

Epilogue

By R. Mark Melville

On March 12, 1941, Helen Keller visited and spoke at the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. Andrew Jenson was in attendance. After the meeting, he was introduced to her as “the ‘oldest man in Utah,’ which was stretching the facts a little”; however, he was certain that, at ninety years old, he was the oldest person in the meeting.¹ This event was typical of the final years of Jenson’s life. Even though he was quite aged, he still continued to attend gatherings, meet prominent people, and fulfill his duties as Assistant Church Historian. He never stopped speaking in various stakes and wards or traveling outside of Utah, whether it was to speak at a friend’s funeral in Idaho (as in 1939) or to visit California and Arizona with his wife (as he did in 1941, the last year of his life).

“I now feel that I ought to write a history of my life for the perusal of my posterity and lovers of history,” wrote Jenson in his journal in 1937, before the *Autobiography* was published. “I am still pleading with the Lord to prolong my life until I shall ‘finish’ or pass on to the next world.”² By finishing his story himself, he ensured that it would be completed the way he wanted it. *The Autobiography of Andrew Jenson* was published in 1938, but it only covers his life through 1935, when he turned eighty-five. Yet the last six years of his life were as productive as the earlier years had been. As a true historian, he never stopped recording details in his journal, and this journal provides valuable insights into the last six years of his life, which were not recorded in his autobiography.³

The year 1936 was the first year not recorded in his *Autobiography*. In September, he traveled by train to participate in the dedication of a monument at Winter Quarters, Nebraska, the site of a Mormon pioneer settlement from 1846 to 1847. He continued by car to visit Nauvoo, Illinois, and the surrounding area before returning by train to Salt Lake City. In March 1937, he published the fourth volume of his *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, which included biographies of many people who had sent their information to him.⁴

1. Andrew Jenson, autobiography and journals, March 12, 1941, volume 15, box 4, number 1, MS 1230, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

2. Jenson, journal, March 26, 1937.

3. This epilogue consists mostly of information gleaned from his journal about the last six years of his life, after his *Autobiography* ended.

4. Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson Memorial Association, 1936).

Oh how thankfull I feel that the task is done. I have worked almost night and day during the last five months, endeavoring to have the book issued from the press before the general conference, and I have been worried almost to a nervous breakdown to accomplish what I set out to do, without any encouragement from those higher in authority though I must say that the members of the First Presidency and some of the Council of Twelve Apostles have encouraged me to go ahead. The 4 volumes of the Encyclopedia now in print represents the most valuable work of reference ever written and published by any member of the Church. . . . But while my life's labors in the historical field have been understood by some, the majority of people who should have been interested in it from the beginning have not stood by me and will not give me proper credit until I shall have gone beyond the veil.⁵

After this volume was published, Jenson went about distributing the book, giving the first copy to President Heber J. Grant. During this time, his wife Emma⁶ was suffering from a long sickness. On Monday, April 12, 1937, he spent the day at home (the Church offices being closed for Arbor Day) and tended to Emma. That afternoon, friends and family members gathered in a circle to pray around Emma's bed. "While still praying, our attention was drawn to Emma who drew a heavy breath or too [*sic*] and then ceased at once to breathe, and thus her spirit left her body and she was dead," Jenson recorded. "I have witnessed many instances of effective prayers, but I have never experienced such a case before where prayers were answered so instantly and miraculously as on this occasion."⁷ They were relieved for her to be released from her sickness. She was buried in Salt Lake City the following Sunday.

In August 1937, Jenson traveled up to Idaho for the dedication of a monument of the pioneers there. In January 1938, he and his wife Bertha spent a month in California, where the Junipero Serra Museum expressed interest at putting up a monument dedicated to the Mormon Battalion. Although a monument was apparently never erected at that museum, the trip led Jenson to think more about the Battalion. After returning to Utah, he spent the next several months researching the Mormon Battalion, and in June 1938, he took a train to Council Bluffs, Iowa, to begin a long historical journey. He traveled by car and bus to follow the route of the Mormon Battalion through Iowa, Kansas, New Mexico, Arizona, Mexico, and California, then took the train back to Salt Lake—a journey of five thousand miles at the age of eighty-seven. "I . . . was successful in most places in getting what information I sought in regard to the Mormon Battalion. But I must admit that had I been permitted to make the journey forty years ago, when many

5. Jenson, journal, March 19, 1937.

6. Jenson first married Kirsten Marie Pedersen on August 30, 1875. He entered into plural marriage by marrying Emma Howell on December 10, 1886, and Kirsten died less than a month later on January 3, 1887. He married Emma's sister, Bertha Howell, on July 18, 1888. He was married to both Emma and Bertha until Emma died.

7. Jenson, journal, April 12, 1937.

of the Mormon Battalion boys were still alive, I might have made a greater success than I have done on this occasion.”⁸ In November of that year he traveled to North Platte, Nebraska, to participate in a ceremony dedicating another monument to the pioneers. It was dedicated by Apostle George Albert Smith.

On the day he arrived back in Salt Lake City, Jenson was walking home from the Historian’s Office when he was hit by a car, and his shoulder was dislocated in the accident. The doctor examined him the next day and “found everything as well as could be expected under the circumstances.”⁹ Two days after the accident was Thanksgiving: “We feel very thankful that the accident which came to me was not worse.”¹⁰

His *Autobiography* was finally published and distributed in December 1938, after years of proofreading and revisions. Preston Nibley, president of the Northwestern States Mission, gave a very favorable review of Jenson’s *Autobiography* in the Church section of the *Deseret News*: “When one considers that this man has kept a daily journal since he was thirteen years of age, and after a long life, in which his travels have ‘covered nearly a million miles, including two trips around the world, and visits to every Stake of Zion and all the Missions of the Church,’ he now issues a voluminous autobiography when past his 88th birthday; this I say is remarkable in itself and deserves our attention. But when that life has been spent in assisting to build upon the earth the Kingdom of God, it becomes more significant and important to all the world.”¹¹

On April 16, 1939, Jenson met Prince Frederick IX and Princess Ingrid from Denmark, who were visiting Salt Lake City and the United States.¹² Jenson had returned to his native Denmark several times, but on this occasion Denmark came to him. He recorded that the Crown Prince remembered him from his 1935 visit to Rebild. In May 1939, Jenson traveled by train to visit his daughter Eleonore and attend the World’s Fair in New York. Of course, no Andrew Jenson trip would be complete without Church history, so he visited the site of the restoration of the priesthood in Harmony, Pennsylvania. He also visited Washington, DC; Virginia; and Illinois on his way back.

In January 1940, Jenson traveled with George Albert Smith to California for the dedication of a Mormon Battalion monument in San Diego, completing the work Jenson had begun in 1938. The dedication took place on January 28. Smith gave the dedicatory prayer, and Jenson gave a few speeches throughout the day. President Heber J. Grant was the main speaker, and five thousand people attended.

8. Jenson, journal, June 18, 1938.

9. Jenson, journal, November 23, 1938.

10. Jenson, journal, November 24, 1938.

11. Preston Nibley, “Autobiography of Andrew Jenson Reviewed,” *Deseret News*, Church Section, January 28, 1939, 5.

12. Frederick IX was the son of Christian X, whom Jenson had met in 1935. Frederick later became king at the death of his father in 1947. Chris Cook and John Stevenson, *The Routledge Companion to Modern European History since 1763* (London: Routledge, 2005), 9.

The last major published contribution of Andrew Jenson was his *Encyclopedic History of the Church*, published in March 1941, eight months before his death. It comprised the information he gathered from as early as 1874 through the 1930s, during which time he visited every stake in the Church. The *Deseret News* called it “his crowning achievement,”¹³ and Jenson himself regarded this as a capstone project of his life.

With the publication of the *Encyclopedic History of the Church* I feel that my life’s work is nearly done, so far as the writing of books and historical articles are concerned. I shall soon pass on to the great beyond, leaving behind a great work yet to be done and plenty of able men and women to do it. I have done my best to contribute to the history of the Church, covering the first century of its existence, but a greater work will be done by future historians as the Church grows.

While my labors have been a labor of love throughout, I have, however, one selfish thought in mind: *I desire to live after I am dead*. In this connection I think of the righteous Abel of whom the Apostle Paul said: “He being dead yet speaketh”. Now I humbly but earnestly apply the words: “He being dead yet speaketh” to myself when I shall say good-bye to mortality.¹⁴

On November 14, 1941, he attended a Daughters of Utah Pioneers meeting in the Relief Society Hall in Salt Lake City, where he gave the opening prayer. The next day, a Saturday, he went to work at the Historian’s Office. As World War II was raging in Europe (just weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor), Jenson wrote in his journal, “The destruction of the British War ship ‘Ark Royal’ was made public.”¹⁵ These were the last words he wrote. He had instructed his daughter Eva Jenson Olson, “You will have to finish this journal whenever the time comes that I shall pass away,” and the remainder of his journal was written by her. During the afternoon of November 15, he felt tired, so he went home to rest for the weekend, planning to return to work on Monday morning. He took a nap, then worked from home until supper. “While eating a bowl of hot bread and milk he turned deathly white and was seized with a severe chill”—a heart attack.

During the next few days, Jenson was rational only at times, and on November 18, “during the early morning [he] thot [*sic*] he was talking to Pres. Heber J. Grant and bore a powerful testimony to the truthfulness of the Gospel, etc. He

13. “Andrew Jenson Taken by Death,” *Deseret News*, November 19, 1941, 3.

14. Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1941), iv.

15. Jenson, journal, November 15, 1941. The *Ark Royal* was a British aircraft carrier that was torpedoed on November 13, 1941, by a German submarine near Gibraltar. David Hobbs, *British Aircraft Carriers: Design, Development and Service Histories* (Yorkshire: Seaforth Publishing, 2013), 74–82.

told Aunt Bertha¹⁶ he was going home today and when she told him he was at home he said he was going to a home far away from here.” Apostles Charles A. Callis and John A. Widtsoe, along with A. William Lund, his fellow Assistant Church Historian, “gave him a beautiful blessing but did not promise him life.” After eating dinner, “he commenced reaching out his hands as tho he were picking some kind of fruit and eating it, and oh how good it seemed to taste as he smacked his lips and seemed so satisfied.” He then entered a coma until he passed away at 8:35 p.m. on Tuesday, November 18, 1941, less than a month before he would have turned ninety-one.

“He stated on many occasions that he desired to live as long as he could be useful and active, and when his time came to leave this sphere of action, that he would go quickly and without much suffering,” his daughter Eva recorded. “We, of course, shall miss him, but we feel greatly blessed in having had him so long and for the wonderful life he had led. He saw many changes during the time he lived, and accomplished a tremendous amount of work. While we mourn his loss, we know there are many on the other side to welcome him and there will be a time of rejoicing together there.”

Jenson’s contributions to the history of the Church were so significant that the First Presidency, consisting of Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark Jr., and David O. McKay, issued a statement at his death:

In the passing of Brother Andrew Jenson the Church has lost one of its unique characters and one who has rendered a great service. His devotion to historical research was of the highest character. He never wearied in finding facts and making a record of them.

He was a staunch Latter-day Saint. He loved the work. His constant thought was service.

His testimony was perfect. The Gospel was his whole concern.

The Church will miss him.¹⁷

The Presiding Bishopric arranged for his funeral to be held at the Assembly Hall on Temple Square on November 22.¹⁸ Several prominent historians and General Authorities spoke at his funeral.¹⁹ He would have loved to hear his work so appreciated.

Historians were the first to pay tribute to Jenson. Assistant Church Historian A. William Lund reported that Jenson had told him, “I have asked the Lord to give me strength that I may finish [the *Encyclopedic History*], and then I will be willing to pass on. I want to leave to the Church a short history of every ward, every branch, every mission and every Stake in the Church up until the

16. Eva was the daughter of Bertha’s sister Emma (both of whom were Jenson’s wives), so she called her “Aunt Bertha.” One of her children was Earl E. Olson, who was later named an Assistant Church Historian, just like his grandfather.

17. “Church Heads Honor Leader,” *Deseret News*, November 19, 1941, 1.

18. “Andrew Jenson Taken by Death,” 1.

19. “Historian Paid Final Honor,” *Deseret News*, November 22, 1941, 9, 11.

year 1930.” Jenson fulfilled his goal. Lund considered the Journal History of the Church, a manuscript history of newspaper clippings and journal entries since the beginning of the Church, to be “the greatest monument that Brother Jenson has left.”²⁰ Kate B. Carter, representing the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, greatly appreciated Jenson’s work, since her mother had crossed the ocean and the plains in the same companies as Jenson in 1866. Her mother’s family had died on the plains, and thanks to the information Jenson provided, Carter was able to perform proxy ordinances for them in the temple.

Members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency then spoke. In his address, Apostle John A. Widtsoe recalled the visit he had paid Jenson a few days earlier: “In his delirium he seemed to be calling for pen and paper. There was history to be written. I thought as I stood there that history, of course, is written in the Spirit World, and that no doubt he would be called to continue his work on earth in the Hereafter; but also that he would have mightier tools than pen and ink with which to write upon the scrolls of eternity.” Church Historian and Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith talked about growing up across the street from Jenson and working with him for forty years in the Historian’s Office. He lamented that most members of the Church would not appreciate all the work Jenson had done. And finally, President David O. McKay, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, read a letter from President Heber J. Grant. He last heard Jenson speak at the dedication of the Mormon Battalion monument the previous year. President McKay noted that Jenson’s body had become more frail but that he himself was still alive and vibrant.

Harold W. Langton, bishop of the Seventeenth Ward in Salt Lake, concluded the funeral by offering words of consolation to his widow Bertha Jenson. After the service, Elder Widtsoe dedicated the grave at the Salt Lake City Cemetery, located in the hills of Salt Lake, northeast of the area where Jenson spent so much of his life living and working.²¹ Jenson’s stone monument was one that he had had custom made in December 1937. It was a granite obelisk with a name on each side, one for him and his three wives, and on top of the obelisk was a detailed globe, with the route he took on his first trip around the world.²² It was a fitting monument to the life of a man who traveled the world in the interest of Church history.

20. Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, CR 100 137, Church History Library.

21. Jenson is buried at plot 67302 M-3-1-E-1 in the Salt Lake City Cemetery.

22. Jenson, journal, December 19, 1937; “Elder Jenson Memory Noted,” *Deseret News*, November 21, 1941, 10. For his first trip around the world, see Reid L. Neilson and Riley M. Moffat, *Tales from the World Tour: The 1895–1897 Travel Writings of Mormon Historian Andrew Jenson* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2012).