In December 2009, the Tanner Humanities Center began its initiative for the study of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, its institutions, history, culture, and people. Our intention was to confront a tribalism on campus and in the community that divided us into hostile camps and denied understanding and tolerance. We sought to make a difference by bridging the fault lines and nurturing empathy through learning.

The time was ripe for this initiative. Gordon B. Hinckley led the church. We had found a true friend in historian and recorder Marlin K. Jensen. President Michael K. Young of the University of Utah was supportive of our work but was still cautious of lingering prejudice on campus. He observed that this effort could not be led by a Latter-day Saint, but that a Jewish professor might achieve success. The untimely passing of my colleague and best friend Professor of Utah History Dean May also fostered a time of reflection at the U that opened opportunities for a new awareness of how bigotry rents the fabric of humanity. Yet, as I was told by a university administrator, “This is a great idea, but I can’t think of anyone who would be interested in supporting it.”

We began with a plan. I asked Professor of History Paul Reeve, Dean’s last Ph.D. student, to gather scholars and plan a curriculum of courses on the Latter-day Saints. With this blueprint, we funded courses on the church and its people in philosophy, sociology, gender studies, film studies, rhetoric and writing, poetry and literature, world languages and cultures, and history. We brought to campus leading intellectuals like Richard Bushman, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, David Campbell, Gregory Prince, and Kathleen Flake. We organized conferences on women in the church; the beliefs and deeds of Sterling McMurrin, Obert C. Tanner, and Lowell Bennion; the 1978 revelation; and race relations in the church. We set a goal to raise $400,000 to fund and endow the first Mormon Studies Ph.D. fellowship. In fact, we raised nearly one-half million dollars. And, to bring new ideas to campus and community, we funded the Marlin K. Jensen Artist and Scholar in Residence Program that has brought professors from Utah Valley University, Brigham Young University, and the University of Otago in New Zealand to the U to teach. In all, we raised more than $1.2 million. Our initiative has set the pace for other university-based programs in the United States.

This entire effort was made possible by donations. The George and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation has been a valuable friend. The University of Utah supported our work. Two National Endowment for the Humanities grants have enriched the education of schoolteachers from around the United States with the people and events of Utah’s history. More than one hundred individuals have contributed. We are grateful for your faith in our work.

I will leave my position as director of the Tanner Humanities Center and the Mormon Studies Initiative in July 2019. I want to thank the men and women on campus and in the community who worked with us to select students and professors to hold our fellowships and scholarships. The staff at the Tanner Center, whose members are Jewish, Catholic, atheist, and Latter-day Saint, has taken on this work as a mission to repair our world. We have kept our shoulders to the wheel. It is our blessing that you have joined us in this endeavor. Perhaps the day-dawn is breaking.
In August 2018, the Tanner Humanities Center received a $169,999 award from the National Endowment for the Humanities for its Landmarks of American Culture and History teacher workshop program. The workshops will be held on June 16-21 and July 7-12, 2019 and be co-directed by University of Utah Professors of History Bob Goldberg and Paul Reeve. The Tanner Humanities Center is the only Utah organization to receive NEH funding during this grant cycle. This is the second NEH grant award the Center has received since 2016.

Titled, “Manifest Destiny Reconsidered: The Utah Experience,” the workshop aims to enrich the curriculum of teachers nationwide by helping them develop a nuanced understanding of western expansion. Under the direction of a diverse team of national and local scholars, teachers will investigate how religion, race, gender, and class impacted the Utah migration and challenges standard interpretations of Manifest Destiny and American citizenship. This will include travel to local historic sites, including Emigration Canyon National Historic Landmark, Donner Hill, This is the Place Heritage Park, Temple Square, Fort Douglas Military Museum and Cemetery, the Bear River National Historic Landmark, and The Golden Spike National Historic Site. The workshop also will provide an historical framework for analyzing how issues at the forefront of settling the Utah Territory – freedom of religion, equality, immigration, federal vs. state rights, economic opportunity, and violence – continue to shape our nation's political and social debates.

Additional workshop faculty and community experts include Ryan Dearinger, Eastern Oregon University; Keith Erekson, Latter-day Saints Church History Library; Matt Grow, Latter-day Saints Church History Department; Jeff Nokes, Brigham Young University; Darren Parry, Northwestern Band of the Shoshone; Andrea Radke-Moss, Brigham Young University-Idaho; Quinn Rollins, Granite School District; Greg Smoak, University of Utah; Emily Utt, Latter-day Saints Church History Department.

For additional information, including the application process for teachers, see thc.utah.edu/teacher-workshops/neh/
A Conversation with 2018-2019 Latter-day Saints Studies Graduate Research Fellow—Dima Hurlbut

Dima Hurlbut, a doctoral candidate in the Department of History at Boston University, is spending the 2018-19 academic year at the Tanner Humanities Center as our Latter-day Saint Studies Graduate Research Fellow. He will deliver a work in progress talk at 12:00 p.m. on March 5th, 2019 in the Tanner Humanities Center’s Jewel Box Conference Room. The talk is free and open to the public.

How did you become interested in Latter-day Saints Studies?

Being raised in Salt Lake City as a non-Mormon, I have always been fascinated by religious history and this community’s faith traditions. As an Africanist historian, however, I never intended to pursue these topics in my academic work. I accidently stumbled into this field when I was investigating possible dissertation topics. Because of my interest in primary source materials and the Latter-day Saints’ reputation for legendary recordkeeping, I conducted exploratory research out of mere curiosity in the Latter-day Saints Church History Library over one winter break. After poking around in the impressive archival and manuscript collections relevant to the study of postcolonial Africa, I realized that a case study of the expansion of Mormonism into Nigeria could make a compelling contribution to the historiographical debates on African Christianity, Global Christianity, religious conversion, and Nigerian history.

What is your research project?

Drawing on archival documents, manuscripts, and oral materials, my project analyzes the expansion of Latter-day Saint churches into southeastern Nigeria. Specifically, I am interested in the nature of religious conversion and the effects of religious change at both the local and global level. My research explores not only why Nigerians were drawn to an American religious tradition, but also how Nigerians’ embrace of the Latter-day Saints’ message transformed how they married, buried their dead, and lived their lives. My research also considers how the emergence of congregations in southeastern Nigeria impacted the theology, practices, policies, and missionary strategies of both the Latter-day Saints and RLDS Churches.

How has the Latter-day Saints Studies Fellowship at the Tanner Humanities Center benefitted you and your research?

This fellowship at the Tanner Humanities Center has allowed me to spend an entire academic year immersed in archival and manuscript collections housed at L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Marriott Library Special Collections, and the Latter-day Saints Church History Library—a voluminous body of historical materials without which I would be unable to complete my dissertation project. I am a relative newcomer to the world of Latter-day Saints history, so I also have appreciated the opportunity to engage with the incredibly generous and talented group of scholars working at the University of Utah and in and around Salt Lake City.
What can we expect in your work in progress talk in the spring?

I intend to compare the RLDS and the Latter-day Saints missionary experience in southeastern Nigeria during the 1960s. By doing so, I aim to isolate the historical factors that have both facilitated and hindered the spread of this faith in southeastern Nigeria. I also will identify what this can tell us about why some churches have succeeded within the religious environment of southeastern Nigeria while others have not.

What is next for you in this field and in your career?

In Fall 2019, I will apply for post-doctoral fellowships and faculty jobs in history. I also aim to present the research that I have conducted during this fellowship at multiple conferences and defend my dissertation in Spring 2020. In the future, I hope to explore systematically what Latter-day Saints’ archival materials can contribute to historiographical discussions about postcolonial Africa that are not necessarily centered on religious issues.
The Tanner Humanities Center launched its Marlin K. Jensen Scholar and Artist in Residence program in fall 2016. The goal was to host prominent scholars with expertise in Latter-day Saints studies or renowned artists who explore the relationship between faith and art in their work. The semester-long residency is tailored to a specific scholar or artist, but each Marlin K. Jensen resident serves as a mentor for students, offers public lectures or performances, teaches workshops or classes for University of Utah students or lifelong learners, and contributes to the Latter-day Saints studies curriculum planning and program development. Utah Valley University Professor of Philosophy Brian Birch held this position in 2016-17, and Brigham Young University Professor of English Kimberly Johnson held it in 2017-18.

We are grateful to the many donors who have supported our efforts in developing and launching this program. Major donors include the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation, Greg and Julie Cook, Peter and Brynn Huntsman, Steven Petersen, Bill and Pat Child, the Bank of Utah, the Boyer Family Foundation, the R. Harold Burton Foundation, J. Frederick and Alice Pingree, and the Child Family Foundation.

Ian Barber, 2018-19

Ian Barber, former Fulbright Scholar and Associate Professor at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand, is our 2018-2019 Marlin K. Jensen Scholar in Residence. His Fall 2018 special topics course for the Department of History is titled “Mormons and the Past.” It considers perspectives from cultural anthropology, archaeology, and history and covers difficult topics such as religious violence and changing practices regarding identity, science, and sexualities. During the fall semester, Barber also delivered a work-in-progress talk at the Tanner Humanities Center titled “The Gospel you Bring . . . Shoots All: Re-Theorizing Revitalization in American Latter-day Saint and New Zealand Māori Prophet Engagements” and spoke in the Department of Anthropology on the “American Sweet Potato in Oceania.” He also presented “Whatever Happened to Zeptah? Ancient and Anachronistic Nomenclature, Textual Revision, and Joseph Smith’s Production of the Book of Abraham” at the 2018 Joseph Smith Papers Conference.

Andrew Lloyd, 2019-20

In Spring 2020, Professor Andrew Lloyd of the University of Texas at San Antonio will hold the Marlin K. Jensen fellowship and focus on Latter-day Saints and the high musical arts. The project is in the preliminary planning phase, but Lloyd aims to organize a public lecture series featuring guest composers from around the country, hold private and master class sessions with students and community members, and compose and premier a new choir and organ piece. Stay tuned for details!
Black, White, and Mormon II:  
A Conference on Race in the LDS Church  
Since the 1978 Revelation

On June 29-30, the Tanner Humanities Center hosted “Black, White, Mormon II: A Conference on Race in the LDS Church Since the 1978 Revelation” in collaboration with the College of Humanities’ Simmons Mormon Studies Professor Paul Reeve. The multidisciplinary conference took place at the downtown Salt Lake City public library. It opened with the Sterling M. McMurrin Lecture on Religion and Culture delivered by African American writer, historian, and activist Darius Gray. In “A 54-Year Journey Toward Racial Equality in the Mormon Church,” Gray discussed his efforts to press for racial change and serve as a voice for African-American Latter-day Saints. Scholarly and community panels followed, addressing the church’s racial policies, the impact of the 1978 revelation, steps needed to achieve racial equality, and the intersection of race and community. Participants also attended a lunch plenary session with Marcus Martins, Associate Dean of Religious Education at BYU-Hawaii.

Additional conference sponsors included:

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Better Days 2020 Gateway to Learning Educator Workshop

In June 2018, the Tanner Humanities Center piloted a teacher workshop for 30 Utah teachers in partnership with Better Days 2020, a non-profit organization dedicated to popularizing Utah women’s history in creative ways (www.betterdays2020.com). This workshop explored the suffrage and women’s rights movements in Utah from 1870-1970s. It examined the factors that led Utah women to be among the first to vote in the United States, asked how they lost and then regained the vote, considered how they participated in the national women’s suffrage and women’s rights movements, and analyzed voting challenges unique to Utah’s Native women.

Instructors for this workshop included Colleen McDannell, University of Utah; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Harvard University; Katherine Kitterman, Better Days 2020; Jennifer Robinson, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute; Naomi Watkins, Better Days 2020; and Quinn Rollins, Granite School District.

Due to the great success of this workshop, we will partner with Better Days 2020 in 2019 to offer two workshops on topics related to Utah women’s suffrage and the struggle for equal rights. Details will be forthcoming in Spring 2019.

2019 Conference

In partnership with the local grassroots organization Mormons Building Bridges, the Tanner Humanities Center will host an interdisciplinary conference in late September 2019 at the downtown Salt Lake City Public Library. The conference aims to provide a forum for thoughtful bridge-building between Latter-day Saint and LGBTQ+ communities. Invited speakers and panelists will address Latter-day Saints’ doctrine in terms of gender and sexuality, discuss how empathy connects faith groups, and analyze the role of LGBTQ+ stories for Latter-day Saints. The conference also will feature experts on spiritual trauma, religious liberty, and inclusion. Stay tuned for details.
Applause, Applause!

The University of Utah Press has just published *Conscience and Community: Sterling M. McMurrin, Obert C. Tanner, and Lowell L. Bennion*, edited by Robert Alan Goldberg, L. Jackson Newell, and Linda King Newell. McMurrin, Tanner, and Bennion were friends and colleagues whose lives often intertwined. Professors at the University of Utah, they addressed issues and events of their time, influenced the thought and culture of Latter-day Saints, and helped institute a new period of intellectual and social activism. This work addresses private and public aspects of their three lives and examines the roles each man played in shaping their communities. Additional contributors include Brian Birch, Mary Lythgoe Bradford, Kathleen Flake, J. Boyer Jarvis, Mark Matheson, William McMurrin, Kent Murdock, Gregory Prince, Carolyn Tanner Irish, Ellen Bennion Stone, and Emma Lou Warner Thayne.

The College of Humanities' Simmons Mormon Studies Professor Paul Reeve and the J. Willard Marriott Library have collaborated on a public history project called “A Century of Black Mormons.” This newly composed database documents and recovers identities and voices of black Latter-day Saints during the faiths' first 100 years (1830-1930). Additional project partners include the Latter-day Saints Church History Library, the University of Utah Department of History, and several Latter-day Saints Studies scholars and community members. See http://centuryofblackmormons.org

The College of Humanities is working to establish an Endowed Chair in Latter-day Saints Studies in honor of black pioneer Jane Elizabeth Manning James. Jane's legacy of lifelong adherence to the faith, despite persecution and denial of temple access, situates her at the intersections of religion, race, gender, and class. This chair will mark the University of Utah as a national leader of research in this area of Latter-day Saints Studies; help to honor and retain accomplished faculty; and fund related programming, research, and teaching. For additional information, contact Lexie Kite, College of Humanities Development Director, at lexie.kite@utah.edu or 801-585-5053.

On March 17, 2018, the Tanner Humanities Center hosted a Latter-day Saints Studies academic summit with scholars and development professionals from around the country and representatives from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Lead by Richard Bushman (Professor Emeritus of History, Columbia University) and Kathleen Flake (Richard Bushman Chair, Department of Religious Studies, University of Virginia), the group discussed the state of Latter-day Saints Studies programs nationally and how to work together to advance scholarship and programs in the future. Organizations represented were the University of Utah; Utah Valley University; Brigham Young University; Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship; Claremont University Graduate School; Utah State University; the University of Virginia; Columbia University; University of California, Santa Barbara; the Graduate Theological Union; the Widtsoe Foundation; and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, among others.
Latter-day Saints Studies Initiative Donors

The Tanner Humanities Center is grateful for the generous donations we have received from the community since 2010 in support of our Latter-day Saints Studies Initiative. If we inadvertently made any mistakes or left anyone off of this list, please let us know.

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Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel!
We welcome donations at all levels and would be honored to discuss our Latter-day Saints Studies Initiative and its funding opportunities with potential donors. We also would be pleased to arrange a visit to the Tanner Humanities Center or an invitation to applicable programs or events. Please contact Bob Goldberg, Director, at (801) 581-8844 and bob.goldberg@utah.edu or Susan Anderson, Development Officer, at (801) 581-8862 and susan.anderson@utah.edu.
Mission and Overview

Since 1988, the Obert C. and Grace A. Tanner Humanities Center has promoted humanities inquiry and exchange by supporting innovative scholarly projects and creating opportunities for interaction among scholars, students, and lifelong learners. We offer twenty programs in three major areas: research support, public lectures and programs, and faculty outreach. Our activities reflect a vision of the humanities as not only relevant, stimulating, and cutting-edge, but also essential for developing critical thinking, tolerance, and respect at the University of Utah and in our community.

Latter-day Saints Studies Initiative at The University of Utah

The Tanner Humanities Center launched its Latter-day Saints Studies Initiative in 2010 to encourage vibrant, intellectual exploration of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its people on campus and in the wider community. Funds raised for the Initiative have supported an endowment for a graduate research fellowship, the Marlin K. Jensen Scholar and Artist in Residence program, conferences, classes, public lectures, panels, and other community events.

Staff

Bob Goldberg, Director
Beth Tracy, Associate Director
Susan Anderson, Development Officer
Megan Dipo, Marketing and Communications Manager
Cole Thorpe, Student Assistant (Not Pictured)