

## Editors' Preface

This revised and enhanced edition of Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jenson's *Autobiography*<sup>1</sup> is the fourth volume of his personal writings published with the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University. Previous volumes include Reid L. Neilson and Riley M. Moffat, *Tales from the World Tour: The 1895–1897 Travel Writings of Mormon Historian Andrew Jenson* (2012), Justin R. Bray and Reid L. Neilson, *Exploring Book of Mormon Lands: The 1923 Latin American Travel Writings of Mormon Historian Andrew Jenson* (2014), and Reid L. Neilson, Justin R. Bray, and Alan D. Johnson, *Rediscovering the Sites of the Restoration: The 1888 Travel Writings of Mormon Historian Andrew Jenson, Edward Stevenson, and Joseph S. Black* (2015). As Jenson devoted his professional life to the collection, preservation, and dissemination of the Latter-day Saint story, we feel his extraordinary life is worthy of remembrance and retelling in 2016, the seventy-fifth anniversary of his death.

The Danish-American historian passed away in November 1941 at the age of ninety. Norwegian John A. Widtsoe, a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, spoke at Jenson's funeral. He related the following story to the congregation assembled in the historic Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah. "A few hours before his death, Elders [Charles A.] Callis, A. W[illiam]. Lund and I stood by his bedside. In his delirium he seemed to be calling for pen and paper. There was history to be written. I thought that history of course will be written in the spirit world, and that no doubt he would be called to continue his work on earth in the Hereafter," he shared with Jenson's family and friends in the congregation. But Elder Widtsoe then bore his belief that in a paradisiacal state the late Assistant Church Historian "would have mightier tools than pen and ink with which to write upon the scrolls of eternity. Freed from the restraints of earth, there will be at his command vast universal forces, with which the story of the uncounted ages will be preserved." Jenson would continue to chronicle the life, faith, and works of the Saints in the eternities to come.

The Scandinavian apostle concluded his funeral tribute by reflecting further on his last mortal moments with Jenson: "As I stood by his bedside, and since, the lines of Kipling passed through my mind—though we can not agree with them fully, they have seemed, since Brother Jenson's passing, to fit into my thoughts."

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1. Andrew Jenson, *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938).

He then quoted English writer Rudyard Kipling's 1892 poem, "When Earth's Last Picture Is Painted," as his benediction on Jenson's life:

When Earth's last picture is painted and the  
tubes are twisted and dried,  
When the oldest colours have faded, and the  
youngest critic has died,  
We shall rest, and, faith, we shall need it—lie  
down for an aeon or two,  
Till the Master of All Good Workmen shall put  
us to work anew.

And those that were good shall be happy; they  
shall sit in a golden chair;  
They shall splash at a ten-league canvas with  
brushes of comets' hair.  
They shall find real saints to draw from—  
Magdalene, Peter, and Paul;  
They shall work for an age at a sitting and never  
be tired at all!

And only The Master shall praise us, and only  
The Master shall blame;  
And no one shall work for money, and no one  
shall work for fame,  
But each for the joy of the working, and each,  
in his separate star,  
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God  
of Things as They are!

Until his death, Jenson's canvas, paints, and brushes were the paper, pens, and typewriters of the Church Historian's Office. He found joy in his work, never seeking great money for his tireless efforts, Widtsoe seems to be suggesting. Following his recitation of Kipling's verses, the First Presidency counselor concluded his remarks: "God bless the memory of Andrew Jenson; and bless his dear wife and his family. May their father's faith be theirs."<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note that acquiring, documenting, and publishing Church history was not purely a scholarly or historical pursuit for Jenson—the untiring Danish-American believed it was a spiritual labor with eternal ramifications. As Assistant Church Historian he preached the importance of recordkeeping in his many sermons and more than two dozen general-conference addresses. "If it had not been for the writers . . . who belonged to the original Church, what would the doings of Christ mean to us?" Jenson asked the Latter-day Saints on one occasion. "And if somebody had not recorded the many . . . beautiful sayings of

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2. John A. Widtsoe Papers, CR 712/2, box 58, folder 2, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Christ and his apostles, what would we have known of the ministry of Christ and of his apostles? We would merely have had some vague ideas handed down by tradition that would lead astray more than lead aright.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, if not for the writers and historians of past dispensations, there would be no sacred history in the form of Hebrew and Christian scripture. The same would hold true in this dispensation, Jenson often taught, if Church members failed to keep contemporary ecclesiastical and personal histories.

In their assessment of Jenson as Mormon chronicler, former Assistant Church Historian Davis Bitton and former Church Historian Leonard J. Arrington documented his many contributions to Mormon historiography. “All told, Jenson traveled an incredible one million miles in his lifetime—twice around the world, crossing the Pacific Ocean four times, the Atlantic thirteen times. He visited every Latter-day Saint mission except that in South Africa. He served ten missions for the church, including a three-year term as president of the Scandinavian Mission,” they describe. “In addition to collecting historical data, he gave an estimated six thousand historical addresses during a forty-two-year period, thus educating a whole generation in historical matters.” But Jenson’s most important influence on the field was his unceasing collection and publication of Mormon history information: “More than any other person—more than any group of persons—he organized materials of Mormon history, catalogued and indexed them, prepared reference helps, and wrote twenty-seven volumes of biography, chronicle, and narrative and documentary history based upon them. He also wrote more than two thousand historical newspaper articles.”<sup>4</sup> Jenson was a one-man history-producing machine!

We feel that Jenson lived his life in crescendo as a Mormon historian—there was seemingly little diminuendo in his chronicling of the Latter-day Saint past. We hope that twenty-first-century readers will enjoy reading his autobiographical account and will likewise come away with a greater appreciation of the multitude of bricks he laid in the foundations of Mormon historiography. Today it would be almost impossible—and quite irresponsible—to write on nearly any aspect of the Latter-day Saint past without first reviewing and referencing Jenson’s historical spadework. This is a remarkable achievement for a Danish convert and immigrant to America, who never enjoyed a single afternoon of university life or scholarly apprenticeship. Jenson was a self-made man and chronicler of the past.

Jenson felt spiritually called to the work of record keeping in the dispensation of the fulness of times and dedicated his life to helping his fellow Saints remember the goodness and mercy of a loving Father in Heaven. This *Autobiography* is a witness to his role in enlarging the memory of the Latter-day Saints (see Alma 37:7–8).

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3. Andrew Jenson, in *Ninety-Seventh Semiannual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1926), 54–59, as cited in Paul H. Peterson, “Andrew Jenson Chides the Saints,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 1 (2000): 198.

4. Davis Bitton and Leonard J. Arrington, *Mormons and Their Historians* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 55.

## Editorial Guidelines

Preparing Andrew Jenson's lengthy *Autobiography* for republication has been a labor of love, but a labor nonetheless. In our careful review of his original text we have discovered a number of errors and inconsistencies, for multiple reasons. To begin with, his memoir was originally published before the age of computers, so there were problems inherent with the old style of typesetting. In addition, Jenson relied heavily on his earlier writings, such as journals and letters, and consequently, mistakes crept into the text. Furthermore, many of the editorial practices of Jenson's day are considered nonstandard today. In general, we have tried to retain the historic nuances of Jenson's writings while fixing mistakes that make the text less readable. For this reason, there may be inconsistencies in the way words and punctuation are treated.

**Dates.** Some dates in the original publication were unfortunately wrong. These have been corrected, when possible, either by consulting historical calendars or by consulting Jenson's voluminous journals at the Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah.

**Spelling.** Most spellings have gone unedited, except in cases where it was obviously a mistake, rather than a historic variant. There are a few exceptions: we have removed hyphens from *today*, and Jenson spelled *Chile* inconsistently, so we have standardized it.

One unique situation in the original publication was the treatment of foreign place names. As a native Dane, Jenson was usually consistent in adding diacritical marks for places in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. He also knew some German, but he was inconsistent in spellings of German place names. However, he was unfamiliar with Latinate languages, so he did not apply accent marks to Spanish, French, and Portuguese places. We have therefore decided to retain the accent marks for Scandinavian place names but to remove them from all other place names.

**Punctuation.** We have added many commas to improve readability, particularly around appositive phrases. The use of the serial ("Oxford") comma is inconsistent, according to Jenson's original usage. We have placed all periods and commas inside quotation marks, per standard American usage.

**Capitalization.** We have made some issues of capitalization consistent, even when they conflict with modern-day standards. *Priesthood* has been capitalized but *saints* has not, since that is how Jenson usually handled the terms. We have capitalized *Mother* and *Father* when they function as names, for the sake of clarity.

**Other issues.** Modern readers may find Jenson's use of *o'clock* perplexing, especially when it comes after an uneven time, but we have kept it as it appeared in the original publication. A couple of sentences in chapter 76 are obviously wrong and missing something; however, we have decided not to fix them because doing so would require major revisions that could potentially change the intended meaning.

## Acknowledgments

The Religious Studies Center's leadership team and editorial staff continues to show their commitment to Mormon studies through their print publications and online offerings. We appreciate the competence and goodness of publications director Thomas A. Wayment, executive editor R. Devan Jensen, production supervisor Brent R. Nordgren, publications coordinator Joany Pinegar, and their team of student editors. We are thankful for the expert typesetting guidance of Alex Masterson and the careful editing work of Hadley Griggs, Allyson Jones, Kimball Gardner, Leah Welker, and Lauren Whitby. The RSC team is committed to excellence in both scholarship and production values, and it shows in their many publications.

We are also grateful for the support of the executive leadership of the Church History Department, including Elder Steven E. Snow, Elder James J. Hamula, and Richard E. Turley Jr. The librarians and archivists of the Church History Library at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University all provided helpful guidance and access to needed documents and photographs along the way. We also thank Silvia Ghosh, who transcribed the book.

Finally, Reid dedicates this documentary edition to Ronald W. Walker, his graduate advisor in American history at Brigham Young University. Ron encouraged him to pursue his dream of becoming a historian, while Reid was at a crossroads in his personal and professional life. Together they celebrated the centennial of the Church in Japan (2001) and coedited *Reflections of a Mormon Historian: Leonard Arrington on the New Mormon History* (2006). Ron continues to be a marvelous mentor and faithful friend to his former graduate student—today they both enjoy tap dancing to work as historians.

Mark dedicates this book to his grandparents, David and Eula Ebbert. They were baptized in the waters of the Pacific while living on Guam in the 1960s, and they have fully embraced their adopted Mormon heritage since that time. Like Andrew Jenson, they rose from humble circumstances to become successful and prosperous. Mark hopes to learn from their experiences for years to come.

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