

Elder David O. McKay's 1920–21 Travels in the Pacific Basin

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“No pen can portray the joy of isolated Church members upon learning that a visit from one of the Twelve might be anticipated,” Hugh J. Cannon reminisced of his globe-trotting adventure with Apostle David O. McKay. “Should a prophet in one of our communities today announce that Peter, senior Apostle of our Lord, would appear in person on the following Sunday and address and greet the people, their anticipation could not exceed that of Latter-day Saints residing in remote missions upon learning of Brother McKay’s appointment.”¹ Cannon was speaking from personal experience. Between December 1920 and December 1921, he accompanied McKay over sea and land, riding nearly every form of transportation then known to man, on behalf of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

It is clear from the extensive personal writings of McKay and Cannon—as well as records of Church members they visited on the Mormon periphery—that they viewed themselves as latter-day counterparts to early Christian evangelists, like the Apostle Paul and his traveling companion, Timothy. They sought to re-create the acts of their New Testament brethren

1. Hugh J. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels of David O. McKay and Hugh J. Cannon,” ca. 1925, typescript, 4, microfilm, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

in the modern age and in the western hemisphere.² Their travelogues constitute one of the most important historical narratives of how the restored Church of Jesus Christ moved beyond its North American birthplace and traditional borders to an international setting.

Important to this exploration is the technological unevenness and religious nature of McKay and Cannon's fact-finding mission. Religious studies scholar Thomas A. Tweed offers an avant-garde theory of religion in a new volume, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. As his book's title suggests, parts of religion can be separated into *crossings* and *dwelling*s. Religions, Tweed proposes, "are not only about being in place but also about moving across."³ His notion of terrestrial crossings, a category that includes pilgrimages, missions, compelled passages, and constrained journeys, clearly applies to McKay and Cannon's journey. These two men, on behalf of their religion, embarked on an assignment which forced them to cross social, religious, political, geographical, temporal, and linguistic boundaries on a regular basis over a twelve-month period. Their terrestrial crossings on the Mormon periphery were mediated by unfolding transportation and communication technologies, as well as the spiritual nature of their journey.

Terrestrial Crossings

In early December 1920, McKay and Cannon said tender good-byes to their families, especially to their wives—Emma

2. See Jan Shippo, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 53–65; John W. Welch, "The Acts of the Apostle William E. McLellin," in *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836*, ed. Jan Shippo and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994), 13–26.

3. Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 123.

Ray and Sarah, respectively—who were both recovering from recent childbirth. Over the next 365 days, these husbands and fathers traversed a variety of cultural and geographical borders before returning to the comforts and familiarity of Salt Lake City, Utah. They visited the isles of the Pacific, the capitals of Asia, the nations of Down Under, the cities of India, the sacred sites of the Holy Land, and the metropolises of Europe. In his colorful memoir of the journey, Cannon encouraged his readers to imagine themselves as traveling companions. “Come with us, therefore, on our trip around the world,” he invited. “If you join us in our experiences, you will sail tempestuous, also placid seas, many of them terrifying, others dreamy and restful. You will go into strange lands, some, comparatively, not yet out of their swaddling clothes, others falling into senility.”⁴ Readers, then and now, are jarred by the disjointed technologies upon which world travelers of the 1920s relied.

Tweed argues in his theoretical study that “religions enable and constrain *terrestrial crossings*, as devotees traverse natural terrain and social space beyond the home and across the homeland; *corporeal crossings*, as the religious fix their attention on the limits of embodied existence; and *cosmic crossings*, as the pious imagine and cross the ultimate horizon of human life.”⁵ McKay and Cannon’s globe-trotting adventure, of course, falls into the terrestrial category of religious crossings. In November 2005, Tweed presented a related paper at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion on how his new theory might be applied specifically to Mormon studies, observing that the Church of Jesus Christ “can serve as a generative case study for both comparative analysis and translocative history.” To bolster his thesis, Tweed suggested that “in many ways Mormonism seems to emphasize [terrestrial] crossings of all sorts,”

4. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 1.

5. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 123.

especially migrations and missions.⁶ Long-time students of Mormon history are bound to see the relevance of Tweed's assessment and theoretical underpinnings to explicating the transnational nature of the Latter-day Saint past, present, and future. The journey of McKay and Cannon is a prime example of its applicability, as these men were constantly negotiating international boundaries of all sorts.

Tweed argues in his book that "terrestrial crossings vary according to the shifts in travel and communication technology. . . . They also vary according to the nature of the journey and the motive for the transit."⁷ There is no question that technology mediated McKay and Cannon's international movements. A variety of modes of transportation and communication, as well as their own travel goals, affected the men's journey. Like many Church leaders and laity, Cannon viewed technological progress as providential: God's hand was in the ongoing development of transportation and communication advances.⁸ "How changed are world conditions since Joseph Smith's memorable prayer!" Cannon exclaimed, pointing out the many advances between 1830 (the Church of Jesus Christ's organization) and 1920 (their fact-finding mission) that made such a journey feasible: "Inventions which have brought nations so close together, steamships, steam and electric railways, telegraph and telephone, flying machines, and radio were either wholly unknown or in their infancy. Did the effulgent

6. Thomas A. Tweed, "Beyond 'Surreptitious Staring': Migration, Missions, and the Generativity of Mormonism for the Comparative and Translocative Study of Religion" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Philadelphia, November 20, 2005), 5, 11.

7. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 124, 127.

8. See James B. Allen, "Technology and the Church: A Steady Revolution," in *2007 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Morning News, 2006), 118–58.

light which accompanied Father and Son to this earth spread beyond the sacred grove in New York and inspire man to turn nature's laws to practical use?"⁹ While outsiders would likely challenge the validity of Cannon's sentiments, few would question that mankind's ability to move about, and communicate across, the globe had improved by the early decades of the twentieth century.

Transportation Technologies

To begin with, advances in transportation increased the mobility of the First Presidency's representatives. "Each technological change prompted increased, and transformed, contacts," Tweed notes on the impact of transit on transnational faiths.¹⁰ McKay and Cannon made their journey during a time of overlapping and emerging technological advances. As such, their travels were marked by technological steps forward and backward, depending on where they were. Cannon described the various modes of transportation they enjoyed, or endured, on the journey: "The missionaries traveled on 24 ocean-going vessels. They spent the equal of 153 days on the water, traveled a total of 61,646 miles not counting trips made by auto, streetcars, tugs, ferry boats, horseback, camels, etc. Of the miles traveled, 23,777 were by land and 37,869 were by water."¹¹ As Tweed rightly observes, "There is no simple linear progression in transportation technology in any region or across the globe, since multiple technologies co-exist at the same time."¹² The McKay and Cannon party experienced almost violent shifts in transportation, transferring between cars and camels and from steamers to schooners.

9. Cannon, "Around-the-World Travels," 3.

10. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 125.

11. Cannon, "Around-the-World Travels," 213.

12. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 125.

Decades earlier, when the first Church representatives crossed the globe's major oceans as emissaries, they relied on mercurial trade winds to whisk them to their destinations. In contrast, McKay and Cannon usually enjoyed the convenience and regularity of steam propulsion as they crossed the sea. For the longer legs of the journey they traveled by large ocean steamers, the preferred mode of passenger travel in the early 1920s. But even the finest steamers still subjected helpless passengers to debilitating seasickness. "Have you ever been aboard a vessel on an extremely rough sea?" Cannon asked his readers. "Have you felt it roll and toss and plunge, then when struck full force by a mighty wave which washes its decks, felt it shudder and tremble as though it had received a death blow and must assuredly sink? And all the while the stomachs of the sensitive passengers are performing similar evolutions and are dancing about as wildly as the ship itself."¹³ While steamers had taken away the uncertainty of the winds, they were unable to protect passengers from the rolling of the waves.

When McKay and Cannon arrived in Japan for their first mission visit, they experienced culture shock. By 1920, Japan had emerged on the international stage as a hybrid of traditional Asian and progressive European cultures through its efforts to adapt to and take advantage of the world's best technologies. Cannon described their arrival in Asia:

Here, too, one enters a new world. The people, themselves so different in features and dress from the Europeans, the buildings, temples, pagodas and shrines, rikishas drawn by fleet-footed youths, heavy wagons drawn by men or oxen or small horses or by a combination of all three, all were as unusual as if the stranger were indeed arriving on a heretofore unknown planet.

But no! After running the gauntlet of custom officials he attempts to cross the street and is in grave danger

13. Cannon, "Around-the-World Travels," 12–13.

of colliding with an intimate acquaintance—one might say a rattling good friend—a Ford automobile. One feels inclined to pick it up and hug it, such is the delight at seeing something so familiar.¹⁴

They continued to be fascinated by Japan's mixture of "Occidental" and "Oriental" cultures, including its transportation system. Both regarded Tokyo's trains, streetcars, automobiles, and watercraft to be excellent by Euro-American standards. Even the antiquated jinrikshas (rickshaws) that transported them from the docks to the mission home were smiled upon for their novelty.

But as McKay and Cannon continued their journey east from Tokyo to Beijing via the Korean peninsula, they lamented the more primitive Korean transportation system. "Roads appear to consist mainly of foot paths and the transportation of the country seems to be carried on the backs of cows and oxen," Cannon remembered. "Yonder an immense load of straw moved along the path without any visible means of locomotion, but somewhere under the mass was a patient cow. At the same time the driver, trudging along on foot, had a huge load on his own back."¹⁵

They were even more unimpressed with transit options in interior China. "Think of a city of a million inhabitants without a street car or omnibus line!" a disappointed Cannon noted of Beijing (Peking). "The principal means of transportation—indeed the only means except for one's legs and an occasional auto or a small horse-drawn carriage at the time of this visit—were the innumerable rikishas. These flit rapidly and silently through crowded streets, dexterously avoiding collisions which to the traveler appear wholly unavoidable and furnish an excellent opportunity of seeing Chinese life.

14. Cannon, "Around-the-World Travels," 20–21.

15. Cannon, "Around-the-World Travels," 33.

A facetious American has dubbed these conveyances ‘pull-man’ cars. This was Peking.”¹⁶

The same chaotic scene was repeated in Tianjin, a principle Chinese seaport and city with a population exceeding one million at the time, which mainly relied on manual labor for transit.¹⁷ The modernized port city of Shanghai, especially its transportation system, was a welcome treat. “There is an incongruous mixture of Occidental civilization and Oriental primitiveness in Shanghai,” Cannon described. “Unlike Peking, the city has a street car system and other modern means of transportation. On some of the streets the visitor would think he was in Europe; on others not ten minutes distant he might easily imagine himself in the innermost heart of China.”¹⁸ To paraphrase Tweed, transportation technologies unfold unevenly around the globe, a reality to which the Church representatives could testify.

As fact-finding missionaries, McKay and Cannon noted what was needed in the various Church outposts in the Pacific. In several of the missions, unreliable and expensive transportation was a major issue. When they arrived in Tahiti, for example, the Brethren saw a great need for the Church to own its own ship to help transport missionaries and members. Cannon noted that the purchase of a large schooner “would enable the elders to go to their fields without such extravagant waste of time and which with wise management might also enable the Church members to escape the traders, some of them unscrupulous, who call for their pearl shell and other products and pay just what they please for it.”¹⁹ While in Samoa, they enjoyed the luxury of traveling by horseback during their mission tour.

16. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 35.

17. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 45.

18. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 46.

19. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 83–84.

“The trail over which they traveled skirted the seacoast, sometimes along sandy beaches, and occasionally over precipitous cliffs,” one of them observed.²⁰ They had it better than most of the native Saints who customarily walked the twenty miles between Apia and Sauniatu.²¹

The two men were delighted to once again find Western transportation comforts in British-colonized Australia. Cars and trains were to be had everywhere; they typically traveled long distances by train, as the area of Australia measures about three million square miles. Still, they observed that the Australian railroads were not up to U.S. standards: “One of the incomprehensible blunders of this enterprising nation is the condition of the railroads. Each state is the owner of its own system, and almost without exception it has a different gauge [width between tracks] from all others,” Cannon noted in his travelogue.

After leaving Australia, McKay and Cannon traveled by train up the Malay Peninsula and then across the breadth of India. After riding a steamer from Bombay (Mumbai) to the top of the Red Sea and the Egyptian coastline, they were struck, and amused, by the primitive transportation system of Cairo. In their minds, not much had improved since pharaohs walked the earth thousands of years earlier. As in Korea, where the locals transported goods on the backs of beasts of burden, the Egyptians similarly relied on camel labor. Cannon recalled that they “passed hundreds of donkeys and camels loaded with vegetables, fruits and other supplies for the city’s markets. Indeed, almost everything—coal, brick, building stone and lumber—is carried on the backs of these patient beasts.”²² In keeping with tourist custom, both men hired a camel for a sightseeing trot

20. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 132.

21. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 133.

22. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 187.

around the pyramids at Giza. For better or worse, transportation options fluctuated dramatically as they crossed cultural and national boundaries.

Communication Technologies

Advances in communication technologies likewise mediated the traveling experiences of the Apostle and his traveling companion. “Changes in communication technology have had implications for the sorts of crossings available to the religious,” Tweed suggests, and “as with travel technology, multiple media forms have co-existed at the same time.”²³ Mirroring their uneven transportation experiences, the two men endured various nations’ uneven communication platforms as they circumnavigated the globe. For the most part, they were able to contact their families and Church colleagues only by letters, which often took weeks to reach their destinations. On several occasions they did have access to telegraphs and cablegrams, but more often they lacked means of immediate communication with Utah for weeks at a time.

When they arrived in French Polynesia, for example, the First Presidency’s representatives expected to tour the Tahitian Mission with its president, L. H. Kennard. But they were shocked to learn that Kennard had departed from mission headquarters three months earlier to hold a conference on a distant island and had not been heard from since. McKay, who felt that he had been neglected on such an important visit, was worried and upset until the locals explained that this was how things worked in the islands, as there was no means of communication or transportation, other than ships. Cannon explained the situation to his North American readers who likely struggled to appreciate how different life was in the

23. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 125–27.

South Pacific: “There is no regular communication between the islands. The missionaries must travel on trading schooners which ply from one island to another at irregular intervals and must await their chance of finding a vessel which will bring them back to the starting place. Not infrequently an elder after receiving his release is compelled to nurse his patience in a remote and isolated field for several months before he is able to find means of leaving for Mission headquarters, and the place of embarkation for home.”²⁴

In fact, the four elders who met McKay and Cannon at the docks in Papeete were waiting for their own ships to take them to their mission assignments or to return them to America. Two of the missionaries had been waiting four months for a ship to transport them to their fields of labor. Another elder had already been released but could not find passage back to the ports of California. He thought it would be one more month before he could bid his mission field *bon voyage*.²⁵ There was little to do but wait.

On another occasion, McKay and Cannon were hoping to meet Latter-day Saint Joseph Wilford Booth in the Middle East in order to distribute humanitarian funds for struggling Church members in Armenia. When the First Presidency’s representatives arrived in Cairo, they received a stale communiqué that Booth was on his way to Syria for the proposed rendezvous. However, due to limited communication networks in the region, McKay and Cannon had no way to contact him to arrange for a meeting place. Undaunted, they took a train from Jerusalem to Haifa in search of Booth. It was only by Providence that the Apostle and his companion were able to unexpectedly run into Booth at the Haifa train station.²⁶

24. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 79.

25. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 79–80.

26. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 198.

Both men rejoiced when they were able to sporadically communicate with family and friends by cablegram and telegraph. While steaming across the Indian Ocean, McKay encouraged Cannon to send his eighty-two-year-old mother a “wireless message of love and congratulation” for her birthday, which Cannon happily did. “This was done, and as the good woman was eating her breakfast on the morning of her birthday the words which had traversed thousands of miles of land and water, were delivered to her.” And when McKay and Cannon arrived in New York, after crossing the Atlantic, they were thrilled to telegraph their loved ones in Utah. “During a large part of this tour, the brethren had been completely out of reach of their families. Any of their loved ones might have been dead for several weeks before word could have reached them. This in itself was sufficient cause for gratitude that they were again within telegraphic reach of home,” Cannon reminisced.²⁷ Years into the twenty-first century, it is difficult to grasp and to appreciate how asymmetrical international communication networks were in the early 1920s.

Nature and Motive of Travel

Just as “terrestrial crossings are mediated by divergent transport and communication technologies,” Tweed observes, “they also vary according to the nature of the journey and the motive for the transit.”²⁸ Although religious travel can be one-way, as in the case of the Puritans who fled to the New World to escape religious persecution and the Hindus who travel to the sacred site of Banaras (Varanasi) to depart from this life, he suggests that “much religiously motivated travel is a round-trip

27. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 213.

28. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 127.

passage for one purpose or another.”²⁹ In the case of Cannon and McKay, they traveled as both pilgrims and missionaries—two of Tweed’s most typical types of religious travelers. “You will be strictly an ‘uncommercial traveler,’ seeking neither sales nor business opportunities, and yet it is not to be a pleasure trip,” Cannon advised his readers as he invited them to retrace his 1920–21 globe-trotting adventure with their imaginations. “It will be your duty to study their [international Church members] spiritual and, as far as possible, temporal needs, and to ascertain the effect of ‘Mormonism’ upon their lives.”³⁰ The fact-finding nature and ecclesiastical motives of their travels guided them to the sites and people that they visited.

Although there is no pilgrimage requirement within the tenets of Mormonism, we can understand, at least partially, McKay and Cannon’s journey as a meandering pilgrimage to the Holy Land.³¹ McKay made it clear in his diary that he considered his fact-finding mission complete once they had toured the Latter-day Saint colonies in Australia; he wanted to return home, but he felt compelled to pay homage to the sites of early Christianity before his return.³² So rather than heading back home east via the Pacific, they continued heading west to the Middle East. Still Tweed points out that there are some similarities between religious pilgrims and missionaries: “Most missionaries also go on round-trip journeys beyond the homeland’s borders.” Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism,

29. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 127.

30. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 1.

31. For examples of more contemporary pilgrimage sites, see Karen Howard Austin, “Building the Kingdom: The Mormon Church’s Production of Heritage Tourism Sites” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2004).

32. David O. McKay Diaries, September 6, 1921, David O. McKay Papers, MS 668, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

for example, have all grown beyond their geographical origins thanks to representatives at various times in history.³³ The Church has also sent out spiritual emissaries. By 1920, the Church of Jesus Christ was operating nearly a dozen missions in North America, seven missions in Western Europe, and six missions in the Pacific Basin.³⁴ Many scholars of religion are aware of the tremendous evangelistic outreach of the Church, yet few are alert to its historical scope and variety, including its colonization and humanitarian outreach.

Legacy of McKay and Cannon's Terrestrial Crossings

McKay and Cannon's exploratory mission and pilgrimage to the Mormon periphery can be viewed as a "terrestrial crossing" of great significance to the subsequent globalization of Mormonism beginning in the second half of the twentieth century. As one reads their memoirs, memory is taxed by trying to keep track of the hundreds of social, religious, political, geographical, temporal, and linguistic borders they cross on a daily basis on behalf of the Church over 366 days. One is struck by the way their global travels were dictated by the unevenness of the age's transportation and communication technologies. McKay and Cannon, like the travelers of their era, did not enjoy the luxury of jumbo-jet transport, a convenience taken for granted in the twenty-first century. While primitive automobiles were available in several of the missions they toured, McKay and Cannon more often moved about on trains, streetcars, jinrikshas, wagons, horseback, camels, and even foot. Perhaps even more jarring to present-day readers is their lack of communication with their families, friends, and ecclesiastical sponsors in Utah. Modern luxuries like e-mail,

33. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 129–31.

34. "Presiding Bishop's Office Bulletin #62," Anthony W. Ivins Papers, Utah State Historical Society Research Center, Salt Lake City.

the Internet, instant messaging, and Blackberry technology were still decades away from development. An occasional cable or telegraph line was all they had as they traversed a multitude of boundaries on the borderlands of Mormonism.

But what was the legacy of McKay and Cannon's terrestrial crossings on the Mormon periphery?³⁵ How did their circumnavigation of the globe in these circumstances reshape their worldviews? Did their yearlong journey impact how the Church was later administered worldwide? When McKay and Cannon returned to Utah in December 1921, both men resumed their former lives. McKay returned to his apostolic duties and assignments as Church Commissioner of Education while Cannon resumed his stake presidency responsibilities. The duo was subsequently called to preside over separate foreign missions during the 1920s: McKay over the European Mission and Cannon over the Swiss-German Mission. Sadly, Cannon passed away unexpectedly in 1931. Yet McKay eventually served as President of the Church and was the public face of the Church for nearly two decades. During his administration, Church membership ballooned, the number of missionaries increased sixfold, and three temples were built in the Pacific Basin and Europe.³⁶

As his biographers describe, McKay's 1920–21 apostolic tour "was a major first step toward comprehending that a

35. I am thankful to McKay biographer Gregory A. Prince, who encouraged me to reflect on these questions and even provided a few of these answers during his comments on a draft of this essay that I presented at the annual meeting of the Mormon History Association, Salt Lake City, Utah, May 2007. See the chapter "An International Church" in Gregory A. Prince and William Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 358–79.

36. Mary Jane Woodger, "McKay, David O." in *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 3:726–27.

worldwide church would consist of more than a series of copies of the Great Basin church.”³⁷ Since the end of the nineteenth century, his fellow Church leaders had encouraged non-North American converts to remain in their native lands where they could build up the Church. This was a sea change with regards to the longstanding policy of gathering to Zion. While traveling, McKay came to appreciate that if Church members on the periphery were no longer expected to congregate in the Great Basin—where all of the Church’s services and programs were offered—then the Church needed to provide these opportunities abroad.

Furthermore, McKay and Cannon also accomplished a number of specific tasks requested by the First Presidency. Elder McKay, for example, dedicated the Chinese realm for the preaching of the gospel in January 1921. Months later, the duo met with Joseph Booth of the Turkish Mission to distribute Church funds earmarked for humanitarian aid in the struggling region. The Church’s governing body had also charged McKay with the “duty to study their spiritual and, as far as possible, temporal needs, and to ascertain the effect of ‘Mormonism’ upon the lives of the international Saints.”³⁸ In so doing, both men gained a better understanding of the challenges facing the Pacific Saints, including the challenges of transportation and communication in various lands. They came to appreciate that the needs of Church members were different in various parts of the world. A mere franchising of the Church and its programs would not always work, as heretofore believed by some in Church headquarters. At last, Church officials could honestly say they knew what was going on around the world because they had been there themselves.

37. Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism*, 358–59.

38. Cannon, “Around-the-World Travels,” 1.

While in Hawaii, McKay was impressed to build a Church school where the youth of the Pacific could be spiritually and mentally strengthened like their counterparts in the Intermountain West. One of his early acts as Church President was to institute the construction of the Church College of Hawaii, known today as Brigham Young University–Hawaii. As Church Commissioner of Education, he also returned to Utah with a list of ways the Church could and would improve its educational offerings in the Pacific Basin. Not only did the Pacific Islander Saints deserve better schools, they also required an increase in the quantity and quality of permanent Church infrastructure. While Church members in North America enjoyed comfortable and substantial meetinghouses, the same could not be said of the international membership. Decades later, McKay instituted a building program, unparalleled in Church history, to rectify this situation. Even more important, McKay promised the New Zealand Saints that there would someday be a temple in their midst, a pledge he fulfilled during his presidency. He also oversaw the construction of temples in England and Switzerland. As President of the Church, McKay strengthened the Church's policy of building up Zion abroad by signaling its permanence through ambitious construction projects that took temples and meetinghouses to the people.