

JOHN L. SORENSON INTERVIEW

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By

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Introduction (Nick Galieti): Staff from Book of Mormon Central took the opportunity to sit down and talk with one of the most respected scholars of Book of Mormon anthropology and archaeology, Dr. John Sorenson. The first portion of this interview was for Dr. Sorenson to offer an oral history of his life and experiences, those that contributed [to] and framed his research. The second portion focused on more direct questions relating to Dr. Sorenson's research as well as his hope and vision for the future of Book of Mormon scholarship. Here now is a conversation with Dr. John Sorenson.

(Nick Galieti) Back in 2011 you stated in a lecture that you intended with your pursuits to start the research of Book of Mormon, not end it. So how did it start in your mind? How did your Book of Mormon research start?

0.53 Well, that's going back a long way. I was initially - my academic experience was going to be in electrical engineering. I'd had two brothers who had both gotten electrical engineering degrees during the depression and so it naturally followed, I mean I didn't know anything else. As a matter of fact, my one brother, his first job after graduating from Utah State in Logan, was at Pearl Harbor and he was there on December 7 and I went to Logan, to Utah State to begin with and two months after I began, Pearl Harbor happened and it was clear that I was going to end up in the military, so after some months there was a call circulating in the engineering area for people who would qualify to be trained as meteorologists and I qualified; I'd had a lot of math and physics and so I joined the Army Reserve and waited for call up and that was in early 1943.

2.40 So I went into the military and ended up after a total of fifteen months of education - the last nine months was at Cal Tech - from which I eventually received a master's degree on the basis of the training. Well I was pretty much filled up with math and physics by then and I was not enjoying it particularly. It was alright, I did alright, but it

was not something I wanted to do. So I was in the military for a total of forty months and getting out in 1946, I decided I wanted to go on a mission and did. I got married a little before I left, by the way, and went to New Zealand and was assigned by the mission president - who happened to be from my ward in Smithfield - to go to the Cook Islands where the church had just been introduced by a good Samoan member who lived there.

4:09 So my companion and I, both of whom were veterans, spent two years in Rarotonga. While I was there, 1948, one year, the Kon-Tiki expedition was going on, the voyage; they were on the raft coming from Peru and there was a ham radio operator on Rarotonga who was in touch with the boat, the raft, and I had been a ham radio operator myself, so visited him a couple of times and was privileged to hear the people on the raft. That spurred a little interest in me along with the myth among Latter-day Saints, especially the Polynesians, that Hagoth had drifted out into Polynesia. There's almost no basis for that but they were hyped on it so when I came home, I decided I would go to BYU and study archeology and Hugh Nibley was new there and Wells Jakeman was new and Sidney Sperry and those were my mentors and so I became an archeologist of a very junior grade and went in 1953 to Mexico with the first year of the field work with the New World Archeological Foundation which was a creature of Thomas Stuart Ferguson.

6:14 Ferguson had been a student at Berkeley at the same time as Wells Jakeman. Jakeman had stayed on and got a degree in ancient history; he was not an archeologist but he represented himself as such and that's easy to understand, he had done a little of it. So he was my primary teacher at the first at BYU but he and Ferguson had clashed thereafter; they were both kind of sure that they were right on interpreting the Book of Mormon in historical terms. And so Ferguson went on and rather brashly got some famous archaeologists, a professor at Harvard, one at the American Museum of Natural History and one at the Carnegie Institution, and they were truly the biggest men in Mesoamerican archeology at that time. He got them to agree to back a foundation because from their point of view, it was a way to get new money, you know, and they were willing to bear the Mormon label if that was required. But the foundation was cast as a scientific organization, nothing to do with the Book of Mormon.

So Gareth Lowe was a fellow student with me at BYU at the time, and he and I went on that first year -

(Nick Galieti) Why did you guys decide to go to that specific area in Mexico?

8:14 That was the idea of Ferguson and Milton Hunter. They had written a book - I think it was published in 1950 - *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* or something of that ilk and their interpretation of the historical traditions in Central Mexico, Southern Mexico, suggested to them that Zarahemla would be in Tabasco. So they sent the expedition there for the first time just to see what was there. There wasn't much there. Obviously, it was not going to work. By the end of the - near the end of five months of the season, there was no discovery of any significance and Ferguson was counting on some kind of a discovery to whet interest to get more money for a second year. By the way, the primary donors were the Marriotts in Washington and Rose Marie Reid, by the way. I have no idea how that came about, but that was an interesting thing.

9:41 Anyway, Ferguson came to Tabasco where we were working in about the first of May in 1953 and said we've got to do something to light a fire to get some more money. Lowe and I had been spending our evenings doing Book of Mormon geography research. We'd heard all that Jakeman had to say about it and were not satisfied. It was alright generally, but he was kind of a fuss-budget and everything had to be exactly the way he thought it would be and there was no room for anything else. So we felt free to speculate a little and analyzed the material in the Book of Mormon and I concluded that it was much more logical that the central depression of Chiapas, up toward the Guatemalan border on the Grijalva River, would be where Zarahemla would logically be. We agreed that the highlands of Guatemala, southern highlands, would be where Nephi was. Thinking all that we thought, so I peddled the idea to Ferguson that we ought to go look where I thought Zarahemla was to be in the Central Depression.

11:32 He agreed; we flew up there, went out and got a jeep and a guide and cruised around in that general area for ten days. It was just about time for the rains to start so we didn't have much time left and we found a hundred sites or so that had never been reported before. Actually only one or two archaeologists had ever even been there, had even looked and they found a couple of obvious things of late. Anyway, it became clear to me and to Ferguson that this was where the new work of the Foundation should center. He went back to - he lived in California, Bay area - went back there and trudged to Salt Lake and peddled the idea to the church authorities that they ought to do something with this knowledge and they did; they bought it.

12:56 So for the next fifty years they funded the work of the Foundation. It was not known – not widely known – and it was certainly not talked about by them – it was known among some Mexican archeologists that that was the source of the funding but it was done discretely. Elder Howard Hunter of the Twelve was put in charge of the activity and he ran the show – that is he was sort of the bishop of the activity for thirty years. He dealt with their problems which were plenty – personal problems and so on. But most of their people, most of their archaeologists were non-Mormon but Lowe became the field director kind of by default. Eventually I, when I got established at BYU years later, I was able to get an honorary doctorate for him from BYU. Everyone called him *Dr.* anyway because he was such a big-shot in Mexican archeology and we made it legitimate that way.

14:35 Anyway, I had a kind of a hands-off role with that Foundation for years. Brother Hunter consulted with me some. I wrote letters in, Gareth and I were always communicating back and forth and I kept up with what was going on and when I got back from there, I was hired as an instructor of archeology for two years at BYU and I had actually had more field archeology than anyone else by far at BYU, so –

(Nick Galietti) What time was this? What year? Do you remember?

1950. From 1953 to 1955 I was an instructor there.

(Nick Galietti) It seemed that by about 1955 you had kind of done enough research where you had your geographic model in place.

15:42 Matter of fact, it turned out that I had the model in general but details have been whetted since then. By 1955, I applied for a National Science Foundation Pre-Doctoral Fellowship; that was the first year that it had been offered in anthropology and I got one of the three grants that year which I wouldn't have done if I had not been a Cal Tech graduate, I'm sure, because I had never had a class in anthropology but I'd had field archeology and archeology in America was attached to anthropology – it was a branch of anthropology. So I went to – I was granted this nice fellowship; thank goodness because I had five children by then; five of my eight sons had been born by then and there was nice dependents money that was attached to the fellowship.

17:07 I got to UCLA, got established with George Brainerd who was a famous Mexican archeologist on the faculty and two months after I got there he died of a heart attack.

Well, that was a blow to put it mildly, but what it did was to send me sideways into social anthropology which turned out to be a very much broader opportunity for my mental processing and so actually I graduated with a PhD in Social Anthropology because they couldn't hire another archaeologist of eminence at that time.

18:09 So when it came to a dissertation, my social anthropologist was a very broad thinker and his concern was with social and cultural evolution up from hunting and gathering to farming to industrialization. He was one of the few anthropologists who had dealt with modern people, not natives, and we agreed that I would try to find a place where there had been industrialization, that is, a major factory had been built that affected a farming community and then to document the kinds of changes that were involved as part of social evolution. He was aware of Geneva Steel and he was aware of American Fork where there had been a study by Lowry Nelson who was a rural sociologist at BYU who studied American Fork in 1930. So we agreed, my advisor and me, his name was Walter Goldsmith, that I go to American Fork and round that up. It happened that I had moved into the same ward as Kirk's parents. How old were you then?

(Kirk Magleby) I was on my mission John when you moved into this American Fork 14th Ward and I came home from my mission, went to visit with Orville Gunther and he said, Kirk, you've got to go talk to this new guy that moved into the ward, John Sorenson.

20:17 That was an interesting idea. Anyway I did a study of American Fork as it had been affected by Geneva Steel; I made a comparison with – what it was called, a controlled comparison, I took also a study of Santaquin which had not been affected particularly by Geneva Steel so I did a comparison of the two communities with my methodological key. So that's how I became an anthropologist in a more general sense than archeology. But I still continued an interest in archeology, how could I not after the experience I'd had, but it was an avocation, not a vocation, so when I got out with a degree from UCLA, I had a hard time. By then I had I think seven of my eight boys and I couldn't get a job that paid enough to support us. So I was looking pretty desperately and I had a good friend at BYU that I had known before when I was an instructor in archeology; his name was Lyman Tyler who was a historian whose interest was primarily American Indians in the west as an aspect of American history. This put him in touch with anthropology and you know, we made natural links.

22:09 He was a good friend and he had become the director of the library and was building the new library which is the present library, Harold B. Lee, he gave me a job as the social science librarian. I had had some library experience as a graduate student; I knew all the library staff, so I came aboard for one year as a social science librarian, but I immediately began to look for ways to get anthropology into the curriculum and me as the teacher, of course. The sociology department - nearly all the faculty had had experience with anthropology in their backgrounds and preparation. It was fairly normal at that time for sociology and anthropology to be a joint department.

23:11 So I began to teach a couple of classes part time while I was the librarian and the following year they agreed to take me on full time as an anthropologist and changed the name of the department to sociology and anthropology. Now this is entirely separate from my old archaeology haunts and that was still an on-going thing with quotes, Book of Mormon archeology as the center of their attention. So there was a certain degree of rivalry which I didn't encourage but my orientation to anthropology was far broader than anything that I had thought of when I was an instructor there. Anyway, I built the anthropology department as an adjunct to sociology.

24:15 Meanwhile, much of my activity, my intellectual activity based on my study of American Fork was on the modern world and that involved me in projects that belonged to the area of *applied anthropology* which is having to do with whatever anthropological thought has to do to contribute to understanding the modern world and its problems. I got into a series of military activities – semi-military activities – with Mark Cannon who eventually became the administrative assistant to the Chief Justice of the U.S. and some other BYU professors - we did a study on Vietnam for the Navy. It turned out that I ended up in charge of that because of the breadth of my concern; I had a much broader view than any of the single disciplines that were involved.

25:44 Anyway, after a while, I got a call from an outfit in California, Defense Research Corporation, a private for-profit organization asking me if I wanted to come to work for them because I had published a major monograph on our Vietnam research. Incidentally, our research was only on the open sources, mainly reports in the *New York Times* whose reporters in Vietnam were outstanding and so we didn't involve classified material at all. What we did was to investigate the whole Vietnamese society as far as we could –

(Nick Galieti) So you did this research on Vietnam. About what time period is this?

27:00 The early 1960s and as a result of my publication, this outfit in California had begun to study the same sorts of insurgency that was going on in Vietnam but in other parts of the world and they were looking for somebody just like me, and so I went to them and this is a think tank, they were a mix of missile defense types – engineers, a couple of physicists; I was the first social scientist and that was my charge to expand that area of their activity. There were a couple of economists and so on but I was the chief social scientist. They paid very well, very well, two-and-a-half times what I had been making at BYU and they didn't want me to go back again; so I went first on leave for one year but I couldn't go back so I was there for five years. They changed the name meanwhile to General Research Corporation. That's about as general as you can get but their bread and butter was missile defense gaming – you know, us and the Russians. That was the main line they wanted to expand in so many ways, if possible.

29:11 So my first activity was in urban insurgency. You ask the question what if the rural guerillas as in Vietnam had decided to lodge themselves in cities? And so I did a major study at first for a couple of years on case studies -Tehran, the Shah was still in power but it wasn't long before he was gone; Caracas, Venezuela; Colombia; Guatemala City, and the question was, could the guerillas lodge usefully in the city and not be routed out by police? What were the police capabilities? What were the key elements of the police station, power stations and so on in the city? And they had political science types and operations research types and we had a couple of colonels, one from the Marines and one from the Army as employees and so from that, we went on to other studies – a major study on Vietnam where our task was to criticize the military's plan for defending Vietnam by erecting defenses around every village – every village so that the guerillas could not get at the people, and our task was to say, will this work? It obviously would *not* work. It was absurd because we knew enough about Vietnam and our consultants and so on, that they would have subverted all the measures that were in place that were purely military and it was clear Vietnam was a lost case anyway.

(Nick Galieti) Everybody's life experiences seem to inform our futures. How did this time period with general research inform –

32:02 What it did was to lead me into the area of assistance research. Assistance research was, from our point of view, everything having to do with the societal setting –

everything. For example, we did a big study on urban transportation planning for Housing and Urban Development and the real question was, if you plan incremental improvements in subway systems, freeways and so on, what do you get out of it? Does it work? But that included calculation of the social costs and benefits and political feasibility. If you planned it, could you bring it off? And so what this taught me was all about every society that we dealt with, every dimension.

(Nick Galieti) Regardless of time period?

33:22 Well, dependent on what information you could get, that was the only question. So what that has done is to lead me now you see in *Mormon's Codex*, my latest book, to this totality of ancient life and there are fragments, not as much as I would like but there is what there is about social, political, warfare, economic aspects of the society, and so my general appreciation that allowed me to get where I am today could not have taken place without my experience in the think tank in California. I was there for five years. Lusted to get back to academics because otherwise it was a matter of running to Washington, running to Washington, running to Washington, the source of money of course, and feeding them the line and doing this and that and so on; it was one complete round of activities. I think I probably made the trip to Washington or Boston or Philadelphia probably 25 times in two years or so and this was academic? That was a far cry from what I'd been used to and I would have been happy to go back, but go back to what?

35:22 When I left there, BYU had decided to combine archeology with the anthropology wing of sociology and anthropology, so in 1969 when I was ready to back, General Research said why don't you just do a subsidiary of social science research (OK, we can do that) in Provo? So we decided to do that and for two years I had Bonneville Research operating in downtown Provo. We had one major contract with the Defense Language Institute of Monterey where we revamped their Korean and Japanese curricula.

36:29 We had about fifteen people, Korean and Japanese language experts and made a big change in their plans, but then the money dried up and so after two years at Bonneville, a good friend of mine, Dean Martin Hickman, arranged to take me back into BYU but not in the department; I was attached to his office in various political arrangements – financial arrangements – so here it was me in his office and there was the anthropology and archeology department at that time in the basement of the Maeser

Building in utter obscurity. They'd had a chance to be included in the planning for the new Kimball Tower which was being built but they decided they didn't want to, so eventually, Dean Hickman told me I've got to have you modernize that outfit and so he appointed me chair of it, but this was me coming in from the outside, so to speak. I was chair for eight years.

(Nick Galieti) What time frame?

38:06 This was 1978 to 1985 or 1986 - forgot. Anyway, during that time I did move us into the Kimball Tower and did modernize the department – expanded it. I actually hired a non-Mormon anthropologist, Tom Blakely, an Africanist, and in a number of ways expanded politically, made contacts with all kinds of other departments and sold them with our curriculum sending more students to anthropology and so on.

(Nick Galieti) What were some of your goals with the department once you took over?

39:05 To broaden it, to make it a genuine anthropology department because the way it was they were mostly archaeologists and they had one anthropologist who was a British social anthropologist who was isolated from the American scene so it was really an archeology department in fact. Not much changed from what it had been before, but somewhat. Anyway, breadth – we became a genuine anthropology department. And that's one leg of my legacy that the anthropology department that's there now was initially conceived by me and was implemented at first by me, but in 1985, I had a heart attack. This was a combination of my long to-do list as chair along with being a bishop of a married students ward and having nine children too. So it wasn't supposed to happen. I looked then exactly as I do now – exactly. The doctor didn't know why, except stress, so I decided to quit and so I retired at age 62, the next year, happy. Retirement is the best job there is.

(Nick Galieti) Well back in 1980 while at BYU you did some work with Jack Welch in starting FARMS and all that. Why don't you talk a little bit about that?

41:24 Yah, and I should – I can go back a little because I had never lost my interest in Mesoamerican archeology and the Book of Mormon. In the 1970s I was still doing some on the side research keeping up with the literature and at some point – I've forgotten now when it was – 1976 perhaps – a friend of mine, David Palmer, a chemist from Chicago was doing research for some big chemical company and he was a Book of

Mormon buff and he came to me and he wanted to know what was the latest that I had been working on; he was aware of my interests and when I told him some of my thinking at that time, he got on a kick and he went to Salt Lake and peddled me and my work to the *Ensign*.

42:42 The *Ensign* was what? five years old then since it had changed from *The Improvement Era* to the *Ensign*. Jay Todd was the editor and Palmer said, *You've got to listen to him. He has some very important things to say.* Todd was interested and asked me to come and talk to a group of people that he assembled at the Church Office Building. They were from different departments, curriculum and so on, but mainly from his publications shop. And I went up for like three months once a week and there were couple-of-hour meetings, peddled my thinking which was fairly significant and advanced at that time, and at the end of it, I had kind of worn out what I had to say, Jay said, *I've got to get this into the Ensign. Can you write it up?* So I did. I wrote it up and it was published, if you can use that term, by Xerox, and I gave away 1,500 copies of that material to people who had heard about it from somebody who had heard about it from somebody and so on. Leonard Arrington bought copies, for example, for all his family because it was so new.

44:39 What it turned out to be was my first book. The 1985 *Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. That's what I'd prepared to go into the *Ensign* but the *Ensign* would not take it – could not take it – because it couldn't pass correlation. The reason it couldn't pass correlation was because *Mister Correlation* was Roy Doxey; he had been President of the Eastern States Mission which included the Hill Cumorah and New York and he was damned if he was going to publish anything that did not include the Hill Cumorah and New York and well, they didn't publish it. Allied with him in the same mental set was Elder Mark Peterson and he was not going to have – his view was, this might even be right, but the people are not ready for it. An interesting point of view which has some validity, but it depends on the case, doesn't it? What they're ready for. So Todd took it to correlation, *rejected, revise* – took it to correlation, *rejected, revise* – about three times with his staff involved in over a period of seven years, so it came into the 1980s, 1984 probably, 1983, and word came to me at least through the grapevine that Sterling McMurrin and his cohorts - they called themselves *the cold coffee Mormons* at the U of U - were going to publish a book by B. H. Roberts that had never been published on the Book of Mormon. This is what Roberts had written about the early 1930s and he

had had doubts, or it appeared that he had had doubts about the Book of Mormon as a result of what he had assessed as the current state of knowledge of ancient America. He did not lose his testimony but he did decide he would not publish that at the time. It was resurrected and it was going to be published in the 1980s by the U of U Press and there was some reason for alarm because it was going to be presented as the testimony defying publication by B. H. Roberts.

48:08 When I learned about it, I alerted Todd at the *Ensign* - that was the first they had heard of it - that it was going to be published. The alert went to various places and ended up with Elder Maxwell and as a result, a committee was constituted of a number of people in church headquarters from different departments: Elder Peterson and Elder Maxwell and Elder George P. Lee and from BYU, Jack Welch, Truman Madsen and me, and this committee met to assess what could be done to counter the negative effects that might come from publishing the Roberts book.

49:08 They decided on several things; doctrinally there was going to be a talk on this, on Christ and so on, but the real issue was, Roberts had assumed that the entire western hemisphere was the scene of the Book of Mormon and that was totally out to lunch; there is no possibility of that, it was no possibility in terms of the Book of Mormon in the first place because of the dimensions of the territory that was involved among the Nephites, so the real question was, what can the Church do to get over this point that the Book of Mormon territory had to be a restricted one, not the whole hemisphere? It was clear that Mesoamerica was the only possible scene; it was clear because that was the only civilization, the only place where books were written, where writing was common and so on. So major cities and major wars were fought, and the like.

50:35 So the real question was, shall they publish me and my book or not? Or some version of that so the end result was I was directed to summarize some of my material in two articles for the *Ensign* and they were published in 1984 in the *Ensign* and they opened the door to the notion – editorially, the point was made, the Church is not saying that this is where it all took place, but the implication was that that could be and it backed off from the hemispheric thing. So at the same time, Deseret Book was signaled it was okay to publish my book. Before that they had turned it down because it wouldn't pass correlation. So the book came out in 1985 and I think it had considerable influence among BYU LDS scholars on the Book of Mormon.

(Nick Galieti) *It's been in publication for over thirty years. To what do you attribute its longevity?*

52:17 I couldn't say. I couldn't say. Maybe it's because Deseret Book just were lazy, didn't realize that they could get rid of it. I don't know. But in any case, it is a fairly unique book to be in print for thirty years and 25,000 copies of it have been printed. So eventually, I wanted to get my broader view, my more advanced view, my fuller view that I had worked on in subsequent years so I decided to do this other – this *Mormon's Codex* – that's not what I called it at first, but I had the concept of a comprehensive volume that would bring together everything worthwhile about Mesoamerica that resonated with the Book of Mormon and bulldoze, as it were, bulldoze any opposition, non Mormon or Mormon, either way, it didn't matter, to bulldoze it by the sheer bulk of the information that I presented - you know, a bibliography of 85 pages, 1,500 references or something like that, and most of them to the technical literature.

54:06 Now I should go back to one other aspect of my work. When I came back from my mission and recollection of the Kon-Tiki activity, I had to do a master's thesis at BYU in archaeology and my chosen topic was evidences of communication between Polynesia and the Americas. I did a master's thesis and I must say it was very good. Nobody has ever paid any attention to it, but it really was; it was much more than Thor Heyerdahl had thought he would find and there was no question that there was communication of some kind between Polynesia and the Americas which was slightly satisfying to the old Polynesian missionary, but it was a lot more than Hagoth - more complicated.

55:40 Anyway, that interest in communication across the ocean by sailors was a secondary interest of mine all the way through and eventually I became acquainted with other people in the anthropological and geographical fields who felt the same way; it was a very small minority, we were called diffusionists and I became one of their major spokesmen. In 19 – I don't know, when was it? I've forgotten what year this was published – 1990 – 1996 for a second edition, a comprehensive bibliography of voyaging across the ocean was compiled by Martin Raish and me - Raish was a librarian, he's since been the librarian at Ricks College, head librarian - and two volumes, 1,200 pages, over 5,000 abstracted articles, it became *the* document for diffusionists. Nobody has even come close to it.

57:43 I thought sometimes that I would update it but then I decided, why should I, because nobody has paid any attention to it anyway except a small minority of us who care. Anyway, I came to be one of maybe five of the key figures in the whole diffusionist movement and one of them, Carl Johannessen, a non-Mormon, a geographer at the University of Oregon, and I became close associates. His big thing was plant geography and he was an inveterate traveler; he'd been to India probably fifteen times and one of his important finds in India was in the sacred temple art pictures of corn. Corn's a strictly American plant. What are they doing there? Well he documented that corn was there for a couple of thousand years. How did it get there? The answer obviously is somebody carried it in a boat – it didn't drift in the ocean, so there were a number of crop plants that he was aware of and I was aware of from my work in the bibliography that suggested this was a line of evidence that would establish that there was communication by sea across the oceans and so he and I began to work together and in 2001 or 2002, we were invited by a professor – an Asian Studies professor at the University of Pennsylvania to give a paper at a conference that he had organized at Penn on ancient communication, and ours was on some thirty-five plants that were demonstrably present in the Old World and in the new before Columbus.

1:00:53 So what did it signify? Well, we went on from there. The number is now over a hundred plants and it's impossible, impossible that they could have been brought by the Bering Strait or that they could have drifted by sea or in the wind or whatever. Carl was still trying to bring the attention of the geographical profession to our work; he keeps doing revisions and he's the same age I am, over ninety, but he's not going to give up. I've given up. But we did publish a book and he's published a revision of it since then; you won't have it here, I'm sure. Oh yes, yes. That's his latest version, but actually, I did a majority, eighty-five percent of the work on it, which he would acknowledge but I thought, when I started to do the work, I have to have a non-Mormon involved, and Carl was the obvious person. So we worked as a total team for fifteen years trying mostly in vain to attract the attention of *the* scholars, with very limited results.

1:03:01 Now this has to do, obviously, with the Book of Mormon, but not directly. No. Our work does not mention the Book of Mormon at all, but I still have a book on my computer that will never be published, I expect, called *How America was Civilized* and it takes the plant material evidences – now our first evidence of communication between

the hemispheres from this plant evidence was at such and such a time and then there was a period when there may not have been any, and then there was another splurge of manifestations of evidence and so on, and I have about twenty-five periodic voyaging instances – interludes, and maintain that communication in cultural terms from the old world can be matched up with those voyages.

(Nick Galieti) *Why won't it ever be published?*

1:04:26 Well I don't care. It won't do any good. Maybe it will be published online, I don't know, but that's my view now that the deadheads in anthropology and geography are not going to have their minds changed for them. They simply don't want to grant that there was voyaging and the major reason among anthropologists is they see the New World – civilization arising in the New World as independent from the Old World so it gives us a control but if there's only one case, then there's no control and so all we know is history, but we don't know theory; we don't know the theory of cultural development and they want that because it's one of the major reasons why American archeologists, anthropologists are in business because it's their contribution to the great theory of cultural development.

1:05:55 Well anyway, I'm beyond caring. Now this shows a number of things coming out of my background coming up to the point of *Mormon's Codex* which is the culmination of everything I had to say, and I've said it; I still read it because I'll forget it if I don't. Let me – a couple of things that just occurred to me in line with what's just been said. I have – one of my legacies has been an attempt to organize scholars in such a way that there would be continuity in Book of Mormon studies. It's been a futile activity. I was very active in the original University Archeology Society of Wells Jakeman which was all the FARMS there was at the time, but it came a cropper – it just wasn't going to work very much, I backed off from that – several different things I tried to get people together. One of the troubles was the people there were to get together wanted to push their own points; they didn't want progress; they wanted that *their* point of view was presented and dominant so I backed off and when Jack Welch came in 1980 assessing whether he wanted to come to BYU and join the law faculty, he had the initial FARMS organized in California, I immediately jumped on it and said you have my full support. As a matter of fact I think I was the only BYU professor at first that fully supported him because I could see from my past experience that he knew how to manage such things and from his legal point of view he could see that it would work,

and it did, so my five years from 1980 to the time of my retirement in 1986 I was strongly supportive of the early FARMS.

1:09:26 I've been associated with it since in its various fulminations, progressively more disappointed with what has happened to it. Once it got inside BYU, that was kind of an ultimate death knell because then you had to satisfy administrators and FARMS did not need administration. So when I had backed off, I fully supported FARMS Maxwell Institute as far as that went until they moved the offices and didn't offer me another office and made me go home and I said, oh well so it's probably time anyway, but I've been disappointed with the way Maxwell Institute has moved or not moved in regard to the Book of Mormon so when Book of Mormon Central came along and Jack and Kirk had this notion, I've fully supported it and if I had the strength I would participate more fully but this is the limit of my strength.

(Nick Galieti) What do you see as the vision of Book of Mormon Central moving forward? What would you like to see have happen?

1:11:31 To make the connections, to make the connections with active researchers to cultivate a sense of community among researchers. We were just talking just before we started about Brian Stubbs and I've encouraged Brian for twenty-five years in his work on languages because he was the only one who was willing to invest in it. Maybe that's because he didn't have a PhD. In other words, he didn't have to defend himself; he just worked and his work shows what he can do and shows the truth. If this organization can build a community of such people – such people who are devoted to the cause and not to their personal publicity gain, then it will please me, and I think it is possible. It's possible but I will venture that in twenty-five years this will fall apart too. It's in the nature of organizations that they tend to do that. Like the Retrenchment Society of Brigham Young. Well, okay.

(Nick Galieti) Well Book of Mormon geography has become very fragmented and lots of different theories have come up. Why do you suppose there are so many different theories out there?

1:13:32 Well the main reason there are so many theories is because people are lazy; they pick and choose passages in the Book of Mormon that refer to geography but they don't do *all* of it, they don't do *all* of it and you must do *all* of it and you must satisfy every aspect of it in order to arrive at the truth. People that pick up on – well, there are some of the people in Peru – well, you know so and so – there's this hill or there's this wall or

there's this area, this site or this Lake Titicaca or whatever, and they get fascinated by that thing itself rather than the question of what does it all mean? How does it all fit together? And I've tried to maintain a comprehensive view at all times and I can't help what anyone else does.

(Nick Galieti) What role do you see technology playing in Book of Mormon research?

1:15:12 Well my view is the history of technological development over the last twenty-five years is that it's unpredictable, so I'd say, so I would say it will be what it will be. It will be what someone makes of it. I think the prospects are interesting. I should say just a word about filming. I've participated as a "expert" on the preparations for a number of Book of Mormon films – very hard work because the people from an aesthetic point of view have their aims; they want to tell a story, they want some romance in there whether there is any or not, they're going to have it, and they've listened to me sometimes for some things and they've ignored me for some others. I have a number of things written on my computer that nobody would ever want to see again but cautions about - you got to look at this, you can't ignore this, that kind of thing, and I think the same would be true of all technology there will be attempts at – where the technology takes the lead and that's not the way it's going to work; it has to be a follower and a supplement if it's going to be useful. That's all I can say; that's more than I can say.

(Nick Galieti) So what are some areas of Book of Mormon research you would consider promising?

1:17:27 Or I would *like* to consider promising, if they ever get done, if efforts ever move in that direction. One certainly is the language connections. I find it interesting that the one review of my *Mormon's Codex* is by Mark Wright and Brant Gardner in *Interpreter* and they actually said unbelievably to me, *Oh you can just skip the language and biology, they don't mean anything*. Holy cow! They mean all kinds of things – get at it! Do it! You can't dismiss possibilities, and language has great possibilities and Brian is leading the way and I say hey, good, go!

(Nick Galieti) What advice would you give young scholars?

1:18:47 I would say also archaeology needs to be pursued but it's a very difficult thing to pursue because it's very costly and there are so many ways to go wrong, interpretive ways to go wrong so you may think you haven't got anything, and maybe you don't,

but maybe you do and I think what I've done in *Mormon's Codex* in the last few chapters on the archaeology is to point out things that have been significant even though they may not have looked to others as significant, so keep your eyes open, don't shut off any possibilities. Okay, so what was your question?

(Nick Galieti) Well, just any other advice that you would give to scholars – young scholars starting out.

1:19:58 Don't give up. I think I've exemplified that – sixty-five years, especially when there were times when it was not at all clear what was going to result and the results have been superior to what I could have anticipated thirty years ago say – so that's one bit of advice. Don't give up on the Book of Mormon. It says some things that we haven't plumbed yet because we haven't asked the right questions – you have to ask the right questions and the Church membership in general is not asking any questions about it at all. It can answer some questions if it is examined carefully but not if just casually. Okay, that's all the advice I have except keep digging.

(Nick Galieti) That's good. That's actually where I was heading. I've got pretty much two more questions left. What do you know spiritually that you wouldn't have known without doing your research?

1:21:35 I'm not sure that there's anything. I've never had any question that the Book of Mormon is what it represents itself to be. When I was a child it just seemed so obvious to me, obvious, although I was not a reader of the Book of Mormon very much, it was obvious to me that it was just what it said it was and it continues to be obvious to me so spiritually, that's another matter.

1:22:19 It's a – what I've been thinking about lately is what it means – what it has meant for the Church. The Church could have been originated, organized after Joseph Smith's first vision, but it wasn't. It couldn't be. It couldn't be because that was a matter of opinion for Joseph simply to say I had the vision of these two figures and so on and so on, and the answer is, oh yah, you just thought that up. But with the Book of Mormon, there is a *thing* – a *thing* – and it must be explained. It cannot *not* be explained, and the explanations that have been offered that are other than the book's own just don't fly. They're really absurd. Joseph Smith made it up – Joseph Smith didn't make anything up; he couldn't have made it up.

1:23:51 So the Book of Mormon is not only the keystone of our religion, it is also the cornerstone, and Joseph said that – also the cornerstone of our religion. It's the cornerstone in the sense that it is firmly in place; it's not going to shift. Everything is built on or around it. The keystone has another significance, of course, but the spiritual significance of the Book of Mormon is that it exists; it must be accounted for and anyone who attempts to account for it other than the way Joseph accounted for it is unfortunately limited in their perspective and view – it won't do.

(Nick Galieti) Is that your testimony?

1:24:59 Oh, my testimony, every time I give it in my ward is, the Book of Mormon is exactly what it says it is, nothing more, nothing less, exactly what it says it is. And I'm – you know I have a new – you may not have seen it yet, but the new *Ensign* has an article and I'm very grateful to Mormon, as I say at the end of that, very grateful for his producing that book because everything else has depended upon it. We would not be in the same church situation at all if it were not for the Book of Mormon. The Kingdom of God could not advance as it will. It's a great confirmation. That's all.

(Nick Galieti) Okay.

(Kirk Magleby) Would you tell us a little about your relations with Michael Coe. He's been one of your strong supporters of your diffusionist notions.

1:26:25 Well, I sent him a copy of the book with Johannessen; I haven't sent him *Mormon's Codex* – no, it was *Mormon's Codex* I sent him, and the other book as well and he responded, *Well, you seem to want to bring contacts across the Atlantic and I tend to bring them across the Pacific*, which means he simply doesn't know what I'm talking about because Mulek came across the Atlantic, I believe, and Lehi across the Pacific. He just has a limited view but he did tell me in the letter when a year-and-a-half ago I guess, he said if I had my life to live over again, I would spend at least half of it demonstrating a connection between Southeast Asia and Mesoamerica. He said that's very plain to me that – he doesn't talk a lot about that to his colleagues because they don't want to hear it, I think.

1:28:09 I probably said somewhere, I can't remember where, what he said once. He was talking at BYU under the anthropology department about his current work. This is twenty-five years ago, probably, when he was still doing active work and I went up to

him afterward and greeted him, we'd been old friends for a long time, and he said, *John I don't want to talk to you.* He said, *You're too intimidating.* So I didn't. What he meant was, I might raise questions that he knew would be well-informed but probably raise questions that he didn't want to deal with. That's pretty much our relationship. Mutual respect, I think.

(Kirk Magleby) Could you give us a little insight into your relationship with Dave Kelley?

1:29:38 Yah, good old Dave. I can't even remember how it began. He was a graduate student at Harvard and an independent thinker then, as he always was, and a mature thinker. However it came about, it may have been about my master's thesis, the *Polynesian-American Connection*. That probably was it because it was in 50 – yah it would have been about 1951 when I first knew him. I was a student; he was a student, but we began to write to each other and he would send me long screeds, five, six, single-spaced pages of what he was thinking and speculations and so on; it was all very well informed, or it looked like to me and he welcomed what I shared with him so we continued writing for years and he got his PhD and he went to teach at I think at Texas Tech and continued to work some in Peru – he did some archaeology in Peru but mostly in Mesoamerica and he kept expanding his diffusionist views. That was our common ground.

1:31:42 I don't remember a time when we didn't communicate except there might be a couple of years when we didn't but it was just like we interrupted a conversation for a little while and then he visited me a couple of times here. He was a great friend. His wife is an archaeologist also but her concern has been really the Toltec era in Mesoamerica. Anyway, he ended up in Calgary – is it the University of Calgary? Yes. Trying to think if there was a University of Alberta or something like that, yeah Calgary. I visited him once up there, forgotten what the occasion was, but we were good friends and good mutual informants. I offered to compile his diffusionist writings in a book once and he sent me a few things that I otherwise wouldn't have but I never got around to it, I'm sorry to say. But partly his interest and mine were shared in connection with Oceania; he found language relationships in I guess a Fijian language, or the Polynesian languages from the Fiji area that I found very interesting and confirmatory to what I was doing. Anyway, as we met as diffusionists, he was one of the four or five key figures always. I miss him. I was hoping to share a copy of

Mormon's Codex with him but he passed away. That's all I can say about him. He was a very good friend.

(Kirk Magleby) He has incredible respect among Linda Schele, her colleagues and others, basically David Stuart, Peter Matthews, all those people that were so influential in the decipherment of the Maya, they have high respect for Dave Kelley.

1:34:46 Oh they should. Yah. He is cited as still one of the basic workers in the field of decipherment.

(Kirk Magleby) John, we would like to hear a little bit more about those ten days in the jeep in the Central Depression.

Unfortunately, I can't remember very much.

(Kirk Magleby) That must have been an exciting time for you.

1:35:18 Well, I guess it was. The excitement has tended to grow on it too – or dissipate. But it was both exciting and frustrating because Tom Ferguson's real interest everywhere we went was to ask whether anyone had found figurines of horses. No, no, no Tom! If we had found them what would we know if they found a figurine of a horse? But you know he was looking for iron ore or to explain the iron or so on; he had a limited view of archaeology and what it could do. I had enough knowledge of pre-classic Mesoamerican archaeology that I could place the sites pretty much in perspective that we were encountering and knew enough about the pottery.

1:36:36 But Tom really wanted to get on to the next place – get on to the next place – more. We were so busy taking notes and recording observations that so and so and so and so and so and so – well I've heard there's a site over here – you know, that's the kind of concern we had, not a synthesis of any kind. And then after it was over, he flew back home and I was left in a hotel room with a collection of sherds and figurine heads and trying to figure out how to get them home, which I did, but it was not pleasant, so it was kind of indeterminate what to make of all that we had found.

1:37:57 We had found a lot that must be significant but in geographical interpretations couldn't – were not obvious immediately. One of the things, he still had odd ideas, and he was the boss of the place; he was funding it; he was calling the shots in a sense; I was

trying to put a few limits on him – what he was doing – and my concern was to keep him quiet as much as possible.

1:38:41 So we didn't find Zarahemla. The nearest I came to it was – we could have gone across lots in the jeep – across grass land – short grass land for savannah for twenty miles and got to Santa Rosa which turned out in my view to be Zarahemla but I didn't quite make it, but I was in the land, nevertheless and along the river and that was kind of enough.

1:39:32 We were being guided by a young man who didn't know a lot. He was an employee of the State Museum and he was just a young guy; he knew how to drive the jeep and could find us a place to sleep and so on. But he didn't have any knowledge of any kind but he was a nice fellow, kind companion. So I was pretty much isolated intellectually and that was not a time to be thinking, there was so much to do. That's all I can say about it. Anything else? Any remnant questions that you had on –

(Nick Galieti) I think for the most part you said it, covered it in some form or another.

Well I'm grateful for the privilege you've given me of talking this way.

(Nick Galieti) Well maybe one last question. Why does Book of Mormon archaeology and anthropology matter?

1:41:00 It matters in the way that Jack Welch phrased the early FARMS objective – I've forgotten who he quoted but the point was, there are legitimate concerns about the Book of Mormon. We need to deal with them, not ignore them, so this is a matter of disposing of interesting or potentially significant questions and to place them in their correct context, really to shape the questions better rather than suppose that we've already shaped them and found answers that are not correct. I mean think of Jack with his chiasmus. You know, who had thought of the question? No one had thought of the question of what it might mean because they didn't even know what *it* was. And when he discovered *it*, then he asked the question, well what significance does this have for the Book of Mormon? And it has some; it's not vital but it has some significance as evidence for it and as a means of literary analysis but it's dealing with the real questions of the Book of Mormon and that's how I have seen all that I've done is not about the book itself, but to sweep away any questions that somebody might think were

significant barriers to acceptance of it. There are no barriers; it's all just the way it says.
Well thank you very much for the privilege.

(Nick and Kirk) Thank you, excellent, excellent. (clapping)

I don't do anything for claps

END – 1:43:46