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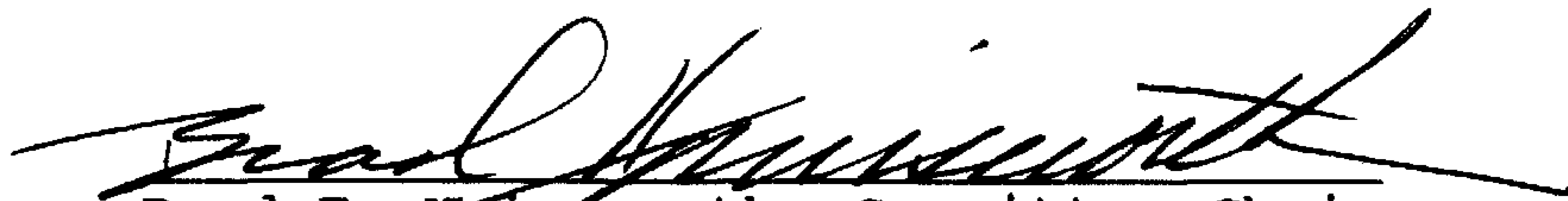
Wendell J. Ashton:
Advocate, Publisher, Civic Leader

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Communications
Brigham Young University

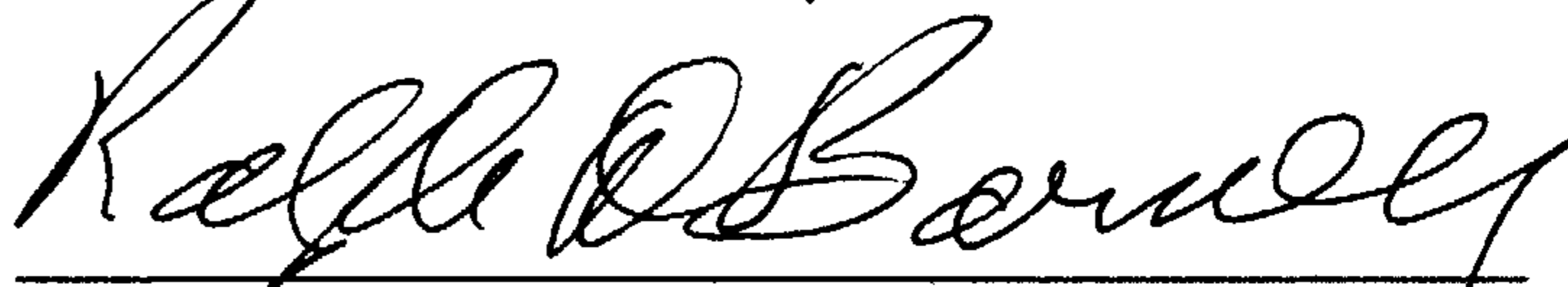
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Val L. Peterson
August 1994

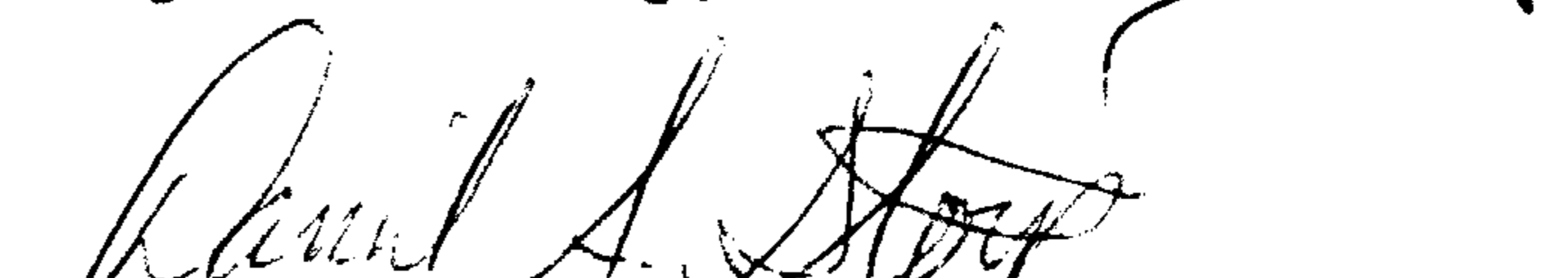
This thesis by Val L. Peterson is accepted in its present form by the Department of Communications of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.



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April 22, 1994
Date

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Overview

Wendell J. Ashton has been described as a pacesetter in the communications field in the Intermountain West. He was a trailblazer in public relations in the early days of his career at Gillham Advertising. His life has been filled with challenges such as publisher of the Deseret News, director of the LDS Church Communications Department, principal in Gillham Advertising, and various civic and community activities.

Ashton's communications career was one of innovator and pioneer as he helped forge the public relations industry in the Intermountain West. His career has followed in the footsteps of many other professionals such as Lon Richardson Sr., William S. Adamson, Nelson Aldrich, Edwin Dowell, Parry D. Sorensen, Jennings Phillips, David W. Evans, Arch Madsen, and G. Robert Ruff.¹ This thesis will examine the career of Wendell J. Ashton as it began, as it grew, and as it blossomed through major communications, advertising, and public relations projects. This study will reveal how Ashton increased the status of public relations professionals in Utah in the following ways:

1. In the length and quality of his career.

¹John C. Speer. "The Role of David W. Evans In Public Relations Counseling In The Intermountain West." Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University. Provo, Utah. 1985. p.1.

2. In the number of the clients and organizations he served and campaigns he organized.
3. In comparison with his communication's peers.
4. In his career and life achievements.
5. In his contributions to the professional and philosophical development of the budding profession of communications.
6. In his management of the LDS Church Public Communications Department.
7. In his management of the Deseret News as publisher.

In analyzing these seven areas, this thesis will show not only how he became a leader in the communications field in the Intermountain West, but also how Ashton's early career as editor of the Millennial Star and as a reporter for the Salt Lake Telegram prepared him for the challenges he would later face in his professional life.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to analyze Ashton's early career and how it prepared him for communication management positions. The study shows:

1. How Wendell J. Ashton's career in communications contributed to the development of communications counseling in the state of Utah and within the LDS Church;
2. How Ashton's early life and contributions prepared him for significant career and agency-building counseling projects;
3. How those contributions increased dramatically during his experience at Gillham Advertising;
4. How he was able to use that experience to organize the Church's public communications department on a world-wide basis; and
5. How he was able to bring his leadership, experience, and creativity to the Deseret News to make it a more dynamic and credible publication.

Extent and Limitations of the Study

This study examines Wendell Ashton's communications career and his contributions to the communications profession. The study begins with Ashton's birth in 1912 and continuing throughout his professional career. The study will also analyze Ashton's many contributions to the community through public service.

Justification of the Study

Wendell J. Ashton's career is of historical interest as well as offering an opportunity to document the history of communications in the state of Utah and in the LDS Church. Ashton's professional career is composed of experiences that can be used as case studies for effective communication campaigns. A study of his career in communications will also illustrate the development of the communications process within the LDS Church. His organization of the public communications department set in motion the beginning of a world-wide communications effort to spread the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' gospel message to people around the world. The organization of the world-wide communications department will provide a model that can be used by professionals involved with international communications.

Methods

Seven sources of historical information will describe how Wendell J. Ashton rose to prominence in the communications field in the Intermountain West, and how he contributed to the growth of the communications field on a world-wide basis. These sources are:

1. Unpublished statements, articles, and papers written by or about various professionals, including papers and histories from Wendell J. Ashton;
2. R. L. Polk City Directories for Salt Lake City from 1903 through 1990;
3. Newspapers and other periodical articles about the various communications professionals studied.
4. Papers and documents from the Deseret News and the Newspaper Agency Corporation. These papers will help document the seven-and-a-half years that Ashton served as the publisher, as well as the contracts and minutes of the 1982 negotiations of the joint operating agreement between the Salt Lake Tribune and the Deseret News.

5. Papers, memoranda, and correspondence from the LDS Public Communications Department that will show the organizational structure and departmental operation over the five years that Ashton served as the director of the LDS Church's Public Communication Department.

6. Articles, books, and papers written by Wendell J. Ashton, such as articles from the Salt Lake Telegram, public relations campaigns written by Ashton at Gillham Advertising, and the following books written by Ashton such as A Voice in the West, In Your Own Image, It's Your Life To Enjoy, Salt of the Earth, Bigger Than Yourself, A Window on Life, Theirs Is The Kingdom, and America's Burning Issue.

7. Wendell J. Ashton's life history as dictated to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical department in 37 interviews.

8. Interviews with former employees such as Jean Van Valkenberg, Dale Van Atta, and Deann Evans.

Definition of Terms

Communication

Communication is a behavior of individuals, groups, or organizations. People communicate when they move messages to or from other people.²

Public relations

James E. Grunig, from the College of Journalism at the University of Maryland, has developed a public relations definition based on Sam Black's definition introduced in his book Practical Public Relations. Public relations is the "deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its public."³ Grunig combined this definition with Rex Harlow's definition from his article Building a Public Relations definition, "public relations is the management, planning, and execution of communications for an organization as a whole."⁴ The definitions were blended by Grunig to create the definition used in this thesis. "Public relations is the

²James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt. "Managing Public Relations." (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984) p. 6.

³Sam Black, Practical Public Relations. (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1962), p.3.

⁴Rex Harlow, "Building a Public Relations Definition," Public Relations Review 2 (Winter 1976):36.

management of communication between an organization and its publics."⁵

Advertising

Advertising means the paid publicizing of one's goods and services to the appropriate constituent publics. It is a function of marketing.⁶

Agency

Agency refers to any organization paid to perform a service for another organization. Thus, real estate agents buy and sell real estate for clients; advertising agencies handle similar functions for their clients; and public relations agencies (or divisions of agencies) handle the communications management function for their respective clients.

Counselor

Counselor refers to any person who gives advice to or represents a client or agency in the actual performing of services for the agency or client.

⁵Ibid. p.6.

⁶Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center and Glen M. Broom, Effective Public Relations, 6th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p. 7.

Communications counselor

Communications counselor refers to any person who represents clients in both public relations and advertising--sometimes in the same project or campaign.

Journalism

Journalism is a profession, a public service, and a business. Its primary object is to inform through narration, explanation, and interpretation of events.⁷

Evaluation

Wendell Ashton's career will be evaluated using the following ten points which have been gleaned from his career as a public relations professional. These points will be used to show his development and preparation for the management positions which followed later in his life.

1. His Strong Work Ethic. Ashton put forth the time and effort to be successful in his chosen field or profession. He exhibited the tenacity and determination

⁷Frank W. Scott, "Some Notes on Ethics and Taste for Journalists," The Journalism Quarterly 5 (June 1928): 4-5.

to produce professional communications campaigns on a continual basis.

2. His Integrity & Trust. The key factor in associations with clients and other communications professionals is integrity and trust. Reporters rely on public relations professionals to give them accurate, truthful information. When a communications professional breaks the integrity and trust with a reporter, the professional can no longer be effective.

3. His Role as an Advocate. A public relations professional is an advocate for the client. The public relation professional is working on behalf of the client to serve the client's best interests. Ashton often said, "public relations is a combination of being a salesman, a reporter, and an attorney."

4. His Creativity. Public relations and advertising require creativity to communicate the message to the targeted public. Creativity is the life blood of communications. Creativity is the innovative idea that captures the

attention of the targeted public and helps make the client successful.

5. His Planning and Strategy for Campaigns. Communications is an art of calculated tactics combined with proper timing. A public relations professional needs to know when a story will capture the interest of reporters and the public. The same principle applies to special events, communications plans and campaigns.

6. His Technical Skills. A communications professional must have the technical skills to accomplish the campaign. Proficient writing skills and updated technical skills are essential in keeping pace with an evolving market place.

7. His Handling and Working with People. Working with people and clients is an art. People need to be handled so they gain respect for the professional as well as what can be accomplished through communications. Ashton forged a relationship with the Eccles brothers that lasted a life time. He had the ability to smooth over

situations and solve problems while maintaining people's support.

8. His Organizational Skills. Organizational skills are a must in the profession. Special events, communications plans, and campaigns require organizational skills and attention to detail to ensure a smooth event.
9. His Determination and Stick-to-itiveness. A professional must accomplish what he or she set out to do. Sometimes the first attempt or the first idea will not overcome the problem. Creativity often comes from hard work and analyzing the problem.
10. His Commitment to All that Counts is Results. In the end, the only thing that matters is two-way communications has taken place. The client has received the desired result through a communications plan, the communications problem has been solved, and internal and external communications has taken place.

OVERVIEW

The second chapter of this thesis will review the early life of Wendell J. Ashton and his early experiences such as editor of the school paper, reporter for the Salt Lake Telegram, and editor of the Millennial Star.

The third chapter will analyze Wendell Ashton's career at Gillham Advertising. This chapter will review his many clients such as Utah Power and Light, Mountain Fuel, First Security Bank, the savings and loan industry of Utah, the Utah Dairy Association, First Federal Savings, Stevens-Henager College, and Petty Ford.

The fourth chapter will examine the 1968 Liquor-by-the-Drink ballot issue in the state of Utah. Ashton was the executive for Gillham Advertising who spearheaded the opposition and grassroots citizen movement.

The fifth chapter will examine Ashton's efforts in organizing the LDS Church public communications department on a global scale. It will also explore the many issues Wendell Ashton dealt with during his tenure as managing director of the Public Communications Department. Programs and issues such as pageants, visitor centers, radio and television commercials, public announcements such as the one concerning blacks and the priesthood, the death of President Harold B. Lee, and the announcement and open house of the LDS Washington D.C. Temple.

The sixth chapter will review the seven-and-a-half years that Wendell Ashton served as the publisher of the Deseret News. Also reviewed are the changes instituted to increase the circulation of the Deseret News in Salt Lake City, and the negotiations with the Salt Lake Tribune in 1982 to renew the joint operating agreement.

The seventh chapter describes the contributions Wendell Ashton made during his professional life to civic and community groups throughout the Salt Lake Valley and the state of Utah. Among the groups Wendell Ashton has chaired or managed are the Utah Symphony, the Jazz One Hundred Club, the ballet, Salt Lake City Chamber of Commerce.

The eighth chapter summarizes Wendell Ashton's career and presents a set of guidelines Ashton developed through his life that made him successful in his communications career.

Chapter 2

The Early Years

Parents

Wendell Ashton was born October 31, 1912 to Marvin O. and Rae Jeremy Ashton in Salt Lake City, Utah. Ashton was the oldest of six children, three boys and three girls. Wendell's brother Marvin J. became an apostle in 1971 for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his father served as first counselor in the presiding bishopric of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1917 to 1934. Ashton said his father was the greatest role model throughout his life, instilling in him many of the character traits that later became the cornerstones of his success. His father placed the utmost importance on honesty and hard work.⁸

Marvin O. Ashton's emphasis on hard work was passed on to his children through the training and instruction he gave them at home. He believed part of their training should be learning to work and provide for themselves. To teach this point, Ashton provided various opportunities to teach his children about the meaning and importance of work. Wendell's first recollections of work and responsibility are connected with the family rabbits.

Ashton's father bought some rabbits and built several hutches that he placed in the garage. Responsibility for the

⁸Wendell J. Ashton, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Typescript, Salt Lake City, Utah, April 1990.

rabbit's care and maintenance were given to his two sons Wendell and Marvin J. During the summer, the two boys would roam alfalfa fields and cut wild alfalfa with sickles. The boys carried the alfalfa to the chicken coop where they placed it on top and allowed it to dry in the summer sun. When the alfalfa finished curing, they stacked it and stored it for the rabbit's winter feed.⁹ This work ethic extended throughout Wendell's life. Wendell always put forth the effort and time to see projects through from beginning to end.

Marvin O. Ashton also stressed the importance of honesty and integrity to his children. During Wendell's childhood, his father seized a teaching moment that developed the young boy's character and created a standard for the rest of his life. Ashton related the following story.

Ashton was playing out front of their two story home at 1341 E. Browning Ave., in Salt Lake City. The city was placing new sewer pipe in front of their home to keep up with the growing population. The workmen dug a deep trench down the side of the road. The workmen then placed large lead pipes in the trench that required fitting together. To fit the pipes together, the workmen had a large pot of lead they heated to a molten state. The workmen would then take the

⁹Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 12, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

molten lead and pour it around the seams of the pipe forming a seal.

Each day neighborhood boys and girls watched in fascination as the workmen toiled on the project. At approximately 4 p.m. the workmen finished for the day; they put away everything and prepared the work site for the next day. The big pot of molten was left out to cool and harden. After the workmen left, the neighborhood kids found sticks to put in the molten lead and then pull out forming a lead tip on the end of the stick. Ashton continued dipping the tip of the stick until he had a tip that looked like a cattail. He carried the stick around the neighborhood showing off how his was the biggest lead cattail. As Ashton went around the neighborhood bragging, someone asked him where he had gotten the lead. The neighbor said if Wendell had taken the lead from the workmen's pot then it did not belong to him and that constituted stealing. This thought had never occurred to the young boy, and he began feeling guilty about the whole situation. He went home and told his mother he had stolen hot lead from the workmen's pot by dipping a stick into it. Ashton's mother told his father about the situation. Marvin O. Ashton decided the best way to handle the situation was to call a special family home evening after dinner. Ashton's father related the following story to illustrate the point of honesty to his children.

A young Arab boy lived in the Middle East. His father decided he was going to take the young boy on a trek across the desert by camel to sell goods at the market. Whenever anyone traveled across the desert, they were in constant fear of being robbed by bandits roaming the desert. The boy's mother gave him a small amount of money to put in his pocket. She took his jacket and sewed the rest of the money inside the lining so if they were stopped by the bandits the hidden currency would not be found. After a few days of traveling across the desert, bandits surrounded them. Lining the group up the bandits confiscated all the money they could find. After taking all their goods and possessions, one of the bandits asked the group whether they had any more money. The young boy spoke up and said he had some money sewn into the lining of his jacket. The bandits replied, "You're an honest young man, and we will not take the money in your coat and we will return the money we found in your pocket."¹⁰

The principles of integrity and trust are illustrated by this story. Marvin O. Ashton instilled in Wendell and all of his children the importance of honesty. Such values were of importance throughout Ashton's life and became a trademark of his career. As his career progressed, Ashton found a key factor in his associations with clients and other communications professionals was integrity and trust.

¹⁰Wendell J. Ashton, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Typescript, Salt Lake City, Utah, April 1990.

Reporters rely on public relations professionals to give them accurate and truthful information. When a communications professional breaks a reporters or clients integrity and trust, the professional can no longer be effective.

Childhood

When Ashton was nine years old he had his first experience which encouraged him to enter the communications field. Ashton was in third grade when his elementary teacher suggested the class hold a grammar contest. The class, filled with nine year olds, was excited to participate in any type of contest. Miss Monihan outlined the rules. She would give each member of the class a strip of green construction paper. When one student would hear another use bad grammar and the guilty party admitted the error the offending party was to give the other the strip of construction paper. The student with the most pieces of construction paper at the end of the week was the winner. Ashton wanted to win the contest, so he decided the best way to win was to say nothing during the week and listen for other students to make grammatical errors. Ashton's strategy paid off and at the end of the week he had the most pieces of construction paper, thus winning the contest.

Miss Monihan presented Ashton with a little hardbound book with a cardboard cover, entitled The Boy Scouts in Italy, by Captain John Blaine. Miss Monihan wrote on the book's

flyleaf, "To Wendell Ashton, hoping that you will gain many laurels through your constant use of good english." She spelled "English" with a lowercase "E" and then signed it "Leila Monihan, November 17, 1921."¹¹ This was just the beginning of Ashton's learning process which would encompass grammar, composition, and editing.

Ashton's training extended past the classroom. He took his first paid job when just eight years old. His father hired him to lick postage stamps for advertising pieces that were to be sent from his father's lumber yard, the Sugar House Lumber and Hardware Company. He was paid twenty-five cents-a-day for licking stamps. This job began his early training in the lumber business. Ashton was later moved to mending cloth cement bags. In the 1920s, cement was delivered in cloth bags. These cloth bags would get torn as they were used. It was Ashton's job to sit in a small cubicle with a long, curved needle and twine-like thread mending the bags with cloth patches. After mending cement bags, Wendell and his brother Marvin were assigned to help unload railroad cars of shingles, splintery, hard oak flooring, and lathe.

Wendell and Marvin next worked as clerks in the hardware store. Ashton had the additional assignment of glazing windows in the hardware department. Marvin was assigned to

¹¹Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 19, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

work in the hardware store with the intention that he would eventually become the hardware manager. Ashton, on the other hand, was trained as a salesman and pricing clerk in the lumber end of the business. As Ashton explained it:

Then in the later years my father assigned Marvin to work in the hardware store, with the thought that he would emerge as the hardware manager, and I was trained as a salesman and pricing clerk in the lumber end of the business. We continued in that situation until I went on my mission although during the great depression I put myself through the University of Utah as a sportswriter. But, both my brother Marvin and I did much of our growing up as laborers in this family business. However, my father was always very strong at not giving us any favors. He felt we ought to work hard and paid us very little for our services at the Sugar House Lumber and Hardware Company.¹²

Ashton's background at the Sugar House Hardware and Lumber Company provided him with a background in business. The time spent at the lumber company also taught him the value work. This work ethic would serve him well throughout his career in advertising, public relations, and in his civic activities.

Adolescence

Ashton went to the old LDS High School located in the heart of Salt Lake City. The building was located on Main Street at North Temple where the Church Office Building and the Relief Society building now sit.

¹²Ibid., p. 24.

Scholastically Ashton had no motivation throughout high school. He did just well enough to get by as far as grades were concerned, not really trying to excel. Ashton's friend, Edmund Y. Wells, asked him to start writing for the high school paper Gold and Blue, covering sophomore sports. He wrote for three years throughout high school and then one year of junior college at LDS High. When he reached junior college, he was the senior member on the newspaper staff, and the faculty appointed him as editor of the paper.¹³

As the Blue and Gold editor, he decided he should set a better example to those around him and achieve better grades. He decided B's and C's were not good enough began applying himself and earn A's and B's.

His entire time on the school paper was as a sportswriter. As Blue and Gold editor, Ashton tended to overemphasize sports. While editor, Ashton sent copies of the Gold and Blue to the sports departments at the three major newspapers, the Desert News, The Salt Lake Tribune, and The Salt Lake Telegram. In 1929, immediately before the stock market crash and the great depression, Clark N. Stohl, sportswriter for the Telegram, called Ashton. He said they read the Gold and Blue and were impressed with the sports coverage and offered Ashton a job. In the Spring of 1930, Ashton started at the Telegram.¹⁴

¹³"Ashton, Stewart 1929-30 Editors," Salt Lake City (Utah) Gold and Blue, 23 May 1929.

¹⁴Wendell J. Ashton, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Typescript, Salt Lake City, Utah, April 1990.

The City Creek Marathon was the first event Ashton covered. The marathon featured the best high school distance runners from the northern and central parts of the state. The runners ran up through City Creek Canyon and back down.¹⁵

The hardest task in Ashton's new journalism career was not the writing, but the typing. The newspaper copy had to be typewritten and Ashton didn't know how to type. Ashton typed his stories by the hunt and peck method, stories took hours to write because of his slow typing.¹⁶

Ashton's position at the Telegram was a learning experience for him and set a tone for his professional life. The Telegram was considered to be Salt Lake City's only independent newspaper, and the paper's philosophy was to get the scoops or be the first to break stories to the public.

Ashton's first year was spent covering high school sports. He spent his second and third years covering college sports. A highlight of Ashton's sportswriting career was covering the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles. The depression limited the amount of funds the Salt Lake Telegram spent for gathering news. The paper didn't have enough money to send Ashton to Los Angeles, so he traveled by Greyhound bus at his own expense.

¹⁵Wendell J. Ashton, "North Summit Takes Team Laurels; Brown is Third," Salt Lake Telegram, 6 April 1930.

¹⁶Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 28, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Ashton stayed with an aunt in Los Angeles and covered the Olympic games. In 1932, the Fins were the great distance runners. The legend of marathon running, Pavo Nurmi, was there as the Fins' coach. During the Olympics, some long distance runners ran with watches in hand. Babe Didrikson, who later became a professional golfer, competed in track and field. She participated in the high jump and the javelin.¹⁷

The winner of the 100 and 200 meters in the '32 Olympics was a man from Michigan University named Eddie Tolan. Ashton featured Tolan in his Olympic articles because Tolan grew up in Salt Lake City.¹⁸ The track and field events were the highlight of Ashton's Olympic coverage.

I believe becoming a sports reporter changed Wendell Ashton's life. The ability to tie sports and writing together provided Ashton with an entry into the communications field. Ashton gained the desire to excel and set the example for those around him while serving as the editor of the Blue and Gold. This filtered down to his studies, his writing, and his personal life. The position as reporter gave him the opportunity to meet communications professionals which influenced his career path later in life.

Ashton was transferred from sports beat to the police beat. During his final year at the Telegram, Ashton covered a front page murder story about two neighbors who fought over irrigation water.

¹⁷Wendell J. Ashton, "Feminine Sprint Star Plans More Triumphs," Salt Lake Telegram, 11 August 1932.

¹⁸Wendell J. Ashton, "Olympic Judge Asserts Tolan, Metcalfe Tied," Salt Lake Telegram, 5 August 1932.

The neighbors were arguing over irrigation rights when one man shot the other. The man was so despondent over what he had done he turned the weapon on himself.¹⁹

Another front page story Ashton did at the Telegram was about a national police test administered to the Salt Lake Police Force. The examination tested the officers on various phases of police work, traffic regulations, and criminology. Ashton, Bill Adamson from The Salt Lake Tribune, and Eddie Penrose from The Deseret News, covered the Salt Lake City police beat.

Adamson and Ashton took the test alongside the police officers. The two reporters had a slight advantage because they covered all phases of the police department. Bill Adamson received a ninety-seven and half percent, while Ashton received a ninety-six percent on the test. The police department average was sixty-eight and a half percent.

Ashton's front page story for the Telegram said the Salt Lake police department was only sixty-eight percent intelligent. Ashton's article continued by saying two newspaper reporters also had taken the test and averaged ninety-six-and-a-half percent.²⁰

The next day, Tally Burbage, a Salt Lake City police officer, came up to Ashton and expressed his dissatisfaction with the article. The officer placed his revolver's barrel right in Ashton's ribs. Burbage then told Ashton that he was so unhappy with the

¹⁹Wendell J. Ashton, "Dispute Over Irrigation Supply Comes to Fatal End for Neighbor Men," Salt Lake Telegram, 22 May 1934.

²⁰Wendell J. Ashton, "Test Shows S.L. Police Only 68.75 Per Cent Intelligent," Salt Lake Telegram, 1934.

article that he could have killed Ashton. This story is an example of the type of reporting the Telegram expected from its reporters. Ashton said, "I think the greatest thing I learned at the Telegram was to be creative and seek what we called a 'scoop.' The Telegram was very interested in innovative reporting."²¹

Ashton's time as the police beat reporter gave him the opportunity and experience at writing hard news. Ashton learned the ins and outs of working on a newspaper staff. The background received from working on the newspaper helped prepare him for his career in advertising and public relations.

College

The Telegram staff started writing the paper at 7 a.m. and had the paper out three hours later. Ashton would catch the street car downtown at 10:10 a.m. and ride it to the University of Utah Campus. By working at the Salt Lake Telegram, Ashton put himself through the University of Utah and saved enough money to finance his LDS mission.

When Ashton entered the University of Utah, he made a commitment to himself that he wouldn't let one quarter's grades go below a previous quarter's grades. The first quarter of his sophomore year at the U Ashton was taking 18 hours and earned straight A's. For the rest of the year and for the three quarters

²¹Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p.31, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

of his senior year, he was taking 17 or 18 hours a quarter, had a full-time job, did church work, and dated, and he never received an A- -- nothing less than straight A's.

Ashton found the easiest classes to receive an A in were the toughest subjects. One professor, Levi Edgar Young, one of the Seven Presidents of the Seventy, a General Authority in the LDS Church, taught American history at the University of Utah. Ashton took this class from Young. The only test Young administered was an essay test on the students thoughts regarding American history. This was a very broad, and general topic. Ashton was worried stiff about the grade he would receive. At the end of the quarter, Elder Young told the class he was giving all the boys A's and all the girls B's. That was the way Young graded.²² In today's society this method of grading, in light of Title IX and affirmative action, would not be an acceptable practice.

Ashton's college experience taught him to work by objectives and goals. Time management was also instilled in Ashton while attending the University of Utah. "I think the greatest thing I learned at the University of Utah was how to use my time. I budgeted my time so when I rode the old street car from the Telegram office on Main street up to the University, about a half-hour ride, I was digging in my lessons all the time."²³

²²John James, "Events of Interest In Beehive State," Pittsburgh, (PA) The Druid, 1 July 1933.

²³Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 89, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Missionary

Ashton's experience as a Telegram reporter led to an unusual mission call. Ashton was called to the European Mission. A year before, Gordon B. Hinckley, had been issued the same kind of call. The European Mission was the head of all the missions in Europe and the British Isles. This mission acted as an umbrella mission providing supervision over the other European missions.²⁴

Heading the European Mission was a member of the Council of Twelve, Dr. Joseph F. Merrill. In 1934, Ashton was called to serve in the European Mission. Upon his arrival to London, he was asked to serve in the British Mission. This mission was in the Lancashire area of Preston, England where the first missionaries arrived with Heber C. Kimball in 1837. Ashton's senior companion was Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., who later became president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from to . Smith served as the district president and Ashton as the district clerk.

Ashton served in Preston for eight months, then President Merrill brought him to London in 1935. Ashton began editing the Millennial Star, the oldest publication of the church. Ashton considered it a privilege to edit that publication.

My quarters were in a little bathroom converted to a bunk room. It was a narrow cubicle with a tile floor and a double deck bed. My first companion there was Elder Gordon B. Hinckley. He was on the upper deck as the senior elder and I was on the lower deck. He was in charge of public relations for the European Mission, and I was assigned

²⁴"Farewell to be on Sunday Night," Salt Lake Telegram, 1 June 1934.

to succeed Richard S. Bennett. My title was "associate editor." President Merrill as the president of the European Mission was listed as editor, and I edited the Millennial Star under his direction.²⁵ He wrote the editorials and he gave me pretty much free hand in editing the Millennial Star.²⁶

An interesting experience Ashton had while editing the Millennial Star was with James H. Moyle, father of Henry D. Moyle, who later became an LDS apostle and a member of the first presidency. At the time, Moyle was the U.S. Commissioner of Customs under Franklin D. Roosevelt. Moyle came to London on government business and was a good friend of Joseph F. Merrill. Merrill asked Moyle if Ashton could meet with Moyle to discuss his conversation with one of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon.²⁷

During Moyle's three-year residence at the University of Michigan Law School, he learned David Whitmer was still living and in good health. On his way to Salt Lake City, Utah, Moyle decided he would pass through Richmond, Missouri and visit David Whitmer. Upon graduation in June 1885, Moyle found David Whitmer seated under a fruit tree in front of Whitmer's home.

²⁵"S.L. Man Joins London L.D.S. Editor's Staff," Salt Lake Telegram, August 1935.

²⁶Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 115, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁷James H. Moyle, "A Visit With The Last of the Witnesses," Latter-day Saints Millennial Star, 4 June 1936.

Moyle thought Whitmer had been plagued by curiosity seekers, so he presented Whitmer with a book to ease the situation. Moyle felt more at ease the longer he spent time with Whitmer. Moyle felt comfortable asking Whitmer questions about his experience of an angel showing them the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated.

Whitmer repeated to Moyle "he did see and handle the plates; that he did see and hear the Angel and heard the declaration that the plates had been correctly translated; there was absolutely nothing to prevent his having a full, clear view of it all."²⁸

Moyle proceeded to ask why Whitmer left the Church. Whitmer responded by saying he never left the Church, he continued with the branch originally organized in Richmond. Whitmer believed Joseph Smith, Jr. was a prophet of God. After 1835, when Smith enlisted the aid of Sidney Rigdon, Whitmer believed Smith became a fallen prophet. Moyle said, "I now believe that jealousy and disappointment soured his soul, but nothing could obliterate his testimony of the divinity of the Book of Mormon."²⁹

David Whitmer also possessed one of the three manuscripts from which the Book of Mormon was published. Moyle inquired whether Whitmer would sell the manuscript. Whitmer said he would not even talk about selling the manuscript and regarded the manuscripts care as a sacred trust.³⁰ This experience had a lasting impression on

²⁸Ibid., p. 355.

²⁹Ibid., p. 356.

³⁰Ibid., p. 366.

Ashton. It showed Ashton that Whitmer held true to his testimony of the restoration even though he was no longer active in the LDS Church.

Ashton's journalism experience gave him a background to edit and write the Millennial Star. President Merrill didn't interfere with Ashton's editing of the Millennial Star because of his experience. Ashton introduced many changes to the Millennial Star. One change was the introduction of pictures. The previous staffs did not use pictures. Ashton decided the Millennial Star cover should include pictures. One issue had a picture of Lord Baden Powell, chief scouting executive of the world, who lived in London. While on the Millennial Star staff, Ashton introduced other changes such as news of the church and talks from the general authorities. Here again, his creative background learned at the Telegram helped him in upgrading the Millennial Star. He improved the layout making it more attractive.

Ashton related this about the Millennial Star,

We had the Reader's Digest of the Church. We would take the cream of the articles that appeared in the Church News, Improvement Era, Instructor, and the Relief Society Magazine. In those days, there was no television but they had a series of radio talks on KSL and we took the cream of all those talks and published those in the Millennial Star. We felt we had a very good publication.³¹

³¹Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 117, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Each letter of type for the Millennial Star was set by hand. Ashton sent the copy to Liverpool to be printed by a man named James Foggo.

We introduced pictures on the cover. They previously just had type. Then Joseph J. Cannon, the president of the British Mission, directed the missionaries to use the Millennial Star to tract with rather than the tracts, and that was effective. I had requests from the missionaries to put pictures of American Indians on the cover, because it seemed to open doors for them. But we didn't overdo it. That was a great experience editing the Millennial Star in 1935 and 1936.³²

Serving as Millennial Star's editor allowed Ashton the opportunity to combine many communication skills learned from the Gold and Blue and the Salt Lake Telegram. Ashton was not afraid to do new things such as use pictures, use new and innovative covers, and use a different format to provide more information to the readership. He combined the qualities of technical expertise and a strong work ethic thereby creating a publication useable for members and non-members alike.

Post Mission

When Ashton finished his missionary service for the Church, he was given a letter of introduction from Trevor Wignall, a British Sports writer and Ashton's distant cousin. This letter was addressed to a New York editor to help Ashton find a job in New York City. In New York, Ashton's father, mother, and sister

³²Ibid., p. 118.

Eleanor were waiting on the docks when Wendell got off the boat. They were there to drive him back to Utah. Ashton always suspected his father came to New York because he didn't want him staying there and becoming a sports writer.

Upon his return to Utah, Ashton worked at the Sugar House Lumber and Hardware Company. He became president of the Sugar House Chamber of Commerce when only 29 years of age. He also was called to the General Sunday School Board.³³ This call came from Sister Lyman writing George D. Pyper, general superintendent of the Sunday School Board, recommending Ashton be called to the board.³⁴

In 1940, Ashton assisted in Ab Jenkins' successful campaign for Salt Lake City mayor. Mayor Jenkins, in return, appointed Ashton to the Board of Adjustment. The Board of Adjustment allowed people to apply for variances to the city building code. Ashton served on this board for twelve years. In 1942, he was appointed chair of the Salt Lake City Tire and Automobile Rationing Board. This board was established to ration fuel, tires, and automobiles during World War II.

Ashton worked at the Sugar House Lumber and Hardware Company until asked to be the general secretary of the Sunday School Board in 1942. Ashton said he felt it was a call from the Church when in reality it really was more of a business proposition. Ashton accepted the offer and began full-time employment for the Church.

³³"Wendell Jeremy Ashton," Instructor, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, July 1938.

³⁴"Ashton Is Named To Church Board," Salt Lake Telegram, 22 December 1937.

While on the LDS General Sunday School Board, Ashton wrote for the Instructor. The Instructor was a magazine designed to aid church teachers with additional materials for Sunday school lesson plans. Over a twenty-seven year period, Ashton wrote the monthly back cover article of the Instructor. The articles covered topics from the architecture of LDS churches to examples from the life of Jesus Christ.

John A. Widstoe took an interest in Ashton's writing for the Instructor. After Widstoe reviewed Ashton's writing, he suggested Ashton read Nathaniel Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter. Widstoe said, "He's got an elegant style, and it's elegant because of its simplicity. You read the Scarlet Letter."³⁵ Ashton proceeded to heed Widstoe's advice. He not only read Scarlet Letter, but he studied it to the point it influenced his writing style for the rest of his life. Ashton said, "I've always tried, under Widstoe's direction, to seek for the elegance of simplicity. That suggestion did more for my writing than any other advice I ever had."³⁶

Ashton's first series on the Instructor's back cover was a series on interesting church meeting houses. From those essays emerged a monthly article about various gospel and general church topics. Ashton spent about twenty-three hours writing and researching each article. Virtually all of those articles have

³⁵Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 72, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

³⁶Wendell J. Ashton, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Typescript, Salt Lake City, Utah, January 1992.

been published in book form. The books include It's Your Life To Enjoy, In Your Own Image, Bigger Than Yourself, and To Thine Own Self. Ashton wrote these articles on the basis of first-person experiences and on the many lessons drawn from the Savior's life.

While serving on the Church's General Sunday School Board, Ashton and Adele Cannon Howells, general president of the Primary, jointly developed the idea of Arnold Friberg doing oil paintings based on the Book of Mormon. Friberg is an artist who's renowned for historical paintings. Friberg was commissioned to do twelve paintings based on the Book of Mormon. These paintings are now Church property and are displayed and reproduced throughout the Church community, including the paperback version of the Book of Mormon.

In 1946, at the request of Mark E. Petersen, general manager of the Deseret News, and with the consent of the Quorum of the Twelve, Ashton was transferred from secretary of the General Sunday School Board to the Deseret News. Ashton's first assignment was putting together the centennial edition of the Deseret News that was planned for July, 1947.

During this period, Ashton was heavily involved in the Sons of Utah Pioneers, serving as the Sugar House Chapter President. Harold Jensen, a local promoter serving as National President of Sons of the Utah Pioneers, asked Ashton to serve as the centennial president. The Sons of the Utah Pioneers goal was to repeat the first pioneer company trek from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City, Utah.

The plan enlisted 143 men, three women, and two boys to cross the plains in simulated wagons.³⁷ These wagons were built in a box-like shape as designed by Willard R. Smith, then bolted to each car. The group took war surplus staves, draped canvas over them, thus making the covered wagon portion of the train. Plywood was cut out in the shape of oxen and fastened to the sides of the engine. A car, when fitted with the various pieces, had two oxen up front and a canvas top that gave them a genuine appearance of a covered wagon.

Three weeks before the trek began, President George Albert Smith, his first counselor, J. Rueben Clark, Jr, and David O. McKay, called Ashton into the office and asked him to call off the trek. The presidency feared liability problems and shedding bad light upon the Church. They were worried the trek was going to be a poorly planned affair which would embarrass the Church. Ashton recalled,

President Smith called me into his office, and said, "Bro. Ashton, don't you think that you ought to call this off (the trek across the plains)? and I said no. What they did was assign a new apostle, Spencer W. Kimball, to go with us. That way I got really well acquainted with President Kimball. He later told me, "I had instructions from the First Presidency that if your trek didn't go well, to haul you off the road and tell you to go home." That's what his instructions were. But he had a great time with us.³⁸

³⁷"Souvenir Program and Guide for the Utah Centennial Trek," The Sons of Utah Pioneers, 14-22 July 1947.

³⁸Wendell J. Ashton, Interviewed by Val Peterson, January 1992, Salt Lake City, Utah, Typescript.

The wagon train assembled on the temple lot in Nauvoo and departed July 14, 1947. D. James Cannon went back over the trail and arranging for stops where the wagon train would spend the night. Each evening the participants put on programs dramatizing events that happened in the area. It was estimated that 40,000 people saw the group's presentation in Omaha (Winter Quarters).

The group ate buffalo and antelope meat cooked over the open fire. The Sons of the Utah Pioneers arranged for the highway patrol of each state (Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Utah) to escort them across the state. The night before they arrived in Salt Lake City, President David O. McKay, chair of the Utah Centennial Commission, drove to Fort Bridger wearing a beaded, leather Indian vest. He joined in the wagon train's evening activities. On July 22nd, the wagon train, President David O. McKay and Spencer W. Kimball drove up Salt Lake City's Main Street. Thousands of people lined the streets waiting for them to drive through town and finish the trek. One of the trek's highlights was coverage by Life magazine, July 1947, and a photo of Spencer W. Kimball overlooking a circled wagon train.

After Ashton returned from crossing the plains, Mark E. Petersen, general manager of the Desert News and member of the Quorum of the Twelve, approached Ashton and surprised him by asking him to be managing editor of the Desert News. The managing editor is the person who is responsible for putting the newspaper out on a daily basis. The Desert News was positioning itself to challenge the Tribune for readership market dominance in the Salt Lake

Valley. The book Mark E. Petersen: A Biography refers to the newspaper war, "A newspaper war of sorts erupted in Salt Lake City with the Tribune and the News competing for readers."³⁹ The Tribune had a much larger subscription base than the News. Ashton was thrust into managing a newspaper launching an "all out battle" with the Tribune without the benefit of knowing how to manage a major metropolitan newspaper. Ashton said,

So there I was hanging out there on the line with no one to show me what to do. I'd put out this special edition, but that wasn't like meeting deadline, handling stories as they'd come in from the police reporters and all the other reporters and all that stuff. I was just there as managing editor--Alice-in-Wonderland. It was the darkest period of my life--for about two years. I didn't know what was going on--here I was new, and they were in this big expanded program.⁴⁰

Ashton's first assignment was to expand the staff and columnists of the newspaper. He hired Elaine Anderson Cannon as teen editor, Winnifred Cannon Jardine, as food editor, and Ramona Wilcox Cannon, as Mary Marker, a question-and-answer column similar to Dear Abby and Ann Landers.

The newspaper expansion was the result from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints pouring millions of dollars into the Desert News to be competitive with the Tribune. This campaign

³⁹ Peggy Petersen Barton, Mark E. Petersen: A Biography, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985. p. 101.

⁴⁰Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p.80, The James Moyle Oral History Program Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

between the two newspapers spawned competition in give-a-ways such as butcher knives and other gifts for subscriptions. This resulted in both newspapers losing money and setting the stage to force the Newspaper Agency Agreement (joint operating agreement) which was negotiated between the two newspapers in 1950.

Mark E. Petersen approached Albert E. Bowen concerning the possibility of competing newspapers modernizing and sharing the same presses and equipment while maintaining separate newsrooms. Bowen felt this proposal needed First Presidency approval. J. Reuben Clark examined the proposal both as a businessman and a lawyer. "The lawyer spoke first. 'It's against the law.'"⁴¹

Petersen knew Congress was considering special legislation making it legal for competing newspapers to share equipment. The current proposal was illegal under the Sherman Antitrust Act. Petersen discussed the proposal with John Fitzpatrick, publisher of the Tribune, and Fitzpatrick agreed to present the proposal to the Kearns family, the Tribune owners. The two sides agreed to a tentative proposal which they presented to the Justice Department for approval. Paul H. Ray, a Salt Lake attorney, convinced the Justice Department "that unless the Newspaper Agency Corporation contracts received government approval, two responsible newspapers, both vital to the community, would meet their deaths at the hands of the Sherman Antitrust Act."⁴²

⁴¹Peggy Petersen Barton, Mark E. Petersen: A Biography, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985. p. 102.

⁴²Ibid. p. 105.

The NAC contract approval cleared the way for newspapers across the country to share equipment costs without violating the Sherman Antitrust Act. The Justice Department ruling was made into legislation called the Newspaper Preservation Act.⁴³ However, a monumental debt was incurred by the Desert News and not repaid until shortly after Ashton assumed the role of publisher of the Desert News in 1978.⁴⁴

Ashton was having a difficult time serving as managing editor of the Deseret News. He did not have a broad enough understanding of how to put the newspaper out on a daily basis as well as lead a newspaper expansion. This caused a tremendous conflict and pressure on Wendell Ashton. In reflecting on his time as managing editor, Ashton said, "It was a difficult time, and I really came close to a nervous breakdown at the time."

In 1949, Elder Mark E. Petersen asked Ashton to take a year off and write the history of the Desert News.⁴⁵ Ashton threw himself into the assignment, spending a year working in the Church historian's office. Ashton described the year as a healing

⁴³Ibid. p. 105.

⁴⁴Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p.82, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁴⁵Wendell J. Ashton, A Voice in the West, New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, Inc., 1950. p. 1.

experience and is proud of the work he produced, A Voice in the West.⁴⁶

⁴⁶"New Book Tells History of West," Salt Lake City, (UT) Deseret News, 30 March 1950.

CHAPTER 3

Wendell Ashton Joins Gillham Advertising

"All that Counts is Results," Wendell Ashton.

When Ashton completed the manuscript A Voice in the West, he received a new assignment as Church News editor. Ashton's pride was hurt when Mark E. Petersen told him of this assignment. As he was considering the Church's offer, a position opened at Gillham Advertising. Lon Richardson, Ashton's former sports editor from the Telegram, was a owner of Gillham Advertising. Richardson encouraged Ashton to apply for the account executive position. Ashton felt the Church News editor position was a demotion and he wanted to prove to himself and to others he could be a successful professional.

Several qualified candidates applied for the Gillham position. Ashton had to prepare an advertising campaign for Sego Evaporated Milk. He spent all night preparing his presentation in a communications area where he had no experience. As a result of his presentation, he was awarded the position at Gillham Advertising. In the spring of 1950, Wendell Ashton joined Gillham Advertising, operated by Marion C. Nelson, President, and Lon Richardson, as senior vice-president.⁴⁷ Gillham Advertising is the oldest advertising firm in Utah and in 1950 was one of three largest firms in the

⁴⁷"Teamwork By Specialists Brings Gillham Agency To Top," Utah Publisher, April 1957 p. 9-11.

Intermountain West with Evans Advertising and Harris & Love Advertising.⁴⁸

Ashton was appointed the first public relations director for Gillham Advertising. Gillham found it difficult to compete for the major advertising accounts without public relations services. The accounts did not pay very well for the service, but the firm could more than make up the difference from the 15 percent commission made from advertising.⁴⁹

The first thing Ashton did upon learning of this new assignment was visit the newsrooms of the Salt Lake Tribune and the Deseret News. He asked each newsroom what needed to be done to improve public relations in the Salt Lake Valley. In both cases, they used Jody Priest, public relations practitioner for the Union Pacific Railroad, as an example of how the duties of a public relations professional should be performed. The point was further illustrated when both newspaper staffs related that when Union Pacific had an accident the first person to call them was Jody Priest. The news media trusted Jody Priest and in return he trusted them.⁵⁰ Honesty and integrity are the first steps in

⁴⁸"Advertising Agency Reports Changes, Additions in Staff," Salt Lake Tribune, 16 April 1950.

⁴⁹Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 103, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 111.

creating working relationships with the media. Each time a public relations practitioner displays honesty in dealing with a story the practitioners credibility increases.

The first day Ashton went to work he was assigned to handle the Mountain Fuel's public relations account. Ashton had both a selling and news background from the Sugar House Lumber and Hardware Company and the Salt Lake Telegram. For him, public relations was a natural career move. Ashton found public relations was a combination of selling and news reporting.⁵¹ Public relations combines all the aspects of being a salesman, a reporter, and an attorney into one profession. Ashton found he loved the challenges, the creativity, the strategies and the associations that were all part of his new career at Gillham.

Utah Dairy Association

Ashton developed and brought the Utah Dairy Association account to Gillham Advertising.⁵² He found the account was a real challenge to demonstrate the benefits of advertising and public relations to the dairymen. He presented a program for the dairy industry to sell more milk in Utah. He illustrated that when you spent X number of dollars on

⁵¹Ibid., p. 110.

⁵²Ibid., p. 105.

advertising per hundredweight of milk, it increases the amount of milk the public buys.⁵³

Ashton found good support from the distributors, but the dairy farmers wanted to send the money to the American Dairy Association in Chicago. The American Dairy Association invited the farmers to Chicago each year to show them what they were doing to increase the milk sales across the country. While the farmers were there, the association treated them like royalty, entertaining them during their stay. The executive treatment at the annual convention persuaded the farmers to continue directing their money to Chicago enabling to attend the annual convention.

Ashton found that distributors such as Hi-Land Dairy, Cloverleaf Dairy, Cream O'Weber, and Meadow Gold recognized the importance of advertising and public relations services to the industry. The dairy farmers, however, didn't understand the marketing aspects very well and preferred to send their money to Chicago.

Ashton told the dairy farmers that if they were to advertise locally, not only would they increase the in-take of milk, but the news outlets would be more apt to do dairy industry feature stories and print recipes created by the

⁵³"Advertise Wares Dairymen Told," Logan Herald, 8 March 1953.

association. These things would increase the amount of milk being consumed in the state of Utah.⁵⁴

One instance where Ashton's services were particularly noted by all members of the Utah Dairy Association was during the mid-1950's. The chief executive officer of Safeway Stores, a hard-fisted executive officer, demanded the Utah dairy farmers apply and operate under a federal marketing order. This federal marketing order was a government support program the farmers were resisting. The association decided to mount an all-out public relations campaign. The news media were full of articles and stories on the battle between Safeway and the Utah dairy industry.

Ashton orchestrated two dairy leaders to speak to the legislature and meet with the Governor. Political leaders and the public supported the dairy association. The dairy association overcame the Safeway's push to enter the government supported program. Safeway suffered for years after their defeat because the farmers told their families and friends not to shop at Safeway. A big disadvantage Safeway had during the campaign was all their public relations practitioners were from the East and did not understand the Utahan people or their culture.

⁵⁴Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 105, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Several years after the media battle between the dairy farmers and Safeway, the farmers applied for the federal price supports program and were accepted.⁵⁵

This experience shows the importance of handling and working with people. People need to be handled so they respect the profession as well as what can be accomplished through communications tools.

On another occasion, the farmers in Fillmore and Beaver sprayed insecticides on their alfalfa crops. The cows ingested the sprayed alfalfa and contaminated the milk that, in-turn, contaminated the cheese. The cheese was inspected by the Food and Drug Administration. The FDA condemned the cheese and confiscated a large portion of the cheese produced in central Utah.

The dairy industry was concerned about the effect this event was going to have on sales, not only on cheese but also on milk. At the time, Utah cheeses were sold to the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City.

Ashton went to the Deseret News publisher, Preston Robinson, and to the Salt Lake Tribune executive editor, Arthur C. Deck, and explained the problem. Ashton told them he believed in freedom of the press and they had to judge whether or not they wanted to carry a story about the condemned Utah cheese. Ashton explained that such a story could severely damage Utah's Dairy Industry and possibly cause

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 106.

bankruptcy for part of the dairy industry and farmers alike. Both men agreed not to publish the story.

A reporter from KSL Television heard about the story and began to pursue it. The reporter called Ashton inquiring about the story. Ashton told the reporter he felt it wasn't in the best interest of Utah to do a story about the contaminated cheese. The reporter shot back that he thought Ashton was trying to suppress the story from the public. The reporter threatened to use the story. Ashton replied that if the reporter did he would go to his assignment editor. The story was never used and the dairy industry survived the situation.⁵⁶

This story combines the importance of strategy, advocacy, and honesty. Ashton realized the possible impact the story would have on the entire Utah Dairy industry. Ashton devised a strategy while working as the dairy association's advocate which incorporated his integrity with his working relationship with people.

Ashton later said of the working relationship with the Utah Dairy Association, "I felt during my twenty years of serving the dairy industry, I gave them far more service and far more results than what they paid me...."⁵⁷

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 108.

Utah Power & Light and Mountain Fuel

Gillham advertising had both the Utah Power & Light account and the Mountain Fuel account. These two businesses were fiercely competitive. Mountain Fuel sold natural gas appliances and heating, while Utah Power & Light marketed the all-electric home with electric ranges, water heaters and heating systems. Eventually the rivalry got so bitter between the two companies they both came to Gillham and said, "You can have our account, but you have to get rid of the other account."

Gillham chose to keep the UP&L account serviced by Ashton. As Utah Power & Light account executive, Ashton planned the advertising strategy in cooperation with their management team.⁵⁸

The biggest problem facing the Utah Power & Light account was getting more homes to go all-electric and to use electric heating instead of gas. During Ashton's tenure with Utah Power & Light, the company in conjunction with Gillham Advertising waged the all out campaign in support of clean, electric living.⁵⁹

When Ashton first became an account executive for a company such as Utah Power & Light, he went out and met with

⁵⁸"U P & L Receives Award," Watts Current, January 1967.

⁵⁹Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 105, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

the client. Together they planned and created the strategy and approach to be used. Ashton then returned to his office and wrote the newspaper, radio, and television copy until he finished the complete package. As Gillham and the accounts they handled grew, other account executives went out to the client and devised the overall strategy. Upon the account executive's return, the practitioner turned over the theme to specialists who developed the ads. Gillham Advertising continued to grow by developing a television and radio department. Gillham created this department to handle the sophisticated production techniques required in audio/visual production.⁶⁰ The department was added to allow individuals to specialize in the creative and technical skills necessary to create sophisticated advertising and public relations campaigns. The advent of radio and television required firms and practitioners to develop production departments to take the communications campaign from the idea into reality.

First Security Bank

Gillham Advertising was handling Walker Bank & Trust account while pursuing the First Security account. Ashton worked approximately one year when First Security Bank approached Gillham Advertising about handling their account. Gillham jumped at the chance of handling the Eccles brothers' business. John Wallace, Walker Bank and Trust chief executive

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 112.

officer, offered Gillham the opportunity to continue with their account, but the Eccles brothers didn't want Gillham handling any competitor's account.

First Security Bank's account executive dealt directly with Marriner and George Eccles. Ashton found it extremely important to have skills in handling and working with people at top levels. If you could not win the confidence and get along with top management, you were out. Lon Richardson and Marion Nelson taught Ashton that when dealing with clients, "Always treat clients as equals and never be subservient to them. You're the professional. You treat yourself as equal to them, but never talk down to a client, either."⁶¹

When First Security Bank built a large high-rise on Fourth South and Main Street in Salt Lake City, Ashton handled the event's public relations. Marriner and George Eccles were the cover story for Business Week in conjunction with the building opening. Ashton began generating a large amount of exposure for First Security in the media, particularly the newspapers. Television was a fledgling industry and did not have much of an impact.

First Security's public relations operations grew so much that Gillham eventually recommended they implement a full-time public relations department. First Security implemented the recommendation and retained Gillham to handle their advertising. This illustrates the importance of the public

⁶¹Ibid., p. 111.

relations professional to serve as the client's advocate. The public relations professional works on behalf of the client serving the clients best interests.

Stevens-Henager College

This account was a small account for Ashton. He worked this account because of the challenge involved and the ability to influence the lives of young people. Stevens-Henager depended on advertising to place students in their programs. A simple way to measure an advertising campaigns effectiveness is by tracking the number people enrolled in the school's programs.

Ashton found the most effective type of advertising for Stevens-Henager was the testimonial type of advertising. The advertising centered on a young woman who worked as a waitress for 50 cents an hour. She told how she had taken a six-week speed writing and typing course at Stevens-Henager and had been able to find a job for four times as much money. The radio testimonials were accompanied by a corresponding newspaper testimonial ads.

Ashton commented, "It was a challenge, and it was interesting to see how you could turn these young lives around and make them much more productive, with the development of a little skill."⁶² This client is representative of "All that counts is results." In the end the only thing that matters is

⁶²Ibid., p. 110.

that communications has taken place. The client received the desired result through a communications plan. The communications problem was solved and internal and external communications took place.

Fisher Brewing Company

One of Gillham's top accounts when Ashton started work was the Fisher Brewing Company. Ashton was concerned with the possibility of working on the brewing company's account and the message working on that account would send to those around him.

Ashton went to Marion C. Nelson and Lon Richardson and explained, "Now, look, I don't want you to think I'm better than anybody, but I'm on the Sunday School General Board of the Church, and I don't want to be over here writing copy on Fisher Beer account and going out talking about the Word of Wisdom at Sunday School conventions."⁶³ Throughout Ashton's twenty-one year career at Gillham advertising he never worked on the Fisher Beer account. This point shows the importance of integrity and trust. Ashton represented what he believed. He did not want special treatment, but he did want people to respect his beliefs and values.

⁶³Ibid., p. 111.

Petty Ford

Ashton handled the Petty Ford account nearly his whole career at Gillham advertising. Fundamental to advertising is name recognition and the selling of benefits of the product.⁶⁴ In advertising Petty Ford, the advertising wasn't selling Fords; it was selling the benefit of buying a Petty Ford car. "You save more, because Petty sells more." The advertising stressed that you could get a better price on a car at Petty because of their large volume. Ashton said about advertising,

You want them to know the benefits. Name recognition isn't enough. It's very important, but you have to sell the benefits. For example, when you're selling milk, you stress that it's refreshing and it builds bones and strong bodies. When you're selling electric ranges, it's the benefits that sell them. We used to stress all of the time that electric heating is cleaner, it's safer, and your curtains last longer.⁶⁵

A communications professional must have the technical skills to accomplish the campaign. Proficient writing skills and updated technical skills are essential in keeping pace with an evolving market place.

⁶⁴Wendell J. Ashton, Play For The Extras, Speech Given To Apartment House Association of Utah, March 10, 1958.

⁶⁵Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 117-118, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

CHAPTER 4

Liquor-By-The-Drink Campaign 1968

Since territorial days the state of Utah, has regulated how alcohol can be distributed among its citizens. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes in complete abstinence from alcoholic beverages. This belief sometimes causes a conflict of beliefs and social standards in the regulations of alcohol between member and nonmember.

The state of Utah as well as the United States has a long history of conflict in the legislation and enforcement of alcohol use. On January 26, 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States became law putting national prohibition into effect. During the next eighteen years, drinking was illegal in the United States. In 1933, the federal government returned the authority to regulate alcohol to the states. The Utah Legislature enacted the Liquor Control Act requiring all alcohol sold in packaged form through state-controlled outlets or agencies.

During the years that followed, numerous groups attempted to liberalize the drinking laws in Utah. These attempts were aimed at the Utah Legislature to modify the laws governing the purchase and sale of alcohol. However, these attempts failed, with only one even making it to the Senate floor for a vote.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Raymond E. Beckham. "The Utah Newspaper War of 1968: Liquor-By-The-Drink." Thesis presented to the Department of Communication, Brigham Young University. Provo, Utah. 1969. p. 10.

In 1968, the restaurant and tourism association believed loosening the liquor laws was the way to increase Utah's tourist and convention trade. Many important publics supported the association, one such supporter was John W. Gallivan, the publisher of the Salt Lake Tribune. He was concerned about Utah moving forward and creating an environment where people wanted to visit or relocate. He firmly believed creating this type of environment required Utah to relax its drinking laws. By relaxing the state's drinking laws, more hotels, motels, and restaurants would come to Utah, thus expanding the tourist trade.

John Gallivan decided that he would use the Salt Lake Tribune to bring the liquor-by-the-drink issue to the people of Utah on the November 1968 ballot.

Early in 1968, the public opinion polls taken indicated people would overwhelmingly vote for liquor-by-the-drink. As a result of these polls, the LDS Church leadership became concerned about changing the laws regulating liquor sales and what changing those laws would do to the state's morality. The Church leadership assigned Marion G. Romney and Gordon B. Hinckley, Apostles from the Council of the Twelve, to develop a campaign against the liquor-by-the-drink initiative.

Marion Romney and Gordon Hinckley went to Gillham Advertising and met with Wendell Ashton about hiring Gillham to organize and run the opposition campaign to the Liquor-by-the-Drink initiative. The two apostles were very clear the

campaign was a business proposition. They not only wanted Ashton and Gillham Advertising to handle the advertising and public relations, but also to organize the citizens committee--under their approval.

Ashton and Gillham Advertising accepted the challenge to organize and oppose the liquor-by-the-drink initiative. Ashton immediately approached his friend, B.Z. Kastler, an administrator at Mountain Fuel Supply, known friend of the church, and a non-member, about being citizen's committee chair. Mr. Kastler agreed to serve on the committee, but not to serve as chair since he worked for a public utility.⁶⁷

Mr. Kastler approached another good friend, Richard A. Van Winkle, CEO of the Lockhardt Company, a subsidiary of Zion's First National Bank, to serve as committee chair. Mr. Van Winkle was not a member of the church. The fourth member of the committee was James E. Faust, who had been named as a regional representative for the LDS Church for the state of Utah.

This four-man committee, (Richard A. Van Winkle, chair, B.Z. Kastler, James E. Faust, and Wendell Ashton) incorporated a non-profit organization named Citizens for a Better Utah. The group then organized local units that followed the LDS Church pattern for wards with a chair in each stake over the

⁶⁷Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 123, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

wards. James E. Faust had the responsibility for the grass-roots effort in each of the ward and stake boundaries.⁶⁸ Ashton talked about the composition of the committee and how it helped the campaign.

Kastler and Van Winkle were both social drinkers. They were both opposed to excessive drinking and felt that we ought to have controls.... In a way, having these men involved with us gave us an advantage, that people couldn't say that we were prohibitionists, because the Church was not in favor of returning to prohibition, but rather we felt that we should have controls.⁶⁹

Liquor was the main issue involved in the initiative, but numerous people believed that the groups represented by John Gallivan were to prevail in Utah, many other more liberal initiatives would be presented to the public. John Gallivan advocated a more liberal lifestyle that would attract more business and not maintain the conservative standard Utah represented. An example of another possible initiative was parimutuel gambling, which later became an issue in 1992.

John Gallivan became the force behind groups favoring liquor-by-the-drink. Ashton, in turn, was the driving force behind those opposed to the initiative. Ashton and Gillham Advertising had the charge to develop a campaign which would defeat the change in the Utah liquor laws.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 124.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 124-125.

The campaign was funded through contributions raised through Citizens for a Better Utah. The committee bought television, radio, and newspaper advertising as well as developed and distributed brochures and pamphlets.

The Deseret News and the Salt Lake Tribune had a joint agency operating agreement with the Tribune publishing the Sunday paper distributed to both customers. Ashton went to the Tribune to argue that the Sunday paper was a joint paper because both Deseret News and Tribune subscribers took the Sunday paper.

Mr. Gallivan used the Sunday Tribune to give what he felt were his most telling arguments for liquor-by-the-drink. The Sunday paper caused a real problem for the committee in that it had no way to advocate their cause to the Tribune readers other than through advertising.

The advocacy roles assumed by the two newspapers also caused a problem among the staff at the Deseret News. Many reporters at the News felt the paper should be a good, objective metropolitan newspaper. The news people did not favor liquor-by-the-drink, but they favored giving objective treatment to the campaign. However, the committee and the Church asked the news reporters to take an advocacy role contrary to the professional judgement of the reporters and editors at the Deseret News.⁷⁰

Lon Richardson prepared copy for the brochure distributed by local volunteers around the state. The brochure's theme became one of the main themes against the initiative. His theme

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 125.

was "your liquor is going to cost you a lot more if we go to liquor-by-the-drink."⁷¹ This approach was designed to appeal to the non-LDS person and to those who drank. This theme proved to be the campaign's most persuasive argument.

William N. Plymat of Des Moines, Iowa provided another effective theme for the campaign. Mr. Plymat was an insurance executive who had been working nationally to oppose liquor-by-the-drink. He provided data that showed states who had gone from a state controlled program to liquor-by-the-drink had large increases in their automobile fatalities.

The campaign's turning point was when the President of the LDS Church, President David O. McKay, came out with a strong statement against the initiative. Many LDS people felt liquor-by-the-drink would be good for business, but as soon as President McKay outlined his position, people supported him.

In June 1968, Central Survey of Iowa was hired to survey how the campaign was going. The survey showed that if a vote were held in June the initiative would be defeated by a two-to-one margin. Central Survey of Iowa conducted another survey in October, close to the election, which showed that Citizens for a Better Utah had lost some of the support among non-active LDS members and that non-LDS favored liquor-by-the-drink. Ashton later commented about the strategy used by the committee.

I felt it was a historic landmark in Utah because our polls showed that at the time Utah was approximately 70 percent LDS and that 70 percent of the LDS membership

⁷¹Ibid., p. 126.

would pretty much follow the prophet on what he would ask them to do in political matters. We've since had other moral issues in the state, and it follows just about the same pattern. If you take 70 percent of 70 percent, you've got 49 percent of the people with you to begin with. Then you pick up enough non-mormons who sympathize with our point of view that we can win.⁷²

In November 1968, the liquor-by-the-drink initiative was defeated by a two-to-one margin. Citizens for a Better Utah had organized a successful campaign composed of television, radio, newspaper, brochures, and pamphlets. Ashton spearheaded this campaign spending almost eight months on a full-time basis organizing and planning strategy for his client, the LDS Church.

Citizens for a Better Utah let Gillham decide what the fee would be for the past eight months service. Ashton felt an obligation to his associates at Gillham to charge an adequate fee. Ashton then took his portion, and paid his taxes and tithing. The remainder of his payment was donated to Primary Children's Hospital. Ashton later said of the campaign and his efforts:

I feel strongly that you give your best efforts when you're not paid, and I didn't want to take any personal pay for my role, although it took a lot of professional time. The Lord had blessed me in the advertising business, I was doing all right, and I just felt that I shouldn't in any way benefit financially from my role with that [liquor-by-the-drink initiative] although it took virtually all my time.⁷³

This campaign combined all ten elements that have been identified: work ethic, integrity and trust, advocacy, creativity, strategy, technical skills, handling and working with people,

⁷²Ibid., p. 127.

⁷³Ibid., p. 133.

organizational skills, stick-to-itiveness, and results. I think more importantly than these ten points is the civic and community mindness that Ashton displayed. He was not concerned about making money. He was concerned about making a difference in his community through utilizing his skills as a communicator.

CHAPTER 5

Public Communications Director for the LDS Church

The liquor-by-the-drink campaign was completed, and Ashton took over his old accounts at Gillham Advertising. The agency progressed and Ashton continued servicing his accounts and having an influence on the Gillham Agency.

In 1971, Ashton received a phone call from President Harold B. Lee's office asking him to meet with President Tanner and President Lee that coming Sunday morning. President Lee began by saying that approximately a year earlier the church organized a department called Internal Communications, with J. Thomas Fyans as managing director. Now the Church was prepared to organize a companion organization, called external communication.

Ashton had previously interviewed with a search committee consisting of Lee Bickmore, CEO of National Biscuit Company, James Conkling, and a gentlemen from General Electric. President Lee said the First Presidency decided to invite Ashton to take the position. President Lee explained that the brethren wanted the Church to take the initiative instead of responding and reacting to news events. The Church organized a department called Church Information Service that provided news releases. The Church Information Service was also a place where the media received information and inquired about the Church. President Lee said the Church wanted to broaden the

program to a world-wide scale. They wanted the department to handle visitors centers, hosting, pageants, information services, exhibits, television, and motion pictures.

After explaining what the operation would entail, President Lee asked Ashton if he would organize and direct it. Ashton asked President Lee if this was a business proposition or a church call. Ashton had previous experiences in this way (Sunday School General Secretary) and he wanted to know what the exact situation was. Ashton recalled very clearly President Lee's response, "Wendell if anybody has been called by the Lord, you have." With that response, Ashton did what most faithful members of the church would do. He said, "All right, I'm ready to respond."⁷⁴

N. Eldon Tanner asked if Ashton had any hesitation in leaving Gillham Advertising. Ashton responded by saying he did not feel any obligation to stay. He had contributed at Gillham Advertising and felt no further obligation to the ownership, but he did need sufficient time to turn over his accounts to other account executives at Gillham.

Ashton returned to Gillham with the news of his upcoming departure. His associates asked if he would remain at Gillham as a consultant for a monthly stipend. Ashton turned them down because he felt he should go to the Church without ties to any advertising agency. Ashton often remarked, "I probably didn't do the smart thing. But I felt I did the wise thing."

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 178.

Ashton recalled the announcement of his new position.

I remember when the announcement was to be made, President Joseph Fielding Smith had just passed away and President Lee hadn't yet been sustained as President of the Church. I asked President Lee, "Whom should this announcement come from, the First Presidency"--which had been dissolved with the death of President Smith and hadn't been reorganized--" or the Council of the Twelve?" He said, "We'll make the announcement from the First Presidency." So I was announced as the new managing director of the Public Communications Department by a First Presidency that actually didn't exist. But it was soon thereafter organized, with President Lee as president, N. Eldon Tanner as First Counselor, and Marion G. Romney as Second Counselor.⁷⁵

Ashton's salary at the church was \$35,000 a 50 percent cut from the \$71,000 he made as an advertising account executive in 1971 at Gillham Advertising. Ashton later said of his decision, "But I still felt, as I'd always felt, that the Church is divine. So, I thought, 'Ashton, you'd better have your priorities straight.' So it was with that feeling that I accepted."⁷⁶ This is an example of doing what one thinks is right. Ashton displayed integrity to oneself. He did what he believed was right even though he had to put his personal interests aside.

The Church Office Building was still under construction when Ashton accepted his new Church position. President Lee gave Ashton an office located on the main floor of the Church

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 178.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 179.

Administration Building. His office was located between the members of the First Presidency. President Lee also told Ashton to report directly to him. Ashton was not working under the Council of the Twelve, but working directly for the First Presidency and he had open access to the President always.

When Ashton accepted his position with the Church the advisors to the Church Information Service were Elder Mark E. Petersen and Gordon B. Hinckley. President Lee was aware of Ashton's situation at the Deseret News in 1950 and that Elder Petersen did not have a high opinion of Ashton's management skills. Lee let Ashton decide if he wanted Elder Petersen as an advisor. Ashton indicated that he had something to prove to Petersen and wanted Petersen to remain as advisor to external communications. Ashton later said, "I felt that I won his confidence and respect, and he was wonderful to me. He offered me his own secretary when I became the managing director of Public Communications."⁷⁷

The first item of business on Ashton's agenda was to change the department name. In talking it over, he and his associates decided "external communications" sounded like a medical term. The name was changed to "public communications," which they felt described the role of their department much better.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 180.

Don LeFevre described when Ashton took over as managing director of public communications, "He wanted to get out and get things done. He was a human dynamo, full of excitement and enthusiasm. His enthusiasm was contagious and spread throughout the staff. He was always thinking, looking for new angles and looking for creative ways to communicate the message."⁷⁸

Ashton later described his role as a professional public relations executive with the LDS Church:

I might just say here that with Gillham, I was a professional public relations executive. There are also what we call press agents or public information officers, but there's a big difference. I always felt that an able, competent public relations man is a salesman, attorney, and a press agent rolled into one. He has to be creative and think of the impact of certain news developments. I love public relations work, I loved it with Gillham, and I loved it with the Church, because it is a combination of selling and journalism and advocacy. You're an advocate for your client. Just as there are honorable attorneys who represent their clients well, I felt the same with public relations. You don't give the media untruths. You're honest with them, but you're still an advocate.⁷⁹

Ashton felt that in his position as public communication's managing director he was an advocate for Church programs. He met weekly with his advisors, Elder Petersen and Elder Hinckley, but Ashton felt like he had a

⁷⁸Don Lefevre, interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, Ut, February 23, 1994.

⁷⁹Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, Typescript, p. 181, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

free hand under the First Presidency and his advisors. When a major story developed, the public communications advisors understood Ashton would go directly to President Lee.

The second responsibility given Ashton by President Lee was to act as Church spokesperson in responding to network television and news media. President Lee made it clear that responding to the mass media in behalf of the church was Ashton's responsibility. Several problems occurred at the time, particularly with blacks not receiving the priesthood. When the network news wanted to have a spokesperson speak about the issue of blacks and the priesthood, Ashton responded.

Ashton's third responsibility was to organize his department within the broad outlines given by the First Presidency. Ashton spent the first few weeks just trying to lay an organizational blueprint. He organized his department into five divisions: News and Information, Electronic Media, Visitors Centers, Hosting, and Pageants.

The department's whole thrust was to take the initiative in communicating the gospel message of the LDS Church, not waiting to respond to people seeking information. With this objective in mind, Ashton established an office in New York City with Charles Graves as the public communications representative. Ashton said of Charles Graves:

He had a great knack for making friends. He was a born salesman, and that's really what a good public relations man has to be. As I say, it's a combination of journalism and selling. He couldn't

write a story, so we would prepare stories for him in Salt Lake, but he sure could market them with people like the New York Times, CBS, ABC, NBC Associated Press, and United Press. He had a great knack for making friends and selling them positive stories on the Church. I remember in the New York Times, he had a story on family home evening, as well as other stories on the seminary program and on the home teaching program.⁸⁰

Charles Graves organized New York news conferences. President Lee flew to New York to participate in one particular news conference. President Lee had served as a Salt Lake County Commissioner so he was not over awed in meeting the press. This press conference, from the communications center of the world, generated a large amount of exposure for the Church from the communications center of the world.

After establishing the New York office, the Church later established offices in London, Paris, Los Angeles, Toronto, Frankfurt, Sydney, Sao Paulo, and Tokyo.⁸¹

The Salt Lake City public communications staff did the majority of the work such as writing press releases, backgrounders, and providing information. However, Ashton felt the Church needed personal contacts with media representatives in those key cities and countries. A good example is the London media. They not only have influence on

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 182.

⁸¹Wendell J. Ashton., "Public Communications Department Files 1972-77." 10 Reels Microfilm, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. Reel 1.

the British Isles, but also influence Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Hong Kong.

This assignment utilized Ashton's organizational skills. Organizational and management skills are a must in the public relations profession. LeFevre described Ashton's management style, "His management style was to make assignments and he expected it to be completed. He trusted you to do your job. He didn't micromanage. He delegated assignments and didn't look over your shoulder to see you completed it."⁸² Communications plans, special events, media relations, and marketing campaigns require organizational skills and attention to detail to ensure a smooth running organization that meets the organization's objectives.

Another change Ashton made after becoming managing director of public communications was terminating the advertising relationship with Evans Advertising. Ashton believed the public communications department could do better than Evans Advertising. Later, the public communications department did a series of advertisements in Reader's Digest and they employed an agency from Detroit. Ashton thought there were advantages to using an agency from outside the Wasatch Front because the outside agency could bring a non-LDS viewpoint to the Church's message. He believed the agency helped eliminate a vocabulary unique to the Church and helped

⁸²Don LeFevre, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, Ut, February 23, 1994.

the Church convey a message the outside world could understand.

Advertising the Church in Readers Digest is an illustration of creativity. Creativity is the innovative idea that captures the attention of the targeted public and helps make the client successful. The target market was to communicate the Church's message to non-members.

Another program Ashton and his staff developed was the creation of a public communications director in each Church stake outside the Wasatch Front. The stake public communications directors were to coordinate the efforts of making media contact, placing press releases, and implementing a public relations plan within their stake boundaries. In multi-stake areas, a coordinator was designated to combine the stake's efforts implementing their communications plan.

The Southern California area is a good example showing the implementation of this program. Burt D. Lynn, an advertising and public relations executive for Western Airlines, was the Southern California Area public communications director. Mr. Lynn organized a float entry in the Rose Bowl Parade featuring the theme "Families Are Forever." Mr. Lynn also placed several stories with the Los Angeles Times, and with the electronic media in Southern California.⁸³

⁸³Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, Typescript, p. 231, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of

Ashton was also responsible for the World's Fair expo display. In 1974, the World's Fair was in Spokane, Washington. The public communications department designed and created the Church's exhibit. This responsibility was assigned to Thomas Lasko who was in charge of creating exhibits for visitor centers, world's fairs, and special expositions. The exhibit in Spokane was a replica of the gold plates. The building was built in the shape of the golden plates with the rings and plates.

Inside was an exhibit where Book of Mormon prophets actually spoke to people who came to hear the message. The Church designed mannequins that looked like Nephi, Samuel, and Moroni. The mannequin's face was projected from a camera that made the mannequin appear like it was speaking to the audience. The Church also had special Books of Mormon printed which had Moroni and Expo '74 on the cover. This exhibit was a popular attraction of the 1974 World's Fair.⁸⁴

On December 26, 1973, Ashton received a phone call from D. Arthur Haycock, the personal secretary to President Harold B. Lee. He asked Ashton to wait while President Romney came to the phone. President Romney informed Ashton of the passing of President Lee and asked him to make the announcement to the world. Romney also told Ashton Spencer W. Kimball was with

Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁸⁴Wendell J. Ashton. "Public Communications Department Files 1972-1977." 10 Reels of Microfilm, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. Reel 2.

him in President Lee's room and that N. Eldon Tanner was in Arizona for Christmas.

Ashton had just seen President Lee two days before at a wedding reception. He realized the magnitude of this assignment as he made the call to the Associated Press informing them of President Lee's death. After Ashton made the call he felt like President Lee was going to phone and ask why he called the press and embarrassed the Church like that.⁸⁵

Ashton promptly organized a news conference for President Kimball, the new Church president. One question asked by NBC News was, "When did you actually become president, and the leader of the Mormon Church?" Ashton never forgot President Kimball's response: "When President Lee took his last breath, I assumed the mantle of President of the Church."⁸⁶

Ashton later compared the two Church presidents that he served under regarding their styles in dealing with the press.

President Lee served as a Salt Lake County Commissioner. He dealt with the tough problems of being a public figure. So he wasn't overawed with the news conferences. On the other hand, President Kimball was a sweet, kindly man who had no experience in dealing with the news media. I think this was a great key to President Kimball's leadership and his inspiration. He used to say to me, "Ashton, I don't like these press conferences, and I don't like to be interviewed on these network

⁸⁵Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 193, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 194.

television shows. But if it helps the work, I'll do it." That was his spirit.⁸⁷

The transition from President Lee to President Kimball proved to be a very difficult time public-relations-wise. President Kimball was very inexperienced in communicating with the news media. The question of the Church denying the priesthood to the blacks was growing with intensity. Ashton recalls an experience when he accompanied President Kimball to Stockholm, Sweden.

We were there for an area conference. We were in his car, and as I remember, President Tanner was in the car. We were talking about what they would probably ask him on a national radio interview in Sweden about the black question. I told him the statement that President Lee had approved, in which there was this sentence: "Someday the blacks will receive the priesthood." I felt that President Kimball was more opposed personally to the blacks receiving the priesthood in the near future than was President Lee. And yet it was President Kimball who received the revelation bringing the priesthood to the blacks.

I was with President Kimball in news conferences and interviews in Sweden. Then I was invited by him to join him for the area conferences in Japan, the Philippines, Korea, and Hong Kong. We held news conferences in all those countries, and President Kimball was wonderful in his cooperation with the press.⁸⁸

Ashton handled all the media relations, while President Kimball spoke to the saints at area conferences throughout the world. While in Samoa, the editor of the island paper asked Ashton to write a story for the paper on President Kimball's

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 189.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 195.

talk. Ashton asked Arthur Haycock for an advance copy of President Kimball's remarks, which Haycock provided. Ashton wrote his story in advance of the conference and delivered the article to the Samoan paper.

When President Kimball delivered his remarks he departed entirely from his prepared text. President Kimball told the people of Samoa they were not Lamanites but that they were Nephites, descendants of Hagoth. He exhorted them to live uprightly and to remember who they were. Ashton immediately scurried over to the newspaper and was able to pull the old story and replace it with a new one. That incident caused Ashton to adjust his news media contacts and make sure the talks were given before he gave the press the finished story.

Ashton found Japan to be the country most difficult to obtain coverage for the Church. Ashton said, "I found it was very difficult to get publicity on President Kimball, because in their eyes he was just the leader of a sect." However, Ashton was able to get coverage on two other church leaders, President Benson and David M. Kennedy, special advisor to the First Presidency.

President Benson received coverage because he had ideas about how to feed the world's starving billions. He was very strong on teaching underdeveloped countries how to raise crops more efficiently and productively. David M. Kennedy received coverage because he was an international finance authority. However, none of the articles referred to the fact the two

gentlemen were in Japan as a result of their relationship to the LDS Church.

While in Manila, a news reporter for the Express, the largest Philippine newspaper, asked Ashton to arrange a photo opportunity by having President Kimball come out on the landing of the plane and wave. President Kimball had already boarded the plane, so Ashton asked Kimball if he would come out and wave. David Kennedy criticized Ashton for imposing upon President Kimball. Ashton and Kennedy had a confrontation concerning the amount of time President Kimball was dealing with the press. Ashton told Kennedy that it was his stewardship to handle the public communications and that President Kimball would let him know if he was out of line. It was Kennedy's responsibility to deal with government leaders and Ashton politely told Kennedy that.⁸⁹

The most memorable news conference with President Kimball was in Washington D.C. when the newly completed temple was open to the public before the dedication. President Kimball was in Washington meeting with distinguished guests such as Betty Ford, Warren Berger, Representatives, and Senators.

The press conference gave the opportunity for the Church to explain its beliefs on matters such as works for the dead and how the temple was the portal to heaven in tying families together for eternity through temple marriage. The public communications department designed and created various pieces

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 200.

of literature explaining the purpose of the temple. Ashton later commented about the Washington D.C. open house and press conferences:

I felt that some of the most positive publicity that has come to the church in the past twenty-five years came through the opening of the Washington D.C. Temple. More people toured the temple there than at anytime before approximately 750,000 people. Of course President Kimball was the central figure there, and his wonderful cooperation with us in Public Communications enabled us to get very positive articles in the national media, including the three major networks, news magazines like Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report.⁹⁰

When President Kimball became ill, the press were notified of his hospital admittance. The media was there waiting for him as he arrived. Ashton said, "I can still remember Arthur Haycock, President Kimball's Secretary, holding up his hand in front of the cameras as they followed Kimball into the hospital. I think this is the type of reporting that I would term irresponsible."⁹¹ President Kimball was entitled to some privacy, and you do not need to have the glaring cameras right in his face when there is a man who is very seriously ill and is being wheeled into the hospital."⁹²

As Ashton reflected on his time in public communications and the many news conferences with the President, he believed

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 202.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 199.

⁹²Ibid., p. 201.

people other than the Church president could have handled some of the media duties.

I think we should have had fewer news conferences in which the President of the Church participated and confined his contacts with the media to times when he was giving official pronouncements, rather than subjecting him to that sometimes grueling question and answer experience. In the Philippines, they had President Hinckley speak for the Church. It went very well and would make one more inclined to hold more press conference like that. Because it is news when the President of the Church is visiting. But, someone other than him can handle the questions.⁹³

Electronic Media

Electronic media or radio, television, and motion pictures all came under one division headed by Heber G. Wolsey. This division worked closely with Bonneville International and their production departments. One project that received the most recognition was the Home Front Series Public Service Announcements. The Public Communications Department decided to tie these announcements closely to the messages of family and the parent-child relationship. In 1970, the home front series captured an estimated \$15 million in free advertising through public service announcements. The home front series won a Clio award for its excellence in television commercials.

Public Communications looked upon the home front spots as "opening doors and warming hearts." The reason the home front

⁹³Ibid., p. 199.

series received so much exposure was because of the high quality commercials being produced by Wolsey and Bonneville.

The electronic media department also did several television specials highlighting famous LDS people such as Johnny Miller and Billy Casper. The special on Johnny and Linda Miller's family centered on his being a good family man and giving statements regarding how the Church was central in his life. During interviews, Miller said that his family came first, the church came second, and his golf came third. Ashton said, "He was a powerful influence in getting our story across at the time."⁹⁴

In 1977, a special called "The Family and Other Living Things" was produced by the electronic media department and syndicated by several TV stations. During the broadcast, the Church invited people to phone or write for literature. As a result of that television special, tens of thousands of requests came for LDS literature.

Print Media

During Ashton's tenure he convinced the brethren to advertise in Reader's Digest. Reader's Digest put together a proposal for the Church to do an eight to sixteen page insert six times a year. It was the first time the church had ever done any advertising of that type.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 220.

Ashton presented an idea to the Brethren that if you have 25,000 missionaries at \$250 per month that amount multiplies into hundreds of millions of dollars. If the Church could increase the productivity of the missionaries by 10 percent with a \$5 million investment, then it's a good investment.

The Church used the Reader's Digest advertising for approximately four years at an annual budget of approximately \$6 million per year. The Brethren wanted more of a hard sell and Reader's Digest wanted more of a soft sell. Eventually, the Church's message became a harder, more doctrinal sell. The Church's demographics show most converts are 18-20 years old, while Reader's Digest has an older demographic. This fact caused the Church to discontinue the advertising campaign.

One objective of the Public Communications Department is preparing the climate. The department often used the expression of "opening doors and warming hearts." That means if you can increase the number of doors that open to the missionaries by 20 percent, you are also increasing the number of convert baptisms by that amount. That was the original approach with Reader's Digest. Then the Church became much more direct and hard-sell by saying: "Here are the distinctive features of the gospel. You can receive this brochure. It gives you the distinctive teachings of Mormonism in greater

detail." The Church used both approaches, direct sell, and "opening doors and warming hearts."⁹⁵

Hosting

Hosting was organized with two approaches. First was the hosting of VIP's. This was originally conducted by Irene Staples. Ashton later called Stan and Oma Wagstaff to help and they later assumed the duties. The Wagstaffs were to call, through priesthood channels, retired or semi-retired couples to serve in hosting distinguished visitors to Salt Lake City, including ambassadors, members of Congress, the consul general, or even heads of state. The couples were to arrange all details of these visits including visits, if necessary, to the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve.

The second approach involved organizing a group of women to act as hostesses and guides for people going through the Church Office Building tours. Phyliss Sandberg was in charge of organizing this group. She had approximately one hundred women serving as tour guides. Visitors asked these women for tours of the Church Office Building. The tour began with the giant mural of Jesus in the Church Office Building lobby. The tour continued with the guides explaining several points of interest and concluded on the observation deck of the modern sky scraper. On the observation deck, the tour guides showed points of interests throughout the Salt Lake Valley.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 227.

Howard Hughes Will

"I guess that in all my time as public communications director the story that drew the most attention world-wide was the purported Howard Hughes will," said Ashton. The will was delivered to Ashton's Office on the 25th floor of the Church Office Building. A handwriting expert examined the will and declared it genuine. The Church decided the will should be delivered to the Las Vegas county courthouse. Ashton and the Church's legal counsel delivered the will to the county. The media asked Ashton if he believed the will was genuine or fake. He replied, "I remember seeing the will, and I still say what I said then, that it was either genuine or an ingenious job of counterfeiting."⁹⁶

The story gained added credibility since many people close to Howard Hughes were LDS. However, Melvin Dumars, the gas station attendant named in the will, was very unstable and unbelievable. Eventually the people trying to get the will recognized as genuine ran out of money to continue the court's appeal process.

Cultivation

As the managing director of public communications, Ashton believed the cultivation and personal contact with media representatives would pay benefits as well as future friendship. One example was an Associated Press reporter

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 209.

named David Briscoe. Mr. Briscoe wrote several pieces about the Church that weren't exactly what the Church liked to see printed, but Ashton continued to befriend and cultivate him with the goal of making Briscoe's articles more accurate and tempered.

Mr. Briscoe called and said he was working on a four-part series about the Church's finances. Briscoe asked Ashton to look through and ensure the article's accuracy. This is an unusual practice, that of a reporter allowing a public relations professional to proof his article's accuracy. The proofing of the articles resulted through cultivating key media and creating a personal relationship with those who are reporting on your organization. Ashton proofed the four-part series and found several inaccuracies which he corrected before the series was published.

CHAPTER 6

Publisher, Deseret News

In 1978, Ashton went to the Deseret News and found many challenges awaiting him. These challenges included a declining subscription base, re-negotiating the joint operating agreement between the Salt Lake Tribune and the Deseret News, Deseret Press losing money, and a staff and public who were skeptical about the LDS Church sending its public relation's professional to be the Deseret News' publisher.

Deseret News Publishing Company

Ashton was appointed as the executive vice president of the Deseret News Publishing Company. That position had two roles. One was the publisher of the Deseret News and the other was the president of Deseret Press. Deseret Press was the LDS Church's commercial printing organization. Deseret Press printed the Church's magazines, manuals, and books. To keep the plant working, Deseret Press sought commercial accounts that supplemented the Church's business. However, when the church needed something in a hurry, the commercial accounts were put aside. Printing project delays resulted in Deseret Press having a poor reputation and business practices.⁹⁷

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 319.

Deseret Press paid for business that was not profitable. The company also paid the salesmen whether or not the salesmen collected on the accounts they serviced. The Deseret Press did not specialize in any one or two printing areas.⁹⁸ The Church actually bid some books in the Chicago publishing market and found those bids cheaper than the Church could do in-house.

After two years, Ashton recommended to Elder Thomas S. Monson, who once was manager of Deseret Press, that Deseret Publishing divest from Deseret Press. Ashton suggested that Deseret Press become the Church Printing Services and a division of Church operations. Elder Monson accepted the recommendation and took the leadership role towards changing the Deseret Press status.⁹⁹

Publisher

In 1978, Ashton entered a newsroom that believed the Church wanted to replace him as the public relations director and instead of sending him on a mission, they sent him to the Deseret News. DeAnn Evans, associate city editor when Ashton was made publisher, recalled, "The Deseret News was without a publisher since Earl Hawks' death. Bill Smart served as senior editor since Hawks' death. The announcement of Ashton as publisher created fear and trepidation the

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 321.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 321.

Church would exert more control over the paper. There was a great deal of worrying about Ashton going from public relations a focus to a news focus. Everybody was quite worried."¹⁰⁰

Twila Van Leer, a Deseret News reporter, said, "I think there was some encouragement. We were getting someone with a background in journalism, public relations, and advertising. We (the newsroom) had hopes we would get a little further removed from Church headquarters."¹⁰¹

DeAnn Evans said, "Our fears were unjustified. He had some real strong news instincts. He was a person who whatever he was involved in he wanted to go first class. He was a champion of a good news operation. He championed a cause. He was very competitive. He wanted us to be competitive."¹⁰²

The first question asked Ashton as publisher was whether or not the staff could do investigative reporting. The newspaper was involved in some extensive investigative reports particularly concerning the Tooele Army Depot. In Ashton's opinion, the articles previously printed were

¹⁰⁰DeAnn Evans, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, UT, February 28, 1994.

¹⁰¹Twila Van Leer, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, UT, February 24, 1994.

¹⁰²DeAnn Evans, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, UT, February 28, 1994.

excessive and he thought it tarnished the Deseret News image as a metropolitan, family newspaper.¹⁰³

The pinpoint team did a series of articles on the Central Utah Project. The team uncovered cost overruns, mismanagement, and delays. The articles were ready to run in the Deseret News when Ashton stopped the stories from being printed. Ashton stated that this was the worst thing that could happen to the state (the printing of the CUP series) and he did not want the responsibility for damaging the project.

After Ashton stopped the report on the CUP, J. Heslop informed the pinpoint team that the Deseret News wanted them to do more in-depth reporting than investigative. The team asked what in-depth reporting meant. Heslop replied by giving the team a list of subjects. The first item on the list was ice cream. Heslop explained the paper wanted the team to do an in-depth report on ice cream, such as how much was consumed in Utah, how many calories it contained, and how it was made. Joe Costanzo left the paper when he heard what kind of reporting the Deseret News wanted.¹⁰⁴ Twila

¹⁰³Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, Typescript, p. 324, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁰⁴DeAnn Evans, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, UT, February 28, 1994.

Van Leer, a pinpoint team member, said, "We had no support and the whole team fell apart."¹⁰⁵

Ashton said the following,

"I've had to put my foot down on some of this investigative reporting. The staff has all wanted to do it, you see, crusading and all this stuff. But I've felt it hasn't always been in the best interest of the Deseret News or the Church. Sometimes I've thought that for me to walk through our newsroom was almost like walking through no-man's land, because the word gets around fast with reporters as far as whose killing a story, and it all came back to me."¹⁰⁶

Ashton's primary reason for being the Deseret News publisher was the re-negotiation of the thirty-year contract with the Newspaper Agency Corporation (NAC) and the Salt Lake Tribune. During the first three years as publisher, Ashton was involved in negotiating the joint operating agreement, reviewing newspaper policies, and meeting with the editorial board to determine the paper's editorial content. Bill Smart ran the paper's day-to-day operations.¹⁰⁷

In 1950, the Deseret News decided to challenge the Salt Lake Tribune for Salt Lake City's majority share in the newspaper market. Ashton was the Deseret News' managing

¹⁰⁵Twila Van Leer, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, UT, February 24, 1994.

¹⁰⁶Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, Typescript, p. 324, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 325.

editor. The Church invested millions of dollars into the Deseret News expansion. The paper started a Sunday edition and expanded its coverage. As a result, both papers began losing money. At the time, one or two competing newspapers joined efforts by pooling their mechanical, advertising, and circulation operations while remaining independent in their news and editorial positions. The Salt Lake Tribune and the Deseret News proposed this model in the Salt Lake market.¹⁰⁸

As a result of the joint negotiations, the Newspaper Agency Corporation was founded in 1952. The NAC handled both newspaper's printing. Daily press time for the Tribune was 12 a.m. and 6 a.m. for the Deseret News with the Tribune publishing the Sunday newspaper. The NAC formed a combined advertising department that offered a single rate which was 70 percent of the combined rate. When large companies saw the single and combined rates, they usually opted for the combined rate.¹⁰⁹

In 1981, Ashton and Wilford W. Kirton, the Church's legal counsel, were the two principals in the NAC contract re-negotiation with the Kearns-Tribune Corporation. The Salt Lake Tribune started the re-negotiations by demanding

¹⁰⁸Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, Typescript, p. 326, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 326.

70 percent of the NAC profits. The 1952 contract called for a 50/50 division of the profits between the two newspapers. The Tribune asserted that because of their larger circulation, 113,000 subscribers which was 62 percent of the total circulation, they were entitled to 70 percent of the profits.¹¹⁰

The Kearns-Tribune group proposal in the NAC contract re-negotiations left the Deseret News a very weak six-day newspaper with no basis from which to challenge the Salt Lake Tribune's circulation. During a tense negotiation point, Ashton approached the Quorum of the Twelve and told them, "Look, we want to continue a joint agency operation with the Tribune. It's better for both of us. But, I don't think we should enter into another thirty-year contract with them for a joint agency operation if we're going to be just a little weak sister paper with the Tribune."¹¹¹

In June of 1981, with authorization from the Quorum of the Twelve leadership, the Deseret News laid out a position that stated, "We want an agency operation. But if we do not get a reasonable agreement out of this, we are prepared to go it alone." Separate operations for both papers was the last thing the Tribune owners and principals wanted. The Tribune would face an all-out competitive battle with the

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 325.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 334.

Deseret News which had backing from the Church's resources.¹¹²

At approximately this same time, an American Newspaper Publishers' Association equipment convention took place in Atlanta. Ashton attended the convention with one purpose in mind -- visiting the Goss Press demonstration where webb presses were exhibited. He inquired how long it would take to deliver a giant webb press to the Deseret News in Salt Lake City.

The following Monday morning when Ashton returned from the convention he received an urgent call from Mr. Gallivan, publisher of the Salt Lake Tribune, wanting to see him as soon as possible. Gallivan was concerned about the Deseret News exploring the possibility of buying a press. Ashton said, "I'll never forget, I went into his office and he held his finger to his temple and said, 'You're putting a gun to our head.'" ¹¹³

After the Tribune knew the Deseret News was serious about keeping a viable newspaper in the Salt Lake Valley, the Tribune was willing to make some concessions. It was finally negotiated that the Deseret News receive 43 percent of the profits and the Tribune receive 57 percent.¹¹⁴

¹¹²Ibid., p. 334.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 334.

¹¹⁴DeAnn Evans, Interviewed by Val Peterson, February 28, 1994, Salt Lake City, UT.

Ashton felt they could have received more concessions than they actually negotiated for, but the Quorum of the Twelve did not want to be unduly demanding. Ashton later said of the joint operating agreement negotiations:

It was a fine line (negotiations). I can say here that some of the brethren later felt, 'Well would we really want to go it alone?' But at the time I had authorization to let the Tribune know that if they didn't come to some sort of reasonable terms with us, then we could go that way. Of course, it was a game of power negotiating, and our number one strength was the fact that we had the resources to go it alone and get into an all-out battle.¹¹⁵

During the 1952 NAC contract negotiation, the Deseret News committed one major mistake. Each side agreed that the Tribune would publish a Sunday edition for both papers. This gave the Tribune an advantage when people shifted to a morning paper. Most of the weekly Deseret News subscribers also subscribed to the Tribune Sunday paper. Ashton later said of the joint Sunday paper:

The Sunday Tribune was like an advertisement for the week-day Tribune. Then also Sunday papers grew. So by the time we launched the Sunday Deseret News 30 percent of all advertising that appeared in the Tribune and News combined was in the Sunday Tribune. So that Sunday Tribune was really worth as much as three days worth of the weekday Deseret News and the Tribune combined, because that's where the advertising was. People were spending more time with their Sunday paper and it was a big advantage.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 334

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 327.

As the 1981 re-negotiations progressed, Ashton suggested the two papers create a hybrid Sunday paper where the Deseret News and the Salt Lake Tribune both wrote a separate local section and cooperated on all the other sections of the paper. The idea caught hold, but as negotiations were nearing an end, both papers agreed to have entirely separate Sunday newspaper and allow the News to have Parade Magazine.¹¹⁷

There was a real concern on both Ashton's and President Monson's part because many subscribers enjoyed getting the Deseret News six days a week and the Salt Lake Tribune on the seventh day. Both sides agreed that Tribune subscribers could not take the Tribune six days a week and then take the Sunday Deseret News and vice versa. The fear existed that those taking the Deseret News and the Sunday Salt Lake Tribune would switch entirely over to the Tribune.

The Tribune allowed the Deseret News to subscribe to syndicated wire stories for their new Sunday edition. The agreement gave the Deseret News the opportunity to run Associated Press, United Press International, Knight-Ridder, New York Times, Washington Post and other syndicated stories the Tribune previously held exclusively.

Another important development was the two papers written agreement to work towards closing the gap between the two papers' circulations. Evening newspapers across the

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 327.

country were losing circulation while morning papers were gaining. Through the NAC, the Tribune agreed to work hard to close the circulation gap.

The agreement also formed an executive committee that consisted of the two newspaper publishers and the NAC general manager which met weekly or as necessary.

Circulation

Before the Deseret News started its Sunday paper, the daily circulation was approximately 70,000. Of those 70,000, approximately 55,000 were subscribers to the Sunday Salt Lake Tribune. The paper instituted a forced circulation where if customers subscribed to the Deseret News six days a week they could not subscribe to the Sunday Salt Lake Tribune. Because of this policy, the Deseret News lost approximately 200 subscribers who switched to the Salt Lake Tribune in order to continue receiving the Sunday Tribune paper. Of the 15,000 Deseret News subscribers who were not taking any Sunday paper, 13,000 began subscribing to the Sunday Deseret News. Single copy sales of the Sunday Deseret News accounted for an additional 3,500 copies.

Ashton decided to move the Church News from the paper's Saturday distribution to a Sunday distribution. The major reason for the change was to create a strong seven-day paper circulation. Many people voiced concern over having a Sunday paper in their home. LDS faithful expressed these

concerns after hearing General Authorities speak against the reading of Sunday newspapers.¹¹⁸ Ashton answered each objection received with a personal letter in which he explained the need for a strong metropolitan paper.¹¹⁹

One frustration Ashton faced was increasing the Deseret News' circulation and closing the gap between the Deseret News and the Tribune. The total penetration or combined circulation of the two newspapers was below the national average. The Salt Lake Valley newspaper readership was one of the lowest in the country although the education level in Utah was one of the highest.¹²⁰ The new joint operating agreement allowed the Deseret News to begin a separate advertising campaign to increase readership. While Ashton was publisher, the Deseret News spent \$500,000 a year in radio and television advertising anticipating increased circulation. Evans said, "Ashton was trying to make the Deseret News a strong presence in the community using every skill he learned in advertising and public relations."¹²¹

The circulation of evening newspapers was declining throughout the United States. Ashton attributed this

¹¹⁸Ezra Taft Benson. "The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson." (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988) p. 439.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 333.

¹²⁰Ruth Clark & Associates. "Salt Lake Valley Newspaper Readership Survey." (Chicago: Ruth Clark & Associates, 1984).

¹²¹DeAnn Evans, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, UT, February 28, 1994.

decline to the following reasons: 1) people spent their evenings watching television instead of reading the newspaper; 2) people read the newspaper in the morning with breakfast or before going to work; and 3) more people were interested in college and professional sports which were accentuated by cable TV.¹²²

The Deseret News performed an operational audit that showed for an evening paper to be successful, the paper must be delivered on time. The Deseret News was to be on the customer's doorstep no later than 5-5:15 p.m.. The paper moved the printing deadline up so the paper was in the rack by 11:30 a.m. This allowed people going to lunch an opportunity to buy the afternoon paper. The paper's first edition printing deadline was 10:30 a.m.. The paper's last edition printed by 1:30 p.m. with the intent that home delivery be no later than 5:30 p.m..

Editorials

In his tenure, Ashton gave some broad guidelines to how he wanted the paper's editorial page to reflect their view point. A good example was the federal deficit. He instructed the three editorial writers to take a

¹²²Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, Typescript, p. 339, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

conservative stance on the issue which meant the reduction or elimination of the deficit.

Each morning the three editorial writers, Bill Smart, senior editor, and Ashton sat down and reviewed the editorials written for the next days' paper. During the meeting, the subject matter and the thrust of the editorial were agreed upon. Sometimes the group did not agree. Ashton took the argument's more conservative side and Bill Smart took a more liberal view of the situation, thereby creating lively and spirited debates. Ashton viewed himself as thinking more like the Church's leadership because of his extensive background with the Church by serving as the public communications director, on the correlation and leadership committees, and on the Sunday School General Board.

Sometimes during the pre-writing discussion Ashton came into the meeting and said, "Here is what we are going to write about and here is our position." At other times, he said, "I don't know enough about the issue why don't we dig into it and produce something that is fair and reasonable knowing the previous stances of the paper." The staff went back and prepared an editorial which followed the paper's position and Ashton usually accepted it for publication.¹²³

¹²³Ibid., p. 356.

Personnel

One situation involving DeAnn Evans, managing editor, Bill Smart, editor, and J. Heslop, executive editor was representative of how Ashton dealt with personnel and morale problems. Evans was granted a leave of absence with the intent of pursuing a doctorate degree and teaching communications. She decided she would attend the University of Utah and take her leave of absence in the fall of 1985. Evans was having second thoughts about leaving the Deseret News. This decision was compounded when Brigham Young University offered her a position plus half-salary to pursue her doctorate at the University of Missouri. BYU requested she wait one more year before taking advantage of this opportunity.

Upon granting Evans her leave of absence, Ashton promised Heslop her position as the managing editor. Evans' decision to stay caused a problem because of the promise made to Heslop. Ashton felt that since Evans tendered her resignation she had to leave. Ashton's decision that Evans must leave caused a stir among the staff. Evans was well liked and many people felt like Ashton was forcing her to leave the News.

The Deseret News morale was low so Ashton scheduled a meeting with Evans. However, she was unable to attend when she went home with a migraine headache. Ashton came to his office on Saturday morning and found a memo from Evans which

stated that Heslop encouraged her to stay as the Deseret News' managing editor. Ashton immediately phoned Heslop and asked him if he told Evans to stay at the Deseret News. Heslop haltingly admitted that it was true. Ashton, considering the new information, asked Heslop how he felt about Evans staying on as the managing editor. Heslop replied that it would be all right with him.

Evans said, "Ashton reacted, "This can't be." He didn't want to slight Heslop. He wanted Heslop to have a vital role. I also believe he was getting pressure from above to give Heslop, who had just returned from a mission, an important position within the paper. Ashton wouldn't discuss the issue with me, so I wrote him a long memo, an angry memo, saying Heslop had encouraged me to stay. Ashton latched onto that statement and I stayed at the Deseret News. I always felt like this affected our relationship and it took several years for us to get back to the easy going relationship we had before."¹²⁴

Ashton met with Evans on Monday, Nov. 19, 1984 and explained the whole situation to her and then offered to let her stay as the managing editor. Evans said she wanted to do that. Ashton then asked her if he had her support as publisher. She replied, "You've always had my support."

¹²⁴DeAnn Evans, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, UT, February 28, 1994.

Ashton then proceeded to meet with Evans, Heslop, and Smart where he explained the situation to all of them. Considering the new information, Ashton told them he was agreeable to having Evans stay on as the managing editor. He then looked at each one and asked them if he had their support as publisher. He proceeded telling them that this was the time to let him know if he did not have their support. Each one looked back at him and told Ashton he had their support. When they finished Ashton told them, "Then we'll go from there. The next thing we'll do is meet with all our editors and department heads."¹²⁵

Ashton met with the department heads and explained the situation with Evans and his previous and current position. Ashton told the department heads that Evans would stay with the Deseret News. He further explained that the Deseret News had several things going for it at the time such as editorial content and a skilled professional staff.

Conflict of Interest

Ashton was involved in the community as the Utah Symphony president and as the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce president. Evans, who was appointed as managing editor by Ashton, said, "There was a perception of a conflict of

¹²⁵Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, Typescript, p. 350, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

interest especially in the symphony and in the business end (business section). He was not heavy handed (in the regulating of the newsroom)."¹²⁶

Ashton was concerned about the areas where he had a conflict of interest and he took steps to protect himself and the paper from being influenced. He told the reporters covering those areas to write the stories without showing him and then he would read it in the paper. Evans said, "He told the symphony reporter to just cover the symphony. Don't show me the story just print it."

Evans commented, "The publisher is the direct representative of the owner and is responsible for the dollars and cents (of the paper) and the owners representative in the community. The publisher needs to be involved in the community, but it can't effect the way you cover the news."¹²⁷

Editorial and Advertising Content

The Deseret News had a perception of being an in-house organ for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This perception created a view among the Salt Lake public that they were not getting an objective view on all the issues. "We (The LDS Church) want a strong metropolitan

¹²⁶DeAnn Evans, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, UT, February 28, 1994.

¹²⁷Ibid.

paper, so we can have a strong voice to take a strong editorial position against issues like the ERA and liquor-by-the-drink. You need a strong voice, but we're convinced that you just can't have a strong metropolitan newspaper and edit out too much of this stuff (R-rated advertisements, comic strips)."¹²⁸

The newspaper commissioned a survey by Ruth Clark which revealed the affiliation with the Church hurt the Deseret News more than it helped the paper. The study showed the Deseret News had to convince the public that the paper conducted good, thorough, and aggressive reporting.¹²⁹

Evans said, "The Deseret News did some good aggressive reporting they hadn't done for several years. Ashton was an advocate for us in that regard. He could be educated. If you could get him on your side he would fight for you to the end, fighting for your story. I saw him go to bat for us and sometimes not go to bat for us. He picked his battles wisely."¹³⁰

In his early days as publisher, Ashton discouraged and even stopped the publication of some investigative reports. As he served as publisher, he learned what it would take to

¹²⁸Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, Typescript, p. 344, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹²⁹DeAnn Evans, Interviewed by Val Peterson, February 28, 1994, Salt Lake City, UT.

¹³⁰Ibid.

make the Deseret News a strong metropolitan paper with aggressive reporting.

In the Salt Lake Tribune, Evans wrote, "I must confess a bias. I was employed by the Deseret News for 13 years. I loved the work and profited from my association with some of the finest human beings around. But my decision to escape to academic life centered mainly around the frustrating controls on coverage of issues sensitive to the Mormon Church."¹³¹

A good example how the Deseret News struggled with the editorial content of items not directly written and edited by the newspaper staff was a three-strip series of the comic strip, "Doonesbury," authored by Gary Trudeau. For much of the 1980's, this comic strip was very popular. Many of the comic strip's subjects satired by Trudeau were politically or socially important. Trudeau talked about issues such as homosexuality and political issues. His characters often used profanity.

One day Ashton was meeting with a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, when the Apostle brought up the subject of the comic strip "Doonesbury." The Quorum member told Ashton that he should eliminate "Doonesbury" from the newspaper because it taught poor values to the young people reading the paper. Ashton agreed wholeheartedly, but said

¹³¹DeAnn Evans, Comment on The Media: Deseret News Kept Quiet on LDS Story. Salt Lake Tribune. February 26, 1993. p.F3.

that he needed to look at the other side of the picture. If the Deseret News dropped "Doonesbury," the Salt Lake Tribune would immediately include it in their paper's editorial content. This would reinforce the perception that the LDS Church controlled the Deseret News' content.¹³²

Gary Trudeau took an 18 month sabbatical from creating the comic strip "Doonesbury." When he returned, he did a three-strip series that was a satire on Deity being involved in President Reagan's re-election campaign. Ashton decided the Deseret News would not run "Doonesbury" those three days. His decision received national attention. Many people commended him for his stand, while others felt it was censorship by the Church's newspaper.¹³³

Another example of crucial decisions made by the publisher was when Parade Magazine, printed under the Tribune mast head and delivered through the Deseret News, featured a cover story called "Sex in America Today." The News did not realize the article was in Parade Magazine until 10:45 p.m. Saturday night. Ashton faced a dilemma and he explored his options. If he ignored it and said nothing, the readers would feel like the News approved of this type of editorial content. However, if he pulled the magazine,

¹³²Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, Typescript, p. 344, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹³³Ibid., p. 345.

he would have some saying he was censoring the news. If he ran an apology in the Sunday paper, the News would draw attention to the story. Ashton and his staff, with the board of directors' support, decided to leave Parade Magazine in the paper. They printed an apology in Monday's paper stating they discovered the article too late to remove it from Sunday's paper.

The next day proved how hard it was to please the daily readership of a metropolitan newspaper. Before people received the apology, they began calling the paper saying how incensed and outraged they were that the Deseret News had editorial content of that nature in their paper. Some people vented their anger by canceling their newspaper subscription. After the apology was printed, the Deseret News received calls criticizing the paper for publishing the apology.¹³⁴

President Lee established a policy of not accepting R-rated movie advertisements. This policy was developed when a small percentage of the movies released during the year were R-rated instead of the majority as they have become in the movie industry. The Deseret News found many people subscribing to the paper wanted to know when R-rated movies played at the theaters around town. Ashton reflected on the Deseret News' overall findings, "We found that a lot of our good active LDS people wanted to know what R-rated

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 347.

movies were better than the PG rated movies as far as wholesomeness was concerned."¹³⁵

Ashton proposed and had approved a policy change that allowed the printing of R-rated movie advertisements. Ashton still found many challenges even though the policy was changed. He began editing more and more PG and R-rated movie ads that he considered sensuous or pornographic. Ashton continued editing the illustrations until the largest motion picture organization pulled all of their Deseret News advertising. Ashton later said,

We didn't mind losing the revenue, but you had good LDS subscribers who couldn't find out where a PG movie was running and who complained about it to us. So it's been a fine line to walk. Even now I'll sometimes get an illustration for a PG or R-rated movie and we'll get protests from people, and I don't blame them. But they say, "Why do you let that get in the Deseret News? You have to go along a little way or they'd pull their advertising. And it isn't for the money that we do it, but for the readership. So it's an increasing challenge to our Church Standards."¹³⁶

One time, all the Board of Directors members received a letter accusing Ashton of being a "pornographic smut peddler" for allowing the Deseret News to advertising R-rated movies. The letter included ad reprints of R-rated movies such as "Best Little Whorehouse in Texas." The

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 328.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 328.

letter said, "Either get rid of Ashton or get rid of your R-rated movie ads."¹³⁷

The Deseret News refused some ads because they attacked the LDS Church President. However, the newspaper normally accepted ads attacking the LDS Church. Whenever the Deseret News did not accept an ad, the group immediately went to the local television stations. Then there was a television story saying that this was an ad the Salt Lake Tribune printed, but the Deseret News refused to print. The refusal of ads and the subsequent publicity reinforced the perception of Church censorship in the Deseret News' content.¹³⁸

"[The paper is facing] no win situations. But we're facing more of those, and I think my feeling now, and I feel our board is behind me, is that we're not going to tamper as much, though some of this objectionable material gets in. If you're a metropolitan newspaper you can't keep tampering with these things."¹³⁹

Evans said of Ashton, "He was tenacious as a bulldog. Determined to succeed. If you get Ashton on your side there is no better person fighting for your cause. He is tenacious and determined."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 347.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 347.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 346.

¹⁴⁰DeAnn Evans, Interviewed by Val Peterson, Salt Lake City, UT, February 28, 1994.

CHAPTER 7

Civic Leadership

Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce

While serving as the managing director of Public Communication for the LDS Church, Ashton was nominated to serve as the first vice president for the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce by B.Z. Kastler, president-elect. When Mr. Kastler retired from the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, Ashton assumed the role of president in 1978-79.

The Chamber of Commerce's main objective and activities were: 1) to attract new industry to Utah; 2) to monitor closely the matters before the Utah Legislature that affected small and large businesses; 3) to promote the goodwill of the city with its neighboring cities; and 4) to build the City's image before the American public.¹⁴¹

Several projects were accomplished and received recognition for Salt Lake City during Ashton's tenure as president of the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce. Salt Lake City was named the best major city to live in America to live by Money magazine. The survey resulted in Salt Lake City receiving large amounts of media coverage around the United States.

While president of the Chamber of Commerce, Ashton met Sam D. Battistone. Mr. Battistone was the owner of the New

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 264.

Orleans Jazz and Sambo Restaurants. His wife was from Lehi, Utah and he was a convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mr. Battistone was featured in the Church News which allowed Ashton to become acquainted with him. During the conversation, he told Ashton he was considering moving the New Orleans Jazz to Salt Lake City. Mr. Battistone asked Ashton what he thought about Salt Lake City as a possible site for his team. Ashton thought it would be wonderful for Salt Lake City and for the Church.¹⁴²

The New Orleans Jazz financial situation was not good. The Dome was a financial burden on the community. New Orleans City officials booked conventions in the Dome and bumped the Jazz from the facility. This caused the Jazz's financial outlook to be poor. These circumstances necessitated Sam Battistone to move his team. The National Basketball Association leadership did not like their franchises moving from city to city. The NBA felt it created an instable feeling and they were reluctant to approve a change.¹⁴³

Mr. Battistone submitted a request to the NBA for a city change. The other NBA owners considered the request at

¹⁴²Wendell J. Ashton, "Salt Lake Area Chamber of Commerce Plays Key Role in Bringing Jazz NBA Franchise to Utah in 1979." Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, p. 2.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 3.

their winter meeting held at the Chicago Airport Hyatt. Ted Wilson, Mayor of Salt Lake, and Wendell Ashton, president of the Chamber of Commerce, were present to represent the city and pitch why the owners should approve Mr. Battistone's application to move the franchise.

The owners were behind their scheduled agenda. While Ashton waited he obtained a list of the owners. The list contained their name, team, and something about each owner. When Ashton walked in for the meeting he called each team owner by name and told them a fact he knew about their team.¹⁴⁴

Mayor Wilson and Ashton's presentation included the following facts or reasons the Jazz should be allowed to move: 1) Utah was the fourth fastest growing state in the United States; 2) Basketball experienced a high degree of interest in Utah. The high level of basketball interest is illustrated by 40,000 people who played organized basketball each year, i.e., church, city, and high school. The University of Utah and BYU were consistently among the top ten in their game attendance. Also, the ABA Stars experienced good support while located in Utah; 3) Ashton organized a program of selling Jazz season tickets in case the team came to Utah. He sold 3,000 tickets before they even knew if the Jazz would be coming to Utah. These

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 8.

tickets were sold on the condition that if the Jazz did not come they would refund all of their money.

In New Orleans, the mayor and other prominent business people organized a similar season ticket program. When they were at the Chicago meeting, the owners asked them how many season tickets they had sold to keep the franchise in New Orleans. The reply was almost none and that sealed their fate.¹⁴⁵

The owners voted to move the franchise here, and I felt that it was a great boon, far more important than just to have an athletic team here. I felt that having the Utah Jazz here told America that Salt Lake City was major league, it would be a great asset in attracting new industry to Utah. Then I remembered a statement that Hugh B. Brown had made once, 'East of Denver, Utah and Mormon are synonymous.' I felt it would help the missionary effort of the Church by letting them know that out there where there's sagebrush and jackrabbit and odd people like Mormons. It would give us respectability. So, I felt pleased I had taken the leadership in helping move the franchise to Salt Lake City. I think that was my greatest accomplishment as president of the Chamber of Commerce.¹⁴⁶

In February 1983, Wendell escorted violinist Itzhak Perlman to a concert and reception sponsored by First Security Corporation. On the way to the reception held at the Marriott Hotel, the men were passed through the back alley. While walking, Mr. Perlman noticed many people exiting the Salt Palace and wanted to know what they had

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁴⁶Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 267, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

attended. Ashton answered they had attended a Utah Jazz basketball game. Perlman immediately said, "Oh the Utah Jazz! That's Adrian Dantley and all those fellows." He then proceeded to speak of the New York Knicks and was very knowledgeable about the National Basketball Association (NBA). Perlman stated, "You know if the Utah Jazz had been playing the Knicks, I'd have been in the Salt Palace and not in your symphony hall."¹⁴⁷

At the reception, Spencer Eccles called Ashton over to discuss the status of the Utah Jazz. Sam Battistone had some preliminary talks with Spencer Eccles about obtaining a large loan to carry the team through the following season. Eccles asked Ashton, "Do you think it's worth saving the Jazz?" and Ashton replied, "I surely do." Then Eccles asked, "Well how do the Church Brethren feel about it?" Wendell said, "I can't speak for the brethren, but I think they feel very kindly about keeping the Jazz franchise here for all that it means for the Church."¹⁴⁸

First Security proceeded to consolidate all outstanding Utah Jazz loans and gave the team a single loan totaling \$6 million. The loan tided the Jazz through their 1983-84 season. The 1984 season was the most successful as far as attendance and win-loss record in the team's history. The Jazz won the Midwest Division.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 266.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 269.

Mr. Eccles called Ashton in March, 1984, and said, "Look, the bank examiners are going to be checking this, and we've got to get this loan with the Utah Jazz resolved. I gave them a loan for twelve months to tide them over; the loan is due in April 1984, and we've got to find at least \$6 million in equity money for them to keep the franchise here." Ashton was happy to help and said he would go to work on it immediately.¹⁴⁹

Ashton called Fred Ball, president of the Chamber of Commerce, and put together a meeting of six prominent Salt Lake business people interested in the Jazz. These people were pulled together to devise a strategy on raising the \$6 million.

The strategy was to sell limited partnerships of \$350,000 to 20 businesses to raise the \$6 million plus \$2 million in capital. The financiers, based on offers from other cities, estimated the Jazz were worth approximately \$12 to \$18 million.¹⁵⁰

The Chamber of Commerce made a presentation to Deseret Management Corporation that included David B. Haight, Chair, and Gordon B. Hinckley as a board member. Ashton arranged

¹⁴⁹Wendell J. Ashton. "Salt Lake Area Chamber of Commerce Plays Key Role in Bringing Jazz NBA Franchise to Utah in 1979." Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, p. 12.

¹⁵⁰Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, Typescript, p. 271, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

for the presentation. Mr. Eccles, Dave Checketts, vice president for marketing of the Jazz, and Fred Ball gave a three-part presentation to the board. Their presentation included charts and graphs. The data showed how much it meant for Utah and the Church to the Jazz in the state. The Utah Jazz franchise generated a great deal of publicity through their coverage in newspapers, radio, television, and magazines.¹⁵¹

When the presentation finished, the three gentlemen asked Deseret Management Corporation to buy three or four units through its business entities at \$350,000 a unit. The strategy was if the Church showed their concern about the franchise then the three gentlemen could approach other businesses and say, "The Church purchased shares, won't you also support us?"

President Hinckley and Monson talked to Ashton and said they wanted the franchise to remain in Salt Lake City, but they were concerned whether the Church should invest in a professional sports franchise even through its business entities.

President Hinckley again talked to Ashton at the open house and dedication of the Church Museum of History and Art. He expressed concern and desire to help with the Jazz situation and hoped Utah would not lose the franchise. However, he still expressed concern about the Church

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 271

investing money through its corporations. Ashton suggested calling a meeting of twenty affluent business people and have a member of the Twelve there to express support for financing the franchise. President Hinckley didn't feel that a member of the Twelve would be appropriate. Ashton suggested a member of the Seventy and specifically Hugh W. Pinnock. President Hinckley agreed.

A breakfast meeting was arranged at the Hotel Utah's Roof Restaurant at the Hotel Utah. Ashton and Hugh Pinnock invited twenty-five business people, eighteen of which attended. Pinnock gave a presentation about the importance of the Utah Jazz and seven businesses agreed to participate.¹⁵²

President Hinckley continued to express interest in the plight of the Jazz and expressed a commitment to have Church corporations invest heavily in season tickets. Ashton continued pitching businesses trying to sell Utah Jazz equity shares. Emmanuel Floor, president of Triad Utah, heard the Utah Jazz were in financial difficulty. He spoke to the Khashhoggie family about the Utah Jazz's financial state.

Meanwhile the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce asked Ashton to chair an appreciation luncheon for the Utah Jazz being the Midwest Division Champions. The luncheon held at the Hotel Utah had more than 700 local business leaders who

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 272.

presented awards and showed support for the Utah Jazz. Approximately ten minutes before the luncheon, the Khasshoggie family and Triad Utah worked out arrangements with a group of bankers to guarantee the entire \$6 million. However, the Jazz organization continued going to individuals selling equity shares that were bought from the Khasshoggie Family. The announcement was made at the luncheon.¹⁵³

Salt Palace

Wendell Ashton said the following about the Salt Palace:

I've always felt that the Salt Palace is a great asset to the community. The Salt Palace provides, for the citizenry of the Salt Lake Valley, entertainment that we couldn't have provided otherwise. For example, we bring in the Disney shows, we bring in the horse shows, they hold the Days of "47" rodeo there. It just provides an ideal setting for enriching the quality of life in Salt Lake City. In terms of entertainment, culture, and sports events, it's just been a fine thing.

The Salt Palace's benefit is its role in attracting conventions and various shows and exhibits to the Salt Lake Valley. The Salt Lake Tourist and Convention Bureau advocated the expansion of the Salt Palace to increase its exhibit space. In 1981, several community leaders, including Wendell Ashton, discussed the idea of expanding the Salt Palace through a bond issue.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 274.

Ashton went to President Tanner and explained the proposal. He presented the benefits the Church received when large conventions came to Salt Lake City such as: 1) increased Temple Square tours; 2) exposure to Salt Lake City; and 3) the opportunity for the Church to teach thousands of people each year about Latter-day Saint beliefs. President Tanner and the other members of the First Presidency supported the bond issue.

The Salt Lake Tribune always supported the Salt Palace through editorials. Under Ashton's leadership, the Deseret News also supported the project. Ashton commented the following about the importance of both papers supporting the bond issues through editorials: "We have found in the Salt Lake Valley that bond issues do not go with Tribune only support. While they have a larger circulation than the Deseret News, they don't have the editorial clout that the News has. So with the Church and the News behind it, we promoted it hard and the bond issue did pass."¹⁵⁴

Ashton served on the planning and construction committee for the expansion with John W. Gallivan, publisher of the Salt Lake Tribune, serving as committee chair. Ashton served on many other civic and community groups such as the symphony.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 277.

Symphony

Wendell's first wife, Marian Reynolds Ashton, was a symphony devotee. She loved to listen to the symphony and tried to get Ashton to attend with her. She was never able to get him to the symphony. Ashton later commented, "I felt like the symphony was something for women, and for my recreation I like fishing, sports, and gardening. I loved Marian dearly, but she never could get me to go to the symphony. She would go with her mother or her sister, but I just felt it was a sissy thing for a man to go to a symphony concert."¹⁵⁵ In 1962, Marian Ashton passed away from cancer. This left Ashton a widower with five children.

After a year, Ashton married Belva Barlow. She also was a symphony devotee. Belva's friend, Marie Bagley, sang in the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, which on occasion received complimentary symphony tickets. She gave Belva her tickets for the Philadelphia Orchestra and Eugene Ormandy. Ashton, wanting to make a good impression on his new wife, agreed to attend the concert. Ashton said of the experience, "I wanted to please my bride, with all the challenges of coming into a home with five children, some of them still very young, so I went with her to the concert. I didn't enjoy the music so much, but I did enjoy watching Ormandy swing his baton."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 277.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 278.

During this same period, Ashton was asked to chair the American Cancer Society's statewide cancer crusade. Ashton felt like it was something he should do for "Marian's sake if for nothing else."¹⁵⁷ Ashton identified Mr. Woodbury as the person to serve as the Salt Lake County Crusade Chair. Ashton and Mr. Woodbury worked together to far exceed the cancer crusade goal. Shortly after the crusade, Woodbury became the Utah Symphony board president.

After Mr. Woodbury's appointment as Utah Symphony's president, he asked Wendell if he would serve as the symphony's first vice-president.¹⁵⁸ Ashton really didn't have any interest in the symphony and thought his new wife felt that he already had too many community obligations. Ashton told Mr. Woodbury he needed to discuss it with his wife thinking she would tell him that he was too busy and didn't have the time.

Ashton approached his wife about the symphony board proposition. She immediately responded that this was one civic responsibility he should do. She then outlined how all his civic involvements were related to the Church. This would be a good opportunity for Ashton to broaden his contacts throughout the community while being helpful for his advertising business and the Church. Ashton said, of

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 279.

¹⁵⁸"Ashton Named," Salt Lake City (UT) Deseret News, 23 March 1965.

the experience, "I felt like I had pinned myself, to please her, I went back to Mr. Woodbury and told him I'd be the symphony's first vice-president."¹⁵⁹

At the time, the symphony was struggling financially. Ashton was trying to sell season tickets, but there were no season ticket holders to use as a working base. Ashton went from business to business selling four tickets at each business in efforts to raise the needed \$400,000 operating budget.

In 1965, the renowned pianist, Gina Bachauer, a Greek native, received an invitation for the Utah Symphony to attend the annual Athens Music Festival. The symphony needed \$150,000 to participate in the festival. As Ashton recalled, "Woodbury and I were inexperienced enough that we didn't know you couldn't raise it (the money), so we proceeded to start raising the money."¹⁶⁰

They had barely begun raising the money when Woodbury was struck with a massive stroke. The symphony expected Ashton, as first vice-president, to take over the Symphony.¹⁶¹ The Utah Symphony expected Ashton to raise the funds necessary for the symphony to go on their first

¹⁵⁹Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 280, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 280.

¹⁶¹"S.L. Ad Executive Gains Symphony Presidency," The Salt Lake Tribune, 2 September 1966, Section D.

world tour of Europe and attend the Athens Music Festival.¹⁶²

Ashton began raising money. He went to the Church who committed \$17,500; to businesses; and to the State Department. He asked the State Department for \$50,000. Ashton, being a life-long Republican felt uneasy asking Senator Moss to request the money. So Ashton went to Calvin W. Rawlins, who was known as Mr. Democrat, and a Symphony Board member. Rawlins asked Senator Moss to request the money. Senator Moss was turned down twice by the State Department. Senator Moss called Vice President Humphrey and explained how much it meant to Utah and Ted Moss. The State Department reluctantly gave the Symphony the needed money. Ashton had raised enough money for the Symphony to make the world tour.¹⁶³

The symphony performed three concerts in Greece, playing at the historic Herod Atticus Amphitheater. In Athens, they were invited to a reception hosted by King Constantine and his two sisters Princess Irene and Princess Sophia. The Symphony continued their tour by playing

¹⁶²Harold Lundstrom, "Symphony Receives Invitation To Athens, Salt Lake City (UT) Deseret News, 7 September 1965, section B.

¹⁶³Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 280, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

concerts in Belgrade, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, Vienna, Berlin, Stuttgart, and London.¹⁶⁴

Playing in Europe and Greece was a tremendous accomplishment for the Utah Symphony Orchestra. However, the tour was more successful for the symphony at home because it let Utahns know that a quality orchestra was within the community. The tour helped the symphony by informing the public through positive media exposure, by raising additional contributions, and by increasing season ticket sales.

Ashton's role with the symphony was mainly a fund raising responsibility. Ashton discussed his role with the Symphony: "I've developed a great affection and esteem for Maurice Abravanel. I didn't know anything about music. I still am a music illiterate and that was actually an advantage. I left all the music and programming to him, and he left to me all the business end of it. We had a small staff and struggled. Beginning in 1965 and 1966, I personally raised most all the money."¹⁶⁵

Wendell's symphony fundraising responsibility increased each year over the next twenty-years while he served as the chief executive officer. In 1985, Wendell was hosting 150

¹⁶⁴Harold Lundstrom, "Munich Invite For Symphony," Salt Lake City (UT) Deseret News, 18 October 1965, p. B1.

¹⁶⁵Wendell J. Ashton Oral History, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1984-85, typescript, p. 281, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

to 200 breakfasts or luncheons each year for the sole purpose of raising money. Ashton was raising approximately \$1.5 million each year on the Symphony's behalf.

Since the first tour to Europe, the symphony has played three additional tours to Europe, a tour to the Caribbean and South America, Carnegie Hall, New York, and Washington D.C. Over Ashton's twenty-year career, the Utah Symphony became rated by Fortune Magazine as one of the twelve best in the United States.¹⁶⁶

Maurice Abravanel launched a program to take the symphony from school to school and community to community. The Utah Legislature funded approximately 60 to 80 percent of the cost. The symphony performed approximately 250 concerts a year. In 1974, the symphony became a full-time orchestra which brought a new set of challenges in administering the business affairs. All musicians were unionized and the union was constantly seeking higher salaries. That made it difficult to keep the symphony viable.

The Symphony through Ashton's leadership had created a \$6 million endowment. To continue expanding the \$6 million endowment, Ashton started a sponsorship program where businesses sponsored a Symphony evening. The sponsorship was packaged in a way that made it appealing for businesses to participate. The sponsor received tickets to the event,

¹⁶⁶Ibid., p. 282.

a buffet dinner, reception with the guest artist, and pictures for the special guests. The sponsorship package allowed businesses to contribute to the symphony while providing an evening of entertainment for their special guests.¹⁶⁷

Ashton expressed concern regarding the Symphony's future:

My feeling now is that the future of the Utah Symphony is going to rest not so much on the leader as on an organization. Abravanel was a great leader. He carried the burden before Woodbury and I came onto the scene, both financial burden as well as the musical burden. But now it's too big for that. I think we have a great musical director in Joseph Silverstein, and he'll be wonderful, but he isn't going to have the time nor the expertise to raise the money. So I think the answer there is with our staff.¹⁶⁸

The Tabernacle on Temple Square was the symphony's home for thirty years. It was also the site for political rallies, Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon all spoke from the Tabernacle's pulpit. In 1974, President Lee called Ashton into his office. He told Ashton, "Now, we're not going to push you out, but we'll be grateful if you'll go to work on a new home, a concert hall."¹⁶⁹

The state of Utah was preparing for the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration and Ashton was appointed to the Utah American Revolution Bicentennial Commission by Governor

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 286.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 285.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p.285.

Calvin Rampton. The governor appointed Obert C. Tanner as the chair. The two men decided the commission's goal was to give Utah a new concert hall as a bicentennial gift.

Governor Rampton recommended to the legislature a \$6.5 million appropriation toward building a new symphony hall. The legislature passed the appropriation. The commission needed an additional \$10 million for financing the total project.

Ashton suggested a bond issue be placed before the people with John W. Gallivan as committee chair. Governor Rampton asked Mr. Gallivan to lead the bond effort, and he accepted. President N. Eldon Tanner and Ashton raised the \$40,000 needed to advertise the bond issue before the public.

Richard Eyre was asked to create a strategy for successfully passing the bond election. Eyre had handled Jake Garn's first Senate campaign. Eyre worked out a strategy that received voter approval for Symphony Hall. As a result of the bond issue passage, a \$9.8 million bond was issued through Salt Lake County.

The Church offered a 99-year lease on the property where Symphony Hall was to be constructed at a nominal fee to the county. The Governor appointed Mr. Gallivan chair of the planning and construction committee, on which Ashton also served. FFKR Architects were selected to design and oversee the project. Frank Ferguson, a principal with FFKR,

was the designer. The wedge shape design of Symphony Hall was unique and different. People who knew of Ashton's great involvement with the Symphony later referred to Symphony Hall as Wendell's Wedge. In April 1983, Time Magazine rated Salt Lake City's Symphony Hall as the most acoustically sound hall in the United States. Symphony Hall has attracted prominent orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Boston Pops, Cleveland Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, National Symphony of Holland, and the London Philharmonic.¹⁷⁰

Wendell reflected on his career with the Symphony and said, "Through the years it's been a wonderful experience for me. I have learned to love Beethoven and Brahms. I don't like the contemporary music so much, but I've learned to love Beethoven, Brahms, and Bach, though not Bach as much. But I do love the classical music and now thoroughly enjoy it."¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰Ibid., p. 286.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 282.

CHAPTER 8

Summary

Wendell Ashton's communications career spanned seven decades over a period of fifty-six years. He worked in virtually every aspect of the communications profession. Starting his career as a journalist, for the Gold and Blue, and then for the Salt Lake Telegram, covering sports, police beat, and the city desk for Salt Lake's only independent newspaper.

Wendell Ashton received his LDS mission call to the European Mission where he served as editor of the Millennial Star. The Millennial Star is the oldest publication of the Church. Wendell instituted many new and innovative ideas during his tenure as Millennial Star editor such as pictures, condensed talks, and news of interest to the European saints. Wendell called the Millennial Star the Reader's Digest of the Church.

Upon Wendell's return, he worked for his father's lumber yard the Sugar House Lumber and Hardware Company. Wendell was also called to the General Sunday School Board of the LDS Church. He worked in this capacity until he was offered the position as the LDS General Secretary to the Sunday School. In this assignment, he was tasked with production of the Instructor, the Sunday School's magazine. In 1941, Wendell began writing the back cover to the

Instructor. Wendell wrote the back page of the Instructor featuring everything from LDS Churches to vignettes on the Savior's life.

In 1947, Mark E. Petersen requested Wendell Ashton be transferred to the Deseret News to serve as the managing editor. Wendell was responsible for the daily operations of the newspaper. At the same time, the Deseret News was positioning to challenge the Salt Lake Tribune for market share. Wendell never served in management of a major metropolitan newspaper, coupled with the major campaign for newspaper readership Wendell was less than successful. Mark E. Petersen asked Wendell to take a year and write the history of the Deseret News. Wendell spent a year in the Church archives researching and writing a Voice In The West which was published in 1950.

Upon completion of the book, the Church offered Wendell a position as Church News Editor. Wendell felt this position offered was a demotion. At the same time, an account executive position became available at Gillham Advertising. Lon Richardson, senior vice president of Gillham Advertising and Wendell's editor at the Salt Lake Telegram, encouraged Wendell to apply for the position. Wendell prepared a campaign for Sego Evaporated Milk. Wendell joined the Gillham Advertising firm in 1950. A year later, Wendell received a promotion to vice president at Gillham Advertising. Wendell served as account executive

for twenty years at Gillham Advertising for accounts such as Utah Power and Light, First Security Bank, Stevens-Henager College, and Utah Dairy Association.

In 1968, Wendell directed the advertising and public relations effort which defeated liquor-by-the-drink on Utah's ballot by a margin of two to one.

The First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints called Wendell to serve as the managing director for the Public Communications Department in 1972. Wendell organized and directed the new department. The purpose of the department was to communicate the LDS Church message to the world. Wendell established public communications offices in New York, London, Toronto, Paris, and Frankfurt.

Wendell was transferred by the Church to serve as publisher of the Deseret News and as executive vice president of Deseret News Publishing Company in 1978. Wendell received responsibility for negotiations of the joint operating agreement between the Salt Lake Tribune and the Deseret News.

Wendell, also devoted his life to civic and community events. Wendell served as president of the Sugarhouse Chamber of Commerce. He served as national president for the Sons of Utah Pioneers. He also organized and led the Sons of Utah Pioneers on a re-enactment of the 1847 Utah Pioneers original trek.

Wendell served as president and chief executive officer of the Utah Symphony from 1966-1985. Wendell helped the symphony accomplish world tours, the building of Abravanel Hall, and funding a full-time symphony in Salt Lake City.

He also served as president of the Salt Lake Areas Chamber of Commerce from 1978-1979. Wendell was instrumental in bringing the New Orleans Jazz to Utah. He later was essential in helping the Jazz receive financing to stay in Utah.

Wendell was called on an LDS mission to Britain from 1985-88. When Wendell returned from his mission, he continued to be involved in Salt Lake area civic and community activities. In 1992, Wendell served on the committee of citizens against parimutuel gambling.

In studying Wendell's communications career, I have compiled a list of principles that guided Wendell throughout his career. The following is a list of guidelines which I believed helped Wendell be a successful communications professional.

Public Relations and Advertising Principles
Outlined by Wendell Ashton

1. His Strong Work Ethic. Professionals putting forth the effort and the time to be successful. Exhibiting the tenacity and determination to be successful.
2. His Integrity & Trust. The key factor in associations with clients and other communications professionals is

integrity and trust. Reporters rely on public relations professionals to give them accurate, truthful information. When a communications professional breaks the integrity and trust with a reporter the professional can no longer be effective.

3. His Role as an Advocate. A public relations professional is an advocate for the client. The p.r. professional is working in behalf of the client to serve the clients best interests. Wendell often said, "public relations is a combination of being a salesman, a reporter, and an attorney."
4. His Creativity. Public relations and advertising require creativity to communicate the message to the targeted public. Creativity is the life blood of communications. Creativity is the innovative idea that captures the attention of the targeted public and helps make the client successful.
5. His Planning and Strategy for Campaigns. Communications is an art of calculated tactics combined with proper timing. A p.r. professional needs to know when a story will capture the interest of reporters and the public. The same principal applies to special events, communications plans and campaigns.
6. His Technical Skills. A communications professional must have the technical skills to accomplish the campaign. Proficient writing skills and updated technical skills are essential in keeping pace with an evolving market place.
7. His Handling and Working with People. Working with people and clients is an art. People needed to be handled in such a way as they respect the profession as well as what can be accomplished through communications. Wendell forged a relationship with the Eccles brothers that lasted a life time. He had the ability to smooth over situations and solve problems while maintaining people's support.
8. His Organizational Skills. Organizational skills are a must in the profession. Special events, communications plans, and campaigns require organizational skills and attention to detail to ensure a smooth event.
9. His Determination and Stick-to-itiveness. A professional must accomplish what he or she set out to do. Sometimes the first attempt or the first idea will not overcome the problem. Creativity often comes from hard work and analyzing the problem.

10. His Commitment to All that counts is Results. In the end the only thing that matters is that communications has taken place. The client has received the desired result through a communications plan. The communications problem has been solved and internal and external communications has taken place.

Wendell Ashton said:

"I was a professional public relations executive. There are also what we call press agents or public information officers, but there's a big difference. I always felt that an able competent public relations man is a salesman, an attorney, and a press agent rolled into one. He has to be creative and think of the impact of certain news developments. I love public relations work, I loved it with Gillham, and I loved it with the Church, because it is a combination of selling and journalism and advocacy. You're an advocate for your client. Just as there are honorable attorneys who represent their client well, I felt the same with public relations. You don't give the media untruths. You're honest with them, but you're still an advocate.¹⁷²

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 181.

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