

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



THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF THE SUNSTONE SPECIES

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF CREATIVE ADAPTATION

By *Elbert Eugene Peck*

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

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

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

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

SCOTT KENNEY YEARS 1975–1978

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

THE STUDENT JOURNAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

"LET'S START A MAGAZINE"

Rapid adaptations! or What's news?

AT only its sixth issue, SUNSTONE's presentation and its self-perception dramatically changed. Directed by Orson Scott Card, the uncredited issue editor, the magazine changed size and frequency—from a quarterly journal to a "bi-monthly," 8½-by-11 inch magazine. This early commitment to switch and be a magazine that targets a slightly more popular, but still intellectual, audience with relatively short, illustrated, accessible articles marked the creation of the SUNSTONE species (different from the LDS academic journals that influenced its founding). This role also defined the aim of many subsequent Sunstone projects—to connect college-educated, lay Saints with scholars of Mormonism.

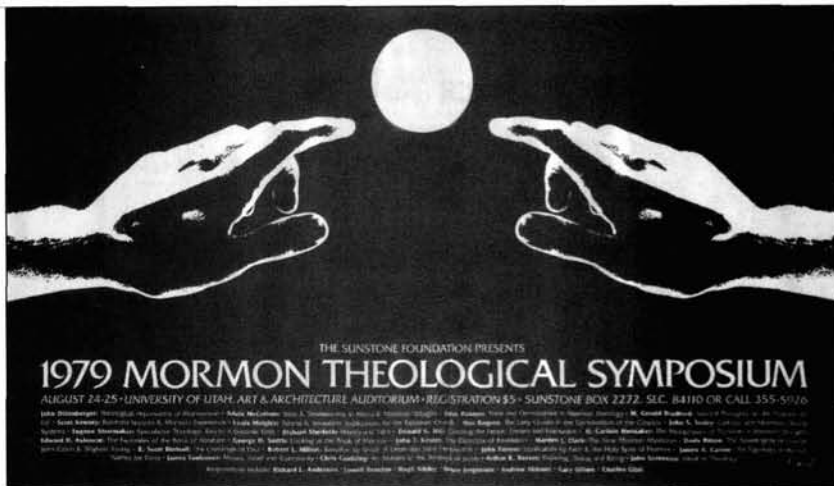
Then, in the very next issue, after an unusually long delay, even for SUNSTONE (finances!), the magazine made yet another dramatic editorial shift—adding LDS news. What had been an incidental interest in current events now was the primary focus. SUNSTONE and the start-up LDS newsmagazine *The New Messenger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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

1978–1980

ALLEN ROBERTS & PEGGY FLETCHER YEARS

Sunstone's charisma is institutionalized in ongoing programs.

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

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

SUNSTONE articles became longer, more substantive, and

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

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

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

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

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

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

