



Pictorial Rug with Temples and Church Leaders, by Reuben and Mary Ouzounian (c. 1955; wool, cotton, silk, goat hair; 270 cm × 360 cm). Armenian Latter-day Saints living in Aleppo (now Haleb), Syria, completed this rug during their long and uncertain wait for visas permitting them to join Church members in Utah. Among the motifs are the Rocky Mountains under American flags, covered wagons recalling earlier pioneers, and representations of the temples and Church presidents to that date. Church Museum of History and Art.

version of Mormon folk art, different from the more personal expression of nineteenth-century women.

In the mid-twentieth century the Church often adopted an institutional method of preserving past art forms. The Church-wide dance festivals held into the 1970s brought young people together from across the world to share in an evening of the celebration of folk dance forms. Similarly, roadshows gave expression to local members' talents in miniplays that often depicted pioneer heritage values and customs (see *DRAMA*). Musicals like *My Turn on Earth* and *Saturday's Warrior* in much the same way as nineteenth-century folklore perpetuated folk traditions about premortal exist-

tence and the significance of life on earth (see *MUSIC*).

Twentieth-century Mormon folk art also reflects a faithful people as the story of the founding events and of the pioneers continues to figure prominently in every type of folk art. In general, it features respect for traditional art forms and mass participation. Folk art forms now flourishing in many different cultures have been welcomed as personal expressions of the testimony and love of Church members around the world.

[See also *Folklore*; *Material Culture*.]

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FOLKLORE

Mormon folklore comprises that part of the Church's cultural heritage which Latter-day Saints pass on from person to person and from generation to generation, not through written documents or formal instruction but through the spoken word or customary example. That is, someone will listen to tales told at home or at a Church meeting about the sufferings of the Mormon pioneers and then will repeat these accounts to others; or a young girl will watch and then assist her grandmother make "temple quilts" (quilts on which the form of the Mormon temple in which a couple is married is stitched) for the marriages of each grandchild, and in the process will eventually learn to make her own quilts; or each evening children will be gathered by their parents into family prayer and then one day will continue the practice in their own families.

The materials of Mormon folklore fall roughly into three broad categories. First are things people make with words (from songs and stories of grandparents struggling to establish a New Zion in the harsh Great Basin Kingdom, to contemporary accounts of God's providential hand guiding "the affairs of the saints" and directing the efforts of missionaries in an ever-expanding church, to humorous tales that caricature Mormon foibles and

ease the pressures of “being in the world but not of it”). Second are things people make with their hands (from traditional implements, such as the Mormon hay derrick, to homemade “quiet books” designed to keep small children constructively occupied during church meetings, to home preserves and special holiday foods, to a decorative family Book of Remembrance [*see* MATERIAL CULTURE]). And third are things people make with their actions (from “creative dating” practices of youth, to special family celebrations of birth and baptismal dates, to family genealogical meetings, to church and community celebrations of traditional holidays from Thanksgiving to Pioneer Day).

This listing of examples focuses very consciously on the word “make,” because the categories of Mormon folklore are dynamic rather than static. Each recounting of a miraculous healing, each quilting of a familiar log-cabin pattern, each performance of a family birthday game is in every instance a new act of creation that speaks from both the past and the present. They speak from the past because the forms are traditional and recurring, having been developed by the LDS community over decades. They speak from the present because the forms are constantly reshaped to fit the needs of contemporary Latter-day Saints and to reflect contemporary values and concerns.

Because of this constant regeneration and reshaping of older forms, Mormon folklore lies not at the periphery but at the center of LDS culture. It is not, as is sometimes thought, simply a survival from the past kept alive primarily by older, less educated, and agrarian Church members; rather, it is a vital, functioning force in the lives of all Latter-day Saints. Further, as the Church continues to grow and change, new forms of folklore that speak more directly to present needs will sometimes replace the old. For just as Latter-day Saints in the pioneer era generated and transmitted folklore in response to the circumstances of their lives, so, too, contemporary Latter-day Saints will create and pass along folklore as they react to the strains and stresses, the joys and the sorrows of their lives. For example, converts to the Church living in the mission fields, away from church centers in the mountain West, may be little moved by tales of pioneer suffering and may know little of earlier stories of the providential saving of the pioneers' crops from swarms of locusts or of the legends of the THREE NEPHITES; but they will know and tell stories of their own miraculous conversions and of

the ridicule and suffering they endure, with the help of God, as they struggle to survive as the only Latter-day Saints in sometimes unfriendly and often hostile communities.

Properly to understand the Latter-day Saints, one must know their folklore—must see how it bolsters their faith, builds a sense of community, ties them to the past, and provides them an escape through humor from pressures that might otherwise be their undoing. Especially, one must understand Mormon folklore in order to understand the Mormon ethos. This is so because people tell stories about those events that interest them most or participate in customary practices that are most important to them. Because these stories and practices depend on the spoken word or on voluntary participation for their survival, those that fail to appeal broadly to a Mormon value center, a common body of LDS attitudes and beliefs, will simply cease to exist. Those that persist, therefore, serve as an excellent barometer for prevailing Mormon cultural and religious values.

In a number of Utah and western towns a Mormon temple, usually built on a hill or in the center of the valley, dominates the landscape, symbolizing for all who pass by the religious values that originally brought LDS settlers to the region. In towns and valleys surrounding the temples, in Sunday School classes, in family gatherings, among friends, the descendants and converts of these settlers relate stories that tell of the price paid for blessings now enjoyed, that give evidence of the providential hand of God in the lives of the faithful, that lift sagging spirits, bolster courage, promote obedience and give hope for the eventual and ultimate victory of Zion. The stories give a glimpse of this rich and ever-growing body of narratives, the lore of faith.

The question remains whether narratives embodying these values are really “true”—and, concomitantly, if they are not true, what is their ultimate value? Although the stories frequently are based on actual events, their details clearly change as they are passed along by word of mouth. These changes, however, do not occur randomly; they are dictated by cultural determinants. As stories are transmitted from person to person, they are often changed, usually unconsciously, to express the new tellers' beliefs and to meet their needs. Because folk narratives mirror and reinforce these beliefs, and because the beliefs are themselves historical facts, moving people to action more handily

than the realities on which they are based, they can yield valuable historical data. But it is more profitable to turn to them for other reasons, to view them not as history but as literature, and to discover in them not the ledger-book truths of actual events but expression of the people's heart and mind. To a greater or lesser degree, Mormon folk stories may or may not be factually accurate. But as keys to understanding the Latter-day Saints and their church, they are always true.

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FOLLOWING THE BRETHREN

Latter-day Saints believe that God gives REVELATIONS to living PROPHETS and that their words, when so inspired, are to be received as his (D&C 1:38). It has therefore become common in the Church to say that Christ and his prophets are as one because they represent him (cf. John 17:21–23). This means that prophets, as agents of Christ, announce his gospel, and are one with him in teaching, testimony, and purpose (see UNITY). Thus, the scriptural injunction to follow Jesus and the baptismal COVENANT to obey his commandments also require following his prophets.

Among Latter-day Saints the injunction to "follow the Brethren" derives from this requirement of obedience to Jesus and to prophetic instruction. In this context, "the Brethren" are the GENERAL AUTHORITIES, particularly the FIRST PRESIDENCY and the QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES, who are formally sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators. The principle involved can be extended to include local priesthood leaders such as PRIESTHOOD QUORUM presidencies, BISHOPS and STAKE PRESIDENTS, and the presidencies of the women's auxiliary organizations—RELIEF SOCIETY, YOUNG WOMEN, and PRIMARY—within their respective jurisdictions. This exten-

sion of the principle to all Church leaders at every level is based on the recognition that all officers in the Church are entitled to revelation in their CALLINGS and on the assumption that they are in harmony with the Brethren. Referring specifically to the prophet who is currently President of the Church, the Lord has instructed members to "give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith" (D&C 21:4–5).

Latter-day Saints claim a variety of blessings from following prophetic instruction. Not only does following the Brethren unite the Saints, enabling them to advance the purposes of the RESTORATION more effectively, but it also allows them to receive the rewards of such obedience, which include the GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT.

Following the Brethren, however, does not imply blind obedience, for every member of the Church is entitled to an individual witness of the Holy Spirit that the leadership of the Church is inspired by God. For this reason, following the living prophet obliges members to live worthy to receive personal inspiration and revelation. It gives contemporary meaning to MOSES' desire that "all the Lord's people" be prophets and thus recipients of inspiration (Num. 11:29), and to the Savior's saying that all should "live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God" (D&C 84:44; Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4).

Because Church members are entitled to divine confirmation of prophetic declarations, there is no teaching among Latter-day Saints of "prophetic infallibility." As Joseph SMITH taught, "a prophet was a prophet only when . . . acting as such" (TPJS, p. 278). Prophets have personal and private opinions, and they are "subject to like passions," as all people are (see James 5:17; Mosiah 2:10–11). However, when acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit in the prophetic role, "whatsoever they shall speak . . . shall be the will of the Lord" (D&C 68:3–4; see SCRIPTURE). As the Savior told Joseph Smith, "He that receiveth my servants receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth my Father" (D&C 84:36–37; see also Matt. 10:40; 3 Ne. 28:34).

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