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Provenance:

Category: **Document**

Person: **Hyrum Don Carlos Clark**

Date:

The Family File Finding The Face Of An Angel Some men are blessed with the gift to see things that ordinary people cannot see. Great artists and musicians often wrestle with this burden. Torlief Kn

## The Family File

### Finding The Face Of An Angel

Some men are blessed with the gift to see things that ordinary people cannot see. Great artists and musicians often wrestle with this burden. Torleif Knaphus belongs among those who have known the struggle of dealing with a gift, greater than the mere shaping of clay between human hands. cart

The sculptor left a legacy of work that shows a wide range of vision and skill, particularly some of the sculptures that make their place among the art telling the story of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He saw the latter-day work with an eye that keenly demonstrated faith, sacrifice and vision.

### Torlief Knaphus

His oxen in the baptistery of the Alberta Temple became the prototype for other temples at one point and the diversity of his work is well demonstrated by the 100-plus figures one can find atop the Mesa Temple.

But one of the most compelling experiences of his life involved a time when he could not find someone to match what he needed to see.

Knaphus' is an exemplary story of faith and sacrifice and of one who gave his all to belong to the Kingdom of God.

Born in Norway, he joined the church early in life because he found answers where others would not

venture to see or feel beyond their experience and prejudice. He joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints against the advice of his family and friends. He had found truth, however, and paid a heavy price for it.

His faith seemed to be matched only by his artistic skill and temperament. He turned down a scholarship to Italy to refine his artistic skills to come to America and be with the Saints. He made the last bit of the journey to Salt Lake City from Chicago with nothing but an apple in his pocket, full of faith and hope, but equipped with no knowledge of English and even less money.

Out of his hardships and experience, his art found a visual form. His sculpture of a couple struggling to pull a handcart, now displayed on Temple Square, was but a figurative demonstration of his own life.

Knaphus eked out a meager financial existence and often found himself in the employ of the church he loved, underbidding what an artist should have been demanding for projects he had committed to.

After the death of his first wife, he was commissioned by the church to do a sculpture of the angel Moroni that could be placed on the Hill Cumorah-----bringing attention to the prophet whose work marked the end of the Book of Mormon.

Torlief struggled to visualize what the prophet would look like. It apparently is a struggle that took place for a long period of time. He made the issue a matter of prayer and would often go to En-

sign Peak for communion with God about the matter.

His second wife, Rebecca Marie Knaphus, said the artist told her once that during this period of time he was visited by Moroni. She said he described him as being dressed in white in a sort of military outfit. It was too sacred an experience for him to elaborate, she said. No details are given about how or where or specifically when this sacred visit occurred. He seldom spoke about it, she added.

With a visual image of the former prophet in his mind, the artist made a whole series of sketches to give his project a form. The sketches quickly multiplied, however, leading to a complexity about which sketch was appropriate.

Once again the sculptor found solace in climbing Ensign Peak to make the issue a matter of prayer. This time he took his sketches with him and laid them out in front of himself. He was determined to narrow his search down to one and to make sure his choice was in accordance with the Lord's will.

He knew in his mind which image he liked, but wanted to know the mind and will of God. He was willing to put aside his artistic inclinations, if Divine Providence so mandated.

As he laid the pictures out on the mountain, a finger came and pointed to a specific sketch---the very sketch he had chosen.

The next day he took the sketches to church headquarters where he laid the sketches out for the presidency of the church and the 12 apostles, just as he had the day before for a divine source. Every single one of them chose the same sketch that a heavenly finger had pointed out less than 24 hours before.

This chosen work was now closer to being a reality. Now he had to get down to the actual work itself and finding one who resembled what he had seen and sketched.

He found the body and torso of the former prophet

in the physical makeup of a new friend, Elwin Clark, who had done a fireplace for the artist. He lived nearby in Salt Lake City.

Clark had the muscles and build of one who had known the rigors of labor most of his life. Knaphus quickly put him to work posing for his developing project.

But he could not find a face that was the perfect fit to complete his masterpiece. He set about as only he could to find the right match.

Knaphus never owned a car and was famous for picking up people off the street for this project or that one. It was not uncommon for him to approach strangers and in his thick Norwegian accent ask them over to his studio for a sitting.

One day in his jaunts around Salt Lake City, he saw an elderly, bearded-gentleman who caught his attention. He followed him around for sometime before he cornered him and pleaded with him to pose for his work.

The gentleman, a rancher by profession, had moved from Wyoming back to the place of his birth, Farmington, a small community located north of Salt Lake City. He had no idea of the scope of what he was being asked. But the artist was persuasive and so he responded.

Knaphus could not have imagined what his wild meanderings and search for the right face had brought together. His project had received the direction of heaven but it had another twist to it---that seemed very familiar to his new model.

Elwin Clark was already in the room when the older man came into the studio. It was a chance meeting, but there was familiarity in his companion model.

Hyrum Don Carlos Clark. The face of an angel, specifically Moroni.

The man asked to pose for the finishing piece of the sculpture was Hyrum Don Carlos Clark, Elwin's

father.

The statue was eventually finished and a likeness of this unique father/son combination made its way into bronze. It now sits atop the Hill Cumorah, beckoning to others to come and find the magic behind the place and the message it represents.

Descendants of Hyrum Don Carlos Clark sometimes affectionately look at the statue and call it "Moroni Clark."

More realistically it is the physical testament of the struggle of an artist who was given the direction of heaven to complete a work that itself stands as a witness of something far greater than itself.

Written by Antone Clark

March of 2000