

MARY ANN MORRIS PHOENIX

at the Romney Reunion
31 March 1977

I am delighted to be here tonight for more than one reason. Twenty four hours ago I was in the hospital and supposedly had pneumonia and so you can see how anxious I was to be here. And while I lay there I thought to myself I have another reason for wanting to be here. From the time I was a very small child I was told over and over again that the nicest thing that had happened to me, the thing I should be the most proud of, was that I belonged to the family of Romney. It was sort of the Royal house of Utah idea that we had told us from the time we were children. When any of us behaved very well we were told that that was because of the Romney in us. And if any of us were pretty, which I never was, we were told that we looked like the Romneys. And as I lay there I thought of an experience I had where I worked. One of my colleagues came in to me and said, "Come out quick and taste the water in this fountain. It tastes like mouse water." And I very obligingly went out and tasted it. And then another colleague came in and said, "Come quick. The new fire escape smells as if it had marijuana in it." Out I trotted. And then I thought, "Well, you poor old fool. You have no idea of how mouse water tastes. You have no idea of how marijuana smells. And you have no idea of what a Romney looks like." So you see what a pleasure it is for me to see you all. I do think that I grew up believing that all Romney's had special steel in their spines some way or other because my grandmother, Mary Ann Romney, the youngest, told me over and over again that no lady sits but there is light between her and the back of her chair. That was one thing that my mother taught me. My grandmother was eighty years old when she died and she sat that way. It was awfully hard on a little fat girl to achieve that. I thought that you might be interested in some of the Romney family stories that I grew up with. As I said, my grandmother was Mary Ann Romney Lund. She always referred to herself as a "change of life baby". They said that in those days. She was born much after her mother was much past forty. My mother was Mary Ann Romney Lund. We all got the Romney name in our family, girls as well as boys. She was born after her mother turned forty. My name is Mary Ann Romney Morris and I was born after my mother was thirty. And so my life lapped over into the other generation more. The grandmother Romney lived with my grandmother in her home until she died. I'm sorry, I do have the ring that belonged to the grandmother and I went off in such a hurry this morning that I forgot to bring it with me. It is a little tiny circlet with tiny pearls and turquoise set in it. It is much smaller than.....I think my fingers were larger than that when I was born. I also have a copy of the first hymn book published in the British Isles. It is just the words not the music. And inside is written "Given by Miles Romney (to someone whose name I couldn't find) in memory of her loving kindness." And it is the first book of hymns published in the British Isles. I also have a small table with a lovely marble top and very ornate carving that the grandfather made by hand, and another plainer table which he made for his wife or daughters. I also have a complete set of Gibbons Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire which they brought with them. I have Waverly novel books that they managed to bring across the plains. How, I don't know, they must have had to throw everything else out, but they did. Great grandfather was a wonderful architect but was not much of an outdoorsman from the stories they told in my family. My Grandmother was born during the time they were in St. Louis. And the stories told in my family were a little bit different than the ones you have heard. The story that Grandfather Romney told my family was that the Church asked him to remain there in St. Louis because he had a very marketable skill and it was easy for him to get money which the Mormons needed badly and so they asked him to stay there for several years as a special mission, and build a cash reserve,. And so that is why they were later getting here. He just could not drive oxen, according to what we were told. The day that they were to leave to come on the journey from St. Louis he was packing up and he was being taught how to use one of the shot gun type of things they used in those days.' He was so very efficient with it that he shot my grandmother through the leg. She had a hole in her leg that remained there throughout her life. I remember the night she died. You know, they sent you out because you shouldn't be around, but you listened, and all the time in her delerium she must have been terribly concerned about it because

she was reliving the time when she was a little child and the time that her father shot her through the leg. And she was trying to console her father even in her pain. Now when they made the trip down to St. George my grandmother insisted that she walked almost every step of the way because her mother just did not trust her father with the oxen, and so her mother always had her get out and walk. As they went to go over the hill into what is now Washington they followed their map of instructions on how to get there. Grandfather followed them and they went right in just as they had been told to do and they made camp that night and cooked their supper and went to bed and when they woke up the next morning to their humiliation and chagrin they were right in the middle of a cemetery and camped on several of the graves. I heard my grandmother tell that story. When they got there they were not quite ready to build the temple so they sent them up to Grafton. Don't ask me why they would send anyone up to Grafton. In case you don't know where Grafton is, when you go to Zions Park and you look over that way on the road and there is sort of a ghost town.....and he was supposed to farm there. And my mother's older sisters always told me how Grandfather would walk out every evening and look at those jagged, rugged cliffs there and say, "When I was a school boy going to school in London and they taught us Milton's Paradise Lost and we dreamed about Purgatory I didn't dream I would spend the last years of my life living right in the middle of it.

I think it is particularly significant to all of us that his granddaughters and grandsons said that their mother said that no matter how horrible it was never, never once did he say "I wish I hadn't come." His faith must have been so very, very strong. Just to think about what he came out of and what he went into it certainly should stand as a beacon light in the front of all the rest of us. Now when I think of a story that I remember vividly, and I heard it all of my life, and I never heard it as well done as it was, Mr. George, in the Look Magazine when the editors did the book about you, when they said that the Romneys didn't have human blood, you know, some people are descended from people but the Romneys are descended from mules. They told the story about Brigham Young coming down and Grandfather Romney was so proud of his staircases which went round and round. And Brigham Young said he had been notified, whether it was a heavenly notification or what, but he had been notified for it to come down. And Brother Romney said "NO!" And according to this version Brigham Young was not used to people saying "NO" to him. And so they had this long argument, and Brother Romney who was a devout church member brought the two opposing views together by leaving the staircase up, like this, and dropping the balcony down. And the faithful in Southern Utah, like sheep over an English style, have been going up the stairs and down to the balcony for a hundred years as a tribute to one man's stubbornness. My mother's older brothers used to say things about that to my grandmother who, in her very best Queen Victoria manner, was not amused. But we thought it was a very funny story.

After Lucille Taylor Farnsworth, a cousin, moved across the street from me she talked about her grandfather Miles P. Romney. I got thinking about it and I do remember Aunt Annie, and she used to come and stay with Aunt Roxie in St. George and I was very friendly with the Romney girls and so I remembered her. And I asked mother if she remembered Uncle Miles P. at all. My mother died two years ago and she was eighty seven years old and extremely bright right up to the night she went to sleep. And I said, "Do you remember Uncle Miles P. in person?" And she said, "Yes." And I thought maybe these boys would be amused by what she remembered. You know how brothers and sisters talk to each other the way other people won't. And she could just hear and see Uncle Miles sitting there shaking his finger and saying, "Mary, you will keep Rob out of the Celestial Kingdom by now allowing him to go into polygamy." At this point my grandmother would rear back and say, "Miles P. Romney, you married the three best women in the world. Rob married a Romney." And that was the entire case. I didn't know exactly what that meant until I read about Mr. George over here.

The Romney family must have had a very strong feeling for culture in their home. Now, my grandmother was born in St. Louis and drug across the plains and down to St. George and she certainly hadn't much opportunity for formal education and yet, you all know Mrs. Juanita Brooks, one of our finest historians, and Mrs. Paxton, retired dean of Dixie College, they said to me, "When we came to St. George as girls and would see Sister Lund come places we would think, we're seeing the reincarnation of Dickens, Trollup, and Jane Austen. We are seeing what we always

imagined what a real English lady would look like. Evidently they were accepted in Southern Utah as the cultural leaders, because they had a Social Hall built down there. You've heard this story before but it is worth repeating again. We had this Cultural Hall which is now the Utah-Idaho beet sugar company. And they presented East Lynne. And Uncle Miles P. Played the wronged husband and my grandmother played Lady Isabelle. And that night the place was loaded...in more ways than one...Those boys came down from Silver Reef just full of the sacramental wine. Then Lady Isabelle comes up on the stairs and she bangs on the the door and begs, "Oh, let me see my children once before I die." And the people throw paper snowflakes at her. And her hard hearted husband says, "No, no, a thousand times no. I'd rather die than say yes!" Then in the audience one old miner reared to his hind legs and said, "Listen, you s..... of a b....., you forgive her or I'll blast your brains out." They managed to restrain his hand but he blasted away and the bullet holes are still in the ceiling to this day to prove it.

It was stylish when I was a child to learn little poems and say them whether people wanted to hear them or not. Probably they didn't very often. I didn't realize until I was full grown that our country was still in the Wilcox stage, or what have you. I really didn't know how differently my grandmother did function. I remember her teaching me Wordsworth "Nay master, we are seven" that you are all familiar with and "I was an old, old lady and a boy that was half past three." I was in college before I ever heard of Tyler Bunner and good American poetry, but that was the type of thing she taught. She started the first Browning Society in Southern Utah. And what type of a home must have produced her because she had no place else that she could have gathered this type of thing. In 1961 when I became very much involved in St. George's centennial year, I decided that all of us whose ancestors were those people who came into Southern Utah were the descendants of either the biggest fools or the greatest people who were ever produced in the history of the world. When I found out what they went through for their religion I decided that they just must have been the greatest people there ever were. You know they always say behind every great man there is a great woman and then some comedian tries to be funny and says behind every great man is a woman complaining she hasn't anything to wear. Then a year ago they offered another twist to it and said behind every great man there is a great woman and a surprised mother-in-law. I did feel like the best women in the world were the women who went down into Southern Utah. The first two hundred babies that were born there died the second year when they were weaned and there was no refrigeration and the little things had what they called the second year sickness. The people ran around shaking with malaria and there was nothing to wear and nothing to eat but pigweed greens, whatever they call them. Yet you read all their diaries and there was never a complaint. Never one person said, "I did the wrong thing." Not one person didn't think their religion was worth all the sacrifices they had made. But I say that our women were better than our men (and I'll back up my statement there) because every time things got a little monotonous around they sent the old boy to Europe on a mission and he always left his wife pregnant and after she bore the child and supported the children and sent what money she could to him he came back and brought a surprise for her, another wife and its quite amazing how often he brought one that she couldn't even talk to. That must have been charming. When they ran out and couldn't send them on a mission then they sent them on the perpetual immigration fund or whatever it is that they went back to Nauvoo and brought people. But they were not ignorant, hillbilly type of people. Those women were cultured women from the cities of the world and they brought them over those red hills and plopped them down and left them there. And the faith of these women was just as strong the day they died as it was the day they were baptized. I'm sure they had a back bone that I'm afraid not very many of us have today. I decided that whenever I had an opportunity I was going to bring those pioneer women right up in front and where they belonged, not beside their husbands, in front of them. Unfortunately it is pretty hard to find enough about the great grandmother to make her come alive out of the daguerreotype pictures we have seen of her. I asked my mother's older sisters what about her, and they said, "Well, she always wore black silk." And I said, "To do housework?" And they said, "She didn't do any housework by the time we knew her. And she always wore a real lace thing around here (her neck) a jabot type of thing which Uncle George, her oldest son sent to her." And I said, "I guess she always sat up so there was a light behind her back." And they said, "Yes, always a light between her back and the back of the chair." They said she was what you think of and what we were taught was a perfect lady. You didn't speak of leg in her presence. Chairs didn't have legs. You dusted the limbs. And certainly no boy ever asked for a leg of chicken or a breast, he very euphamistically asked for the light or the dark. I

know that she went into a decline, whatever that may be. I read in some old records that when my grandmother was 12 years old she was appointed to take her mother's place on the committee that prepared the bodies for being buried or for burial because Sister Romney had gone into a decline. It seems to have been a fashionable thing in those days, though I don't really know what it is. I guess we'll find out as we go along.

But I think it is very appropriate and very fitting that we should be here tonight because this year on April 6th we mark the one hundredth anniversary of the completion of the St. George Temple. When you stop and think actually the conditions people were in at that time...they were living in caves, literally, there wasn't enough lumber to build anything so they were literally living in caves. They were eating pigweed greens and these people who went down there all had malaria. They were the same color as their clothes if they had had the same clothes for four or five years and had washed them in the Virgin river and they and their clothes all matched each other. There is no question that Brigham Young was the greatest colonizer the world has ever known, but that he would have the ability to think of anything in terms of that size of that temple. And of course he needed someone with the training and the scope that our great grandfather had and to be able to carry it out to that extent. They have declared 1977 as the Temple year. And just a week ago I was called to a meeting with the new president down there who announced that because he had just recently been installed and didn't know what was going on he didn't feel that he had the time to do all the things that needed to be done. And he said that the First Presidency had given him permission that we might have a Temple pageant about the 1st of October. And he didn't say will you, he just said, "Now go home and think of a pageant and get started and we'll all swing behind you when the time comes." And before you have time to say no I thought about a man that had the vision and the inspiration and the steadfastness and courage to stick to and do something like that under the circumstances that he did. I think that as his posterity the least we can do is to try to see that his name is never forgotten for his accomplishments. I thank you.