

# Cuppa Joe | Historic Sites Foundation Fall Lecture Series | Mr. Smith Goes to Salt Lake City | Christin Mackay

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Fred M Smith, Ruth Smith, Utah, polygamy, cousins, historic sites, Joseph Smith III, Zion, Reed Smoot, Joseph Fielding Smith

## SPEAKERS

Karin Peter, Christin Mackay

### **Karin Peter** 00:29

Welcome to Cuppa Joe, where we explore restoration history. And I'm your host Karin Peter, and I'm here with Christin Mackay. Now here at Cuppa Joe we partner with Historic Sites Foundation to interview the presenters from their Spring and Fall Winter lecture series. So, our guest today, Christin Mackay, has done that very thing. She has lectured in the Fall/Winter Historic Sites Foundation lecture series. Christin is the director of the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois, and she is a past president of John Whitmer Historical Association. She's published in, let's see, *Ancient Order of Things: Essays on Mormon Temple* in Signature Books, 2019. And along with her husband, Lach, who has been a frequent guest here on Project Zion Podcast, so, many of you have heard him. He and Christin won the JWHA Best Article Award for "A Time of Transition: the Kirtland Temple 1838-1880," featured in the JWHA Journal, Volume 18, 1998. Now, since she was a college student, Christin has lived on the restoration trail from Lamoni, Iowa, where she graduated from Graceland University with a BA in History to Kirtland, Ohio and Kirtland Temple, to Nauvoo, Illinois, and the Joseph Smith Historic Site. And I'm excited about that, and I'm hoping that we can persuade her to do a podcast episode about living on the restoration trail from a woman's perspective. I think that would be fascinating. So, with all of that background, welcome, Christin.

### **Christin Mackay** 02:07

Thanks, Karin.

### **Karin Peter** 02:09

So, your contribution to the Historic Sites Foundation lecture series, this time around is titled "Mr. Smith Goes to Salt Lake City: Fred M. in Utah 1904 to 1906." And I love that title because of the play on the title of the movie. Mr. Smith Goes to Washington. The average guy goes to Washington DC, and we talked earlier that was Jimmy Stewart. And so, Mr. Smith now goes to Salt Lake City. And from your lecture description, we read that in 1904 FM Smith accepted an invitation from President Joseph F. Smith, his cousin, as I remember to attend a family reunion in Salt Lake City, honoring the 104th anniversary of Hyrum Smith's birth. While becoming acquainted with his Utah cousins, Fred M was

invited to speak at the tabernacle. And the next year, Fred M. took his wife Ruth and their young daughter Alice, and they moved to Salt Lake City to live among the Latter Day Saints...which sounds a lot like moving to the Amazon to live among the natives who just had a little bit of that feel to there ... to live among the Latter Day Saints from 1905 in May until March of 1906. About a year. Ruth called her time in Utah. I love this quote, "various and curious." And while spending time with cousins by day, Fred studied in the evening, how best to convince them that the Josephites, his tradition of the restoration were the "True Church," and much of the drama of Fred's visit, and I can imagine there was drama with that going on, It played out in the RLDS favorite *Salt Lake Tribune*, the newspaper in Salt Lake that kind of leaned toward RLDS and LDS *Deseret News*, the church owned newspaper and publication. So, between Fred and his cousin Joseph Fielding Smith. So, with all of that drama there, which really, probably is a movie in the making, why this Christin? Why did you decide on this topic?

**Christin Mackay** 04:16

Well, I was president of the John Whitmer Historical Association in 2022. And as part of that role, I had to present a research paper at the Presidential banquet. I knew the audience would be about half Community of Christ and half Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, with a few people sprinkled in who are just interested in restoration history, and I'm sure the audience expected me to speak on Nauvoo, where I currently live or Kirtland since the last time I had been published, it was about Kirtland Temple, but I chose Fred M. to appeal to the Community of Christ audience and his first trip to Salt Lake to appeal to the Mormons.

**Karin Peter** 04:55

Ah, so, you knew your audience (I try) as best you could. So, when you after you had chosen your topic, so, you've lived along the restoration trail the historic sites, but you yourself have not lived in Salt Lake City. Have you visited Salt Lake City?

**Christin Mackay** 05:16

Yeah, we I've been out there a few times. I think probably the first time was maybe 15 years ago or so, And so, it was interesting, you know, reading about Fred's first experience going out there. We visited the same places, basically, you know, Temple Square and the tabernacle where I was not asked to speak.

**Karin Peter** 05:39

I wasn't either when I visited so, you know, solidarity.

**Christin Mackay** 05:42

But you know, visiting all those different sites, their Visitor Center, which was called the Information Bureau back in Fred's day, and also visiting the Beehive House, which was the home that Brigham Young built for his family when he was there. And so, Joseph F. Smith is living in the Beehive House. Fred gets to stay there. I think actually Lach thought that was the coolest part of the whole story that Fred had gotten to stay there.

**Karin Peter** 06:09

I remember, the Beehive House. It was really interesting. (Yeah.) Okay, so, as you began to explore this topic, what did you decide were like the most important aspects you wanted to be sure to include?

**Christin Mackay** 06:24

I wanted to show the personal side of Fred. In Community of Christ, what pops to mind when you say President Frederick M. Smith is Supreme Directional Control, which briefly was a policy change presented by Fred and the Joint Council in 1924, almost 100 years ago. Fred M. wanted to be able to build Zion, so, the Auditorium the Sanitarium hospital without the approval of the Council, or the General Conference. And that led to a split in the church, which Fred M. even offers his resignation at one point, which is not accepted. But the Presiding Bishopric did resign, as did an apostle at the time, and it was all highly controversial. And it's basically with the onset of the Great Depression when the church was forced into austerity measures. And the Bishopric regained oversight of the finances. So, seeing Fred M's approached with Supreme Directional Control. I wanted to take a look back at Fred before he was church President while his father is still alive, and see what he was like. And trips to Salt Lake that his father and his uncles, Alex and David, had undertaken before him, were very painful experiences. David comes back, you know, he's never known his father. And he comes back and wonders why Emma had lied to him about his father and polygamy. Joseph and Alex knew their father, you know, as little boys. And they would have had childhood friends out in Utah. And so, I think they better understand why the Mormons tend to treat them inhospitably. And it's a fascinating dynamic to have first cousins as presidents of the two churches who would have been close family at one time, but are now bitterly divided over religion and succession to that religion. And I wanted to show Fred's firsthand experience with his cousins and how he thought he could convince them and their followers that they were in the wrong church. Something I don't mention in the paper, but included in the accompanying PowerPoint was to show the journal account of the day before Fred left for Utah. He performed his first baptism. He was a member of the First Presidency at this point, but yet he hadn't baptized anybody yet. And I thought that was interesting

**Karin Peter** 08:40

A fabulous fact, Christin, to toss in there. I mean, that just rattles my brain is how could that possibly be right?

**Christin Mackay** 08:48

And just a few years before when he and Ruth headed out on their honeymoon, which, of course, they went to a church reunion for that, where he preaches his first sermon. He had just been ordained an Elder, you know, not long before they were married. So, Fred is very young in his church work, when he experiences Utah for the first time, and yet has this strong conviction already that his way is the right way.

**Karin Peter** 09:10

Yes, I think you and I chatted before and I said, I see that sometimes in the missionaries that come around visiting, usually, when they find out who we are, because we always invite them in and we have a nice chat, and they leave and that's great. But every once in a while, I'll get one that you can tell is just fresh out of missionary training and can't wait to convince me that I'm wrong. And I kind of sensed that Fred M had that same kind of zeal going on.

**Christin Mackay** 09:40

That idealism, and yes, zeal is a great word for that.

**Karin Peter** 09:44

Absolutely. Well, you mentioned that you wanted to kind of share about Fred and before the First Presidency because, you're right, when you talk about Fred and we do go to this kind of what we view now in hindsight, an authoritarian grab for control with Supreme Directional Control and seen as a more rigid figure, I think. (Yes.) And so, this does give us an opportunity to see him a little bit before that. So, what were some of the initial challenges to telling that part of Fred M's story, the before the First Presidency part?

**Christin Mackay** 10:22

Well, I wanted to tell a balanced story. I had Fred M's journals and articles from the *Herald*. And Ruth Smith wrote a book called Concerning the Prophet in the 1920s, I think trying to humanize Fred for church members, and the public. To share the Mormon side of it, I used online resources at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints church history library. And, some of the materials I used like Angus Canon's affidavit about his visit with Joseph and Fred required special permission to access which the library was very gracious in granting. I also used Utah digital newspapers to see what was happening in the press at that time in Utah. The interactions with the press become pretty ugly. So, I did leave out a whole discussion on tithing. At that time, the RLDS church was publishing the name of every tithe payer in the *Herald*, as well as the budget. In church leaders were to account for every penny that they spent, and they were not wealthy men. We were very transparent, then as we strive to be now. The Mormons were not and Fred saw this as a weakness. So, to this day, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints keeps their finances confidential from their membership and the public. And I think Fred was really hoping that since we had the early church in common with each other, we would care about the same things like tithing, like succession. But on that first visit to the family reunion, it was eye opening to see how different the churches were from each other. And he was horrified to learn that even though the public practice of polygamy had been discontinued, several years before, young people who had probably grown up in polygamous families, were still okay with the idea of it. So, when Fred, Ruth and Alice go out to live in Utah, the next year, his determination is stronger. He's had time to plan how he'll convince the LDS members that they're in the wrong church. And at first, his cousins, and even Senator Reed Smoot are entertaining and interacting with Fred and Ruth, but the relationships do become strained at times over the arguing in the press.

**Karin Peter** 12:30

So, let's talk a little bit more about the newspaper, the back and forth, what's happening there in the press. Can you track down who's feeding the information, if you will? Do you have any of that? Was any of that in your research?

**Christin Mackay** 12:50

So, one of the controversial things that plays out in the paper in the summer. So, they've been there for about a month. Fred writes into the Salt Lake Tribune about the Joseph Smith, Jr. Birthplace Memorial that the Mormons are announcing the same day in the *Deseret News*. So, the idea is that the Mormons

are going to build a monument out at Sharon, Vermont, memorializing where Joseph Smith Jr. was born. And Fred is angry from a family member standpoint, you know, this is his grandfather's birthplace being marked. Joseph III is also livid about it. And they're so, worried that Joseph Jr. is going to be associated with polygamy by the Mormons putting up this monument and basically laying claim to him. So, he writes all this into the paper. But the funny part is, you know, the announcement is made that day. How does Fred even know that this announcement is going to be made? And we find out later that maybe within the next week, Fred goes to visit Joseph Fielding Smith, his cousin, and asked him What do you think some of the article? So, I think probably Joseph Fielding had leaked the information to Fred, because the plans were announced or presented to the First Presidency, maybe two weeks before it made it into the papers. So, someone knew something somewhere. So, you've got these cousins battling it out in the papers, but at the same time, you know, sitting down with each other to also argue about it.

**Karin Peter 12:56**

Isn't that something like the layers of relationship, right? And we all have families. We all know how families function. But there's some real correlation to what is happening today in our current political climate and our social friends. Where, you know, on Facebook, people are just at each other's throats and often family members and yet you know, right now we're facing the holidays and they'll be sitting at the same table. So, yeah, It's complicated. Absolutely. And when Fred initially goes out, he does an interview with the Salt Lake Tribune, where he lays out kind of his plan, you know, to visit with our current church members and to present our ideas and beliefs to the Utah cousins out there, but his primary purpose is to save the good in Mormonism. He wants to clear Joseph Jr's name. He wants the people in Utah to know that the RLDS church is the true Church, and we are a lot of law-abiding citizens, and we are ready to welcome them in if they will only choose us so. So, I want to touch on a comment there, "law abiding citizens," talk a little bit more about that, and about morality in Utah.

**Christin Mackay 15:45**

So, polygamy is illegal at this point. And so, one of our tenants is that we've never practiced polygamy. So, we've always remained law-abiding citizens, we've never broken the law of the land, which would have been practicing polygamy.

**Karin Peter 16:01**

So, at that time, when Fred went out there in 1904-1905 that wasn't too long after ... The Manifesto of 1890. And, well, even Joseph F Smith was hiding for a time, because he was a polygamist. Yeah, and so, even after the Manifesto, church leaders were still polygamists. They just found ways to go under the radar, so to speak of the federal government. (Yeah.) And driven by federal politics and statehood, and all of the other things that went on in a geopolitical kind of realm in Utah and Deseret. I just wanted to give an offer quick sidenote, I, when I visited the Beehive House and toured it, we had a lovely missionary sister who took us through. And she asked if we had any questions, our group, and somebody asked about polygamy when she said, this is where as many of his wives lived, and she goes, "Oh, polygamy. They won't let us do that anymore." And then she went on. And that had to be my top one of my top five weird moments of my visit to Salt Lake, was this 16 or 17 year old girl going, "Oh, polygamy? They won't let us do that anymore." Alrighty, then. So we, and I share that because if you grew up RLDS, or now Community of Christ, maybe less so, in Community Christ, but very much

RLDS, you grew up with the, "We were not polygamists." That was our standard that we bore, and were horrified by it. And this young girl's response to me showed me, you know, a different perspective about how someone can grow up and not be horrified by that. So, it was really an interesting moment for me to kind of dissect my own reaction about that. So, we have the cousins. There were more than just Joseph Fielding and his family. There were other cousins out there in Salt Lake that Fred and Ruth would have encountered and met with. Were there other pieces of that that you found interesting, that you wanted to share with us that's in your lecture. Well, one of the lighter moments in the paper comes from Ruth and her account of a picnic on Lake Utah, with the Smith cousins and the Smoots. It was a beautiful day until on the return trip across the lake, a squall came up on their boats. And she said, the fury of the ocean itself is not more sudden nor treacherous than when the wind whips up out of nowhere and the great green waves come smashing across the helpless prow. And she began to feel seasick and Senator Smoot, seeing her in distress reached over and picked up Alice and placed her firmly between his knees while the boat continued to struggle. And Ruth goes on to say that even years later, when she pictured Senator Smoot working in Washington, she always remembered how he had once protected her child when she was too ill and too frightened to know whether she was beside me. And incidentally, Fred M and Joseph Fielding had been fishing from a dingy tied to the larger boat during the storm. With the larger boat hobbled, Ruth had instructed the captain to cut her husband and his cousin loose, leaving them to get to shore on their own. So, Fred and Joseph Fielding never let her forget she had cut them loose in the middle of the storm, but she had every confidence they could row themselves back to shore. And that was a nice lighthearted moment I thought, you know. Here they are out for a nice picnic together. Ruth is an interesting woman. We have a podcast but when he eaten did on her and so, I encourage our listeners to make sure to check that out. Good for her. Although that brings up again what we talked about earlier. They've been having this war in the newspapers. You know, they argue back and forth, and yet the two of them are out there in the dinghy together. (Right.) Everybody else is on the main boat. It's like, it's just crazy. So, you mentioned Reed Smoot again. So, tell our listeners who, who Reed Smoot was because he's kind of like 19, early 1900 version of Mitt Romney. Yeah. Reed Smoot was an apostle in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and was elected by the state legislature to be a senator from Utah. And the congressional Smoot hearings lasted from 1904 to 1907. At the heart of the matter was the issue of polygamy, which had been officially discontinued as a practice in the church with the Manifesto in 1890. However, polygamy was still privately being practiced post 1890, and by prominent church leaders, such as their church president. Although Smoot was a monogamous himself, congressional leaders were concerned that Senator Smoot would be in conflict with Apostle Smoot. And their religion was basically still being seen as breaking the law by continuing the practice of polygamy. But in the end, he's allowed to stay. So, a lot of kerfuffle, and (right) there is went. Just more political drama. Right? So, yeah, absolutely. And not that much different from when JFK ran, and people were worried that he would, he would care about what the Pope said more than what the Constitution said, you know, the argument in the in the 60s as well. All right, religion and politics are always an interesting combination, as we know, from our current climate. So, I wanted to just go back just one more time before we kind of move into the next part of our conversation. But you talked about, Ruth wanted to really humanize her husband to the church audience, because well, for a lot of reasons that's why she wrote her book. But what I'm interested in is, in a lot of the recordings that I've done with Wendy, about the wives of Joseph Smith III, his three successive wives, she did a lot of sharing from his journals and letters home. And he comes across as just so personable with this loving vocabulary and way of seeing the world. And he has a wonderful



sense of humor and wit, and he's just delightful in his letters, and obviously loves his family very, very much. And obviously loved his first wife, who passed away young, his second wife, who had a tragic accident, and his third wife, he just seemed to have this boundless sense of compassion and love. And then you contrast that with our understanding of Fred M. and it's like, Oh, ouch. What did you find about Fred M. that kind of might illustrate a side of him more to what we see in his father. Well, one thing I haven't mentioned before is that we have a recently discovered letter of Joseph III's that he writes to Fred M. of, after Bertha's death, and he's so lonely, and he wants to find love again. And he knows that the church members would have something to say about that, but he just wants love again. And I think it's fascinating that he's confiding this in Fred, right? This sweet Father-Son reaction and interaction and Joseph III is very poetic in his words, I actually should have brought that up. I'm not sure where it's at the moment. But it's just the sweetest letter. And so, I think that kind of shows their close relationship that he's able to confide in him. And I think it's maybe a year later that he meets Ada, and they get married and so, kind of a happy ending that way, but it was interesting to see the depth of his loss there as well. So, yeah, so, that was an interesting tidbit. So, you can learn more about the wives again, from Project Zion Podcast episodes on each of them. But as I remember, Ada was much younger, but in her responses to the letters, she loved him just as much as (Yes), as he loved her. It was just all three love stories were just beautiful. Okay, so, move away from that kind of thinking about Fred M. and that. I wanted to ask you, as you were preparing your lecture, did you learn anything new or surprising or gain maybe a new insight about something that you might be able to share with us? Well, as a historian, it's always interesting to examine someone's life and the circumstances that influenced it as a young boy. Fred knew that he was likely to succeed his father and he carried the weight of that destiny. And, I think that also, informs how he behaves in the future, right? So, Joseph III also, poured what he had into Fred, but he knew that it was also, important that Fred have his own interests and outlets. One of the fun things I found in Fred's receipt books was that he really enjoyed soda and oranges. Nearly every day, he's having a soda sometimes with Alice. In Ruth's book, I found that Ruth and Fred were thrilled that they had daughters. This isn't in the paper, but when Ruth was expecting their younger daughter, Lois, she was apparently due around the time of a general conference, Fred wanted to stay home with Ruth in case she went into labor. But the church expected Fred to be at the conference with the idea that an announcement could be made, that she'd gone into labor or the baby had been born and Fred and Ruth knew that many in the church, were hoping the baby would be a boy. And they were so, happy that by having daughters, that pressure would be off of them to take on a church leadership role. But of course, what they perhaps didn't take into account was that years later, Alice would be often told that she should have been a boy. Yeah, yeah. That's terrible. That's a terrible image of what her life was like. She certainly right um, had the pressure and that that someday it would be his responsibility, but to burden a young woman with that kind of identity. Yeah, really hard. Sometimes we forget, as church people.

**Christin Mackay** 26:29

Right, right.

**Karin Peter** 26:30

Everybody's a person, everybody has feelings. So, Fred, what about the experience of Fred and whether it's his experience in Utah, or just his experience in general, and his contribution to the church in general, What do you think about this figure and his experiences still kind of reside in Community of

Christ? What aspects of Fred M's DNA, his emotional or personal DNA do we still see exhibited in the church?

**Christin Mackay 27:04**

I think that beyond the obvious, like the structure of the auditorium, and if you were a church member, living in Independence, born in a certain period of time, it's likely you were born at the San. You know, I know I have family members that were born there. I think the single biggest concept that Fred championed was building Zion, gathering to Independence building the auditorium, being involved in social programs, were all a part of Fred's vision for what the church could and should be. And we are still in the mode of building Zion through our Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives. You know, I think his legacy is very much still alive.

**Karin Peter 27:40**

Absolutely, we might not use the word because of its political overload. But it still is very much our understanding of community or even what we kind of refer to now as the reign of Christ. So, yes, very much so. And we forget about that, that whole, he was part of that building generation. And that was, that was a marvelous gift to the church. So, how has your own study of FM Smith's experience and perhaps the study of church history in general, how has that informed your discipleship, you Christin Mackay? How has your study, and maybe even study of Fred here for this lecture informed you as a disciple?

**Christin Mackay 28:24**

Well, Fred was born 100 years before I was, so I feel like we have that in common, that 100-year difference. Reading about his first visits to Utah, you know, I definitely thought about my own experience going to those same places. And also, you know, he talks about the struggling RLDS church congregation there that's in Salt Lake, which I can't imagine at that time trying to be RLDS in Salt Lake. What a struggle that would have been, because I know that it's a challenge now, even. You know, even though we have a healthy congregation going there, but at that time, you know, Ruth had to take over the Sunday school basically, and get that all in line. I think Fred was regularly speaking there, because they said, you know, the people were just worn out, probably with what they were facing, culturally and professionally, in trying to be RLDS in Salt Lake. And I think Fred M is just one example of someone who, like many others in church history, with the help of the church community achieved building Zion in the name of Christ, and His experience just has a larger spotlight on it. When I think of the day-to-day example, I think of discipleship, and I think the work that members put in on their congregations and their campgrounds, and at their campgrounds they may only visit a few times a year, but they remember their grandparents building the campgrounds are doing the same upkeep and that's building Zion and working at historic sites. I've seen lives changed by a chance visit or encounter there. The threads that tie us together throughout church history reach throughout the world. I've sat in homes in Australia and Denmark that proudly display photos of Kirtland Temple and the Independence Temple. And those folks might never have the opportunity to visit those places, but they are important to their story and spiritual life. It's easy to not realize that church history is being made every day in the life of the church. We can find commonalities in early church stories from Kirtland and Nauvoo and Lamoni. And we can see and use those 20th century buildings like the Auditorium and the Temple and Independence. And we can meet and worship together, and our congregations and our homes, and our



campgrounds, all of those things are still building Zion. So, I think that's been the biggest takeaway from this paper for me. We're still doing it.

**Karin Peter** 30:51

Yeah, yeah, I might look different. But it's still what our commitment is all about in Community of Christ. Otherwise, we don't need the word community. (Right. Right.) So, before we wrap up our conversation here, Christin, I just wanted to give you the opportunity if you have any closing thoughts. I know, in a series I did with Lach, he always had some odd little anecdote at the end that he saved. Do you have a comment, or maybe a particular incident you want to share with us before we close?

**Christin Mackay** 31:22

I just hope that I've been able to provide a glimpse at what it looks like to be a young adult in the church in the earliest 20th century. And perhaps to give you more insight into Fred and before he had to take on the mantle of the church presidency. One of the things I found interesting was, I was surprised to find that once Fred and Ruth and Alice returned to Lamoni and attend the next general conference, which was within weeks of their return, Joseph Smith, the third presents what becomes section 127 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which calls Fred M to be the next church president, once Joseph III passes away. And of particular interest, there's a paragraph in there that talks about how important it is to continue to labor in Utah for the church. It's the only time Utah is mentioned in the Doctrine and Covenants. So, you know, here the mantle was kind of being passed to Fred M, you know, officially, for the future. And the work in Utah makes it into Scripture.

**Karin Peter** 32:31

That's interesting. I didn't realize that. Okay, I'm gonna have to go back and look at that, because I'm thinking, Oh, how interesting. And then I'm thinking, Oh, what a burden. (Right, right.) Oh, my goodness. Yeah. Because it didn't have the greatest experiences. All right. Well, we've come a long way since section 127. So, we have lots of other things, to focus on missionally, as well. But I do want to thank you, Christin, for joining us today and maybe humanizing in your own way, Fred M a little bit more for us and introducing us to Ruth as well. So, if you would like to, listener, contact Christin, you can do so, and you can email her at C Mackay, that's cmackay@cofchrist.org. And you can go and view this entire lecture, which I understand has PowerPoint slides and photos and that kind of thing. Excellent. You can see all of that, and the other lectures from the fall winter series for 2023 at the [historicsitesfoundation.org](https://historicsitesfoundation.org) website, so, we encourage you to do that. And of course, go to Project Zion Podcast website and check out all the other podcasts about Fred M. And Ruth. So, for Project Zion Podcast, and Cuppa Joe, I'm Karin Peter. I've been here with my guest Christin Mackay, who hopefully will return again. Thank you so, much for listening.