



PROJECT MUSE®

Marrow of Human Experience, The

William Wilson, Jill Terry Rudy

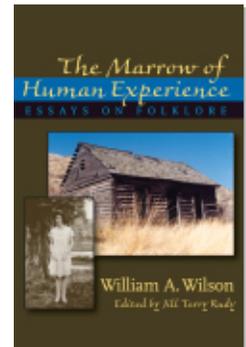
Published by Utah State University Press

Wilson, William and Jill Terry Rudy.

Marrow of Human Experience, The: Essays on Folklore by William A. Wilson.

Utah State University Press, 2006.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/9290.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9290>

THE FOLK SPEAK

Everyday Life in Pioneer Oral Narratives

One of my first introductions to folklore studies was attending the Fife Folklore Conference at Utah State University (USU) as an impressionable undergraduate student. I had been told by one of my professors at Brigham Young University (BYU) that I needed to introduce myself to Bert Wilson, who at that time was director of the folklore program at USU. I made the introduction, and during lunch, Bert sat down with me and talked about folklore and the fact that he was going to move to Provo to become chair of the English department at BYU. I became excited to know that he would be coming to BYU and that I would be able to work with him. Little did I know that I would eventually carry that excitement to graduate school at Indiana University to do a doctorate in folklore from Bert's alma mater. That particular lunch encounter is so indicative of the kind of man Bert is. He is a scholar of international repute who had time to sit with an excited neophyte and influence him in more ways than he'll ever know, the strongest influence being his kindness and humanity. During our twenty-plus-year relationship, it has been an honor to try to live up to the human values that he taught me, not only as a student in his courses, but as a human being in everyday life.

In February 2003 there was an exhibit at the Lee Library at BYU honoring William A. Wilson and his contributions to the field of folkloristics and Scandinavian studies. Thirty years before the exhibit, Bert published an article called "Folklore and History: Fact amid the Legends" in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* (1973a). In this article, Bert tells a story of trying to interest the special collections curator at BYU into accepting "the burgeoning collections of folklore," but that ultimately, special collections was only interested in "authentic historical documents." Wilson used this story to talk about how folklore could be useful to historians in putting

This paper was read at a conference on Everyday Life in Pioneer Utah. It was printed in *Nearly Everything Imaginable: The Everyday Life of Utah's Mormon Pioneers*, 485–503, eds. Ronald W. Walker and Doris R. Dant (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1999). Reprinted by permission of BYU Studies, Brigham Young University.

a human face on history and providing a more complete interpretation of events in the past.

In that article, Wilson attempts to speak to the validity and even necessity of using folkloric materials as part of historiography, arguing that up to that point in time the “only historians to make extensive use of oral traditions to reconstruct the past have been students of Black African history, forced to these traditions by the paucity of written documents.” Many scholars at this time were making similar arguments about the under-represented voices in historiography: Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and the *Discourse of Language* (1972); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987); and later cultural critics like Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1996); and the New Historicists, *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veveser (1989). What all these scholars have in common is the idea that historiography is a political enterprise representing voices of elite, ruling classes. Wilson alludes to this point in the article; the voices of seemingly insignificant protagonists in the American historical narrative, “of trapper and homesteader to that of the factory worker and sophisticated suburbanite,” are missing and forgotten.

Folklore, Wilson argues in “Fact amid the Legends,” is what can provide a glimpse into the attitudes, values, and beliefs of a community at a particular moment in history. He gives several examples from Mormon culture and history to illustrate this point. These include J. Golden Kimball stories, Mormon Nephite narratives, Mormon polygamy, folk heroes of the American West like Butch Cassidy, and Mormon missionary narratives. Those attitudes, values, and beliefs expressed by folklore may reveal communities at their best and worst, but they complete an official “factual” history of the community by describing what people of the community “believe to be fact.” These ideas on folklore and historiography were later expanded by Wilson into two separate articles, “Something There Is That Doesn’t Love a Wall” and the following article, “The Folk Speak: Everyday Life in Pioneer Oral Narratives.”

Wilson begins this article by stating that “A common misperception holds that the study of folklore is useful primarily for illuminating the past,” but that really this point is only one way folklore can be used in historiography, as was also shown in “Fact amid the Legends.” Folklore can be useful also to “give us a picture not so much of what ‘really happened’” in the past, “but rather of what those of us living in the present believe happened.” Grounding his ideas in Mormon pioneer narratives, Wilson uses the stories to illustrate the process of “communal re-creation” and that “the stories come in time to reflect the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the people keeping them alive and lose at least some of their credibility as accurate accounts of the past. That is, the narratives will tell us much more about those who relate them than they will about the events they recount.”

It is a tribute to Bert Wilson, in addition to many of his contemporaries, that he was grappling with salient issues that would eventually change the face

of folkloristics and even other related disciplines, including history. To know the influence of folkloristics in the humanistic disciplines, one need only look at the changing study objects and research questions in cultural studies, history, cultural anthropology, sociolinguistics, and sociology. This example of working across academic fields, then, shows the kind of man and scholar Bert Wilson is: a facilitator and consensus-builder rather than a fence-builder against other disciplines. It is also poetic irony and, unquestionably, a tribute to Bert's persistence that the exhibit in the Lee Library that honored him in 2003 also celebrated the renaming of the BYU Folklore Archives as the William A. Wilson Folklore Archives and acknowledged the merging of the archives into the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at BYU four years earlier.

—George H. Schoemaker

AS WE LOOK AT THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF COMMON PEOPLE IN PIONEER UTAH through the lens of folklore, we should make sure that we understand what kinds of images will be reflected by that lens. A common misperception holds that the study of folklore is useful primarily for illuminating the past. Just the opposite is true. To be sure, folklore is born in the past and relates events that occurred at earlier times, but it lives in the present. It will give us a picture not so much of what “really happened” in pioneer Utah, but rather of what those of us living in the present believe happened.

The reason for this circumstance is simple. Folk narratives are kept alive and are passed from person to person by the spoken word, by people who hear stories, like them, and then tell them to other people. As they participate in this process, narrators of the stories change them—not consciously, in most instances, nor in any attempt to deceive, but in response to the cultural imperatives of the moment. Like most of us who tell stories about events important to us, these narrators will selectively remember details from the past, will highlight and sometimes embellish those that appeal to them, and will leave others in shadow. Through this process—a process folklorists call “communal re-creation”—the stories come in time to reflect the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the people keeping them alive and lose at least some of their credibility as accurate accounts of the past. That is, the narratives will tell us much more about those who relate them than they will about the events they recount. What Elliott Oring has said about the truth value of folksongs can be applied equally well to the stories we tell about nineteenth-century Utah:

If a song is to continue, a generation must find something in it worth continuing while altering aspects which are no longer consonant with its own values and beliefs. . . . A song cannot be adequately conceptualized as the reflection of some ancient past [or in our case, the pioneer past]. At any point in its history, the song is the distillation of generations of cumulative modification. If it

can be said to reflect any group at all, perhaps it can only reflect the group in which it is currently sung—that group which has (for conscious or unconscious reasons) maintained and transformed elements from the past in the creation of a meaningful, contemporary expression. (1986, 10)

Applied to the stories contemporary Mormons tell about the practice of polygamy, for example, Oring's dictum would suggest that these Mormons would remember and relate narratives about plural marriage in terms meaningful to them in the present. And that, indeed, is the case. In those families that hold positive views of polygamy, narratives of harmony and cooperation between the families of plural wives circulate. In families that hold a less sanguine view of the practice, stories of heartbreak and discord, like the following, predominate:

A kind and mild man received instructions to get another wife. The first wife, knowing that this was a principle of the gospel, willingly accepted the situation and helped prepare for the wedding. She prepared the nuptial chamber and the wedding dinner. [Her husband] . . . and his new wife went upstairs, and [she] . . . was left to do the dishes. Then something happened. As she was doing the dishes and thinking things over, she got madder and madder. She went outside, picked up a hatchet, rushed upstairs, and chopped down the door. The new wife was so terrified she left and never returned. (Campbell 1970a)

Historians are sometimes dismayed by what they perceive as folklorists' lack of interest in the truth about the past. Truth is an illusive creature, seldom fully capturable, but folklorists are as much interested in it as are any other scholars. They simply seek different kinds of truth—truths of the human heart and mind. Folklorists understand that it is not what really happened in the past that captures the attention of most people and moves them to action, but what they "believe" happened. And they know that one of the best ways to get at what people believe is to examine the stories they tell about former times. If, for instance, one wants to know what polygamy was really like, one will be much better off relying on standard historical sources. But if one wants to know what contemporary Mormons believe polygamy was like, how this belief could influence the manner in which the historical record is interpreted, or, perhaps more important, how this belief reflects and shapes present attitudes and influences current behavior, then one would do well to turn to folk narratives like the one above.

So it is with stories of the pioneer era in general. Many people, most perhaps, do not learn of life in nineteenth-century Utah by reading historical treatises. They learn what life was like "back then" by listening to stories—stories

told in their homes, at family reunions, in Sunday School classes, in seminary classes, and occasionally across the pulpit. While these stories may have originated in actual historical happenings and may at times square with historical reality, they will have developed, through the processes of communal re-creation described above, into accounts that reveal how the common people of contemporary Utah view the everyday lives of Utah's common people of yesterday. More important, the stories will have become something other than mere reflectors of beliefs about the past. As usually occurs in the process of myth formation (and I use the word in its positive sense), the narratives have become projections onto the past of what we value in the present, historical constructions, as it were, after which we hope to conduct our own lives.

In saying this, I should make clear that, while folklore is communal in nature and reveals concerns common to a group, it would be a mistake to assume that a folk community is some sort of monolithic body whose members all think and act alike. No two members of any group will ever see the world through quite the same lenses. Still, the stories collected and submitted to the BYU Folklore Archives over the past four decades—the stories upon which this paper is based—present a fairly uniform view of the past held by those who have told the stories.

It should come as no surprise that this view is heroic. Most people seeking in their lore historical warrant for present-day action will see the past in heroic terms. Mormons are no different. The dominant theme in their pioneer narratives is struggle—struggle against nearly insurmountable forces of nature and humankind, carried on by valiant men, women, and children who do not yield to opposition. They may suffer severe deprivation and even death, but they do not falter or waver in the faith, and they remain ever true to their vision of the kingdom of God restored. They and their stories thus serve as exemplars of the way we should confront the challenges of our lives in our contemporary world.

Though the stories cover a broad range of subjects, they tend to cluster around three major themes: struggles on the trek West, struggles with Native Americans, and struggles to survive in a new land.

THE TREK WEST

Although accounts of the migration to Utah lie generally outside the focus of this paper, the telling and retelling of these stories was very much a part of the life of nineteenth-century Utah, as settlers in a new world sought courage to face present hardships by remembering the price paid to get to their new homes. One storyteller, for example, noted that his grandmother had told him trek stories when he was young “to impress on his mind the suffering of his ancestors to get across the plains and enable him to be born and raised in a Mormon environment” (Wixom 1975).

Some of the most poignant trek stories tell of the travails of children on the trail:

Grandma would tell the stories about walking the long, long way across the plains and some of the hard and frightening experiences of being at Winter Quarters and burying loved ones on the plains. She'd also tell of evening, as they were stopped for the night. Wagons and handcarts in a circle. Parents trying to keep warm by dancing the Virginia Reel and little children playing tag or Ring-around-the-Rosie or, if they needed to be quiet and rest, to just try to catch the sunbeams in their aprons. (Bryant 1972a)

Unfortunately, the stories reveal few sunbeams in the children's lives. Many tell of the youngsters' tragic deaths:

My great-grandmother . . . was a member of one of the numerous pioneer companies that came across the plains to Utah. One night, when the company was within the region of Wyoming, my great-grandmother slept next to a little girl. The weather was especially bad and the temperatures that night went far below zero. When they awoke the next morning, they found that the little girl had frozen to death and my great-grandmother's long hair was frozen to the stiff body. The only way they could get them separated was to cut my great-grandmother's hair. The pair of scissors they used has been passed on from generation to generation since that time and are now in the possession of my aunt. (Strong 1965a)

Other stories tell of children mourning parents' deaths:

My great-great-grandmother . . . decided to go to Salt Lake with the hand carts. But she died along the way and was buried on the plains. Her little girl cried and cried. The rest of the company got ready to go after the burial, and started off. When they camped for the evening, they noticed that the little girl was not with them. They sent back some scouts to see if they could find her. They retraced the entire day's journey and found the little girl crying on the grave of her mother. . . . They took her with them back to camp and eventually to Salt Lake. (Tometich 1967)

Still other stories tell of both parents and children attempting to show love and affection for each other in ways made more difficult by life on the trail. When a little girl lost her "precious doll that she had taken care of since her family had been forced to leave Nauvoo," she was heartbroken. Her mother, "sad to see her daughter so sad, . . . made a new doll with a face made out of an apple core and a dress made of an old rag" (Steed 1984). Another girl, wishing to give her mother a birthday gift but having no means to do so, "would pick the flowers that she thought were prettiest along the way and dry them

somehow. When they finally reached the valley, she had a lot of flowers. She pressed them in a glass frame and gave them to her mother for a birthday present” (Smith 1982).

The stories about the suffering of adults focus on their hunger, their chills, their weariness, and their deaths. The following story is representative of tales that are legion:

As one of the early wagon trains was nearing Utah, . . . their provisions were already nearly exhausted, and the people themselves were near exhaustion. During the storm, three members of the party died. After the storm had passed, their relatives and loved ones made arrangements to bury them. The ground, however, was frozen so hard that the poor pioneers were unable to dig the necessary graves. The people were faced with the problem of not knowing what to do but of having to do something fast. They had only a few blankets, but from those few they took three. They wrapped the bodies in these blankets. They hung the bodies from trees with ropes. They were high enough so that the wolves could not get to them. Thus, the wagon train continued on its journey toward the promised land, leaving their loved ones and friends taken care of as well as possible. (McCauley 1968)

Some of these pioneers, once arrived in their promised land, carried marks of the journey throughout their lives. “Grandma could never understand,” said one narrator,

why anyone would want to cultivate a cactus plant. She and her husband had both walked across the plains as children, and as they made their journey west there seemed to be so many thorny weeds and rocks. Grandpa said, “My feet were torn and bleeding and many times I could hardly walk.” His widowed mother . . . had brought the fatherless family through to Payson, Utah. She had done her very best to keep her family as clean as possible, but the little boy’s feet had healed with dirt still under the skin. When he died of cancer at age 67, his son stood by the bedside. The nurse said, “I wonder why the bottoms of his feet are black?” His son said, “It is all right. He is carrying the soil of the plains with him, even to his grave.” (Bryant 1972b)

According to the above story, the widowed mother brought the family through the trek west to safety. Another account states:

While Sarah Jane Matthews and her husband were crossing the plains with a handcart company, the husband developed arthritis

to the extent that he could not ford the streams and rivers without a great deal of pain. Sarah carried him across the remaining streams. This is a literal example of supporting the priesthood. (Card 1971)

Though this story is recounted somewhat tongue-in-cheek, it nevertheless points to the fact that in story after story, pioneer women emerge as some of the strongest characters in the narratives. One good sister lost her husband soon after the trek to Salt Lake had begun, and three of her six children died on the way. The first year in Salt Lake Valley, the three remaining children were caught in a storm and froze to death. “This would seem to be the end of the story,” said the narrator, “but this woman went on to get married again and start her life all over. She never gave up” (Anderson 1967a). Contemporary Mormons, both women and men, could scarcely find greater examples of courage to face present challenges than is to be found in these stories of rugged pioneer women who never gave up.

NATIVE AMERICANS

Once in Utah, the Saints faced new dangers from the original inhabitants of the region. Though the pioneers had encountered Native Americans on the trek west, few accounts in the archive give details of these encounters. Once the pioneers had arrived in Utah, however, numerous stories developed recounting struggles between settlers and Native Americans. Though the Mormons probably treated the Native Americans better than did most western settlers and consequently had fewer violent encounters with them, the events that have caught the fancy of later storytellers have been the hostilities and conflicts. These narratives are full of dramatic intensity and once again characterize the pioneers as bold and heroic. Unfortunately, they also paint an uncomplimentary and dehumanizing picture of the Native Americans. Told entirely from the settlers’ point of view, the narratives refer to Native Americans again and again in pejorative terms, as “bucks” or “squaws,” and depict them as less than fully human—vicious, depraved, dirty, lazy, smelly, and stupid. One can only wonder how some of the stories discussed below might sound told from the perspective of the Native Americans.

Many stories of Indian raids and ruthless murders closely resemble accounts of the savagery perpetuated against the Mormons in Missouri a few decades earlier, suggesting that the Saints at times viewed both Missourians and Native Americans in a similar light. For example, one of the Missouri persecution narratives telling of an attack on the Saints at Haun’s Mill states:

It was at the time of the Haun’s Mill episode, and during this time some of the Saints had a warning before the disaster struck. H. Lee’s mother put him into or under a huge grate in the fireplace

just before the mob came into her house. They [the mob] saw the mother with the baby, and they killed his mother by shooting her. They took the baby and bashed him against the stone fireplace until his brains were running out. All this was witnessed by this young boy. (Bryner 1970)

A narrative from Sanpete County tells of a local massacre in almost parallel terms:

These boys [hired to help with the grain harvest] were just about to this farm, and they could hear these Indians whooping and carrying on, so they got down and crawled through the grass over to where they could see this ranch. The father must not have been at home at that time, and there was the mother and a little boy and then a baby. The little boy had run and hid and got away from them, . . . but they took the mother and tied her across a horse and whipped the horse and made it run with her. They took the baby and swung it around and hit its head on a tree and killed it. Then they set fire to the farm. . . . The way they had put [the mother] . . . on the horse had killed her too. (Blackham 1971a)

In similar narratives of brutality, the Native Americans cut off the arm of a man traveling to his home in Bountiful and beat him to death with it (Ball 1992), completely wipe out a group of settlers on the way to Manti (Blackham 1971b), kill and scalp a young boy herding cattle (Lundell 1974), and kill a father and son from Circleville on their way home from cutting wood, filling their bodies with arrows and then stealing their wagon and oxen (Blackham 1971c).

In numerous accounts, Native Americans attempt to kidnap the children of the settlers, especially if the children are fair haired. But they display their assumed depravity most clearly in accounts of how they treat other Native Americans, sometimes children kidnapped from other tribes, sometimes their own:

Granddad . . . was out working in the field one day and looked up, and two buck Indians had a little Indian girl they had stolen from another tribe, and they made him understand they wanted to trade the girl for some of Granddad's prize heifers he had secured to help build his herd. Granddad hesitated, and they placed her head on a chopping block and indicated they would chop her head off unless Granddad gave them the heifers. To save her life, he went along with their request. (Larsen 1974)

In one instance in Cache Valley, an Indian father threatened to kill his own daughter if a family of settlers would not allow him to exchange her for food. The settlers took the little girl in and raised her as one of their own. When she

was fifteen, her father came back after her. "She refused to go with him. She said that she loved her white parents better than her parents who would trade her off for food" (Woodhouse 1975).

Intrepid fighters themselves, the Native Americans in some stories are claimed to have greatly admired white men who resisted their attacks with fierce courage. According to one account, "a stage driver from Eureka was surrounded by warring Indians. He valiantly held them off for a great while, but was finally . . . captured. After he was killed, the braves cut out his heart and ate it because they wanted some of his great courage" (Roberts 1974). According to other accounts, the Indians actually released, rather than killed, dauntless foes.

But even more than they admired brave men, the Native Americans supposedly respected feisty pioneer women who would stand up to them with fire in their eyes. In narratives describing such encounters, the pioneer housewife is not unlike her predecessor in Missouri, who, as in the following story, fearlessly confronted mobsters:

The Saints knew they were in danger, so it was not unusual for Grandmother to have her gun close by when she was alone. One day two men came up to the door and said they were supposed to collect all of the weapons and they wanted her gun. She looked down the barrel at them and said, "All right, but I intend to unload it first." They rode away and didn't make any attempt to take it by force. (McCauley 1971a)

In a similar fashion, as the following three narratives indicate, spunky Utah pioneer women stood their ground against marauding Indians:

My grandmother was a little teentsy woman only about five feet tall and real light, and she wouldn't take guff from anybody. One day when she was baking bread, a buck Indian came just as she was taking a loaf out of the oven. I guess he asked for some, but when she said no, he said he'd take it anyway. Well, she was building up a fire and had put the poker and fire shovel right in the fire while she talked. Now the Indian was only wearing a little breech cloth and when he went to take a loaf, she jerked the red-hot shovel right out of the stove and smacked him on the bare behind. He pulled his knife and said, "I'll kill you." She took her shovel and said, "I'll burn you," and chased him out of the house. (Sabin 1961)

The husband [of a newly settled farm] had gone off to get supplies. The wife and children were left by themselves. One night some Indians came and started bothering them. Finally the Indians camped right out in front of the cabin. The wife could not sleep because she knew the Indians were planning to kill her and her family. She got

on her knees and prayed; after that she knew what she must do. She gathered her children, marched outside and spread their bedding out right in the middle of those Indians. She got her children to kneel down and had a family prayer. Then they all crawled into bed and slept as much as they could under the circumstances. The next morning the Indian in charge told her they were planning on killing her and her family, but when they saw how brave she was they decided not to. (McDonald 1984)

One evening as a certain woman was finishing milking the cows and making cheese in the milk house, there suddenly appeared at the door a small band of Indians. These Indians were very fierce looking and demanded to have the milk and cheese which was there. This pioneer lady, being a fiery-tempered woman, refused to give these Indians what they wanted. Instead she grabbed an axe which lay nearby and began swinging it around her head warning the Indians that the first to attempt to steal the milk and cheese would be very sorry. After contemplating their situation for several moments the Indians began to shrink back away from this woman and toward the door leading to their safety. The woman kept brandishing her weapon, threatening these intruders, and even sermonizing to them, saying that if they had come to her and asked in a gentle manner for something to eat she would gladly have given them what they requested. The Indians left. Later, however, they returned, this time in a different spirit. They asked the woman in a polite manner for some milk and cheese. She gave it to them, and from then on the Indians were very friendly to this "heap brave white squaw." (Rees n.d.)

In some of the stories, resourceful pioneer women move beyond winning respect of the Native Americans through plucky acts of courage and instead diminish their humanity by reducing them to buffoons. In one account, a housewife sicced her dog on Indians who had come begging for bread, causing them to flee in terror (Blackham 1971d). In another, a girl hid from approaching Indians in a flour barrel. Unable to breathe, she emerged from the barrel a ghastly white just as her unwelcome visitors burst into the house. They "took one look at her, thought she was a spirit sent to punish them, and they hurriedly backed out of the door and galloped away on their ponies" (Easten n.d.). And in still another example, a plucky pioneer girl turned a threatening Native American into a complete fool:

[This family] lived quite close to the hills and Indians were camped quite close to the foothills. This girl was washing; she had a washing machine that was an old wooden one that had a wheel that would

turn. This Indian brave came down and he had long braids. He came down and he started acting smart to her and talking smart to her and she couldn't understand him. He wanted different things that she had here at her home. . . . When she wouldn't give them to him, he grabbed her and started throwing her around. She grabbed one lock of his hair, his braid, and hurried and put it into the wringer and wound it up tight and fixed it so it couldn't run back, and then she turned and fled while he was tied to the wringer. (Blackham 1971e)

After relating an account of a battle in Diamond Fork Canyon between settlers and Indians who had stolen the settlers' cattle and scalped and cut off the right hand of one of their men, one storyteller added, "The men were called out on such occasions many other times to fight for their land and protect their families" (Anderson 1967b). I have no reason to doubt this story. Battles did occur, with casualties on both sides. But the statement gives not the slightest hint that the Native Americans who had occupied these valleys before the arrival of the Saints might also have been fighting for their land and to protect their families. Nor do any of the stories berating the Native Americans for begging for food suggest that they might occasionally have been reduced to such action because they had been driven from their homes and hunting grounds.

In defense of the pioneers and especially of those who have kept narratives about them alive, I should add that most people who tell the stories do not necessarily do so to deprecate Native Americans; they tell them to illustrate the heroism of their ancestors in taming this land and establishing a new Zion. But in order to achieve these ends, the settlers had to displace the area's original inhabitants. Stories that depict these inhabitants as savage, dishonest, and shiftless have made the task seem more justifiable. Unfortunately, even today the stories have helped keep alive attitudes that might otherwise have disappeared long ago.

A NEW LAND

Fortunately, an occasional story presents the Native Americans in a favorable light. In one story, for example, when the food supply of a southern Utah family was exhausted, a group of Native Americans appeared on the scene. They demanded food. When the mother, whose husband was absent, protested that they had none, the Native Americans opened a sack of clover seed, thinking it was flour, and began eating. They found it so bitter they spit it out and then left. The next morning, the mother "found fresh deer meat at the front door. The Indians had felt so sorry for the children having to eat nasty clover [that] they gave them something good to eat" (George 1982).

This account leads us to the third category of popular pioneer stories—those illustrating struggles to survive in an inhospitable physical environment,

where not only the Native Americans, but the Saints as well suffered severe deprivation. These narratives are in many ways similar to the tales of hardship and struggle experienced by the Saints on their trek west, except now the suffering arises not from the difficulties of the journey, but from trying to survive in a hostile land at journey's end. Once again, the tellers of these tales find in them examples of courage and fortitude we would do well to follow in our contemporary world. The stories are, as one narrator points out, "monument[s] to pioneer virtue" (Carson 1973a). Many of the stories, like the following, tell of both severe hunger and self-reliance:

Things got really hard. There would be lean years on the farm, but . . . [this fellow's] dad would never accept charity or help of any kind. One day he was so hungry because he would share what he had with the children that he fainted in the store. Everyone thought that that was such willpower and remarkable that a man . . . rather than accept charity would be so hungry that he would pass out in the store. They fed the family, and the next year things were better and he paid it all back again. He always paid his tithing, and he wouldn't take charity either. (Carson 1973a)

Other stories tell how the pioneers suffered from lack of material goods and from the harshness of frontier living:

When Grandma Gurr was a child, her mother told her of the hardships endured by those who settled in Orderville. They had no houses, so the settlers had to dig holes in the ground. These they covered with brush. When it rained they had to leave, and she said as soon as it would start to drizzle, the people would begin to pop up like prairie dogs. They were all very poor and could not afford shoes, so in the winter they would take a hot board with them when they went to school. They would run as fast and as far as they could, and then they would put the board down and stand on it to warm their feet and then begin over again. Granddad Gurr was sixteen before he had a pair of shoes. (McDaniel 1972)

And again:

My grandfather . . . raced over those hot desert rocks [at Rockville, Utah] on feet that had grown tough as shoe leather, and a good thing too, for he had never had a pair of shoes. It must have been icy enough in midwinter that he had to have makeshift shoes along with all the other makeshifts, for the hot, dry land produced little, and they were very poor. (McCauley 1971b)

Numerous stories tell of heartbreak caused by sickness and death. One narrative tells how a couple lost two children to diphtheria and then had to remain isolated so others would not catch the disease:

Nobody could go to the home and help take care of the sick. The poor mother and dad had to [care for them], and finally the children died. . . . Some of the . . . young fellows in the town went and dug the grave in the cemetery. Then they had to go stand on the other side of the fence clear away, while the parents put the two children in boxes. They had to build the boxes themselves and dress the children's bodies. They put them into the boxes all by themselves, took them down to the cemetery in their own wagon all by themselves, and put them in the grave—the mother at one end and the daddy at the other—and covered them over so no one else could get close to the plague. . . . Then the mother and daddy got in the wagon and drove home all alone. (Carson 1973b)

This story demonstrates, says the collector, how the people carried on “in the face of great personal sorrow” (Carson 1973b). The clear implication is that in the struggles we face in our lives we should do likewise.

During the pioneer era of hardship and trial, one major narrative cycle rose to prominence—stories of the Three Nephites, those ancient Book of Mormon disciples of Christ who were granted their wish of “tarrying in the flesh” until the second coming of the Savior to “bring the souls of men unto [Christ]” (3 Nephi 28: 9). Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and still today, narratives have circulated throughout the Mormon West telling of one or more of these disciples appearing to the pioneers and assisting them through difficult times.

Though the stories are interesting for their own sake, for our purposes they provide further insight into what contemporary Mormons perceive to have been the major trials in the pioneers' lives. The narratives cover a broad range of subjects, but their main themes roughly parallel those already illustrated in the stories cited above—struggles with the harsh natural environment, with illness, and with grinding poverty. Three examples will have to suffice. In the first, a Nephite helps a man escape death in a severe snow storm; in the second, two Nephites heal the child of a woman isolated from adequate medical assistance; in the third, a Nephite provides material assistance to a widow and her impoverished family.

This story was told to me by my father about his uncle, reported as having occurred in the 1880s during the time when settlers from Sanpete County, chiefly Fountain Green and Fairview, were moving over the mountain to settle Emery County. Circumstances had required Uncle Milas to cross over the mountain on foot, since the majority of the people didn't have . . . riding horses in those times.

As he got on top of the mountain, a storm hit, the temperatures dropped, it became very cold. He was unable to move on and unable to find much in the way of shelter, and he realized that unless he could find some and build a fire he would freeze. He did find some sort of sheltered place and attempted to start a fire but was unable to get one going successfully. The wood was damp and the wind and things just generally prevented the fire from burning. He was becoming more and more desperate, more and more hopeless of success. At last he did succeed in getting a tiny little ember going—a small flicker—but it was evident that it was not going to catch on. In fact it was dying out when suddenly someone stepped up behind him and threw something from a bucket onto the fire which made it immediately blaze up and begin to burn the wood vigorously. Uncle Milas turned about to see who had done it since he hadn't been aware of anyone else anywhere near him, and there was no one there. And he searched and called and was unable to find the person. And he always interpreted it as having been one of the Three Nephites who had helped him in a time of need. (Geary 1968)

There was a lady that had a child that was very sick, and she didn't live very close to neighbors. She was alone with the child—her husband wasn't home at the time. She was afraid the child was going to die, and she prayed earnestly that help could come some way to her, and she knelt down and prayed. Shortly after, there was a knock came to the door, and there was a man standing there at the door. He said he had been told to come there, that she had a sick child. He had a partner with him, and if she liked they would come in and administer to the child. She told him she would and didn't give it a thought that he was a stranger. . . . The two men came in and administered to the child. The child was healed almost instantly. She asked them to come in and sit down, but they couldn't stop. But her child was made well. She didn't see where they went. She thought the two men were the Nephites. She never did know where they went. (King 1945)

My aunt, who lived in Rock Point, Summit County, Utah, was left a widow with a large family. She just wondered how she was ever going to manage, and one day an elderly man came to her home and asked for bread. She said, "Oh, I wonder what I'm going to do! I just have this big family and all." But anyway she gave him a meal and brought him in and fixed him up, and when he left he said, "Sister, you'll be blessed. You'll never see the bottom of your flour bin." And she looked for him when he went out the door, and she couldn't find him anywhere. And she always felt that this visit was from one

of the Nephites. She had looked and looked and not any of the other neighbors had ever seen him. And she said as long as she lived she never did see the bottom of her flour bin. (Browne 1969)

In this last story, the Nephite gives assistance to the widow because, following the teachings of the Savior, she willingly shares her last meager provisions with a stranger. This pattern is followed again and again throughout the Three Nephites canon. The Nephites come to the assistance of those who, in spite of overwhelming hardships, strive to live gospel principles. As the stories continue to circulate among us today, they testify that those of us who follow the examples of our valiant pioneer ancestors will be similarly blessed.

The last two stories given above are interesting for another reason: the subjects are women. Indeed, in story after story the righteous person a Nephite visits is a woman—in many instances a woman struggling to care for her family by herself, because her husband is dead, on a mission, or simply away from home working. These are strong women, tough women, women who do not waver in the faith and who willingly sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their families. For women struggling today to overcome different but equally challenging obstacles, the stories encourage faithful perseverance as they face their trials.

Other pioneer women emerge from a variety of non-Nephite narratives who also serve as role models, but for other reasons—not just because they are faithful but because they are plucky, resourceful women with take-charge attitudes. One good widowed sister, for example, worked hard to support her children by taking in washing. She was thrilled when a neighbor gave her a sack of seed peas one day in exchange for her work. She carefully prepared the hard, sagebrush-covered ground for planting, made furrows, and then, on hands and knees, placed “each precious seed the right distance apart.” When she had completed the task, she stood up satisfied, turned around, and discovered that their old rooster had followed closely behind and had eaten every pea. She did not wring her hands in despair. She immediately killed the rooster, reclaimed and replanted the peas, and then ate the tough old bird. When summer came, she and her children enjoyed many meals from the pea patch (Strong 1965b).

In another instance, a sister in Spanish Fork used her old copper clothes boiler until it finally wore clear through and was completely useless. New boilers were available only in Salt Lake City. Her husband was too busy plowing to make the trip to buy a new boiler, and because the family horse was being used in the plowing, the sister could not make the trip herself by buggy. Undaunted, she

walked the sixty miles from Spanish Fork to Salt Lake City, bought a copper boiler, and carried it sixty miles home. This in itself was an impressive feat, even in those rugged pioneer days. But the thing that made the 120-mile hike really amazing was that when she made that grueling journey, . . . [she] was seven months pregnant. (Walker 1964)

CONCLUSION

As I look back over the stories discussed in this paper, I am aware that they seldom picture the routine events of everyday life in pioneer Utah. To be sure, they tell us of the hardships endured and of the faith and unyielding courage to withstand these hardships. But they do not tell us what the people ate, what they wore, how they made their food and clothing, how they built and furnished their homes, how they educated their children, how they entertained themselves, how they worked, how they worshiped. My grandmother, the wife of a homesteader in Idaho, baked eight loaves of bread for her large family every other day; my mother felt she had successfully passed the rite of passage to womanhood when she first cooked for threshers all by herself; my grandfather followed the yearly agricultural cycle of dry-land wheat farmers. Such details do not appear in these pioneer stories.

Discussing how the stuff of ordinary life gets transformed into legend, folklorist Richard M. Dorson writes:

There would be little point . . . in remembering the countless ordinary occurrences of daily life, so the legend is . . . distinguished [from regular discourse] by describing an extraordinary event. In some way the incident at its core contains noteworthy, remarkable, astonishing, or otherwise memorable aspects. (1962, 18)

Freshly baked bread appears often in pioneer stories: Native Americans come begging for it; Nephites deliver it to starving missionaries. But the baking of the bread or the cooking for threshers or the planting and harvesting of crops does not seem noteworthy, remarkable, or astonishing enough to have made its way into the stories we tell of our pioneer ancestors. We prefer instead dramatic stories of conflict, struggle, and heroic action.

And this observation takes us back to the point made at the outset. We have remembered the past in terms meaningful to us in the present. We have taken the actual events that gave rise to the stories discussed in this paper and, through the process of communal re-creation, have dropped some details, embellished some, and added some. In the process, we have created narratives that reflect ourselves—our values and attitudes—at least as much as they do the events described.

This is certainly not a process unique to Mormons. I have spent considerable time studying nationalistic movements. Many scholar-patriots, in attempts to create for their countries a national spirit and a sense of national purpose, have sought in the stories of their people's past historical models for what they want the nation to become in the present. Speaking of this process as it relates to living history exhibits in our own country, Mark Leone observes:

As a visitor, you take all this folklore and all this symbol mongering and imagine yourself to be the native of Williamsburg or Mesa Verde. . . . And because the data are relatively mute . . . , they are then more easily made to give the messages of those who do the reconstructing. . . . The tourist [at Williamsburg] does not really become immersed in the real eighteenth century at all; he is spared the shock of the filth, degradation, and misery common to that era, and is led into a fake eighteenth century, a creation of the twentieth. While in this altered frame of mind he is faced with messages—the reinforcement of standard modern American values like those surrounding the myths of our own origin as a nation—that come out of today, not two centuries ago. (1973, 130-131)

What Leone describes comes close to the process we follow as we tell and retell, and in the telling create and re-create, the stories of our pioneer past. I would not use Leone's word "fake." I see nothing pernicious, or even conscious, in the communal re-creation of our past in folklore. I would use instead the word "constructed." The stories give us a constructed past, a mythical past, a past shaped, as Leone suggests, in terms of our contemporary values, in terms of what we want ourselves to be today.

In saying this, I wish in no way to detract from or diminish the importance of our pioneer heritage. My own roots are too firmly embedded in that heritage for me ever to disparage it. Of my eight great-grandparents, six of them were early converts to the Mormon church from Denmark, England, and Wales. Four of them were part of the exodus from Nauvoo in 1846. Three of these four remained in Winter Quarters, while the fourth marched with the Mormon Battalion. All six of them crossed the plains before the coming of the railroad, one dying on the trip. Four of them crossed in wagon trains, two of them in a handcart company. One of them participated in the united order experiment in Brigham City. Another participated in the skirmishes designed to delay the advance of Johnston's army. All of them played important roles in establishing Mormon communities in Utah. The blood of the pioneers courses through my veins, and I am immensely proud of these ancestors. My regard does not change the fact that the stories many of us have grown up hearing construct a picture of Utah's past that focuses on the heroic and leaves in shadow the living, breathing human beings, with all their human foibles, who have made possible our being here today. If we have in our folk narratives created a picture of the past that is in large measure the image of what we value and want to become, what is that picture? With the exception of those narratives that reflect and continue to strengthen demeaning stereotypes of our Native American brothers and sisters, it's a pretty good picture. In the stories we find both women and men who, inspired by their unwavering faith in the restored gospel, live always by their principles. We find men and women who will not be swayed from their course

by persecution, the ravages of nature, unrelenting poverty, illness, or death. We find women and men who, no matter what trials this life may bring, believe that, if they persevere, in the end all really will be well. I have the feeling that if my pioneer fathers and mothers were shown this picture they might smile a bit and then say, "Well, we weren't quite like that, but we hope you will be."