremembered the date when he spoke to Embry about the recording nearly forty years later.⁴

In the recording, the Hopes bear simple, powerful testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Len Hope also recounts the dramatic

place, suggesting the Hopes moved to Utah in February 1952, eight months before Len’s September 14 death. Hanks remembers the Hopes’ Utah residence being short-lived: “It was a very brief period. I’m not sure how long they were there. He died in 1952. I know it was a year or two or more after their visit in 1947.” Embry notes, “They were only in the Polk City directory one year, living at that address. They aren’t there in 1951, there in 1952, and then gone by 1953.” Hanks, interview, 16.

3. Stanley L. Fish, Bradley J. Kramer, and Wm. Budge Wallis, *History of the Mormon Church in Cincinnati (1830–1985)* (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Ohio and Cincinnati Ohio North Stakes, 1997), 58–59, 68; Hanks, interview, 1–3, 7–8, 15–17; “Cincinnati Pair to Attend Conference for First Time,” *Deseret News*, September 26, 1947, 9.

4. The Marion D. Hanks Collection (MS 31743) in the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as CHL), catalogues these recordings as MS 31743/14AT0046, MS 31743/ACASS0001, MS 31743/ACASS0028, and MS 31743/ACASS0033 respectively. Hanks, interview, 1–3.

events surrounding his 1919 baptism. The tape is one of the earliest audio recordings of Black Latter-day Saints bearing testimony, making it an invaluable resource for those interested in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its Black members.

Len and Mary Hope

Len Hope was born in Magnolia, Alabama, on October 10, 1894 or 1895.⁵ His parents, Jim and Annie Buffet Hope, were tenant farmers who had been born—likely enslaved—in the years just prior to the American Civil War.⁶ As he recounts in his recorded testimony, Len attended the Baptist Church as a young man, and his desire to “get religion” led him to “seek very hard for it.” During a revival, he struggled and prayed for religion, yet despite his arduous efforts, he experienced no religious awakening and concluded that “there was no religion for me.” Even so, he accepted baptism at the end of the revival, promising a preacher that he would “live all the laws of the Baptist Church and keep all the commandments of Jesus Christ.”

His spiritual quest was not over, however. Not long after his baptism, Len had a dream in which the Lord showed him that he “had to be baptized over again.” He began searching the scriptures to “find out who had the right church” and soon became convinced that he needed the gift of the Holy Ghost. But when he sought advice from preachers on how to get it, they could give him no set answer. He then turned to prayer, and once again, his fervent prayers yielded no immediate results. A short time later, Latter-day Saint missionaries left a tract at his home. Len read it and learned “how the elders had the authority to preach the

5. Len Hope’s record of membership for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gives his birth date as October 10, 1895. Record of Members, Southern States Mission, CR 375 8, box 34, folder 1, item 53. The 1920 and 1930 United States Censuses also give 1895 as his birth year. His Selective Service draft registration card, however, lists October 10, 1894, as his birth date. “United States World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918,” Alabama, Marengo County; A–T, image 2289, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Registration Administration. Likewise, the 1940 U.S. Census gives 1894 as his birth year. While the 1900 U.S. Census lists no “Len Hope” in the family of Jim and Annie Hope of Marengo County, Alabama, it identifies a “Boots Hope,” born 1894, in the family. If “Boots” was Len’s childhood nickname, then the 1900 census may be good early evidence of an 1894 birth. Complicating the matter is Len’s death certificate, which gives October 11, 1893, as his birth date. “Utah Death Certificates, 1904–1965,” Salt Lake City, 1952, image 1869; Utah State Archives Research Center, Salt Lake City.

6. Jim Hope and Annie Hope, in “United States Census, 1900,” Alabama, Marengo, ED 73 Precinct 13 Hampden, image 20.

gospel” and confer the gift of the Holy Ghost on “whomsoever . . . they lay their hands.” He became an instant convert, but he was drafted into the U.S. Army during World War I, delaying his baptism and confirmation until June 22, 1919.⁷

Eight months later, Len married Mary Pugh in Wilcox, Alabama.⁸ Mary was born to Ben and Mahala Ratliff Pugh in Lamison, Alabama, on October 11, 1902.⁹ Like Len, she was the child of tenant farmers and had grown up in the Baptist Church, studied the Bible, and turned to the pastor of her church for answers to her questions about religion. The pastor was her uncle and, according to Mary, would never answer her questions. “He made my father whip me a few times and said I was sassing him,” Mary later recalled. Without better spiritual guidance, Mary “would pray the best I knew.” After Mary became engaged to Len, her uncle predicted that she would become a Latter-day Saint as well. Mary was seventeen years old at the time, and she had not heard “any thing about the Mormon Church worth while.” Still, she married Len and began reading the Book of Mormon. After a year, she was convinced that she “could see no better Church” than the one her husband belonged to, but she was not baptized until September 15, 1925.¹⁰

The Hopes eventually had nine children, six of whom—Rose Anna (b. 1921), Izetta (b. 1923), Maryzell (b. 1925), Len Jr. (b. 1926), William (b. 1930), and Vernon (b. 1934)—lived to adulthood. These six children were likewise baptized into the Church.¹¹

7. “Len Hope’s testimony, undated,” audio recording, Marion D. Hanks Collection, CHL; Len Hope, in “Alabama, World War I Service Cards, 1917–1919, Alabama Department of History and Archives, Montgomery; Len Hope, Record of Member, Southern States Mission, CR 375 8, box 34, folder 1, item 53.

8. Len Hope and Mary Pugh, January 1920, “Alabama County Marriages, 1809–1950,” database with images, FamilySearch, [https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2DQ-RS22:19 February 2021, citing Wilcox, Alabama, United States, County Probate Courts, Alabama, Family History Library \(FHL\) microfilm 1,418,507.](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2DQ-RS22:19 February 2021, citing Wilcox, Alabama, United States, County Probate Courts, Alabama, Family History Library (FHL) microfilm 1,418,507.)

9. Mary Hope, Record of Member, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, CR 375 8, box 34, folder 1, item 264; Ben and Mahala Pugh Family, “United States Census, 1910,” Alabama, Wilcox, Clifton, ED 148, image 8 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.). Note that Mary’s Record of Member entry identifies her parents as “Bean” and “Mahalie.”

10. “Testimony of Len R. Hope and Mary Hope, 1938,” [3], CHL; Mary Hope, Record of Member. Mary was baptized by Elder Wm. O. Clouse and confirmed by Elder Sterling W. Sill, future member of the First Council of Seventy.

11. “Testimony of Len R. Hope and Mary Hope, 1938,” [3]; Cincinnati Branch, Record of Members and Children, 1930–1942, no. 48–52, 197, 214, 258, LR 1734 23, CHL.

The Hopes in Cincinnati

In the early twentieth century, particularly after World War I, many African Americans in the Southern United States left the region to find better work opportunities and escape the pervasive violence and racial discrimination that existed under Jim Crow laws.¹² The Hopes joined this “Great Migration” in the summer of 1928, when Len and Mary relocated their family to Lockland, Ohio, a suburb just north of Cincinnati, where they remained for the next twenty-four years.¹³ Although Len’s obituary states that he operated a fiberizing machine at a paper manufacturing company during the entirety of his time in Cincinnati, the 1930 and 1940 U.S. Censuses, respectively, identify him as a laborer at a cotton mill and a car unloader of asbestos shingles.¹⁴ However he was employed, Len apparently experienced no shortage of paying work in Cincinnati, even after the onset of the Great Depression. One person remembered Len picking and selling berries to earn an income.¹⁵ Mary also worked for a time as a maid at Cincinnati’s Christ Hospital.¹⁶

12. For more about the Great Migration, see Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Vintage, 2010); James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Beverly A. Bunch-Lyons, *Contested Terrain: African-American Women Migrate from the South to Cincinnati, Ohio, 1900–1950* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Alferdteen Harrison, ed., *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991).

13. Len Hope Sr. and Mary Hope, Record of Members, South Ohio District, CR 375 8, box 5008, folder 1, item 228, Ohio State, Part 2, CHL; Marion D. Hanks, oral history interview by Jessie L. Embry, May 18, 1989, 12, CHL.

14. Joseph R. Stuart, “Len Hope,” *Century of Black Mormons*, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, accessed January 10, 2023, <https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/hope-len>; “Len Hope,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 15, 1952, 15. A 1940 city directory also identifies Len Hope as a “fctywkr” or factory worker. *Williams’ Hamilton County (Hamilton County, Ohio) Directory 1940* (Cincinnati: Williams Directory Co., 1939), 363. Marion D. Hanks remembered Len Hope working “in a fiber glass making factory in the area.” Hanks, interview, 1.

15. See Petersen, “Race Problems,” 17. According to Petersen, Len once declared, “I paid my tithing and during that whole depression, I didn’t lose one day’s work. Sometimes I didn’t make much money on that day, and I did have to go out into the hills and get berries, but I always had an income.”

16. *Williams’ Cincinnati (Hamilton County, Ohio) Directory 1939* (Cincinnati: Williams Directory Co., 1938), 551; *Williams’ Cincinnati (Hamilton County, Ohio) Directory 1940*; see also Marion Duffin, Journal, October 30, 1936, CHL.

Today, Cincinnati is the home of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, a nod to the city's long and complex place in the history of race relations in the United States. Before the Civil War, Ohio was a free state, so Cincinnati's location on its southern border with Kentucky made it a home for abolitionists as well as a destination (if not always a haven) for runaway enslaved people seeking freedom.¹⁷ But like many cities throughout the United States, Cincinnati was a racially segregated town well into the mid-twentieth century. Many neighborhoods, schools, hotels, and restaurants routinely barred African Americans from their premises, thus relegating them to "the bottom rung of the city's economic ladder" and greatly limiting their opportunities.¹⁸ Even churches in the city were segregated, with some denominations split between white and Black congregations.¹⁹

For much of the twentieth century, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints restricted men of African descent from holding the priesthood. Yet, attendance at its wards and branches was technically open to all people, regardless of race.²⁰ In places like South Africa and the American South, however, where racial segregation was a social norm, predominately white Latter-day Saint congregations often enacted local policies—spoken and unspoken—prohibiting Black people from attending regular Church meetings. In some cases, such policies led to the formation of small "cottage meetings" where Black Saints held worship services in their homes with missionaries, ward or branch leaders, and friendly local Saints.²¹

Such was the case for the Hopes in Cincinnati. When Marion D. Hanks first met the couple, they had been holding monthly cottage meetings in their home for more than a decade. "The Hope family did

17. For more on race relations and the Black community in nineteenth-century Cincinnati, see Nikki Marie Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802–1868* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

18. Robert B. Fairbanks, "Cincinnati Blacks and the Irony of Low-Income Housing Reform, 1900–1950," in *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820–1970*, ed. Henry Louis Taylor Jr. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 193.

19. Bunch-Lyons, *Contested Terrain*, 90–91; "Go to Church Tomorrow," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 15, 1930, 10.

20. "Race and the Priesthood," Church History Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed December 29, 2022, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

21. "Racial Segregation," Church History Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed December 29, 2022, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/racial-segregation?lang=eng>.

not always come to church because they were not always welcome,” Hanks remembered. “There was kind of an unwritten rule that they would not come except on special occasions.” He described the white members of the branch as “wonderful people but southerners.” He recalled that “some of them were not advanced in their sense of the value of other human beings but geared that to their own sense of ethnic purity and color.”²²



Len and Mary Hope with Elder Marion Duff Hanks. Courtesy Richard D. Hanks.

No firsthand account exists of how or why the cottage meetings started at the Hopes' home, but the story must have circulated among missionaries and others who visited the branch because some of them gave abbreviated versions of it in their journals, letters, and later recollections. Writing to his parents in March 1931, a missionary from Arizona explained that branch members did not let the Hopes attend Church because “it would keep all the whites from attending.” While the missionary believed the family “should be able to attend once in awhile [*sic*] at least so that they could hear the works of the Church from the pulpit,” he believed the Church’s priesthood restriction, coupled with erroneous notions about the social benefits of racial segregation, justified the exclusion. “Since the Gospel dispensation hasn’t been opened to the blacks,” he reasoned, “I guess it is better that they do not come for it would really keep a lot of whites away.”²³

22. Hanks, interview, 2. Mildred Catherine Bang Cannon, whose grandparents and parents were some of the earliest members of the Cincinnati Branch, remembered the Hopes coming to Church for district conferences and other important meetings. “People voted not to have them,” she recalled. “They could come to conference when a General Authority came.” Interview by Jed Woodworth, January 15, 2021, 1, CHL.

23. Henry Layton to Richard Layton and Annie Horn Layton, March 3, 1931, CHL. In his recollection of the Hopes’ experience in Cincinnati, Marion D. Hanks noted that some members of the branch had no “trepidation or reticence” about the Hopes attending regular church meetings. However, those who opposed integrated meetings won out. “It was primarily the old guard,” Hanks recalled. “Some of them had been in the Church a

Another elder noted that the Hopes were “not allowed to attend Sunday school with the whites because of siver [severe] persecution,” resulting in “the Branch Sunday School Superintendent and group of members” holding a monthly “testimonial service” at the Hopes’ home.²⁴ Future Latter-day Saint Apostle Mark E. Petersen, who lived in Cincinnati for three months in 1936, recounted that “some of the members of the Church became extremely prejudiced against this Negro family. They met in a group, decided what to do and went to the Branch President, and said that either the Hope family must leave or they would all leave.”²⁵ Lula Belle Blackham, another mid-century western transplant in Cincinnati, likewise reported that “some members had concerns about black members being in the congregation and it had been decided before we ever got there that the Hopes would not come to meetings each week, but that they would be invited to come to stake conferences, which they always did.”²⁶

The most detailed account of what happened between the Hopes and the Cincinnati Branch comes from Jonathan Stephenson, a Latter-day Saint who knew Mary Hope later in life, when she was a member of his ward in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. According to Stephenson, after their move to Cincinnati, the Hopes attended branch meetings until “strong objections” from some members led branch president Charles V. Anderson to ask the couple to stop attending. As Stephenson tells the story, Anderson was “red-eyed and crying” when he told the Hopes, “We will do everything we can. We know that it isn’t right, but the feelings of the people are something we just have to put up with.” Anderson then promised that he and other branch members would “make a special trip out here each month to bring the sacrament to you and have a church service in your home.”²⁷

long time and fought a long battle. They were not about to lose their own esteem or place in the neighbor’s eyes by having black people come to Church.” Hanks, interview, 17.

24. Duffin, *Journal*, December 1, 1935.

25. Petersen, “Race Problems,” 16.

26. Lula Belle B. Blackham, “Cincinnati Years, 1948–1952,” 7, CHL.

27. Jonathan Stephenson, “‘I Cries Inside’: A Short Biography of Len, Sr. and Mary Hope,” [10], CHL. Although Charles V. Anderson attended cottage meetings regularly at the Hopes’ home, he made no mention of the meetings in his short memoir or his life in Cincinnati. He does, however, allude to the Hopes and their devotion to the Church: “Cincinnati has a colored population of 50,000. Some of them are quite wealthy. They are members of various churches, but have their own places of worship, fraternal societies, etc. The Latter-day Saints have only one [Black] family belonging to their Church. They are very devout, and live exemplary lives. They own their neat little home, and are very

The branch's decision to bar the Hopes from regular church meetings left the couple heartbroken and deeply disappointed. Len and Mary complied with President Anderson's request, however, and held cottage meetings and other Latter-day Saint worship services in their home for the next two decades.²⁸

Cottage Meetings at the Hopes' Home

Diaries and recollections of missionaries and local Saints who knew the Hopes provide a wealth of information about the family's cottage meetings and their effect on those who attended them. Marion D. Hanks remembered the Hopes holding a meeting every first Sunday of the month, the day Latter-day Saints set aside for fasting and bearing testimony. "There would be a testimony meeting and an instruction period followed by a meal which the Hopes would prepare for those who came," he recalled. "When I learned of that, I began to attend immediately. In nearly a year in Cincinnati, I spent my first Sunday afternoons at the Hope home."²⁹

After Lula Belle Blackham and her husband, Udell, moved to Cincinnati in 1948, they began attending monthly cottage meetings. By that time, the Hopes had been holding cottage meetings for twenty years, and a routine had been established:

On the first Sunday of the month, the Branch Presidency would go to their home to conduct a fast and testimony meeting and give the family the opportunity of partaking of the sacrament. The family could then pay their tithes and offerings to the Branch President and bear their testimonies along with others of the branch who came. Always that wonderful, poor family prepared a delicious meal to serve after the meeting to everyone who came, often as many as twenty of us. . . . What a spiritual experience it was to be there. Len and Mary positively glowed as they greeted

industrious. One of their girls is quite gifted musically." Charles V. Anderson, *Twenty-Three Years in Cincinnati: A Six Months' Visit to the Old Mission Field* (Salt Lake City: n.p, n.d.), 17, CHL.

28. Stephenson, "I Cries Inside" [10]. Evidence suggests that the Cincinnati Branch had somewhat eased its restriction on the Hopes' Church attendance by 1951. Abner L. Howell, an African American Latter-day Saint from Salt Lake City, visited the Hopes in the summer of 1951. He recalled that the Hopes could "come to church once a month, on fast Sunday," Kate B. Carter, *The Story of the Negro Pioneer* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1965), 59. Marion D. Hanks likewise believed "the branch . . . was treating them more courteously" by the time they moved to Utah in 1952. Hanks, interview, 9. Still, there is no evidence that the branch ever fully rescinded its restriction on the Hopes.

29. Hanks, interview, 6.

each of us. Their home was humble but immaculate, their children and grandchildren polished and in their best clothes. They lined up to pay their tithes and offerings. Brother Hope was always invited to conduct the services in his home. He always, it seemed to me, chose to sing, “We Thank Thee O God For a Prophet.” There is a line in the song that reads, “there is hope smiling brightly before us.” Always, there was Brother Hope singing that song with fervor and gusto and with a big smile on his face.³⁰

Although Hanks and Blackham remembered these meetings happening once a month, missionary letters and diaries suggest that cottage meetings, both planned and unplanned, occurred more frequently at the Hopes’ home.³¹ Inez Gibson and Essie Holt, two missionaries who served in Cincinnati in the early 1930s, attended various cottage meetings at the Hopes’ home, almost all of which took place on a day other than Sunday.³² Between January and April 1932, Gibson, her companion, and some elders visited the Hopes on a Saturday every month to teach Primary lessons to the children, take part in a cottage meeting (sometimes with a sacrament service), and enjoy a meal prepared by Mary. One missionary, Ronald Gowers, may have been initially reluctant to attend a meeting at the home, but once he arrived there, he had an uplifting experience. “Never felt better in my life,” he wrote. “Held a testimony meeting with them. . . . It strengthened my testimony to hear them give theirs. The kids were just little angels. Hope to get back again.”³³

As Lula Belle Blackham’s recollection suggests, Mary’s cooking always played a key role in these meetings, and missionary journals are rife with descriptions of the food she prepared. Essie Holt and her companion once taught a Primary lesson and then ate a supper of “spare ribs, potato salad, beans, tomatoes, corn bread, hot biscuit,” and some fruit, with chocolate ice cream and cake for dessert.³⁴ Fred Croshaw, a missionary who visited the Hopes in 1932, praised Mary’s culinary skills after enjoying “Fried chicken & everything” at their home.³⁵ “Held Primary and Cottage meeting & Oh boy for the dinner,” he wrote in his

30. Blackham, “Cincinnati Years,” 7.

31. See Hanks, interview, 14.

32. See, for instance, Inez Gibson, Journal, July 12, 1930; August 6, 1930; November 23, 1930; July 27, 1931; November 28, 1931; January 16, 1932; February 20, 1932; March 26, 1932; April 30, 1932; Essie Holt, Journal, July 27, 1931; September 2, 1931; October 5, 1931; CHL.

33. Ronald Gowers, Journal, November 15, 1934, CHL.

34. Holt, Journal, September 2, 1931.

35. Fred Croshaw, Journal, April 30, 1932, CHL.

journal. “Pineapple ice cream too.”³⁶ In another entry, he noted that “we then went out to the Hopes” and fellow missionary Karl R. Lyman “ate half a Turkey I know, but he didn’t get sick. Had a lot of fun.”³⁷

Marion Duffin, who was in Cincinnati in 1936, recorded, “After the meeting [the Hopes] had us all come in the kitchen and have dinner with them. My what a grand dinner! Roast Turkey and dressing. Every thing [*sic*] was just like a Thanksgiving dinner.”³⁸ Lulabelle Blackham recalled that she had “never eaten corn bread dressing to equal Mary’s. She was a marvelous cook and cooked for some wealthy families. She never knew how many were coming, but always there were leftovers. I wonder if the Lord had anything to do with that.”³⁹ Inez Gibson twice made the mistake of going to the Hopes’ home without an appetite. “They fed us more ice cream,” she wrote in her journal. “I was just about sick. Had to gulp it down. Then they gave us plums, peaches, and apples. Thanksgiving dinner never filled me so full.”⁴⁰

The hallmark of the cottage meetings, though, was the sharing of testimonies. Like Ronald Gowers, many people remarked on the Hopes’ powerful testimonies and the effect they had on those who heard them. Hanks recalled that each family member “would bear testimony in order from Len, Mary, Rose, down to Vernon who could barely talk. He was a little boy.”⁴¹ After one meeting, Fred Crowshaw wrote that the “Hopes bore their testimony & was it real. The love & happiness in that home I have never saw it equaled.”⁴² Opal Litster, another missionary, reported that it “did me good to hear them bear their testimonys [*sic*].”⁴³ Marion Duffin, likewise, believed “the testimonial meeting we hold there is certainly a strength to my testimony.”⁴⁴ Catherine Bang Cannon, whose family were early members of the Cincinnati Branch, remembered going to the Hopes’ home every month with her uncle Alvin B. Gilliam, who succeeded Charles V. Anderson as president of the branch. Recalling the Hopes and their testimonies, she said, “They believed with all their heart the church was true.”⁴⁵

36. Crowshaw, Journal, February 4, 1933.

37. Crowshaw, Journal, December 27, 1932.

38. Duffin, Journal, January 5, 1936.

39. Blackham, “Cincinnati Years,” 7.

40. Gibson, Journal, July 12 and August 5, 1930.

41. Hanks, interview, 6.

42. Crowshaw, Journal, April 30, 1932.

43. Opal Litster, Journal, September 17, 1932, CHL.

44. Duffin, Journal, January 5, 1936.

45. Cannon, interview, January 15, 2001, 1.

Occasionally, those who attended the cottage meetings recorded details about the contents of Len's testimony. In some cases, these records yield vital insights into Len's feelings about the Church's priesthood restriction. Missionary Karl R. Lyman, for instance, remembered that Len "knew he should [*sic*] not have the priesthood, but that he felt in the justice of God that some day this would be given to him, and he would be allowed to go on to his eternal reward with the faithful who held it." For Lyman, it was "a real testimony builder to go to [the Hopes'] home and hear the wonderful sweet testimonies they had."⁴⁶ Another missionary, Joseph Hancock, recorded a more sobering testimony from Len, which captured Len's anguish over the priesthood restriction as well as his ambivalence about his skin color. "He as you know cannot hold th[e] Priesthood," wrote Hancock to his fiancée in December 1949. "He bears testimony that he would let any man strip him literally [*sic*] of his black skin if he could only hold the priesthood." According to Hancock, Len's anguish that day became manifest as he and his guests sang the hymn "Do What Is Right." "He cried not aloud but the tears flowed," Hancock recorded. "I can imagine the things that that man has gone thru in order to stay true to the church."⁴⁷

In a subsequent letter to his fiancée, Hancock also retold Len's harrowing conversion experience (see below), which Len often shared at cottage meetings. "It made me ashamed to think how I had taken this church for granted," he wrote. "I also thout [*sic*] how selfish I had been to not want to share the gospel with others. This gospel is the only hope we have!"⁴⁸

The Hopes' Testimonies

In addition to the recording Marion D. Hanks made in 1952, there have been at least two other formal attempts to make a word-for-word record of the Hopes' testimonies. The Church History Library houses the earliest, a three-page typescript dated April 28–29, 1938. Little is known about this document. The typescript is creased and torn in places, but the text itself is largely undamaged. The first two pages contain Len's testimony. The third page contains Mary's. Whoever prepared the typescript included lines for Len and Mary to affix their names, but neither testimony was ultimately signed. It is unclear if the typescript is a transcript of the Hopes'

46. Karl R. Lyman, *As I Saw It* (Orem, Utah, n.p., 1972), 74, CHL.

47. Joseph Hancock to Gloria Gunn, December 2, 1949, CHL.

48. Joseph Hancock to Gloria Gunn, December 31, 1949, CHL.

oral testimonies or simply a written version of them. The testimonies are titled “The Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope” and “The Testimony of Sr. Mary Hope.”⁴⁹

“The Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope” begins with a descriptive statement: “My reason for being a Mormon and my testimony to the truthfulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that has been restored to the earthin [*sic*] the last days Be it known to all the world to all it may concern.” It then recounts Len’s conversion story and ends with a simple testimony: “I know that Joseph Smith is and was a true Prophet of God and God the Father of our spirits and Jesus Christ is the son of God. My family and I are happy untold so I bear my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEM [*sic*].”⁵⁰

“The Testimony of Sr. Mary Hope” follows the same basic format, but in addition to recounting her conversion experience, she testifies of a time when Latter-day Saint elders healed her when she “was suffering from ‘high blood pressure’” and “nervous breakdowns.” Her closing testimony is more protracted than Len’s and merits reprinting. It not only captures her voice and faith in the restored gospel, but it also reveals that she too may have harbored ambivalence about her racial identity and the Black community:

So I am thankful to my heavenly father for this testimony. I do know that this is indeed the true Church of Jesus Christ. I know that God lives and hears and answers prayers, also that Jesus Christ is indeed the son of God also that without a doubt in my mind that Joseph Smith was and is a true prophet of God, and all thoss [*sic*] that have succeeded him are truly prophets of our God. I pray that regardless to how many persecutions may come, I pray, I also hope that we are standing separated from our race, may stand steadfast [*sic*] and unmoveable [*sic*] before our God. We hope someday we may meet you all again. I bear this testimony, I do it in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN.⁵¹

49. The typescript was donated to the Church History Library by Judith LaMontagne. 50. “Testimony of Len R. Hope and Mary Hope, 1938,” 1–[2].

51. “Testimony of Len R. Hope and Mary Hope, 1938,” [3]. What Mary meant by “I also hope that we are standing separated from our race, may stand steadfast [*sic*] and unmoveable [*sic*] before our God” is unclear because the statement seems to be missing at least one word. There is evidence that Len and Mary Hope were criticized by the local Black community for their membership in the Church. Lula Belle Blackham recalled that “I once heard [Len] say that his black friends chided him for belonging to that ‘white church’ where he couldn’t hold the priesthood and where the white members didn’t want him to come.” Blackham, “Cincinnati Years,” 7. With this in mind, one possible rendering could be “I also hope that we [who] are standing separated from our race,” a recognition

The other known attempt to record Len Hope's testimony is found in Stanley L. Fish, Bradley J. Kramer, and Wm. Budge Wallis's *History of the Mormon Church in Cincinnati (1830–1985)*, a history published by the Cincinnati and Cincinnati North Stakes in 1997. The testimony was not produced with the assistance of Len Hope; rather, it is a later reconstruction (likely from the mid-1990s) of the “words of Len Hope as recalled by Stanley L. Fish.” Fish was an Arizona native who came to Cincinnati on a mission, married into a local family, and became the Cincinnati Branch president in 1947. He knew the Hopes well and often heard Len bear his testimony and recount his conversion story.⁵² Fish's version of Len's testimony tells the same story and employs some of the same phrases as the typescript testimony and the Hanks recording. However, even though the Fish reconstruction is written in the first person, as if originally spoken by Hope, it should not be construed as an accurate representation of his voice.

Additional research and analysis are needed to understand more fully the relationship between the Hopes' testimonies, their cottage meetings, and the history of race and ad hoc segregationist practices in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. What seems evident, though, is that Len and Mary Hope's home in Cincinnati became a shared sacred space where the family could recover the formal worship practices and faith community otherwise denied to them in the Cincinnati Branch. Not only were their cottage meetings a place where Len, Mary, and their children could, in the words of the Book of Mormon, “meet together off” with fellow believers “to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls,” but it also was a place where they could “do good,” providing meals and other forms of Christian hospitality to those who refused to break sacramental bread with them elsewhere (Moro. 6:6; see Matt. 5:44).

that the religious path she and Len had taken had removed them from the Black church and the community it fostered. Her hope that her family may be steadfast and immovable is, therefore, an expression of faith that they might remain true to the path they have taken, despite persecution and social repercussions. Another possible rendering, however, is “I also hope that [because] we are standing separated from our race, [we] may stand,” which is more in line with Len's apparent willingness to “let any man strip him literally of his black skin if he could only hold the priesthood.” Unfortunately, all known sources related to the Hopes reveal little about their relationship to or feelings about the broader Black community. Blackham's recollection, cited above, indicates that they had Black friends, and contemporary sources confirm it. See Gibson, Journal, November 23, 1930; Cincinnati Branch, Minutes, October 5, 1941. Note the Gibson source does not specify the race of the Hopes' friends.

52. Fish, Kramer, and Wallis, *History of the Mormon Church in Cincinnati*, 58–59, 76.

As prominent features of these meetings, Len and Mary's testimonies likewise functioned as much rhetorically as confessions of faith as unequivocal claims to membership in the Latter-day Saint "household of faith." Indeed, in their telling and, in Len's case, frequent retelling of their conversion experiences, the Hopes powerfully affirmed their right to sit at the table alongside fellow believers. As is evident in the transcript that follows, though, Len's testimony was more than a confession or a claim. It seems significant, after all, that all known versions of Len's testimony end with his Latter-day Saint congregation in Alabama welcoming him unreservedly into the fold, offering to protect him from lynch mobs, and assuring him that his name was written not only in the records of the Church, but also in heaven, where it could not be scratched out. During the years Len shared this testimony, Alabama was hardly a bastion of racial tolerance; indeed, in the years immediately following Len's death, cities like Selma and Montgomery became primary battlegrounds in the Civil Rights movement. But in Len's testimony, Alabama was home to "some of the beautifullest smiles that the Latter-day Saints can give," an image that contrasted sharply with the "feelings of the people" who refused to worship with him and his family in Ohio.

Marion D. Hanks characterized Len Hope as "an absolutely pure guileless man," and doubtlessly this was true.⁵³ Yet while sharing his testimony at a cottage meeting in segregated Cincinnati, Len could bear a wily witness, subtly and lovingly offering his friends and fellow believers a better, more Christian way of being a Latter-day Saint.

Transcript of the Hanks Recording

What follows is a transcript of the Len and Mary Hope recording found in the Marion D. Hanks Collection at the Church History Library.⁵⁴ The quality of the recording is good, despite the audiotape being a copy of what was likely the original circa 1952 recording. Every effort has been made to produce an accurate transcription of Mary and Len's words. Len Hope suffered from severe respiratory problems late in life, and his speech is sometimes punctuated by coughing and hoarseness, making some of what he says difficult to decipher.⁵⁵ For the sake of clarity,

53. Hanks, interview, 15.

54. A partial, imprecise transcription of Len's testimony from this recording can be found in "Early Black Pioneers: Building the Kingdom through Faith," *LDS Living* (July/August 2005): 59–61.

55. According to Hanks, Len Hope's lungs "were destroyed" after years of breathing in particles at the factory where he worked, leaving him with "a form of almost miner's black lung disease." Hanks, interview, 6.

some minor repetitions and filler words have been eliminated from the transcript.

**Len and Mary Hope, Audio recording [1952],
Marion D. Hanks Collection, MS 31743, 14AT0046.**⁵⁶

Mary:

[Indecipherable]⁵⁷ this gospel is true without any shadow of a doubt. I know that Joseph Smith was indeed a true instrument in the hands of God in bringing to pass this wonderful work that we are engaged in. I know that God is our Father. He will hear and answer our prayers. I know that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of the true and living God. I bear you my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Len:

Brothers and sisters, I wish to state why I become a Latter-day Saint. I once was belonged to the Baptist Church. Before I become a Baptist, I thought it was wise to ask the old head, some of the old members that had been members of the church for a long time, how do you get religion and what was religion?

Some of them stated to me that when you get religion, you have, they said that you have to pray for it. And they said that you have to see peculiar things and have peculiar dreams. And they said that you have to see yourself crossing hell on a spider web.⁵⁸ I thought that was very peculiar, but, however, I was willing to try it.

So I tried to get religion that year. And I used to pray for it and seek very hard for it, for religion. I used to go out in the old cotton fields and corn patches and begging the Lord for religion. So, I couldn't get religion that year. I didn't, couldn't see myself crossing hell on a spider web, nor could I see any of these peculiar things.

56. Audio recording can be found at <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/72c48317-499c-4223-9b9d-4df6b6ecc585/o/o>.

57. The recording begins midsentence, perhaps suggesting that it was an impromptu rather than a planned recording. But since the recording is a copy, it is also possible that the original recording contained a full testimony from Mary, which was then lost when the copy was made.

58. A reference to Jonathan Edwards's 1741 sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Edwards said, "All your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock." See Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1739-1742*, Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 22, eds. Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch, and Kyle P. Farley (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2003), 410.

The next year, I tried religion again. And as you know, it's customary for those Baptist and Methodist denominations, how they gather their people around on their benches, called mourners' benches,⁵⁹ we sit around and we pray and they'll pray for us. And after that for a little period, why, they give us a prayer period, a rest period, to go out and pray for our sins.⁶⁰ And they let us go out and spend about an hour or two hours praying for our sins. So, I went out many a night and went out and laid down in the cotton patches and the corn fields, looking up to heaven, begging the Lord for religion, dew falling on me heavily.

Well, [indecipherable]⁶¹ it was impossible for me to see any of these peculiar things, and it looked like there was no religion for me. So, I went back to the church and promised to live all the laws of the Baptist Church and keep all the commandments of Jesus Christ as far as I could understand them. I give the preacher my hand with that covenant. So, when the revival was over, they baptized us.

And shortly after that, the Lord showed me in a dream that I had to be baptized over again. I wondered, "Was I in the right church?" or "What had happened?" Finally, that blowed over and I began to search the scriptures night and day, trying to find out who had the right church and which of all the sects were right.

To make a long story short, I read a great much about the gift of the Holy Ghost. But Jesus Christ says that when the Holy Ghost come upon you, it will lead and guide you to all the truth and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever he has said.⁶² I figured right then and there, everybody needs the gift of the Holy Ghost. So I begin to ask the preachers then about the gift of the Holy Ghost. I asked them what was the Holy Ghost and how do you get it? One preacher said that you get the Holy Ghost when you get religion. They both go hand and hand. I didn't feel much like I had the gift of the Holy Ghost. I asked another preacher. He said you have to go out and pray for the gift of the Holy Ghost. I wonder how they differ in their opinions, calling themselves God's sent ministers. I think right then—everybody,

59. Also called the "anxious seat," the "mourner's bench" was a bench or a series of benches usually placed at the front of some evangelical churches or revivals where penitent Christians and the unconverted would sit or kneel to publicly pray, confess sins or guilt, contemplate their spiritual well-being, and seek communion with God and his Spirit. See Randall Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2004), 29–30.

60. Possibly "ourselves."

61. Possibly "after all that."

62. An allusion to John 14:26: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

I mean, they was wrong—how they would differ and call themselves God’s sent ministers.

So, I decided to take the last one’s advice. And I thought that by choosing for my praying ground some out of place, that looked like I⁶³ was deserted or thrown away. In fact, I’d a been able to humble myself so much so until like I was in sackcloth and ashes. So, I choose my praying ground out at an old house where other people had lived long years past. The old house had about rotted down. The floor is rotted out of the old house. And its top had about rotted off. You could look out and see the stars and the moon and so forth.

So, I got into this old house and begin to pray for the gift of the Holy Ghost. I prayed, and I cried all night for the gift of the Holy Ghost. The next morning, no gift of the Holy Ghost. I thought I wasn’t praying right. I thought by making a covenant with the Lord, he might give me the gift of the Holy Ghost. I thought then to promise him that I was going to neither eat nor drink until I received the gift of the Holy Ghost or die.

My brothers and sisters, I valued my word. I thought lying was awful crazy, and after I had made that promise, I could picture myself walking up and down the road, passing the death,⁶⁴ just wondering what the people were going to say about me. I wasn’t going to change unless the Lord had to come down or sent some angel or whatnot to make known to me about the gospel of the Holy Ghost. But the Holy Spirit prevailed with me not to make such a promise, and I thank him from that day for this, that I didn’t make the promise.

So, I went back to the house, and after drying the tears off my face, [unintelligible] brother⁶⁵ some sort of fairy tale where I had spent the night. That blowed over for a little while.

The elders was all the time down in Alabama preaching the gospel, but they never did come out to preach to us. We lived in the country, way out where one house sits here and one sits way over yonder in the hill. They wasn’t close together at all. And this particular house, we had cultivated this particular spot for cotton and corn. Daddy had plowed up every pathway that come up to the house and didn’t even leave a pathway

63. Possibly “it.”

64. “Death” here may allude to his covenant with God “to neither eat nor drink until I receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and die.” The idea seems to be that Hope could picture himself walking down the road on the brink of death-by-fasting.

65. Hope apparently lived with his brother at this time (see later reference to “brother’s home”). He seems to be saying here that he told his brother “some sort of fairy tale” to account for his absence during the night.

to come up to the house. And it had been raining about forty days in the year of 1913.⁶⁶ Can you picture the elders coming across this muddy place with their beautiful shined shoes and nice suits of clothes to bring me a little tract? They brought a little tract⁶⁷ up to the house and give it to my sister.⁶⁸ I wasn't home, and when I came in, my sister said, "Here's a tract the elders left for you." I wondered why she didn't try to read it or thought the tract was for her.

Well, she give me the little tract, and I begin to read it, and some of the first things I saw how the elders had the authority to preach the gospel in these last days and on whomsoever that they lay their hands might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.⁶⁹ I was convinced right then and there.

They was having a conference down at the little chapel of the branch, so I went down immediately and applied for baptism. And the elders said, "Brother Hope, we'll be glad to baptize you but we'd rather for you be sure of yourself. Get more books and read so you won't be carried about with every wind of doctrine, cunning craft of men whereby they lie in wait to deceive."⁷⁰ I felt that was very wise. So, I goes back home, sent way out in Salt Lake City, and get the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, and many other books.⁷¹ And reading, read them all through. They read so good till I was in a hurry to be baptized.

66. In 1913, Hope would have been eighteen or nineteen years old.

67. "I think it was the 'Plan of Salvation.'" "Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope," [2]. *The Plan of Salvation*, a twenty-four-page Latter-day Saint missionary tract by John Hamilton Morgan (1842–1894), was published in 1887 by the Juvenile Instructor Office, Salt Lake City. The tract was reprinted and circulated many times over the next century.

68. According to the 1900 U.S. Census, Len Hope had three sisters: Eliza (b. 1882), Minnie (b. 1883), and Susie (b. 1890).

69. A possible allusion to Acts 8:18–19: "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." See also Doctrine and Covenants 49:14: "And whoso doeth this shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, by the laying on of the hands of the elders of the church."

70. An allusion to Ephesians 4:14: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

71. "So I went back home and sat down and ordered the Book of Mormon, The Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine & Covenants, and other books and read them." "Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope," [2]. Hanks remembers Len Hope being studious: "He would speak, and he knew the gospel very well. He could quote by the armlength from the standard works. He studied all the time. After he retired, they [that is, Len and Mary] just spent all their time studying the gospel." Hanks, interview, 17.

While I was thus convened, I was called into the war and served my time overseas.⁷² I served my time over there, and I felt like the Lord was with me in every move, so that he was in partnership with me. I felt like instead of in the service, I was going to school. I learned many things. Some of the things I brought back, I should have been scared while going through dangerous scenes, but I was very tickled, and surprised, and enjoyed it.

So, those scenes I went through. I really believed that I'd have been killed, but the Lord knew my work wasn't finished on this earth, so he suffered me to get back home without a scratch.⁷³ So, as soon as I got back home, I applied for baptism immediately. And they take me way up in the woods to an old creek, and they baptized me, and take me out on the bank, confirmed me a member of the Church, laying their hands on my head for the gift of the Holy Ghost.⁷⁴

I had seen the people of other denominations claim that when the Holy Ghost hit them, well, they have to jump and holler. And I've seen elated⁷⁵ people sitting in the church and the preacher begin to preach, preaching about their dead relatives and so forth, and get them feeling sorrowful and so forth and they claim that was the Holy Ghost, I guess. But anyway, they start to screaming and throw their little babies across the church, and people who caught the babies, they all begin to walk benches, try to stand on their heads, and cut somersaults. So, the Holy Ghost, kind of like that, I wasn't so much particular about it. But, however, I set out back to my house rejoicing, I could jump a little bit too.

But the elders said, "It⁷⁶ don't come like that, Brother Hope." Say, "You begin to live the gospel, and the Holy Ghost will come as you need

72. Hope registered for the draft in Marengo County, Alabama, on June 5, 1917. He reported for "special mechanical training for military service" at Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, on July 15, 1918. He then shipped out from Hoboken, New Jersey, aboard the USS *Leviathan* with the Camp Jackson Automatic Replacement Draft Battery 11th Field Artillery (Colored) on September 29, 1918. He was honorably discharged from military service on March 19, 1919. Len Hope, in "United States, Veterans Administration Master Index, 1917-1940," image 2079 (St. Louis: National Archives and Records Administration, 1985).

73. "So being protected by the hands of the Lord serving on the firing lines I barely escaped death." "Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope," [2].

74. According to his Record of Member, Hope was baptized in Magnolia, Alabama, on June 22, 1919, by John M. Tolbert and confirmed by Horace J. Knowlton.

75. Possibly "related."

76. That is, the Holy Ghost.

it more.” That’s exactly what happened. I begin to live the gospel, and the Holy Ghost when it come, comes as a small still voice calling you to feel as wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove, bold as a lion, and humble as a lamb.⁷⁷ The greatest thing of all this world, he’ll give you an assurance in your heart to know which of all the sects is right. And from that day to this, I haven’t⁷⁸ any doubt in all my heart that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was the only true Church on this earth. And I know if you live the gospel, pay your honest tithing, and live the Word of Wisdom, you will be saved back into the presence of our Lord, from which we have come forth.

So I began to live the gospel, and in a few days, the mob crowd came for me, some of the lower class of white people that lives in that vicinity. They had their pistols, rifles, sawed-off shotguns. Come to my brother’s home and ask, tell me to come out, say they want to talk with me. They wasn’t going to hurt me. [Laughs] Looked like they’d a left their guns at home if they weren’t going to turn and hurt me. And I got up enough nerve to go out and talk with them, and they said, “What have you did, now you went overseas, and you learned a few things about the white folks, and now you want to come back and join, is that it?”⁷⁹

I told them, no. I told them I had been investigating this gospel long before I went overseas. Therefore, I found that this was the only true church on the earth, and therefore I came back and joined. That stunned them for a little while, and they said, “Well, go down to the branch and have them scratch your name off or we’re gonna hang you to a limb and shoot you full of holes.” That’s a pretty hard lick, but still I wasn’t really scared, seemly.

So, I went down the next morning, down to Church while they were having a conference. Told them my experience and what had happened.

77. An allusion to Matthew 10:16: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” Hope may also have had Proverbs 28:1 in mind: “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.” The phrase “humble as a lamb” does not appear in the King James Bible or other Latter-day Saint scriptures.

78. Possibly “haven’t had.”

79. “So in a few days a band of white men came to my brothers house with rifles and shot guns so they called me saying, ‘We just want to talk to you.’ So I went out and they ask me, ‘Why did you join the whites.’ I said, ‘No, I was investigating long before I went to war and I found it was the only true Church on earth that is why I joined it,’ ‘We want you to go and have your name scratched off the record if not we will hang you up to a limb and shoot you full of holes.’” “Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope,” [2].

To my surprise, I thought I was going to see them with their hung-down heads and sad countenances. Fortunately, I saw some of the beautifullest smiles that the Latter-day Saints can give. They said, “Brother Hope, this is just the persecution of the devil.” Said, “We all have to endure this.”

And I thought to myself, these beautiful people, and when you live the Word of Wisdom, you can see it on the outward appearance the same as inward, the spiritual. If these beautiful people can endure persecution, why couldn’t I? I just felt like I could have been hung to this limb and shot full of holes.

They told me then to have my name scratched off, but the elders and so forth, the missionaries, told me my name wasn’t⁸⁰ down and only it was wrote down in Salt Lake City, and since that time I dreamt⁸¹ that it was wrote in Salt Lake, not only in Salt Lake, but it was wrote down in heaven.⁸² And I can’t doubt the gospel the least bit.

And I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of the living God. And all those that succeeded him, all the way down to President O. McKay,⁸³ is a true prophet of God. I bear you my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Scott Hales has been a writer and historian for the Church History Department since 2015. He is a general editor and lead writer for *Saints*, the new four-volume history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He has a BA in English from Brigham Young University and an MA and PhD in English from the University of Cincinnati. His writing has appeared in various academic and literary journals, including *Religion and the Arts*, *BYU Studies Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. He lives in Eagle Mountain, Utah, with his wife and five children.

80. Possibly “was.”

81. “I had another vision or dream that the Elders work had been recognized in heaven and my sins had been forgōtiven and my name was written in heaven.” “Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope,” [2].

82. “I rehearsed to the L.D.S. my troubles, so thoes [*sic*] beautiful smiles they gave me not only put sunshine ~~thei~~ into their souls but mine also, so they said ‘Brother Hope we could not scratch your name off if we tried to, for your name is in Salt Lake City and also written in Heaven.[’]” “Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope,” [2].

83. David O. McKay became President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on April 9, 1951.