

Cuppa Joe | Historic Sites Foundation Spring Lecture Series | Eric Paul Rogers | From Morrisite to Josephite and Beyond

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Eric Rogers, Karin Peter

Karin Peter 00:30

Welcome to Cuppa Joe, where we explore restoration history. And I'm your host for this, Karin Peter. Now here at Cuppa Joe, we partner with Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation to interview the presenters from their seasonal lecture series. Our guest today is Eric Paul Rogers. Now, Eric has been with us before and as I went and looked back, it was the episode on Mark Hill Forscutt: Mormon Missionary, Morrisite Apostle, and RLDS Minister. So, it may be the first thing that we discuss, Eric, is these titles to your lectures, we might need to have a conversation about some of these. But Eric has studied organizations within the restoration movement, particularly the Church of the Firstborn or the Morrisites; Community of Christ, which was formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and the Apostolic United Brethren or what's known as the Allred Group, and I'm pretty sure that's a fundamentalist sect. Is it not?

Eric Rogers 01:35

Correct? Yeah. polygamous fundamentalist.

Karin Peter 01:38

Okay. And his research has been published in a number of books and journals, including Curriculum and Teaching, Educating About Religious Diversity and Interfaith Engagement: a Handbook for Student Affairs; Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion; Journal of Mormon History; The Persistence of Polygamy, Fundamentalist Mormon Polygamy from 1890 to the Present, also The Religious Educator and the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal. That's quite a litany there of publications. So this is really interesting. I'm not sure I knew all that last time. That's wonderful, wonderful. So your contribution to the Historic Sites Foundation 2023 Spring Lecture Series, is titled "From Morrisite to Josephite and Beyond." And I am wondering if there's some connection to your Mark Forscutt research that you did in this and is that somehow connected you to this?

Eric Rogers 02:40

Yes, it's all interrelated. And I will mention Forscutt in my presentation this Thursday, but I will point... I will pay more attention to others than Forscutt and point people to our interview last year and to the Spring Lecture Series lecture last year on Forscutt.

Karin Peter 03:03

Excellent, that will give some good background to some of this as we go on. So the intro to this lecture for 2023 says that you're going to explore the organization and development of the Church of the Firstborn, and that was under the Prophet/Leader Joseph Morris. Also the conflict that resulted in the death of Morris, which sounds ominous, and the dispersion of Morris's followers among various faith communities, including the RLDS tradition, the RLDS church. So let's get started with the basic question of who the heck was Joseph Morris?

Eric Rogers 03:41

Well, I wish we knew more. But we do know some, some basic ideas around Joseph Morris, where he came from and how he ended up where he did. We know he was born in England, in Cheshire County, in December of 1822. So that gives you a bit of frame. So Joseph Smith was born in 1805, we have Joseph Morris 1822. And he converted to Mormonism at the age of 23. I haven't been able to find any details around his conversion story, but we do know that there is a baptismal record, at 23, so that would have put him joining the church in 1845. So again, we're in the post-martyrdom period in Nauvoo, but prior to the exodus of a good portion of the church to the west. He married before he immigrated to the U.S. and his first wife was named Mary Thorpe. She was also from County Cheshire, and they had four children. However, three of the four died in infancy before immigration to America, and as I was preparing, I found some additional source material around those children, so there's some detail that I didn't know before preparing to visit with you. So they immigrated then in 1850, I'm not exactly sure, I think around 1850. And before they move west to Utah territory, they live for two years in St. Louis, and then moved to Pittsburgh. And we do have record of him serving as a Branch President for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the Pittsburgh area. So convert in England, immigrates to America, actually given a position of leadership within the church, and then Joseph and Mary moved to Utah in 1853. And they live first in Sanpete County. For those that don't, aren't familiar with Utah geography, Sanpete County, some of its towns would be Manti, Mount Pleasant, Ephraim. And it's about 100 miles, Mount Pleasant is about 100 miles south of Salt Lake. And if I say here, I'm in Salt Lake, I'm downtown Salt Lake. So when I say here, I mean Salt Lake. And then they moved north to Provo, which is in Utah County, about 50 miles south of Salt Lake, and then later to Slaterville, which is about 40 miles north of Salt Lake. Slaterville's in the Ogden area. While he was in Provo, he was known for his religious zeal, some people called him Praying Joe, because he would just drop down in the middle of the street and begin to pray out loud, and that garnered some attention. And it wasn't always positive. His reputation was not necessarily a positive one, particularly with local church leaders. And Joseph actually accused local church leaders of trying to get married to leave him. Now, this was at a period of time during what we call the Mormon Reformation, where there was a lot of enthusiasm and energy and talk around elevating the spirituality of the people and it wasn't unheard of to try to convince a woman that priesthood leaders, that church leaders perceived as being married to not quite so elevated a man to leave him to marry — and because of polygamy, right, there were all kinds of opportunities then. And unfortunately, or fortunately, I'm not, I won't make that judgment statement, but Mary does choose to leave Joseph, and ends up some four years later, being sealed to a man named

Henry Beale, in 1857, in the endowment house in Salt Lake City. So as he divorces Mary, he's trying to find other marriage opportunities. And it seems like he's being thwarted by local church leaders on every account, which he obviously does not like and complains about. And that caused him to openly criticize local church leaders, and their teachings. In a letter in 1857, so they've come to Utah in '53, Mary leaves him, he's having these these contentious interactions with local church leaders. He writes a letter in December of 1857 to Brigham Young. And he outlines the abuses that he suffered at the hands of the Provo Stake President, whose name is James C. Snow. But in addition to his complaints about local priesthood, he alludes to his role as a prophet. So he is writing to Brigham Young, the Prophet, although I'm not sure if Brigham Young saw himself as a prophet, Joseph Smith was the prophet. But there's that initial allusion to maybe Joseph Morris playing a role as a prophet. And there's no evidence that Brigham Young or his secretaries respond back to Joseph Morris, but we do have those letters or that letter, in particular, in the archives. And in the margin, there's a note that says he's weak minded, suggesting possibly some type of mental illness, which again, could account for local church leaders intervening in his efforts to marry especially when, when because of plural marriage, it might not be easy to find a new wife. And so one way would be to take the wives of other men. There are some extreme examples and I don't want to represent these as, suggest that these are representative, but there are accounts of young men being castrated. So that kind of took them out of the marriageable pool for women during especially during that, that period in the 1850s when there was when the Mormon Reformation was at its height. And then over the next three years, so from 1857 to 1860, Morris writes more than a dozen additional letters to Young, in very grandiose terms with very poor spelling and grammar, which I'm sure didn't add to his reputation. So it's not surprising that Young didn't respond to the letters. But we do again have those letters from Joseph Morris and marginal notes with words like balderdash in the margins. So that's kind of this, the who Joseph Morris is, where he came from, and what led up to circumstances, up to the founding of the church that he organized.

Karin Peter 10:49

So being, coming out of England, coming to the U.S., serving in leadership, and then these processes beginning to happen, where he's kind of ousted from leadership,

Eric Rogers 11:02

Definitely marginalized.

Karin Peter 11:04

Very much so, unfortunately, happening at the same time, where as you describe the Reformation, where there was kind of this elevation of, of spirituality. Was it the charismatic nature of his behavior that seemed to his public behavior that seemed to be part of the problem?

Eric Rogers 11:22

Yes, and again, I think it was that his particular brand of charisma that was perceived, perceived negative, right that others who are charismatic, so I'll mention a little bit later, John Banks, who becomes one of his key convert one of Joseph Morris's key converts, also very charismatic, but a polished speaker, a former Mission President in England. And he wasn't perceived in the same way as Morris. So there was something about Morris's personality and his particular brand of charisma, that for some came across as off kilter, perhaps reflective of mental illness, derangement. Yet he found others

including John Banks that I mentioned and Mark Forscutt who I also mentioned who perceived him as a prophet.

Karin Peter 12:17

So that was kind of where I was going with this. So he's ousted from leadership, he's marginalized. And yet the Church of the Firstborn comes about so what happens there that brings that to fruition?

Eric Rogers 12:31

So I think the Mormon Reformation is critical. So we've talked about elevating the spiritual nature of the Latter Day Saints. They've been the you know, the first companies arrived in 1847. So it's been 10 years, that they've been there, and they've been focusing on survival. So I think that's one of the things that drives Brigham Young and two of Brigham Young's key leaders that drive the Mormon Reformation are George A. Smith, who Joseph Morris absolutely does not like. And, and when Morris is critical of Brigham Young he often cites that it's, it's actually George A. Smith behind it, it's not Brigham, but George A. Smith is an outspoken advocate for the Reformation, for rebaptism, for recommitment. And Jedediah Grant. These Jedediah Grant, George A. Smith and Brigham Young are kind of the key voices of the Mormon Reformation and their language and public preaching is very strong, and sometimes violent in nature, towards those who don't measure up or who are apostates or who are Gentiles. In other words, non Mormons, and the language opens the way to justify Mormons inflicting violence on their Gentile or apostate or less than measuring up Latter Day Saints.

Karin Peter 14:09

So is this this kind of the same time period as the Mormon wars? Is this the same time that...

Eric Rogers 14:15

Exactly. So, in the midst of the Mormon Reformation, you also have Johnson's army coming from the east to put down what was termed in the Mormon rebellion where Brigham Young refused to allow federal judges and the Governor to be put in place because he was the governor. So there was a time when you have a Mormon governor in the state of Deseret, and a federally appointed non Mormon governor in the territory of Utah who were competing. So you have the Mormon reformation. You have the arrival of or the pending arrival of federal troops to put down the Mormon Rebellion and and then In September 11 1857, you have the Mountain Meadows Massacre. And while the perpetrators of the massacre initially placed blame on the local Paiute Indians, it was fairly well known that Mormons were at least involved, if not the instigators of that attack. So you have a very volatile social, political, cultural environment in which Joseph Morris is feeling marginalized. And I think that your question is, is very important, because I think it's in that context, that people like John Banks, or Mark Forscutt, who are also opposed to polygamy. Maybe it's not so much, Joseph Morris's charisma, or even his doctrine, although Seth Bryant might disagree with me on that. I think it's more as though one of the few local alternatives to Brigham Young, that reflects continuing revelation and a charismatic leader that's not institutionalizing and corporatizing the church in ways that they saw Brigham Young doing that. And it doesn't have the same level of authoritarianism that Young seems to impose upon the church.

Karin Peter 16:31

Okay, so we've established kind of the climate and the context from from which this comes, how does this actually happen? What happens so that what we end up with is an established Church of the Firstborn? What is what has to happen for that to take place?

Eric Rogers 16:48

So I mentioned John Banks. John became one of Joseph Morris's proselytizers. He was one that was very effective at conveying the message of Joseph Morris as a prophet. Come, listen, and follow Him. As I mentioned, before, Banks had served in significant leadership roles, he was well respected. However, when he came, he was, he understood a promise from Brigham Young when he went to serve as president of the mission in in England, that when he returned, so we're talking about John Banks now. John Banks understood when he returned, Brigham Young would install him as the Presiding Bishop of the church. So when John Banks returns, he goes to Brigham Young, just across the street here, from where I'm sitting, and said, Okay, I'm ready to step into that role and, and Young reneged on his promise, which led to a fistfight. And to John Banks, also being marginalized because of the way that he was treated by church leaders. So Banks lives in Pleasant Grove, which is in the Provo area, which is to the south and he's proselytizing there. Joseph Morris moves to Slaterville, which is about 30 miles north, 40 miles north of Salt Lake and moves into the community moves into the home of some people that were open to him and who began to perceive him as a prophet. And while he's in Slaterville, he starts to get something of a following. Now in, in the Ogden, South Ogden area, there's a little town called South Weber. South Weber has, at the time in the 1850s and 1853. The Latter Day Saints there built a fort for Indian protection. Because of Johnson's army coming in, all have the forts and all of the residents in northern Utah move south, so they wouldn't be here when Johnston's army arrived, and so they abandoned the fort. So by 18, by the late 1850s, after Johnson's army comes, conflict is avoided. Johnston's army sets up at Camp Floyd, which is kind of in the Provo area, but to the west where it's not where they're not in the Mormon community. There's this there's this fort left there, and it's not occupied. And so Morris and his followers begin to move into the fort and to occupy it. Now one of the key players in this is Richard Cook. Richard Cook is the Bishop of the South Weber Ward. Well, guess who Morris converts. Bishop Cook, along with about 16 or 17 of his ward members. So as people gather, you have starting to be in the hundreds, dozens and then hundreds of people following Morris at Kington Fort and maybe 100 members of the South Weber Ward. And so this becomes obviously something of a threat to the general church leadership. And Brigham Young sends two apostles, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff to the South Weber Ward they investigate and excommunicate Richard Cook and the other board members who follow Morris. So, on April 6, that they should ring familiar. 1861. So 31 years after Joseph Smith organizes the Church of Christ, in New York, Morris organizes a new church with guests how many members? Six, again, so we're, we're following the pattern of the, of the church that Joseph Smith organized with Joseph Morris, John Cook, Richard Cook, John Firth, William Kendall, and Nathan Byrne as members. And they call the church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Most High, that was shortened to Morrisites, and then later iterations came to be known as The Church of the Firstborn.

Karin Peter 21:14

Okay, so why six men? were there...

Eric Rogers 21:17

Because that was the that was the pattern established by Joseph Smith. The in the formation of the church that Joseph Smith Jr. organized.

Karin Peter 21:28

So there would have been many, many, many more followers. He just wanted to he just wanted to mirror

Eric Rogers 21:34

As there were in New York, in 1830. (All right.) And on that day, on April 6 1861, Morris issued a proclamation that said all of his followers should gather to Kington Fort, and the quote that has been any he expresses this statement that has been quoted since he says, "Because Christ will come tomorrow." And they held all things in common. So while that wasn't true of Joseph Smith Jr's church in April of 1830, it certainly became a communal consecration community after they, after they encounter Sidney Rigdon and others in Kirtland. So they held everything and all things in common. And because Christ is coming tomorrow, they Some sources say that they even trampled their crops, as an expression of faith and confidence in the prophecy of Joseph Morris, that the image that Christ's coming was imminent that his second advent was around the corner, as has been the case since the days of Jesus Christ. And the Apostle Paul and the early apostles.

Karin Peter 23:03

yes. So I can understand that there would be groups that had allegiance to local leaders, like with the bishop in South Weber, and they would join. So were they all people who had felt marginalized or somehow disgruntled with Brigham Young or with other church leaders, or are there other groups of people?

Eric Rogers 23:26

Yeah, I would be I would be. I don't think I could confidently say, All. Right? We're generalizing here, but I think yes, what we see is poor, immigrant, anti-polygamist, anti-authoritarian, may have had bad experiences with Brigham Young or Heber C. Kimball, or others of the 12 or others of the the Brighamite leadership. I think those are commonalities among most of those who aligned with Morris. So George Dove, who was one of Morris's followers, would eventually publish Morris's revelations, but not until 1886. Those were published in San Francisco, many decades later. One of the things that George Dove did, by the way, Morris's revelations were published under the title "The Spirit Prevails." Among the documents that Dove preserved was what was called a roll of membership. That roll of membership contained about 430 names. And of those 430 names I've identified I've identified or distilled down to about 150 surnames. So I mentioned that they came primarily from or they came primarily from the UK. So you see surnames like Adams, Hill, McHugh, McCune. Also from Scandinavia, particularly from Sweden, and especially from Denmark, so names like an Anderson, Kristofferson, Goodmanson. And also from Switzerland. Names like Diatom, Cool, Verna, Bera. Of course, the the German versions of those as a German language versions of those, mostly from Switzerland. And many of those followers were there were recent immigrants, they were unable to speak English, which was another marginalizing influence. And so Morris actually directed many of his revelations to be translated into Danish so that they can be consumed by his followers.

Karin Peter 25:40

So, when I'm thinking in the broader context of, of immigrants coming in to the United States, from those areas you named that was a common issue as people would get here not knowing that polygamy was part of what was happening, be disappointed when they discovered that by the time they got to Utah, and then trying to figure out what to do as they're living in a marginalized way in Deseret. So let me be clear that in a lot of different stories,

Eric Rogers 26:09

let me give you an example. So I mentioned that I would, I mentioned I think I mentioned John, John L. Bera. Bera will end up in the RLDS church. But he said this in his autobiography, he says, and this is commenting on his arrival in Utah, "Reader, you may think how I felt coming from Babylon in full confidence to go to the Saints of the Most High, and then find them such transgressors of the law, which would not have been tolerated in Babylon, so called, oh, my God, my God, what will be the end of this? Oh, Israel of old has gone astray in spite of the warnings of the prophets. And here Israel of Latter Day is going astray, yay, their prophets and their leaders their seducers. As we arrived at the city square, which was as dusty as earth could be made, and a strong wind blowing, we were in a puzzle 1000s of miles away from home and friends, destitute in a strange country, with but little understanding of their language. No advice, no help, no assistance in any way. There you are. Route or die. Oh, my gosh. Now, now that was written in retrospect, (yes). Which we all look back on our on our past and interpret it through the lens of where we are now. But still, we could you know, there are many such comments. Forscutt could have said the same thing with the exception of the language barrier.

Karin Peter 27:47

Well, oh, my goodness, that's as that's as lamentations as you can get from that perspective. So we have this group of people who as you were describing them for immigrant, anti polygamous, disgruntled, you are describing the RLDS folks that stayed back in the Midwest as well, that's, that's our heritage.

Eric Rogers 28:12

But you know, prior to 1860, there is no

Karin Peter 28:17

right.

Eric Rogers 28:19

official organization,

Karin Peter 28:21

But the same feelings, the same kinds of same kinds of reactions. Okay. So, there were obviously a lot of similarities in the beliefs with the Morrisites compared to kind of mainstream Mormonism at the time. Was polygamy really the main difference, or were there other significant differences?

Eric Rogers 28:44

Morris was was fairly innovative. So he claimed to have received numerous spiritual manifestations, but he doesn't start to publicly talk about them until 1857. But from his writings, you get the idea that there was a cosmological view that was forming in him that was certainly influenced by the teachings of Joseph Smith Jr. But that were perhaps even more expansive or different, as early as his time in Pittsburgh. So Morris's revelation in 1857, clearly established him, in his own mind, and for those that listen to him as a prophet, but that placed him at odds with Brigham Young and the church. The way that he tried to manage that with Brigham Young is Brigham, you're a prophet, I'm a prophet, you're there to be the temporal leader of the church, I will be the spiritual leader of the church. So therefore getting marginal notes like balderdash from either Brigham Young or the secretaries that responded and wrote, however, that transformed and shifted, where Morris taught that Brigham Young was a fallen prophet. that no more missionaries should be sent out into the world, which is a pretty big deal, right? And if the second advent is sown here, then why send out missionaries we've got to get ourselves spiritually and physically prepared for that. And, and now I'll look at I'll hint at some of those innovations and, and they're quite extensive and I can't I wouldn't claim to fully understand all of Morris's teachings. But Morris's Revelation designated him as the seventh angel of the apocalypse. And it outlines his teachings outline 10 steps to godhood. So you do have, you know, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, depending on who you believe, right, this, these teachings around becoming gods. And one of the ways that he definitely diverted was in his explanation of the Doctrine of Reincarnation. So he saw himself as having lived many, multiple, multiple lives. I'm thinking of my following of a recent, the national news of a trial in Idaho around Lori Vallow, with along with her husband, Chad Daybell were Latter Day Saints, who also taught multiple lifetimes, multiple probations, multiple identities. And this was something that Morris taught as well. And then as I've mentioned, already, the immediate advent of Jesus Christ. So far, he goes so far as to say January 1 1862, is the day.

Karin Peter 31:40

I don't know there was probably snow. I've been to Utah in January, that's probably what happened. Oh, okay. So we get an idea of what he was like which we can look in Community of Christ history and find people that have had similar kinds of pronouncements over the years. That's, I think that's part of kind of goes hand in hand with some of the restoration traditions and experiences. But this gets, this takes a dire turn, because in your, your description of your lecture, you talk about the conflict that leads to his death. So what goes wrong?

Eric Rogers 32:22

What doesn't go wrong? (Oh.) So from the beginning, and I've pointed this to some of the conflicts, but the more sites had ongoing conflicts with their Mormon neighbors. We'll just jump to Kington Fort. So we're in the fort, and an example would be the Mormon, their Mormon neighbors would harass them. So a quick example would be they ride their horses into the fort, ride their horses into a home and take a hat off of a Morrisite man. Take the horses or the properties of the Morrisite individuals and when they were retrieved by the owners, the Mormons would bring charges against the Morrisites for theft. And local law enforcement including Lot Smith, who plays into the Mormon rebellion and efforts to stop Johnston's army from coming into the Salt Lake Valley. Lot Smith was sheriff in in Davis County, Weaver County. And so there was all kinds of conflicts going on. You've got to have your grain milled? Well, if you go to a Mormon miller, they're not going to mill your grain because your a Morrisite. So it made life very difficult. And so there was all kinds of conflicts. But when you have the Advent of Christ

predicted, and then fail, and then fail again and fail again, some of Morris's adherents began to lose faith. And the problem with losing faith is that you wanted to then leave the community but the problem with leaving the community is you already consecrated everything to the community. So if you had consecrated a horse or a wagon, or some other property, and then you take that and leave, how does the community perceive that? (Right) Perceived as a theft. So William Jones was one of Morris's first converts. He became dissatisfied and attempted to leave and take with him his consecrated property, but was detained. Well, that's illegal detention. You can't do that. There were three individuals who ultimately would be would leave, and Morris organized a posse, went out to retrieve them, brought the property and those individuals back and imprisoned them in a building in a small cabin in Kington Fort. And so, family members petitioned the local court, in particular the Chief Justice of the Third District Court, who is John F. Kinney, to order their release. Kinney orders issues a writ of habeas corpus, which is a requirement that they release these three individuals, and the Morrisites receive refused to receive the writ. And so judge Kinney, gives the writ and orders the Territorial Militia to enforce the writ. So that's problematic to some degree because you have a military body enforcing a civil writ. But the Territorial Marshal is out of the territory at the time so a Deputy Territorial Marshal is tasked with enforcing the writ. His name is Robert T. Burton. 17 years later, he's going to be in the Presiding bishopric of the church. And that that will and he'll be brought up on charges in relation to what happens at Kington Fort. So Burton organizes the Nauvoo Legion, the territorial militia, and as they move north from Salt Lake through Davis County, other members of the militia are joining in with him. And so we don't have exact numbers but by the time they get to the bluffs on this, so Kington Fort is down in a river valley where the river flows through so you've got bluffs on the north, bluffs on the south, the territory militia sets up on the bluffs on the south with cannon. And sightseers, observers, audience, local community members gather on the north butte to watch what's going to take place. And Burton gives an order to a herd boy, who's herding sheep, and says take this to Morris. It basically requires the surrender of Morris within 30 minutes. There are then all kinds of different accounts of what goes down. But the basic account is that Burton says they didn't respond, I'm gonna send a warning shot over the fort. So meanwhile, in the fort, they've seen the troops on the bluff, and Morris has gone into the fort to get a revelation, the 12 have just come from a morning meeting. Morris goes to get a revelation, and the rest gather in an open air Bowery just outside the fort. So they're praying for the Prophet to receive a revelation Morris is seeking a revelation. And they're expecting a conflict. Morris is expecting either to be saved, or that the conflict ultimately will spark the coming of Jesus Christ that is a necessary thing, but that ultimately they'll be protected. Well, that first cannon shot that Burton says is a warning shot falls short of the fort tumbles into the Bowery kills two women, including John Bera's wife, Susanna Siedler, and takes the chin off of Mary Kristofferson, who's a 14 year old girl, which then sends everything into uproar. And basically is the beginning of a three day battle that takes place between the militia and the Morrisites. By Sunday, there are 10 or 11 dead, including two of the militia members, and the Morrisites put up a flag of truce. Burton rides into the fort, they've ordered that the the arms be stacked. And Burton says that Morris gives the command to go for the weapons, at which time Burton shoots Morris. He shoots Banks. There's a woman who tries to throw herself in front of Morris who's also killed by Burton. And that's why he's brought up 17 years later on murder charges of Mrs. Bowman while serving as a Presiding Bishop in the church. And essentially with the murder of Mrs. Bowman, and that the Morrisite War was officially over. So that's so it was Friday the the 13th of June 1862 that the battle started, and by Sunday morning, Morris and Banks and several others were dead and the rest were taken into custody by the militia.

Karin Peter 40:02

So I have two follow up questions with that. One is what happened to them after they were taken into custody? Where did they go? How did they disperse? And second, what happened with the trial with Burton?

Eric Rogers 40:17

Do you want us all start with Burton? Okay. Burton was acquitted, unsurprisingly. Basically, the defense argument was that he was just executing his duties and responsibilities. He was under threat. Armed threat by Morris's followers. What happened to them is that they were brought up on charges that were different charges for different individuals. Ultimately, by next by the next spring. So the spring of 1863, Judge Kinney, a non Mormon, actually, I think he had been replaced by this time. But the non Mormon judge that was in place, dismissed all of the charges.

Karin Peter 40:58

Did they stay in Utah?

Eric Rogers 41:00

So, yes and no. There is a little pioneer cemetery in South Weber. I was just there yesterday, taking some pictures for my presentation on Thursday. And there's actually a headstone that says Joseph Warner, so this was one of the Swiss immigrants, and then in quotes, Morrisite 1870. So here you have, eight years after the conflict, he dies and is buried in the Pioneer cemetery, but still identified as a Morrisite. Yeah. Interestingly, when I was several years ago, I was tromping through the community, just knocking doors and trying to talk to people about the history. There was a woman that I met and she said, Because of where she lived in South Weber, not because of her heritage, but where she lived in South Weber. As a child in elementary school, she was derogatorily called a Morrisite...In the 50s.

Karin Peter 42:03

How interesting.

Eric Rogers 42:05

Yeah. So where did they go? Colonel Connor, Patrick Connor, who was over the military unit, the non Mormon military and at the federal military unit in Salt Lake, took a group, a large group of the Morrisites and they went to Soda Springs, Idaho, and a number of them stayed there. John Bera was one of those that went to Soda Springs, initially. I have family who went there. Mary Kristofferson, who lost her chin, She married Niels Andersen and Mary and Niels Kristofferson-Anderson lived out their lives in Soda Springs. There's a monument to... a headstone to them. And that tells the story of the Morrisites from the Morrisite perspective in Soda Springs. And so a large contingent went to Soda Springs. And some went immediately from Soda to Deer Lodge Montana. Another contingent went directly west into Nevada and California. Mark Forscutt was one of those who went to Ruby Valley, Nevada, the Doves went on to Carson Valley. And so that's why you get the Doves eventually in California in the San Francisco area. And then you have some dispersion, and realignment and recruitment and proselytizing because there is schism within Morrisism, including Walla Walla, Washington, where we get the Walla Walla Jesus, which is an interesting story,

Karin Peter 43:38

okay, this I'm gonna have to hear so either save time at the end and tell me or it's another, it's another episode.

Eric Rogers 43:46

So, so I'll just hit on it quickly. George Williams became kind of the de facto leader, but he wasn't even at Kington Fort. He was in Salt Lake. He wasn't even a Morrisite until after the battle, but he steps in He claims he's the Prophet Canaan, as others claimed. And he steps into leadership and and particularly in leadership in the in the Deer Lodge community. What is that when I say Deer Lodge? Some might be unhappy with that I'm not more specific than that. Barb Walden, for example, knows it was Dempsey Creek and Racetrack Creek, which are actually outside of Deer Lodge.

Karin Peter 44:30

They're huge mining areas and canyons.

Eric Rogers 44:34

Yeah, so the Walla Walla Jesus was William Davies. So William Davies was one of Morris's followers, and he ends up in Montana and then gets a revelation that he needs to go to Walla Walla. And while there, discovers or has a revelation that his child is the reincarnation of Jesus Christ, and so his child becomes what's becomes known as the Walla Walla Jesus, and actually got quite a following from the region who believed in, in this little baby as the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. He had two more children and they were the Holy Ghost and the Father, God the Father. And so you had a Trinity born to William Davies, unfortunately, two of those three children passed away in in childhood. And so the grandiose vision that he might have had for his community wavered and fell apart. You actually have Morrisite arguably Morrisite leaders and followers in the Deer Lodge area and there's the only surviving building in the world that's Morrisite is at Racetrack Creek. It is just off of I 90, in just south of Deer Lodge. And I actually went to a an Eliason family reunion there I kind of invited myself and Eliasons were among Morrisites who then joined Community of Christ, RLDS church in Deer Lodge. My family members, Katie and Anders Kristofferson joined the RLDS church in Deer Lodge in 1868. and 1870.

Karin Peter 46:22

It was at that same little white building they meet in now. Yep, yeah.

Eric Rogers 46:25

Yeah. And I got to get into that white building at that Eliason family reunion because they still own that four acres there. And I'd never I've driven by and tried to get into the building and never was able to until 2012 when that Eliason family reunion took place. It was at the RLDS part of the community, that community Christ chapel in Deer Lodge, and then out at the House of the Lord.

Karin Peter 46:50

Interesting. So I'm, I'm watching the flow of this. Soda Springs, Deer Lodge, Walla Walla, we're talking about the people who are following typical frontier trails of the time, either into mining or with cattle and the old way the railroads went through. Yeah, absolutely. Okay, so they disperse and in some in Deer

Lodge, some in Walla Walla, some other places, end up connecting with the RLDS tradition. So other than some of your family members, where else did that happen? And did people go back like wasn't it Forscutt went back towards Missouri at one point?

Eric Rogers 47:31

Yeah, I'll point to two examples. Well, I've already told you about Katie and Anders Kristofferson. Katie was a Hansen that married Anders Kristofferson. And they settled and raised their family in Deer Lodge. And were members of the RLDS community there. Their descendants, for variety of reasons ended up becoming mainstream Protestants in a variety of mainstream traditions. John Bera went initially to Soda Springs, but he was baptized in 1869. So this is seven years after the battle, the Morrisite War, and he's baptized in Mallette city, which is north of Salt Lake north of Ogden, before you get to Idaho, Pocatello and Idaho Falls, it's right on the Idaho Utah border. And Bera is baptized in 1869 by Edmund C Brand. And then he was confirmed by David H. Smith and EC Brand. So quite a nice RLDS pedigree there. (Absolutely.) He was ordained an elder right after that in 1869 by EC Brand, and served a mission to Switzerland and Germany, as appointed by the annual conference or semi annual conference in 1872. He returned in 74 from Switzerland, was ordained as 70 in Plano, in 1880, by John H. Lake and Mark Hill Forscutt and William H. Kelly. And then at the semi annual conference of 1880, he was again appointed to serve in Switzerland in Germany. And he was he attended the St. Joseph Branch and ended in the Independence branch. (Okay.) Forscutt, who I have spoken about on previous occasions in Episode 489, of Cuppa Joe on Project Zion Podcast.

Karin Peter 49:36

Thanks for looking that up.

Eric Rogers 49:39

You can go there to learn more about Forscutt. But he initially went and joined the military and went to Ruby Valley, so there were no other Morrisites with him. He left the community I think, maybe largely due to Elizabeth's influence, and then moved back to Salt Lake and was baptized again without Elizabeth's knowledge in Salt Lake on New Year's Day 1865. And by 1867, he leaves and goes east and ends up in Lamoni with Joseph III. And eventually Elizabeth follows.

Karin Peter 50:16

Yeah, that was a great episode, I'd really encourage people to go and listen to that.

Eric Rogers 50:21

Yeah. And then Forscutt and Bera cross paths as they ministered for the remainder of their lives.

Karin Peter 50:28

So in that episode, and you've touched on it here, you have family connections through all of this, that that is part of your interest. Yeah. What's what sparked that for you to really dive into this with the Morrisites in the Church of the Firstborn?

Eric Rogers 50:44

Well, when I was courting my, my wife, in 1986-87, and they and her family, I met her family and they found out I was Mormon. And she was converted to Mormonism too they were really unhappy. She had joined the church after she turned 18 because of the opposition of her family to joining the, the Mormon church. And so it was really me trying to understand that opposition, where it was coming from because I was expecting to spend the rest of my life with her. And with her family, we're no longer married, but I still consider her family my family. And I had an opportunity then to explore what is it that was that was causing that opposition. And it was really rooted in the history of the Morrisite movement, in which her ancestors who are involved, Anders and Katie Kristofferson, and others. Those stories of Aunt Mary getting our chin shot off the war itself. My wife's maternal grand grandfather was a Mason, and he was a he was anti Mormon because of the Nauvoo endowment being taken from Masonic rites. So it was that Morrisite and Mormon history that was their main reason for opposing her joining the church, and also her to some degree, marrying a Latter Day Saint. And like I said, they eventually left the RLDS church and join mainstream Protestant denominations. But those stories got told and retold at those family reunions, we're in Soda Springs. So when you go to Soda Springs you get to see at Mary's grave, and what's Mary's grave, it tells the story and it tells the Morrisite version of the story, right? It was inaccurate, but it tells the story in a certain way. And so those stories about the abuses suffered at the hands of Mormons continued to be told and retold at reunions and in homes, and continue to influence people's lives to this day. (Yeah.) They like me now.

Karin Peter 53:07

But that is true. Some of those old divisions, some of those old hurts, they don't go away because we continually relive them. As we tell our narrative and how we understand it. Yeah, this all of this is really fascinating to me. So the connections of some of these groups as they move into other places in the West, is fascinating as well, to see how Mormonism as well as these different groups began to grow and merge and split and, and change in the part of the world where I'm most familiar, which is the Northwest. Yep. So when you began to research this, when I first asked you, who was Joseph Morris, you said, well, we only know so much, so other than that challenge. What were some of the other challenges to to really putting this together into lecture form?

Eric Rogers 54:00

I would say limited source material. So we've already hinted at that, right? We just don't have that much about Joseph Morris. Also conflicting stories, you get different perspectives, depending on who's writing the account or telling the account. I also find it difficult to maintain objectivity and balance, which I'm not a trained historian. But I know that that's an ideal within good history.

Karin Peter 54:26

It's easy to be an example of what you mean.

Eric Rogers 54:29

It's easy to villainize to villainize Brigham Young, or Joseph Morris, depending on on your point of view, and so because it's easy to pick villains and victims, that can blur my objectivity. These are sensitive issues even today. I mentioned going door to door knocking doors in South Weber some people don't want that history told and retold. And they have their perspective and if you take have a different perspective or suggest that there are alternative narratives that can be off putting to somebody that is

married to committed to lifelong, whose ancestors were participants on one on one side or the other, and so that objectivity is difficult, and just the complexity of religious schism and the motives for disaffiliation or re affiliation. Now, why did John Bera join RLDS church? Why does Forscutt? Why did Katie and Anders? Why didn't Mary and Niels Kristofferson in Soda Springs? Why wouldn't you know Joseph, the Josephite tradition, the RLDS or Community of Christ tradition, appeal to them. Those without the diaries, and you have to make inferences and you have to speculate and that's always then can be influenced by bias. And so it's just a really fascinating for me, facet. It's a fascinating endeavor, a challenging endeavor, and one that will probably never be answered. And it's maybe that's why I like it so much. I'll be a little bit vulnerable. I love golf. And one of the things I love about golf is, you know, I'll never master that dang thing. And sometimes I'll hit a really good shot, but most of the times I don't, it's that good shot that keeps me coming back. It's Mrs. Peak, opening her door. In South Weber in saying, okay, sit here. I'll be back in 15 minutes, but don't move. And then she comes back in 15 minutes with a cannon ball that's been passed down from generation to generation, that she's been willing that she was willing to share with me that that's my good shot. Right? That's, that's the thing that I'm like, Oh, this is so amazing, and wonderful and cool. And, and there are I'm sure all kinds of misses along the way. I love Seth Bryant's master's thesis at the University of Florida in 2008. And in he delves into a lot of those things around motive. And like, as I suggested earlier, he looks at he he would make a more compelling case than I would that it was what Joseph Morris was teaching that was really compelling to people that and I don't feel I would probably take the side that it was not Brigham Young. It was still it was still Mormonism, but it wasn't Brigham Young. And it wasn't those aspects of Brighamite Mormonism that they despised. But they also, you know, how would their lives had been different? What if Joseph Morris had been embraced by Brigham Young? What if he had like Forscutt with had been called as a 70? You know, John Bera talked about root or die, what if they had rooted instead of resisting, you know, maybe Bera or Forscutt or others would have risen to leadership and become presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, that they became leaders in the RLDS church, who we revere today, so

Karin Peter 58:10

How interesting. So when we began talking, you said that you would learn more about Morris's children from when you first researched your lecture? What other new things did you discover or maybe surprising things? Was there anything other than the cannon ball surprising that you discovered in this?

Eric Rogers 58:33

I was struck? And this is maybe something I relearned, okay, rather than learned, but I was struck by the radical ways in which religion evolves as individuals and community and communities, kind of renegotiate the teachings and traditions that they inherit. And I've already mentioned the Lori Vallow Daybell trial, and the ways in which that cult or that group of individuals, renegotiated their most recent brand of Mormonism, into something new and innovative that spoke to people in ways that mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints doesn't. You're probably familiar with the movement within the US, particularly the western US of ... Now, his name slipped my mind.

Karin Peter 59:34

Denver Snuffer?

Eric Rogers 59:35

Yeah, Denver Snuffer. So they do not refer to themselves as Snufferites, but the idea is, that they're renegotiating, in the current context, their religious tradition in ways that puts them at odds with the president of the LDS church today, Russell Nelson and caused them to lose their membership. So around fundamentalism that isn't polygamist around the belief that we're returning to what something I don't think exists, but to this pure Joseph Smith doctrine and belief and practice. So, so focused on seeing God having a personal manifestation of, of Jesus Christ, that's caused them to be marginalized and excluded and excommunicated from the mainstream LDS Church. But people have flocked to Snuffer. And, again, it's not even to Snuffer, it's to his ideas and the kinds of things that he's doing and, you know, whatever charismatic personality traits that he may have, and that seems to be so so I'm just struck by that and I think I knew that and we observe it. But it's like, we really haven't gotten past that. We're continuing to renegotiate with each new generation, our own religious tradition, and we and we will interpret our scripture, our doctrine and our history in ways that serve us now. And we might claim that this exactly the way it was back in first century, Christianity, or back in 1830, Mormonism, but I'm less and less convinced that that's even a thing or possible. Yeah. But as human beings as that's, that's what we do.

Karin Peter 1:01:28

Yeah. Some would say some would say Community of Christ excels at that. At adapting.

Eric Rogers 1:01:36

Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. So and, I mean, who are the members of Community of Christ that are leaders in the Salt Lake Valley today? Well, they're Brighamites, right? (Absolutely.) So they have renegotiate. And I think that there's a growing, growing interest in other options because people are dissatisfied, particularly a more liberal or progressive option. Because my tradition, current traditions, seems to step forward in some respects and backwards in others and when they step forward, they alienate the more conservative fundamentalist members. And when they step back, they alienate the more liberal or progressive it says, We've been more willing to excommunicate the more liberal or progressive and less willing to excommunicate or marginalize the more conservative. Yeah.

Karin Peter 1:02:28

Yeah. Which happens. I'm as I'm listening to you. Explain it that way. I'm thinking that happens in families that happens in you know, business institutions, it happens, because it's part of human nature,

Eric Rogers 1:02:41

Human nature. Yes.

Karin Peter 1:02:43

Yes. It's it's who and how we are. So is there...

Eric Rogers 1:02:46

one last little teaser and I (Okay), I won't elaborate. But in the 2000s, there was a chiropractor and leader of a sect called Baha'is Under the Provision of the Covenant that was led by Leland Jensen, who goes by Doc Jensen, who read senior Leroy Anderson's book about the Morrisites, and used the

Prophet Canaan, George Williams', revelations about Deer Lodge being the location of the second advent of Jesus Christ as confirmation and support for his calling as a prophet, and named the state prison which is at Deer Lodge, as Ezekiel's Temple and the location of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. So it's another thing that I had heard but relearned as I was preparing.

Karin Peter 1:03:43

And that just brings another level of amazement at the creativity of people's religious imagination, because that is just astounding. Although if I'm going to think about where would Jesus show up again, I'm not real fond of the Midwest. So I'm thinking Deer Lodge actually has a little bit more.

Eric Rogers 1:04:06

Like if I moved to Deer Lodge, it's not because that's where his Ezekial's Temple is. And that's where Christ will come. There are a lot of other reasons for me.

Karin Peter 1:04:13

Yes. It's a beautiful place. Beautiful.

Eric Rogers 1:04:16

I love independence, but...

Karin Peter 1:04:19

I know. I'm not a Midwesterner, I need those mountains. So you this is not a new topic for you, as you said, You've had a long kind of experience with dipping into these topics back and forth. But what from this particular story, the story of the Morrisites has really kind of stayed with you either as a learning kind of a key learning or just something you can't shake. Is there something that's really done that?

Eric Rogers 1:04:48

I think we've probably hit on this already, but I would say that it's the power of stories to shape our views, our attitudes our daily decisions and ultimately the course of our lives. So what are the stories that we're listening to? What are the stories that we're telling? Why are we telling them? It's the stories, those stories have such power to shape the direction we go and who we become?

Karin Peter 1:05:19

Well said. So what's next? I mean, next year in the Spring Lecture Series, when I email you again, what am I going to be emailing you about next year?

Eric Rogers 1:05:32

Well, I would I would really like to. I want to do more work on connecting the Morrisite Role of Membership with Susan Easton Black's Early Members of the Reorganization and chart out, so do some more kind of pick and shovel work to see where those ties are. I do this stuff because of personal interests. When I was 12, I moved from Jackson, Wyoming to Kalispell, Montana, seventh grade. My homeroom class. My homeroom teacher is Mr. Kendall. All I know about Mr. Kendall, and I don't even know how I found out about this is that he was RLDS. We never talked about me being a Latter Day Saint and him being RLDS. But guess what, one of the names that are on the Morrisite...

Karin Peter 1:06:23

Uh oh. Was it Kendall?

Eric Rogers 1:06:25

It's Kendall.

Karin Peter 1:06:26

Because they went to Deer Lodge and they missed the count.

Eric Rogers 1:06:31

So I would really like to, to explore and tell those stories, those other stories of the Morrisite to RLDS path.

Karin Peter 1:06:45

Wonderful. Well, I look forward to hearing some of that I especially love the ones that have connections to kind of this northern part of the West that we don't usually associate when we start talking about Mormon history, we tend to think, Utah, Arizona, Idaho, but it's much bigger than that. And, and I don't know, it has probably been done, but even the connections to like the platting of San Francisco by Samuel Brennan, and some of those things that we don't really explore. Well, any closing thoughts from our interview today before we wrap up our episode?

Eric Rogers 1:07:20

Um, yes. So I can't talk about the Morrisites without saying how grateful I am to C. LeRoy Anderson, who did an inestimable work to preserve records and tell the story of the Morrisites. He's a lapsed Latter Day Saint who I visited, he was. So I directed the Institute of Religion at the University of Montana for the LDS church. He he was retired when I was there, but he was an emeritus sociology professor at the University of Montana. So I've been in his home a number of times, and met, spent time with him, he has an amazing collection of materials. And anyway, you can't talk about the Morrisites, we don't know what we know about the more sites without LeRoy's work. So I would encourage anybody that's interested to buy his book, it's, I would buy the most recent edition, which is a 2010 publication called Joseph Morris and the Saga of the Morrisites and then in parentheses (Revisited.) So that's where we get the information about Leland, "Doc" Jansen, which wasn't in previous editions, and I was able to locate some sceptors that were used in the foreshadowing ceremony. Prior to the attack at Kington Fort in the church history museum. I photographed them and they made it into LeRoy's most recent publications. So Utah State University Press 2010. I would also just say how grateful I am to my friends in Community of Christ and Historic Sites Foundation for encouraging and supporting my research, and I've learned so much from you. And Karin, thank you for Cuppa Joe for the countless contributions that you make. And then probably finally, I would say, as co-chair of the program committee for John Whitmer, go to come to our conference in Texas, September 21 to 24th in Fredericksburg. The theme of the conference is Restoration Tales from Texas Dust and very much influenced by the Whitite movement. Mel Johnson will play a significant role in all of that including being one of our plenary speakers. So I hope you'll be able to to make it I know that's a long ways to go but I'm sure it will pay off.

Karin Peter 1:09:39

The long way to Fredericksburg. It is a lovely town in Texas. Well I want to thank you again. A big thanks to Eric Paul Rogers for joining us today. You're always such a wonderful visit. I forget that we're recording our conversation for Project Zion because it really is a fascinating conversation. So for our listeners, we encourage encourage you to view this lecture you can always find the historic sites, lectures on their website, [Historicsitesfoundation.org](https://www.historicsitesfoundation.org) where they are archived, the ones from both winter 2022 and spring 2023 series. And again, this is Cuppa Joe part of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter. Thanks for listening