

*Sunstone has been reinvented again and again by idealistic, expansive, chaotic, ventures. Its twisting, high-speed, roller-coaster journey in Mormon studies has kept its supporters wondering—and fearing—about what was next.*



# THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF THE SUNSTONE SPECIES

## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF CREATIVE ADAPTATION

By *Elbert Eugene Peck*

SINCE KIRTLAND, LATTER-DAY SAINTS HAVE EXPRESSED and explored their faith through independent forums—journals, newsletters, books, magazines, social clubs, historical groups, theaters, and schools. In the 1960s and 1970s, as the Church correlated programs and consolidated publications, independent Mormon forums proliferated. Was it because the number of Saints interested in the emerging, diverse topics reached critical mass? Or because sixties' activism prompted Saints to compensate for the downsizing of institutional Mormonism? Whatever. In ground plowed by the 1960s' triumvirate—*Brigham Young University Studies*, the Mormon History Association, and *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*—numerous other organizations and publications flowered in the 1970s: hardy perennials such as the Association for Mormon Letters and the women's *Exponent II* and ephemeral annuals such as the architectural preservation group *Cornerstone* and the intellectual journal *Carpenter*.

*ELBERT EUGENE PECK* became editor of *Sunstone* in 1986. He may be contacted by e-mail at <ElbertPeck@aol.com> or at <SunstoneUT@aol.com>.

One summer, in this fecund, primordial Mormon intellectual soup, divinity students Scott Kenney and Keith Norman conceived and incubated the idea of a student circular, and by the fall, another Mormon group was born. At a 15 September 1974 meeting at the cabin of the late Mormon social philosopher E. E. Ericksen (Kenney's grandfather), seven godparents organized to publish a journal for students to exchange ideas and experiences. From that start, The Sunstone Foundation emerged, fought to survive, and adapted to find a niche in the ecology of Mormon intelligentsia.

SUNSTONE magazine is now the flagship of a flotilla of Sunstone forums; but once, the magazine was the organization. Later, often to buoy the magazine, the other forums were launched. In this historical overview, Sunstone's projects and programs are identified by the publisher/editor tenure during which they happened; nevertheless, the achievements were the collaborative brainchilds and backbreaks of many staff and volunteers, who regrettably cannot be named in this sketch.

When *Dialogue* subscribers were mailed a prospectus/subscription offer for the forthcoming rag, many questioned the need for "another *Dialogue*?" There were other, unmet needs.

**SCOTT KENNEY YEARS 1975–1978**

*Students idealistically organize to celebrate the  
the Restoration and confront the realities  
competing visions and production burnout.*

## THE STUDENT JOURNAL

*Young at art,  
or What's on the calendar?*

**S**COTT KENNEY's editorial in the debut issue espoused SUNSTONE's purpose: a forum for thoughtful, young Latter-day Saints committed to Elder B. H. Roberts's call for "intelligent disciples" to recast the doctrines of the Restoration in new formulas. The attractive, small journal with glossy color reproductions inside and on the cover proclaimed itself "A Quarterly Journal of Mormon Experience, Scholarship, Issues and Art."

The founders proposed to explore and celebrate all things Mormon in as many print formats as possible. But, as staff-box names dramatically changed from issue to issue and each of the first three issues had a different masthead, clearly the details of just how to do that were being worked out by a fluid group of current and recent students. Their cause-driven vision shone through the obvious clouds of organizational challenges, and those five small SUNSTONE journals established most of the forms and traditions of the magazine: poetry, fiction, interviews, opinion columns, reviews, contemporary issues, theology, history, art, and drama. Most articles were very short (one to three pages), written by young scholars, many who still contribute to SUNSTONE.

The bulk of the first issue featured Robert Elliot's BYU-produced (and censored), mission-life play, *Fires of the Mind*, inaugurating SUNSTONE's ongoing celebration of Mormon drama.

With the first cover's color reproduction of Mormon art-glass windows, the founders boldly linked SUNSTONE with Mormon arts. In addition to original illustrations for articles, the early issues abundantly featured Mormon photographers, painters, architects, and artists, and art about Mormons—many with inside color reproductions. SUNSTONE meant Mormon visual art, and that early celebration is often fondly recalled, and it has never since been equaled in the magazine.

In fact, nearly a year before the first journal appeared, The Sunstone Foundation published the 1975 Mormon History Calendar, the first of eight annual calendars that showcased quality reproductions of historical photographs. This moderately successful plan to milk the cash cow of year-end calendar sales was the first of many heroic but often hapless efforts to underwrite the magazine through high-quality, get-rich-quick enterprises, including Mormon stationery and movies-in-the-park. These projects were motivated by the relentless need to pay printers, but their content flowed from the staff's expansive vision, and this relentless love/need combination eventually transformed the foundation into being the sponsor of multiple Mormon forums. But at the start, SUNSTONE was welcomed as an engaging, intelligent, graceful, well-written periodical by, for, and of young, faithful Latter-day Saints.

**"LET'S START A MAGAZINE"**

*Rapid adaptations! or What's news?*

**A**T only its sixth issue, SUNSTONE's presentation and its self-perception dramatically changed. Directed by Orson Scott Card, the uncredited issue editor, the magazine changed size and frequency—from a quarterly journal to a "bi-monthly," 8½-by-11 inch magazine. This early commitment to switch and be a magazine that targets a slightly more popular, but still intellectual, audience with relatively short, illustrated, accessible articles marked the creation of the SUNSTONE species (different from the LDS academic journals that influenced its founding). This role also defined the aim of many subsequent Sunstone projects—to connect college-educated, lay Saints with scholars of Mormonism.

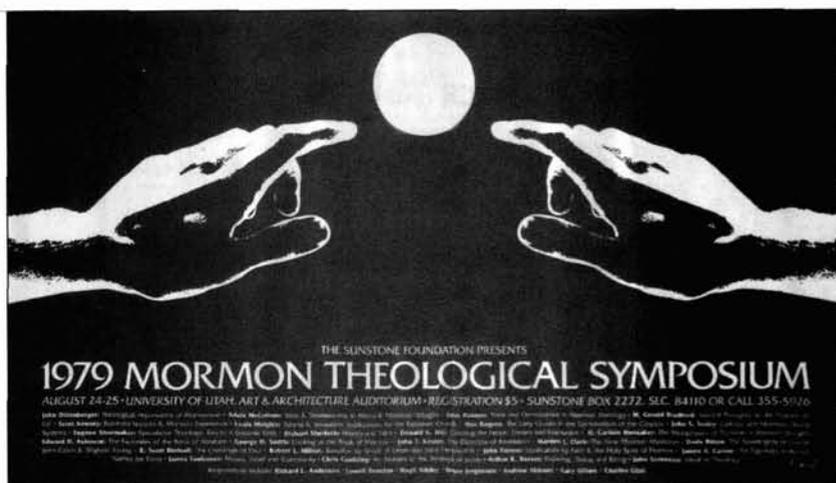
Then, in the very next issue, after an unusually long delay, even for SUNSTONE (finances!), the magazine made yet another dramatic editorial shift—adding LDS news. What had been an incidental interest in current events now was the primary focus. SUNSTONE and the start-up LDS newsmagazine *The New Messenger and Advocate* fused under the SUNSTONE masthead. Edited by former *Advocate* publisher Kevin Barnhurst, the new, thinner SUNSTONE had few of the popular feature articles; it concentrated on the former *Advocate's* news departments. This very different, third major version of the magazine within its first seven issues prompted intense reevaluations: Just what was SUNSTONE? A bright journal for young, not-ready-for-*Dialogue* LDS scholars? Or a more popular, intellectual magazine with articles by and for Mormons of any age? Or a Mormon *U.S. News & World Report*?

Responses were strong and contradictory. Some letters championed the news focus; others angrily lamented the loss of full-length features. Charting a compromise, bills-payer/publisher Scott Kenney responded that "with all its faults the last issue of SUNSTONE generated more than twice as many new subscriptions as any previous issue." In Mormon news, SUNSTONE had struck an unmet need, which,

coupled with in-depth feature articles on Church history, scripture and doctrine, social issues and art, now gives it a unique position among Mormon publications. . . . SUNSTONE is . . . for Latter-day Saints interested in many diverse facets of being Mormon in the twentieth century. Our articles are oriented to the general reader rather than the specialist.

The next three issues fulfilled Kenney's vision. It hosted full-length features, including a discussion of the recent revelation granting the priesthood to Blacks. News consumed fewer pages and was standardized in short departments that became predictable magazine components for years: "Update"—paragraph-length reports; "Mormon Media Image"; "One Fold"—news of other churches; and "Mormon Associations." The visual arts were revived with art and photo-essays, but commissioned illustrations were absent.

The magazine had settled into an agreed-upon, stable, comfortable format. When Scott Kenney left in 1978, SUNSTONE, having been transformed by several identity crises in its



*People schedule vacations so they can attend the symposium, where the two most often-asked questions are: Maybe I'm getting old, but is the average symposium age rising? and What is it about so many lawyers doing theology?*

eleven-issue quest to explore Mormonism, knew what it was about: a Mormon magazine of features and news—in *that* order!

*SunStone's* compound-noun masthead (as it was then doubly capitalized, and still is by the nostalgic Dennis Clark) took the two simple nouns used to describe an engraved Nauvoo Temple stone capital and combined them into one proper noun that in time acquired a distinct Mormon meaning. So, too, had the magazine created its unique mission by combining the editors' Mormon world-view with their American passion for citizen-accessible, intelligent periodicals of issues and ideas. *SUNSTONE* had evolved into a popular, Mormon intellectual forum. Whew! But that didn't mean the future would be less dramatic.

### 1978–1980

#### ALLEN ROBERTS & PEGGY FLETCHER YEARS

*Sunstone's* charisma is institutionalized in ongoing programs.

**A**LLEN ROBERTS and Peggy Fletcher succeeded Kenney as co-publishers and co-editors. During their ten-issue, two-year tenure, The Sunstone Foundation began as a publisher of a magazine and transformed into an expansive, networking facilitator of Mormon intelligentsia.

Roberts/Fletcher stabilized the magazine's inherited format in an attractive, standardized graphic design that became, at last!, comfortably predictable. Simple, economy-minded two-color covers handsomely framed a photograph or drawing that advertised the lead article. With few original illustrations, public-domain art or historical photographs creatively adorned many articles. But the colorful celebration of Mormon art all but disappeared. They added pages and regularly hosted interviews with thoughtful Mormons and non-Mormons. Steven Christensen's regular "Sunday School Supplement" column established the columnist as a magazine feature.

*SUNSTONE* articles became longer, more substantive, and

better documented. Established professors now filled each magazine; few pieces were by graduate students. Instead of light historical pieces, *SUNSTONE* focused on history. Roberts/Fletcher's premiere issue featured Dean May's "Thoughts on Faith and History," the first serve in a decade-long volley among distinguished yet intense players on this widely debated topic. This series simultaneously demonstrated *SUNSTONE's* commitment to publishing scholarship and to documenting contemporary controversies. Later, the Grace Fort Arrington Award for Historical Excellence was awarded to *SUNSTONE* and Fletcher for hosting this never-ending match.

While the majority of features were "faith promoting," Roberts/Fletcher embraced the day's hot issues, printing the text of Louise Degn's controversial KSL-TV documentary "Mormon Women and Depression" and Linda Sillitoe's essay/report on Sonia Johnson's excommunication.

Edited by young intellectuals, *SUNSTONE* was "A uniquely Mormon magazine," as its short-lived subtitle proclaimed, that spanned perspectives and ages. And it was read by more people: subscriptions tripled to three thousand.

Since some of its founders had been divinity students, *SUNSTONE* always featured theology. Now, the number and quality of theology pieces grew, with articles such as Mark Leone's controversial "The Mormon Temple Experience."

**Symposium.** Eugene Shoemaker's "Speculative Theology: The Key to Dynamic Faith" was the first published article that had been earlier presented at a Sunstone symposium—the 1979 Mormon Theological Symposium, held at the University of Utah. *SUNSTONE* had already begun to mine articles from the rich veins of Mormon conferences, such as the Mormon History Association's. Now to generate better articles—especially theological ones—Sunstone sponsored its own conference. In a short time, the summer symposium outgrew serving the magazine's needs and became a separate and equal forum of the foundation. Ironically, symposium sessions now often determine the magazine's content. "Sunstone" soon replaced "Mormon" in the symposium title, causing eternal confusion over just when "Sunstone" should be italicized.

Over the years, symposiums and related Sunstone lectures have been a wellspring for articles that have appeared in many thirsty periodicals, even the *Ensign*. Indeed, many all-time favorites would not have been written without the symposium's unmovable and public deadline. The symposium gained notoriety for its few controversial sessions, but the complete list of symposium presenters reveals a surprising diversity of speakers and topics, and the annual symposium became a place where scholars and interested lay members from many disciplines and perspectives cross-fertilize. The task of recruiting contrasting panelists and paper commenters forced Sunstone to reach out to a broad spectrum of thoughtful Mormons and Mormon observers. That never-ending process helped transform The Sunstone Foundation into an organiza-



CAL GRONDAHL



"WE NEED SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL AND INSPIRING. AND YET REFLECTS THE TASTE OF THE AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS."

*The craft of the cartoons in Freeway to Perfection amazed Mormons like Star Wars did Americans. Going where no Mormon had gone before, they showed us an engaging and ironic world of proud but flawed beings. But it wasn't a movie screen; it was a mirror—we were viewing average, imperfect Mormons who were silly, yes, but endearing and likeable, too. Wow! I'll get a copy for Dad. The Force was with Calvin Grondahl.*

tion that networks, facilitates, and cultivates Mormon studies as much as it prints and hosts presentations. Its computer database of names, fax and phone numbers, and street and e-mail addresses is invaluable and envied.

**Fiction Contest.** Bruce Jorgensen's "Born of Water" was the first Sunstone Fiction Contest winner the magazine published. Until then, fiction had been generated by unpredictable submissions and by begging. Just as the symposium had been created by the need for better articles, the fiction contest was begun to get better stories. And as with the symposium, today the contest has developed its own role and reputation because it often shines an early spotlight on emerging important Mormon writers. And, according to pattern, both quality and length grew. For almost two decades, the children of Brookie and D. K. Brown have generously funded the contest, which was renamed to honor their late parents.

**Cartoon books.** Mormon humor and Sunstone took a quantum leap when *Freeway to Perfection* appeared on regional best-seller lists. It was the first of three Calvin Grondahl cartoon books that Sunstone published. With probing insider knowledge and affection, Grondahl aims to remind Mormons "Ye are not Gods yet" and to speak "what everyone in the room is thinking, but no one will say." His employer, the *Deseret News*, eventually told him to choose Mormon cartoons or his job. He's now at the *Standard Examiner* in Ogden, Utah.

O my heck! Expanded magazines plus symposiums, fiction contests, cartoon books—all in two years! In strengthening the magazine by establishing ongoing programs, Roberts/Fletcher recreated Sunstone. By the time Allen Roberts returned to his architectural firm, when people said "Sunstone," they could mean the foundation, the symposium, the magazine—or everything together. These were fun, expansive times. During these years, Sunstone sparked some tension, suspicion, and controversy, but for most involved, the static

was similar to the tensions between the many academic disciplines and society in general, and likewise tolerated, as evidenced by the increasing number of BYU faculty in Sunstone's forums. By far, Sunstone's biggest challenge was keeping its visions and abilities equally yoked. On good weeks, Sunstone was "only broke." Yet a belief in the cause and a conviction that Mormon studies was a growth industry not only powered the Sunstone train, but it built-up steam and gained momentum.

### PEGGY FLETCHER YEARS 1980–1986

*With expansive vision, Sunstone nearly perishes.*

#### THE EARLY FLETCHER YEARS

*A smoothly running editorial machine.*

PEGGY FLETCHER became editor/publisher/foundation president in 1980. Her first eight solo issues maintained its distinguished, conservative look. Articles on the arts slightly returned, including ones on missionary graffiti on the ceiling tiles in the old Language Training Mission and the ban on drums in Nigerian branches. There were more articles by scholars of other faiths, many who had been symposium lecturers. In contemporary issues, which fueled the controversial reputation, the magazine had a political emphasis, with articles on church-state issues and abortion. Women's issues commanded more pages, including topics on Mother in Heaven and the loss of Sister-given blessings. Book of Mormon scholarship continued with challenging archaeology and wordprint studies. Articles relating to the individual and the Church increased, including one on Helmuth Huebener's anti-Nazi crusade and subsequent excommunication and execution.

The symposium graduated to downtown hotels. Organizations, such as *Exponent II* and the Society for the Sociological Study of Mormon Life, began sponsoring sessions. In 1985,

works by Mormon artists were exhibited. The symposium tent bulged as more groups and individuals congressed under it. Other occasional lectures were held, such as the short-lived Sunstone Debate Society's pro-con evening on "Resolved: Mormons are Christian."

SUNSTONE had maintained this comfortable stride through two editors and seemingly could have continued expanding and refining its popular, tried-and-true formats. But the past is prologue—another dramatic change was announced: the magazine's news stories and book reviews would now appear only in the *Sunstone Review*, a new, "monthly" Sunstone periodical.

SUNSTONE REVIEW

*One's reach must exceed one's grasp,  
or How can something free pay for something that's not?*

THE *Sunstone Review* . . . the most heroic of those brilliant projects shrewdly undertaken to make loads of money that ended up as a financial failure but a transforming vision. A Mormon combination of *Newsweek* and the *New York Review of Books*, the fast-read, throw-away, news-print, magazine-size *Review* was priced cheap (often free) to gain a large circulation that would subsidize the money-losing SUNSTONE.

The *Review* planned to lure national book ads by greatly increasing the number and scope of reviews. Each *Review* presented up to fifteen full-length book reviews, plus short notes, long review essays, and movie reviews. Although Mormon books got notice, the reviews focused on books by national, non-Mormon publishers: religious/ethical books such as Harold Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*; non-fiction, such as Norman Podhoretz's *Why We Were in Vietnam*; and fiction by Saul Bellow and John Updike. What a great idea!—Mormons engaging the larger, thoughtful world from their LDS perspective and for an LDS audience.

Unfortunately, the *Review* attracted no national advertising; instead of being the hoped-for asset, it was a big liability.

~~Citizen~~ Sister Kane  
*or The watchdog on the Church?*

LIKE a star going nova, the news half of *Sunstone Review* exploded the magazine's news formats. Previously, three column-length departments housed paragraph-length news summaries. Now, numerous departments provided abundant stories with punchy-verbbed headlines. The existing departments were enlarged—"Update," "One Fold," "Mormon Associations," and "Mormon Media Image." New ones were

created—"People," the humorous "Short Subjects," "Sports," "Speeches and Conferences," "Articulture," and "Interviews."

Covers often featured a lead news story, such as the impact of newly installed satellite dishes or Mark Hofmann's then-believable account to find the lost one-hundred-sixteen pages of the Book of Mormon. The *Review's* limited original reporting covered important Mormon events the regular media didn't, and the staff dreamed of becoming a vigorous Mormon news magazine with in-depth investigations on LDS trends, events, and programs. For now, the news mostly summarized Salt Lake newspaper stories—a valuable service. Fifteen years later, the *Review's* news still has pith and punch, and many controversies are identical, such as graduation prayers.

Since the *Review* was to come out monthly, it had an easy-to-paste-up, formulaic design, but many reviews had commissioned art. It ranged between thirty and forty pages, and never came out twelve times in a year. In the fourth and last volume, only four thin issues appeared. With a design change, few reviews and weak news, they were ghosts of the earlier issues.

To rescue the financially drowning organization, this ambitious endeavor was abandoned, but the project fundamentally reoriented the foundation. On the publishing side, the *Review* made Sunstone address, more than ever promotion, distribution, sales, and advertising. Editorially, it demonstrated the expansive, unrealized potential of the news and reviews.

Before the *Review*, Sunstone had been a host for discussions of hot contemporary issues. Now, with

the reporter's cap came the adversarial tension between journalists and institutions. Sunstone's immersion in journalism occurred in the wake of the community's disillusionment after the release of Church Historian Leonard Arrington, the moving of his staff to BYU, and the "closing" of the Church Archives. The impassioned stands on truth-telling about history were applied to covering contemporary Church actions.

The necessity of the independent press in American democracy is axiomatic. For many Saints, however, the need for a true, independent, *insider* Mormon press is heresy, and the act is apostasy. Its instances are rare, brief, and infamous. And given the inherent tensions between Church leaders and re-



*Is a true, independent, insider Mormon press heresy? Its instances are rare, brief, and infamous.*

porters, perhaps committed Saints can't professionally cover the Kingdom. Since Sunstone's resources were limited and the *Review's* life short, the complicated conflicts assumed in this Woodward/Bernstein role were only tasted (bitterly), as Church spokespersons stonewalled even innocuous inquiries. Nevertheless, Sunstone's encounter with journalism strengthened its relationships with local and national newspeople, forged an institutional commitment to Mormon journalism, and helped articulate the vital need for open forums inside Mormonism. SUNSTONE's ongoing coverage of the intellectual skirmishes in the 1990s is a legacy of the *Review*.

#### SUNSTONE DURING THE REVIEW

*A columnist under every (sun)stone,  
or No news is good news.*

**M**EANWHILE, the magazine creatively filled the pages vacated by the news and reviews. New columns appeared, such as Marybeth Raynes's "Issues of Intimacy" and Michael Hicks's "Aesthetics and Noetics." These were opinion columns, informed by the authors' expertise. The *New Republic* is a political "journal of opinion"; similarly, these columns reflected on contemporary Mormonism and helped nudge Mormon intellectual discourse beyond scholarship and personal essay to interpretation and commentary.

On the other pages, the established formats improved. The fourteen issues produced during the *Review* years are confident and strong. Each had one short story, one poem, and up to nine features—the most ever. History and theology articles were abundant; contemporary-issue articles examined excommunication, Church public relations, and Mormon closet doubters. Art articles were absent, but now most articles had a unique graphic design with original illustrations. Over all, the magazine's content and look attained a higher professionalism.

After a year, SUNSTONE replaced its established design. Then just six issues later, in tandem with changes in the *Review*, the magazine changed its graphic look again. With fewer pages and a more jumbled editorial package, SUNSTONE was in flux—once more!

Paralleling the ailing *Review*, SUNSTONE printed only two of its projected six issues in 1984. These were Sunstone's darkest days. Given the extremely irregular mailings (even for Sunstone) and reduced professionalism, rumors buzzed about weighty obligations and imminent demise. Few readers were surprised at the announcement that at the start of 1985, both magazines would recombine into one, uh, *monthly* magazine.

#### VOLUME 10

*All the news that fits,  
or Every marriage requires compromise.*

**W**HAT a challenge!—to preserve in one magazine what had filled two: seven feature articles, one short story, one poem, five columns, extensive news coverage, and numerous reviews of Mormon and non-Mormon books. To accommodate news and reviews, the mag-

azine size grew, but within a few issues, it dropped back.

The reviews suffered most in the union. Since then, rarely has any issue had more than three, and almost all books have been about Mormonism.

The first recombined SUNSTONE dedicated fourteen pages to various news departments, which soon shrank into a three-page "News" section. Stories included the censoring and re-taping of Elder Ronald Poelman's general conference address and the Hofmann bombings and forgeries.

The average number of magazine columns dropped to two, and the number of feature-length articles also decreased. Although the personal essay had long been a feature, SUNSTONE now inaugurated the popular "Pillars of My Faith" symposium and magazine feature.

The foundation's major expansion during this consolidation was the first "regional" symposium, in Washington, D.C. At it, cassette recordings of sessions were sold for the first time, greatly expanding the symposium audience. Selling tapes is another Sunstone money-making project that worked.

Another revenue project of this period failed, but it did provide perhaps unintentional humor. Unaccountably, SUNSTONE briefly featured questionable personal ads, such as the "gorgeous vivacious woman seeking total heretic with zest for life."

A more sane and enduring addition was the lead "editorial," started by Peggy Fletcher's touching, "Stretching toward the Light." As the editor reflects personally on spiritual values that resonate with readers, the editorial frames the magazine's intellectual differences within a larger, shared context. This perspective helps many to disagree with a controversial article without feeling they must reject the forum that presented it.

Volume 10 promised twelve issues in one year, and it *delivered* twelve issues, but in two years. By the volume's end, the wobbles of re-joining the two magazines had been finally negotiated into a comfortable, if not perfect, marriage.

But, surprise! Sunstone's future was again uncertain—half-way through the volume, editor/publisher Peggy Fletcher, as integral to Sunstone as Moroni to the temple, married and announced her departure. The volume's last issue led with two editorials: one by the new publisher/foundation president, Daniel H. Rector, Sunstone's business manager, and one by the new editor, Elbert Eugene Peck, a former *Sunstone Review* managing editor and a Washington, D.C., symposium organizer.

#### 1986–1991

#### DANIEL RECTOR & ELBERT PECK YEARS

*Old things become new.*

**D**ANIEL RECTOR and Elbert Peck were the first to carry the Sunstone torch who had not been around when it had been lit. They instituted few dramatic innovations. Their relay gathered, restored, expanded, and stabilized the various Sunstone traditions. Their tenures comprise the second half of Sunstone's history, during which Sunstone's organizational turmoils dropped to a simmer but the external tensions rose to a scalding boil.

**Symposiums and Lectures.** Under Rector/Peck, sympo-

siums and lectures greatly expanded. From 1987 to 1993, Sunstone hosted a monthly scripture lecture series in Salt Lake City. In 1990, it sponsored the theme symposium, "Plotting Zion." Regional symposiums were begun in California (1987), Seattle (1988), Chicago (1992), and Boston (1993). Each regional symposium is organized by locals who are crazy enough to think, "if we organize it, they will come." Between one hundred and five hundred souls do. Each symposium develops its own personality and soon becomes a reunion of old friends.

Under Rector/Peck, "theological" was dropped from the Salt Lake symposium title, reflecting the many academic disciplines now participating: literary critics, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and material culturalists. Some topics were perennials, such as Mormonism and the environment; some were experiential, such as a panel of Relief Society presidents; some reflected emerging U.S. social issues, such as spouse and child abuse; and some critiqued fleeting hot ideas or books, such as Helen Schuckman's *A Course in Miracles*. Every time period had a women-related session. At the first Rector/Peck symposium, Hugh Nibley spoke on the Book of Mormon, and each year the number of BYU faculty participants grew. New formats included hymn singing, plays, sermons, comic routines, morning devotionals, creeds and psalms, interviews, author meets the critics, and prayers at plenary sessions. Once, an original symphony was performed.

Symposium proposals may be on any topic. They are accepted or rejected for quality of thought and expression, and each year organizers raise the standard a little. The assembled smorgasbord of issues, perspectives, and approaches reflects Mormonism's blending of the boundaries between lay members and clergy and between amateur and scholar. Over three days, up to fifteen hundred people attend one of the Salt Lake symposium's one-hundred-plus sessions. There, a sociologist's research on Mormon families will be scrutinized by an audience full of Mormon family members. A theological essay by a stay-at-home parent may be responded to by a Yale Ph.D. candidate. And panels on topics from favorite spiritual movies to home teaching involve thoughtful people from all professions and disciplines. This mix makes a vibrant dynamic. One non-Mormon scholar comes to the symposiums because "the audience cares about the subject to their bones." This blending frustrates some BYU administrators as the symposiums aren't pure academic con-

ferences. Conversely, some Church leaders see the symposiums as being too intellectual for the general membership.

As an open forum, inevitably a few sessions address controversial topics or present revisionist interpretations. Given the media's natural bias toward conflict, these sessions are the ones covered, and when taken collectively, the public impression of symposium proceedings is formed by a small, unrepresentative subset. During Rector/Peck, the Wasatch Front media increased its coverage, as did the Associated Press.

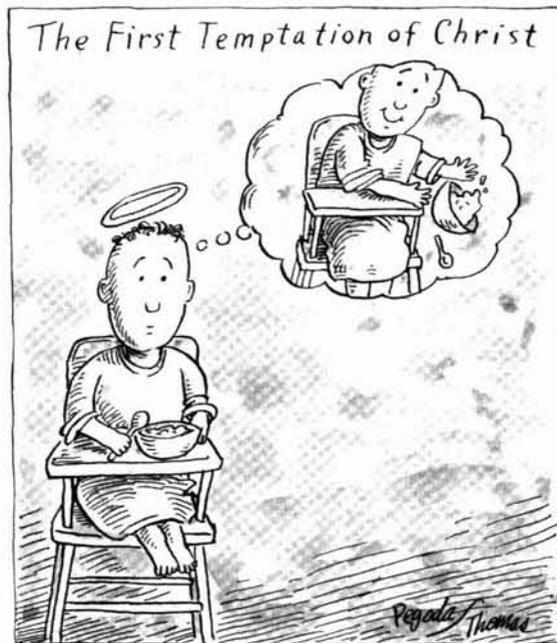
**Sunstone magazine.** A new, conservative graphic design was implemented, which standardized article format and art/illustration placement but did not require them. By creating a window for poems at the end of articles, the number per issue rose to seven. Over the years, the magazine's look matured by refinements and new sections, but the basic design has now served SUNSTONE for half its life.

Humorous columns increased, and cartoons became a fixture. Each issue was launched with a Grondahl cartoon and splashed down with one by Pat Bagley, with other recruited cartoonists in between. Much of the tension concerning Sunstone is over the appropriateness of reproducing American pluralistic forms inside its theistic community, and this question applies to cartoons. For most readers, Grondahl's cultural pokes are okay, but what about pointed political cartoons on a Church policy? Should Church leaders be cartooned? Jesus? God?

The periodic publication of Mormon plays was resumed; unless published, they vanish after their run. Happily, some plays have been reproduced because of appearing in SUNSTONE. The Association for Mormon Letters gave Sunstone a special award for this "singular and unremunerative" service.

Mormon arts were addressed with mixed success. In creative writing, the short-short story category was added to the Brown fiction contest. With visual arts, commissioned illustrations increased substantially, often executed by young, portfolio-building artists; fine art was again neglected.

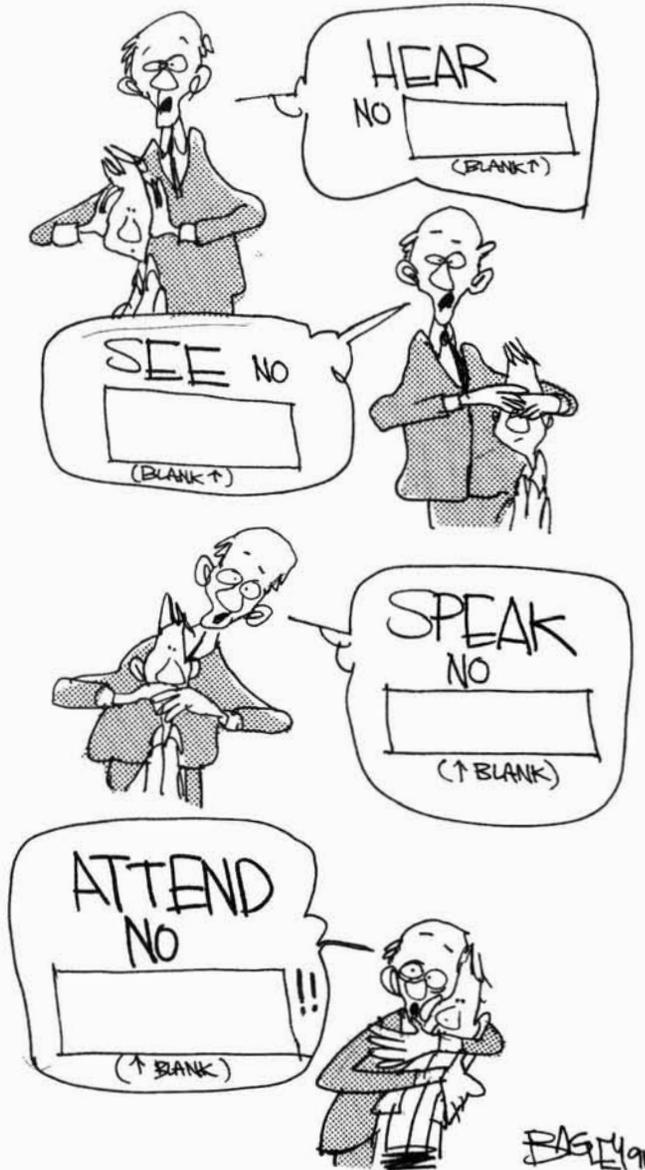
New columnists included sociologist Marie Cornwall, textual critic Dorice Williams Elliott, anthropologist David Knowlton, and author Orson Scott Card, whose conservative columns provoked liberals and tested their beliefs in tolerance and diversity. Guest columns "Turning the Time over to . . ." and "This Side of the Tracts" were created in part to feature short symposium panel presentations.



**Where do you draw the line?**  
Cartoons were added so we could laugh.  
But religion is a serious matter, and  
humor prompts strong responses.  
To the editors' surprise, this drawing  
solicited the most criticism—Jesus  
is too sacred to cartoon.

REPRINTED BY PERMISSION OF THE DOOR

# FILL IN THE BLANK:



Following the Church's 1991 "Statement" on symposia, BYU censored faculty involvement, which aggravated the balance of perspectives. Ironically, to counter the disproportioned margins, organizers now spend most of their time recruiting moderate replacements and designing more "faith-promoting" sessions.

The news section slowly grew, adhering to the traditional focus on academic conferences, calendars, humorous spots, Church developments, and intellectual controversies.

Articles presented diverse topics, approaches, and perspectives—including philosopher James Faulkner on postmodernism and scripture, art historian Linda Gibbs on spirituality and modern art, management professor Warner Woodworth on building Zion in the Third World, and humanities professor Art Bassett asking, "How Much Tolerance Can We Tolerate?"

Rector/Peck's two most famous issues featured dishonored general authorities. They publicized SUNSTONE's role as a documenter of contemporary Mormonism and demonstrated the fuzzy distinction between being messenger or advocate.

In 1989, the magazine published complete typeset versions of Elder George P. Lee's long, angry, handwritten letters to the First Presidency and the Twelve, which Lee released to the press after his excommunication for apostasy. A popular premium in promotional mass mailings, the issue went through three printings. *This People* subscribers eagerly subscribed just to get the issue (but they didn't renew).

In 1991, after the *Arizona Republic* story on Elder Paul H. Dunn's fabricated war and baseball stories, SUNSTONE devoted much of an issue to journalist Lynn Packer's more detailed, original research and to seven thoughtful responses. To document the episode's folk humor, widely circulating Dunn cartoons were reproduced. Enjoyed on the fax underground, they were hated in print. Readers split as to whether the Dunn cluster was a balanced service or mean-spirited sensationalism. The successful Lee promotional text was used with the Dunn issue; it elicited a virulent response that the earlier one didn't.

In 1990, changes in the temple endowment received wide media coverage, and SUNSTONE reported the interest. Avoiding direct quotations, the story noted that some newspapers provided explicit descriptions of the excised rituals. It also reported that all individuals quoted in the media (all positively) were rebuked by local Church leaders for speaking about the temple; some had their temple privileges revoked. A later issue reported that for running the news story, Rector's and Peck's privileges had been revoked.

Meanwhile, the magazine grew to sixty-four pages. Because of aggressive new-subscriber mass-mailings, which offered tempting free books, subscriptions rose from 3,500, briefly peaked at 10,000, and receded as the "soft subscribers" did not renew. New-subscription revenues and a put-Sunstone-in-the-black donation campaign erased Sunstone's long-time debt.

In 1991, Daniel Rector left for a job that allowed him to feed his family and pay his mortgage. During his leg of the relay, the Sunstone torch had flared brighter than ever.

## ELBERT PECK YEARS 1991–

*A Cornucopia of Things,  
or You say symposia, I say symposiums . . .*

**E**LBERT PECK continued as editor, and in early 1992, Linda Jean Stephenson was hired as publisher. She left for health reasons in December, and Peck assumed



*In their Mormon cartoons, political cartoonists Cal Grondahl and Pat Bagley only used fictional characters and probed general cultural incongruities. Then in the confrontational early 1990s, some Sunstone cartoons modeled political cartoons—they depicted real personalities and commented on current events. Today, a cartoon may toy with some news report about Mormonism, but the cartoonists avoid drawing Church leaders.*

both jobs. During this period, intellectual skirmishes escalated into major battles, about which Sunstone hosted discussions and reported news (which often involved Sunstone forums).

For many years, Church leaders had in passing noted the “critics inside and outside the Church.” In the late seventies and early eighties, talks by Apostles Boyd K. Packer and Ezra Taft Benson helped spark the argument over the writing of faithful history. But Apostle Dallin H. Oaks’s 1989 “Alternate Voices” general conference address expanded the discussion beyond historiography to all intellectual discourse and included the forums of discussion as well. In numerous sessions and articles, individuals grappled with the issue.

After the 1991 symposium, the debate warped to hyperspace when the First Presidency and the Twelve issued a “Statement” on “recent symposia” that inappropriately discuss private matters or ridicule sacred things; they cautioned about participating. The statement provoked another debate over dissent and the independent exploration of Mormon ideas. BYU’s discussion focused on whether Church-paid professors could freely speak on taboo topics, such as Mother in Heaven, or in Sunstone forums. Reflecting the national culture wars between conservatives and feminist/postmodern scholars, a heated war over personal and institutional academic freedom ensued, and dissenting faculty convinced the American Academy of University Professors to censure BYU for limiting expression. Some of the persuasive cases involved Sunstone.

As BYU bullied its faculty away from Sunstone, the resulting drop in “moderate” scholars meant that the proportion of “liberals” went up. Supporters feared Sunstone could become the “marginal” organization that critics said it already was—the Statement was self-fulfilling. Sunstone’s response was to still welcome all responsible voices *and* to more strongly cultivate

civil, respectful speech, to aggressively recruit non-BYU moderates, and to highlight constructive papers in plenary sessions and cover stories. But it could not fully compensate.

Much of the debate over the appropriate role for Mormon studies occurred at or was reported in a Sunstone forum. At the 1992 symposium, Lavina Fielding Anderson chronicled instances of alleged LDS ecclesiastical repression of scholars, intellectuals, and feminists. Her revelation of the existence of the apostle-led, dissident-monitoring, Strengthening the Members Committee prompted a fiery Utah hailstorm.

In September 1993, after the symposium, Church disciplinary councils tried six individuals for apostasy for public statements. For five of the six, charges included SUNSTONE writings, such as D. Michael Quinn’s “150 Years of Truth-Telling in Mormon History,” or symposium speeches, such as Anderson’s chronology and Paul Toscano’s jeremiad against Church leaders. Five were excommunicated, one disfellowshipped. Some were disciplined when they would not agree to limit their future speech. Subsequently, other authors were excommunicated in part for their Sunstone-hosted words, such as former-BYU, now-Brandeis-biblical-scholar David Wright for his views on Book of Mormon historicity. SUNSTONE’s news section published his letters of defense to his stake president, as it did when feminist author Janice Allred was excommunicated.

Winds from the “Purge” billowed the brushfires into a firestorm. Individuals retrenched, charged, fled, prayed, retreated. The times were politicized and polarized; everyone and everything was affected, especially civility and good will. The simple decision whether to join a public conversation was now for some a test of loyalty to principles and institutions that a decade earlier did not seem in conflict. Former co-author professors now wouldn’t even speak on the same panel.

When Sunstone did not categorically ban the excommunicates but considered their proposals as any other, some individuals quit Sunstone, as did Orson Scott Card, who refuses invitations as long as “apostates” are allowed to speak.

Even a cursory look at the magazine articles from this period shows how this cancer grew and colored so much discourse and so many magazine pages. Since it was *the* topic of the day, SUNSTONE hosted the discussion, but it sought to direct it with constructive articles, such as Bonner Ritchie’s “Let Contention Cease: The Limits of Dissent in the Church.”

The above events are truly pivotal, yet they did not entirely consume the times. Another glance through the issues reveals the silent majority of pieces uninvolved with the crisis: plays, poems, stories, columns, letters, reviews, sermons, essays histories, and humor—the lively essays of Eugene England and Levi Peterson, the light mind and even lighter pen of Elouise Bell, Dave Knowlton elucidating how and why we structure testimony bearing, roadside Saint Esther Peterson bearing her expansive Mormon soul, and Mike Hicks’s priesthood quorum memoir. During these dark days, Sunstone’s eclectic embrace of different forms, disciplines, experiences, and beliefs refreshed and enlightened.

One lasting result of “the Purge” is that now unorthodox symposium speakers and magazine authors (even of letters to the editor) are regularly invited by their stake president or bishop to discuss their comments, which have been referred to them by their area presidency. Almost all report a warm, positive, pastoral conversation, although some resent the inquisitorial shadow of the Big-Brother Strengthening the Members Committee. But others welcome the opportunity for dialogue and are undisturbed by a request to explain public comments.

One positive result is that Sunstone now works harder to raise the quality of its discourse in two areas: (1) scholarship and rigor of thought, and (2) civility and respect for all Latter-day Saints and symposium participants. As we improve our ability to “speak the truth in love,” the symposium/magazine becomes even a more open forum. Individuals once alienated by someone’s harsh, condemning rhetoric will only return when they feel that they will be listened to with respect and their views responded to with intelligence and good will. Proposals that likely would have been accepted a decade ago are now rejected for one or both of the above criteria.

During Peck’s tenure, two symposium functions were added. Since 1993, each Salt Lake symposium has hosted an art exhibit and auction. This commitment to visual art also helps Sunstone’s finances. The 1999 auction’s profits began the Sunstone endowment. In 1997, Sunstone assumed the lucrative symposium book concession, and now the Sunstone Mercantile bookstore serves walk-ins and mail-orders (and soon, the Internet) year round. Some friends have donated used books; they get the tax deduction, and with no wholesale costs, the monies from their sale are 100 percent profit.

During this period, the magazine continued its almost imperceptible progress by implementing small and moderate improvements, such as setting off poems with Mormon-Christian icons, expanding news coverage and photographs, creating the

“On the Record” section to reprint important documents, and adding/enlarging cartoons, illustrations, and call-out quotes. Each issue artfully showcases at least one full-page photograph. Covers regularly host full-color humorous drawings. From Wayne Booth speaking on pride to Kathleen Flake on the Lord’s Supper, strong and diverse features blend personal and scholarly voices. A “Cornucopia” section was inaugurated at the front—short miscellanea of musings, factoids, psalms, creeds, lists, and new-book excerpts—to provide chewy nuggets for readers on the run and to create a short format for one-idea essayettes. The last-page “Olive Leaf” was designed to conclude the magazine on a spirit-filled note. It takes time for the small staff to incorporate even minor additions, and Peck often quotes Emily Dickinson (poem 843):

I made Slow riches but my Gain  
Was steady as the Sun  
And every Night, it numbered more  
Than the preceding One.

All Days, I did not earn the same,  
But my perceiveless Gain  
Inferred the less by Growing than  
The Sum that it had grown.

The long-term result is an eighty-page magazine with more diverse topics, authors, and formats in an engaging package—the strongest SUNSTONE ever.

Inch by inch, idea by idea, need by need, Sunstone continues to slowly adapt and grow.



SUNSTONE is many different things rolled into one quirky image. It is multiple forums and competing constituencies; it is scholars and feminists and seekers and artists. It leads the community with view-changing articles, but also it follows the sweep of national styles and topics. It’s a scholarly forum *and* an opinion rag. A literary gazette *and* a news service. Faithful and skeptical. Exultant and descriptive. Soapbox and altar. Mirror and canvas. Vision and inkblot.

This skeleton history overlooks Sunstone’s perky human family—the revolving flesh and blood and hearts and brains and brawn that keep it living. Those know-it-all amateurs, dyslexic editors, anti-social receptionists, angelic donors, quixotic publishers, reclusive typesetters, gabby proofreaders, and proof-reading subscribers. God bless them, everyone.

For a quarter century, Sunstone’s expansive, chaotic ventures have been tempered by pragmatic, stonehard realities. Its Mormon trek has been a wild, twisting, high-speed quest that kept its company wondering and a little fearful about what was next. Throughout the journey, Sunstone has evolved into a hardy species that gathers, examines, celebrates, and disseminates Mormon experience, scholarship, issues, and art. ☐