



View of Mexico City, Mexico, ca. 1890. Library of Congress.

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MESOAMERICA:
MEXICO, GUATEMALA, EL SALVADOR,
NICARAGUA, FEBRUARY 1923

“Jenson’s Travels,” February 1, 1923¹

MANZANILLO, MEXICO

Thursday, February 1. After a good night’s rest, the passengers on the steamer *Colombia* arose to behold a cloudy and stormy morning on the Pacific Ocean, and as the day advanced the wind increased in volume, until the waves rolled quite high. At noon we were 242 miles from San Francisco in latitude 34°24′ N and longitude 120°25′ W. The coast of California was in sight all day.²

Friday, February 2. Very early in the morning the *Colombia* cast anchor off San Pedro, California, and about 7:00 sailed into her pier at Wilmington, a suburb of San Pedro. Here Elder Page and I (together with other passengers) left the ship and went by rail to Los Angeles, where we called on President Joseph W. McMurrin³ and other missionary elders and sisters at the headquarters of the California Mission.⁴ I also called at the palatial residence of Albert W. McCune,⁵

on Kingsley Drive, and Brother, McCune gave me letters of introduction to prominent officials in Peru, South America. We returned to the steamer in the evening, and the voyage was resumed about 6:00 p.m.; and before we retired for the night, we passed the Coronado Islands on our starboard side.⁶

Saturday, February 3. As we looked out of our stateroom porthole in the morning, we were sailing southward with the mountains of Lower California on our left in plain sight. The weather was fine, with a clear sky and a smooth sea. At noon we were 189 miles from San Pedro in latitude 30°47′ N and longitude 116°56′ W.

By this time we had formed the acquaintance of a number of fellow passengers, most of whom were Americans bound for New York. But there were also some French, Germans, and Latin American citizens on board, altogether 114 first-class passengers. Traveling steerage there were seventy-three passengers, including thirty-eight Chinese. The steamer *Colombia* (380 feet long and ten thousand tonnage) was built in Amsterdam, Holland, for the Dutch South American

1. Jenson, “Jenson’s Travels,” *Deseret News*, April 7, 1923, 3.
 2. Jenson “spent most of the day writing, reading, and retired early.” See Jenson diary, February 1, 1923, 274.
 3. Joseph William McMurrin (1858–1932) was known as an enthusiastic missionary, serving three full-time missions for a total of ten years before becoming a member of the First Council of the Seventy (1896–1932). He then served as president of the California Mission (1919–32), overseeing over four thousand members throughout Arizona, California, Nevada, and Oregon. See Jenson, *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:218, 4:323.
 4. The headquarters of the California Mission was located at 153 West Adams Street. Besides visiting with President McMurrin, Jenson received letters from home and “purchased a guidebook to Latin America at the Chamber of Commerce.” See Jenson diary, February 2, 1923, 275.

5. Alfred William McCune (1849–1927), a semiactive member of the Church, owned a profitable mining operation in Peru and built two railroads in the Andean country—the Cerro de Pasco Railroad and the Ucayali Railroad. (McCune’s large Salt Lake City home, located at 200 North Main Street, still stands and is a popular events and reception center.) In 1920 he moved to California, where Jenson ran into him in 1923. See Clayton, *Peru and the United States*, 87.
 6. Jenson wrote: “Brother Page and I were separated, we having to vacate stateroom no. 42 which had been taken by passengers who came on board at Wilmington. I was assigned to stateroom no. 6 on the upper deck, while Brother Page was given a bed or berth in the hospital.” See Jenson diary, February 2, 1923, 275.

trade but sailed for several years on China trade before she was purchased by the Pacific Mail Company. Her crew consists of 107, including officers, engineers, stewards, etc. The waiters are native Filipinos.⁷

Sunday, February 4. We spent a quiet Sunday on board the *Colombia*.⁸ The mountains of Lower California were still in sight in the early part of the day, and we had passed Point San Eugenia in the night. At noon we were in latitude 26°51' N, longitude 114°24' W. The distance run during the past twenty-four hours was 275 miles. In the evening no land was in sight, as the Lower California peninsula at this point in this latitude bends eastward, forming the Magdalena Bay. In the absence of religious services on board, the passengers engaged in the evening in community singing, including patriotic United States hymns.

Monday, February 5. Again the third morning we found ourselves sailing off the shore of Lower California, and at 4:30 p.m. we passed Cape San Lucas, the southernmost point of the peninsula. In passing the lighthouse, which stands on elevated ground on the cape, we sailed within half a mile of the land.⁹ The people at the lighthouse saluted us by hoisting the Mexican

flag as we passed. After passing this important landmark, the *Colombia* changed her course to the southeast, heading for the coast of Mexico proper. During the day we crossed the Tropic of Cancer,¹⁰ 23½° N latitude, but the weather remained cool and pleasant though we were now in the tropics.

An Arid Region

The peninsula of Lower California extends north and south about seven hundred miles, having an immense area of country but only a few inhabitants. The peninsula is separated from the rest of Mexico by the Gulf of California, which is one of the largest gulfs in the world. Lower California is an arid region because of its scarcity of water. There are sections of the peninsula where it has not rained for seven years. A traveler must be a desert lover thoroughly to appreciate the sandy wastes, the weary miles of cactus, its huge canyons marked here and there by the trace of a very low tribe of Indians, the existence of which cannot be explained by any of the common sense theories of today. From a Book of Mormon standpoint, they are perhaps the most degraded type of the ites.¹¹

There are only a few towns in Lower California; one of these is La Paz, a town of six thousand inhabitants, situated

7. "We have a band aboard," wrote Jenson, "who discourses music at every meal. An amusement committee was formed during the day with a Mr. Wright as chairman, and the committee arranged a dance on the deck in the evening. I spent most of the day and evening writing for the *Deseret News*." See Jenson diary, February 3, 1923, 275–76.

8. Of the previous night, Jenson wrote, "My sleep last night was somewhat broken through being cold and by having unpleasant dreams." See Jenson diary, February 4, 1923, 276.

9. "In passing," Jenson wrote, "everybody on board who had a spyglass or Kodak were busy in the use of these." See Jenson diary, February 5, 1923, 276.

10. The Tropic of Cancer is an imaginary parallel line above the equator and is the most northern point at which the sun can shine directly overhead. See *Geographical Dictionary*, 1201.

11. Latter-day Saints have historically viewed Native Americans as descendants of Book of Mormon Lamanites, although those conceptions have evolved over time. See Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 41–157, particularly 116–28. See also page 9 in the introduction to this volume.



Market Booth and Group on La Viga Canal, Mexico City, ca. 1919. Library of Congress.



The Cathedral and Plaza de la Constitución on Independence Day, Mexico City, 1931. Library of Congress.

on the Gulf of California about 2,500 miles south of Guaymas, in Sonora. La Paz is sometimes called the hottest place in the world. Gold, silver, copper, marble, pearls, cereals, sugar, cattle, etc., are the principal products of Lower California, and mining and pearl fishing are the chief industries. The port of La Paz ranks as the third most important pearling post in the world. In 1920, La Paz, according to a recently published article in the *National Geographic Magazine*, had more dollars per wagonload of population, perhaps, than any other town in the western half of the world.¹² The price of pearls had been boosted sky high by the demand from the newly enriched of the world war,¹³ and La Paz had pearls to sell. La Paz had been a pearling center for centuries. When the Spaniards, led by extraordinary noses that could smell marketable commodities over leagues of sand and tumbled mountains, first came to Lower California, naked Indians were living in brush shelters on the shores of the gulf. They found nothing to tempt them and were, according to the legend, about to sail away when they discovered that these naked Indians—so miraculously poor from the Spanish point of view that even their souls seemed hardly worth saving—were possessed of pearls worth the ransom of kings.

In the crown jewels of the emperor of the now-dissolved Austria-Hungary, there was (and undoubtedly the pearl specialists know where it is today) a great black pearl. That gem

was found in the careless hands of an Indian baby playing on the beach of La Paz.¹⁴

No Land in Sight

Tuesday, February 6. We sailed all day in the southerly direction with no land in sight. At noon (when the usual astronomical observations were taken) we were in latitude 20°47' N, longitude 107°06' W. The weather was fine, but no oppressive heat.¹⁵

Wednesday, February 7. At daylight we found ourselves sailing near the mountainous shores of Mexico, and at 7:00 a.m. anchor was cast in the Manzanillo Bay. After breakfast most of the passengers were taken on shore in rowing boats.

Manzanillo, with about five thousand inhabitants and situated in the state of Colima, is the most important Pacific port in Mexico. It is 603 miles by rail from Mexico City and is the only Mexican port having direct railway connection to the interior of Mexico. The climate of Manzanillo is tropical, and as we had landed we were for the first time on the voyage practically reminded by the oppressive heat that we were in the tropics.¹⁶

12. See Correy, "Adventuring Down the West Coast," 469, 473.

13. Referring to the Great War, or World War I, 1914–18.

14. Of the rest of the day, Jenson wrote: "I spent the day writing and conversing with other passengers. There were games in the forenoon and a dance for young folks in the evening." See Jenson diary, February 5, 1923, 277.

15. Jenson spent most of the day "conversing with fellow passengers and reading." He also wrote a letter to Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. (1876–1972), then Church Historian and Recorder (1921–70). See Jenson diary, February 6, 1923, 277.

16. Jenson wrote: "When on shore we found it quite hot, and on returning to the ship, Elder Page and I changed our cold-climate clothing to that of the

Manzanillo is a typical Mexican town in many respects—the low adobe houses; the plaza near the center of the town; a somewhat pretentious Catholic church; numerous Chinese shops; genuine Mexican oxcarts; the peons, both men and women, carrying heavy burdens on their heads; the cobble-paved streets; the all-around market; the numerous saloons, etc., were in evidence on every hand. The main part of the town is stretched along the beach, but a large number of the private residences occupy commanding elevated positions on the deep slopes of the hills which rise immediately behind the town.

While on shore we called on the United States consul, Mr. Stephen E. Aguirre,¹⁷ a pleasant young gentleman, who seemed very pleased to have Americans call on him, and he “put us wise” in regard to several features of Mexican civilization. Some of our fellow passengers, who came from a country where prohibition laws are supposed to be in force, could not withstand the temptation of imbibing freely of the stuff that makes men act silly, and they returned to the ship in such a condition that the rocking of the boat which brought them out to the ship did not seem to add materially to their inclination to stagger.

tropical, we having provided ourselves with white apparel for that purpose.” See Jenson diary, February 7, 1923, 278.

17. Stephen Earnest Aguirre (1892–1972) served as the United States Vice Consul to various cities in Mexico, including Ciudad Juárez (1917–20), Chihuahua (1920), Manzanillo (1921–24), Nuevo Laredo (1925–29), Piedras Negras (1929), and Mexico City (1929–32). See “Aguirre, Stephen Earnest,” <http://www.politicalgraveyard.com>.



Man selling clay water bottles on his back in Mexico City, ca. 1910. Library of Congress.



National Palace, Mexico City, April 11, 1911. Library of Congress.

Mexico is the fourth-largest American republic—the United States, Brazil, and Argentina each being larger. It is bounded on the north by the United States, on the east by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, on the south by British Honduras¹⁸ and Guatemala, and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. The area of Mexico is about 767,000 square miles, and the population is about twelve million. The coastline on the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea is 1,728 miles, on the Pacific Ocean 4,674 miles. The inhabitants are chiefly mes-

18. British Honduras was a colony of Great Britain from 1862 until 1964, when the territory became self-governing. It was renamed Belize in 1973 and became an independent nation in 1981. See *Geographical Dictionary*, 130.

tizos, a mixture of Indian blood with that of the Spaniards and their descendants. There are also a considerable number of Europeans and other nationalities. A large percentage of the population is of pure Indian blood, many races being represented.

Physical Features

The chief physical features of Mexico are two great mountain chains, which traverse the entire republic, forming between them a number of great valleys and plateaus. The immense elevation, on which the capital of the republic is situated, called the Plateau of Anáhuac, is the largest and most important. There is a fringe of lowlands, known as the Tierra Caliente, on both the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific. The mountain range on the west is the Sierra Madre Occidental and in the east the Sierra Madre Oriental. The more important mountain peaks are Popocatepetl (17,520 feet high), Pico de Orizaba (18,250 feet high), Iztaccíhuatl (16,906 feet high), etc. The climate of Mexico is modified by the great elevations and is largely determined by vertical zones. Mexico is partly in the tropical and partly in the temperate zone. The Tierra Caliente districts along the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, extending inland and upward to an altitude of three thousand feet, have the heat of the tropical zone. The nights are tempered by the sea breezes, which also make the heat bearable during the day. The regions from three thousand to five thousand feet above sea level have a climate like that of the temperate zone. The cold region (*tierra fría*) has a height of seven thousand feet and

upward above sea level. Most of the central plateau is located in this zone.

The soil of Mexico is suitable for many crops. The most important products are maize, cotton, henequen (sisal hemp), wheat, coffee, beans, guayule, chickpeas, chicle gum, tobacco, vanilla, and sugar. Cattle raising is a source of great wealth. Mining industries are carried on in almost all the states and territories in Mexico, silver and gold being the most important minerals. Petroleum is an extremely important produce. Mexico has the most prolific oil wells in the world. Although Mexico is not a manufacturing country, there has been considerable development of manufacturing. The money system of Mexico is based upon a gold standard. The peso (one hundred centavos) is the unit of value equal to about fifty cents United States money.¹⁹

“Jenson’s Travels,” February 11, 1923²⁰

SAN JOSÉ, GUATEMALA, CENTRAL AMERICA

Thursday, February 8. Having continued our voyage yesterday afternoon from Manzanillo, Mexico, we found ourselves sailing southward off the coast of Mexico this morning, and at noon we were in latitude 15°45′ N and longitude

100°02′ W, and we were 293 miles from Manzanillo. We had opportunities to associate freely with our fellow passengers, some of whom were people of refinement, culture, and education but who were generally democratic in their disposition and behavior.²¹

Friday, February 9. We enjoyed the day on board the *Colombia*, as the weather was pleasant, and there was no occasion to complain of the heat. At noon we were in latitude 15°12′ N and longitude 95°26′ W, and our run the past twenty-four hours was 280 miles. Early in the afternoon we lost sight of land as we were crossing the Gulf of Tehuantepec. In the evening an entertainment was given on board (in the social hall) consisting of speeches, vocal and instrumental music, recitations, etc. I gave a twenty-minute speech on the voyage of the ship *Brooklyn*, which in 1846 brought the first shipload of American immigrants from New York to California, and incidentally referred to the great pioneer work done by the Latter-day Saints in western North America. I was listened to with marked attention throughout, and after the entertainment many of the passengers expressed their pleasure at having learned so much about the Mormons in such an opportune way and said that my talk would surely cause them to view our people in a different light in the future than heretofore.²²

19. At nearly every town along the way, Jenson had a habit of climbing to the top of a hill, pulling out source material for each country, and writing for the *Deseret News*. This pattern started in Manzanillo, Mexico. See Jenson diary, February 7, 1923, 277.

20. Jenson, “Jenson’s Travels,” *Deseret News*, April 14, 1923, 8.

21. Jenson “spent most of the day writing.” See Jenson diary, February 8, 1923, 279.

22. Jenson wrote: “I had asked the Lord in prayer before the commencement of the exercises to assist me, and my prayer was answered. I conversed with passengers on Mormonism until nearly midnight.” See Jenson diary, February 9, 1923, 280.



Central Railroad and Volcano de Agua, Guatemala, ca. 1900. Library of Congress.



View of Guatemala City, ca. 1912. Library of Congress.



Pan American Division of Central Railroad, Guatemala, ca. 1900. Library of Congress.



Street scene in Guatemala. Library of Congress.



Street scene in Guatemala City, 1911. Library of Congress.

Passengers Fish for Sharks

Saturday, February 10. As daylight dawned upon us, the outline of the coast of Guatemala, Central America, was visible in the distance, and early in the day the *Colombia* cast anchor off the little town of Champerico to take in a cargo of coffee, which was brought out to the steamer by lighters. None of the passengers landed, but as the ship was surrounded by a school of sharks, some of the men busied themselves during the day with catching this man-eating fish with hook and line. Four large sharks were thus caught and brought on board, the largest of which measured eleven feet in length and weighed about seven hundred pounds. This experience with the sharks caused much excitement among the passengers and served to ward off the monotony of the life on board.²³

Sunday, February 11. About 1:00 a.m. (past midnight) the *Colombia* lifted anchor and steamed farther down the coast of Guatemala, and after sailing about seventy-five miles in a southeasterly direction, we cast anchor on the roadstead of San José, an important seaport of Guatemala, which is connected by a narrow-gauge railroad with Guatemala City, the capital of the Republic of Guatemala, which city is situated in the mountainous upland about 120 miles inland from San José.

23. The sharks brought on board had "their terrible jaws cut out and then the carcasses thrown overboard." In the evening, "most of the young passengers participated in a masquerade ball; many unique costumes, hastily prepared, were in evidence." See Jenson diary, February 10, 1923, 280.

San José is built upon a sandy beach, behind which, at a considerable distance, are mountains of a volcanic nature. Thus, two lofty peaks (volcanoes) are plainly seen from the coast; one of these is called Volcán de Agua (Volcano of Water) and the other Volcán de Fuego (Volcano of Fire). The first has hot water in its crater, and the latter (a double cone) spits fire and brimstone occasionally. Soon after our arrival off San José, some of the passengers (including Elder Page and myself) landed. We were, four at a time, placed in a basket, which was lifted by a crane (attached to the ship's machinery) from deck, swung out over the side of the vessel, and then lowered into the lighter in waiting. We were landed at the iron pier by the use of the same kind of machinery. While on shore, we called on Mr. David M. Savage, the United States consular agent at San José, who furnished us with important information concerning the Republic of Guatemala.

Facts about Guatemala

Guatemala is the most northerly of the Central American republics, lying directly south of Mexico. It is bounded on the north and northwest by Mexico, on the east by British Honduras and the Gulf of Honduras, on the southeast by Honduras and Salvador, and on the south by the Pacific Ocean. The area of Guatemala is about 48,290 square miles, a little more than half the area of Utah and about the size of Illinois. It extends from 13° to 17° N latitude, and its population is about 2.2 million. The coastline on the Caribbean side is seventy-nine miles, on the Pacific side two hundred



Ancient Mayan monument found in Quirigua, Guatemala, ca. 1910. Library of Congress.

miles. A chain of mountains traverses the country from north to south. This sends out spurs in every direction, forming numerous high plateaus, which are healthful and fertile. There are also a number of very picturesque and delightful valleys through which flow some important rivers, of which only one, the Río Dulce, is navigable. There are many varieties of climate in Guatemala. On the coast, sea level, it is tropical—hot and humid with heavy rainfalls; in the vicinity of Zapata there is a torrid region; in the interior, at Guatemala City and vicinity (altitude five thousand feet), the climate is generally like spring in the temperate zone; at Quetzaltenango (altitude seven thousand feet) it is cold. The number of pure white inhabitants of Guatemala is about sixty thousand, and Europeans are not numerous. Seventy-five percent of the population is composed of Indians, or native Guatemalecans, the remainder being of mixed blood. The exports of Guatemala are coffee, bananas, sugar chicle, woods, cattle, hides, rubber, skins, etc. Coffee is the principal agricultural product of the country and constitutes more than five-sixths of the nation's exports; sugar production is second. Next in importance are bananas, raised chiefly on the Gulf of Honduras. Cereals, such as corn, wheat, rice, beans, etc., are also grown. Cattle raising is of some importance. There is considerable timber wealth in the forests. The industries are of a minor character and consist chiefly of small plants for the manufacture of articles for local use. In the eastern part of the country, where the greatest amount of American capital is invested, the influx of American and Jamaican laborers has done much to make the

English language better understood and more generally used. Otherwise, the language of the country is Spanish. One-fifth of the country's capital is German. The German colony is the largest in the republic, and most of the coffee raising is in the hands of the Germans. The money system is based upon a silver peso, which is worth only two cents in United States money. One hundred centavos make a peso.

The people of the United States are inclined to appropriate the term *republic*, and the name *Americans* to themselves, as though they had a copyright on these words. And yet there are six little republics in Central America—namely, Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, which lay great stress on the term *republic* as applied to each whose citizens proudly call themselves Americans.

Has Diversity of Levels

Guatemala, the largest and most important of these republics, is a country of mountains, tropical forests, lakes, rivers, coast, and plains. No portion of the earth, perhaps, presents a greater diversity of levels in an equal amount of surface, or a greater variety of climate. There are three minor mountain systems in the country. Of these the northern series is composed chiefly of denuded cones from 1,500 to two thousand feet high, with plains between; the central consists of ranges running from east to west and reaching a height of from seven thousand to fourteen thousand feet; the southern branch comprises a number of volcanic peaks which culminate in several notable volcanoes. These ranges parallel the Pacific

and are known as the Cordilleras. The Pacific side of Central America, from Guatemala and Nicaragua, is a highly volcanic region, and the many companion peaks and niched ranges, as they are seen from the sea, look like great fangs. Perhaps in no country in the world is found a greater number of perfect cones than in Guatemala, where there are scores of these peaks, ranging from Volcán Tajumulco (13,814 feet high) and Volcán Tacaná (13,334 feet) down to the small cones only a few feet above the sea level yet maintaining the characteristic outline. Many of the peaks have never been ascended, so that little is known about their formation. All of these volcanoes are now extinct, or at least quiescent, except Volcán Santa María (10,535 feet), from which smoke and steam constantly issue out of a fissure, or crater, on the side several hundred feet from the top of the cone, or crater, proper. This volcano had been quiet so long that it was looked upon as extinct until early in April 1902, when rumblings were heard, and suddenly the mountain belched forth mud and sand, throwing the latter fifty miles or more. By this eruption Quetzaltenango, hitherto an enterprising town and the second city in the republic, was almost ruined and several thousand of its inhabitants destroyed. A number of villages near the base of the mountain were almost completely demolished, and a part of Ocós, the most northerly Pacific port, sank into the sea during one of the earthquakes, which accompanied the eruption. A Latter-day Saint student and believer in the contents of the Book of Mormon cannot help comparing this event with the sinking

of the city Moroni and other Nephite cities at the time of the Crucifixion of the Savior.²⁴

Since the settlement of the country by the Spaniards in 1522, about fifty eruptions and more than three hundred earthquakes have been recorded. Innumerable hot springs are found in nearly every part of the country. Nevin O. Winter, in his interesting work entitled *Guatemala and Her People of Today*, writes: "In former times the natives are said to have cast living maidens into the craters of the volcanoes to appease the spirits or gods who were supposed to be angry. Later, after Roman Catholic Christianity was introduced, the priests held masses and the people formed processions to calm the angry mountain, until finally the happy thought struck the priests of baptizing the volcanoes and formally receiving them into the church in order to make them good. This was finally done, but the 'goodness' did not last, for even Santa María, supposed to be one of the 'saintliest,' went back to her old tricks, and her fall from grace was more disastrous than any of the other recorded instances of her uncertain disposition."²⁵

24. Latter-day Saints believe that when Jesus Christ was crucified at Calvary, a number of signs occurred on the American continent to inform the Book of Mormon peoples of this salvific event (3 Nephi 8–10). The signs involved great tempests of thunder and lightning, three days of darkness, and land-shaping earthquakes, including the sinking of cities into the ocean, like the city of Moroni that Jenson makes mention of above (See 3 Nephi 8:9). Modern-day geographers, geologists, and historians have studied this Book of Mormon event and tested it against new understanding of explosive volcanism and destructive liquefaction. See Kowallis, "In the Thirty and Fourth Year," 136–90. See also Jordan, "Many Great and Noble Cities Were Sunk," 119–22. See also Reynolds, *Dictionary of the Book of Mormon*, 251.

25. Winter, *Guatemala and Her People of Today*, 5–6.

In the hollows of the mountains lie a number of beautiful lakes. One lake, Lago de Atitlán, at an elevation of more than a mile, has no visible outlet, and its depth is unknown. The town of Flores is situated on an island in Lake Petén Itzá. Guatemala's coastline on the Atlantic, or gulf, side is about 160 miles and on the Pacific side nearly three hundred miles.²⁶

Climate Agreeable

Most people are apt to associate tropical lands with the idea of intense and disagreeable heat, but even at the equator, which one would naturally think almost uninhabitable, the upland sections are just as well adapted for the abode of white people as the temperate zone is. If one should start at sea level at the equator and ascend the mountains one mile, he will experience the same change in temperature as to go due north one thousand miles. If he goes up another mile, he will find the summer temperature lower than that in that part of North America 2,500 miles north of the equator. The same is true of Central America, for climate is determined by altitude and not necessarily by nearness to the equatorial line.

Ruins, testifying of a highly civilized population, are very numerous in Guatemala. These ruins are believed to be the handiwork of the Toltec race, and Guatemala is often referred to as Toltec Land. Are the Toltecs²⁷ the same as the

26. See Winter, *Guatemala and Her People of Today*, 6, 8.

27. Toltecs were a Nahuatl-speaking tribe of American Indians that flourished in central Mexico prior to the Aztecs, from the tenth to the twelfth century. Their culture and architecture are among the least understood aspects of ancient Mesoamerica. However, scholars and tradition agree that Toltecs were a highly civilized, city-dwelling community. See Cobean

Nephites of Book of Mormon history?²⁸ Are the great ruins of Guatemala ruins of Nephite cities and temples?²⁹ Nevin O. Winter devotes a chapter of his book, “The Ancients and Their Monuments,” and gives interesting accounts of some of these ruins, and I cite a paragraph or two from his writings. He says:

“Various theories have been propounded concerning all these ruins of Mexico and Central America. . . . A few writers ascribe them to descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, to the Phoenicians, and to the Egyptians.³⁰ Some ascribe to them great

and Mastache, “Toltec,” in Carrasco, *Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, 239–41.

28. Jenson further wrote: “[Guatemala] is by many Latter-day Saints believed to be a Book of Mormon land, as the land is full of ruins, testifying that such a people as the Nephites must have lived in this country many generations ago.” See Jenson diary, February 11, 1923, 281.
29. By the time Jenson left for South America in 1923, students of the Book of Mormon had already made comparisons between Nephite and Lamanite origins, calendars, writing, beliefs, and archaeology with those of the ancient Toltec civilization. See Stebbins, *Book of Mormon Lectures*, 229–31. More recent scholarship has also compared Book of Mormon civilization with the ancient Toltecs. See, for example, Hunter, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon*, 1:43, 207–8, 2:60–64.
30. Later that day, Jenson wrote to President Heber J. Grant: “I am now right here in the Republic of Guatemala, where the ruins from ancient days are very numerous, and where many Book of Mormon students think the Nephite civilization flourished more than in any other part of the western world. San José, where I am writing these lines, is only twenty-five miles from the city of Guatemala, where there are museums and libraries of a most important nature, and if I could have known that I had your sanction to do so, I would have gone to Guatemala [City] to examine literature and visit ruins in the interest of Book of Mormon geography, but as I have no instructions to do such work, I pass on to Panama somewhat dissatisfied, as

antiquity, and others assert that they are of comparatively recent construction.”

The well-known traveler J. L. Stephens says, “They are the work of the same race who inhabited the country at the time of the Spanish conquest, or of some not very distant progenitors.” A. P. Maudsley, in his works on American antiquities, gives many careful drawings of the inscriptions found upon rock tablets. Some of these, which have already been worked out, relate to chronological accounts extending over a period of more than three thousand years. . . . According to their ingenious calendar system and mode of reckoning, they are carried back to a fixed date, very much as we reckon from a fixed date, namely, the birth of Christ. The later dates of the Quiriguá inscriptions very probably may be assigned to a place somewhere about the beginning of the Christian era.³¹

Republic of Honduras

East of Guatemala lies the Republic of Honduras, which is bounded on the north and east by the Caribbean Sea; on the south by Nicaragua, Salvador, and the Pacific Ocean; and on the west by Guatemala and Salvador. The area of the republic is about 46,250 square miles, and the number of inhabitants is about eight hundred thousand. Honduras is mountainous throughout and possesses considerable diversity of climate, soil, and products. There are large and fertile

I never expect to come this way again.” Jenson to Grant, February 11, 1923, Church History Library.

31. See Winter, *Guatemala and Her People Today*, 156–57, 164.



Rural village in Honduras, ca. 1915. Library of Congress.



Bridge construction in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, ca. 1915. Library of Congress.



Street scene in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 1911. Library of Congress.

plateaus and valleys. On the Atlantic coast there is a stretch of land suitable for and devoted to the cultivation of bananas. There are several navigable rivers in the republic. The climate along the Atlantic, or Caribbean, coast is generally torrid but is somewhat modified by trade winds and rainfalls. The Pacific coast also has a torrid climate. In the interior, in the high altitudes, the climate is temperate, very pleasant and healthful. The chief source of wealth in Honduras is the banana. Coconuts are also important, while cattle raising is a very considerable industry. Other sources of wealth are tobacco, sugar, maize, coffee, hides, mahogany, and dyewoods. Honduras is very highly mineralized, but much of the country is unexploited. Silver, gold, zinc, copper, iron, and coal are among its minerals. The inhabitants of Honduras are chiefly Indians or half-castes with a considerable mixture of Spanish blood. There are also many Negroes. Spanish is the language of the country, but on the north coast, English is coming into general use because of the important American industries located there. The silver peso of one hundred centavos is the monetary system. The normal value of the peso is forty-three cents in United States money. The metric system is official and is generally used.

British Honduras is an English crown colony in Central America and is therefore not classed as one of the Central American republics. It is bounded on the north and north-west by Mexico, on the west and south by Guatemala, and on the east by the Caribbean Sea. The area of British Honduras is 8,538 square miles; population, forty-five thousand. The inhabitants are of mixed Indian, Negro, Carib,

and Spanish stock. The number of persons of pure white blood is comparatively small. English is the official language of the country, but some Spanish is spoken in the interior and along the border of Mexico and Guatemala. The money system is based upon that of the United States. American money circulates interchangeably with that of the colony. English weights and measures are generally used. British Honduras is a little larger than Wales. The chief industries are the cutting of mahogany, logwood, dyewood, rosewood, cedar, etc.; the chief products are bananas, chicle, coconuts, sugarcane, pineapples, tobacco, grapefruit, hides, sisal hemp, tortoiseshell, rubber, limes, etc. Belize (ten thousand inhabitants) is the capital of the country.³²

“Jenson’s Travels,” February 12, 1923³³

LA LIBERTAD, SALVADOR, CENTRAL AMERICA

Monday, February 12. About 1:00 a.m. (after midnight) the steamer *Colombia* again lifted anchor and continued the voyage in a southeasterly direction down the Central

32. After returning to the ship in the afternoon, Jenson and Page spent the day “sleeping, reading, writing, etc. In the evening, Dr. Hopkins, who had spent thirty-seven years as a doctor missionary in China, delivered a lecture on China and the Chinese.” See Jenson diary, February 11, 1923, 282. Nehemiah Somes Hopkins, MD, (1860–1953) and his wife, Fannie (1862–1916), served as medical missionaries for the Methodist Episcopal Church North China Mission, 1886–1923. See Baker, *Ten Thousand Years*, 122.

33. Jenson, “Jenson’s Travels,” *Deseret News*, April 21, 1923, 8.



National Palace, San Salvador, ca. 1920. Library of Congress.

American coast, and at 7:00 a.m. anchor was cast off Acajutla, a port of the Republic of Salvador with open roadstead. While the ship was unloading goods and taking on board a cargo of coffee, a number of passengers, Thomas Page and myself included, landed under difficulties, in the same manner in which we landed at San José, with this exception: that the Salvador people charged us double price for landing and getting aboard again. Acajutla (with one thousand inhabitants) is the terminus of a narrow-gauge railway, which connects it with San Salvador (the capital of the republic) sixty-five miles away.

On our landing at Acajutla, a train was just starting inland, so some of us boarded the same and traveled twelve miles to Sonsonate, a city with about fifteen thousand inhabitants, situated in the midst of a rich farming district but also near the foot of a volcanic range of mountains with numerous cones or peaks of volcanic formation. Among these peaks is seen the famous Volcán Izalco, from which smoke and fire frequently arise. The summit of the peak is fewer than ten miles from Sonsonate. We spent several hours in Sonsonate visiting the plaza, the cathedral, the government buildings, the market, fine stores, etc. The town is laid out in circular blocks, with streets (following the cardinal points the compass) crossing each other at right angles. In traveling through the country, we became acquainted with the general features of a Central American farming district with country homes; most of the latter consisted of small huts thatched with long-leafed grass, which reminded me very much of the huts of Samoa and Tonga, which I saw in 1895 while taking my first trip around the world.³⁴ Nearly every native we saw, both in town and country, was sparsely clad and barefooted, and in the country the clumsy two-wheeled carts drawn by oxen and the primitive farming implements were everywhere in evidence. The oxen pull their loads by yokes fastened to their horns. The country in this part of Salvador is quite flat between the coast and the mountains. We returned to Acajutla early in the afternoon and were soon afterwards taken on board the

34. See Neilson and Moffat, *Tales from the World Tour*, 113–62.

steamer.³⁵ In the evening a mock trial was held on the deck, which aroused much merriment among the passengers.

Visit San Salvador

Tuesday, February 13. The steamer resumed its voyage from the Acajutla roadstead soon after midnight, and about 6:00 a.m. it arrived off La Libertad, another Salvador seaport with an open roadstead. Anchor was dropped about three-quarters of a mile from the iron pier, which is built about a quarter of a mile out into the ocean. La Libertad, with a population of about three thousand, is situated on a level strip of land between the ocean and the mountains, and we landed here in the same manner as at San José and Acajutla. According to arrangements previously made through the purser of the *Colombia*, we left La Libertad about 10:00 a.m. and traveled twenty-five miles over a fine road, but through a very broken mountain country, to San Salvador, the capital of Salvador, which is situated in a large mountain valley at an elevation of 2,115 feet above the level of the sea and near the foot of the volcano San Salvador. In thus traveling inland we passed through several villages and saw extensive coffee and banana plantations and large fields of sugarcane and maize. We also met a large number of men and women traveling on foot carrying heavy burdens, mostly on their

35. On returning to the ship, Jenson wrote: "We were compelled to pay an extra \$2.00 each, besides the \$2.00 we paid on landing, before we were allowed to return to the ship. It was a perfect graft on the part of the officials." See Jenson diary, February 12, 1923, 282.



Marketplace, Santa Tecla, Salvador, ca. 1920. Library of Congress.

heads, they being on their way to the coast market. Further inland, the same class of people traveled towards the capital carrying marketable articles. Long ox-trains were traveling in both directions between the capital and the coast, mostly engaged in hauling coffee bags (each weighing 150 pounds) to the port. There is no railroad on this route to compete with the traffic, but we met several automobile trucks on the road loaded to the limit—these vie with the oxcart and pedestrian transportation. We found San Salvador a fine and most interesting city. It was almost entirely destroyed by an earthquake a few years ago but has been rebuilt in such a way that it cannot be destroyed again by an ordinary quake. Salvador boasts of having the finest government palace in Central America, a very large market, a beautiful plaza, numerous fine stores, and many palatial residences. Most of the ordinary houses are built of adobes. The recent earthquake created a new lake near the city and changed the course of the principal river running through the valley; hence, steps had to be taken to protect certain parts of the city from inundation. The plan of the city of San Salvador (which has eighty thousand inhabitants) represents blocks of the same size and irregular streets of the same width throughout. If the late President Brigham Young had figured on Salvador instead of Utah, he could not have laid out his capital with more accuracy than did those who founded San Salvador.³⁶

36. The gridiron plan is a type of urban development wherein sidewalks and streets run at rigid right angles, creating a simple way to divide territory and determine standard-sized lots. Joseph Smith intended to use a similar

Returning to the coast, we passed through the city of Santa Tecla, containing twenty-four thousand inhabitants. This town is situated in a mountain valley south of the volcano San Salvador (also called Quezaltepec), whose immense crater can be easily reached from Santa Tecla.

I may add that San Salvador may in size and nature serve as a type of the other capitals of the Central American republics. They are, of course, not alike in every detail, but they have many things in common and are all situated in mountain districts and in the interior where the climate is cooler, and healthier, than on the seacoast; they are all connected with the ocean ports by rail. These railroads, all narrow gauge, however, run crosswise through the country, and what is perhaps wanted more than anything else in the interest of commerce at the present time is a longitudinal railway running through Central America from Mexico on the north to South America. The old dream of railroad builders to have a continuous railroad system from Alaska to Patagonia will undoubtedly be realized in the near future, but the governments of the six Central American republics cannot agree in many of their policies; there have in the past been repeated failures in establishing a Central American Federation of states, though such a union, copied after our own United States, would, or ought to, give unbounded prosperity to Central America. Jealousy

square grid pattern as rendered in the earliest City of Zion plat in Jackson County, Missouri. Brigham Young and the Latter-day Saints eventually adopted this type of city plan for Salt Lake City. See Curl, *Dictionary of Architecture*, 333. See also Galli, "Building Zion," 111–36.

and lack of confidence seem to be the underlying cause of these failures.

Has No Atlantic Coastline

Salvador, or El Salvador, is the smallest, but most densely populated, of all the Central American republics and is the only one without a coastline on the Atlantic side of the continent. It is bounded on the northwest by Guatemala, on the north and east by Honduras, on the southeast by the Gulf of Fonseca, and on the south by the Pacific Ocean. The area of Salvador is 7,225 square miles (less than one-tenth the size of Utah), and its population is about 1.5 million. The Pacific coastline is 160 miles. The chief physical features of Salvador are the two mountain chains, which cross almost the entire country, attaining a considerable altitude and sending out numerous spurs. Enclosed by these spurs are many valleys of great fertility. Many of the mountains of Salvador present a picturesque appearance, some of them being cultivated to their summits. Coffee, sugar, balsam, indigo, henequen (sisal hemp), cacao (cocoa beans), and tobacco are the chief products of the soil. The mining resources of the country consist of gold, silver, copper, lead, etc. The climate of Salvador is tropical in the lowlands but in the higher altitudes is temperate and very agreeable. In the main, the country is healthful. The greater part of the population is mestizo—of mixed and Spanish blood. The number of pure whites is comparatively small. There are also a considerable number of real Indians. The language of the country is Spanish, but the more important business firms use also English and French. The

money system of Salvador is on a gold basis. The standard is the colón, fixed by law at two for one American dollar. The coins are these: silver, fifty and twenty-five centavo pieces; one, three, and five centavo nickel pieces. Bills are issued in denominations of one, two, five, ten, twenty-five, fifty, and one hundred colóns. The metric system of weights and measures is the legal system, but it is not used; all weights and measures used locally are based on Spanish units.

From our enjoyable automobile trip to San Salvador we returned to La Libertad about 6:00 p.m. As the port has no harbor, steamers anchor in the open roadstead and discharge their cargo by lighter, landing at the iron pier over the surf by swing. We resumed our voyage at 10:00 p.m.

“Jenson’s Travels,” February 14, 1923³⁷

CORINTO, NICARAGUA, CENTRAL AMERICA

Wednesday, February 14. After an uneventful voyage of about three hundred miles from La Libertad, we arrived at Corinto in the Republic of Nicaragua this morning about 10:00, and about an hour later the steamer *Colombia* was lying safely along the wharf in Corinto Bay, right in front of the town. This was the first port of call since we called from San Pedro, California, where passengers could land without the use of boats or lighters—a privilege which we fully appreciated. In stormy weather it is dangerous to land in the manner we did

37. Jenson, “Jenson’s Travels,” *Deseret News*, April 28, 1923, 3.

at open roadsteads, but as we were favored with unusual good weather and a quiet sea, we experienced no serious inconveniences and no accidents, except that a few of the lady passengers had a slight attack of seasickness at La Libertad through the lighter (which brought us on shore) being tossed about by the undercurrent of the ocean. On arriving at Corinto we lost no time in going ashore and were soon busy visiting places of interest, writing letters, walking through coconut groves, and trying to speak Spanish with some of the inhabitants. As good luck would have it, we found natives in the principal stores and hotels who could speak English, which made up for our lack of knowledge of Spanish.

Corinto is a town of about three thousand inhabitants and is connected by railroad with Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, situated inland eighty-seven miles from Corinto on the southern shore of Lake Managua; this city has forty thousand inhabitants. Corinto, as its front appears from the seaside, reminded me of Nuku'alofa, the capital of Tongan Islands, as I saw it in 1895.³⁸ Like other seaport towns, Corinto has considerable rough element, and there are in Nicaragua quite a number of outlaws who have fled from justice in the United States and elsewhere; but as there is no treaty or agreement between Nicaragua and the United States as regards the turning over of criminals, outlaws con-

sider themselves safe in Nicaragua. Thus, we were told that a certain American who keeps a brothel of the lowest type in Corinto is wanted in the United States for murder and that a reward of \$50,000 is out for him, but in the absence of extraditing regulations, he has for fifteen years been successful in evading his just punishment and has during that time led the roughest kind of life in Nicaragua. Corinto is the great business port in the Republic of Nicaragua, and about 65 percent of the foreign commerce of the country passes through this port. The excellent wharf, where steamers discharge their cargo and reload, has much to do with the increase of business at Corinto. Behind the town, but at a considerable distance inland, there is a volcanic range of mountains; and among the numerous cones or extinct volcanoes, which show off to advantage against the eastern horizon, there is one which is not extinct, as it is almost continually smoking.

East of this range of mountains, but far southeast of Corinto, is the well-known Lake Nicaragua, which is connected with the Atlantic Ocean by the San Juan River. Among the numerous canal routes suggested in bygone years to connect the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific was one which recommended the deepening of the San Juan River and utilizing the Nicaragua Lake from its west bank to the Pacific Ocean, the distance being shorter than through the Panama Canal from Colón to Panama City.

Largest Republic

Nicaragua is the largest of the Central American republics. It is bounded on the north by Honduras, on the east by

38. Jenson visited the Tongan Islands in August 1895, where he gathered historical information concerning the Tongan Mission, which had been established four years earlier in 1891. See Neilson and Moffat, *Tales from the World Tour*, 113–40.

the Caribbean Sea, on the south by Costa Rica, and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. The area of Nicaragua is 49,200 square miles (about three-fifths the size of Utah), and its population is about seven hundred souls. The coastline is three hundred miles on the Atlantic and two hundred miles on the Pacific. The population consists almost entirely of Indians and Negroes and mixture of the two with white blood. The proportion of pure white blood is about 10 percent. About 75 percent of the population lives in the western half of the country. The eastern and western sections differ greatly, and there is little communication between them, the journey by rail and river being difficult. In the western section, the people are of mixed Spanish and Indian blood, although there are quite a number of Nicaraguans of pure Spanish descent. In the eastern half, there is a considerable representation of Negroes from the West Indies, also natives of mixed Negro and Indian blood. Nicaragua is traversed by two mountain ranges, and there is a great diversity of climate products and soil. The plateaus and uplands are extremely healthful and fertile and vary in altitude from two thousand to three thousand feet. The lowlands are hot and tropical. Several of the mountain peaks of Nicaragua are extinct volcanoes. San Juan River, about 225 miles long, connects Granada on Lake Nicaragua with the Atlantic Ocean. Lake Nicaragua is about 110 miles long and about forty-five miles wide. On an island in the center is the volcano of El Ometepe.³⁹ There are other important lakes in

the republic. The climate of the eastern and western sections of the country is quite different. In the eastern part, rains are very frequent during practically the entire year, while in the western part there are distinct wet and dry seasons.

The products of Nicaragua are chiefly agricultural, among them being coffee, cacao, sugarcane, rubber, corn, beans, rice, and tobacco. Bananas and mahogany are the chief items in the exports of the eastern section. Cattle raising is carried on extensively. Timber cutting and extraction of dye are important industries. There are some large sugar mills in the western section and also a number of electrical plants, ice factories, sawmills, shoe factories, etc. Nicaragua is a country of great promise in mining.

While Spanish is the language of the country, there is a wide knowledge of English on the eastern coast. The present monetary system of Nicaragua is the gold standard. The unit is the córdoba, divided into one hundred centavos, its value in terms of United States currency is one dollar. The fractional coins are the half cent and cent of copper and five-, ten-, twenty-five-, and fifty-cent pieces of silver. The official standard for weights and measures is the metric; but for domestic trade, local standards are in use.

39. Ometepe, the largest island on Lake Nicaragua, contains two volcanoes, namely Concepción and Madera. See *Geographical Dictionary*, 870.