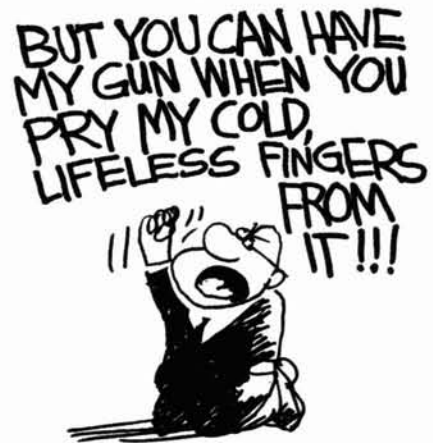


UPDATE



MADMAN OPENS FIRE IN FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY; PRESIDENT HINCKLEY URGES GUN CONTROL

A CLINICALLY DEPRESSED and possibly paranoid schizophrenic man entered the LDS church's Family History Library on 15 April 1999 and began shooting with a .22 caliber handgun. Sergei Babarin, a seventy-year-old Russian immigrant, killed two people and injured three others before being shot to death himself by Salt Lake City police. Killed were library security guard Don Thomas, 62, of West Jordan, Utah, and library patron Patricia Irene Frengs, 55, of Pleasant Hill, California, according to the *Deseret News*.

On Monday, 19 April, President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke at Thomas's funeral, offering his condolences and counseled that "This terrible incident becomes a warning to all of [the] ever-present danger" in society when mentally unstable people have easy access to guns. According to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, President Hinckley expressed his sad amazement that "such a person" as Babarin, a man with a "warped mind," was permitted by society to "arm himself with an automatic weapon to cut down and kill . . ." To Thomas's family and loved ones and the other one thousand people attending the funeral, President Hinckley said there are no answers why the grandfather of twelve, a man just two months short of retirement, was taken from life.

"We cannot live and work in a bunker mentality," President

Hinckley continued. "This entire episode was gruesome . . . and we hope never to experience it again." The president further told how he had often exchanged greetings with Thomas, whom Hinckley called a self-effacing man. "It was never expected that he would be asked to give his life."

The library re-opened to somber staff and patrons the Monday of Thomas's funeral. Nearly one dozen counselors from LDS Social Services were on hand to assist any people having difficulty coping with the tragedy.

Babarin had been treated for mood disorders, but according to news reports, had stopped taking his medication. Further, Babarin had previously been charged with a felony weapons violation that he had plea bargained to a misdemeanor. After a street altercation, police had confiscated a gun from Babarin, but because Babarin's crime was reduced to a misdemeanor, he was legally able to purchase a gun identical to the confiscated one less than one month later. It was this second weapon with which Babarin terrorized library visitors.

The day of Thomas's funeral, Dave Jones (D), minority leader in the Utah state House of Representatives, called upon Utah Governor Mike Leavitt (R) to call a special session of the legislature to address the availability of weapons to mentally unstable persons. That same day, Leavitt responded that no such session was needed and that Utahns needed to take time to reflect on government's role in reducing violence. The following day, Tuesday, 20 April, fifteen people died in a shooting spree at Columbine High School in Littleton,

Colorado. After this horrific tragedy, Leavitt called upon the legislature's interim committees to study gun issues for ninety days and then report to him. Then the governor will consider calling a special legislative session.

## SALT LAKE SELLS MAIN STREET BLOCK TO LDS CHURCH

SURPRISING RESIDENTS of Salt Lake City, the LDS church and mayor Dee Dee Corradini announced on 1 December 1998 plans to close to traffic a section of Main Street between North and South Temple Streets, according to the *Deseret News*. And on 13 April 1999, the city council approved the sale of the city street to the Church for \$8.1 million.

The section of Main Street divides Temple Square from the block with the Church administration buildings, including the Church Office Building and the Joseph Smith Memorial Building (the former Hotel Utah).

A December 1998 Church press release listed potential benefits to the city from the street's closure. Benefits included: expansion of the gardens of Temple Square "to provide pleasant meandering walkways . . . and space uniquely designed for cultural events" and that will enhance visitors' experiences in the state's capital city; increasing public safety for pedestrians moving between various points downtown; and allowing the Church to expand its underground parking facility in the area. The press release also noted that "professional traffic consultants" determined that the closure will have only minimal impacts on downtown automobile traffic.

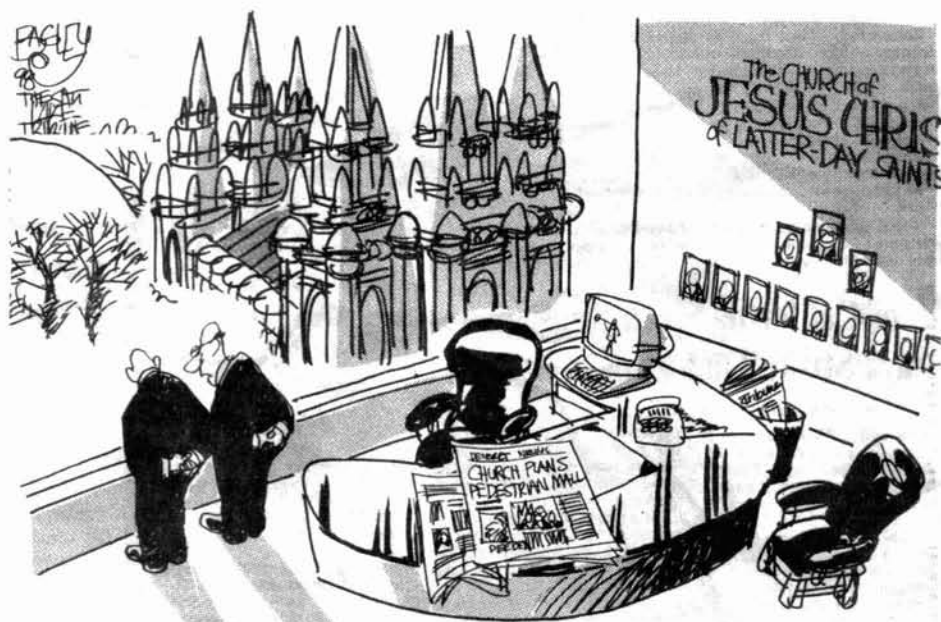
But as the public debated the closure in the months between its announcement and its final approval, all of the purported benefits were called into question and religion entered the debate.

"If the Catholics or Baptists wanted to buy this section of Main Street, you would say absolutely not," Heather Doral told the city council, according to the *Salt Lake Tribune*. "This is public property. Shouldn't this be the end of the matter for the the Mormon Church as well?"

In voting to approve selling the street to the Church, the city council also approved an easement reservation that would revert the land to public ownership if the Church denies public access to the space. Still, the Church is granted the right to restrict smoking, assembling, picketing, and other activities. Commissioner Craig Mariger complained about giving the Church these rights. "This doesn't sound like public space to me. It sound like an annex to Temple Square."

In approving the sale, the city council voted along religious lines, 5-2.

Proposals to close the section of Main Street have been around since 1962. For years, however, Main Street merchants have opposed the closure, fearing that the reduced traffic would hurt their businesses. But in a controversial 1996 decision that irked many of these same Main Street merchants, the city decided to run its new light rail transit system along downtown Main Street. The tracks have now been laid, though the system is not yet operational, and the street's traffic is now dramatically reduced. And after the past two years of massive Main Street construction, the *Deseret News*



"TOO BAD THEY WOULDN'T SIGN OFF ON THE MOAT— THAT WOULD'VE BEEN COOL."

reports that many Main Street merchants are now supportive of closing the street section and creating a pedestrian avenue there. "This will create a place, and what makes uniqueness is place," city Community and Economic Development Director Stuart Reid told the *News*.

## ANTHRAX HOAX HITS CHURCH OFFICES

A PACKAGE WITH A NOTE saying the parcel contained anthrax was found 3 March 1999 in the mail room of the LDS Church Office Building. Three employees were taken to a hospital as a precautionary measure, the *Deseret News* reported.

According to Church spokesperson Dale K. Bills, "The package and wording were similar to other packages distributed around the Salt Lake Valley" in the previous couple of weeks. Some if not all of the mysterious "anthrax" packages were postmarked from Lexington, Kentucky.

Bills said that the hoax did not interrupt Church administration except for mail processing.

The day before the Church Office Building scare, Neil J. Gallagher, FBI assistant director in charge of the national security division, had been quoted in an Associated Press story as saying that anthrax threats are almost a daily occurrence in the United States. Gallagher expressed fear that, because of the threats, Americans will cease to take anthrax terrorism as a real possibility.

## MAN CONVICTED OF TORCHING CHURCHES

A FORMER CHURCH OF CHRIST minister who had an eight-year affair with a LDS organist in Albuquerque, New Mexico, was convicted on 23 March 1999 of ten counts of vandalism against LDS church property. One church, valued at \$2.5 million, was destroyed by fire in June 1998. The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that Walter Gene Grassie, 49, faces sentencing in June of this year. Prosecutors expect Grassie to receive a prison sentence of at least fifteen.

Bob Gorence, a First Assistant U.S. Attorney, told the Associated

Press that this case is indeed sad: "Here's a man who's successful, at the top of his whole life—and then he just loses it." The breakup of Grassie's affair with Sharlene Jensen provoked his crimes. The prosecution contended that Grassie blamed the LDS church for the breakup because of Mormon teachings that convinced Jensen to ultimately forsake Grassie and stay in her marriage to her husband, Buddy Jensen.

## MORMON MOTHERS SUE TO HALT SCHOOL PRAYERS

THROUGHOUT THE 1990s, Mormons have often found themselves on the conservative side of United States politics. For example, Mormons can be counted on to vote en masse for Republicans, to support proposed constitutional amendments banning abortions and outlawing flag burning, and to oppose gay clubs in public schools. Also, Mormons of the '90s typically favor prayers in schools. Ironical it is, then, that two LDS mothers recently joined with the American Civil Liberties Union in Sante Fe, Texas, to prevent local schools from allowing public prayers and other public endorsements of religion.

The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* reported that the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the Mormon mothers, banning school prayers from athletic events.

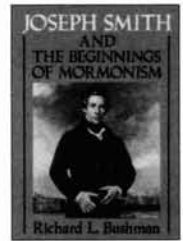
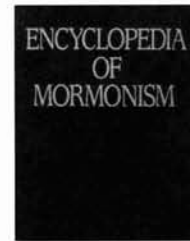
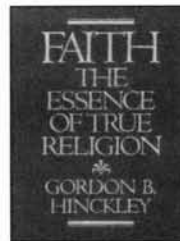
The court noted that the predominant religion had been unfairly supported by school officials. One seventh-grade teacher, for instance, had passed out in class notices for a Christian revival. When this teacher learned of one student's being LDS, the teacher condemned Mormonism as an evil, non-Christian cult.

Throughout the legal proceedings, the two mothers and their three children have remained anonymous so as to avoid community backlash. The court noted that school officials and other community persons had tried to discover the identity of the plaintiffs "by means

of bogus petitions, questionnaires, individual interrogation or downright snooping." School officials had been threatened by the court with contempt, according to the *Times-Picayune*.

"It's not so much that other people's religion offended them," Debora Perky said in the *Times-Picayune*. Perky is a former ACLU regional director who helped prepare the case. "They just wanted the school out of it. There had been several instances where their own religion had been called into question, and they wanted the schools to get out of religion, even if it had been their own religion being pushed."

Of related interest, a non-Mormon family has sued the Madison School District in eastern Idaho to prevent school prayers. Courts have thus far ruled that the school district may indeed allow prayers, though the case is still under appeal. Mormonism is the predominant religion in the area, and the non-Mormon plaintiffs in the case have remained anonymous to avoid community wrath.



The Church has embarked on a two-year mission to supply U.S. libraries and universities with accurate information about Mormonism.

## CHURCH DONATES BOOKS, OTHER RESOURCES

THE CHURCH HAS BEGUN a two-year project to donate informational resources to libraries and colleges in the United States. The effort is in response to a study that revealed that many of the institutions the Church is targeting currently have only information that incorrectly portrays LDS history and doctrine, according to the *Ricks College Scroll*.

Books and other reference materials being supplied to the select institutions include the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, *Faith: The Essence of True Religion* by President Gordon B. Hinckley, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* by Richard L. Bushman, the Church's triple combination of canonized works, several video cassettes about Church history, and a Latter-day Saint library on CD-ROM, which includes more than one hundred LDS reference works.

## FAMILY HISTORY ARCHIVES TO GO ONLINE

AMID RUMORS AND SECRECY, the Church has announced that in March or April 1999, a portion of its vast genealogical library will become accessible via the Internet. The announcement has family historians ecstatic. "Online genealogists have been hoping and praying for this quite some time," said Terrence Day, a Mormon who writes a genealogy column for a Washington state newspaper.

The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that cyberspace channels were abuzz with gossip in early March 1999 about the possibility of the library's going online. Because of the hubbub, the Church "reluctantly, and quietly, posted a terse statement about the service on its official Web site, [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org)," reported the *Tribune*. Church spokesperson Mike Otterson confirmed to the newspaper that the statement had

## PEOPLE

### DEATH

- Emeritus general authority and president of the Salt Lake Temple since 1996, **Elder Carlos E. Asay** passed away 10 April 1999 at age 72. He had served as the senior member of the presidency of the Seventy and as president of the Church's Europe Area in the late 1980s. Elder Asay was born in Monroe, Utah, in 1926. At the University of Utah, he had lettered in basketball for four years and later earned a Ph.D. in education. He was a veteran of World War II. Elder Asay married Colleen Webb on 20 October 1947. Suffering a massive heart attack on 5 April, Elder Asay was hospitalized for five days prior to his death.



### TRANSFER

- Renowned Mormon historian **D. Michael Quinn** has said for quite some time that he would complete his projects at hand and then take a sabbatical from Mormon studies. The awaited day has arrived. Quinn's second edition of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* is off the press, and he recently presented a second edition manuscript of *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years* to Signature Books. His work done, Quinn is currently living in Mexico and plans to remain there indefinitely.







