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## Low Out of the Dust

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**Abstract:** This article discusses how the Hill Cumorah pageant, “America's Witness for Christ,” was prepared from the Book of Mormon by H. Wayne Driggs. It depicts scenes from the Book of Mormon, which proclaims a solemn message of Christ.



SAMUEL THE LAMANITE DECLARES THE COMING OF CHRIST TO A GROUP OF NEPHITES, IN A SCENE FROM "AMERICA'S WITNESS FOR CHRIST."

Photo by D. B. McRae.

# LOW OUT OF THE DUST

A STORY RECALLED ON CUMORAH'S HILL FROM WHENCE CAME "AMERICA'S WITNESS FOR CHRIST."

By OLIVER R. SMITH  
*Of the Eastern States Mission*

HILL CUMORAH'S somber outline showed dimly against a dark sky. Up the broad slope were spaced, one above the other, three wide stages with imposing scenery. Several thousand people gathered at the foot of the hill, spreading over tiers of seats and into standing room areas beyond. Their automobiles, representing nineteen states, covered an adjacent parking field.

This was the historic setting on July 23rd and 25th at Palmyra, New York, for the Eastern States Mission's pageant, "America's Witness For Christ." The annual missionary gathering had attracted nearly a thousand Latter-day Saints to the Church's birthplace. The pageant presentations, prepared from the Book of Mormon by H. Wayne Driggs of New York University, drew non-Mormon visitors from populous nearby cities in numbers that swelled the three evenings' attendance to over fifteen thousand.

Long before the opening hour each evening the audience had filled the seats to overflowing. An expectant hush fell as a spotlight parted the curtain of darkness to reveal a group of trumpeters, far up on the hill top. Softly they played the

plaintive strain of "The Nephite Lamentation." The lyric reader began the prologue, introducing the theme with "I am the Light and the Life of the World. . ."

In successive episodes the great Nephite history was unrolled; colorfully costumed characters dramatized scenes on the main stages, and carried the action realistically to various points on the hillside where skillful lighting enhanced natural settings. Dramatic reading and recorded music wove an impressive background of epic grandeur.

The thrilling climax came with a scene of the Savior's appearance to the Nephites, sublimely pictured by a brilliantly lighted figure descending from the distant crest of the hill.

As the final tableau faded from view and the last notes of the trumpeted postlude died away, there was completed a new chapter in the development of pageantry at Cumorah. That development is a story of vision and devoted work, with the belief that a Book of Mormon "passion play" can be presented each year and eventually become an event of Church-wide significance.

EARLIEST advocate of the pageant idea was former Mission President Don B. Colton, who more than three years ago visualized it as a potential missionary agency. Others associated with him caught the vision, and by collaborated efforts directed talents and energies toward working out the plan. A drama laboratory was fortunately provided in the form of the mission's conferences which were being held each summer at Palmyra.

The first practical experience came in 1934 with the production of a brief pageant at the Joseph Smith Farm, attended by a few hundred Church members. The enterprise was dropped the following summer to make way for the dedication of the Angel Moroni Monument. At that time Hill Cumorah became recognized as the most suitable location for public gatherings, because of its situation on a state highway. (Concluded on page 631)

TRUMPETERS ON HILL CUMORAH



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Early in 1936 a second pageant was composed, produced, revised, and produced again in one of the wards of New York stake. From the experience of the previous works a third was prepared, titled, "Truth From the Earth." Presented at the Hill Cumorah during the July conference that year, its one performance was witnessed by five thousand people.

This success motivated another period of planning and writing which developed the latest work, "America's Witness For Christ." Here, with a portrayal of the Book of Mormon's major theme, mission authorities feel they have a near approach to the desired ideal for presentation year after year.

Production of the Cumorah pageants has been accomplished by the intensive work of a volunteer staff and cast, composed of missionaries and local Church members. Selected according to their aptitudes for particular activities, they serve freely and loyally, as actors, musicians, stage hands, electricians, or ushers.

Through radio and the press, people in western New York have been made aware of Cumorah as a Mormon historic spot and have come to expect the inspiring presentations there each July. The rising barometer of their interest, indicated by increasing attendance from year to year, demonstrates a positive response to the plan of pageantry.

Under direction of Frank Evans, new mission president in the Eastern States, preparations are already going forward for next year's event. A recently completed concrete stage and amphitheater, provided by the Presiding Bishopric, will give more adequate facilities than before at the historic hill.

So, with widening influence, Cumorah's pageant will thrill its audiences again next summer. Latter-day Saints who view it will recall Isaiah's declaration to Israel: "And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust."

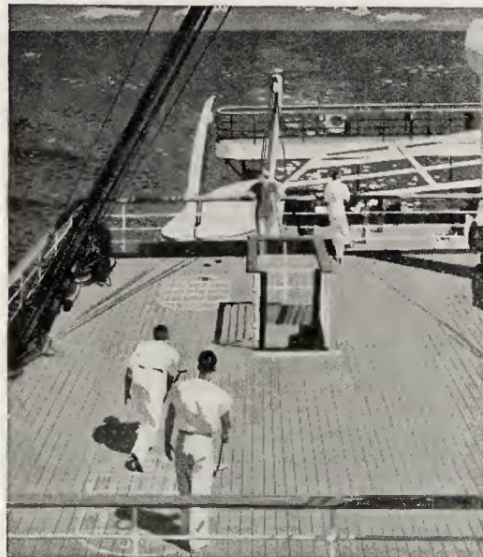
But there is a new accent in that voice from the past. Eloquent now with poetry, drama, and music, the Book of Mormon proclaims its solemn message of a new "Witness for Christ."

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