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“The Gospel of Intelligence and Culture”: Literature and Literary Instruction in the Twentieth-Century MIA Curriculum

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Abstract: All of the initiatives we have discussed here—the libraries, the literary lessons, and the different iterations of the reading course—were designed to help create a unique Latter-day Saint literary culture capable of fitting into American and world cultures but also of enlarging them. The women and men who implemented these initiatives had such a comprehensive view of their religion that they could not help but see the canons of world literature as a logical part of their own scriptural inheritance. The core assumptions that move through all these programs for literary instruction come from the theological heart of the Latter-day Saint religion as it was understood by people like Orson F. Whitney, Susa Young Gates, John A. Widtsoe, and Ruth May Fox. The religion they loved taught them that reading is important, that inspiration is universal, that writing is a form of prophecy, and that mutual improvement is part of God’s plan. And they believed with all their hearts that all human beings have a spiritual obligation to seek out the best books and use them as entry points to the mind of God.



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“The Gospel of Intelligence and Culture”

Literature and Literary Instruction in the Twentieth-Century MIA Curriculum

Michael Austin and Rachel Meibos Helps

If the learned will only listen to the learned, God will send them learned men, to meet them on their own ground, and show them that “Mormonism,” the Gospel of Christ, is not only the Gospel of truth, but the Gospel of intelligence and culture. —Orson F. Whitney, “Home Literature”

In his journal for April 29, 1888, Bishop Orson F. Whitney recorded a curious meeting that he had with an Apostle. “Had a long conversation in the morning with Apostle Moses Thatcher,” wrote Whitney. “He gave me a blessing and set me apart to deliver a lecture on Sunday, June 3rd next, at the Mutual Improvement Conference in the Tabernacle. My subject is Home Literature. I consented to deliver it, though very busy and overworked, at the request of the Authorities.”¹ This remarkable assignment—he was called and set apart to give a speech in the way men at the time were called and set apart to go on missions—was the genesis of Whitney’s “Home Literature” address.² “We will yet have Miltons and

1. Orson F. Whitney, *Diary, 1888 January 1–1889 March 3, April 29, 1888*, COLL MSS 188, box 1, folder 9, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

2. Orson F. Whitney, “Home Literature,” *Contributor* 9, no. 8 (June 1888): 300. On the significance of this address for the development of Mormon literature, see Eugene England, “Mormon Literature: Progress and Prospects,” in *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 455–505; see also Richard L. Cracroft, “Nephi, Seer of Modern Times: The Home Literature Novels of Nephi Anderson,” *BYU Studies* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 3–16; Michael Austin, “The Brief History and Perpetually Exciting Future of Mormon Literary Studies,” *Mormon Studies Review* 2, no. 1 (2015): 49–74.

Shakespeares of our own,” he prophesied in that speech, which gave its name to the new literary movement that flourished among the Latter-day Saints between 1880 and 1910. Whitney’s “Home Literature” speech has since become a rallying cry for generations of Latter-day Saints convinced that their religious tradition contains the raw materials they might forge in the smithies of their souls to achieve literary greatness.

Whitney’s address, however, was only peripherally about producing distinctive Latter-day Saint literature. The primary aim of the talk was not to convince some young Latter-day Saints to write literature; it was to convince all young Latter-day Saints to read literature so they would be able to speak on equal footing with the learned people of the world. Whitney began his speech by pointing to the Church’s biggest public-relations problem of the time, which was that most people in the world saw them as “enemies of education, despisers of learning, haters of books and schools, and of everything, in fact, that is pure, ennobling and refined.”³ He did not overstate the case. In 1887, the Edmunds-Tucker Act disincorporated the Church and escalated the imprisonment of its leaders, filling the newspapers and the dime-novel press with lurid tales of barbarism. Only six months before Whitney spoke, Arthur Conan Doyle introduced the world to Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*, in which England’s first consulting detective traces a bizarre series of London murders back to the wilds of polygamous Utah. Whitney saw his faith as a comprehensive religion embracing everything beautiful and true, and he lamented the profound unfairness of the world’s perception of his faith. “A greater mistake was never made, a crueller wrong was never committed, a more heinous moral crime was never perpetrated than when the ‘Mormon’ people . . . were thus made odious in the eyes of mankind,” he thundered. “To rob such a people of their good name,” he continued, “is indeed a crime, not only against the immediate victims of the slander, but a crime against God and humanity.”⁴

Whitney insisted that the best response to this affront was to demonstrate to the world that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had a vibrant intellectual culture. He began his speech by quoting Doctrine and Covenants 88:118, “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith,” which became the centering refrain of his remarks. He repeated it five times during the address, each time with increasing urgency.

3. Whitney, “Home Literature,” 297.

4. Whitney, “Home Literature,” 297.

Literature means learning, and it is from the "best books" we are told to seek it. This does not merely mean the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the book of Doctrine and Covenants, Church works and religious writings—though these indeed are "the best books," and will ever be included in and lie at the very basis of our literature. But it also means history, poetry, philosophy, art and science, languages, government—all truth in fact, wherever found, either local or general, and relating to times past, present, or to come.⁵

Whitney believed that a thriving literary culture was essential to the missionary effort because the best way to convince educated and cultured people of the gospel's value was to speak to them in educated and cultured ways. "If the learned will only listen to the learned, God will send them learned men, to meet them on their own ground, and show them that 'Mormonism,' the Gospel of Christ, is not only the Gospel of truth, but the Gospel of intelligence and culture."⁶

The fact that Whitney gave this address on a direct assignment from an Apostle and member of the YMMIA superintendency suggests that the Church leadership—after decades of warning members against imaginative literature, especially fiction—was warming to the idea of making literary study a formal part of the MIA experience.⁷ Whitney articulated two mutually inclusive reasons to do so. First, the missionary effort and the long-term social and economic health of the Latter-day Saints in Utah required that members of the Church be accepted as part of the civilized world—people who read the same books and knew the same things as other civilized people. Even more important for Whitney was the fact that he saw the Latter-day Saint gospel as an expansive theology that encompassed all good things in the world—including its great art and literature, which he believed to have been inspired by God through a process different in degree, but not in kind, from the revelations received by Joseph Smith.

Whitney's speech was published in the June 1888 issue of the *Contributor*, which, at the time, billed itself as representing "the Young Men's and Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Associations of the Latter-day Saints."⁸ The same issue of the *Contributor* that published "Home

5. Whitney, "Home Literature," 299.

6. Whitney, "Home Literature," 299.

7. See Richard Cracroft, "'Cows to Milk instead of Novels to Read': Brigham Young, Novel Reading, and Kingdom Building," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 2 (April 2001): 102–31; see also Bruce W. Jorgensen, "Heritage of Hostility: The Mormon Attack on Fiction in the 19th Century," *Wasatch Review International* 4 (1996): 75–94.

8. *Contributor* 9, no. 8 (June 1888): front cover.

Literature” also published a proposal by Junius F. Wells, the editor of the *Contributor* and original president of the YMMIA Central Committee, to address the need for an understanding of the world’s literature that Whitney identified in his speech.⁹ In an editorial entitled “A Course in Reading,” Wells argued that, to encourage its members to become good readers, the Church needed to solve the problem of filtration. Young people, he believed, lacked the knowledge to sift through the mass of printed pages available to them—much of which consisted of inexpensive, highly sensational dime novels that parents and Church leaders abhorred. “We go into the libraries, or into the bookstores, and gaze upon the shelves of books,” he wrote, “and we are bewildered to know which of these we should select, for our information, for our culture, and the development of our faculties. We are as likely as not to make a choice that is bad.”¹⁰

Wells suggested using the *Contributor* to encourage reading good literature by carefully curating books and making them part of the mutual improvement activities. At the time, he proposed that the *Contributor* would select five books each year in five different categories—including imaginative literature—as textbooks for the MIAs.¹¹ He convinced the Church to support the initiative financially by purchasing the books and making them available by mail order. Despite this support, however, the reading course didn’t catch on. In December 1890, a letter under the signatures of Wilford Woodruff, Joseph F. Smith, and Moses Thatcher—the general superintendency of the YMMIA—began, “Dear Brethren—we have on hand over one thousand sets of the M.I.A. First Year’s Course of Reading, and desire your co-operation in placing them, as soon as

9. Brigham Young called Junius F. Wells, the son of his second counselor, Daniel H. Wells, to create and preside over the Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association in 1875. He served in this capacity until 1880, when John Taylor reorganized the presidency with members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as its presidency. Wilford Woodruff then became the YMMIA president, and Wells remained on the board as the editor and publisher of the *Contributor* until 1892, when he sold the journal to the Cannon family publishing company.

10. Junius F. Wells, “A Course in Reading,” *Contributor* 9, no. 8 (June 1888): 309.

11. Wells, “Course in Reading,” 311. The books for the first year were the following: B. H. Roberts, *The First Principles of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Contributor Company, 1888) (Doctrine); James E. Talmage, *The First Book of Nature* (Salt Lake City: Contributor Company, 1888) (Science); Charles Dickens, *A Child’s History of England* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1853) (History); Washington Irvine, *Readings from Washington Irvine* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1887) (General Literature); and George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Nephi, Son of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Contributor Company, 1888) (Home Literature).

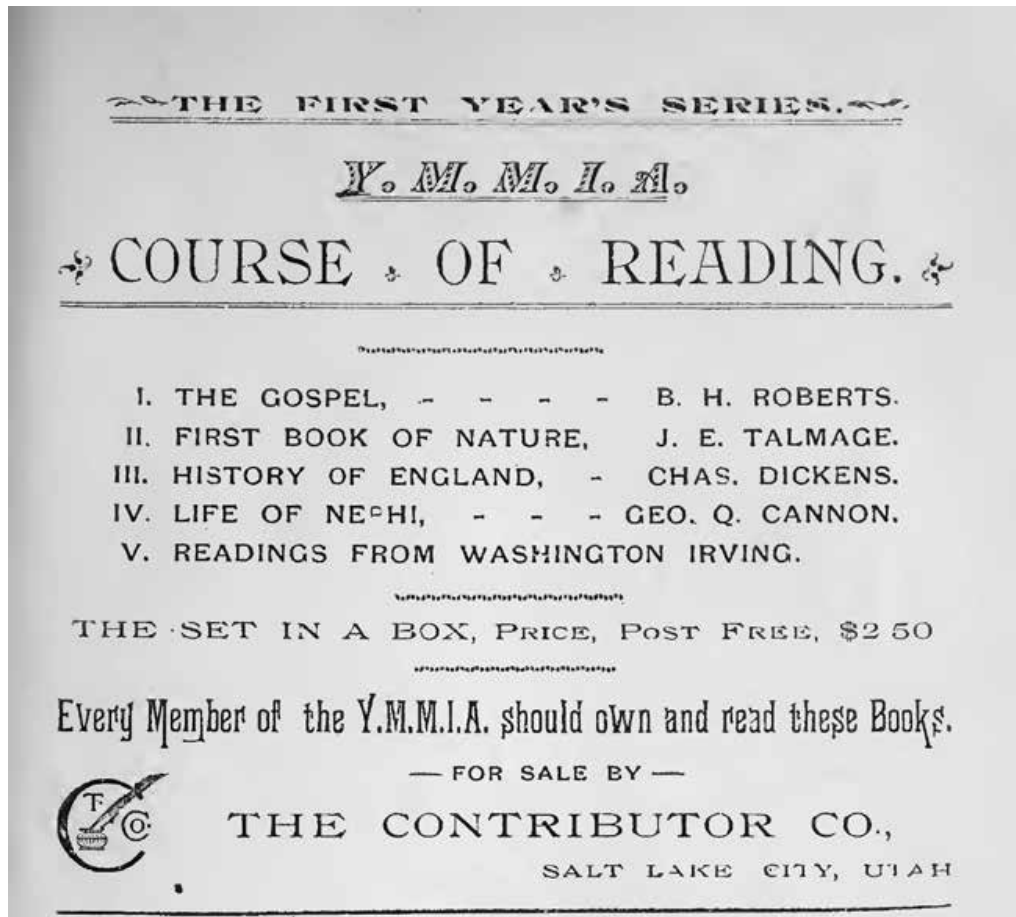


FIGURE 1. *Contributor* 12, no. 3 (January 1891): inside back cover. Archive.org.

possible, in the hands of the members of our Associations, with necessary instructions as to their proper use.”¹² The *Contributor* said very little about the course of reading in 1891, but the January issue carried a half-page ad selling the five books as a boxed set for \$2.50 (with free shipping) (fig. 1).¹³

Neither Junius F. Wells nor the *Contributor* had the institutional heft necessary to enact this curricular vision. The YMMIA Central Committee that Wells led had been replaced by a General Authority–led superintendency with Elder Wilford Woodruff as the president. As a privately owned periodical, the *Contributor* could not create curricula

12. *Contributor* 12, no. 2 (December 1890): 79. The first edition of the YMMIA manual in 1891 listed ten monthly readings from Irving’s reader and, for advanced students, a one-page outline of an American literature course consisting of seven monthly lessons. See *Latter-day Saints’ Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Associations, Manual, Part One* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1891), 88–90.

13. *Contributor* 12, no. 3 (January 1891): 129.

or set institutional priorities. In 1888, none of the Church's auxiliaries had a standardized curriculum or an official periodical—two things that would have helped the proposal to succeed. Each local organization controlled its own curricular and activity schedules. Soon after Wells made this proposal, however, the structures of the MIAs began to change. In 1889, the YLMIA board launched the *Young Woman's Journal* as an official periodical, edited by Susa Young Gates, and the *Contributor* focused entirely on the YMMIA until 1896, when it folded and was replaced by the *Improvement Era*—the official publication of the YMMIA general board. The YMMIA published its first lesson manual in 1891,¹⁴ and the YLMIA published its first lesson outlines, the *Guides*, in 1893 and 1896.

As the nineteenth century ended, both of the Mutual Improvement Associations had the platforms and the curricular structures necessary to convert their institutional values into formal lesson plans. And both organizations counted reading and literature among their most important institutional values.¹⁵ Furthermore, the generation of Latter-day Saints that came into leadership positions during the 1890s had been born in Utah during a time of relative stability and sent east to study at elite American universities.¹⁶ They returned to Utah with advanced degrees and an expansive understanding of their religion as a vessel capable of containing everything in the world that was beautiful and true—and this included poetry, drama, and fiction, which played important roles in the intellectual formation of this generation of Saints. As a result, the opening decades of the twentieth century produced an unprecedented outpouring of literary instruction and reading encouragement from the youth auxiliaries of the Church.

Libraries and Literary Lessons

In 1875, Brigham Young called Junius F. Wells into his office and instructed him to organize the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association (YMMIA). Two years later, Eliza R. Snow directed that the Young

14. *Young Men's Mutual Improvement Associations, Manual*.

15. In 1891, the YMMIA published its first official handbook, which listed theology, history, science, and literature as the four basic studies at the center of the young men's organization. *Young Men's Mutual Improvement Associations, Manual*, 3. That same year, the YLMIA began collecting statistics from all of its members that included the number of pages read in "Church works" (including scriptures) as well as other works—namely, "literature, histories, [and] biographies." Lillie Freeze, "Home Reading," *Young Woman's Journal* 3, no. 2 (November 1891): 89.

16. See Thomas W. Simpson, *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism, 1867–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 28–53.

Ladies Retrenchment Association—which had been established in 1869 among Brigham Young’s daughters and then established in most wards and stakes—be renamed the Young Ladies’ National Mutual Improvement Association, which was eventually shortened to the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association (YLMIA).¹⁷ Both organizations had roots in the mutual improvement society movement that had flourished in both the United States and Great Britain for much of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ Most mutual improvement associations and societies focused on book reading, literacy, and oratory, and most of them offered their members access to proprietary libraries and reading rooms.¹⁹ Plans for libraries were part of the YMMIA from the start. When Brigham Young called Junius F. Wells to create a mutual improvement society for the young men, one of the first positions they discussed was a general librarian. When Wells asked about this, Young responded, “Yes and a librarian, when you are ready for it. That will be right, to collect good books and encourage reading them.”²⁰

By 1881, the Mutual Improvement Associations operated in twenty stakes and had eighty-one libraries with a total of 3,084 books.²¹ Wells frequently toured the stakes to advocate for libraries in rural areas. After a visit to the Tooele stake in 1887, for example, Wells reported that the members agreed to contribute their sheep to create “a perpetual source of income for library and reading room purposes.” The idea was so profound, he thought, that “in a few years we may expect that in all towns where sheep raisers are plentiful, there will be found thriving libraries and reading rooms, deriving support from this investment.” And he concluded his report with the strong statement that “the Associations should endeavor to hammer in the idea that their library is to be the library of the town.”²² The local YLMIA’s also maintained their own

17. The organization’s name was changed once again in 1924 to the Young Woman’s Mutual Improvement Association. For a history of name changes, see Marba C. Josephson, *History of the YWMIA* (Salt Lake City: Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Association, 1955), 3–4.

18. Mary Kelly, *Learning to Stand and Speak* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 117; Elizabeth McHenry, “‘Dreaded Eloquence’: The Origins and Rise of African American Literary Societies and Libraries,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 32–56.

19. Kelly, *Learning to Stand*, 143; see also McHenry, “‘Dreaded Eloquence,’” 32–56.

20. Wells related his meeting with Brigham Young to establish the YMMIA in his “Historical Sketch of the Y.M.M.I.A.: First Period,” *Improvement Era* 28, no. 8 (June 1925): 714–16.

21. Junius F. Wells, “Historical Sketch of the Y.M.M.I.A. First Period, Part III,” *Improvement Era* 28, no. 11 (September 1925): 1074.

22. Junius F. Wells, “Association Intelligence,” *Contributor* 5, no. 8 (March 1887): 200.

libraries between 1890 and 1909. In 1890, the general board reported 3,141 books in the ward and stake libraries.²³ By 1895, the general board reported 5,970 books in the ward and stake libraries. The board reported 15,422 books in their libraries in 1905 and 24,621 in 1909.²⁴

Two important differences between the library systems lay in the kinds of materials they contained and the processes they had for acquiring books. The YMMIA libraries did not have specific guidelines on what to include, though they were instructed in a communication from the Quorum of the Twelve that “all books used in libraries, for the use of the Association, [are] to be inspected and approved by the General Superintendent and his Council, and all works containing skeptical, immoral or improper doctrines or principles, [are] to be excluded therefrom.”²⁵ The Young Ladies’ organization took a much more active approach to curating library content. The 1896 edition of the YLMIA’s *Guide* instructed wards and stakes to make it a priority to “secure the Church works, then the text and reference books recommended in the *Guide*.”²⁶ The *Guide* lists 92 recommendations in five categories: theological (11), history and travel (25), fiction (40), poetry and essay (14), and household and psychology (2). Novels, poems, and literary essays accounted for 54 of the 92, about 60 percent of the recommendations. Practically, though, the percentage was greater, since some of the recommendations included all of the works of a single author, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, and Sir Walter Scott—three authors who together produced more than a hundred volumes of prose.

In 1898, the YLMIA proposed to expand its library program by adding a network of traveling libraries in which each stake would maintain a separate book collection apart from their stationary libraries and would ship those books to each unit in the stake for a specific period of time. This was a local response to a national movement to create traveling libraries in resource-starved rural areas.²⁷ YLMIA general board

23. *Young Woman’s Journal* 1, no. 8 (May 1890): 270.

24. For a contemporary discussion of the YLMIA traveling library, see Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: From November 1869 to June 1910* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 163.

25. *Contributor* 1, no. 8 (May 1880): 191.

26. *Guide to the Second Year’s Course of Study in the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1896), 11.

27. For a discussion of the traveling library movement at the turn of the century by one of its major figures, see Melvil Dewey, *Traveling Libraries: Field and Future of Traveling Libraries* (New York: New York State University, 1901). For a discussion of traveling

member and future president Ruth May Fox (fig. 2) proposed that the association establish traveling libraries to supplement ward libraries with secular classics and imaginative works by Latter-day Saint authors.²⁸ The YLMIA board approved Fox's proposal in December 1898 and spent much of the next year preparing to launch the program.²⁹ The board directed each stake YLMIA to appoint a library committee of at least three people to select books, raise funds to purchase them, and coordinate the sharing of books among the individual wards.³⁰ The *Young Woman's Journal* itself would vet books and publish occasional lists of approved or recommended materials. The first list included seven novels by Louisa May Alcott, Charles Dickens's *A Child's History of England*, Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur*, poetry collections from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Alfred Lord Tennyson, three collections of lectures by John Ruskin, and two recently published novels by Latter-day Saint authors: Ben E. Rich's *Mr. Durant of Salt Lake City* and Nephi Anderson's *Added Upon*.³¹



FIGURE 2. Ruth May Fox (1853–1958), the designer of the traveling library program and the third General President of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association. Courtesy Church History Library.

libraries in Utah, including the YLMIA project, see Linda Thatcher, "The Traveling Library in Utah," *Utah Libraries* (June 1987): 4, 6–7.

28. For a contemporary discussion of the YLMIA traveling library, see Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association*, 249–51; for a retrospective analysis, see Josephson, *History of the YWMIA*, 217–26. Josephson includes an appendix with many of the early works approved for the library.

29. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 2, 1891–98, December 12, 1898, 208, Church History Library, History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association*, 250.

30. "The Traveling Library," *Young Woman's Journal* 11, no. 1 (January 1900): 36.

31. "Traveling Library," 37.

Every issue of the *Young Woman's Journal* from March through December 1900 added more approved titles to the traveling library list. At one point, the members of the board reconsidered a previous action to reject two novels—Ella Wheeler Wilcox's *Maurine* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*—and both books were placed on the approved list.³² In July 1901, the *Young Woman's Journal* published a revised list of 181 works in six categories: Church Works (19), Home Authors (19), Works of Moralists (46), History (13), Poets and Poems (24), Fiction (60). Together, the categories of home literature, fiction, and poetry accounted for nearly 60 percent of the approved books, including books by Louisa May Alcott, Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Sir Walter Scott, Edward Bellamy, Oliver Goldsmith, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and Edgar Allen Poe.³³ But Utah's library resources increased dramatically in the early twentieth century, as Utah communities embraced Andrew Carnegie's library grant program and built twenty-three new libraries between 1901 and 1919.³⁴ In 1913, the YLMIA board told stake leaders "that the traveling library should be abolished whenever, in the judgment of the stake officers, it had outlived its usefulness."³⁵ At that time, the traveling libraries had a combined total of 3,959 books.³⁶

One of the primary functions of the MIA's libraries was to support the literary portion of their curricula. Both the men's and the women's organizations included imaginative literature in their early manuals, and this emphasis was especially prominent in the YLMIA, whose leadership saw imaginative writing as an area in which young women could develop their talents and even achieve renown. In 1899, the YLMIA leadership commissioned Alice Louise Reynolds (fig. 3) to write a ten-part series of articles on "Great Women in History" for the *Young Woman's Journal*. Reynolds studied English literature at the University of Michigan and became Brigham Young University's first woman professor in 1894. She began the series with the bold statement that a women's intellectual

32. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 5, 1902–5, July 6, 1904, 313–14.

33. *Young Woman's Journal* 12, no. 7 (July 1901): 334–36.

34. See Susan H. Swetnam, "Small Mormon Towns: Carnegie Libraries to Protect Youth," in *Books, Bluster, and Bounty: Local Politics and Carnegie Library Building Grants in the Intermountain West, 1890–1920* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2012), 88–111. See also Max J. Evans, "A History of the Public Library Movement in Utah" (master's thesis, Utah State University, 1971), 71–104.

35. Josephson, *History of the YWMIA*, 223.

36. "Y. L. M. I. A. Annual Report, 1911," *Young Woman's Journal* 23, no. 10 (October 1912): 590.

renaissance had arrived and that women in the twentieth century would be able to pursue knowledge and creative expression alongside men:

Relegated to the past, are those superstitions and ideals which led a woman to believe it a crime well nigh impeaching her womanhood to analyze and seek to gain an intelligent appreciation of God's creations.

Woman has knocked at the door of intellectual life, and her magnanimous and gracious partner, man, has opened it unto her. Invention has freed her hands, and the humanitarian instinct of all classes has made for her an abiding place. It is the story of this intellectual renaissance that I am about to relate.³⁷



FIGURE 3. Alice Louise Reynolds (1873–1938), founder of the Brigham Young University literature department, April 1930. Ernest DeAlton Partridge and Nell Clark Partridge family papers, MSS 4153, box 18, folder 8, Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

While Reynolds's series is not limited to literary accomplishments, women writers dominate the lessons. Six of the lessons highlight individual writers: two feature George Eliot, while Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and Elizabeth Barret Browning are each featured in one lesson. Only two women who were not writers—Joan of Arc and Queen Elizabeth I—are featured as part of the series.³⁸ Reynolds's

37. Alice Louise Reynolds, "Woman's Intellectual Renaissance," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 1 (January 1899): 6.

38. Alice Louise Reynolds, "Great Women in History," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, nos. 1–10, including "Woman's Intellectual Renaissance," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 1 (January 1899): 5–8; "Woman in Eighteenth-Century Literature," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 2 (February 1899): 70–72; "George Eliot's Religious Life," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 3 (March 1899): 108–11; "George Eliot," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 4 (April 1899): 157–60; "Woman as a Sovereign," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 5 (May 1899): 224–36; "Joan of Arc," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 6 (June 1899): 255–58; "Harriet Beecher Stowe," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 7 (July 1899): 310–20; "Louisa M. Alcott," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 8 (August 1899): 368–71; "Elizabeth Barret Browning," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 9 (September 1899): 408–13; "Wherein We May Be Great," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 10 (October 1899): 475–77.

emphasis on women whose accomplishments came through the written word framed literature as an especially important pursuit for Latter-day Saint women. This set the stage for the YLMIA literature lessons, which, from 1900 through 1914, constituted the most ambitious attempt thus far of any auxiliary organization in the Church to incorporate formal literary instruction into their curriculum.³⁹

In 1900, the YLMIA launched the literary lessons with an eight-part course on the poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, including three lessons on Longfellow's life and overall work and specific lessons on five individual poems.⁴⁰ The next literary lessons came in September 1903, when the *Young Woman's Journal* launched one of the most ambitious lesson sequences that any Church auxiliary has ever attempted. They sought to tell the history of world literature from the beginning of recorded history until the end of the sixteenth century in twelve lessons, a series titled "A Day in the Library." The sequence began with "The First Hour: Literature before Christ"—a six-page literary history that covered Moses; Gilgamesh; the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*; the Hindu Vedas; the poems of Hesiod, Sappho, and Pindar; the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; and the writings of Cato, Cicero, Virgil, and Horace.⁴¹

These lessons were dense, and the subject matter was difficult. By October 1903, the *Young Woman's Journal* had already received

39. In 1914, the Relief Society launched an equally ambitious literature curriculum in the *Relief Society Magazine*, which was also edited by Susa Young Gates. This curriculum lasted from 1914 until 1970. See Michael Austin and Rachel Meibos Helps, "Great Books and True Religion: The Relief Society Literature Curriculum, 1914–1970," *Journal of Mormon History* (forthcoming).

40. The first two sequences of monthly lessons for the YLMIA were published in a stand-alone pamphlet series called the *Guide*. Each edition of the *Guide* devoted twelve lessons to each of its topic areas. The first edition, *Guide to the First Year's Course of Study in the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1893), had three topics (theology, Church history, and human physiology and hygiene) and 36 lessons. The second edition, *Guide to the Second Year's Course of Study in the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association*, had four topics (the New Testament, history of Utah, home management, and physical exercise) and 48 lessons. See also Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association*, 181–83. From 1900 on, the lessons were printed in a section of the *Young Woman's Journal* labeled either "Guide Work" or "Guide Section." The Longfellow lessons were published in the *Young Woman's Journal* 11, nos. 1–8 (January–August 1900): 43–46, 96, 141–44, 190–92, 238–40, 286–88, 334–36, 381–83.

41. "A Day in the Library. The First Hour: Literature before Christ," *Young Woman's Journal* 14, no. 9 (September 1903): 427–32.

complaints about the difficulty of the lessons and responded with a strongly worded editorial about the importance of literature and beauty:

There are certain things about books that almost everybody in the world knows. Now while we, as a people, have many admirable qualities, our course of reading is decidedly limited. . . . If God had not intended us to read the great things of poetry and prose, He would not have inspired them. Anything that gives you a larger thought, a beautiful emotion, or a wholesome laugh, is in keeping with the mind of Deity. Our Lord is not a narrow Being who holds us down to the chapter and verse of square-cut doctrine. If He had been He never would have created such a lovely world. The fields would have brought forth only wheat and potatoes. There would have been no violets or primroses; the lucerne would have borne no purple flower, only a leaden sheath to hold the useful seeds.⁴²

The twelfth "Day in the Library" lesson was published in the August 1904 issue of the *Young Woman's Journal*. This lesson introduced the writers and major works of the sixteenth century, including Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, More's *Utopia*, Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, and Spenser's *Faerie Queen*; the last of these became the first lesson in the four-year lesson sequence that followed.⁴³ From September 1904 through March 1908, the YLMIA literary curriculum offered a four-year survey of major British and American (and some European) writers that began with Spenser's *Faerie Queen* (1590) and ended with the poetry of James Russell Lowell, who died in 1891. The chart below shows all of the lessons that were part of this four-year sequence.⁴⁴

42. *Young Woman's Journal* 14, no. 10 (October 1903): 467.

43. "A Day in the Library. Twelfth Hour: Sixteenth Century," *Young Woman's Journal* 15, no. 8 (August 1904): 379–84.

44. 1904–5: "Faerie Queen," *Young Woman's Journal* 15, no. 9 (September 1904): 429–32; "Cervantes and Bacon," *Young Woman's Journal* 15, no. 10 (October 1904): 475–80; "Shakespeare," *Young Woman's Journal* 15, no. 11 (November 1904): 523–28; "Milton and *Paradise Lost*," *Young Woman's Journal* 15, no. 12 (December 1904): 579–83; "Dryden, Bunyan, Walton, Locke, and Newton," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 1 (January 1905): 60–65; "The French Dramatists," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 2 (February 1905): 106–12; "Addison, Pope, and Swift," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 3 (March 1905): 156–60; "Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. The Novel," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 4 (April 1905): 276–78. 1905–6: "Goethe," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 9 (September 1905): 440–45; "Goethe (Continued)," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 10 (October 1905): 493–96; "Robert Burns," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 11 (November 1905): 541–44; "Wordsworth," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 12 (December 1905): 597–600; "Walter Scott," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 1 (January 1906): 44–48; "Lord Byron," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 2 (February 1906): 92–96; "Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats," *Young Woman's Journal*

Literary Studies Second Year (1904–5)

Faerie Queen
 Cervantes and Bacon
 Shakespeare
 Milton and *Paradise Lost*
 Dryden, Bunyan, Walton, Locke, and
 Newton
 The French Dramatists
 Addison, Pope, and Swift
 Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. The
 Novel.

Literary Studies Fourth Year (1906–7)

Goldsmith
 The Essayists—Lamb and DeQuincy
 Charles Dickens
 William Makepeace Thackeray
 George Eliot
 Alfred Tennyson
 Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert
 Browning
 John Ruskin

Literary Studies Third Year (1905–6)

Goethe
 Goethe (Continued)
 Robert Burns
 Wordsworth
 Walter Scott
 Lord Byron
 Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats
 Thomas Carlyle

Literary Studies Fifth Year (1907–8)

Washington Irving
 William Cullen Bryant
 Nathaniel Hawthorne
 Ralph Waldo Emerson (Seniors) / Louisa
 May Alcott (Juniors)
 John Greenleaf Whittier
 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
 Oliver Wendell Holmes
 James Russell Lowell

In 1908, the board announced a shift in the focus of the literary lessons, from the sweeping studies of broad literary movements to the deep exploration of individual texts.⁴⁵ Subsequent lessons were work-based instead of author- or period-based and included Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra*, George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Emerson's "Friendship,"

17, no. 3 (March 1906): 141–44; "Thomas Carlyle," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 4 (April 1906): 189–92. 1906–7: "Goldsmith," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 9 (September 1906): 428–32; "The Essayists—Lamb and DeQuincy," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 10 (October 1906): 476–80; "Charles Dickens," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 11 (November 1906): 523–28; "William Makepeace Thackeray," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 12 (December 1906): 581–84; "George Eliot," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 1 (January 1907): 45–48; "Alfred Tennyson," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 2 (February 1907): 93–96; "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 3 (March 1907): 139–45; "John Ruskin," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 4 (April 1907): 189–92. 1907–8: "Washington Irving," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 8 (August 1907): 380–84; "William Cullen Bryant," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 9 (September 1907): 427–32; "Nathaniel Hawthorne," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 10 (October 1907): 476–80; "Ralph Waldo Emerson; Louisa May Alcott," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 11 (November 1907): 520–28; "John Greenleaf Whittier," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 12 (December 1907): 581–84; "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 1 (January 1908): 44–48; "Oliver Wendell Holmes," *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 2 (February 1908): 90–96; "James Russell Lowell," *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 3 (March 1908): 139–44.

45. *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 7 (July 1908): 333–35.

and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*.⁴⁶ In the 1910–11 year, the YLMIA reduced the number of formal literary lessons and adopted a suggested home reading list,⁴⁷ similar to the YMMIA's reading course, which we discuss below. While literary lessons appeared sporadically through 1917, most of the association's literary endeavors focused on selecting books for the annual reading course.⁴⁸

The Reading Courses (1906–15)

The minutes of the June 1906 MIA conference detailed some of the serious concerns that Church leaders had about the young men, including "the prevalence of the tobacco and liquor habit," "card-playing, loafing, and intellectual laziness," and a need to encourage "systematic and beneficial reading."⁴⁹ To address these problems, the YMMIA board decided to resurrect Junius F. Wells's annual reading course. Joshua H. Paul, the former president of LDS University in Salt Lake City, offered a resolution at the conference "that a committee of twelve be appointed by the General Board to name books, preferably novels and dramas, suitable for supplementary reading, one book to be named each month for the senior, and one for the junior grade."⁵⁰ The motion passed, and the first selections came out just a few months later, though the ambitious notion of two books a month was replaced by just a few books each year, beginning with three books for 1906–7.⁵¹

The October 1906 issue of the *Improvement Era* announced a supplementary reading course for all young men enrolled in the MIA program.

46. "The Alhambra—Irving," *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 7 (July 1908): 335–36; "Adam Bede—George Eliot," *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 9 (September 1908): 547–48; "Friendship—Emerson," *Young Woman's Journal* 20, no. 1 (January 1909): 54–56; "Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*," *Young Woman's Journal* 20, no. 2 (February 1909): 102–4.

47. *Young Woman's Journal* 21, no. 6 (June 1910): 341; *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 7 (July 1911): 395.

48. The two last lessons in the *Young Woman's Journal* formally labeled "Literary Lessons" occur in January and February 1917 (vol. 28, nos. 1, 2). These lessons are "Lyrics by Shelley" (53–54) and "Lyrics of Wordsworth" (108–9). Other articles on literary topics appear in later issues, including a lesson sequence on the literature of the Bible that began later in 1917.

49. "Our Work: Eleventh Annual M. I. A. Conference," *Improvement Era* 9, no. 10 (August 1906): 822–23.

50. "Our Work: Eleventh Annual M. I. A. Conference," 822.

51. The reading course followed the schedule of each volume of the *Improvement Era*, which began each year with no. 1 in November and ended the following year with no. 12 in October.

In announcing the reading course, Professor Bryant S. Hinckley said that it would serve three objectives: “First, to develop a taste for the beautiful in literature; secondly, to cultivate the habit of reading good books; and, lastly, to impart valuable information.”⁵² All three of the first year’s selections were novels. Two of them were made available to Latter-day Saints at the Deseret News Book Store in Salt Lake City as well as other bookstores: *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), Dinah Craik’s novel about an orphan who becomes wealthy through hard work and unshakable integrity; and *True to His Home* (1897), Hezekiah Butterworth’s historical novel about Benjamin Franklin as a young boy. The third book, Samuel Johnson’s classic Oriental fable, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759), was serialized in twelve parts throughout volume 10 of the *Improvement Era*, ensuring that it would be in the homes of every Latter-day Saint family who subscribed to the magazine.⁵³

The choice of *Rasselas* as the common reading suggests that concerns beyond tobacco, alcohol, and intellectual laziness motivated leaders to create the reading course. Though only a minor classic, *Rasselas* is a major attempt to balance intellectual curiosity with spiritual contentment. Its title character, an Abyssinian prince whose name puns with “restless,” lives his early life in a region called Happy Valley, where children of the king live until they are called upon to take the throne. In Happy Valley, *Rasselas* has the best of everything: food, entertainment, companionship, and education. But he is forbidden to leave unless and until he becomes the king. When he reaches his twenty-sixth year, *Rasselas* becomes restless and convinces one of his tutors, his sister, and her maid to accompany him on a tour of the world. They take enough wealth with them to meet any contingency and escape to see what lies beyond Happy Valley. Most of the action in the tale consists of *Rasselas* and his companions finding people who seem happy and fulfilled and coming to realize that they are not happy at all and that the things that seem to fulfill them are really the causes of their unhappiness. At the end of the book, having seen everything the world has to offer, they return to their home, content that there is nothing better in the world to be had.

52. “Our Work,” *Improvement Era* 9, no. 12 (October 1906), 984.

53. *Improvement Era* 10, no. 1 (November 1906): 16–24; no. 2 (December 1906): 89–99; no. 3 (January 1907): 199–207; no. 4 (February 1907): 274–84; no. 5 (March 1907): 372–78; no. 6 (April 1907): 463–68; no. 7 (May 1907): 518–25; no. 8 (June 1907): 586–94; no. 9 (July 1907): 664–72; no. 10 (August 1907): 790–98; no. 11 (September 1907): 868–77; no. 12 (October 1907): 950–56.

It does not take advanced interpretation skills to see that the first part of *Rasselas* mirrored the experiences of many bright, high-achieving young Latter-day Saints who lived in the Mountain West—a nurturing but highly restrictive home environment. The Church needed doctors, attorneys, scientists, engineers, architects, musicians, artists, industrialists, and educators in order to progress as an institution and build a modern society. In *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism*, Thomas Simpson traces the Latter-day Saint migration from Utah to prestigious American universities from 1867, when Brigham Young first authorized selected followers to leave Utah to study surgery, through 1940, when “hundreds of Mormons had left Utah and Idaho to study ‘abroad’ in the elite universities of the United States.”⁵⁴ The Church needed its youth to leave their homes and pursue education in prestigious secular schools. But they also needed them to return, like *Rasselas*, to Happy Valley.

A year before announcing the reading course, the *Improvement Era* published “The Mormon Boy at College” by Osborne Widtsoe, who attended Harvard University (like his more famous brother John) and received an MA in English literature. Widtsoe spoke openly about the temptations that Latter-day Saint students faced at places like Harvard—not just from a social culture built around alcohol and tobacco, which was indeed a problem, but also from an academic culture built on skepticism and doubt. None of this need be fatal to a boy’s testimony, Widtsoe insisted, because the gospel is capable of encountering all worthwhile ideas, and all forms of truth, and incorporating them into itself. “The temptations are, after all, only those that exist at home,” he concludes. “The boy’s best preparation can be given him while he is at home—that is, thorough instruction in the principles of the gospel; and the development of honest, manly strength to resist temptation. If our boys were thus prepared, we should not be humiliated by having to confess that they lose their faith when they are educated.”⁵⁵

By 1906, much of the Church’s curriculum was in the hands of people like Alice Louise Reynolds and the Widtsoe brothers—men and women who had attended prestigious American colleges and who genuinely believed that Latter-day Saint beliefs and secular education were (or could be made to be) fully compatible.⁵⁶ These assumptions were

54. Simpson, *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism*, 11–12.

55. Osborne Widtsoe, “The Mormon Boy at College,” *Improvement Era* 9, no. 1 (November 1905): 15–19.

56. The minutes from the 1906 MIA conference identify John A. Widtsoe, who studied at Harvard and the University of Göttingen, as the author of the next year’s official

**Be
Readers**
 Get an Ambition
 Do Something
BOOKS
 Suggested by General
 Board Y.M.M.I.A.
 to be read this
 season
 For Young Men under
 18 years of Age
 Tom Browns School Days \$.25
 Wild Animals I Have Known 2 00
 For Older Readers
 The Secret of Achievement 1.50
 Great Truths25
 Silas Marner35
 The Strength of Being Clean
 (Out of Print.)
 Send direct to ERA Office for
 these books. Money must accom-
 pany order.
 IMPROVEMENT ERA,
 Salt Lake City, Utah.

FIGURE 4. *Improvement Era* 10, no. 11 (September 1907): inside back cover. Archive.org.

1906–7 reading course, Joshua Paul, held MA and PhD degrees from Illinois Wesleyan University.

57. *The Crisis* was a bestselling 1901 novel by American writer Winston Churchill (1871–1947), who should not be confused with the British politician and prime minister Winston Churchill (1874–1965), who was also a writer.

58. To see books listed as suggested reading 1906–45, see the appendix.

59. *Improvement Era* 13, no. 1 (November 1909), 75–81. For the Darwinian assumptions in *Our Inland Sea* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1909), see pages 101, 123, 125–26, 134, 136–37, 155, 159–60.

embedded in the early iterations of the annual reading course, which included classic novels like George Eliot’s *Silas Marner* and Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*. They also included biographies of Hernando Cortez and Abraham Lincoln, contemporary bestsellers like Winston Churchill’s *The Crisis*,⁵⁷ and several books about science and nature. These books were even permitted to contradict Church orthodoxy in nontrivial ways. *Our Inland Sea*, Albert Lambourne’s classic memoir of his year spent homesteading on Gunnison Island in the Great Salt Lake, offered an unapologetically Darwinian view of nature. It was chosen for the reading course in 1909,⁵⁸ which began in November—the same month that the *Improvement Era* published the First Presidency’s message “The Origin of Man,” which sharply criticized evolutionary science and challenged many of the same assumptions that Lambourne made in *Our Inland Sea*.⁵⁹

manual “on Modern Revelation, with special reference to the study of the Doctrine and Covenants.” “Our Work: Eleventh Annual M. I. A. Conference,” 822. The designer of the

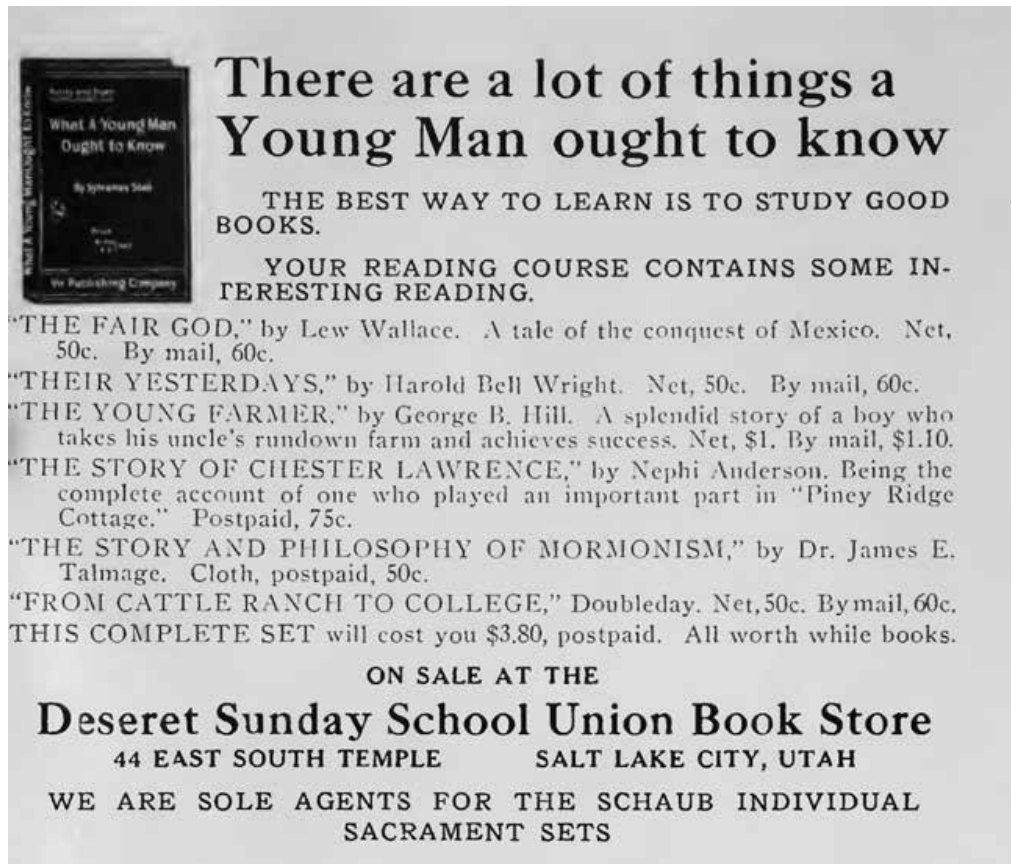
The reading-course model had much to offer over other forms of literary instruction. It encouraged not only book reading but also book owning, which gave the youth a permanent stake in their own education. It was also a flexible program. Local ward and stake MIAs could use reading course books in regular lessons or as the basis for out-of-class assignments and reports. Or they could use them as requirements for various achievement awards that each association sponsored. In 1910, the YLMIA switched from teaching regular literary lessons to a "Suggestive Home Reading" course of nine books, from which each young woman was instructed to choose three to read during the year. This list included three weighty works of prose fiction—*The Fair God* by Lew Wallace, *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott, and *The Crisis* by Winston Churchill—along with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, and, for home literature, Susa Young Gates's *John Stevens' Courtship*.⁶⁰ The *Young Woman's Journal* also published articles about selecting and enjoying good literature—most notably the ten-part series of essays titled "Reading and the Larger Life" by John Henry Evans.⁶¹ Even though the board curated the list carefully, they did receive occasional complaints. The 1914 YLMIA minutes address a letter from a gentleman in Wyoming "censuring the Reading Course committee for approving Winston Churchill's book entitled *The Crisis*." The board stood by their decision, though, and "the Secretary was instructed to answer and tell him there were no objections made by our committee, and his criticism might be made on the Bible."⁶²

The two associations published separate reading lists from 1910–11 through 1914–15. The two lists differed significantly in their preferences for fiction, drama, and poetry. During this time, the YLMIA selected

60. *Young Woman's Journal* 21, no. 6 (June 1910): 341.

61. John Henry Evans, "Reading and the Larger Life," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, nos. 2–7, 9–12, including "The Meaning of a Book," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 2 (February 1911): 80–83; "Two Reasons for Reading," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 3 (March 1911): 133–35; "Making a Life While Making a Living," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 4 (April 1911): 202–5; "Is It Profitable to Read Novels?," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 5 (May 1911): 236–39; "Good Novels and Bad," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 6 (June 1911): 302–6; "How to Read Novels," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 7 (July 1911): 361–64; "The Pleasure of Poetry," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 9 (September 1911): 492–96; "On the Reading of History," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 10 (October 1911): 553–57; "The Newspaper and the Magazine," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 11 (November 1911): 624–27; "Reading and Study in the Home," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 12 (December 1911): 697–702.

62. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 8, 1914–17, March 26, 1914, 16.



**There are a lot of things a
Young Man ought to know**

THE BEST WAY TO LEARN IS TO STUDY GOOD BOOKS.

YOUR READING COURSE CONTAINS SOME INTERESTING READING.

"THE FAIR GOD," by Lew Wallace. A tale of the conquest of Mexico. Net, 50c. By mail, 60c.

"THEIR YESTERDAYS," by Harold Bell Wright. Net, 50c. By mail, 60c.

"THE YOUNG FARMER," by George B. Hill. A splendid story of a boy who takes his uncle's rundown farm and achieves success. Net, \$1. By mail, \$1.10.

"THE STORY OF CHESTER LAWRENCE," by Nephi Anderson. Being the complete account of one who played an important part in "Piney Ridge Cottage." Postpaid, 75c.

"THE STORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF MORMONISM," by Dr. James E. Talmage. Cloth, postpaid, 50c.

"FROM CATTLE RANCH TO COLLEGE," Doubleday. Net, 50c. By mail, 60c.

THIS COMPLETE SET will cost you \$3.80, postpaid. All worth while books.

ON SALE AT THE
Deseret Sunday School Union Book Store
44 EAST SOUTH TEMPLE SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH
WE ARE SOLE AGENTS FOR THE SCHAUB INDIVIDUAL SACRAMENT SETS

FIGURE 5. *Improvement Era* 18, no. 1 (November 1914): 95. Archive.org.

49 books, of which 37 (75 percent) were fiction, drama, or poetry—including works that were considered classics, such as Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* and Leo Tolstoy's "Where Love Is, There God Is Also." In the same period, the YMMIA selected 40 books, of which 15 (37 percent) were fiction and none were drama or poetry. The Young Men's readings were often practical and oriented toward agricultural careers, such as John A. Widtsoe's *Dry-Farming: A System of Agriculture for Countries under a Low Rainfall* and Colvin Bowfield's *Making the Farm Pay*. Both lists included generous helpings of Home Literature during this time. The YMMIA list included Alfred Lambourne's *The Pioneer Trail* and Nephi Anderson's *Story of Chester Lawrence*. The YLMIA list included Anderson's *Piney Ridge Cottage* and Ben E. Rich's *Mr. Durant of Salt Lake City*. Both lists included Lambourne's *Metta: A Sierra Love Tale* and Elizabeth Cannon's collection of Book of Mormon-themed stories, *The Cities of the Sun*.

Though the YMMIA and the YLMIA took different paths, they both arrived at the same place. By 1915, both auxiliaries sponsored a flexible

reading program based on curation and filtration—the same ideas that Junius F. Wells had proposed more than twenty-five years earlier. The separate lists and reading courses worked well with the distinct values and goals of the two Mutual Improvement Associations. The duplication, however, created several problems that consolidation could solve. Two book lists doubled the number of books that the Church offices had to order and publicize, and this led to more logistical issues that required cancellations and last-minute substitutions. More importantly, the total number of titles listed each year—as many as twenty-three books in 1913–14—strained the resources of families with members in both associations.⁶³ In 1915, the YLMIA board authorized the Guide Committee to “approach the Y. M. M. I. A. on the advisability of planning the literary work jointly.”⁶⁴ That August, the associations held a joint MIA conference and announced that the two reading courses would be combined into a single annual list for all members of the Mutual Improvement Associations.

The Joint Reading Course

From the earliest days of mutual improvement, YLMIA leadership’s desire for autonomy conflicted with the powerful urge for correlation and coordination among the Church’s senior leadership. In the early 1900s, the YLMIA presidency rejected several requests from the Young Men to combine their ward and stake libraries.⁶⁵ Church officials tried at least twice to combine the *Young Woman’s Journal* and the *Improvement Era* into one magazine. The first attempt came in 1902, when a committee of the YMMLA general board submitted a proposal to Joseph F.

63. See Marba Josephson, *History of the YWMIA*, 224.

64. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 8, 1914–17, January 13, 1915, 114–15.

65. The minutes of the Young Women’s general board reflect an extended conversation on the topic of combining libraries. **June 10, 1900:** “Pres. Taylor announced that a communication had been received from the General Board of the Y.M.M.I.A. asking that a resolution be passed instructing the uniting of all Ward libraries of Y.M. and Y.L.M.I.A.” The board determined that “the matter required further consideration.” Young Women General Board Minutes, 1899–1901, 118, Church History Library. **January 21, 1901:** “Sister Fox reminded the Board of the request of the young men to unite our Libraries with theirs. President Taylor instructed the members to come prepared to discuss the question at the next meeting” (183). **February 4, 1901:** “The question of uniting the Y.L. and Y.M. libraries was brought up and Sister Gates moved that all ward and Stake libraries be kept separate and distinct. Seconded by M.A. Freeze” (185–86). **March 4, 1901:** “The question had been put directly ‘Shall we united [*sic*] the Libraries?’ The sense of the General Board of the Y.L.M.I.A. was reported to be that it would not be beneficial to do so” (192).

Smith to combine the two periodicals.⁶⁶ The second came in 1907, when a committee led by future Apostle James E. Talmage submitted a series of resolutions to the First Presidency that included the recommendation that the *Improvement Era*, the *Young Woman's Journal*, and the *Juvenile Instructor* be combined into a single magazine.⁶⁷ A note in a 1907 issue of the *Young Woman's Journal* hints at the reasons that the young women consistently rebuffed these efforts at consolidation: "In some cases it has been reported to us that the young men of certain wards have a good library in their associations, and that they will lend the books occasionally to the young ladies. This is very kind on the part of the young men, and is fully appreciated by the young ladies, but we do not want to depend on the charity of any one for our reading matter, but would rather have our own books and be able to pass them around as needed."⁶⁸

By 1915, however, consolidation had become inevitable. The first Church Correlation Committee, led by Elder David O. McKay and including representatives from all of the auxiliaries, was constituted in 1913 with a specific charge to prevent "unnecessary and undesirable duplication of work in the various auxiliary organizations."⁶⁹

From 1915 through 1935, the Mutual Improvement Associations offered a single annual reading course for all members. During this time, 141 books were selected, of which 62, or about 44 percent, were drawn from literary genres. Significantly, none of the literature selections during this time came from the pool of canonical classics represented on earlier lists (Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy, Elizabeth Barret Browning, Samuel Johnson, Sir Walter Scott, George Eliot, and so forth). Most were contemporary fiction or classic young adult novels such as *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, with occasional Home Literature selections, including Nephi Anderson's novel *A Daughter of the North*; Orson F. Whitney's long poem *Love and the Light, an Idyll of the Westland*; and Alfred Osmond's long pioneer poem, *Exiles*.

After eliminating the gender distinctions in the lists, both boards had to address the more vexing problem of age distinctions. Though the MIAs used "Young Men's" and "Young Ladies'" in their titles, they

66. YMMIA General Board Minutes, 1902, 104, quoted in Leon M. Strong, "A History of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association, 1875-1938" (master's thesis, BYU, 1939), 179, Church History Catalogue (M257.49 S923h).

67. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 6, 1906-09, August 15, 1907, 141.

68. "Officer's Notes," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 9 (September 1907): 414.

69. *Correlation Committee Minutes*, 1913-20, 3, CR 398 1, Church History Library.

were open to, and regularly attended by, Latter-day Saints from age fourteen and above. Before the turn of the century, most local associations did not even segment members into graded age groups—everyone from fourteen to fifty or older was part of the same group, making it extremely difficult to select appropriate reading materials. By September of 1903, however, all units had created the gradations, with fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds normally in the junior class and anybody eighteen or older in the senior class.⁷⁰ MIA programming—including the reading course—often appealed more to the older students than to the youth to the extent that, in a 1920 YMMIA general board meeting, General Superintendent Anthony W. Ivins “called attention to the fact that MIA meetings consisted of the older people and that something should be done to hold the young people if the MIA organization was to fulfill its purpose.”⁷¹

The nature of the books began to change soon after the associations merged their reading courses. The 1915–16 course divided readings into junior and senior categories. Subsequent lists were not segmented and catered more intentionally to younger readers. Classic literature disappeared from the list after 1917–18, when John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem, “Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl,” became the last canonical classic to appear on it. The purpose of the course shifted subtly but decisively away from introducing the youth to recognized classics and toward stamping an MIA imprimatur on recently published, age-appropriate books for youth and young adults.

During the time covered by the joint reading course, the MIAs were undergoing significant structural changes, which we can see in the ways that they formatted the book lists. Between 1919 and 1935, the Senior and Junior courses were further subdivided into Scouts/Beehive Girls (12–13), Explorers/Junior Girls (14–17), M Men/Gleaners (18–21), and Advanced Seniors (22–35),⁷² and the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association formally changed its name to the Young Women’s

70. “Our Work: Annual M.I.A. Conventions Report,” *Improvement Era* 6, no. 11 (September 1903): 866.

71. YMMIA General Board Minutes, February 11, 1920, quoted in Scott Kenney, *The Mutual Improvement Associations: A Preliminary History 1900–1950* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 21.

72. See Strong, “History of the Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association,” 110–16; Josephson, *History of the YWMIA*, 231–32. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, class names and age ranges were in constant flux, which can also be seen in the reading course.

Mutual Improvement Association.⁷³ Furthermore, the *Improvement Era* subsumed the *Young Woman's Journal* in 1929 and became “a magazine for every member of the family.”⁷⁴ Beginning with the 1930–31 year, the reading course reflected both the Church-wide orientation of the *Era* and the graded nature of the MIAs, with selections for Executives (the bishopric and all auxiliary presidents), Adults (married adults not in the Executive Department), and all of the various age divisions of the MIAs. Each of these groups constituted a distinct department in the *Improvement Era*, and each department generally chose one book each year. The books were announced at the joint MIA summer conference each year and advertised heavily in the *Improvement Era* and in local newspapers.

On April 23, 1935, a combined meeting of the MIA general boards was held to consider a series of recommendations that had been created by a joint executive committee charged with simplifying the MIA programs. Recommendation #7 suggested “that the regular reading course be discontinued and in lieu thereof, each department stimulate reading through our publications, giving lists of good books.” The recommendation was approved.⁷⁵ From this point on, the reading course was formally discontinued, and book recommendations continued only as “suggested reading.” As it turned out, however, there was not much functional difference between “home reading” and “suggested reading,” and the reading course carried on much as it had before. Each department of the MIA continued to discuss potential readings in their meetings. They announced the coming year’s readings at the joint summer conference, and they advertised the readings regularly in the *Improvement Era*. In 1944–45, MIA handbooks still listed reading course books as requirements for achievement awards and directed instructors to make them part of the courses and activities.⁷⁶

73. See Josephson, *History of the YWMIA*, 4.

74. The *Improvement Era* first used the tagline “A Magazine for Every Member of the Family” in an advertisement in the July 1933 issue (36, no. 9: inside front cover). It appeared on the masthead from November 1933 until December 1943.

75. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 13, 1934–37, April 23, 1935, 156.

76. *Handbook for the Bee Keepers of the Y.W.M.I.A.* (Salt Lake City: General Board of the Young Woman's Mutual Improvement Association, 1944), 41, 83, 91, 149; *Handbook for the Bee Hive Girls of the Y.W.M.I.A.* (Salt Lake City: General Board of the Young Woman's Mutual Improvement Association, 1950), 34, 40.

The MIA recommendation list became a significant factor in book sales by the late 1930s. From 1935–36 through 1944–45, about a quarter of the books were published either by Deseret News Press or by Latter-day Saints seeking a national audience for their books, and inclusion on the reading list could boost sales considerably. After John A. Widtsoe took over as the editor of the *Era* in 1935, he began to receive requests from authors who wanted their books considered for the reading list. "I thought it not unlikely that my book on Masonry would be placed on the reading course of the Mutual," wrote one author in 1937, before adding that he had a new book coming out and that "this new one would not be out of place on the reading course for next year. If I were sure that it would be given that honor I would be glad to follow your suggestion and add a few chapters of the material you suggest."⁷⁷ Another sent a leaflet about a book under consideration in 1938 and wrote, "If you have a chance to speak a good word, . . . I would appreciate your doing it."⁷⁸ After corresponding with Widtsoe for more than a year, California-based writer Paul D. Bailey did manage to secure a place on the reading list for his novel *For This My Glory*, a historical novel that Bailey pitched as a friendly alternative to Vardis Fisher's bestselling *Children of God*. The novel was published by a small Los Angeles textbook company and sold an astonishing 28,000 copies, clearly demonstrating the marketing power of the MIA's list of suggested readings.⁷⁹

In the 1940s, the literary programs of the MIA faced increased scrutiny from the correlation efforts inaugurated by J. Reuben Clark's 1940 "Memorandum of Suggestions."⁸⁰ Faced with the Church's mounting debts and increasing building costs, Clark sought to refocus the organization's efforts on the essential work of growing testimonies and teaching correct behavior. To that end, the First Presidency directed the auxiliaries to "consolidate, cooperate, eliminate, simplify, and adjust their

77. E. Cecil McGavin to John A. Widtsoe, August 19, 1937, John A. Widtsoe papers, CR 712/2, box 44, folder 7, Church History Library.

78. Weston N. Nordgren to John A. Widtsoe, May 13, 1938, John A. Widtsoe papers, CR 712/2, box 46, folder 19.

79. See Michael Austin and Ardis E. Parshall, "The Novelist and the Apostle: Paul Bailey, John A. Widtsoe, and the Quest for Faithful Fiction in the 1940s," *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 3 (July 2016): 183–210.

80. The "Memorandum of Suggestions" is reproduced in full in Antone Kimball Romney, *History of the Correlation of LDS Church Auxiliaries*, 1961, 80–94, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/dadfb6f6-5dfc-47ce-a629-8a87593fe4be/o/o?lang=eng>, accessed December 27, 2022.

work.”⁸¹ Clark specifically directed the MIAs to stop providing activities for members over twenty-five years old and to avoid trying to “occupy the proper field of the public school system.”⁸² He also cautioned “the Mutuals” against trying to entertain the youth. “Work, not amusement, is the norm of men and women,” Clark wrote. “While ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,’ so ‘all play and no work usually makes Jack a vicious boy.’ The constant multiplication of amusements should not continue. The world is more than a fun-house.”⁸³ In 1944, Clark notified auxiliaries that they would have to submit any materials for course use to the newly constituted Publications Committee. For the MIAs, this meant that a Church committee would have to approve every book that they recommended through the reading course.⁸⁴

In response to the changing role of elective reading in the Church, the Joint Executive Committee of the MIA proposed a new model for the reading course in 1945. All departments would use the same scriptural text as their reading course book for the year, and a “Book of the Month” section would be added to the *Era* to recommend more contemporary books to those interested in further reading.⁸⁵ The Church’s leadership concluded that monthly book recommendations would not be feasible, since each book “would have to be read by the Church Publications Committee before it could be used,” and the program itself “might jeopardize the ‘Book Rack’ section of the *Improvement Era*,” which regularly published capsule reviews of both LDS and non-LDS books every month.⁸⁶ So the reading course became an annual common book of scripture. For the next three years, the texts were the New Testament (1945–46), 3 Nephi (1946–47), and excerpts from the Doctrine and Covenants (1947–48).⁸⁷ Some version of the single-book scriptural text

81. Romney, *History of the Correlation*, 82.

82. Romney, *History of the Correlation*, 86.

83. Romney, *History of the Correlation*, 86.

84. A letter from the First Presidency outlining the role of the Publications Committee is reproduced in Relief Society General Board Minutes, vol. 25, September 13, 1944, 74–77, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/5a2a61d7-c703-4a02-ac84-8596fe31c64a/o/78?lang=eng>, accessed December 27, 2022.

85. YWMIA Minutes, vol. 15, 1942–45, January 3, 1945, 244.

86. Joint Meeting of the MIA General Boards, YWMIA Minutes, vol. 15, 1942–45, February 7, 1945, 260.

87. **1945–46:** Minutes of Joint Meeting of the MIA General Boards, YWMIA Minutes, vol. 15, 1942–45, January 3, 1945, 244; see also Minutes of Joint Meeting of the MIA General Boards, YWMIA Minutes, vol. 15, 1942–45, February 7, 1945, 260. **1946–47:**

reading course persisted, though irregularly and with several interruptions, through 1963.

Scattered among the official, highly concentrated one-book lists issued during the final decades of the reading course were frequent unofficial reading lists that appeared in the *Era* only in ads from the Deseret Book Store. In most years from 1948 through 1962, the Church-owned bookstore published at least one full-page advertisement for a “suggested reading course” that, while not formally endorsed by the Mutual Improvement Associations, did imply some continuity with the earlier program. The first such advertisement in 1948–49 lists eighteen books, separated into the various Mutual age groups.⁸⁸ The final such ad in 1961, while acknowledging that the “reading course book for the entire mutual [is] the Book of Abraham from the Pearl of Great Price,” nonetheless listed forty-seven other “Suggested Books”—including W. Cleon Skousen’s *The Naked Communist*, Virginia Sorensen’s *Plain Girl*, and Thor Heyerdahl’s *Kon Tiki*—for study by the Mutual Improvement Association.⁸⁹ In 1964, the *Improvement Era* announced that the reading list for that year would be the *Improvement Era*, which repeated in 1966–67 and 1967–68—the last year that the *Era* announced a reading course before itself being dissolved in the universal solvent of priesthood correlation in 1970.⁹⁰

Conclusion

It would be difficult to overstate how much The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints changed during the remarkable sixty-two-year lifespan of the reading course. When it began in 1906, the Church’s membership was concentrated in the United States and the Intermountain West. Utah was a new state with few public schools and even fewer libraries, and the Church was the only institution in the region with the resources necessary to educate the population. The Mutual Improvement Associations

“New Tools for M.I.A.,” *Improvement Era* 49, no. 8 (August 1946): 520. **1947–48:** Minutes of the Joint MIA General Boards, YWMIA Minutes, vol. 16, 1946–52, March 5, 1947, 93.

88. *Improvement Era* 51, no. 8 (August 1948): 486.

89. *Improvement Era* 64, no. 6 (June 1961): 363.

90. *Improvement Era* 67, no. 8 (August 1964): 674; 69, no. 9 (September 1966): 808; 70, no. 2 (February 1967): 63. In 1971, the *Improvement Era* was discontinued and replaced by two periodicals: the *Ensign* for adults and the *New Era* for youth. These changes were part of a larger effort to centralize the Church’s auxiliary organizations and bring more coordination to their activities. For a description of this process, see the entry on “Correlation” on the Church History Topics page: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/correlation?lang=eng>, accessed December 27, 2022.

were vehicles for creating libraries, designing curricula, and curating reading materials for young people who would otherwise have little access to education. As the Church grew, the goals of the reading course changed. By 1920, the book assignments focused less on introducing people to the classics and more on recommending popular books that supported (or, at least, did not contradict) Latter-day Saint doctrines and values. And in the 1940s, as correlation began to squeeze out auxiliary curricula with no overt connection to doctrinal principles, the reading course changed again to become a method for encouraging close reading and sustained engagement with one scriptural text every year.

But some portion of the original vision of the reading course persisted to the end. In 1888, Orson F. Whitney and Junius F. Wells perceived that the Latter-day Saint pioneers had created both a religion and a culture. And they understood that, while that culture would always be influenced and shaped by the American and global cultures of which it was a part, it could also shape and influence those cultures with its own values and distinctive features. In 1898, Joseph F. Smith called for Latter-day Saints to do just that. “It is quite time that we cease to play second fiddle in all literary matters,” he told a congregation in the Salt Lake 17th Ward. “Cease patronizing so largely the publications of the East, no matter how good they may be; we want to turn the tables and send out to them our thoughts. I would like to see the world patronize us; we ought to have something with which to educate them instead of their educating us.”⁹¹ As Whitney clearly understood, Latter-day Saints had to be in the world before they could derive any value from not being of it.

All of the initiatives we have discussed here—the libraries, the literary lessons, and the different iterations of the reading course—were designed to help create a unique Latter-day Saint literary culture capable of fitting into American and world cultures but also of enlarging them. The women and men who implemented these initiatives had such a comprehensive view of their religion that they could not help but see the canons of world literature as a logical part of their own scriptural inheritance. The core assumptions that move through all these programs for literary instruction come from the theological heart of the Latter-day Saint religion as it was understood by people like Orson F. Whitney, Susa Young Gates, John A. Widtsoe, and Ruth May Fox. The religion they loved taught them that reading is important, that inspiration is universal,

91. Joseph F. Smith, “Remarks of President Joseph F. Smith,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 9, no. 2 (February 1898): 85.

that writing is a form of prophecy, and that mutual improvement is part of God's plan. And they believed with all their hearts that all human beings have a spiritual obligation to seek out the best books and use them as entry points to the mind of God.

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Appendix:

The YMMIA Reading Course, 1906–45

*Books of fiction, drama, poetry, or other literary genres.

1906–7⁹²

**Rasselas*, Samuel Johnson (reprinted in *Improvement Era*)

**John Halifax, Gentleman*, Dinah Maria Mulock Craik

**True to His Home*, Hezekiah Butterworth

1907–8

Juniors (under 18)

**Tom Brown's School Days*, Thomas Hughes

Wild Animals I Have Known, Ernest Thompson Seton

Seniors (18 and older)

The Secret of Achievement, Orison Swett Marden

Great Truths, William George Jordan

**Silas Marner*, George Eliot

The Strength of Being Clean, David Starr Jordan

1908–9

Juniors

**Last of the Mohicans*, James Fenimore Cooper

Makers of History—Hernando Cortez, John S. C. Abbot

92. All YMMIA reading list citations come from the *Improvement Era* unless otherwise noted. **1906–7**: 9, no. 12 (October 1906): 984; **1907–8**: 10, no. 9 (July 1907): 762; **1908–9**: 11, no. 11 (September 1908): 896; **1909–10**: 12, no. 9 (July 1909): 752; **1910–11**: 13, no. 9 (July 1910): 859; **1911–12**: 14, no. 10 (August 1911): 945; **1912–13**: 15, no. 9 (July 1912): 858–59; **1913–14**: 16, no. 11 (September 1913): 1164; **1914–15**: 17, no. 11 (September 1914): 1086–87; **1915–16**: 18, no. 10 (August 1915): 891; **1916–17**: 19, no. 9 (July 1916): 852; **1917–18**: 20, no. 9 (July 1917): 838; **1918–19**: 21, no. 9 (July 1918): 814; **1919–20**: 22, no. 9 (July 1919): 839; **1920–21**: 23, no. 11 (September 1920): 1005; **1921–22**: 24, no. 9 (July 1921): 855; **1922–23**: 25, no. 9 (July 1922): 850; **1923–24**: 26, no. 9 (July 1923): 851; **1924–25**: 27, no. 9 (July 1924): 877–78; **1925–26**: 28, no. 8 (June 1925): 794; **1926–27**: 29, no. 9 (July 1926): inside front cover; **1927–28**: 30, no. 9 (July 1927): 835; **1928–29**: 31, no. 9 (July 1928): inside back cover; **1929–30**: 32, no. 9 (July 1929): inside back cover; **1930–31**: 33, no. 9 (July 1930): 643; **1931–32**: 34, no. 9 (July 1931): 554; **1932–33**: 35, no. 12 (October 1932): 759; **1933–34**: 36, no. 9 (July 1933): 573; **1934–35**: 37, no. 9 (September 1934): inside front cover; **1935–36**: 38, no. 8 (August 1935): 510; **1936–37**: 39, no. 9 (September 1936): 561; **1937–38**: 40, no. 6 (June 1937): 388; **1938–39**: 41, no. 6 (June 1938): 357; **1939–40**: 42, no. 6 (June 1939): 369; **1940–41**: 43, no. 6 (June 1940): 375; **1941–42**: 44, no. 6 (June 1941): 351; **1942–43**: 45, no. 9 (September 1942): 571; **1943–44**: 46, no. 9 (September 1943): 540; **1944–1945**: 47, no. 6 (June 1944): 400; **1945–46**: Joint MIA Board Meeting, YWMIA Minutes, vol. 15, 1942–45, February 7, 1945, 260.

Seniors

- **A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens
- **Hypatia*, Charles Kingsley

1909–10

Juniors

- Abraham Lincoln: The Man of the People*, Norman Hapgood
- **John Stevens' Courtship*, Susa Young Gates
- **The Castle Builder*, Nephi Anderson

Seniors

- Ancient America*, John D. Baldwin
- Courage*, Charles Wagner
- **The Crisis*, Winston Churchill
- Our Inland Sea*, Alfred Lambourne

The YMMIA Reading Course The YLMIA Reading Course

1910–11

Junior

- Timothy Titcomb's Letters to Young People, Single and Married*, J. G. Holland
- **The Widow O'Callaghan's Boys*, Gulielma Zollinger
- **The Bishop's Shadow*, I. T. Thurston

Senior

- **Lorna Doone*, R. D. Blackmore
- American Citizenship*, David Josiah Brewster
- The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, Washington Irving
- "Friendship," "Prudence," and "Heroism," Ralph Waldo Emerson

1910–11⁹³

- The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, Orson F. Whitney
- The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, Parley P. Pratt
- **The Fair God*, Lew Wallace
- **Ivanhoe*, Sir Walter Scott
- **The Crisis*, Winston Churchill
- **John Stevens' Courtship*, Susa Young Gates
- Character*, Samuel Smiles
- **The Indifference of Juliet*, Grace S. Richmond
- **Aurora Leigh*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning
- **Hamlet*, William Shakespeare

93. Citations for the YLMIA reading course 1910–16 come from the *Young Woman's Journal*. **1910–11:** 21, no. 6 (June 1910): 341; **1911–12:** 22, no. 7 (July 1911): 395–96; **1912–13:** 23, no. 7 (July 1912): 402; **1913–14:** 24, no. 6 (June 1913): 382; **1914–15:** 25, no. 7 (July 1914): 448; **1915–16:** 26, no. 7 (July 1915): 451.

1911–12

Juniors

Good Hunting, Theodore Roosevelt

**The Young Forester*, Zane Gray
Boy Wanted, Nixon Waterman

Alfred the Great, Jacob Abbott

Seniors

The Young Man and the World,
Albert J. Beveridge

*Dry-Farming: A System of Agriculture
for Countries under a Low Rainfall*,
John A. Widtsoe

**The Cities of the Sun*, Elizabeth R.
Cannon

**John Marvel, Assistant*, Thomas Nel-
son Page

Joint Reference

Book of Good Manners, Florence
Kingsland

*A Comprehensive History of The
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day
Saints: Century I* (6 vols), B. H.
Roberts

1912–13

**The Winning of Barbara Worth*, Har-
old Bell Wright

Mexican Trails, Stanton Davis
Kirkham

Where Half the World Is Waking Up,
Clarence Hamilton Poe

**Piney Ridge Cottage*, Nephi Anderson
The Pathbreakers from River to Ocean,
Grace Raymond Hebard

**Metta: A Sierra Love Tale*, Alfred
Lambourne

1911–12

**The Opened Shutters*, Clara Louise
Burnham

**The Land of the Blue Flower*, Francis
Hodgson Burnett

**The Calling of Dan Matthews*, Harold
Bell Wright

**“Where Love Is, There God Is Also,”
Leo Tolstoy

**Freckles*, Gene Stratton-Porter

**Happy Island: A New “Uncle William”
Story*, Jennette Lee

**Anne of Green Gables*, L. M.
Montgomery

**Keeping Up with Lizzie*, Irving
Bacheller

**The Cities of the Sun*, Elizabeth R.
Cannon

1912–13

Y.L.M.I.A. History, Susa Young Gates

**Mother*, Kathleen Norris

The Story of My Life, Helen Keller

**Hamlet*, William Shakespeare

**Bleak House*, Charles Dickens

**Queed*, Henry Sydnor Harrison

**Piney Ridge Cottage*, Nephi Anderson

**Mary Cary: “Frequently Martha,”* Kate
Langley Boshier

**Metta: A Sierra Love Tale*, Alfred
Lambourne

**The Secret Garden*, Francis Hodgson
Burnett

1913–14

Juniors

The Courage of the Commonplace,

Mary R. S. Andrews

Stories of Inventors, Russell

Doubleday

Heroes of Everyday Life, Fanny E. Coe

The Pioneer Trail, Alfred Lambourne

**The Southerner: A Romance of the*

Real Lincoln, Thomas Dixon

Seniors

The Reign of the Anti-Christ or the

Great "Falling Away," Janne Matt-
son Sjö Dahl

The House of the Lord, James E.

Talmage

The American Government, Freder-

ick J. Haskin

**Corporal Cameron,* Ralph Connor

Joseph and the Land of Egypt, A. H.

Sayce

Making the Farm Pay, Colvin Cullen

Bowsfield

1914–15

Juniors

**Story of Chester Lawrence,* Nephi

Anderson

**The Young Farmer,* George B. Hill

Cattle-Ranch to College, Russell

Doubleday

Seniors

Their Yesterdays, Harold Bell Wright

The Story and Philosophy of "Mor-
monism," James E. Talmage

**The Fair God,* Lew Wallace

1913–14

Their Yesterdays, Harold Bell Wright

**The Marshall,* Mary R. S. Andrews

**The Lady of the Decoration,* Frances

Little

**The Lady and Sada San,* Frances

Little

**The Harvester,* Gene Stratton-Porter

**Christmas,* Zona Gale

**Mother Carey's Chickens,* K. D.

Wiggins

**The New Chronicles of Rebecca,* K. D.

Wiggins

**The Sad Shepherd,* Henry Van Dyke

**Daddy-Long-Legs,* Jean Webster

**The Ruling Passion,* Henry Van Dyke

Helps for Ambitious Girls, William

Drysdale

1914–15

Juniors

**Peg O' My Heart,* J. H. Manners

The Haunters of the Silences, Charles

D. Roberts

Seniors

**The Fear of Living,* Henry Bordeaux

**The Glory of the Conquered,* Susan

Glaspell

All

The Business of Being a Woman, Ida

Tarbell

Optimism, Helen Keller

The Holy Land, Lydia D. Adler

**Mr. Durant of Salt Lake City,* Ben E.

Rich

Combined YMMIA/YLMIA Reading Course⁹⁴

1915–16

Juniors

- **Little Sir Galahad*, Phoebe Gray
- **The Twenty-fourth of June*, Grace Richmond
- **The Lance of Kanana*, Henry W. French (Scouts)
(Nature book to be selected later.)

Seniors

- Joseph Smith, the Prophet-Teacher*, B. H. Roberts
- A Study of Greatness in Men*, J. N. Larned
- A Play-House*, Alfred Lambourne
- **A Daughter of the North*, Nephi Anderson

Additional Books

- **The Cities of the Sun*, Elizabeth R. Cannon
- **Peter*, Francis Hopkinson Smith
- **The Rosary*, Florence L. Barclay
- **Mother Carey's Chickens*, Kate Douglas Wiggin
- The Problems of Boyhood*, Franklin W. Johnson (recommended for teachers in the YMMIA)

1916–17

The New Testament

- **Tales from Shakespeare*, Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb
Hamlet; Midsummer Night's Dream; Henry VIII; King Lear; Romeo and Juliet,
William Shakespeare
- **Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott
- How We Got Our Bible*, J. Paterson Smyth
- Sandy's Pal*, Gardner Hunting
- Wild Animals at Home*, Ernest Thompson Seton

94. In 1915, the men's and women's reading lists were combined. The identical list was published in the August 1915 issues of the *Improvement Era* and the *Young Woman's Journal*. Subsequent reading lists were labeled "MIA Reading Course" and announced in both the *Improvement Era* and the *Young Woman's Journal* until 1927, after which the list was published in the *Improvement Era*. The lists of suggested reading material printed in the *Young Woman's Journal* from 1915 to 1927 can be found in the following places: **1915–16**: 26, no. 8 (August 1915): 519; **1916–17**: 27, no. 7 (July 1916): 439; **1917–18**: 28, no. 7 (July 1917): 402; **1918–19**: 29, no. 7 (July 1918): 419; **1919–20**: 30, no. 8 (August 1919): 454; **1920–21**: 31, no. 8 (August 1920): 478; **1921–22**: 32, no. 8 (August 1921): 495; **1922–23**: 33, no. 8 (August 1922): 464; **1923–24**: 34, no. 8 (August 1923): 455; **1924–25**: 35, no. 7 (July 1924): 381; **1925–26**: 36, no. 7 (July 1925): 439; **1926–27**: 37, no. 8 (August 1926): 528; **1927–28**: 38, no. 8 (August 1927): 528.

Jacob Hamblin, James A. Little

**Wild Roses: A Tale of the Rockies*, Howard R. Driggs

**Under the Country Sky*, Grace S. Richmond

Speeches of the Flying Squadron, eds. J. Frank Hanley, Oliver Wayne Stewart

1917–18

The New Testament

Coniston, Winston Churchill

**Laddie*, Gene Stratton-Porter

**The Three Things*, Mary R. S. Andrews

Men Who Made Good, John T. Faris

Thomas Alva Edison, Francis Rolt-Wheeler

Florence Nightingale, Laura Elizabeth Richards

*"Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl," John Greenleaf Whittier

How to Get Ahead, Albert W. Atwood

1918–19

A Voice of Warning, Parley P. Pratt

**Kings in Exile*, Charles G. D. Roberts

**Uncle Sam's Boy at War*, O. P. Austin

**The Major*, Ralph Connor

Abraham Lincoln, Wilbur F. Gordy

Heroines of Service, Mary R. Parkman

**Love and the Light: An Idyl of the Westland*, Orson F. Whitney

The Man of Tomorrow, Claude Richards

The book of Job from the Bible

1919–20

(Repeated from 1918–19)

A Voice of Warning, Parley P. Pratt

**Kings in Exile*, Charles G. D. Roberts

Uncle Sam's Boy at War, O. P. Austin

Abraham Lincoln, Wilbur F. Gordy

Heroines of Service, Mary R. Parkman

**Love and the Light: An Idyl of the Westland*, Orson F. Whitney

The Man of Tomorrow, Claude Richards

The book of Job from the Bible

(New for 1919–20)

Tobacco and Human Efficiency, Frederick J. Pack

Leaves from My Journal, Wilford Woodruff

**The Light in the Clearing*, Irving Bacheller

1920–21

- Adventures in Contentment*, David Grayson
Heroes of To-Day, Mary R. Parkman
**High Benton*, William Heyliger
**Isabel Carlton's Year*, Margaret E. Ashmun
Prophecies of Joseph Smith and Their Fulfillment, Nephi L. Morris

1921–22

- The Restoration of the Gospel*, Osborne J. P. Widtsoe
The Mormon Settlement in Arizona (published by the State of Arizona)
**A Man for the Ages*, Irving Bacheller
**Fireside Stories for Girls in Their Teens*, Margaret W. Eggleston
Trails to Woods and Waters, Clarence Hawkins
The Strength of Being Clean, David Starr Jordan
The Promised Land, Mary Antin

1922–23

- The Vitality of Mormonism*, James E. Talmage
**If Winter Comes*, Arthur S. M. Hutchinson
Fundamentals of Prosperity, Roger Ward Babson
**Feet of the Furtive*, Charles G. D. Roberts
The Strength of Being Clean, David Starr Jordan

1923–24

- 3 Nephi from the Book of Mormon
Companionable Books, Henry Van Dyke
**Ox-Team Days on the Oregon Trail*, Howard R. Driggs and Ezra Meeker
**Including Mother*, Margaret Ashmun
**The Dim Lantern*, Temple Bailey

1924–25

- Book of Mosiah from the Book of Mormon
The Founding of Utah, Levi Edgar Young
**Benefits Forgot*, Honoré Willsie
**The Dear Pretender*, Alice Ross Colver

1925–26

- The Romantic Rise of a Great American*, Russell H. Conwell
**Forty-Minute Plays from Shakespeare*, Fred G. Barker
**Mother Mason*, Bess Streeter Aldrich

Life of Christ, Giovanni Papini
The Gospel of Saint Matthew from the Bible

1926–27

The Book of Mormon
Prophecies of Joseph Smith and Their Fulfillment, Nephi L. Morris
**Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker*, S. Weir Mitchell
Wild Life on the Rockies, Enos A. Mills

1927–28⁹⁵

The Book of Mormon
Saturday Night Thoughts, Orson F. Whitney
**The Exiles*, Alfred Osmond (poetry of the Mormon pioneers)
*“The Mansion,” Henry Van Dyke
Two Years Before the Mast, Richard Henry Dana, Jr.
**The Peace of the Solomon Valley*, Margaret Hill McCarter
**A Certain Rich Man*, William Allen White
**The Beauty of the Purple*, William Stearns Davis
**Marching On*, James Boyd
**The Ten Dreams of Zach Peters*, Hermann Hagedorn
**The Trail of the Sandhill Stag*, Ernest Thompson Seton
In the Temple of the Great Outdoors, Theodore E. Curtis
The City of the Sacred Well, T. A. Willard
George Washington, Woodrow Wilson

1928–29

The Pearl of Great Price
From Immigrant to Inventor, Michael Pupin
What Ails Our Youth? George A. Coe
**Round the Corner in Gay Street*, Grace S. Richmond
**So Big*, Edna Ferber
**Smoky the Cowhorse*, Will James

1929–30

Doctrine and Covenants
Karl G. Maeser: A Biography by His Son, Reinhard Maeser

95. From 1928 on, the reading list appears less frequently in the text of the *Improvement Era* or in reports of the MIA summer conference and more frequently in Deseret Book Company advertisements that accompany the text.

- The Book Nobody Knows*, Bruce B. Barton
 **A Lantern in Her Hand*, Bess Streeter Aldrich
 **The Southerner: A Romance of the Real Lincoln*, Thomas Dixon
Three Points of Honor, Russell Gordon Carter
 **The Dove in the Eagle's Nest*, Charlotte M. Yonge
 **The Drama* (magazine subscription)

1930–31⁹⁶

- The Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, George Q. Cannon (Executives)
Grandmother Brown's Hundred Years, Harriet Connor Brown (Adults)
 **The Light in the Clearing*, Irving Bacheller (M Men)
 **Bambi, a Life in the Woods*, Felix Salten (Gleaners)
Schumann-Heink: The Last of the Titans, Mary Lawton (Junior Girls)
 **Mother Carey's Chickens*, Kate Douglas Wiggin (Bee-Hives)
On the Bottom: The Raising of the U.S. Navy Submarine S-51, Edward Ellsberg
 (Vanguard)
 **Chad of Knob Hill*, Howard Roger Garis (Scouts)

1931–32

- The Life Story of Brigham Young*, Susa Young Gates and Leah D. Widtsoe
 (Executives)
People and Music, T. C. McGehee (Music Directors)
Medical Aspects of the Latter-day Saint Word of Wisdom, L. Weston Oaks
 (Adults)
 **With Malice toward None*, Honoré Willsie Morrow (M Men)
 **Singing in the Rain*, Anne Shannon Monroe (Gleaners)
Larry: Thoughts of Youth, Larry Foster (Vanguards/Junior Girls)
Modern Pioneers, Joseph G. Cohen and Will Scarlet (Scouts)

1932–33

- In Search of Truth*, John A. Widtsoe
Through Memory's Halls, Orson F. Whitney
Twenty-one, Erdman Harris
 **A White Bird Flying*, Bess Streeter Aldrich
American, Frank B. Linderman
Boy Heroes of Today, Dan Beard

96. In the 1930–31 list, as with most subsequent lists, each book corresponds to one category within the MIA, given in parentheses.

1933–34

Joseph Smith: An American Prophet, John Henry Evans
Life Begins at Forty, Walter B. Pitkin
John Jacob Astor: Landlord of New York, Arthur D. Howden Smith
**Two Little Savages*, Ernest Thompson Seton
**As the Earth Turns*, Gladys Hasty Carroll
Hidden Heroes of the Rockies, Isaac K. Russell and Howard R. Driggs

1934–35

Strategy in Handling People, Ewing T. Webb and John B. Morgan (Executives)
A Guide to Civilized Loafing, H. A. Overstreet (Adults)
Life of J. Golden Kimball, Claude Richards (Seniors)
William Clayton's Journal, William Clayton (M Men)
The Book Nobody Knows, Bruce B. Barton (Vanguards)
**Smoky, the Cowhorse*, Will James (Scouts)
The New Testament (Gleaners)
**The Southerner: A Romance of the Real Lincoln*, Thomas Dixon (Gleaners)
Heroines of Service, Mary R. Parkman (Gleaners)

Lists of Suggested Readings (noncurricular)

1935–36

Brigham Young: The Man of the Hour, Leah D. Widtsoe (Adults)
"The Community High Road to Better Things," Joseph Geddes (Seniors)
The Leadership of Joseph Smith, John Henry Evans (M Men/Gleaners)
Happy Landings, Youth!, Marba C. Josephson (Junior Girls)

1936–37

The New Testament (Executives)
Wake Up and Live! Dorothea Brande (Adults)
Making the Most of Your Life, John J. B. Morgan and Ewing T. Webb (Seniors)
North to the Orient, Anne Morrow Lindbergh (M Men/Gleaners)
**Heart of a Rose*, Mabel A. McKee (Explorers)
Larry: Thoughts of Youth, Larry Foster (Juniors)
Voice of the Intangible, Albert R. Lyman (Scouts)

1937–38

The Return to Religion, Henry C. Link (Adults/Seniors)
Step a Little Higher, John Henry Evans (Seniors/M Men/Gleaners)
How to Win Friends and Influence People, Dale Carnegie (M Men)
Living through Biography: Real Persons, Edwin Diller Starbuck (Explorers)

North to the Orient, Anne Morrow Lindbergh (Juniors)
 **Cowboy Hugh*, Walter H. Nichols (Scouts)

1938–39

The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Joseph Fielding Smith (Executives)
Madame Curie, Eve Curie (Adults)
Utah Sings, Harrison R. Merrill and Elsie T. Brandley (Seniors)
Pasteur, Francis E. Benz (M Men/Gleaners)
The Magnificent Obsession, Lloyd Douglas (M Men/Gleaners)
Characters and Messages of the Book of Mormon, John Henry Evans (Explorers)
Madame Curie: A Biography, Eve Curie (Juniors)
 **The Lance of Kanana*, Harry W. French (Scouts)
 **Little Soldier of the Plains*, Marian McDonough (Bee-Hive Girls)

1939–40

A Voice from the Dust, Genet Bingham Dee (Executive)
The Rediscovery of Man, Henry C. Link (Adults)
Alone: The Classic Polar Adventure, Richard E. Byrd (Gleaners/M Men)
Antarctic Icebreakers, Lorene K. Fox (Explorers)
 **Queer Person*, Ralph Hubbard (Scouts)
 **Three Sisters*, Cornelia Spencer (Juniors)
 **Caddie Woodlawn*, Carol Ryrie Brink (Bee-Hives Girls)
Good Manners, Beth Bailey McLean (Bee-Hive Girls)

1940–41

Unto the Hills, Richard L. Evans (Executives/Special Interest Groups)
One Who Was Valiant, Clarissa Young Spenser and Mabel Harmer (Special Interest Groups)
The Four Gospels and Acts from the Bible (M Men/Gleaners)
Selected Book of Mormon stories (Explorers)
Hello Life! Elsie Talmage Brandley (Juniors)
Monarch, the Big Bear of Tallac, Ernest Thompson Seton (Scouts)
 **The Singing Tree*, Kate Seredy (Bee-Hives)

1941–42

Abraham Lincoln, Man of God, John Wesley Hill (Executives)
Healthful Living, Harold S. Diehl (Special Interest)
 **For This My Glory*, Paul Bailey (Special Interest)
Cumorah's "Gold Bible," E. Cecil McGavin (Special Interest)
Brigham Young, the Colonizer, Milton R. Hunter (Special Interest)
The Improvement Era (M Men/Gleaners)
The Latter-day Prophet, George Q. Cannon (Explorers)

- **This Is Freedom*, Rhoda Nelson (Juniors)
- Pioneer Stories*, Preston Nibley (Scouts/Bee Keepers)
- **Blue Willow*, Doris Gates (Bee Hive Builders)
- **All the Days Were Antonia's*, Gretchen McKown and Florence Stebbins Gleeson (Bee Hive Gatherers)
- **The Yearling*, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (Bee Hive Guardians)

1942-43

- In the Gospel Net*, John A. Widtsoe (Executives)
- Gospel Standards*, Heber J. Grant (Special Interest)
- I Dare You!* William H. Danforth (M Men/Gleaners)
- Missionary Experiences*, Preston Nibley (M Men)
- Elizabeth, England's Modern Queen*, Cornelia Spencer (Gleaners)
- Maud*, Isabella Maud Rittenhouse, ed. Richard Lee Strout (Junior Girls)
- Lincoln*, Lucy Foster Madison (Scouts)
- Clara Barton*, Mildred Mastin Pace (Bee-Hive Girls)

1943-44

- Daniel Hammer Wells and the Events of His Time*, Bryant S. Hinckley (Executives)
- The American Canon*, Daniel L. Marsh (Special Interest Groups)
- Syrian Yankee*, Salom Rizk (M Men/Gleaners)
- Living through Biography: The High Trail*, Edward Diller Starbuck (Explorers)
- Mama's Bank Account*, Kathryn Forbes (Juniors)
- **This Is Freedom*, Rhoda Nelson (Scouts)
- **Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott (Bee-Hive Girls)
- Invincible Louisa*, Cornelia Meigs (Bee-Hive Teachers)

1944-45

- The Gospel Kingdom*, John Taylor (Executives)
- The Church in War and Peace*, Stephen L Richards (Special Interest)
- **The Robe*, Lloyd C. Douglas (M Men/Gleaners)
- I Wanted to See*, Borghild Dahl (Juniors)
- **Faith-Promoting Stories*, Preston Nibley (Senior Scouts)
- **Traveler's Candle*, Florence M. Updegraff (Bee Hive)
- **Canyon of Whispers*, L. A. Wadsworth (Scout)