

Mormon College Sponsors "Jewish Week"

By Marc H. Tanenbaum

(Rabbi Tanenbaum, director of international relations of the American Jewish Committee, was the convocation speaker at this observance.)

CEDAR CITY, UTAH — Thousands of Mormon school children, many of whom traveled with their parents and teachers hundreds of miles across deserts, came to Southern Utah State College recently to take part in an unprecedented "Jewish Week" observance.

Arranged by Mrs. Lana Johnson, wife of a Cedar City cattle merchant, Mrs. Pauline Nelson, faculty member, and with the close cooperation of the Las Vegas Jewish Federation and the Los Angeles director of the American Jewish Committee, Dr. Neil Sandberg, the predominantly-Mormon college introduced waves of children and youth to key aspects of Jewish history, religion, culture, and contemporary Jewish life.

Dr. Gerald Sherratt, SUSC president, told me that two primary factors led him to support this ambitious "Jewish Week" program: "First, we Mormons have very little meaning without our foundations in the Jewish Bible, the Jewish people, and Israel. Second, since many of our college students come from small farm communities in Utah and nearby states, it is important for their spiritual and intellectual growth that they do not become isolated and parochial. This wonderful 'Jewish Week' is really stretching their minds and keeping their spirits open to the wider world, which is their world."

The college, whose student population numbers about 2,500 from 32 states and 12 foreign nations, became literally a panorama of 4,000 years of Jewish history. The main Jewish Exhibition Hall featured exhibits of a Sabbath table, a Passover Seder, a Sukkah, Channukah menorahs, Purim megillahs, Torah scrolls, tephillim, taleisim, Jewish prayer books and

High Holiday machzorim. Well-informed Jewish students from Hillel chapters at nearby Nevada colleges gave around-the-clock explanations to groups of fresh-faced public-school children, their parents and teachers of Jewish customs and their meanings.

Mormon college students joined the Hillel volunteers in vigorous Israeli Kibbutz dances and songs after classes, a Jewish "food fair" featured traditional Jewish foods, as well as humus and techina.

An entire room was devoted to the Nazi holocaust. Arranged by the Martyrs Memorial and Museum of the Holocaust in Los Angeles, the Holocaust exhibition was dominated by a wall-length map of Europe showing Nazi work camps and death camps which indicated the destruction wrought on Jewish communities.

Much of the "Jewish Week" program was tied in with the national TV series, "Heritage - Civilization and the Jews," as well as with other well-known films of Jewish interest. The college library also displayed a large number of booths of Jewish interest. Special attention was paid to the history of the Utah Jewish community dating back to 1854 through films, photos, and books. Special Jewish musical concerts were also performed, and Jewish art was prominently displayed.

Utah's Governor, Scott M. Matheson -- who is rumored to be a candidate for chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee -- Israel Consul Yorem Ben-Zeev from Los Angeles, and this writer stressed the close theological and historical bonds which have linked Mormons to Jews and to Israel.

In my closing convocation address, I recalled that Joseph Smith, the prophet of the Latter-Day Saints, proclaimed that "the angel Mormon was of Hebrew blood," and that "The Book of Mor-

mon, published by Smith in 1830, was originally published in the language of the Jews." The Mormons believe they are descendants of the tribe of Joseph, that they were led by Lehi, prophets of the tribe of Manasseh, out of Jerusalem in 600 BCE to the coast of America.

The Mormons also believe that in 1890, a "new Jerusalem" was established by God in Jackson County, Missouri, while "simultaneously, the old Jerusalem would be rebuilt by Jews in Palestine, ingathered from all the earth, including the North Pole where Mormons believe The Lost Tribes are gathered."

Mormons went on their exodus to Utah, because its terrain -- with deserts, mountains, and rivers like the Dead Sea and Jordan -- so closely resembled the Holy Land. The "Tenth Article of Faith" of Mormons asserts: We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes, that Zion will be built upon this (American continent)."

That pro-Israel, pro-Jewish empathy hovered over this entire remarkable "Jewish Week" at Southern Utah State College. And the Utah Endowment for the Humanities helped make it all possible.

The week in residence by the British American Theatre Institute will open on Sunday, January 13th at 7 p.m. with the members of the Redgrave Theatre of Great Britain in "An Evening With Shakespeare." The readings from Shakespeare will be presented at the Reed Whipple Cultural Center, 821 Las Vegas Boulevard North and will be followed by a Champagne Reception to welcome the members of the company. Tickets will be \$15.00 per person and reservations are recommended as seating is limited.

Happy Chanukah
Best Wishes to our Jewish Neighbors



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