

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



Edited by
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*The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure
of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Macmillan Publishing Company
New York

Maxwell Macmillan Canada
Toronto

Maxwell Macmillan International
New York Oxford Singapore Sydney



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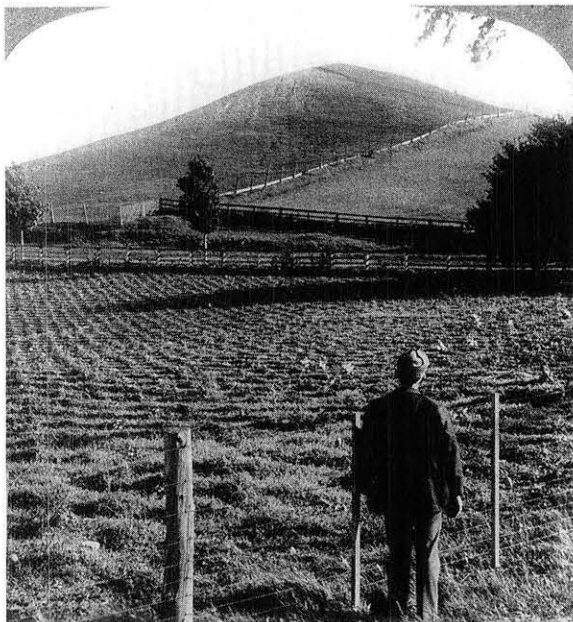
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LAWRENCE A. YOUNG

CUMORAH

Cumorah in the Book of Mormon refers to a hill and surrounding area where the final battle between the NEPHITES and LAMANITES took place, resulting in the annihilation of the Nephite people (see BOOK OF MORMON PEOPLES). Sensing the impending destruction of his people, Mormon records that he concealed the plates of Nephi₁ and all the other records entrusted to him in a hill called Cumorah to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Lamanites (see BOOK OF MORMON PLATES AND RECORDS). He delivered his own abridgment of these records, called the plates of



The north end of the hill Cumorah, near Palmyra, New York, as it appeared c. 1900. More than thirty years after the final Nephite battle in A.D. 385, Moroni deposited the gold plates on the west side of this hill not far from the top. In 1827, the angel Moroni here entrusted those Book of Mormon plates to Joseph Smith, who translated them into English. The hill is a drumlin, a long hill with steep sides and a sloping end formed under an advancing continental ice sheet. Courtesy Rare Books and Manuscripts, Brigham Young University.

Mormon, and the small plates of Nephi, which he placed with them, to his son MORONI₂ (W of M 1:5; Morm. 6:6), who continued writing on them before burying them in an unmentioned site more than thirty-six years later (Moro. 10:1–2).

The Book of Mormon mentions a number of separate records that would have been part of Mormon's final record repository in the hill Cumorah. Though the contents of these can be known to us only to the extent that they are summarized or mentioned in the Book of Mormon, Latter-day Saints expect them someday to become available. Alma₂ prophesied to his son Helaman that the brass plates of Laban (the Nephites' version of the Old Testament) would be “kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation” (Alma 37:4; cf. 1 Ne. 5:17–19). He further explained that “all the plates” containing scripture are the “small and simple” means by which “great things are brought to pass” and by which the Lord will “show forth his power . . . unto future generations” (Alma 37:5–6, 19).

Cumorah had also been the site of the destruction of the JAREDITES roughly 900 years earlier. Moroni states in the book of Ether that the Jaredites gathered for battle near “the hill Ramah,” the same hill where his father, Mormon, hid up “the records unto the Lord, which were sacred” (Ether 15:11). It was near the first landing site of the people of Mulek (Alma 22:30), just north of the land Bountiful and a narrow neck of land (Alma 22:32).

The more common reference to Cumorah among Latter-day Saints is to the hill near present-day Palmyra and Manchester, New York, where the plates from which the Prophet Joseph SMITH translated the Book of Mormon were found. During the night of September 21, 1823, Moroni₂ appeared to Joseph Smith as an angel sent from God to show him where these plates were deposited (JS—H 1:29–47).

In 1928 the Church purchased the western New York hill and in 1935 erected a monument recognizing the visit of the angel Moroni (see ANGEL MORONI STATUE). A visitors center was later built at the base of the hill. Each summer since 1937, the Church has staged the CUMORAH PAGEANT at this site. Entitled *America's Witness for Christ*, it depicts important events from Book of Mormon history. This annual pageant has reinforced the common assumption that Moroni buried the plates of Mormon in the same hill where his

father had buried the other plates, thus equating this New York hill with the Book of Mormon Cumorah. Because the New York site does not readily fit the Book of Mormon description of BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY, some Latter-day Saints have looked for other possible explanations and locations, including Mesoamerica. Although some have identified possible sites that may seem to fit better (Palmer), there are no conclusive connections between the Book of Mormon text and any specific site that has been suggested.

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DAVID A. PALMER

CUMORAH PAGEANT

America's Witness for Christ has been presented at the hill CUMORAH in upstate New York nearly every summer since 1937. Recognized as one of America's largest and most spectacular outdoor theatrical events, it attracts an annual audience of almost 100,000 visitors to its seven performances.

This tradition dates back to 1917, when B. H. Roberts and a group of missionaries went to the Joseph Smith farm outside Palmyra, New York, to celebrate PIONEER DAY. Commencing in 1922, the "Palmyra Celebration" became an annual missionary conference for the Eastern States Mission. In July 1935, as part of the dedicatory exercises for the Angel Moroni Monument, trumpeters at the crest of the hill heralded the commencement of the first production at Cumorah. The next year a pageant, "Truth from the Earth," was presented, and plans were announced to make a pageant at the hill Cumorah an annual event.

Two pageants were presented in 1937: a play about the Mormon pioneer handcart companies, *The Builders* by Oliver R. Smith, on July 24, and *America's Witness For Christ* by H. Wayne Driggs on July 23 and 25. The latter script, with occasional revisions, was then presented annually for fifty years (excluding 1943–47). Harold I. Hansen, a

missionary with theatrical training, was named codirector and thereafter continued as director for forty years, overseeing the installation of a sound system built by stereophonic sound pioneer Harvey Fletcher, the expansion of the all-volunteer cast and crew to almost six hundred participants, and the run extended to seven performances. In 1957 the pageant was recorded with original music by Crawford Gates.

On July 22, 1988, a new *America's Witness for Christ*, written by Orson Scott Card with music again by Crawford Gates, premiered. Its major theme—the reality of Christ's atonement, resurrection, and ministry to the Nephites—is boldly portrayed through events recorded in the Book of Mormon. The visual aspects of the pageant were also updated, with new stages, seating, properties, costumes, and special effects, and a recontoured and landscaped hill.

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CURRICULUM

The Church provides a standard set of curricular materials to all of its units throughout the world. Some matters of basic curriculum had been formatted and distributed to the Church membership since the early days of the Church, but as the AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS were formed, such as the Sunday School, Primary, Relief Society, and the Young Men and Young Women, each developed its own curriculum to help teach members. Eventually it became desirable to coordinate curriculum materials among these auxiliary organizations to avoid undesirable duplication and to ensure the coverage of important topics at all age levels.

At present, over 200 topics are considered annually in the lesson manuals prepared for the courses included in the Church curriculum. These topics are in the general areas of gospel principles