

Lynn Hilton and Jerusalem Studies, Jerusalem Center

Extracted from a 2007 BYU Studies article by Kahlile B. Mehr on a broader topic

<https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/volume-8-number-1-2007/brigham-young-university-and-jerusalem-semester-abroad-1931-1968>

Focused more information about Lynn Hilton and condensed the information somewhat.

In summary:

A Semester Abroad program harkens back to 1931 when BYU professors and staff studied Hebrew in Israel and came into contact with prominent Israelis.

Individual professors who studied Hebrew in language schools became acquainted with Israel, and imbibed its biblical heritage.

At several points in the previous decades, the move toward BYU Jerusalem was spurred by the passion of **Lynn Hilton**. Lynn is married to long time B'nai Shalom member and former officer Nancy Goodstein Hilton.

This extract summarizes key moments and scholars in the movement toward studies in Israel, involving Lynn Hilton in many key steps.



Lynn Hilton greeting a good friend at a B'nai Shalom Gathering

Beginnings

Sidney B. Sperry was the first BYU professor to study in Jerusalem and inspired many BYU scholars to focus their teaching on Christian origins in the land of the Savior's mortal ministry.

Elder John A. Widtsoe, president of the European Mission, established a mission and blessed the land, the fourth Apostle to do so since Elder Orson Hyde. The mission headquarters was located in Haifa from 1933 to 1935, then moved to Beirut, Lebanon. The mission closed in 1939 with the advent of the war, but it reopened from 1947 to 1951.

In August 1945, Eldin Ricks toured the holy land while in the Army. In 1949 BYU employed Ricks and Professor Sidney Sperry asked him to help promote interest in tours. The person writing letters of appointment to Sperry and Ricks was **Lynn M. Hilton**.

The first tour involved sixty-one days steaming to Europe, traversing the continent, and flying to Egypt and Israel, returning homeward through England and Scotland. In reality, it was a European tour with a Holy Land segment.

After the tour, in 1956, Ricks doctoral studies included three months of Hebrew language study in Jerusalem.

President David O. McKay, passing through Chicago to New York, personally offered **Lynn M. Hilton** employment at BYU.

Lynn Hilton's Passion

Lynn Hilton served as a BYU administrator for twelve years, from 1953 to 1959 at the main campus. From 1959 to 1964 Hilton was the founding director of the BYU Center in Salt Lake City. He was

“young, ambitious, full of ideas, and moved the work along rapidly.” He instigated evening school on campus as well as Education Week and helped develop off-campus courses and adult education centers.

Hilton had passion for the Jewish people and their increasing presence in the Holy Land. He promoted the Travel Study program in Israel. In 1953, he authored a series of five lectures on “*The Jews, a Promised People*.” They were published as part of the Know Your Religion series in 1954.

Interesting Trip

In August 1959, Hilton embarked on a life-altering journey of circling the globe, spending two months of language study in Israel, visiting twenty-six countries, bicycling through England and Europe, mistakenly arrested as spies in Jerusalem for taking notes during conversations with military draftees, skin-diving in the Gulf of Aqaba, and quarantined in India on their way home through Asia.

In Israel, they had lived at Beit Hashita, a kibbutz in the Jezreel Valley, twenty miles southeast of Nazareth, tending groves of pomegranate, olives, and citrus to pay for their board while pursuing their study of the Hebrew language.

President Wilkinson flippantly addressed Hilton as “**Lazarus Moses Hiltonsky**” stating “*I can’t for the life of me understand what you are going to obtain from adult education in Jerusalem. The answer to this will either expose my ignorance or yours.*”

Hilton went on to visit the Middle East repeatedly and resided there for five years. It was then that Hilton first got the idea for a BYU educational project in Jerusalem, an idea that he would espouse for the duration of his tenure at BYU.

And this prepared Hilton to propose and host a 1961 tour called the Bible Lands Tour. In 1962, Hilton was asked to conduct a new tour.

In 1963, Hilton proposed sending institute and seminary teachers to Israel for an experience in biblical geography. He would not be directly involved, as he left BYU in 1964 to establish a successful language study abroad program for high-school students.

The BYU programs [in Israel] continued to flourish over the years from the work started by Lynn Hilton.

Others involved, in addition to those previously mentioned:

Robert C. Taylor directed the Semester Abroad program for the next three and a half decades as director starting in 1959.

In 1966, it was proposed that this be extended to Jerusalem. Church President David O. McKay approved it in June 1966 with one important caveat—that half of the program be in Arab territory and half in Israeli territory. In 1992, Taylor wrote that “*there had not been a day in the last 27 years when [his] mind had not dwelt on Jerusalem and the Holy Land.*”

In 1963, Ludlow spent five months studying in Israel where he met various leaders, including recently retired Israeli prime minister **David Ben-Gurion**. Ludlow soon became the key figure in promoting a Jerusalem Semester Abroad program.

Truman Madsen brought groups to Israel 1968 through 2004. In the years to follow, the Semester Abroad program was of prime importance as an impetus for the eventual construction of a BYU

Jerusalem Center. Madsen would later serve as a director of the BYU Jerusalem Center.

In subsequent years, the bond between BYU and Jerusalem forged a link between the Jewish and Latter-day Saint faiths, both of which trace their spiritual lineage back to Abraham.

Lynn M. Hilton history

From [http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Lynn M. Hilton](http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Lynn_M._Hilton)

Hilton was born in Thatcher, Arizona in 1924) and raised in Berkeley and Oakland, California.

He served as a pilot on a B-24 bomber in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II. After leaving the Army at the end of the war, Hilton served as a missionary (1945–47) for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) in Maine, about which he wrote "*Without Purse or Script: Experiences of a Mormon Missionary*" still available on Kindle..

In 1952 Hilton earned his Ph.D. in educational administration from the University of Chicago. He then became a professor of education at BYU. among other things at BYU, Hilton helped to develop the first curriculum for genealogy courses.

In 1975 Hilton set up a business drilling wells for water in Egypt.

He was also made the District President of the LDS Church over Egypt and Sudan at this time and worked for the four years he was in Egypt to try to get the LDS Church recognized by the Egyptian government.

By appointment of the LDS Church's *Ensign* magazine, Hilton was called to organize an expedition of discovery to find the trail of the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi and his family. This expedition was partly funded by the LDS Church.

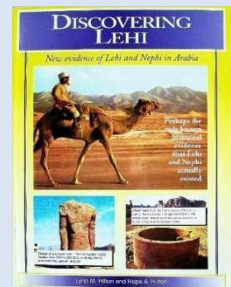
The results of Hilton's discoveries were first published in the *Ensign*. URLs:

- <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1976/09/in-search-of-lehis-trail-part-1-the-preparation>
- <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1976/10/in-search-of-lehis-trail-part-2-the-journey>

Hilton wrote two books on this subject, *In Search of the Lehi's Trail* and *Discovering Lehi*. In 2008, Hilton published a DVD entitled *Lehi's Trail in Arabia*, a slide show and narration.

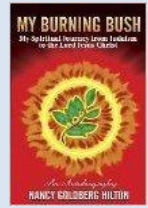
His wife of 51 years, Hope, was co-author of the two books, and died in 1999.

Lynn has run for the U.S. Congress. There is a picture of him meeting with President Ronald Reagan.



Nancy and Lynn

Two years later he married Nancy Goldberg, a Jewish convert to the LDS Church. Goldberg had been a businesswoman in Dallas, Texas before joining the church in 1996. Nancy wrote a book about this experience: "*My Burning Bush: My Spiritual Journey from Judaism to the Lord Jesus Christ*".



Her experience was also recorded in a Maxwell Institute publication: "*With Real Intent: Out of Judaism*" 2006. After this she sold her business and was called on a two-and-a-half year mission to work in the Family History Library.



At the Family History Library, Nancy developed a database of Jewish-related resources in the library that earned her an award from the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies.

The photo at the left shows Nancy and Lynn manning the Genealogy Corner at the Utah gathering.

They both served missions before marriage. Since the Hiltons married in 2001 they have served five missions for the LDS Church.

1. Sydney, Australia, where they served as Regional Employment Directors.
2. LDS Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah.
3. Ten months in Irbid, Jordan, where Hilton was the branch president; Nancy did humanitarian work for the church. On this third mission, they also served eight months as the Directors of the Family History Center in Athens, Greece.
4. The fourth and fifth missions were in New York and Boston respectively, where they performed family history work.

Lynn's Books

Hilton also wrote *The Kolob Theorem: A Mormon's View of God's Starry Universe* and *The Pearl of Great Price Concordance*.

Hilton also served as the editor of *The Story of the Salt Lake Stake*, the Salt Lake Stake's 125th anniversary history while serving on the stake's high council. This work was published in 1972.

Hilton also compiled an edition of the journal of his great grandfather Levi Savage Jr. Hilton's ancestor Levi Savage's interesting parts in the early LDS history are described in http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Levi_Savage_Jr.

One highlight of the Levi Savage Jr journal is that in October 1852, Levi Jr. was called on a Mormon mission to the Far East country of Siam. Levi Jr. left his 21-month-old son with his sister Hannah Maria Savage Eldridge while he served that four-year mission.

