

March 24, 1947

Mr. Frederick B. Tolles, Librarian
Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Tolles:

In reply to your letter of March 21st, I have very little of a definitive nature to report. Mr. Bennett, the representative of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, discussed the Maryland micro-film problem with me some months ago.

We had filmed almost everything at the Hall of Records in the course of the war and with the cooperation of the Library of Congress we had made three positive prints of our negative; one for the Library of Congress, one for the Huntington Library and one for the Public Record Office. Therefore, I was not very much interested in having the Mormons work on the records actually at the Hall of Records. However, they wished to do county records through 1850 and they agreed to deposit a positive at the Hall of Records. Under these circumstances I was willing to let them have another positive copy of the materials already filmed. It was not practical for us to do the work in the counties because we do not have the portable equipment necessary. Now I should like to answer your specific questions.

1. I have no opinion about the kind of film work which the Society does. So little has been done so far at the Hall of Records that no real appraisal is possible. I suggest that you write to Mr. Van Schreeven, at the State Library in Richmond, or to Mr. Eddy, who is Acting Archivist at the North Carolina Historical Commission in Raleigh. The filming has gone a good deal further along in both Virginia and North Carolina.

2. Your question about the motive of such a vast project was a very natural one. I have no information about this except what Bennett and Koehler told me. The Church is making every effort to work out the genealogy of all of its living members. Once this is accomplished by the rules of the Mormon Church the names of these ancestors may be presented and baptized. In this way, as I understand it — and I am no theologian — these ancestors are translated into heaven. The date 1850 is picked because that was about the year that Joseph Smith began his activities. Presumably people who died before that time are innocents in the sense that they could not know the truth and therefore will be judged on the merits of each individual case.

You may recall that there is something similar to this in the Orthodox Christian doctrine in the wracking of hell. Of course the Hall of Records is purely a secular institution and I am in a position to ignore the

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religious motives behind any project. I can see that you might have a good deal of explaining to do. My thought, and that of the Governor and the other members of the Hall of Records Commission, was that the State of Maryland would benefit enormously, whatever the motive.

You are struck by the amount of money that is being spent. My answer to that is that the Mormon Church is enormously wealthy and an expenditure of such a sum is relatively trivial.

Question 3 involves certain principles about which I have no fixed ideas. I have a written agreement with Mr. Bennett that no copies will be made from those deposited in Salt Lake City. My understanding is that they make a master negative, which remains in their vaults, and a positive which is used in the Search Room. Of course there is no way in the world to prevent anyone who wants to from sitting before a microfilm reader and copying the whole text but we can't stop that at the Hall of Records and I don't suppose that you can. Some institutions examine the notes of researchers. This has always been true in Europe and the procedure has been followed in South Africa, India and other archival institutions which naturally fall into the European tradition. I have been opposed to that at the Hall of Records because it creates more ill will and costs more in administration than it is worth. Besides, anyone who really wanted to make copies and take them away could hide these copies on his person. After all, you cannot search students.

My second thought is that perhaps we should be willing to permit as many copies as are desired. Ultimately this would mean that your institution and mine would not function as a center of studies. Students would go to the large and rich establishments which would have in their vaults all of the records of the smaller and poorer institutions. I think that this would be unfortunate for us but I can see no way to prevent it.

I regret that I have not been able to give you categorical answers but perhaps none are yet possible in something as new as archival procedures.

If I can be of any further help, please feel free to call on me.

Very sincerely yours,

Morris L. Radoff,
Archivist.

MLR/rdb