

# FOREWORD

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The 1920s in Latin America marked a period of calm. Governments in most of the region's countries were relatively stable, and economic growth and expansion were adding to their stability. The Mexican Revolution had ended in 1917, and although there were challenges caused by unfinished issues related to the conflict, Mexico in the 1920s was comparatively tranquil. The Panama Canal had been open for ten years and was busy due to global economic growth. Unfortunately, the worldwide crisis of the 1930s sent Latin American economies into a tailspin and created serious political instability in most of the region. This was particularly true of Argentina, which in 1923 experienced economic growth unmatched in Latin America. Capital coming into Argentina was being used to build up one of the world's great cities, Buenos Aires. The boom continued until 1930 when the worldwide depression initiated a period of challenge and struggle. However, the year 1923 was a good time to visit Latin America. The 1920s were also a favorable time to send Latter-day Saint missionaries into a region that had been virtually untouched by The Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints, which had been organized almost one hundred years earlier.

Andrew Jenson and Thomas Page were not your typical tourists. Both had significant experience traveling throughout the world. They knew how to function in countries where they did not speak the language and recognized the need to be careful due to the occasional unethical desk clerk, restaurant waiter, or tour guide. They were both in their seventies, and the lack of amenities in areas of limited tourism in Latin America posed a challenge. They both adapted well to the uniqueness of the region and took side trips, climbed mountains, and visited intriguing places most typical tourists would not. Although often tired and periodically sick, particularly in the high Andes, they obviously enjoyed Latin America.

Andrew Jenson was more than just a tourist; he was a journalist. His intent was to describe to *Deseret News* readers a world little known to them in 1923. He traveled with books and articles and spent considerable time writing descriptions of each country and region. He wrote about geography and general history and referenced the reading materials he

brought with him, which were introductory textbooks. His methods may frustrate a reader in the twenty-first century because his personal observations were often sidelined in favor of general information and statistics he took from his written sources. What he saw and observed forms a smaller part of his narrative than we would like. His personal opinions were often not expressed. The present-day reader wants to know more of what he saw, what he thought, and what he felt. At times it appears his primary purpose was to register an event, a place, or experience in his descriptions rather than understand and appreciate what he was seeing. Consequently, these reprinted newspaper articles can be enhanced somewhat if read in conjunction with his published diary/autobiography.<sup>1</sup>

On this trip Jenson had an additional purpose related to his religious beliefs. For many Mormon tourists in Latin America up to the present, visiting pre-Columbian archaeological sites strengthens their testimony of the Book of Mormon. Jenson's observations were typical of a Mormon tourist who finds Book of Mormon proof in everything pre-Columbian. At almost every indigenous site he visited, Jenson saw evidence of a great civilization that supported his belief in the Book of Mormon. Jenson's visit to Central America, especially Guatemala, and his experiences in Peru and Bolivia all fortified

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1. Andrew Jenson, *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson: Assistant Historian of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1938).

his belief in the Book of Mormon. His guide was the recent research and map by Joel Ricks, who placed the geographic location of Book of Mormon civilizations north and south of the "small neck of land" in Panama (see Alma 22:32).<sup>2</sup>

Jenson's second religious purpose was to observe the region in order to make a suggestion to the First Presidency as to where Mormon missionaries should be sent. An interesting dichotomy related to missionary work surfaces in his writings. On the one hand, he emphasizes the importance of the indigenous populations as far as they connect to Book of Mormon doctrine and justify the introduction of missionaries to the area. On the other hand, he largely ignores the cultures, languages, lifestyles, and perspectives of the current indigenous people among whom he travels. In his descriptions he often connects this missionary purpose to pre-Columbian evidences and to the scriptural belief that the gospel would be taken to and accepted in great numbers by the indigenous populations of the Americas. Consequently, his observations and discussion were connected more to the past and not to twentieth-century indigenous populations.

Jenson's writings reflect a cautious tone and show little of what may be considered racism. He was even careful not to be too anti-Spain, which was a common perspective for contemporary Northern European and American travelers to Latin America. But at the same time, he made few observations of the native population. He discussed miscegenation

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2. Joel Edward Ricks, *The Geography of the Book of Mormon* (s.l., n.d.), [70–72].

of indigenous people and Europeans in the population, but his writings do not clarify what impact this might have on missionary work. He noticed and occasionally recorded evidence of European oppression and domination of the indigenous populations with little emotion or concern. This is especially true in his description of Cuzco, one of Latin America's most indigenous cities.

The tone of his writings changed significantly when he came down from the Peruvian/Bolivian Andes. As with anyone who travels in these high-altitude regions, he and particularly Page were physically affected by altitude sickness. Everything improved when he arrived in Chile, including the food. His passage from Chile to Argentina through the Andes marks a considerable change in his descriptions. He boarded a train to cross the Argentine Pampas.

Argentina was in the midst of an extraordinary period of economic growth bolstered by the exportation of agricultural products from the country's interior. Jenson and Page were both impressed with the country. Jenson increased his number of personal observations. He used superlatives such as "sublime" and "marvelous" in describing the country. He made positive comparisons to the United States and Europe. He clearly enjoyed this part of the trip.

It was in Buenos Aires that Jenson's strongest feelings were manifest. The city at that time was a metropolis made up mostly of European immigrants. It was a city experiencing growth and expansion. The construction of buildings, parks, and transportation venues was in full swing. Jenson

liked the fact that Buenos Aires had a diverse population and culture. His inability to speak Spanish was not a hindrance as many languages were spoken, including his native Danish. He was warmly welcomed by fellow Danes and Americans. He observed that the city was more European than it was Latin American. There were few indigenous people in the city. He stayed ten days, which was enough time for him to feel at home. When he was on the ship leaving the Buenos Aires Harbor and crossing the La Plata River to Uruguay, he gazed back at the city and expressed his feelings: "Leaving Buenos Aires, where we had spent ten days quite pleasantly, was almost like leaving home."<sup>3</sup>

After they left Buenos Aires, their trip to South America was essentially over. They spent a couple of days in Uruguay and three days in Brazil before heading for New York City. They were both tired and ready to get back to Utah. When Jenson arrived in Salt Lake City and talked about his trip, he was methodical and careful, but his positive impressions of Buenos Aires were evident. In his official report to the First Presidency, he did not specify where missionaries should go but suggested the time is ripe for expansion to South America.

It took the immigration of Church members from Germany to Buenos Aires before his recommendations were realized two years later. Missionaries entered South America in 1925. They went to Buenos Aires and not to Ecuador, Peru, or Bolivia, all of which have large indige-

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3. Jenson, *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson*, 570.

nous populations. Missionaries went to the most European, least indigenous, and most economically developed city of Argentina: Buenos Aires. The First Presidency's decision to send missionaries to Argentina in 1925, to German-speaking Brazil in 1928, and to Uruguay in 1947 meant that no missionaries went to the indigenous areas of eastern South America. It was not until 1956 that missionaries went to Peru and Chile—almost twenty-five years after Jenson's visit.<sup>4</sup> The expansion into regions with predominantly indigenous populations in South America would be among the last areas on the continent to have missionaries.

Jenson and Page's trip to Latin America fulfilled Jenson's purpose—to bring information back to the First Presidency about a region of the world that had not had missionaries but was ready to receive them. The publication of Andrew Jenson's travel letters provides an appreciation and understanding of

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4. Paraguay was added to the Uruguay Mission in 1950, and missionaries went to the major population centers. Little work was done with the Paraguayan indigenous population until much later.

1920s Mormonism and its views of the world. It also adds an additional voice among the many Europeans and Americans who traveled to Latin America during this period of relative calm. Latin America displays historical evidence of great pre-Columbian civilizations. It also reflects the influence of the European population and their efforts to duplicate their cultures in Latin American countries. The combination of the pre-Columbian and European influences makes Latin America a unique place. It may have been an in-between period for Latin America, but it was a time of exploration and evolution that would eventually result in Latin America entering the world community. Jenson provides a description of a region that within seventy years would be a major catalyst in Mormonism's historical emergence as a worldwide church.

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