

## ***A Victim of the Mormons and The Danites: Images and Relics from Early Twentieth-Century Anti-Mormon Silent Films***

*Jacob W. Olmstead*

In the fall of 1999, while searching through one of the newspaper clippings volumes of the William Spry papers in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University, I came across a headline that piqued my interest. The headline read, “Mormon Governor Threat to Bar Films in Utah.” The article documents Spry’s years as governor of Utah.<sup>1</sup> For the next several months, BYU history professor Brian Q. Cannon and I began to uncover the circumstances in which Governor Spry would make such an audacious threat. We discovered that in 1911 and 1912, at least half a dozen silent films presenting scurrilous tales about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were released in Europe and the United States (see Appendix).

These films, with alluring titles such as *A Victim of the Mormons* or *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, emerged in the wake of an anti-Mormon movement that originated with the 1904–1906 Reed Smoot Hearings and swept through the United States and later Europe. This crusade against “the Mormon problem” was bellowed through a number of venues, including dime novels, popular magazines, newspapers, traveling lecturers, and plays, all claiming to offer a truthful glimpse into the practices of Mormonism. Like the novels and magazine articles, the films drew upon accounts of plural marriage, the Mountain Meadows massacre, and the Danites as fodder for their sensational stories.

The flagship of these films, *A Victim of the Mormons*, was produced by Nordisk Film Kompagni (Company), a Danish production company, and

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began showing in England in October 1911 where Mormon efforts, led by Rudger Clawson, president of the European Mission, experienced limited success combating the influence of this film. In the first weeks of 1912, the First Presidency learned that *A Victim of the Mormons* would be released to American audiences in February and that another film entitled *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, produced by Pathé Frères, a French production company, was already being viewed by audiences on the West coast. Concerned about the economic backlash they believed would result for the libelous depiction of Utah in *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, Salt Lake City's Commercial Club and Governor Spry began a campaign demanding Pathé rescind distribution of the film. These protests and similar demands made by local theater owners achieved no tangible results.

Meanwhile, the First Presidency, working behind the scenes through Eastern States Mission President Ben E. Rich and others, complained to the National Board of Censorship, which previewed the films before their distribution, only to discover the titular nature of this board. While representatives worked to squash *A Victim of the Mormons*, several other films were released, including *The Mormon*, produced by the American Film Manufacturing Company, and *Marriage or Death*, another Pathé production. However, because of the groundbreaking length of *A Victim of the Mormons* and the fact that it claimed to depict the practices of modern missionaries as opposed to the content of other films, which claimed to be based on historical facts, the Church's energy was focused on *A Victim of the Mormons*. Winning a small victory, the Church's efforts resulted in the reversal by the board to approve *A Victim of the Mormons* until changes were made. The board, however, having no real power, was unable to enforce its recommendations, and apparently the film was distributed unchanged. As to the other films, Church liaisons working with the National Board of Censorship were continually frustrated because the films had received approval long before the Church was ever aware of their existence.

Although the efforts of the Church to suppress these anti-Mormon films resulted in few victories, its encounter with these early films is significant for several reasons. First, it illustrated the Church's burgeoning sensitivity to its public image in the early twentieth century. Second, the attack upon the Church and Utah, which these films represented, generated an amazing sense of unity and cooperation as both Mormons and Gentiles worked together for the good of Utah and her citizens. Finally, this early experience with film gave Church leaders pause as they considered the power of this growing new media and the Church's relationship to it.<sup>2</sup>

Today, these films and the studios that produced them have long been forgotten. And although these films greatly agitated members of the Church in Utah, the films came and went with limited fanfare or critical acclaim in

the motion picture industry. With the exception of *A Victim of the Mormons*, copies of the films themselves are not extant.<sup>3</sup> This is unfortunate because these were the earliest depictions of the Church on the silver screen. Fortunately, some remnants from these productions have survived in the special collections at the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and Academy Foundation in Beverly Hills, California, in the LDS Church History Library at the Church Office Building of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, and from film trade papers published at the time these films were released. This article showcases a few of the remaining items from *A Victim of the Mormons* and *The Danites*, accompanied by brief historical sketches of these films. These particular films were chosen primarily because their star power, length, and cinematography set them apart as perhaps not only the most memorable but also, and more importantly, the most documented of the 1911–1912 anti-Mormon silent films.

### *A Victim of the Mormons*

Produced by the Danish film company, Nordisk Films, *Mormonens Offer* (*A Victim of the Mormons*) was released in Copenhagen, Denmark, on 2 October 1911 and later in London on 10 October 1911. As previously mentioned, after its debut in England, despite the efforts of European Mission President Rudger Clawson, little success was achieved in scotching the influence of this film. (See Images 1 and 2.) After the First Presidency learned of its forthcoming 3 February 1912 release in the United States, they began a vigorous campaign aimed at suppressing the film through the National Board of Censorship. Though the board ultimately rescinded its approval until all references to Mormonism were edited out, the film was apparently released with no changes.<sup>4</sup>

Mormon leaders had good reason to fret about the release of *A Victim of the Mormons*. The film was the brainchild of Ole Olsen, the founder of Nordisk and a respected producer whose award-winning production company was “a major [film] supplier to the world market . . . between 1910 and 1916.”<sup>5</sup> Bordering on the revolutionary, this hour-long feature, which had to be spooled on three reels, was nearly three times the length of the average film.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, its cast included several celebrities, including Vlademar Psilander, perhaps the most popular actor of early twentieth-century Danish film, and noted director August Blom.<sup>7</sup>

Olsen, having a flair for the melodramatic, often roused emotions through provocative subject matter; and, in the case of *A Victim of the Mormons*, he was the first to cash in on the European concern over the “Mormon problem” and the prevailing stories of missionaries absconding

with young women to Utah.<sup>8</sup> While the story line was typical of anti-Mormon fare, its advertisement campaign, particularly in Europe, was ingenious. (See Image 3.) While advertising the film length, release date, and plot and playing on the fears concerning Mormon elders abducting women, the promoters sent “three-sheet” promotional programs to exhibitors, claiming that “He who sees this film and reads this text booklet is warned against the deception of Mormonism.” Moreover, the promotions argued that the film, “by its very sensationalism, should do more to counteract the growth of Mormonism in this country than all the preaching against it, even by the most noted clerics.”<sup>9</sup> (See Images 4 and 5.)

While the rhetoric of the programs played to the fears of the public and advocated a social morality, advertisements for exhibitors gave other reasons for purchasing the film for distribution. Before its release in London and in the United States, ads printed in film trade papers promised substantial, even record-breaking, ticket sales. While the English trade paper *Bioscope* noted, “This Great Winner Creates a Record Booking,” an American paper, *The Moving Picture News*, claimed that the film “HAS NO EQUAL AS A MONEY-MAKER.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, after the film’s release, both English and American trade papers noted that because of the huge demand for *A Victim of the Mormons*, second-run copies were being made available for purchase.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps exaggerating the significance of the film, ads in *The Moving Picture News* claimed the picture to be the “Greatest Box-Office Feature of the Day” and ran an article detailing how busy the offices of The Great Northern Special Feature Film Company, the American company distributing the film for Nordisk, had been in responding to all the requests for the film.<sup>12</sup> (See Image 6.)

As described in the promotion pamphlets, the film tells of the travails of Florence Grange, played by Frau Clara Weith, who is abducted by a Mormon “preacher” named “Reverend” Andrew Larson, played by Vlademar Psilander, and taken to Utah to become a plural wife. In the opening scene, Larson meets Florence in a restaurant through her brother George and is instantly attracted to her. Wasting no time wooing her to his faith, Larson gives Florence an “admission card” to a Mormon meeting. Because she feels as though she had been neglected by her fiancé, Leslie Berg, Florence attends the meeting. Ultimately, Larson is able to indoctrinate Florence and convince her to return with him to Utah, despite the attempts of Leslie to keep the two from fraternizing. Florence later sneaks away from her home and joins Larson at the railway station. Her parents, noticing her absence, look for her in her room—only to discover Larson’s note requesting she join him at the train station.

The second half of the film opens with George and Leslie informing the

police of the abduction, who in turn give the harbor police a description of Larson and Florence. With the aid of a Mormon “brother,” Larson drugs and gags Florence and exchanges her coat and hat, enabling them to board the ship unsuspected while his Mormon friends, one wearing Florence’s coat and hat, are detained. Hearing of the capture, George and Leslie go to pick up Florence—only to discover the coverup. Through “wireless telegraphy,” the ship’s captain is notified to detain the pair upon arrival, but these attempts are foiled by Larson who escapes with his captive. Learning of these events, George and Leslie decide to leave for Utah. Shortly after Larson and Florence arrive in Utah, Florence is locked in her “boudoir” and becomes friends with Larson’s sympathetic first wife. Later, Larson leaves to perform a baptism in the Mormon temple, which, according to the pamphlet, is “portrayed in a striking scene.” Meanwhile, George and Leslie arrive in Utah and follow Larson from the temple to his home. After several attempts to thwart his pursuers, including hiding Florence in the cellar, which is accessible only through a secret passage and a trap door, George and Leslie discover Florence. In the final scene, Larson attempts to murder Florence at gunpoint but is overpowered by Leslie as the shot is fired. In a twist of irony, Larson is killed by his own gun.<sup>13</sup>

As shocking and offensive as the plot of *A Victim of the Mormons* must have been to the leadership and membership of the Church, graphic images from the film, specifically the scenes portraying the temple, must have been equally appalling. (See Image 7.) These scenes showed the antagonist in white robes performing baptisms in what was meant to represent an LDS temple baptistry. Although the font was inaccurately placed before a set of pipe organs and although the oxen supporting the baptismal font were dehorned, kneeling, and in sets of two rather than three, the duplication of sacred Mormon architecture and symbolism most likely generated strong feelings among members who saw the film.<sup>14</sup> And while many factors contributed to the fuel behind the Mormon campaign against this and other motion pictures, perhaps it was this image that was published in *The Moving Picture World* on 30 December 1911 that gave the First Presidency a glimpse at the powerful images that could be portrayed by film.<sup>15</sup>

### ***The Danites***

The film entitled *The Danites* is significantly lesser known than *A Victim of the Mormons* and was not specifically targeted for suppression by Church or civic leaders in Utah. This was primarily because the film debuted after these groups experienced a relatively unsuccessful battle attempting to subdue earlier anti-Mormon films through the production companies them-

selves and the National Board of Censorship.<sup>16</sup> *The Danites* was a two-reel film, roughly two-thirds the length of *A Victim of the Mormons*, and was released by the Chicago-based Selig Polyscope Company, the first reel on 19 February 1912 and the second reel the following day.<sup>17</sup> Selig specialized in making western-type films “on location,” in which the grandeur of the West was captured.<sup>18</sup> Advertisements for *The Danites*, published in the film trade-paper *The Moving Picture World*, capitalized on this, noting the film’s sizable cast of three hundred members, the use of ten “prairie schooners” on the set, and the scenic vistas in which it was filmed while boasting, “This wonderful picture contains more real value than any previous Western story.”<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the largest selling point was that *The Danites* was written by McKee Rankin, the star of the acclaimed 1877 Broadway production, “The Danites of the Sierras,” written by Joaquin Miller.<sup>20</sup> (See Image 8.) While this production did not receive any critical acclaim, it is believed by some to have been the most popular nineteenth-century anti-Mormon theatrical production. During the 1880s, Rankin, using this production as his personal vehicle to stardom, took the movie abroad where it was a great success and continued to draw crowds for many years.<sup>21</sup> One reviewer of *The Danites* asserted that the “older generation of theater-goers” would remember the Broadway production but “To the younger generation the reproduction of the drama in moving pictures will doubtless revive its old popularity.”<sup>22</sup> Selig was most likely counting on this; combined with the controversy generated over other anti-Mormon films at the time and the success of the Broadway play, the production of a film based upon the popular play was a fiscally sound decision.

Essentially, *The Danites* tells the story of the rundown and murder of the Williams family by several members of the Danites. In the first reel, the Williams are en route to the West when they are besieged by Danites disguised as Indians. Nancy Williams, played by Betty Harte, and her young brother, Georgie, escape and join another wagon train led by a miner named Sandy, played by Hobart Bosworth.<sup>23</sup> Two Danites, who have pledged themselves to see to the extermination of the rest of the family, also join the train in disguise. The Danites shortly discover and gun down Georgie. Unable to discover the murderers or to protect herself, Nancy clothes herself in children’s apparel, cuts her hair, and changes her name to Billy Piper.

As described on a broadside advertising the second reel, the second half begins with Billy Piper’s arrival at a western camp where the townspeople have gathered to hear news of the arrival of the new male school teacher. (See Image 9.) When the teacher steps out of the wagon, all are astonished at the sight of a beautiful young widow, whom Sandy immediately falls in

love with and eventually marries. Billy Piper and the “widow” also become close friends. The Danites, still obsessed with killing the last of the Williams family, suspect Billy Piper to be Nancy and follow Billy on a visit to the widow’s home. During the visit, Billy notices the Danites leering through the window and faints. While the widow tries to revive Billy, she discovers Billy’s gender. After several twists in the plot, in the final scene, Billy is confronted by the Danites but is allowed to escape as Sandy holds the Danites at bay with a revolver. However, on her way to freedom, seeing the Danites closing in, Billy dies of a heart attack.<sup>24</sup>

While the film was praised for its cinematography that created “a sense of epic grandeur” of the vast prairies of the West, it was criticized for its two-part release, as neither reel made sense if viewed independently. (See Image 10.) In addition, the film was also censured because no background information was given as to why the villainous Danites were so anxious to exterminate the members of the Williams family.<sup>25</sup> This is a departure from the screenplay, which notes that “After the death of the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, a band of Mormons called ‘DANITES’ o[r] ‘Destroying Angels’ were commissioned by the Elders of their church to destroy all who participated in the death of their prophet, together with the members of their families, wives, mothers and children.”<sup>26</sup>

Apparently, Selig believed that the implications of the term “Danites” would be apparent to American audiences. Billed only as a “western,” for unknown reasons, neither the film nor any of its advertisements made specific reference to the term “Mormon.” While this left some viewers guessing as to who the Danites were and what their motivations were for killing the Williamses, it did allow the film to pass the National Board of Censorship unnoticed, while other films, including *A Victim of the Mormons*, were under heavy scrutiny because of the protest of Church and civic leaders in Utah.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

While Mormons were outraged by the images and stories presented in these early films, Church leaders took solace in the realization that the fuel driving these productions was sizable profits, which could be generated by a controversial topic rather than by animosity against the Church. And as the profits ebbed, within a few months, these film fell into complete obscurity. Fortunately, the relics that remain from *A Victim of the Mormons* and *The Danites* give us a small glimpse at some of the earliest depictions of the Church and its members on the silver screen. Furthermore, they demonstrate the place of Mormonism in depicting the experience of the American West in film.

## Appendix

### Anti-Mormon Silent Films, 1911–1912

**Film Title:** *Mormones Offer (A Victim of the Mormons)*

**Date of Release:** 2 October 1911 (Denmark), 3 February 1912 (U.S.)

**Production Company and Locations:** Nordisk Films, Denmark

**Theme:** Polygamy

**Length:** 3,200 feet

**Actors:** Valdemar Psilander

**Film Title:** *An Episode of Early Mormon Days*

**Date of Release:** 14 December 1911

**Production Company and Locations:** Pathé Frères, France

**Theme:** Mountain Meadows Massacre

**Length:**

**Actors:**

**Film Title:** *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*

**Date of Release:** January 1912

**Production Company and Locations:** Pathé Frère, France

**Theme:** Mountain Meadows Massacre

**Length:**

**Actors:**

**Film Title:** *The Mormon*

**Date of Release:** 25 January 1912

**Production Company and Locations:** American Film Manufacturing Company,  
Pathé FrèresChicago

**Theme:** Polygamy and Mountain Meadows Massacre

**Length:** 1,000 feet

**Actors:**

**Film Title:** *The Danites*

**Date of Release:** 19 February 1912 (1st reel), 20 February 1912 (2nd reel)

**Production Company and Locations:** Selig Polyscope Company, Chicago

**Theme:** Danites

**Length:** 1,000 feet each reel

**Actors:** Hobart Bosworth, Mary Harte

**Film Title:** *Marriage or Death*

**Date of Release:** 21 February 1912

**Production Company and Locations:** Pathé Frères, France

**Theme:** Polygamy

**Length:**

**Actors:**

# A VENUE THEATRE

SUNDERLAND.

New Manager: EDWARD PROCTOR, Business Manager: PHIL SNEY.

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## MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13th.

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The pernicious doctrines of the Mormon faith have been the subject of repeated exposures of the Press, which is to be praised in its efforts to open the eyes of those foolish young women who unthinkingly are too easily gulled by the deceiver when, under the guise of so-called Religion, he disgraces the garb he assumes, and uses his position to sow the seeds of the hated cult of Mormonism.

Mr. PHIL SNEY wishes everyone to know that this production by his very association, should do more to counteract the growth of Mormonism in this country than even all the preachings against it by the most noted Clerics. Every scene being daring, and depicting the awful work of those human vamps.

**OBTAINED AT ENORMOUS COST.  
A RECORD CREATION.  
Extraordinary Exposure of a Terrible Doctrine.**



"UNFORGETTABLE" are the words in every Quarter of the Globe.

## A VICTIM OF THE MORMONS



A Ticking and Topping Escape of "A Victim of the Mormons."

**£20,000** IN TWENTY THOUSAND POUNDS

is the Price asked for the Exclusive Rights of "THE MORMONIC PRISONERS," which has been described by some of a Total Cost exceeding One Million Pounds. The "Lancet" has written on 1st 1911.

MR. PHIL SNEY has obtained the above Rights of Exhibition, by several arrangements with Messrs. JAMES HANCOCK PICTURES, Ltd. This picture is to be SEEN ONLY at the AVENUE THEATRE.

**TERMS AND PRICES AS USUAL.**

ENTRANCE BY THE SUNDERLAND POST COMPANY, LIMITED, 102-104, BEAR STREET.

**SEE**

- The Capture of a Victim.
- The Terrible Scenes.
- The Escape from an Express Train.
- A Mormon Convert's Fight for Liberty.
- The Attack on a Harass'd Telegraph Operator.
- How a Victim was Saved from the Mormons.

Image 1.  
 Broadside advertising A Victim of the Mormons for the Avenue Theater in  
 London, England, November 1911.  
 Courtesy of LDS Church Historical Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

**AVENUE THEATRE**

8-50 TWICE NIGHTLY 9

MONDAY, NOV. 13th

**A Record Creation at Enormous Cost.**  
**EXTRAORDINARY EXPOSURE**  
OF A  
**TERRIBLE DOCTRINE**  
ENTITLED  
**A VICTIM**  
OF THE  
**MORMONS**



"MORNING" are to be found in every Quarter of the Globe.

**£20,000** TWENTY THOUSAND POUNDS  
A sum of money for the purchase of the  
**THE BERRY TEMPLE**  
which had been purchased by the Mormons  
in London for the purpose of building a temple.

**SEE** The CAPTURE of a VICTIM.  
The TERRIBLE SCENES.  
The ESCAPE from an ENORMOUS TRAP.  
A Mormon Convert's Fight for Liberty.  
The Attack on a Mormon Telegraph Operator.  
How a Victim was saved from the Mormons.



A Thrilling andocking Escape of "A Victim of the Mormons."

**AVENUE**  
PRICES AS USUAL.

Image 2.  
Broadside advertising A Victim of the Mormons for the Avenue Theater in  
London, England, November 1911.  
Courtesy of LDS Church Historical Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.



Image 3.

Cover from a Danish pamphlet used to promote *Mormonens Offer* (A Victim of the Mormons) (Aarhus: A/S Fotorama, 1911). The pamphlet, containing sixteen pages, included a short history of the LDS Church, as well as text and images from the film. Copy in the Richard Alan Nelson Papers, 1911–1976, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

**A VICTIM OF THE MORMONS**  
Released October 10th. Length 3,200 feet.



**NORDISK FILMS CO.,**  
18 Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, W.C.  
Works: COPENHAGEN, FREE-PORT.  
And at BERLIN, PARIS, NEW YORK, GENOA, VIENNA.  
Telephone: 175 CITY. TELEGRAMS: "NORDISK FILMS, LONDON."

Image 4.

*Nordisk Films, A Victim of the Mormons, marketing pamphlet, Nordisk Release Heralds, Vertical Files, fd. 132, Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and Academy Foundation, Beverly Hills, California.*

## A VICTIM OF THE MORMONS.

The pernicious doctrine of the Mormon faith have been the subject of repeated exposures by the daily press, which it is to be hoped in its efforts to open the eyes of those foolish members of the gentler sex who are so easily galled by the oily tongue of the deceiver when, under the guise of so-called religion, he disgraces the garb he assumes, and uses his position to sow the seeds of the hated cult of Mormonism. But it has remained to the Nordisk Film Company to produce in "A Victim of

that is being enacted, and cause her to believe herself one of the participants in the situation that he is witnessing. From acting to reality it, we know, is but a step, but of such a stirring nature is this drama, that it is by no means difficult to imagine that the story portrayed in an episode is not life being enacted before our own eyes.

All the characters are sustained by members of the Nordisk Company who have appeared in their former dramatic triumphs



the Mormons" a drama which, by its very sensitiveness, should do more to counteract the growth of Mormonism in this country than all the preaching against it, even by the most noted clerics. It tells in a manner more forcible than the most eloquent rhetoric, the terrible sufferings of a charming young lady who was induced to attend a Mormon meeting, and afterwards fell a prey to the subtle spell cast over her by a leader of the sect, but who happily was rescued by her friends, through the aid of wireless telegraphy, from the clutches of these varginals, before her fair reputation was sullied. From the first look down to the 3,100 feet to which the story runs, it is just one long series of sensational scenes and episodes which swell the subject, and for the time transport him from below the screen into the scene

—"In the Hands of Impartians," "Captives of a Great City," and the like, the dramatic program being as follows:—

GEORGE GRANGE, an Engineer ... HENRICH SEIBERL.  
 FLORENCE GRANGE, his Sister ... FRAU CLARA WEITZ.  
 LITTLE BERG, her Friend ... HERR CARL WEITZ.  
 ANDREW LINDSEY, Mormon Preacher ... HERR W. PHILANDER.

In a restaurant, George Grange, his sister Florence and her friend Little Berg, are enjoying a repast, when the Rev. Lindsey, a Mormon preacher, arrives. The sister was a former school-fellow of George's, and as such is introduced to Lindsey, whilst it is evident that Little Berg takes a natural antipathy to the man.

Image 5.

Nordisk Films, *A Victim of the Mormons*, marketing pamphlet, Nordisk Release Heralds, Vertical Files, fd. 132, Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and Academy Foundation, Beverly Hills, California.

**Greatest  
Box-Office  
Feature  
Of the Day**



**“A VICTIM  
OF THE  
MORMONS”**

**Sensational 3-Part Picture, about  
3000 feet. Over 60 Scenes.**

Scene Rights for this remarkable exposé of  
Mormon practices selling rapidly. Write or  
wire quick if you want this feature—special  
3-sheet and 1-sheet posters.

**Great Northern Special Feature Film Co.**  
1 Union Square, New York

THE MORMON SEIZES HIS POWER

Image 6.

Ad appearing in *The Moving Picture World* 11 (10 February 1912): 507.

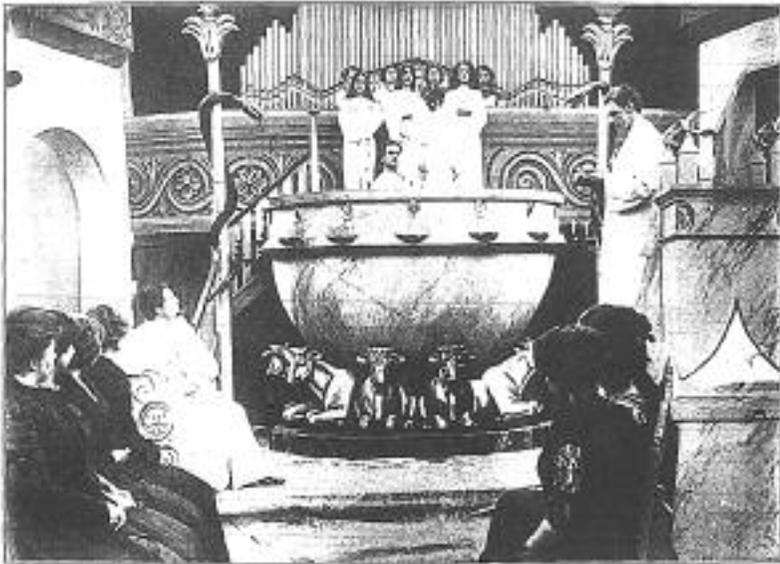


Image 7.

Temple scene from *A Victim of the Mormons*, in *The Moving Picture World* 10 (30 December 1911): 1085.

PICTURE NO. 908.		
"THE DANITES".		
Written by McKee Rankin. Produced by Francis Boggs.		
Second Reel.		
CAST.		
Sandy,	A Miner,	Hobart Bosworth.
Judge,		Geo. Hernandez.
Parson,	A miner,	W. T. Santschi
Limber Tim,	"	Herbert Rawlinson
Hickman,	A Danite	Roy Watson.
Carter,	" "	Al. K. Garcia.
Chink,	A handy Chinaman.	F. W. Huntly.
Stage driver		Frank Richardson.
Grasshopper Jake.	Prop. of Howling Wilderness.	Frank Clark.
Jack Bates,	A miner	Edward Philbrook.
Billy Piper,	(Nancy Williams)	Betty Harte.
"The Widow"	the schoolma'am	Eugenie Besserer.
Captain Tommie		Anna Dodge.
Bunker Hill		Jane Keckly.
Miners, lumbermen, loungers, etc.		

Image 8.

Cast list from McKee Rankin's screenplay, *The Danites*, folder 201, William Selig Collection, Special Collections, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and Academy Foundation, Beverly Hills, California.

# The DANITES

Written by MCKEE RANKIN. Produced by FRANCIS BOGGS



**CAST**

MARY J. WOOD JANE FRANK J. WOOD LARRY GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD	GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD	GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD	GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD GEORGE J. WOOD
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## SECOND REEL

**A**LL the men prepare to welcome the new teacher when they are taken off their feet by the entrance of a young woman, who is subsequently dubbed the "widow." Billy Piper, who in reality is Nancy Williams, is overjoyed at seeing one of her own kind, and these two become good friends. Hickman and Carter, men of the Danite class, whose mission it is to make away with the Williams family, suspect Billy Piper of being the woman they are seeking. Sandy is in love with the teacher. The Danites arrive at the cottage and look in the window. Billy sees them and faints. He is resuscitated by the "widow," who dares her his sex. A year elapses. Sandy and the widow are married. The Danites, however, still sure that Billy is Nancy Williams, resolve to be convinced, and write a note to Sandy, warning him to "keep an eye on Billy." In the meantime, the Danites are causing the crowd to have revenge on Billy, and they start off for his home, only to find it empty and Billy gone. They go on to the widow's, where Billy is and Sandy enters. Billy pleads with him to save him, vowing his innocence, and Sandy agrees to. The men, bent on vengeance, crowd in and are met by Sandy's revolver. He orders them to stand aside for Billy to pass. Billy starts away, but sees the Danites, who have pushed forward. A heart attack seizes her and she falls dead in Sandy's arms. Then it is that her identity is revealed. The Danites, with a triumphant look at each other, quietly leave, their mission entirely fulfilled.



Miss  
Mary  
Hays

# SELIG



Image 9.

Broadside from McKee Rankin's screenplay, *The Danites*, folder 201, William Selig Collection, Special Collections, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and Academy Foundation, Beverly Hills, California.



Emigrant Wagon Train on the Plains—Scene from "The Danites" (562g).

Image 10.

Scene from *The Danites*, in *The Moving Picture World* 11 (24 February 1912): 660.

## Notes

1. "Mormon Governor Threat to Bar Films in Utah," *Morning Telegraph* (New York, New York), 28 January 1912, sect. 4, pt. 2, p.1; clipping in Scrapbook no. 1 (1909–1916), box 1, 119, William Spry Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as Perry Special Collections).

2. For an in-depth and detailed discussion of the efforts to suppress these films, see Brian Q. Cannon and Jacob W. Olmstead, "'Scandalous Film': The Campaign to Suppress Anti-Mormon Motion Pictures, 1911–12," *Journal of Mormon History* 29, no. 2 (fall 2003): 42–76. For the fullest discussion of anti-Mormon film in the first half of the twentieth century, see Richard Nelson, "A History of Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals in the Anti-Mormon Film Era, 1905–1936" (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975). See also Richard Alan Nelson, "From Antagonism to Acceptance: Mormons and the Silver Screen," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10, no. 3 (spring 1977): 59–69.

3. An incomplete copy of *A Victim of the Mormons* is held at the LDS Church History Library, Family and Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. A copy is also held at the Danish Film Museum in Copenhagen. A copy of *The Danites* is not known to exist. Only three of Francis W. Boggess's (the director) two hundred films are extant. Eugene Michael Vazzana, *Silent Film Necrology*, 2nd ed (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2001), 52.

4. Ironically, Great Northern Special Feature Film Company, which was handling

the American distribution of *A Victim of the Mormons*, claimed, "All films handled by the Great Northern Special Feature Film Co. will first be subjected to the criticism of the National Board of Censorship before being placed on the market, and the verdict of the Board will in every case be abided by." "Great Northern Special Feature Film Co," *The Moving Picture World* 11 (6 January 1912):13.

5. *The Cinema in Denmark* (Copenhagen: The Danish Film Foundation, 1970), 3.

6. The film length was 3,200 feet, Nordisk's longest to be released in 1911. Nelson, "A History of Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 29. The year following the debut of *A Victim of the Mormons*, of the 103 films produced by Nordisk, only half were over 1,200 feet. Ebbe Neergaard, *The Story of Danish Film* (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1963), 47.

7. Most of the company was connected with the prestigious Royal Danish Theater in Copenhagen. Nelson, "A History of Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 24–25, 29. For a more detailed discussion of Nordisk Film Kompagni and the careers of Olsen, Vladimar, and Blom, see Neergaard, *The Story of Danish Film*, 9–46.

8. *The Cinema in Denmark*, 4; see also Nelson, "A History of Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 25.

9. See "Great Northern Special Feature Film Company," *The Moving Picture World* 11 (27 January 1912): 315; "Mormon Pictures in Demand," *The Moving Picture World* 11 (10 February 1912): 470. Apparently, differing variations of the promotion pamphlets were printed according to the country in which it was being exhibited. For the London version, see Nordisk Films, *Mormonens Offer (A Victim of the Mormons)* (Aarhus: A/S Fotorama, 1911), marketing pamphlet, Nordisk Release Heralds, Vertical Files, fd. 132, Margaret Herrick Library, Special Collections, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and Academy Foundation, Beverly Hills, California. A copy of the Danish version is in the Richard Alan Nelson Papers, 1911–1976, Box 1, fd 2, Perry Special Collections.

10. "A Victim of the Mormons," *Bioscope* 8 (5 October 1911): 8; "Great Northern Special Feature Film Company," *The Moving Picture World* 11 (27 January 1912): 315.

11. "Jury's Imperial Pictures, Ltd," *Bioscope* 8 (12 October 1911): 66; *The Moving Picture World* 11 (16 March 1912): 993.

12. *The Moving Picture World* 11 (10 February 1912): 507; "Mormon Pictures in Demand," *The Moving Picture World* 11 (10 February 1912): 470.

13. Nordisk Films, *A Victim of the Mormons*, marketing pamphlet.

14. For example, Edwin D. Hatch's thoughts on the temple scene were published in *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*. He wrote, "Perhaps the most absurd feature of the entire affair was the arrival of two English youths in Utah, who are shown as following the supposed 'Mormon' villain from a structure representing the great 'Mormon' temple—which no one who has seen the original or a real photograph of the temple would have recognized, but which, with its pillared porch and broad stone steps extending across the entire front, resembled the entrance to a modern Wesleyan chapel or the front of the church of the Madeline in Paris." Edwin D. Hatch, "Moving Picture Misrepresentations," *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star* 73 (9 November 1911): 710.

15. *The Moving Picture World* 10 (30 December 1911): 1085; For a discussion of how the First Presidency first learned of *A Victim of the Mormons*, see Cannon and Olmstead, "Scandalous Film," 51–52.

16. See Cannon and Olmstead, "Scandalous Film," 68–69.

17. The film length for *The Danites* was 1,000 feet for each reel. The concept of longer films having not fully developed, it was an accepted practice to release multireeled films on separate dates. Nelson, "A History of Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 66.

18. This company was incorporated by "Colonel" William N. Selig in 1900. The earliest films produced by Selig were documentaries of the operation of slaughterhouses and meat-packing plants. However, in 1904, Selig produced its first film, a comedy entitled *Humpty Dumpty*. In 1907, Selig sent former stage director Francis Boggs to Los Angeles to make western films. For a short history of the Selig Polyscope Company, see Anthony Slide, *The American Film Industry: A Historical Dictionary* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 306–8. For a more in-depth look at Selig, see Kalton C. Lahue, *Motion Picture Pioneer: The Selig Polyscope Company* (South Brunswick and New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1973); Anthony Slide, *Early American Cinema* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1994), 26–30; and Gene Fernett, *American Film Studios: An Historical Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1988), 207–13.

19. "The House of Selig," *The Moving Picture World*, 11 (24 February 1912): 653.

20. Rankin played the role of Sandy. The play was based upon Miller's novel, *First Families of the Sierras*. In this work, the Danites were apparently nameless and made only a brief appearance. For more information on the book or the Broadway production, see Nelson, "A History of Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 64–65. The play apparently came to Salt Lake City; see "Pictures Are Released," *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), 24 February 1912, 2. A copy of "The Danites of the Sierras" is held at the LDS Church History Library, Family and Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

21. This drama was also the first wholly American company production to circuit theaters in Britain. Lawrence D. Klenk, "Saints Alive; or Deseret Detested—An Overview of the Mormon Image in American Drama, 1846–1914," unpublished paper, Brigham Young University, 1972, 11, in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. For more information on the development of Mormon themes in theater, see Lael J. Woodbury, "Mormonism and the Commercial Theatre," *BYU Studies* 12, no. 2 (winter 1972): 234–40.

22. Jas. S. McQuade, "The Danites'—A Revival," *The Moving Picture World* 11 (24 February 1912): 660.

23. For a biographical sketch of Hobart Bosworth Selig's leading man dubbed the "Dean of the Film Industry," see Anthony Slide, *The Idols of Silence* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1976), 19–24. Betty Harte starred in many of Selig's early films alongside Hobart Bosworth. *Silent Film Necrology*, 231.

24. "Selig," *The Moving Picture World* 11 (17 February 1912): 614. Jas. S. McQuade, "The Danites'—A Revival," *The Moving Picture World* 11 (24 February 1912): 660.

25. "Comments on the Films," *The Moving Picture World* 11 (2 March 1912): 780; "The Danites," *New York Telegraph* (New York: New York), 25 February 1912, sect. 2, pt. 4, 3.

26. McKee Rankin, *The Danites*, folder 201, William Selig Collection, Special Collections, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and Academy Foundation, Beverly Hills, California.

27. Cannon and Olmstead, "Scandalous Film," 68–69.