

A COMMON LANGUAGE IN THE DESERT:

MARIE OGDEN, THE HOME OF TRUTH AND MORMONS OF SAN JUAN COUNTY

By Dustin Fife

This article by Dustin Fife, a Utah Valley University librarian, and the subsequent one by Gary Shumway, noted oral historian of southeastern Utah, examine the life and teachings of Marie Ogden and the Home of Truth. As a controversial spiritualist who made her home in San Juan County, Marie has continued to intrigue the curious and provide topics for debate. At a time when men dominated much of the business world, she organized and directed a communal society while receiving revelation for daily affairs. Soft-spoken yet firm guidance characterized, this beloved enigma for many residents who knew her.



Marie Ogden's home (sometimes referred to as the inner portal) fourteen miles north of Monticello, Utah. The settlement sits in a vast valley that supported little agriculture and was good mostly for grazing during certain times of year. Photo by author.

Marie M. Ogden, a spiritualist and millennial Christian, came to southeastern Utah in the fall of 1933. She founded the Home of Truth, a communal religious colony, fourteen miles north of Monticello. Nine months after her arrival, Marie secured a vital role in the community by purchasing the county's only newspaper, the *San Juan Record*. She owned and operated this paper for fifteen years, during which she wrote a weekly column that explicated her goals and beliefs. The records of her column constitute an invaluable resource for understanding her experience and that of her followers. The Home of Truth, with few exceptions, enjoyed a friendly relationship with the primarily Mormon residents of San Juan County.

Marie and the Mormons shared a common idiom that made this possible as both Westerners and religious people.

This common language probably existed because of similar historical experiences and religious beliefs. In short, the Mormons could see their ancestors—if not themselves—in the residents of the Home of Truth. What follows is a comparison of the historical experiences and beliefs of Marie Ogden and her Mormon neighbors and the common idiom that they shared.

Marie's Life

Much of the history of the Home of Truth revolves around Marie Ogden's experiences. She left behind several short autobiographical sketches that illuminate her life which she described as having three distinct stages: childhood and adolescence, marriage and motherhood, and religious

seeker.¹ Marie Margaret Snyder was born May 31, 1883, in Newark, New Jersey. She was a gifted student and talented pianist. At the age of nineteen Marie married Harry Ogden with whom she spent twenty-six years of her life during which she raised two daughters (one adopted). Harry was a wealthy insurance executive who supported Marie and their children comfortably. During World War I Marie became an active fundraiser for the Red Cross and other charitable foundations, while during the 1920s she became President of the Federated Women's Club of New Jersey. Although a self-described socialite, she was also a dedicated homemaker and devoted to her husband and children.²

Religiously, Marie was raised in the Episcopal Church but married a Presbyterian man, later attended a Methodist church, and sent her daughters to a Methodist school. Before 1930 she attended church rarely, but wrote that she always believed in Christ and reincarnation. Marie turned to religion energetically after the death of her husband, presumably from colon cancer, in 1929. Marie then avidly studied Christianity, spiritualism, astrology, numerology, and many other religious and quasi-religious fields. In 1931 she began receiving messages from the divine (often from Jesus Christ) through her typewriter, eventually publishing sixty tracts entitled *Messages of the Dawn, Wisdom, and Truth*. She also founded the School of Truth at her home in Newark, New Jersey, and began lecturing about the imminent and catastrophic return of Jesus Christ and the rejection of materialism. Marie interacted with many spiritualists in New Jersey and even spent time with the infamous spiritualist William Dudley Pelley, founder of the Silver Foxes and eventual supporter of Adolf Hitler.

During 1933 she lectured and traveled across the United States three times. On one of her trips to New York City, she received revelation that she was to leave Newark to live in the desert of southeastern Utah, envisioning the valley where she would eventually settle. In fall 1933, Marie and thirty followers gathered their earthly possessions and relocated to San Juan County, Utah. Many of these people came from Boise, Idaho, where she had lectured earlier that year. In Utah they built the Home of Truth, the place where Jesus Christ would eventually return to the earth and begin his millennial reign. Marie remained there until her death in 1975.³

Stegner's Thesis

Historian and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Wallace Stegner visited Marie Ogden and the Home of Truth near the end of the 1930s, and later included a short account of his experience in his book *Mormon Country*. Stegner concluded that the local Mormons and members of the Home of Truth lived together peacefully because of similar historical experiences and religious doctrines. "The Home of Truth is close enough to the Mormon experience, its theology and its record is so recognizably a descendant of the religious upheavals that produced Joseph Smith, that the theosophist colony in the middle of the Mormon desert is appropriate."⁴ Stegner did not go on to compare doctrines or historical experiences. He boldly claimed that the Home of Truth was founded in the same mold and fervor as Mormonism, but his declaration warrants a comparison between the two. Their similarities extend far beyond the two or three examples provided by Stegner. Side by side—two religions that formed more than one hundred years apart—seem to have unequivocal similarities. Though the timelines of the founders' lives are anything but similar—Joseph Smith beginning his religion at a much younger age and earlier time—believers of either religion could have easily recognized similarities between Mormonism and Marie's teachings.

Much of this comparison can be done with just two documents. Marie printed a concise account of her beliefs and aims in a pamphlet printed by the *San Juan Record* in 1934. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon) has a comparable document in the Articles of Faith, a succinct outline of Mormon beliefs written by Joseph Smith. The Articles of Faith consist of thirteen statements of belief that help govern the daily lives of Mormons. This document does not illuminate the entire LDS canon, but it does pro-



Marie Ogden's final resting place in the Monticello cemetery. Her headstone is inconspicuous when measured against the impact she had on her followers and the residents of San Juan County. Marie died in the local nursing home a few weeks before her ninety-third birthday. She resided in San Juan County for forty-two years. Photo by author.

vide an overview of fundamental beliefs. Other comparable ideas come from several sections of the Mormon scripture *Doctrine and Covenants* as well as additional writings by Marie.

Doctrine and History

Mormonism, Marie Ogden, and her followers (Ogdenites) shared many beliefs. For instance they all believed in continued revelation and prophecy. Marie wrote thousands of pages of revelation between 1932 and 1949, but then ceased public writing for unknown reasons. She and her followers believed that they were being directly guided by the divine and that God was working through them to restore his lost truth and a better lifestyle.

Likewise, the Sixth, Seventh and Ninth Articles of Faith, as written by Joseph Smith, elucidate Mormons' belief in modern revelation. "We believe in the same organization that existed in the primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth," also, "We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth," furthermore, "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God."⁵ Mormons do not believe that there is a greatism between God and themselves but rather accept continued revelation as evidence of a divine plan. Mormons living in southeastern Utah might not have believed in Marie Ogden or her prophecies, but would, however, have understood seeking direct guidance from God. Both groups were directed by leaders who published and taught the word of God unabashedly.

When asked what she believed, Marie first focused on God and Jesus Christ, declaring that the Home of Truth's first aim was to live in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ. She taught her followers to recognize Jesus as the "one and only leader of mankind; and to prepare for His return to earth in the not distant day." She went on to exhort her readers to "believe in and to love God as the Father of all Creation, the Source of all there is in the heavens above and in the earth below."⁶ Though she believed in non-mainstream Christian ideas such as reincarnation, her teachings adhered to a Christ-centered belief system. During the nineteenth century (and even today) Mormons also had practices that overshadowed their belief in Christ, such as polygamy, blood atonement, and a theocracy. However, Joseph Smith's Articles of Faith begin in a similar fashion with the First and Third Articles of Faith focused on God and Christ. "We believe in God, the eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost," and "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may

be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."⁷ Both leaders emphasized a strong belief in Jesus Christ and taught the necessity of obedience to his teachings and commandments. Whether or not they interpreted the teachings of Christ the same, their emphasis was similar. The Mormons and the Ogdenites would have respected each other's Christ-centered doctrine.

Marie believed that every man, woman, and child had the right to worship God in their own way. When people came to live at the Home of Truth they did not necessarily have to believe in Marie Ogden's prophecies. Although there is no evidence that non-believers did come to the Home of Truth, no one was forced to worship. In principle, non-believers were allowed to stay as long as they participated in the communal lifestyle. Writing of what she expected of inhabitants of the Home of Truth, Marie said, "We expect each single person, or family, to establish living quarters in accordance with their means, and when this is accomplished, to become a part of the community life we have established in all but the above named choice, which gives all the right to worship God in their own way."⁸ They had to submit to the community in every other aspect of their lives, however, how they worshiped God was their decision.

There was not as much room for free worship within Mormonism because of its established doctrine and rules, but Joseph Smith expressed a similar sentiment in the Eleventh Article of Faith. "We claim the privilege of worshiping almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may."⁹ Both Marie Ogden and Joseph Smith worked against the religious mainstream at times, so it was important for them to claim the privilege with others to worship God in their own way.

Marie's explanation of her beliefs moves from God and Jesus Christ to aspects of community and health. Marie Ogden invited all those who wanted to live the new order of life to come to Dry Valley, Utah, bring everything they had and join in the work. They were never required to worship, but they were required to work and live for the benefit of the entire community. Marie had the final word on distribution of goods. Anything beyond what an individual needed was given to her for the benefit of the community. The Home of Truth was a co-operative with a mission to set an example to the world.¹⁰

Co-operative or communal living was not foreign to the Mormons of southern Utah. In the Forty-second and Fifty-first sections of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, Joseph Smith outlined a form of communalism known as the United Order. Section Forty-two outlines a program in which the bishop or leader of the local church organizes and oversees the provisions of the entire community. Living arrangements

and all other material needs were to be assessed by the bishop and distributed as he saw fit. All excess was to be used to care for the poor and prepare for times of want. The bishop was to organize a storehouse in which the excess could be stored, every person receiving according to his or her need.¹¹

The most famous and successful attempt of living communally for the Mormons was in 1870 with the founding of Orderville in Kane County, Utah. From 1875 to 1890 hundreds of residents of Orderville successfully lived the United Order, building houses around a square, sharing a common dining hall, and distributing food produced by their agricultural efforts. The project remained successful until the railroad and a mining boom swamped the area with outsiders. The Home of Truth's and Orderville's communal efforts held in common the desire of being an example of proper living while decreasing material accumulation.

The two faiths also practiced similar dietary restrictions. Marie instituted a diet that forbid the use of tobacco, liquor, and the eating of most flesh. She believed that it would eventually be necessary to abstain from all meats and meat products, but allowed fish and animal byproducts like eggs and milk. Mormons followed some of the same restrictions given by Joseph Smith in the Eighty-ninth section of the Doctrine and Covenants. They are well known for abstaining from liquor, tobacco, and coffee, but rarely is it discussed that the diet set forth by Smith is much more complex. The consumption of fruits and grains and the use of herbs is encouraged while meat is to be eaten sparingly during times of winter and famine. Accordingly, Marie Ogden and Joseph Smith shared similar beliefs that the body was sacred and so these dietary instructions were to promote a clean and healthy lifestyle.¹²

Both religions preached that the second coming of Christ was imminent and that he would appear at a particular location in North America. Both Ogden and Smith wrote that no one could know the exact time of Christ's coming, however, they believed that it would be relatively soon. Mormons believe that they are the saints of latter-days, or the last days while Marie predicted the coming of Christ several times and eventually settled on preaching that it was imminent without a specific timeframe. Imminent millennialism was stronger in Mormonism during the nineteenth century, but threads of it remained into the 1930s.

The Tenth Article of Faith reveals that Mormons believe that there is a specific place to which Christ will return and reign. "We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory."¹³ Mormons be-

lieve that the New Jerusalem will be built in Jackson County, Missouri, explaining why the Church to this day owns a large section of land there. Marie Ogden did not agree on the place, but understood the process. She taught that most of the earth would be ravaged at the Second Coming of Christ with only a few areas preserved unscathed, one of which was the Home of Truth. This area would become a sub-tropical region from which Christ would personally reign.¹⁴ Both groups believed that they were called to prepare the way for this event and would be preserved at Christ's coming because of their righteousness and preparation.

Historically, relocating to Utah might have been the two faiths' greatest similarity. Both groups came to Utah to start anew. The Mormons came to escape eastern mobs while Marie came to escape eastern tumult and materialism. Although their reasons differed, they each came to the desert of Utah through divine guidance. Both Brigham Young and Marie Ogden claimed to have seen in vision their final destination. Neither religion claimed ancient roots with both justifying their beliefs as restorers of lost truths, but without direct descent from the Biblical Jesus or his apostles. They focused on new revelations streaming from the divine through their prophets.

These are only some of the similarities shared within these two belief systems. Many faiths share boundaries, but Marie and the Mormons shared so many less mainstream Christian doctrines, that it must have been recognizable to the inhabitants of San Juan County. It is impossible to say however, that these doctrinal similarities brought about peaceful coexistence as Stegner claims. There are several other reasons that should be considered as to why Mormons lived peacefully with the Ogdenites. It would be easier to claim that each church emphasized the privilege of free worship, and because of that, they coexisted. It might have been that the Mormons of San Juan County simply viewed Marie Ogden and the Home of Truth as innocuous; there were no incidences of Mormon conversion. First and foremost though, the Mormons of the 1930s were not the same as the Mormons that were driven west from Nauvoo. They were not the Mormons of Mountain Meadows or even the Mormons that proudly sat in jail because of polygamous marriages during the 1880s and 1890s. The Mormons of the 1930s had gone through a transformation at the turn of the century. Kathleen Flake in *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot. Mormon Apostle*, suggests that Mormons began assimilating into American culture at the beginning of the twentieth-century as they tried to gain national political power. LDS prophet Joseph F. Smith emphasized Mormonism's Americanism and tried to downplay earlier supposed un-American beliefs such as polygamy and theocracy. Church members became very wary of national media attention and avoided conten-



Cookhouse at Marie Ogden's Commune. John F. Moore III photo.

as situations.¹⁵

This change in Mormonism is important for understanding the controversy that came to San Juan County during the summer and fall of 1935. In February of that year, Edith Peshak died of cancer. Marie claimed that she was not dead, but going through a transformation. She and her followers, with the support of Edith's husband, bathed and fed her dead body daily. Marie began writing about this process in the *San Juan Record* in March of 1935, but the local Mormons did not react. During that summer, Edith's son Peter visited the Home of Truth and demanded that the body be buried. This garnered national attention with newspapers across the country writing about Utah's "mummy." Once this issue began drawing national attention, government officials in Utah tried to bring a speedy conclusion to the situation, demanding a death certificate be signed. Marie would not comply and media attention began to wane. The timeline of the event shows that the Mormons did not have an aversion to the religious practices of the Home of Truth, but to the national media attention that it had attracted.¹⁶

Common Idiom

Marie Ogden took over the *San Juan Record* on May 10, 1934. She assured the residents of San Juan that the weekly

paper would continue to be a voice for the entire county and announced the addition of a column called "Our Corner," which she authored. When one begins to read Marie's articles in light of Mormon beliefs and history, common ideas and phrases begin to jump off of the page. During the first several months of Marie's writing in the newspaper, she used a shared common language between the two groups which she continued to employ throughout her career as a newspaper woman.

In her first address on May 10, she introduced herself and attempted to mitigate any worries that San Juan residents might have. "It is with great humbleness of spirit that I assume ownership of this weekly journal, known to you as the *San Juan Record*. In doing so it is my desire to continue the present policy of giving to you such local news as you are accustomed to receive, and as time advances, to enlarge or expand the scope of its present day activities."¹⁷ Marie seemed to know that she was an outsider and though she planned to include new things, she wanted San Juan residents to know that this would still be their newspaper. "I extend to you GREETINGS, in the name of the band of loyal friends who are assembled here with me, in this, YOUR land of promise and beauty. May we share it with you and work together to make of it the place God intended it to be?" (Emphasis hers).¹⁸ Referring to it as a promised land could

easily be identified by any religious group because of its biblical context, but would have been particularly poignant to Mormon residents of Utah as well as her following. While the two faiths might not have agreed as to what this should look like, both believed that God intended Utah to be something special. "All we ask is the privilege of living our own lives simply, with LOVE IN OUR HEARTS FOR GOD, the Father of us all, and for our fellow beings whom we would serve in unselfish manner throughout the days to come (emphasis hers)."¹⁹ If the *San Juan Record* were a court of law, this would have been a powerful opening statement.

From the start, Marie tried to build bridges and allay fears, using language influenced by her own beliefs but accepted by Mormons. Her second article on May 17, 1934, was much like her first. She again assured readers that the paper would continue the same policies for news and announcements. She reiterated her desire to cooperate and welcomed suggestions and comments, but her next article on May 24 in "Our Corner" began expressing her own desires and beliefs. Every week she wrote several paragraphs about the development of the Home of Truth and spent the rest of the column expounding metaphysical values. Two major themes which continued throughout her writings were first presented in this issue. "Through the columns of this your weekly journal and through our efforts in other directions we hope to convince you of the purpose back of our endeavor to locate in this, YOUR LAND OF BEAUTY AND PROMISE. To us it represents an opportunity to begin life

over again away from the turmoil and strife of the cities. (emphasis hers)."²⁰ Marie's references to Utah as a land of beauty and promise continued throughout her tenure as editor of the paper; more importantly here, she introduced the themes of escape and renewal. The Home of Truth, founded on an undesirable patch of land in Dry Valley (when Marie and her followers lived in tents while building homes and meetinghouses), repeated somewhat the Mormon's hardships of settling Utah. Starting over meant lots of hard work and Marie returned to this second theme many times over the years. "These are indeed busy days for all of us, but we take great pleasure in doing what we term "PIONEER WORK" and we seem not to mind the hardships and inconveniences we must endure until such time as we can make our homes habitable and more comfortable than they are at present (emphasis hers)."²¹ Pioneering provided a commonality between Mormons and Ogdenites who shared the desert of Utah.

For several weeks after her initial statement, she continued to emphasize the need for cooperation and her belief that the Home of Truth was performing pioneer work. On July 19 and August 2, Marie introduced two final examples of language favorable to Mormon heritage. "We call these desert claims our KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ON EARTH for we shall make of them such a dwelling place as will be worthy of the name (emphasis hers)."²² She also wrote:

It is just such love and generous support as this wh



Meeting structure at The Home of Truth. John F. Moore III photo.

has enabled us to accomplish what we have done thus far in the way of preparatory work toward our GREATER WORK ahead: and because of such friends in all parts of the country that we WILL BRING INTO BEING THE DIVINE PLAN OF REBUILDING AND REHABILITATION FOR MANY WHO ARE FINDING IT SO DIFFICULT TO LIVE DURING THESE TRYING AND TROUBLESOME TIMES (emphasis hers).²³

Mormons and Ogdenites alike, believed that they were fulfilling the divine plan of God on earth and building His kingdom through example and preparation for the millennium. For fifteen years Marie's writing in the *San Juan Record* was replete with examples of idioms understood by both faiths. Although Mormonism had transformed at the turn of the century and was still being Americanized during the 1930s and Marie was preaching reincarnation and nineteenth century spiritualism, the two shared enough in common to foster respect and cooperation between the two groups. In a sense, Wallace Stegner was correct; Mormons and Ogdenites did share many things in common historically and theologically. Marie Ogden was a charismatic leader and for several years the Home of Truth thrived in the desert of southeastern Utah. Her record shows how she built a bridge between two religious groups that created cooperation and understanding.

Notes

- 1 Marie Ogden, *San Juan Record*, Monticello, Utah, June 14, 1934. [Hereafter *SJR*]
- 2 Ogden, "Home of Truth Cooperative Settlement," *SJR*, February 18, 1941 and Buckley Jensen, "Giants of San Juan," *SJR*, April 30, 2008.
- 3 Ogden, "Home of Truth Cooperative Settlement," *SJR*, February 18, 1941.

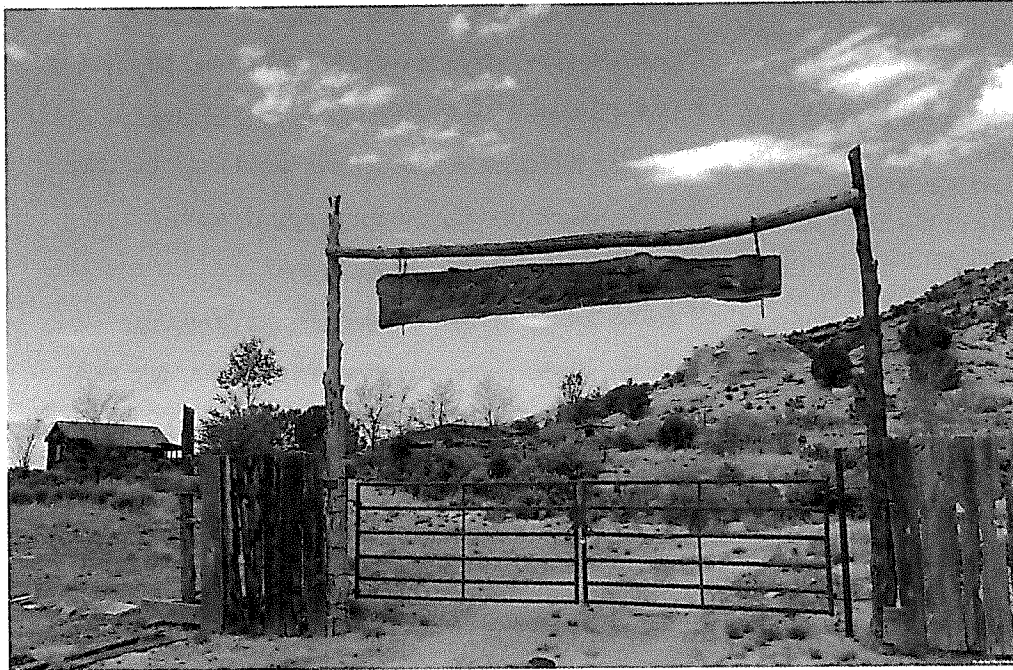
- 4 Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1942), 336.
- 5 Joseph Smith, "Articles of Faith" 6, 7, and 9, *Doctrine and Covenants*.
- 6 Ogden, "Ogden Center Co-operative Settlement," *SJR*, 1941.
- 7 Smith, "Articles of Faith," 1 and 3," *Doctrine and Covenants*.
- 8 Ogden, "Ogden Center Co-operative Settlement," *SJR*, 1941.
- 9 Smith, "Articles of Faith" 11, *Doctrine and Covenants*.
- 10 Ogden, "Ogden Center Co-operative Settlement," *SJR*, 1941.
- 11 Smith, Joseph, *Doctrine and Covenants*, 42: 30-39.
- 12 Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants*, 89: 5-17.
- 13 Smith, "Articles of Faith," 10, *Doctrine and Covenants*.
- 14 Ogden, "Ogden Center Co-operative Settlement," *SJR*, 1941.
- 15 Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
- 16 Jack DeWitt, "Utah's Mystery of the Living Mummy," Publisher unknown, located in Utah Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- 17 Ogden, *SJR*, Monticello, Utah, May 10, 1934.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ogden, *SJR*, July 19, 1934.
- 23 Ogden, *SJR*, Monticello, Utah, August 2, 1934.



Left: Famous Marie Ogden photo with her "spiritual" typewriter. Anyone know where this typewriter is now? SJCH photo. Right: Marie Ogden.

ANOTHER EXPLANATION FOR THE CO-EXISTENCE OF MORMONS AND THE HOME OF TRUTH

By Gary Shumway



Home of Truth. Media photo.

Dustin Fife's finely considered and carefully researched explanation for the local accommodation of members of Marie Ogden's Home of Truth is both laudable and credible. It is interesting that even before he accepted the position of head librarian of San Juan County libraries, Mr. Fife showed a fascination for San Juan County and one of its interesting historical topics as he researched and wrote this study while a student at Utah State University in Logan. Having become acquainted with him in his capacity of county librarian and having been the recipient of several acts of kindness by him, I was pleased to learn of his scholarly interest in the county. When he shared his research with me and his dream of having this work published in Blue Mountain Shadows, I suggested that we interest the editors of this fine local journal in publishing his article, with an accompanying response by me. I am grateful that Dr. Robert S. McPherson, as guest editor of this edition devoted to writers of San Juan history, accepted our work enthusiastically.

In acquitting my own responsibility to our shared objective, I must respond to Dustin's thoughtful research, pointing out areas in which my own perceptions differ, as well as concur, with his. Perhaps an even greater contribution on my part will be the personal insights I can contribute relating to the interaction between Ogdenites and the local community. There is a rather acute connection between my own

family and the Ogdenite community that began even before the establishment of the Home of Truth and continued long after most had abandoned this interesting experiment. The reminiscences of members of my family who participated with my father and mother in their association with this group, as well as my own memories of individual participants, may add credence to my own interpretation of the interactions between the two.

At the outset, I must say that I find Dustin's research impressive and his conclusions persuasive. The very real common beliefs, assumptions and lifestyle shared by the entrenched Mormons of the county and the newcomers could not help but make assimilation

easier. Furthermore, Marie Ogden's very public declaration that her people only wished to share this beautiful, promised land while they awaited the return of the Messiah almost certainly resonated with the Mormons, who planned to do the very same thing.

On the other hand, I have come to believe that some similar beliefs and common aspirations do not best explain the local Mormon willingness to allow the Ogdenites to co-exist in peace. Instead, this is better explained by a combination of other factors, beginning with the feeling on the part of local Mormons that they had no right to consider any alternative. They not only memorized in Primary, but believed the Eleventh Article of Faith which states: "We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may." While I suspect that most of the Mormons who had much contact with the Ogdenites would have liked to convince them of the error of their ways, none that I knew would have considered it their right to use violence to effect such a change. Indeed, most of the local Mormons were not that far removed from an environment in which their ancestors had been beaten, shot, chased from their homes, forced to move elsewhere by other Christians who shared most religious beliefs with them. The local Mormons, al-



Home of Truth. Media photo.

though not truly believing that there was much “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy” in the religion of Marie Ogden, would not have thought that religious differences demanded violence.

Besides a commitment to show some level of tolerance of the religious beliefs of others, there were other factors that may help explain the tranquil association of these two groups. In the small towns of southeastern Utah, and I suspect in most other rural areas where everyone knows every fault of every other person, people have an astonishing ability to accept the faults of others while at the same time remembering their finer traits. A person who believes that he is the prophet Nathan reincarnated but who also shows humility and a love for his neighbors can be tolerated in a community where others are suspected of altering cattle brands or of being very slow in closing the head gate at the end of a water turn. There also seemed to be no mandate that a local Mormon had to confine his or her friends to only those whose religious beliefs matched their own. I know that my own parents shared a genuine friendship with many persons of other faiths, a number of whom were involved with the Home of Truth. I will give some examples of these friendships at the end of this article.

One other important piece of evidence suggesting that the accommodation between these two groups was not a result of common beliefs lies in a section of an oral history interview my wife and I had with Uncle Glen and Aunt Eva Shumway, found in a book regarding their life titled People We Have Known. Realizing that Uncle Glen had been involved with my father in suggesting possible locations and transporting the Ogdenites to these locations

when they first came into the area, I asked Uncle Glen to talk about his experience. It was my intention to include here pages 28-43 of their book which goes into some detail about the exact location of Ogdenite cabins near Camp Jackson on Blue Mountain and in Recapture south of Fiddler’s Green as well as more information than most people would want to know about a number of different aspects of the early Ogdenite experience in the area. The reader has my wife to thank for her suggestion that we only include here some of the information germane to our specific topic. I recommend that those having a wider interest read all of the relevant pages in People We Have Known. The following are expurgated portions of the transcript

which I feel suggest that it was not common religious beliefs that explain the peaceful co-existence of the two groups.

Gary: Uncle Glen, when we stopped to change tapes, you were just starting to tell about working with the Ogdenites. That’s an interesting part of the history of this area; why don’t you tell that whole story. How did you get involved with them in the first place?

Glen: Your father got involved with them first, then he got me involved, too. We had a team of horses and a wagon. The Ogdenites figured that there would be a heat wave around this country. The only ones that would be saved would be in a certain territory, so they wanted to get up on the mountain. I started hauling them up on the mountain.

Gary: Where had they been before this?

Glen: Everywhere. There were some from Idaho and other various states around the country.

Gary: This was just when they were coming together?

Glen: Yes, they were just coming together.

Gary: Do you remember different people, who they were and where they were coming from?

Glen: Well, I remember the Gamblings. They were from Idaho and Mr. Gambling had been the superintendent of Sunday School up there before Marie converted him. There was a Mr. Dodge and a Pefley, to name a few. Marie Ogden was the reincarnation of the Virgin Mary. They believed in reincarnation and there was a fellow by the name of Jackson who was the reincarnation of Brigham Young. They believed in a book that they used to read. This Pefley fellow was a teacher. I remember when we got there and sat in a

little cabin he'd say, "Send the great golden glow of love to the right." Here we'd have to nudge whoever was on our right and then he'd say, "Send the great golden glow of love to the left." Then he would read his book, and it made me remember the temptation of the Savior. In his book, the Savior walked into a beautiful room with a beautiful girl in there without any clothes on, and that was his temptation.

In marriage they believed in the couple living together for a period of time before marriage, to make sure that they liked each other. I never did catch for sure what they believed in. They didn't believe in baptism or anything like that.

One day they were all congregated in a big room we had built there that we called the kitchen. There was a fellow by the name of Nathan and he was the reincarnation of the prophet Nathan from the Old Testament. He started telling me about things, and I would quote scripture to him. There was a man there who didn't talk very plain and his name was Johnson; he was from the old country. I had proved Nathan wrong with all of the scriptures and so he wanted to go to some other scripture. Then Johnson said, "Nathan he has proven his doctrine to you from all of those other books in the Bible." Nathan responded with, "Well, I want him to prove this book." It was one of Paul's, but I forget which one; it may have been Romans or Corinthians.

I took Nathan's book and was able to repudiate it. It hadn't been too long since I'd been on my mission, just a year or so and I was well-versed in the scriptures. Then this Ben Jackson came back from being off. He had heard about it and said to me, "I don't want you to do that again to these people. They may pull up and quit." I responded with, "If they'll leave me alone, I'll leave them alone. However, if they try to tackle me on my religion, then I'll uphold my religion." That was the understanding that we had; he couldn't can me because they couldn't get along without me.

Gary: When you were sitting there and they were talking about the great golden glow of love on the left, were you and Dad nudging to the left and right like you were supposed to?

Glen: Yes, we did like they said to. I didn't think it had anything to do with religion.... It was in the fall and the sheep men had just moved their sheep out of there, but they'd left some and they told the Ogdenites if they found them then they could have them. This Nathan took me out to hunt for these sheep. When we got out there he said, "Oh I wish you could believe as I believe." I returned with, "You ought to believe as I believe, just as soon as me believing what you believe." I never did falter from it all....

Gary: Did my dad ever have any fascination with their religion?

Glen: No, he was with me when they were reading this book, and it was something we were supposed to do as part of the job....

Gary: I've never been able to know whether my dad's fascination was just for the job, or maybe he was caught up in their ideas and all.

Glen: I don't think he was. Everything as far as their religion was concerned, was contrary to our beliefs....If there were ever any prayers to be asked, they would call on your father or I to offer the prayers.

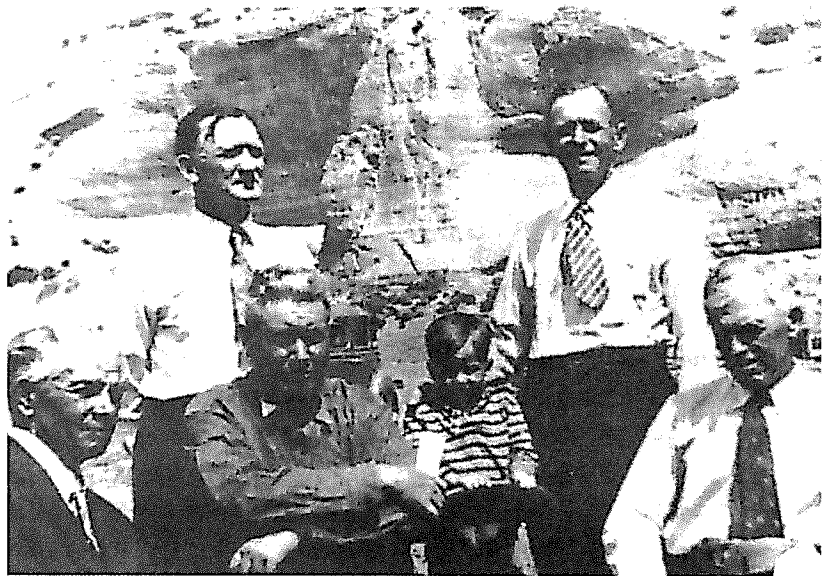
Gary: Oh really, you mean a blessing on the food and things like that?

Glen: Yes, that's right.

Gary: So part of your job was to be the official prayer leaders?

Glen: Yes, we kind of went along with them like that, but as far as changing our minds about religion we were very far from that. Marie Ogden said that we should accept one of her messages [as payment for their work] and your dad told her, "If you get any messages it is from beneath; it isn't from above."

The response of Uncle Glen and Aunt Eva to my question as to whether they and my mother and father had bought into the beliefs of the Ogdenites leaves little doubt that this was not the case. Nevertheless, all of my life I have been aware that my parents valued their friendship with a number of people who had come to Blanding as follow-



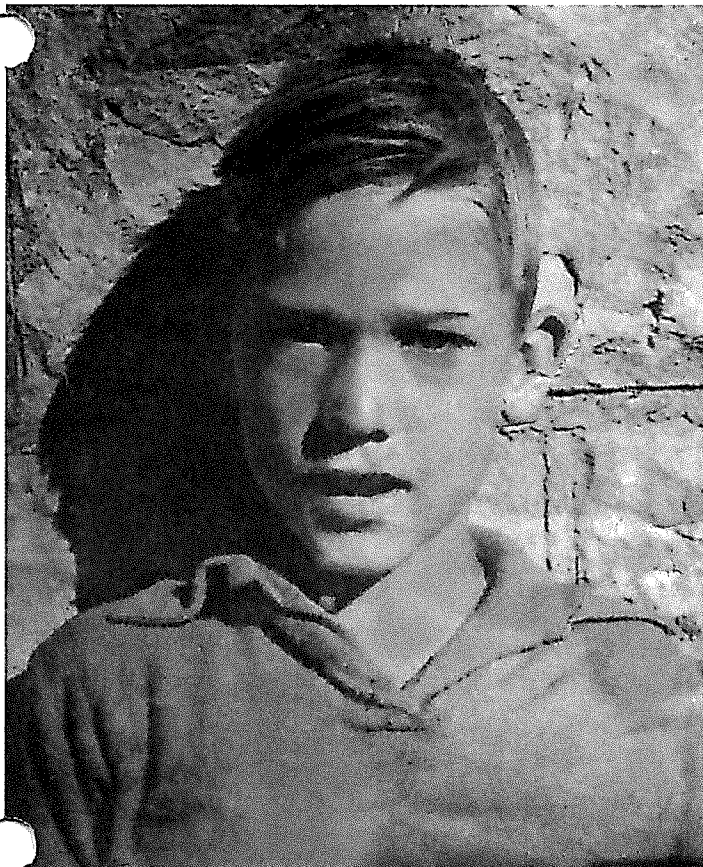
Men and child at Marie Ogden camp. SJCH photo.

ers of Marie Ogden. They spoke with genuine affection for the Gambings, who they considered to be people of fine character. If I understood correctly what Dad told me, Mr. Gambling worked with him in the vanadium mines. They appreciated the Ardits so much that they named one of their sons Keith Ardit Shumway. Ben Jackson, who Dad did not really believe was Brigham Young reincarnated, despite his penchant for bringing a different “wife” with him each time he came to visit, in fact visited our home often when I was a child. “Pappy” and Mrs. Dodge became so enamored with Blanding that they decided to remain for the rest of their long lives after their fascination with Marie Ogden waned.

As I review this topic I realize that some of the Ogdenites also had an influence on my own life. As children, some of my friends and I used to enjoy hanging around “Pappy” Dodge’s carpentry shop. It was not that we were in admiration of his carpentry skills or fascinated with his lathes, saws, and other equipment so much as the entertainment provided by “Pappy” and Mrs. Dodge’s penchant for constantly snipping at each other. We understood nothing of the depths of hurts between them that led to this behavior, but we were fascinated by the colorful language with its constant barbs. And then one day, it all ended. Mrs. Dodge became very ill and was taken to the San Juan Hospital in Monticello. As the tracks of old people going to the hospital

only seemed to go one way, there was little expectation on anyone’s part that she would return home. Then “Pappy” Dodge, too, became very ill and was taken to the hospital. For the hospital administrators, who understood nothing of their background, it was a no brainer that the two of them should be placed side by side in their hospital beds in the same room. Then a wonderful thing happened. With both of them knowing that this was the end, and with nothing else to do with their time remaining, they began to talk about hurts pent up from the time they were young and clueless about how a man and his wife should treat each other. They dealt with a great many issues, talking about them in depth, then laying them to rest. When they had brought up everything they could think of, they frankly and fervently forgave each other for these hurts. Then, while waiting to die, they reached across from their individual beds and began holding hands as they talked about many happier aspects of their life. Soon, they decided not to die after all. They recovered completely, went home and lived for several more years. But, to the disappointment of children who had very much enjoyed their verbal jousting, they never reverted to their old ways. In my own life, when I have needed to believe that people can change, I have remembered “Pappy” and Mrs. Dodge.

Although Marie Ogden seems to have written off Ben Jackson early in the history of the commune, he continued to have a presence in our family life up until the time that I was nearly twelve years old. He would suddenly appear, introduce us to his new “wife,” then interest my father in another of his projects. The last time he came, he brought Stella with him. Before I got to appreciate her for her honesty and over-all decency, I was stricken by her movie star beauty. Tall, thin, shapely, with a swarthy Latin complexion, she wore designer sunglasses and a mink coat that fairly shouted that she was the classiest person I had ever seen. Shortly after they arrived, Dad invited Ben and Stella to go with him, Keith, and I on the annual deer hunt. I remember many happy things about this three day trip that coalesce with many others to convince me that I was blessed with a father who would dependably turn a mundane camping trip into a world class experience. But one of the fondest memories of this trip was my rapture over learning how very delicious store-bought canned apricots are. Compared with home-bottled pears, store-bought canned pears are hard and tasteless and store-bought canned peaches taste like soap suds but store-bought apricots canned in heavy syrup, I discovered on that trip, are heavenly. Stella later told me how much it meant to her that I had rhapsodized over her contribution to dinner that first evening as well as the following. She tried to explain to me how vulnerable she had felt, as her cooking talents were not exactly her strongest suit. However, my enthusiasm for her canned apricots



Gary Shumway, around 12 years old. Shumway family photo.

not only erased her uneasiness but endeared me to her in a way that allowed a wonderful friendship to develop between us. During the several months that Stella and Ben stayed, I spent as much time as I could in the apartment they rented from my mother. While Ben was out in the hills, collecting specimens of agate, jasper, and dinosaur bone for polishing, Stella and I would while away the hours, talking about things that are interesting to a nearly twelve year old boy who knows he has the attention of the most beautiful woman on earth.

Stella's time with us had one other significant impact on our family's life. One day after they had been there for several months, she came up to talk with Mother, wearing her fur coat. She said I could stay in the room while they talked, as she sensed what she had to say would affect me. She then told us that Ben needed to be somewhere else for some good reason, thus they were leaving. Before Mother or I could say anything, Stella stated that even though Mother had not charged them very much for their apartment, they had never been able to pay their rent and she wondered if Mother would be willing to take her fur coat as payment. Mother immediately responded that she knew how much the coat meant to Stella, and that she could not take it. She then said, "Stella, most of my renters who get behind on their rent leave quietly in the middle of the night, taking the quilts off the beds and the mirrors off the walls

to compensate for their loss. I know you would never do that, but leave if you have to and send the money you owe later when you can afford it." When Stella countered by saying that if Mother would not accept the coat in payment she would simply leave it in the apartment when they left, Mother thought for a while, then said, "Stella, if you are determined to sell your fur coat, I would like very much to have it, as I consider it one of the most beautiful coats I have ever seen. But you and I both know that it is worth almost twice as much as what you owe for rent. I will accept it if you will let me pay you the remainder." And so a deal was struck, which everyone felt very good about, and very soon Stella and Ben were gone, leaving behind many sweet memories and a fur coat that, during all the years that followed, reminded me of one of the most special people I have ever known.

It was, then, a combination of striving to allow others to follow the dictates of their own conscience, an abhorrence of using force to resolve religious differences, and most of all, a sincere appreciation for the many good traits of the followers of Marie Ogden that I believe best explains local Mormons' willingness to accept them as neighbors. All were the beneficiaries of each other's presence.

This last section of Blue Mountain Shadows is dedicated to local writers and poets who have faithfully practiced their craft over the years. Three of them—Merry Palmer, Sandra Skousen, and K.C. Benedict—began their friendship and the sharing of their creations in the 1980s when they formed a group of "desert writers." Honing the skill of writing was a passion. Others, like Austin Lyman and Janet Wilcox, found self-expression of experience a satisfying means of recalling thoughts and acquaintances, while Hilda Perkins reminisced about her early childhood in Bluff. For Jon Tate, a sixteen year old in high school, it was the loss of his father that turned the young man to poetry. In each case, the personal experience and the carefully selected word brought meaning to the lives of the writers—a fitting tribute to all who make their home here.