

Making Church History Come Alive: A Conversation with LaMar C. Berrett

Interviewed by Alexander L. Baugh

Introduction

Several years ago I accompanied LaMar C. Berrett on a fact-finding mission to some of the Mormon historical sites in northern Missouri. It was a cold and wet November, and he was dressed for the occasion, which included wearing his “pole” boots as he called them. These leather boots were so tall that they reached nearly to the bottom of his knees. “You will never get chiggers or ticks with these on,” he said, “and they’ll protect you from snakes too!” It was on that trip that I learned that LaMar had worn these boots while exploring and identifying LDS Church history-related sites from Massachusetts to Illinois, and along nearly every stretch of the Mormon Trail from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City—not just once, but numerous times. Since that time I’ve learned a lot more about him and concluded that he might very well be the Mormon equivalent of Indiana Jones. Like his boots, he never went anywhere without his 35mm camera. “He took so many photos,” one colleague remarked, “that he kept Kodak in business.” Another associate once told me, “While most Mormon historians talk and write about *what happened* in Mormon history, LaMar is the person who can tell you exactly *where it happened!*” His lifetime of achievement and service in the field of Mormon History was recognized this past May when he was presented with the Leonard J. Arrington Award by the Mormon History Association. To learn more about his life and his passion for history, I conducted the following interview with him at his home in Orem, Utah, on 30 November 2001.

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The Interview

ALEX: To begin with, maybe you could talk a little bit about your early years, about your parents and family, and growing up in Riverton.

LAMAR: For thirty years my father was the manager of Riverton Motor Company, a Chevrolet dealership. I worked there from the time I was thirteen, sweeping the floors, greasing cars, fixing flat tires, changing batteries, even hauling coal. Riverton Motor sold coal and I delivered it. Even after I was married, I was still working for Riverton Motor.

ALEX: Talk about your experience in World War II. I know you are going to write a history on this, but maybe you could share a few remembrances.

LAMAR: I was drafted right out of high school in 1944 and immediately went to Texas and took basic training as an infantryman. I told them at Fort Douglas that I was a drummer. They said, "We don't need drummer boys, we need riflemen." And so I took basic training and half way through the training the Battle of Bulge started in Germany. So they just cut off our training and put us on a plane and a boat and we went to the front lines in Belgium. So the Bulge started on December 16th and I was there by January 21, 1945. I was taken to a hill covered with fox holes and was assigned to a sergeant there—a rough and tough guy. The first night I was there they took me out in the woods and said, "You sleep here"—three feet of snow. So that's where I slept. We continued improving our fox holes so we could be a little more comfortable. Our assignment was to push back the Bulge. During the war I walked all the way across Germany into Czechoslovakia. We rode tanks and trucks sometimes, but we were mostly walking from village to village, capturing the villages and staying in the houses of the Germans.

ALEX: When did you come home?

LAMAR: After the war ended in May, I came home in July 1945. We were going to the South Pacific to finish the war there, so we had a thirty-day furlough. I went with my parents to see a brother who was in the navy and we were sitting on the beach in California and we heard on the radio that the U. S. had just dropped the atomic bomb. This was a joy to me because now I didn't have to go to the South Pacific. I felt my life had been saved. I had survived the war in Europe. I didn't meet any Mormons while I was there in Germany, so I had a lot of experiences sharing the gospel with soldiers—mainly by example. My buddies knew I was religious and a follower of the Savior. A case in point. A G.I. in my outfit raped a German girl. The officers lined up all the soldiers in my military unit in a line and the girl and her parents came to point out the soldier involved. They had to leave a soldier on the radio all the time. And they said, "LaMar Berrett wouldn't have



*LaMar C. Berrett, Department Chairman, Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1968.
Photo courtesy of LaMar C. Berrett*

done this.” So they left me with the radio to take any messages. After the war was over in Europe, I was transferred to the Second Infantry Band, where I played military drums by day and dance drums by night, for a year. As a bandsman, I had plenty of free time so I wrote down my experiences as a G. I., and I filled five spiral notebooks in long hand. When I got home, I had them bound, and now BYU Press will soon make about a dozen copies of my memoirs.

ALEX: So this was probably your first “historical” effort.

LAMAR: Yes, there’s no question about that. When I read my memoirs, I feel that I am just grateful to be alive. When a student came to me and said, “I should have gotten a ‘B’ instead of a ‘C,’” in my class, I would look him straight in the eye and jokingly say, “Look brother, you shouldn’t be complaining about your grade, you’re just lucky to be alive, much less worry about your grade.”

ALEX: So after your military experience and playing in this dance band, is this when you went on your mission? Tell us about your mission.

LAMAR: After my experience during World War II, I decided to get an education. The G. I. Bill paid our tuition and I started school at the

University of Utah. I went there one year, and then I went on my mission—Southern States. I had some good experiences there, being what we called a supervising elder over a district. In those days a supervising elder worked alone. We had LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and A Wonder*, with its twenty-five lessons to give. And if a missionary gave an investigator twenty-five lessons and the investigator asked you for baptism, then they were baptized. Henry D. Moyle came to the Southern States Mission and spent three weeks traveling and holding meetings in Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Florida. I was with him and his wife all the time, and also the mission president and his wife. It was a real education. I remember Elder Moyle saying, “Don’t wait for the people to ask you to be baptized, you ask them to be baptized!” That was a new concept to me. The mission president called me to be his counselor and he extended my mission an extra four months. I loved my mission, so when I later did a masters thesis I researched and wrote the history of the Southern States Mission, 1831-1861.

ALEX: So your mission experience had a great bearing on your academic future, especially in your masters program.

LAMAR: Yes. And I appreciated my committee—Hyrum L. Andrus, Richard Poll, and Gustive O. Larson. They raked me over the coals. Hyrum used to say, “We’re not writing high school papers.”

ALEX: Tell us how you got into the Church Education System, which will, of course, eventually culminate in your coming to BYU.

LAMAR: I went to the University of Utah and I graduated with a bachelor degree in business. When I started interviewing for jobs, I had job offers, but accepting them meant moving out to the boondocks. I thought, “I’m not going to Texas or any other place.” When I got released from the military I said, “I’m going back to Riverton, my place of birth, and I’m never leaving.” So then I applied to be a Seminary teacher, and I was interviewed by Brother Frank West in the old Bishop’s building in Salt Lake City. Brother West said, “There’s no way you can be a teacher. All the contracts are out and we are ready to go in the fall, so forget it.” So, I went home and forgot it. But soon I got a call from him, and he said, “Brother Harold Smith in Heber is going to quit teaching Seminary to be the manager of the Heber Exchange, the biggest store in Heber. So we need someone to go up there. Would you be interested?” I was delighted. I accepted the offer and taught in Heber for two years.

ALEX: Had you married by this time?

LAMAR: I was married in 1950, and in 1952 I started teaching with George L. Streble, the principal.

ALEX: Did he influence you to go into history?

LAMAR: No, he really didn't. I had no idea of ever getting a masters degree. I was a teacher and I was happy. I enjoyed those students. They were wonderful! I remembered all their names, and that was a great experience. But then the opportunity came, and I talked to William E. Berrett who was in charge of CES. I said, "I'd like to get closer to home, so if something in Salt Lake is opening up, that would be great. It did, but they gave me a choice. I could either go to Magna or Bingham Canyon. I selected Bingham. It was a one room seminary. The next summer I helped build the Seminary building next to Bingham High School. Then the next fall I



LaMar C. Berrett, c. 1972
Photo courtesy of Lamar C. Berrett

was transferred to that building. I taught there six years. In 1960, I was going to summer school to get a masters degree. I spent one full summer in the Church Historian's office every day. I was there at seven a.m. in the morning and they opened at eight. I had access to every photo they had. Joseph Fielding Smith, who had his office there, gave me permission to make copies of any photos. One time, Brother William Lund saw me selecting photos to copy and said, "Who told you that you could do that?" And I said, "Joseph Fielding Smith." "He didn't!" he said. So he marched me into Joseph Fielding Smith's office and he said, "Did you tell this young man he could make copies of photos?" And he said, "Yes, I told him to just be careful what he takes." He was so kind. I loved Joseph Fielding Smith. While I was there, they were cleaning out the basement and they had copies of the *Church News*. The person who was doing this said, "How would you like some issues of the *Church News*?" And I said, "Fine, I'll take them" So now, I am probably the only person who has a complete set from 1931 of the original *Church News* from 1931 to the present. They're fun to look through. While I was there every day they would bring up books from the basement that they didn't want, so I added a lot of books to my personal library.

ALEX: They were just giving the books away?

LAMAR: Well, basically. They charged a quarter or fifteen cents or something like that. I got a whole bunch of old books, magazines, etc. I received original copies of the *Americana Magazine* with B. H. Roberts' articles in them, and much more.

ALEX: So while you were researching your Southern States material, you were picking up books and you were looking at these wonderful photographs. Did you get to take pictures of these photos or did they just let you look at them?

LAMAR: Brother Kohler was there microfilming records. I ate lunch with him every day. He said, "How would you like me to make copies of all these photos you're gathering? I'll put them on microfilm." And so he did. That's how I got interested in photography. I just wanted to use them in Seminary for teaching my Seminary students.

ALEX: And to make slides. . . .

LAMAR: Yes, to make slides. Slide cameras came into existence in about 1952 or 1953, along there. I bought one of them. And those slides were wonderful to use in teaching. Later, at BYU I had a room equipped with a slide projector, changer, and a screen so that I could use slides in teaching Church History. Then by request, I made carousels of slides for all the BYU with selections from my 70,000 slides.

ALEX: So you taught two years at Heber, and six years at Bingham?

LAMAR: Copperton.

ALEX: Copperton, O.K.

LAMAR: Bingham High School was in Copperton, that's at the mouth of Bingham Canyon. And the town was built by Kennicott Copper. The homes had copper roofs. I eventually bought a home facing the city park. It was really a neat little town. The superintendent of the copper pit was the bishop. I was the adult Sunday School teacher. I really enjoyed it there.

ALEX: So, how was it you came to BYU? You got your masters degree in 1960?

LAMAR: Yes.

ALEX: And was it at that time they gave you an invitation to come down to BYU, or was that later?

LAMAR: That was later.

ALEX: Tell us about how that happened.

LAMAR: O.K., I'll tell you all about that. President Henry D. Moyle thought big. He thought big on BYU education. At that time under his leadership the Church was buying property in Arizona and California and Idaho thinking that they might make more BYU junior colleges. At that time I thought, "I ought to be teaching in one of these junior colleges." So I went

to William E. Berrett and I said, "Is there any chance of teaching in one of these new junior colleges?" He said, "Well, if you're interested, you'd better get your degrees!" So I finished up the masters and stayed at BYU for three more years. I had a scholarship. During the first year I couldn't get paid anything—couldn't work—I had to be a full-time student. Second year I taught half-time at the Orem Seminary to keep our flesh and bones together. And the next year, I was asked to teach half-time at BYU. Wes Belnap, the dean, sat in my class one day and I about died. I was so scared. He was looking me over to see if they wanted to hire me at BYU. Well, he decided to do it, and went to BYU Vice-President William E. Berrett and said, "We want LaMar to teach here at BYU." William E. Berrett said, "You can't have him. We don't want our men going to BYU and getting doctorate degrees and then staying at BYU. If he goes out in the field to teach first, then if you want him later, you can have him." So I received a contract to teach at the Logan Institute. I still have the contract. While I was finishing up my dissertation, an interesting thing happened. Merlin Shaw was teaching Church History at BYU, and he went on a Boy Scouts outing near Hole in the Rock. The truck breaks failed, the truck tipped over, and several scouts and leaders were killed, including Merlin Shaw. Wes Belnap then went back to William E. Berrett and said, "You know we just lost Merlin Shaw. We need a Church History teacher and we want LaMar." William E. said, "Well, under the circumstances, O.K." That's how I got to BYU.

ALEX: So tell us about your BYU career. This is 1963. We want to talk about your days as a faculty member. You were at BYU for twenty-nine years, officially as a professor in the Department of Church History and Doctrine, although it has gone by several names. Part of that time you were department chair and director of the Church History area.

LAMAR: I was department chair for nine years. But first I was chairman of the Undergraduate Department and then I became the chairman of the Graduate Studies Department. We had "Undergraduate" and "Graduate." Those were the departments. We didn't have Old Testament, New Testament, so forth. So it was different then. Chauncey Riddle was the chairman of the Graduate Studies Department in the College of Religion, and when they made him graduate dean over the whole university, I took his place as Graduate Studies Department Chairman. Later, we changed the departmental names and we had the Department of Church History and Doctrine and the Department of Ancient Scripture. I was the chair of the Department of Church History and Doctrine. So I was chairman three different times in three different departments in nine years.

ALEX: And this was very early on in your career?

LAMAR: This was when I was younger and smarter.



*LaMar C. Berrett on the Mormon Trail
at Dibble Draw, Wyoming, 15 October 1998.*

*Photo by Dennis Carmen,
courtesy of LaMar C. Berrett*

ALEX: Well, I think that's remarkable because not many young professors get those types of appointments.

LAMAR: Well, I also had an appointment as the director of the Institute of Mormon Studies. That was started by David Yarn. He was the first one, and then Dan Ludlow took his place. Truman Madsen succeeded Ludlow and I took Madsen's place. Most of my time at BYU I taught half of a load, because I was doing administrative work.

ALEX: So what was the department like back then? Who

were some of your closest associates and colleagues?

LAMAR: My first office was in T-22, an old army barracks building. But then they remodeled and made offices in the old Cougarreat in the basement of the Joseph Smith Building and they moved us into those offices. Eventually, I moved into Sidney Sperry's old office. That was the largest office in the Joseph Smith Building. It was a good thing I had that large office because I was given a Haun's Mill millstone, so I hauled that out here and put it in my office. Nobody ever stole it. It was so heavy! It is now in the Independence, Missouri, Visitors' Center.

ALEX: So tell about some other of your colleagues.

LAMAR: Dan Ludlow has been one who's had a great effect upon my life. In 1968 he had made a series of Book of Mormon tapes which were used to teach Book of Mormon. Dan said to me, "We want you to do the same thing in Church History that I have done in Book of Mormon." I was

responsible for twenty-eight, fifty minute productions. It was a two-year project. I researched, wrote scripts, gathered photos, and taped the productions for two years. Of the twenty-eight documentaries, I have one left, "The Utah War." I did that one myself, and about half of the others myself. It was a lot of work. Basically all the time I'm doing this, I was teaching half-time. I asked Larry Porter to do a questionnaire sheet for each lesson to keep the student's minds on their work and to see if they comprehended the information. He did a magnificent job. It wasn't long before we knew he needed to be with us. He was the first person that I had anything to do with hiring. In those days, the department chairman could do the selecting. You had to run it through the dean and the administration, but everybody that I selected was hired. Larry and I flew back to Portland, Maine, to sit in on Don Cannon's class and we hired him.

ALEX: Was Milt Backman at BYU when you were there, or did you hire Milt?

LAMAR: No, I didn't hire Milt. He came one year after I came. But I did have something to do with his friendship. We were buddy-buddies. We had a department chairman and two coordinators in each department. I had Larry and Milt. For three or four years they were my coordinators. We'd meet and discuss and determine salaries and policies.

ALEX: You also spearheaded the efforts to get faculty members who would specialize in some aspect of Church history, didn't you?

LAMAR: Yes, I started that program. Every summer we had research funds, and I'd say, "O.K., Gary Anderson, you go to New Hampshire and search the records there. LaMar Garrard, you go to Vermont." We paid their transportation and lodging. Several of them took their families and had a summer research project. We sent several faculty members east and they brought back reports to show what they found and where they found it. They made copies of their research materials, and we put them in the BYU Library. I was enjoying it so much and I thought, "Someday we would put this all together."

ALEX: So you asked these men to specialize in these areas and learn all the history of the Church in these areas, with the idea that you could produce a volume essentially on each locality.

LAMAR: Well, actually, we thought only in terms of one volume for everything. That was shortsightedness. We soon found out that we couldn't put everything in one volume, but that was our intention. Let me give you all these names. Don Cannon was sent to Massachusetts. Gary Anderson was to do New Hampshire. Larry Dahl did Vermont. Actually, LaMar Gerrard did much of the work on Vermont, and Larry finished the research. Larry Porter did Eastern Canada, Pennsylvania, and New York. In the mean-

time, I got involved in New York City, so I did the New York City portion. Keith Perkins did Ohio, and Don Cannon worked on Illinois. Max Parkin and I did Missouri. He covered Jackson, Ray and Clay counties, and I did Caldwell, Daviess, and of all the counties over to St. Louis if they pertained to the Mormons. Bill Hartley researched in Iowa, and Gary Anderson in Nebraska. Gary became ill as we were working in Wyoming, so I picked up from where he left off and did much of Wyoming and all of Utah. But Gary did work a lot in Wyoming before he passed away.

ALEX: So tell us where the project is at right now. We obviously have the two volumes. Tell us where it's headed.

LAMAR: We finished in 1995—photographs, maps, everything. Volume one is the New England States. Volume two is New York and Pennsylvania. Volume three is Ohio and Illinois. Volume four is Missouri. Volume five is Iowa and Nebraska. Volume six is Wyoming and Utah.

ALEX: So you recognized you could not do it all which is why you got help from some of your colleagues and others?

LAMAR: Right, and they have done a magnificent job.

ALEX: But in the end you've still had to be the prime mover and shaker and basically check everything and do work where there needed more work to be done.

LAMAR: If they didn't plumb the depths deep enough then I just helped them. I made all the maps myself.

ALEX: So do you see this being your finest or your greatest contribution? I know you have many and we're going to talk a little bit more there, but do you see this as really being the culmination of your career?

LAMAR: Yes, I would say so. If I had more years, I know what I'd like to write about.

ALEX: Tell us.

LAMAR: I'm working with Blair Van Dyke on a book we've titled, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Near East*. We're just about through with that and then we'll be banging on the door of a publisher. And the reason we're doing that together—the two of us—is because in the early 1970s I did all the necessary research to write this book. But I haven't been able to write it up. One day I was in Wyoming going over the Mormon Trail with some of the BYU faculty and teachers and I said, "I've got all this research done, if any of you want to be a writer, see me." So Blair saw me, and he said, "I want to do it, I'm interested in the Near East." So he's been working on it for five years, and I mean that's a lot of work. But I got the original sources.

ALEX: In 1973 you published your first book.

LAMAR: That's right.

ALEX: *Discovering the World of the Bible*—talk about how that came to be.

LAMAR: That book was written in what's now my walk-in clothes closet. Just a little nook with room enough for a desk. I went to Robert Taylor who was head of BYU Travel Studies and I said, "It's about time you sent me on a Church History tour." But he waited quite a little while before he decided that I could do a tour. I finally took a Church History tour in 1967, my first tour for BYU Travel Studies. In 1970 he asked me to direct the tour to Israel. I didn't know much, but I did some boning up, and he went with me, and we directed the tour. Well, I had done enough homework that I'd learned quite a bit about all the sites that we were going to see. Dan Ludlow took the first faculty group over there and I was a member of it. As we flew out of Istanbul he sat by me and he said, "How would you like to direct the next faculty group tour like we just did?" And I said, "Well, you know, I'm just little LaMar. You've got all these scholars in Old Testament and New Testament. How can I take them on a tour and teach them anything?" And he said, "Well, we want you to do it." So I did it. And Robert Taylor started asking me to take tours to everywhere—the Holy Land, Church History tours, Book of Mormon tours south of the border—I've done at least twenty of those—Russia, China, the South Pacific, all over.

ALEX: So Bob Taylor was the one who got you going, and then Dan Ludlow pushed that forward a little bit.

LAMAR: The bottom line is, Robert Taylor wrote me a letter and he liked what he saw when he went with me and he said, "I'll send you anywhere you want to go on this earth." I worked with Robert Taylor and BYU Travel Study for ten years, then I quit BYU Travel Study.

ALEX: Because you wanted to do your own tours?

LAMAR: I thought I could take my own tours and make money for my family. Anyway, I decided if a person is going to learn about Israel and these sights, they would have to read a whole book. But people don't have time to read a whole book about this site and a whole book about that site while touring. I wrote a digest with enough information to understand the sights we would see. So I went to BYU Press, and they said, "We'd like to do your book." So they did it. I worked very hard and in 1973, *Discovering the World of the Bible* came off the press in hard and soft back covers. I gave every General Authority of the Church a copy and every faculty member one. BYU Press published about 25,000 copies. Then in about 1979, BYU Press went defunct. Thomas Nelson publishers in Nashville, Tennessee, contacted BYU Press and said, "We'd like to publish *Discovering the World of the Bible*." Later, they phoned me and said, "We can sell your book the way it is, but if you take the Mormon references out of it, we can sell it better." I said,

“Take them out.” So they took out all the Mormon references. They sold 35,000 copies. It was published nationally and sold in national Christian bookstores.

ALEX: So it’s been published by two different publishers.

LAMAR: Three. BYU Press, Thomas Nelson Publishers, and the last one by Grandin Book. Kelly Ogden came to me and said, “You know, we need to update your book, and I’ll do it if you’d like me to.” And I said, “Fine, and we’ll print both of our names on it.” So we did it.

ALEX: So any idea how many copies of the book have sold?

LAMAR: About 75,000.

ALEX: That would put a few shoes on your children’s feet.

LAMAR: I had an editor that was really excellent. Oh, he was so great. I mean they had to check every name—these are foreign names and various Egyptian names. They checked everything—everything—and it took a lot of time. But they were so good. On the maps—I had to lift every dot and put it where it was supposed to be. But I was young and energetic and I could get all that work done. By the way, when I started teaching at BYU, or started my doctoral work. I became David Yarn’s counselor in the bishopric. And so for six years I was his first counselor and some people were saying, “Don’t take any big jobs in the Church while you’re doing your dissertation.” But I got along fine, got high grades, and all was well.

ALEX: Would you talk a little about Wilford Wood and your association with the family and him personally? You developed a trust with him that no one else could have ever done.

LAMAR: I was teaching Church history and learned somewhere along the line about Wilford Wood. So I corresponded with him and talked to him. He invited me to bring my class up to his home. So I took my students to Woods Cross and he gave them a paper with some questions on it—about a half a dozen questions. He would tell them, “If anybody can answer those questions, all of them, I’ll give them this book right here [referring to his book, *Joseph Smith Begins His Work, Volume I*]. If you answer part of them, I’ll give you this other book [referring to *Joseph Smith Begins His Work, Volume II*].” Anyway, he had two books, and when these students left—the whole class of forty or fifty people—they all got free copies from him. He had a little money. He was really a different kind of a guy. Although he bragged a lot, I really appreciated him because he collected so many documents and purchased so many Church history sites. He made some General Authorities a little mad at him, but he also had friends. President McKay went to Woods Cross and dedicated his place. I have a file on Wilford Wood with the minutes typed of the trials of those who killed Joseph Smith—original minutes that Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill used in writing their book *Carthage*

Conspiracy.

ALEX: So your relationship with Wilford Wood and the Wood family began as you learned about him and as you took your classes up there. That started the friendship.

LAMAR: We became very good friends. He appreciated me being a BYU professor that had some trust in him. His stuff was scattered from one end of his museum to the other. I don't see how he ever found anything in his place. It was a mess and his stuff was here and there and all over in this drawer and that drawer. I saw the need for somebody like myself who likes to organize, to do just that with his materials. He died in 1968, and about two years later I asked Lillian, his wife, if she would like me to organize and file things properly and she said yes. She said they would donate his collection of documents to BYU because I was getting a salary and summer research grant and so forth. I went through all of the documents, not the artifacts, but the letters, papers, and deeds, etc. After working on Wilford Wood's materials for two summers (a secretary also helped me), I published, *An Annotated Catalog of Documentary-Type Materials in the Wilford C. Wood Collection*. BYU Press did it.

ALEX: And you filed and organized everything?

LAMAR: I filed everything. It was a project that was very beneficial to BYU. BYU did receive from the Wilford Wood Foundation, \$100,000, which helps fund Church History research.

ALEX: Did BYU ever get the collection?

LAMAR: President Rex Lee and I were going to go up there and finalize this to make sure that BYU got these documentary type things, but it hasn't happened yet. Hopefully it will happen someday.

ALEX: Talk some more about your slide collection. Obviously that was an outgrowth of taking photographs on your tours and needing photos for books.

LAMAR: I started in 1952. Slides were a new thing. They just had black and white in those days. I wanted to use them in class to teach the kids so I started a project of taking pictures of everything that could be used in the classroom.

ALEX: Were they 2 x 2 slides back then?

LAMAR: Yes. They've always been the very same format. I paid for most of the film over the years—my cost. There are a few years when I've taken a tour with faculty members or something and then I've used some funds from BYU with always the intent that I was going to give these in the end to BYU anyway. So I've collected these, and I've always had a half-time or full-time secretary. They helped me. But it does take a lot of time to organize them because I've got to identify them and file them in the right place and because

I'm always going out and taking another slide of the same site. If you can't retrieve them, you just as well forget it. That's been very important. I'm not saying that I'm the best photographer that ever lived, but I probably have the biggest slide collection of its kind of any private individual.

ALEX: And your intent is eventually to give these 70,000 slides to BYU.

LAMAR: Right. They have 4,000 now for starters.

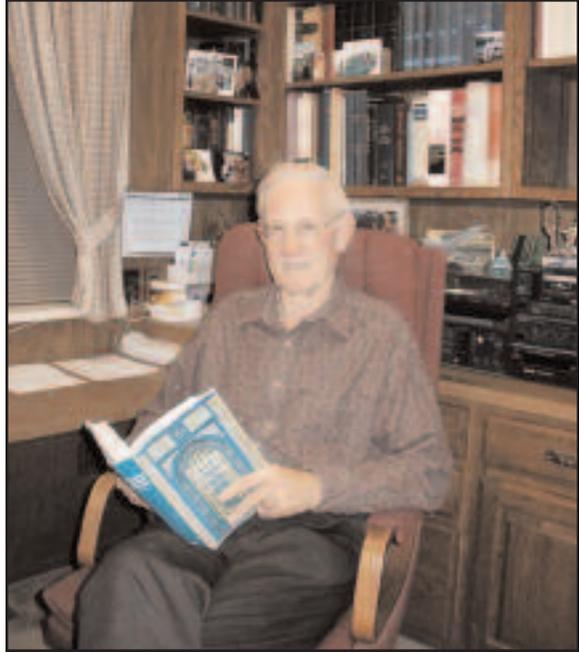
ALEX: Would you share maybe one or two of your favorite stories or incidents from Church history?

LAMAR: I could tell you one that happened in my class. On the first day of class the students came in Room 250 upstairs in the old Joseph Smith building. Fifty seats are filled. There are students standing around the walls and I said, "I don't know what to do with you kids standing up back there because the fire marshal will only allow us to have fifty chairs in this room. So why don't some of you kids standing up back there go find some good-looking, young Church history teacher and take Church history from them." A boy raised his hand at the back of the room and said, "Brother Berrett, I want to take Church history from somebody who's lived through it!" Now to get back to the question. I've liked the unusual, like when Joseph Smith was wrestling in the middle of the street in Nauvoo and broke Howard Coray's leg. I like to tell that story. I like to tell the account by Richard Burton, a non-Mormon, about going to an all-night party that Brigham Young sponsored. He said he went home at four or five o'clock in the morning! It just shows that the Mormons had a great tolerance for enjoyments. I enjoy early Utah history. It's just really interesting to me. I like to tell the story about the fellow who took a turkey to buy tickets to attend the Salt Lake theater. He took the turkey to the box office and the admission price was less than what the turkey was worth, so the girl taking the tickets gave him back two chickens which he put under his arms, and it was very embarrassing to him because he went into the theater and sat by his girlfriend with the two chickens. Well, those are the kinds of stories I like. My testimony is built on a study of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I'm a believer and I pray this shows in the way I act and in the way I treat other people.

ALEX: How have you been able to do all that you've done, considering that you have a family of nine children—your ecclesiastical responsibilities, your research, your writing, your teaching? . . . How have you done it?

LAMAR: Boy, I don't know. The first book for instance. No computers in those days. No such thing. It amazes me how I ever did that. And I never neglected my family. We took them sleigh riding. I got the tractor out. I pulled the kids in the sleigh over in the neighborhood here and all over. I

taught all my kids how to ski. We had Family Home Evening before the Church said we ought to have Family Home Evening. We've taken all our children to the Church history sites. We've taken them to England to our ancestral sites. We've taken them to Israel to get our spiritual heritage and so forth. So they really appreciate that. They appreciate their mom and dad for what they have done in their lives. So I think they're proud of their mom and dad. That's good. Oh, we've been relatively successful with our kids. They're all active in the Church.



*LaMar C. Berrett in his library in his Orem home,
November 2001.*

Photo by Alexander L. Baugh

ALEX: Have any of your kids really taken an interest in Church history?

LAMAR: Yes, somewhat, but not like their father.

ALEX: What advice would you give to someone who is young and has an interest in Church history?

LAMAR: I would give the advice that William E. Berrett gave to me, "You better get your degrees." I could tell you about a few people who have come to me as the department chairman who thought that they ought to be hired as a member of our faculty. I remember one. He was a seminary teacher and he thought that the sun rose and set in him. He came and wanted me to hire him as a part time teacher. I said, "Well, do you have your degrees?" And he replied, "I don't need those degrees, I have the personality to teach. I don't need those degrees, but I want to be hired." I said, "Sorry," and showed him the door. If they are interested in Church history, then they had better read whatever is necessary to be knowledgeable in Church History. One needs to be prepared by getting it up here [pointing to his head]. And

then have the right kind of personality. If he's interested in teaching then I would say about 75% of what's going to make you a good teacher is your personality. You know. You shine through. Certain people have the kind of character or personality to do the job. Some of our teachers put listeners to sleep because they are so dry. They give you information, but they don't have any humor. Just think of Ivan J. Barrett. He was one of the most popular teachers on the BYU campus. His jokes had students laughing, but at the same time they learned the Book of Mormon. So, I think that personality, and being a little more of an extrovert is important. It is difficult to be an introvert and be a good teacher.

ALEX: So now you are in your retirement. Where from here?

LAMAR: Well, I am going to finish the *Sacred Places* series, and the book with Blair Van Dyke on the Mormons in the Near East. I am going to finish writing my experiences in the war as a G.I., and I would like Darlene and I to write a personal history for our children about our lives, noting the things that were the most meaningful. I need to go through all my slides and make sure the identification is accurate and that they are where they are supposed to be, and if they are half good, throw them away. And we've also talked about the possibility of a mission.

ALEX: If you had to do it all over again, what would you do?

LAMAR: If I had to do it all over again, I would get started on my degrees earlier. I could've spent ten more years being productive. I was thirty-seven when I got my doctorate. When I went to the University of Utah, I graduated in three years. I went summers and all. I wanted to get out and get going. And that's the way I feel about getting a degree and teaching at a university or whatever you're going to do. Someone once said, "With all thy getting, get going!" To tell you the truth, when I was young, it was the last thing in my mind that I'd ever be a college professor. I never even thought about it.

ALEX: But the right doors open and the right doors close.

LAMAR: I think the Lord must have had some things in mind for me because I didn't go to BYU thinking that I'd ever be on the faculty. I was hoping that I'd be in one of these junior colleges. But to think that I worked with some of the giants in scholarship at BYU is incredible to me. I know I'm not the genius that lots of faculty members are. I just worked hard. I feel really blessed that I could do what I've done.

ALEX: You've shared some wonderful comments. It gives me a real understanding of your heart and who you are. This has just been great. This is just wonderful.

LAMAR: Thank you.

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