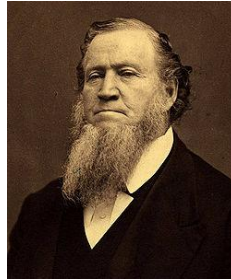


JEW'S AND LATTER DAY SAINTS



Simon Bamberger

Governor of Utah 1917-1921



Brigham Young

Leader of the LDS

By Jerry Klinger

"Latter-day Saints believe themselves to be either direct descendants of the House of Israel, or adopted into it. As such, Judaism is foundational to the history of Mormonism; Jews are looked upon as a Covenant people of God, held in high esteem, and are respected in the Mormon faith system. The LDS church is consequently very Philo-Semitic in its doctrine".¹

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*"I could never vote for that Mitt Romney. He is a Mormon. I could never vote for one of them", the New Yorker proclaimed loudly for everyone to hear. He crunched down on a half done garlic pickle held tightly with one hand while spooning an extra big dripping glob of sugar saturated Cole slaw unto his plate. The pickles and Cole slaw were always ceremoniously placed on each patron's table gratis as they sat down for a meal. God forbid if a waiter should be too slow or even worse forget to bring them.*

*I had just passed their table on the way to the bathroom at Ben's Kosher restaurant off of 441 in Boca Raton.*

*Sheila insisted she wanted a hot pastrami sandwich on rye bread with extra Russian dressing and a large Diet Coke after our overly dry Rabbi's Shabbat morning sermon.*

*Returning to the table I told Sheila about what I had heard. "For the life of me Sheila, I cannot think of a reason to be against Romney in the election just because he is a Mormon", I said.*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormonism\\_and\\_Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormonism_and_Judaism)

*“Did I ever tell you some Jews are stupid,” was her rejoinder. We looked at each other and shook our heads.*

*William Rabinowitz – Boynton Beach, Fl., March 2008*

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She spoke softly on the phone yet I could detect that accented English I knew so well. Her name was Ayelet.

Are you Israeli? I asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “I am”.

“It is interesting here in Salt Lake City” she continued. “This is the first place, outside of Israel, I am not afraid to say, I am Jewish, or Israeli, or to speak Hebrew openly. People are so friendly, so open and accepting. Sometimes they even come up to me and say in Hebrew, ‘I am from the Tribe of Ephraim – welcome.”

She paused for a moment, “They aggressively convert Jews posthumously. It is a major controversy here and in Israel,” she said.

“With all the terrible problems we have, unless great Uncle Moshe comes to me from the dead, vehemently objecting, this is not a stuyot (silliness) that I intend to pick a fight over with a friend.”

Ayelet laughed.

William Rabinowitz, Boynton Beach, June, 2009

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September 22, 1827, in upstate New York near Palmyra, Joseph Smith Jr. a young farmer of modest background lived, when according to Mormon belief, he was visited by the Angel Moroni. After four years of intense spiritual preparation, the Angel permitted him to take possession of a long ago buried book inscribed on golden tablets. The book revealed God’s dealings with the ancient Israelite inhabitants of the Americas. In addition to the book, the Angel permitted Smith to take possession of the breastplate that the High Priest in the Temple of Solomon had worn, the Urim and Thummim.

Smith carried the book’s message to the people of his community and quickly drew believers. He also drew acrimony and made dangerous enemies. Seeking a safe place to live and continue his revealed ministry, Smith relocated time and time again, with his growing community. Near Nauvoo, Illinois on the banks of the broad, muddy Mississippi River he was murdered, June, 1844. He rests, with family members in a quiet dignified simple setting on the river’s shore. The golden plates, the Urim and the

Thummim long had disappeared – stolen from Smith, never to be found again. Yet, his church grew and prospered as did the intolerance and hatred of its adherents.

The hostility to the Mormon community by the surrounding Christian communities was deathly real.

Brigham Young emerged as Smith's successor. He announced to the Church members (1846) there was a promised land. There was a land far to the West, across the great American Desert, as the Great Plains were known. It was a land where they could worship God as they believed right and as God guided. He would lead them to their new home. Brigham Young, called by some the American Moses, led his flock in Mormon imagery, in a great Exodus, across the desert to the Promised Land in the American Wilderness. It would be a home near the American Dead Sea, the Great Salt Lake, surrounded by high snow capped mountains that reached to God. They called the land Utah from the indigenous Ute tribe of Native Americans, meaning "people of the mountains"

Brigham Young and most Mormons believe themselves descended from or converted members of the ancient Israelite lost tribe of Ephraim. It was if they were the first Jews coming to Utah.

The first Jew to see the Great Salt Lake and climb the great Utah mountain barriers of the Rockies was said to be an unnamed Jewish mountaineer. He hunted for furs with Jim Bridger, a mountaineering legend, during the 1820's through the 1840'. Indian stories are replete with references to the "egg eaters." Mountain Men and later itinerant traders who would not eat meat but carried with them hard boiled eggs. They would eat only the eggs, fruit, nuts, and vegetables.

Jews have been noted, many times, as members of wagon trains that crossed Utah on their way to California and Oregon, but they did not stop to settle.

As the American frontier pushed West, Jews were part of it. One of the greatest Western explorers was John C. Fremont; a man nicknamed the "Pathfinder." On a number of his missions of exploration he was joined by F.W. Von Eggelstein his Jewish cartographer and Solomon Nunes Carvalho, the great Jewish American painter from South Carolina, who captured the West for posterity on canvas. Caught in a terrible winter blizzard in southern Utah, Carvalho came near death due to starvation and exposure. A Mormon family from Parowan, Utah rescued him and nursed him back to health, Feb., 1854.

Needing funding, Carvalho set up a portrait studio in Salt Lake City. Brigham Young had graciously welcomed him. Carvalho painted the famed portraits of Brigham Young, various church leaders and sketched Chief Walker. Continuing west to Los Angeles, he met with other Jews there before returning east. In 1857 he published *Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the West*. Owing to the paucity of record keeping by John Fremont, Carvalho's diaries of the disastrous Fremont 1853-1854 mission of exploration, Carvalho's book and sketches became the definitive historical records that are used by scholars of the American west today.

The first permanent Jewish settlers in Utah were a young Jewish couple from Silesia, recent immigrants to America, Julius Gerson Brooks and his wife Isabell (Fanny). Julius, born in 1821, immigrated to New

York when he was twenty one. He made his living as a peddler through New England making a modest living. Returning to Silesia he married sixteen year old Fanny and the young couple returned to America.

They moved west to, Galena, Illinois to try their luck. A recently returned army veteran from the Far West told them of fascinating opportunities if they will but reach for it. Joining a wagon train of fifteen Calistoga Wagons, *Prairie Schooners*, they headed toward Oregon by way of Utah. July of 1854 they reached the Salt Lake Valley. The beauty and possibilities stirred them. They quickly decided to make Salt Lake City their home. The Millennial Star, the local newspaper in 1854, listed twenty two businesses. Included was the "Mrs. Brooks' Millinery Store and Bakery." The Brooks' were to become solid citizens of Salt Lake City and Utah; respected members of the business, religious and social community. Builders of the Brooks Arcade, their name was and is still recognized. In time the Brooks opened shops in the gold mining communities of Marysville, California and various Sierra Nevada mining towns. The Brooks prospered in Utah. The Brooks prospered in America.

In later years, Julius Brooks told his daughter, Mrs. Samuel H. Auerbach, that the returned army veteran, who had told them of the many opportunities in Galena, Illinois so many years ago, tried his hand at farming. He failed as a farmer in Illinois. He later tried his abilities as a merchant in Galena. He failed at that as well. His name was Ulysses S. Grant. Grant succeeded as a Union Civil War general and became the President of the United States.

Brigham Young and Mormon hopes of setting up a separatist, theologically based home in Utah quickly ran into conflict with the Federal Government of the United States. The Federal government claimed ultimate sovereignty. 1857, President Buchanan sent Federal troops under Col. Albert Sidney Johnston<sup>2</sup> to Utah. Brigham Young sounded the alarm. Mormon men assembled for military duty to defend their New Zion against the "Gentiles." Non Mormons as well as Jews were known as Gentiles. The "Utah War" broke out. Mormon settlements were abandoned, Salt Lake City was evacuated. Col. Johnston rode into Utah, nary a shot was fired in anger. The war, ofrnon- war was over in a bloodless victory for the Union.

Wanting to avoid conflict with the returning, uneasy Mormons, Johnston set up Camp Floyd, a military camp thirty five miles from Salt Lake City. Not wishing to be caught in the potential fighting between Mormon and Gentile, the Brooks' moved for a ten year period to California. The only *Jews* remaining in Utah in 1857, at the time of the war, were two documented Jews who had converted to Mormonism. Alexander Neibaur arrived in Utah in 1848. He was said to have been educated as Rabbi. Levi Abrahams, the second Jewish convert, arrived in 1854.

The establishment of Camp Floyd brought much needed hard currency and significantly increased economic activity in the Salt Lake economy. The Pony Express and the Overland Stage service were introduced. The needs of the soldiers and their families encouraged the movement of non-Mormon settlers, wagoners, freighters and shopkeepers to move into the valley. Jewish merchants and freighters arrived with the rising economic opportunities.

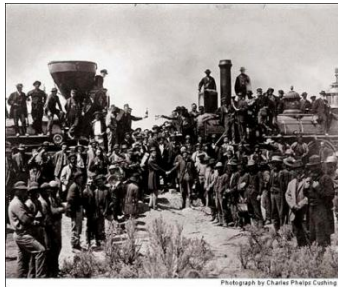
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<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert\\_Sidney\\_Johnston](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Sidney_Johnston)

Nicholas Siegfried Ransohoff, a German Jew, arrived in 1858. He helped organize Utah's first Masonic Lodge. Contemporary records observed Ransohoff peculiar dietary restrictions. Camp Floyd was closed by President Lincoln two years later. Every soldier was needed back east to serve in the Union army. All the garrison supplies had to be sold. Ransohoff, as did other non-Jewish merchants, bought supplies on the spot for cash. However, Ransohoff could not take delivery of a large supply of salted, stored meat. The meat was pork and his Orthodox observances, even on the frontier, did not permit him to deal in pork. Ransohoff instead advanced Brigham Young \$30,000 to purchase the entire supply of pork. Ransohoff and young remained close friends for the balance of their lives.

Samuel H. Auerbach, representing his brothers Frederick and Theodore, Jewish merchants from California, arrived in 1859 with a wagonload of goods. The Auerbachs expanded from one rugged gold rush mining town after another, from Rabbit Creek to Bodie, California. Mining boom towns were not for the faint hearted. Bodie's reputation was anchored forever when a young girl wrote in her diary, "Goodbye God, I'm going to Bodie." Auerbach opened up a tent store in Salt Lake City to business. Only this time, he and his brother Frederick chose to stay when the army moved away to fight in the *War Between the States*.

F. Auerbach & Brothers flourished in Utah, becoming significant factors in its economic development. When the Union Pacific Railroad stretched across America from the east, in the great race to build a transcontinental rail line with the Central Pacific coming from the west, the Aurbach's set up stores as the line advanced, from Bryan, Wyoming to Ogden. At Promontory Point, two spikes, one gold, one silver, were driven anchoring the last rail in place. The spikes united the American continent into a single unified country. F. Auerbach & Brothers were there to witness the moment in history.



Driving the Spikes -1869



Promontory Point

Tensions between the Mormons and the *Gentiles* continued to grow during and after the Civil War.

Mormons accused the Gentile merchants of profiteering and immoral economic activity culminating in charges of Federal Judicial corruption and murder. Mormon Church leaders began preaching against the outsiders. A boycott of non-Mormon businesses was initiated. Mormons actively responded to the boycott call. One year after the end of the Civil War, 1866, the Gentile merchants were facing ruin. They organized themselves and wrote to Brigham Young offering to be bought out.

Young, ever mindful of Federal governmental interference in New Zion's life, was concerned. Forcing out non-Mormons would invite even heavier Federal interference in Utah. The Church's response, create a business moral compass, a parallel mercantile arrangement. Prices that the Church deemed fair would be charged in a Mormon led and approved businesses. The Gentiles would have to compete against the newly created Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution. Signboards appeared above Mormon businesses, an "all-seeing eye" identifying them as being members of the ZCMI were painted at the top. Sales at Gentile and Jewish stores alike collapsed. The competitive boycott by the Mormons took hold. Many Gentile and Jewish businesses failed or moved north toward the railhead robust Gentile town of Corinne.

Corinne served the mining towns of Montana and Wyoming. In 1873, Corinne, swollen to 4,000 souls, was booming. Over time the boycott eased. Jewish and Gentile businesses were forced from Salt Lake City. The damage to Salt Lake's economy, the societal positive of the Church, injured the Mormons as well. Twenty years later Corinne was a ghost town, the boycott, long over. Jewish and Gentile Merchants moved back to Salt Lake City. The Corinne and ZCMI accomplishment had produced a growing political awareness amongst the Gentiles of the need to create a political counter-balance to Mormon dominance. Utah's first opposition party emerged in the hamlet of Bear River. Largely led by Christians, the nascent political effort included Jewish names in its roles, Samuel Kahn, Gumpert Goldberg, Julius Malsh and Simon Bamberger.

The seemingly lost decades of 1860-1880 did not mean that the Jews were forced from their homes in Salt Lake City. Jews have always had a special relationship with the *Latter Day Saints*. Jews were viewed much more favorable than were Christians by the *Saints*. "They were distant cousins". The small Jewish community in Salt Lake City continued to grow.

The small Jewish community in Salt Lake City formed the Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1864. The Society looked after Jews who were poor or had fallen on hard times. High Holiday services were held in the homes of a local Jewish merchants between 1864 and 1866. Later, the Mormons generously donated use of the Seventies Hall, an LDS communal building accommodating the growing Jewish community's need for more space for High Holiday services. They wanted to encourage the Jews to worship God. Brigham Young, respecting and supporting the Jewish community's needs, donated land to the Jews, 1869, for a communal Jewish cemetery.

In succeeding years, Jewish worship was held in LDS buildings, Masonic, Odd Fellows and other rented space. The Jewish community continued to grow. Itinerant mohels, such as Rabbi H. Lovenberg of Elko, Nevada, came to Salt Lake to circumcise Jewish children. A Torah was obtained. The need for a Jewish communal center was becoming evident.

Congregation B'nai Israel (Children of Israel) was formally organized in 1873. Five years later, the Congregation began talking seriously about a permanent Jewish house of worship and a religious school to educate their children.

July 9, 1881, twenty three members of B’Nai Israel met and authorized, President Henry Siegel to purchase a lot at First West and Third South Streets in Salt Lake.<sup>3</sup> Siegel signed the papers and paid John Sharp \$2,600 for the “Tanner’s lot”. Construction of the synagogue was completed in 1883. It was an strange sight for Gentile and Mormon alike in Salt Lake, a Jewish ceremonial parade, chupah, singing and rejoicing as the Torah was proudly carried to the new synagogue. The first service, at the first permanent Jewish house of worship in Utah was held March, 1883.

Keeping kosher was considered near impossible in Salt Lake City where no shochet and no Rabbi were employed. Holidays were celebrated from fasting on Yom Kippur with a full day of prayer to matzas on Pesach as traditionally as possible. The Torah was read every Shabbat. After a year of effort, discomfort grew within the congregation. The largely German Jewish membership felt increasingly separated from the developing American Jewish tradition they wished to follow. Congregation B’Nai Israel voted to invite to their pulpit a young, recent graduate from the reform Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Rabbi Leon Strauss. Rabbi Strauss brought with him the Minhag America, a new siddur. The siddur was a product of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise’s<sup>4</sup> reformation of the European Orthodox model of worship. The Minhag America siddur reflected Wise’s understanding of the American Jewish community’s needs. Reform services incorporated English sermons, men and women sitting together, not wearing a kippah, sometimes organ music and in some places changing the Sabbath day to Sunday. Conforming more and more to the Christian environment about them Jews were able to assimilate better. Ultimately changes in the traditional interpretation of Jewish religious law, especially what was Kosher or not, and Jewish concepts of salvation were included to more closely reflect American life. When Rabbi Strauss arrived in 1884, Reform Judaism was the overwhelming choice of worship that American Jewry adapted.

Rabbi Strauss, the first Rabbi in the State of Utah, served only ten months before the congregation broke apart, acrimoniously, bitterly over the form of the 1885 High Holiday services he had proposed. Orthodox members of the Congregation B’Nai Israel angrily left to hold services once again in private homes. The majority of Congregation B’Nai Israel, wishing a Reform High Holiday worship of God, rented space separately. The first Jewish house of worship fell into discordant disuse and decayed. The building, used by neither the Orthodox nor the Reform, was sold June 16, 1889 for \$20,000.

The need and desire for a permanent house of worship remained. The Reform majority set out immediately to raise funds, purchase land and contract to build a new bigger, more impressive Temple. Their new Temple would be a statement, to the Mormon and the Christian communities about them, of Jewish presence, affluence, acceptance and permanence in Utah.

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<sup>3</sup> The synagogue location today is the site of the historic Peery Hotel. The Peery Hotel is on the National Registry of Historic Places. <http://www.peeryhotel.com/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac\\_Mayer\\_Wise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Mayer_Wise)



Congregation B'Nai Israel



Congregation Montefiore

The Reform Community fully reconstituted as Congregation B'Nai Israel purchased a lot at 249 South 400 East Streets in Salt Lake City. A magnificent Temple, rock faced native Kyune stone building with a huge golden dome rising 83 feet from the ground, was built by the 83 family membership. Phillip Meyer, the nephew of Frederick H. Auerbach of Salt Lake was brought in to design the structure. Meyer, the German government architect for the Kaiser, created a design that was a smaller reproduction of the Great Synagogue in Berlin, Germany. Phillip Meyer was murdered by the Nazis, Oct. 15, 1943 at the German concentration camp of Theresienstadt. Berlin's Great Synagogue was burned on Kristallnacht. Meyer's parents, Gustav Meyer and Rosa Auerbach Meyer, lived in Salt Lake City. They are buried in the Salt Lake City Jewish cemetery.

The cornerstone of the new temple was laid Sept. 26, 1890. The building was dedicated July 12, 1891.

The 1880's began the huge displacement of millions of Eastern European and Russian Jews to America. Some migrated to Salt Lake City and Utah.

The small Orthodox former members of Congregation B'Nai Israel renamed their community, "Congregation Montefiore, in honor of the great English Jew, Sir Moses Montefiore. In 1902, Morris Levy donated a lot at 355 South Third East and Isadore Morris placed \$150 in gold dust on the table to begin contributions toward building a new synagogue. The cornerstone was laid on 13 August 1903, with a dedicatory address by President Joseph F. Smith of the LDS Church. A large contribution by the LDS Church was probably acknowledged by this honor.

The dissension concerning ritual continued within Congregation Montefiore. The Conservative ritual seemed inappropriate to several of the more Orthodox members. Accordingly, a third congregation was established under the name of Shaarey Tzedek (Gates of Righteousness) in 1918. This new congregation built a synagogue at 833 South Second East. The financial woes of the Great Depression ended Shaarey Tzedek in 1932, and its members found their way back to Congregation Montefiore. However, the three congregations had separate cemeteries--Bnai Israel and Montefiore within City Cemetery above Fourth Avenue and Shaarey Tzedek above Twelfth Avenue."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.media.utah.edu/UHE/j/JEWISCOM.html>



Congregation Shaarey Tzedek closed its doors due to a lack of membership growth and a lack of funds.

Congregation Montefiore merged with Congregation B'nai Israel in 1972, after many years of debate and discussion.<sup>6</sup> A new combined congregation was established, Congregation Kol Ami.<sup>7</sup> A new building was built.<sup>8</sup> The new congregation prides itself, as Louis Zucker reflected at the time, "As Jews, we are free to the utmost, in this Mormon Zion, to shape our ends and means as a community and congregation as we ourselves desire."<sup>9</sup> Congregation Kol Ami describes itself, "We do our best to serve every Jew in our midst. We belong to both the Union for Reform Judaism and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism." They have 385 member families.



Congregation B'rith Shalom, Ogden, Utah

Salt Lake City was not the only city in Utah to organize and build a Jewish house of worship. Ogden, Utah, about 40 miles north of Salt Lake City, not far from the former Gentile city of Corinne, was built as a rail head for the Union Pacific Railroad. As a commercial center it too attracted Jewish merchants looking for economic opportunity. The Jewish community of Ogden organized themselves into an Orthodox congregation, Ohav Shalom in 1890. Ogden's streets are named for the U.S. Presidents. The synagogue is located on Grant Ave.

Ohav Shalom, as did Ogden, remained relatively small. The community grew slowly. Ohav shalom changed its name, 1921, to Brith Shalom and built a small permanent synagogue building. The community is a member of the American Reform movement today. Fire In the 1990's severely damaged the interior of the the synagogue. Congregation Brith Shalom is of modest means. They generally have a Rabbi on an itinerant basis and or on High Holidays. Weekly services are conducted by the membership. To rebuild the synagogue and to recover from the terrible fire, the larger Christian and Mormon communities contributed labor, money and love. Ogden is recognized today, by most Americans, as the location of the Internal Revue filing center.

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<sup>6</sup> The building was sold to a Greek Orthodox Church community and is still used as a house of worship.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.conkolami.org/index.shtml>

<sup>8</sup> Congregation B'Nai Israel sold their building after the merger. It is a design center whose present owner a Mormon has gone to great trouble, expense and respect to maintain the synagogue as it looked in 1891. The building is on the National Registry of Historic Places.

<sup>9</sup> A Homeland in the West, Eileen Hallet Stone, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 2001, pg. 17

Utah's Jewish history is unique in two other aspects. The first non-Mormon to be elected Utah's governor was a Jew. "In 1916, Simon Bamberger ran for the office of governor of the state of Utah. Bamberger was the first non-Mormon, the first Democrat and the only Jew ever to seek that office. During the campaign, Bamberger visited a remote community in Southern Utah that had been settled by immigrant Norwegian converts to Mormonism. According to historian Leon Watters, the community's leader, a towering Norwegian, met Bamberger at the train and told him menacingly, "You might yust as vell go right back vere you come from. If you tink ve let any damn Yentile speak in our meeting house, yure mistaken." Bamberger is said to have replied, "As a Jew, I have been called many a bad name, but this is first time in my life I have been called a damned Gentile!" The Norwegian threw his arm around Bamberger and proclaimed, "You a Yew, an Israelite. Hear him men, he's not a Yentile, he's a Yew, an Israelite. Velcome my friend; velcome, our next governor." The Norwegian was correct; Bamberger won the election.

His Mormon friends noted Bamberger's civic mindedness and urged him to run for governor. Despite being a Democrat, Bamberger's policies paralleled those of Teddy Roosevelt and the Progressives. He insisted that the legislature balance the state budget, create a public utilities commission to regulate the price of electricity and gas and banned gifts by utility companies to public officials. He passed a modified line-item budget veto; created a state department of public health; instituted water conservation; and advocated for a lengthened school year, workers' compensation, the rights of unions and the non-partisan election of judges. Bamberger, a teetotaler, supported prohibition. He saw most of his platform voted into law.

Bamberger died in 1926 and is buried in the cemetery of Congregation B'nai Israel, Salt Lake City.

Of course, he's buried in the 'Yentile' section."<sup>10</sup>

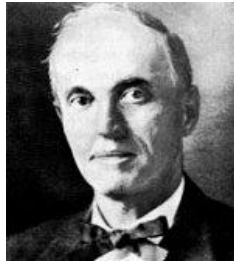
Bamberger strongly supported, 1910, a Jewish agricultural settlement in Clarion, Utah. Theodor Herzl had died six years earlier. Herzl began a vast movement of Jews in spirit if not in fact to return to Palestine to rebuild Zion. Agriculture was a central part of Zionism. Bamberger wanted Jews to come to the New Zion.

The idea of Jews becoming farmers was not new to the American Jewish experience. It had been tried repeatedly for the previous thirty years, almost always ending in failure. The Jewish agricultural community of Clarion survived for a few years only to end in failure.<sup>11</sup> Nothing is left of Clarion save a few Jewish graves. The graves of the builders of the new Zion are respectfully tended to by the present land owner, a Mormon.

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<sup>10</sup> American Jewish Historical Society, referenced by  
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Bamberger.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.jewishmag.com/127mag/cotopaxi/cotopaxi.htm>



Moses Alexander

Simon Bamberger was not the first Jewish American to be elected the governor of a U.S. State. Moses Alexander was elected governor of Idaho, 1914. He served from 1915-1919. For a short few years two Jews served as governors of American States, at the same time, Idaho and Utah.

Jews were not first elected to governorships in the Eastern States where large concentrations of Jews lived but in the frontier states of West. Freedom, toleration and acceptance flowed from the West to the East. The American dynamic of measuring an individual on the basis of who they were, what they accomplished and not what religion they practiced was stronger in the West than the East.

The history of Jewish relations with the Latter Day Saints is a history as long as the church itself. It is only in recent years that the Mormon theistic driven mission to convert the living and the dead has brought the LDS church into conflict with the Jewish world.

Joseph Smith sent Orson Hyde,<sup>12</sup> an LDS apostle, to prepare the land of Palestine for the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland. In Europe, Hyde sought meetings with Jewish community leaders, not to proselytize them but to urge them to return to Palestine. He continued on to Jerusalem. October 24, 1841, he prayed on the Mount of Olives to "dedicate and consecrate this land... for the gathering together of Judah's scattered remnants."<sup>13</sup> Orson Hyde's mission began a long and continual positive link between Mormonism, Palestine and later the modern State of Israel.

Senator William King of Utah served from 1917-1941 in the U.S. House of Representatives and in the United States Senate. Senator King was very instrumental in the creation of the American Palestine Committee in the early 1920's. The American Palestine Committee's purpose was to support the Zionist movement's objectives and the return of the Jews to Palestine. The committee was a major national organization of Christian leaders from the U.S. Congress, business, economic, education and American religious movements. The American Palestine Committee dissolved with the creation of the State of Israel.

Latter Day Saints Church President Spencer W. Kimball dedicated a 5 ½ acre park, overlooking the *Old City* near Mt. Scopus, in honor of Orson Hyde, October 24, 1979. It had been 138 years to the day since Orson Hyde first came to the same location, erected a small altar and offered his prayer beseeching

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<sup>12</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orson\\_Hyde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orson_Hyde)

<sup>13</sup> (HC 4:456-59)

Gods blessings and to prepare the land for the return of the Jews. It was Christian Zionist prayer., It was a Mormon Zionist prayer.<sup>14</sup>

Teddy Kollek, mayor of Jerusalem and other dignitaries, attended the park's dedication. President Kimball announced shortly after the dedication plans to construct a permanent branch of the Brigham Young University in Jerusalem. The church obtained a 49-year lease on land and began construction in 1984. Leasing of land as opposed to ownership of a land in Jerusalem was a political compromise to satisfy the strong protests of the Jewish ultra Orthodox against the Mormons. Until a 1982 agreement with Israel, the Mormons had been aggressively seeking converts to Mormonism in Israel. After 1982, the Mormon Church agreed to cease conversion activity amongst Jews in Israel. The University opened to students in 1986. In Israel, the Church observes Saturday as the Sabbath instead of Sunday.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints maintains the largest genealogical database in the world. People often use it to trace their roots, but the information is kept for religious reasons. The goal of the church is to give every person who lived on Earth the chance to accept the gospel. This can be accomplished only if the ancestry of all humanity is traced back to Adam and Eve.<sup>15</sup>

Mormon theology gives people the chance to accept the gospel even after they die, reuniting families in the afterlife. Many critics see the practice as changing the deceased's faith involuntarily. Though the Mormons had agreed, in writing, not to actively seek conversions of Jews in Israel it did not preclude them from seeking to convert Jews that had died, including in the Holocaust. The practice of converting the dead Holocaust victims created a firestorm in Israel and amongst the world Jewish community over the insensitivity of the Mormons. To Jews its seemed to turn the victims of Holocaust into posthumous victims of forced conversions. Resentment and anger at the Mormon practice resulted in an agreement with the Mormons to cease posthumous conversion of Holocaust victims. Because conversion of the deceased is a fundamental tenet of Mormon faith, as late as 2008, Mormons have again been accused of not honoring the 1995 agreement to cease conversions of Jewish Holocaust victims.

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.nyx.net/~cgibbons/orson\\_hyde\\_prayer.html](http://www.nyx.net/~cgibbons/orson_hyde_prayer.html)

"Grant, therefore, O Lord, in the name of Thy well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to remove the barrenness and sterility of this land, and let springs of living water break forth to water its thirsty soil. Let the vine and olive produce in their strength, and the fig-tree bloom and flourish. Let the land become abundantly fruitful when possessed by its rightful heirs; let it again flow with plenty to feed the returning prodigals who come home with a spirit of grace and supplication; upon it let the clouds distil virtue and richness, and let the fields smile with plenty. Let the flocks and the herds greatly increase and multiply upon the mountains and the hills; and let Thy great kindness conquer and subdue the unbelief of Thy people. Do Thou take from them their stony heart, and give them a heart of flesh; and may the Sun of Thy favor dispel the cold mists of darkness which have beclouded their atmosphere. Incline them to gather in upon this land according to Thy word. Let them come like clouds and like doves to their windows. Let the large ships of the nations bring them from the distant isles; and let kings become their nursing fathers, and queens with motherly fondness wipe the tear of sorrow from their eye.

<sup>15</sup> [http://mormonism.suite101.com/article.cfm/lds\\_baptism\\_for\\_the\\_dead#ixzz0LfFSB2S2](http://mormonism.suite101.com/article.cfm/lds_baptism_for_the_dead#ixzz0LfFSB2S2)

The Mormon community believes their efforts to flag Holocaust victims and their families, to avoid including them in their genealogical records for possible conversion, has been compliant and positive. The disagreements between Mormon and the Jewish world continue. The strain is real.<sup>16</sup>

American Jewish life, since the first Jewish refugees came ashore in New Amsterdam in 1654, has been confounded with the willingness of America to more readily accept Jews if they would give up the outward trappings of their “peculiar” cultural identity. If Jews would be willing to shave their side-locks, abandon their skull caps and become in form and worship more “American,” the promise of America, the promise of economic, social and political equality would be open to them. It has largely been true. Most Jews chose to be more American, accepting the golden ring offered to them, assimilating more and more.

Mormon’s rejected abandonment of their differences, choosing instead to maintain their own tight identity against the Gentiles. They choose to abandon their homes among the Gentiles and seek a new Zion in the West. They choose to be different. The Mormons have and are growing rapidly. They began as an American religion. They are now a world faith. Jews and Judaism, especially American Judaism, searching for ways to become more like the rest of America and, not be so different, is stagnant. Perhaps Jews have a lesson to learn from the Mormons about the pride, the beauty and the future of being different, believing in who you are.

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[www.JASHP.org](http://www.JASHP.org)

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1036093.html>

