



America's Witness for Christ

The Hill Cumorah Pageant, 1917–2019 — a century of faith, testimony, and sacred memory on hallowed ground in Palmyra, New York.

The Sacred Hill



Ancient Record, Modern Witness

In the Book of Mormon, **Mormon** names Cumorah as the site of the Nephite nation's final battle and the place where he hid sacred records — all except the plates he entrusted to his son Moroni (Mormon 6:4–6).

Moroni would later inscribe his solitary witness on those same plates, marking Cumorah as a place of **destruction, preservation, and divine continuity**.

An illustration of a stone box, likely the one containing the golden plates, resting on a grassy hill. The box is made of grey stones and has its lid open, revealing a dark interior. The hill is green with some brown patches of earth around the box. In the background, there are rolling green hills, a few evergreen trees, and a light blue sky with a few white clouds.

Joseph Smith and the Angel Moroni

On September 21, 1823, the angel Moroni visited Joseph Smith and told him of an ancient record buried in a nearby hill. Joseph later wrote that he *knew the place the instant he arrived* — the vision had been so distinct.

On the west side of the hill, beneath a large stone, he found the gold plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate, sealed in a stone box. This sacred event anchored the Pageant's power to its very landscape.

Acquiring the Hill



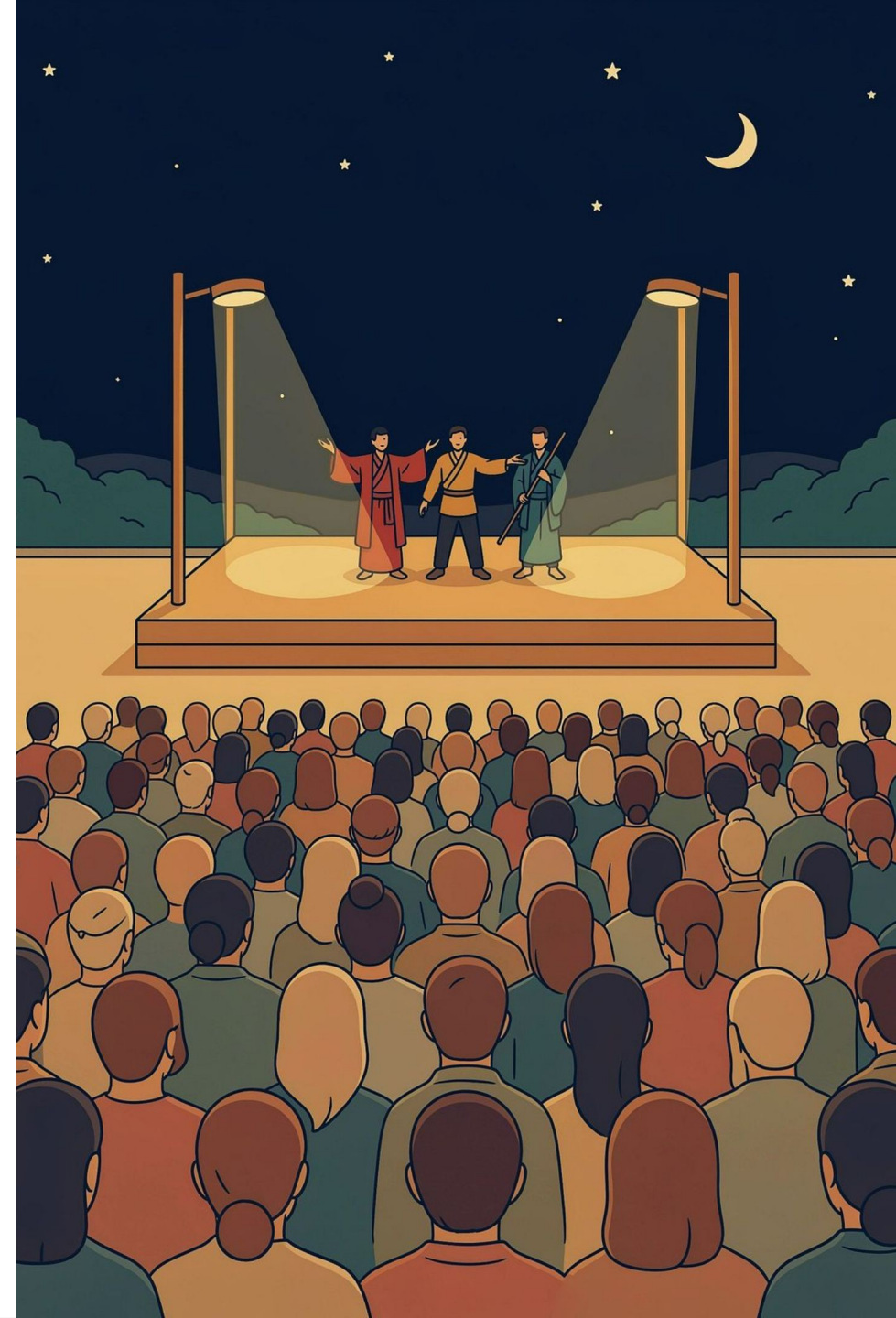
At the April 1928 general conference, Elder Anthony W. Ivins thanked God that the Hill Cumorah had come into the Church's possession in a way that seemed **entirely providential**. Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley had declared years earlier: *"When the Lord wants us to get possession of that Hill, the way will be opened up."*

Harold I. Hansen: Father of the Pageant

When Elder Harold I. Hansen arrived at the Eastern States Mission in 1937, a fragile pageant was already underway — fifty missionaries assigned, but the production struggling. Actors couldn't be heard. Lighting came from automobile headlights. Opening night left Hansen wondering if this was truly his calling.

When I saw the audience, there were over 13,000 people there... I saw things happen on that hill that were never touched by any of us there.

Once Hansen took the director's chair, the difference was immediate. Lines were clear, the script fully dramatized, and the spiritual message made intelligible to thousands.



A Missionary Tool Without Equal

15K

1937 Attendance

Only ~1,000 were Church members

18K

Opening Night 1939

Most attendees were not Latter-day
Saints

600+

Cast Members

Volunteers at the Pageant's height

"America's Witness for Christ"

This title, earned through decades of outreach, fit both the Pageant's script and its public mission. Missionaries found that even **parking cars for ten thousand visitors** created natural opportunities for gospel conversations.

In 1953, with the Korean War draft reducing available missionaries, Hansen proposed bringing **self-funded volunteers from the West**. Participants lived missionary standards — mission dress, companions, daily devotion — and many recalled it as a "mini-mission."

Sacrifice, Revision, and Spiritual Witness

Musical Score — 1954

Crawford Gates composed an original score, recorded with the Utah Symphony and three BYU choruses. When sessions fell behind, Gates prayed for a miracle — and the work came together in time.

New Script — 1988

Orson Scott Card rewrote the script so nonmembers could follow the story more easily. Gates composed a new score to match. Every revision served one purpose: to better testify of Jesus Christ and His restored gospel.

Rain and Providence

When Elder Marion G. Romney prayed over a rain-threatened performance, Hansen felt the confirming witness to proceed. The rain stopped as the lights came on — and returned only after the audience had gone.

Newspapers tracked the pattern so closely that Hansen later admitted he sometimes hoped the torrents would come — just so the burden of deciding would lift from his shoulders.

Lives Changed by the Hill

The strongest evidence for the Pageant's influence is found in the people it touched.

“

"After participating, I could never go back to what I had been before and be happy."

— *Pageant cast member, 1974*

“

"The Pageant was actually the gospel of Jesus Christ to me."

— *Young sister participant*

”

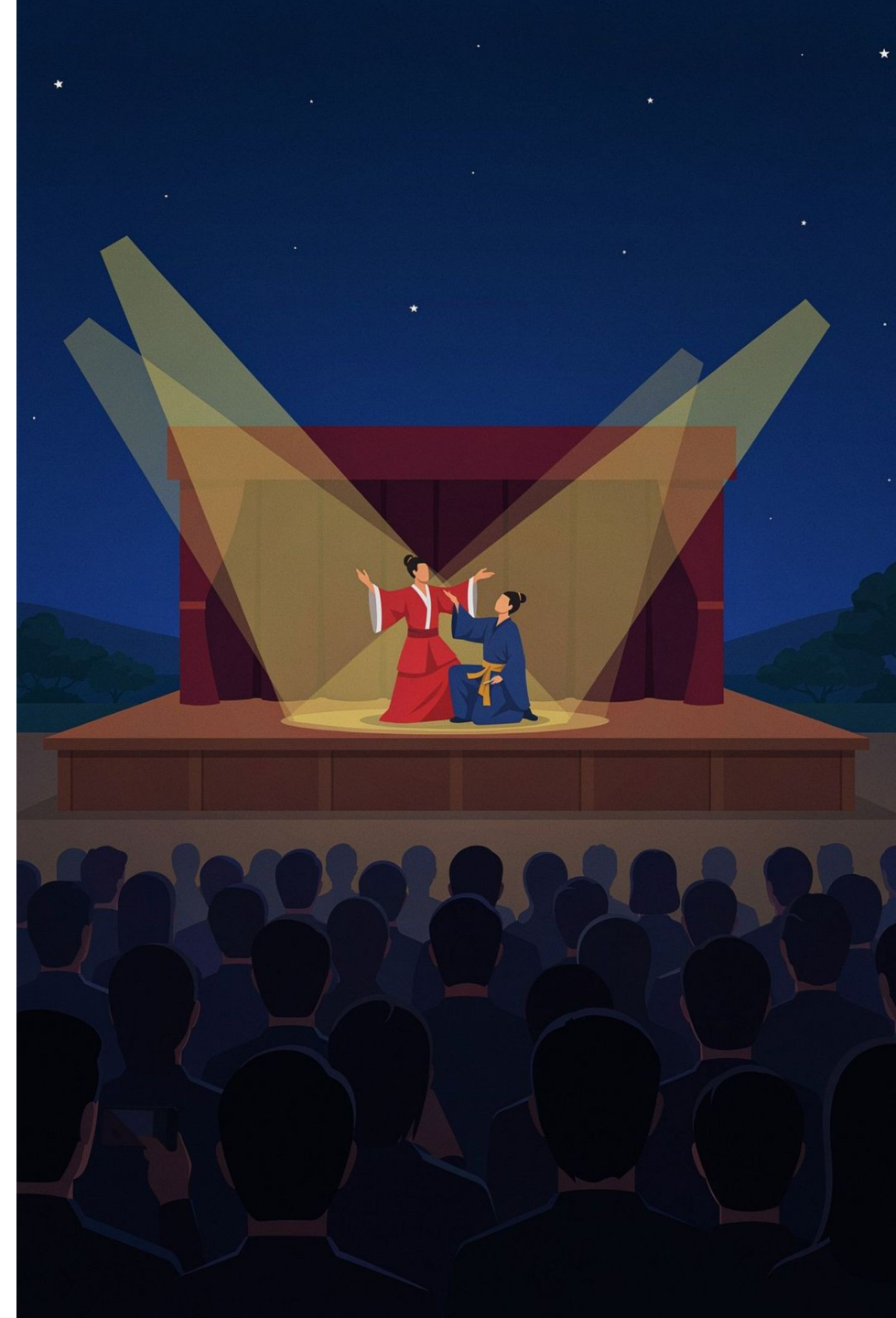
“

"It was the push I needed to join the Church."

— *Audience member*

”

Cast members connected the experience to decisions to serve full missions, attend BYU, and know Christ more deeply. President Thomas S. Monson noted that millions visited the hill — many came curious, and **left with their souls touched by the Lord.**



The End of an Era



A Faithful Conclusion — 2019

After 82 years of live productions, Church leaders made the difficult decision to discontinue the Pageant following its final performance in 2019.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson explained: in a worldwide Church, most members would never visit Palmyra. Ongoing costs for maintenance, security, safety upgrades, and operations had grown to **several million dollars annually**.

The decision was not a denial of the Pageant's spiritual value — it was a recognition that a rapidly growing global Church must create formative experiences **suited to each generation, in their own time and place**.

A Memorial That Endures

The Hill Cumorah Pageant will endure as a **memorial of Christ's restored gospel** — evidence that sacred memory can move people toward testimony, service, and conversion.

Preserved on Film

The 2019 final production is available on the Church website for future generations.

Living Legacy

Thousands who performed, served, and watched carry its witness in their faith.

Sacred Ground

The Hill Cumorah remains hallowed — a place where heaven touched earth and testimony was born.

