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Juanita Brooks Lecture Series

Presented by:

Richard Saunders

“Dear Dale, Dear Juanita: Two Friends
and the Contest for Truth, Fact, and
Perspective in Mormon History”



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THE JUANITA BROOKS LECTURE SERIES

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Juanita Brooks

Juanita Brooks was a professor at [then] Dixie College for many years and became a well-known author. She is recognized, by scholarly consensus, to be one of Utah's and Mormondom's most eminent historians. Her total honesty, unwavering courage, and perceptive interpretation of fact set more stringent standards of scholarship for her fellow historians to emulate. Dr. Obert C. and Grace Tanner had been lifelong friends of Mrs. Brooks and it was their wish to perpetuate her work through this lecture series. Dixie State University and the Brooks family express their thanks to the Tanner family.

Dr. Richard Saunders

Dr. Richard Saunders is an academic librarian and former Dean of Library Services at Southern Utah University. A graduate of Utah State University, he holds graduate degrees in history from USU and the University of Memphis. His career in history has centered on preserving the sources of history as a Certified Archivist and special collections librarian, but he has also researched, written, and published widely in historical topics including Yellowstone, the American West, Mormons, American popular literature, and the US civil rights movement. He is presently at work on a biography of Utah native and historian of Western America Dale L. Morgan, and a study of post-war social and economic change in rural America, focusing on several counties in West Tennessee as a study area.

Dear Dale, Dear Juanita: Two Friends and the Contest for Truth, Fact, and Perspective in Mormon History¹

By: Richard Saunders

We all know Juanita Brooks. She is a small-town Utah success story: the woman who wanted to write, became a towering figure of Utah and Latter-day Saint history, a life member of the Western History Association, and ended up with a lecture series named in her honor. Juanita Brooks is a hero discussed in superlatives. Bill Mulder called her “at once representative and singular.” Others have called her “fearless” and a “faithful transgressor.” In a prior lecture in this series, Levi Peterson, her biographer, called her “a credible hero.” Perhaps the highest praise was paid her by fellow writer and semiprofessional curmudgeon, Charles Kelly, when he said with grudging praise, “She has a lot of guts for a Mormon.”² Brooks is the subject of an important biography in its field, and figures in many scholarly studies of Western women, of Mormon history, and of Utah.

¹ I owe public thanks to those who read various stages of this text and held my feet to the fire with their comments, including Douglas D. Alder, Thomas J. Alexander, Will Bagley, Kathleen Broeder, Caitlin Gerrity, Daniel W. Howe, and several anonymous reviewers.

We’ve said all these things because we have always said them. Lauding heroes is good form in public. In Juanita Brooks’ case, praising her literary heroism helps us express a deep regard for Brooks and her importance to the craft she pursued. I notice, however, that praise is heaped on Juanita Brooks often because she is a notable figure. Let me go out on a limb here to suggest that as a writer or historical actor, Brooks is more iconic or emblematic than she is directly influential. Brooks certainly provides a local face (and an early female face) to a much larger set of changing realities, yet she trained no graduate students, instead teaching English composition (not history) to junior college students. She produced one work of monumental importance—but I will explain later how deeply indebted that work was to her mentor. Juanita Brooks lived her life as a committed but avocational chronicler and storyteller, one who began writing with a massive sense of inferiority in an isolated desert town, but she did not write or publish in a vacuum, so if we are to understand Juanita Brooks as a hero we have to look at her, through her, and past her to the world she inhabited.

² The invocations of Brooks as “heroic” are legion and I cannot begin to list them all here. The ones I quote are: William Mulder, review of Peterson, *Juanita Brooks* (1989), *Western American Literature* 24, n.2 (Summer 1989): 159–160; Levi S. Peterson, “The Saving Virtues, the Pardonable Sins,” *Juanita Brooks Lecture*, 28 April 1989 and “In Memoriam: Juanita Brooks,” *Sunstone* [October 1989]:7; Laura L. Bush, “Truth Telling about a Temporal and a Spiritual Life,” *Faithful Transgressions in the American West: Six Twentieth-century Mormon Women’s Autographical Acts* (Logan: Utah State Univ. Press, 2004), 81; Charles Kelly to Dale L. Morgan, 4 January 1970 (reel 14, frame 272), *Dale L. Morgan papers*, Bancroft Library. Hereafter citations to the Morgan papers simply parenthetically cite the Morgan papers’ microfilm reel and frame number for convenience.

The title for this presentation mentions two friends, and I'll get to that, but the underlying thesis for this presentation is a question: why is Juanita Brooks considered a *heroic writer*? More attention has been paid to praising Brooks than to understanding *why* she holds place in scholarship, what Juanita Brooks *means* to history, and just exactly why terms like *heroic* are used to describe her. I think it helpful to remember that heroes are formed from conflict, so it is helpful to recognize when Juanita Brooks is called a *hero* or *heroic writer* that what we are really saying is that she holds a place within a story of conflict. But what was the conflict? The ideas in that straightforward question ought to be unpacked a bit and perhaps restated a bit: what makes Juanita Brooks a heroic writer in terms of others writing in her time and culture? A large portion of the answer to that question lies in my subtitle—at least I hope it does; I put it there.

Let me give you the answer right up, and then I will give you the explanation for it. The answer is, Juanita became a "heroic writer" within Western and LDS historiography by being an early pioneer of a new path through historical narrative. She was one of several visible characters who took a different approach to the past, one which collided with Utah's received wisdom, the inspiring Pioneer myth.³ So, with the thesis out on the table, here is my hypothesis: the Latter-day Saints' collective psyche experienced a subtle but powerful challenge in the years before and after the Second World War. Just before the midpoint of the twentieth century, the church's well-entrenched inspirational narrative collided with a small group of writers whose influence turned out to be much larger than their body of work. The collision forcibly injected a new

viewpoint into discussions of Latter-day Saint history. Basically, there was a high-level argument about what history is, how it draws upon evidence, and how it functions within the culture. This presentation is about that contest. It is an exercise in *historiology* rather than historiography. If historiography is not large enough to be called a branch of philosophy, it can at least be identified as a twig-like offshoot.⁴ Historiology looks at how the past is understood, the social functions of history, and social *epistemology* or ideas about what in the past is knowable and what constitutes "evidence." All these elements shape what is possible to lay before viewers/readers in the

³ Myth in the sense of "origin story," not "falsehood." A myth is not necessarily fiction—yet like any modern myth, the Pioneer myth is packed with all sorts of inspirational or instructive expectations. A partial list could include: that the Mormons departed Winter Quarters for the west not knowing their destination, concentration on dramatic events (like the ill-fated Martin-Willie handcart companies and not the four times as many which got through without a hitch), and an over-emphasis on personal sacrifices. Though myths are often passed along undisturbed or welcome antiquarianism (study of the past as artifact—recounting and correcting dates, times, participants, geography, and other details), myths are usually ethical productions intended to inspire the rising generation of the time. Erick A. Eliason, "Pioneers and Recapitulation in Mormon Popular Historical Expression," *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expression in North America* (Utah State Univ. Press, 1997), 175–211.

⁴ Jose Manuel de Bernardo Ares, *Historiology, Research, and Didactics: Elaboration and Transmission of Historical Knowledge* (International Scholars Press, 1996). The philosophy of history and historiographical literatures are voluminous. Personally I like two works both by John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 5/e (Pearson, 2010; which I read in an early edition during my first graduate education) and *Why History Matters* (2008). One book that approaches the subjects I raise here (but more in nationalist contexts) is Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, 2/e (Routledge, 2016). *Historiography is the study of how history is presented.*

present and thus tell us “what is *history*.” Along the way, I have to toss out some new terms to help make sense of what was at stake, how approaches differed, and how those views shaped understanding. Don’t give up yet—this really is about Juanita Brooks!

We’ll start (like any historian has to) by setting some limits and boundaries, and to do that we have to extract a snippet out of the timeline of the history of Latter Day Saint history.⁵ We talk about *timelines* as if time exists with beginnings and ends, but life is not really lived in a line. An historian’s beginning and end points in both time and in circumstance are necessary choices, because no book has a limitless page count or is exhaustively inclusive.⁶ Beginnings and ends help us make sense of a story, trimming it to manageable size and giving it an outline and context. Since we are talking about Juanita Brooks, I will put a pin in Latter Day Saint chronology at 1935 and another at 1950,

⁵ Readers will notice a difference in usage between Latter Day Saints and Latter-day Saints. The former is the earliest spelling adopted by the church, and modern historians are beginning to use it to refer to Mormon culture at its broadest, which would include the Reorganization and other groups claiming descent from Joseph Smith Jr.’s organization; the latter refers directly to the Utah-based branch of the Latter Day Saint social tradition. Perhaps because it rested strongly on democratic liberalism, the RLDS branch of the Latter Day Saints seem not to have struggled with its history in quite the same way as the Utah branch of the church. This article focuses chiefly on the latter.

⁶ William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (March 1992): 1347–1376. Choosing a topic, period, and scope are the historian’s choices, influencing the narrative and the arc of the story being told. I owe an anonymous reviewer of this paper thanks for the tip that led to this clarifying citation.

fixing our attention conveniently on fifteen years during which she was being re-formed as a writer into a historian. Because Juanita existed in space as well as time, we also put a pin onto a map at St. George, Utah specifically and into Utah and Latter-day Saint culture more generally.

These pins give us a set of boundaries within which to work; however, I do not want to imply that my two title characters create a modern form of Latter-day Saint history as we know it. All we are doing is pinning down both a place and a time, and using two friends to look at matters larger than either or both of them. Inside the box made by these pins we’ll use the interactions and activities of our two principals as a lens through which to study changes inside our box, across time and culture. The way that I will do this is to focus attention on this box we’ve drawn from three levels above it. The first is right inside the box at the level of *microhistory*, the personal interactions between Juanita Brooks, a close friend of hers, Dale Morgan, and their mutual effect on each other’s writing. Their work both reflects and affects the second level, which is a *macrohistorical* level. At this level we see how history was produced and consumed in Mormondom and in Utah of this period. Finally, we will climb high into the catbird seat of philosophical *historiology* to see how this box fits within time and culture: what history *was* and what it could do—and how it changed—in the social and ideological world of these two friends.

PART I: A MICROHISTORY

Let's start with Juanita Brooks, a small-town housewife and teacher who wanted to be a creative writer, planted in a small desert town of the American West and the Mormon Corridor. She did not start as a historian or even as a writer of history, but found she was comfortable telling stories about the desert and people around her. Most of that happens before 1935, outside the first pin marking our timeline. Juanita began her involvement with the practice of history as a documentary transcriptionist. The catalyst for this activity was Nels Anderson, a Columbia University graduate student in sociology, who in 1933 was doing field research in St. George.⁷ Juanita had married George Brooks the year before, and the Andersons lived around the corner from the Brooks' new blended family. Anderson asked Brooks to write a personal account of her grandfather's polygamous family.⁸ In 1934, Anderson returned east and landed in an executive position on the National Labor Relations Board just as the National Recovery Act began creating projects to provide a few of the rural unemployed with meaningful work during the Great Depression. Knowing the St. George region's rich and distinct local culture and its limited economic opportunities, Anderson wrote asking Brooks to start up and manage a Southern Utah branch of the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA).⁹ She set up a table and bank of typewriters in a back room of her own house,

⁷ *His work in St. George was later expanded and published as Desert Saints (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1942).*

⁸ *Published as "A Close-up of Polygamy," Harper's 168 (May 1934): 299-307.*

where between November 1934 and June 1935 a dozen local women were paid to transcribe regional diaries and similar records which Brooks ran to ground from the bureau drawers and trunks of families around the area. ERA was invalidated by a decision of the staunchly conservative Supreme Court, but the deposit carbon copies of the Southern Utah transcripts were given to a new agency in Ogden, the Historical Records Survey (HRS). The sheets languished in the HRS files, ignored. Three years later, the HRS hired a young man fresh out of the University of Utah, Dale Morgan, as the project editor/publicist and later its historian. Morgan came across the southern Utah transcriptions as he reorganized the project's research files. Mr. Morgan began corresponding with Mrs. Brooks in July 1939 and the rest is, as they say, history—well, we have to assume it was history, because the pair's letters between themselves between 1939 and 1941 did not survive, and by then they were clearly on intimate terms, professionally. After nearly two years of correspondence, the pair met for the first time in January 1941.¹⁰

This story introduces Morgan. Who is he? Except among

⁹ *A complementary version of this story is given by Maurice Howe, the founding director of HRS/UWP in 1935, in Maurice Howe to Dale Morgan, 29 May 1942 (26:895-987), and 30 May 1942 (26:989).*

¹⁰ *DLM to Jessie Empey, 17 August 1939 (27:149); Peterson, Brooks, 92-93, 100-101. The pair began corresponding officially as Morgan began a revision to the Washington County history for its never-completed county records inventory. They were clearly corresponding as the exchange is mentioned in other letters. The pair met for the first time when Morgan came south on Writers' Project business in January 1941 (DLM to Glenn R. Wilde, 20 April 1966 (9:245)).*

scholars, Dale Morgan does not have Juanita Brooks' name recognition. He is not remembered as a major influence on Utah or Mormon historiography, but he was, and he was a defining influence on Juanita Brooks. To understand Juanita Brooks we have to first understand Dale Morgan. Why? Mostly because Brooks considered Dale Morgan her teacher, mentor, confidant, and he was certainly an important supply line of sources and expertise for her during her formative years as a historian.

Morgan was born and raised in Salt Lake City. They shared an experience in early family loss, Brooks of her first husband and Morgan of his father while still a child. Morgan also sustained another defining personal loss. At age fourteen, a bacterial meningitis infection completely robbed him of his hearing. Through his high school, college, and entire adult life, Dale Morgan was irrevocably deaf. Typewriters became his voice, and his correspondence numbers in the tens of thousands. Morgan planned for a career in advertising, but his job in the Historical Records Survey in August 1938, introduced him to the pursuit of history. As early as October 1938, Morgan wrote a cousin that "Practically nothing really worth while touching upon Utah and Mormonism, what they have been, and what they have become, is worth one single damn, and that goes not only for non-Mormon writing but for Mormon writing"¹¹ — and he set himself a personal task to write the history of Utah and

¹¹ DLM to Jerry, 5 October 1938, T. Gerald Bleak letters, Univ. of Utah Special Collections, Salt Lake City; Richard Saunders, "'The Strange Mixture of Emotion and Intellect': A Social History of Dale L. Morgan 1933-1942," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 39-58.

then of Mormonism. That is a pretty high bar for a kid fresh out of college with no training and merely a few months of on-the-job experience. Together, the assigned tasks of focused research and succinct writing in the HRS kindled in him a passion for factual accuracy and a quest for comprehensive completeness. He used both to publish one of the earliest examples of modern historical study within the Latter Day Saint tradition.¹² Morgan possessed a positively remarkable memory, cultivated a genuine flair for writing, and depended almost exclusively on notes, letters, and memos for his interaction with most people. Mrs. Brooks learned she could trust Mr. Morgan's observations and criticisms, and he was faultlessly generous sharing source material with her. They each discovered a kindred spirit dedicated to factuality, fairness, and truth. Before 1941, each also discovered their correspondent also wanted to write about one culturally untouchable subject, the Mountain Meadows Massacre.¹³ Earlier I mentioned that there is no surviving correspondence for those years, so I can tell the early

¹² "The State of Deseret," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 8, n.1-4 (1940). Morgan aspired to crafting a social and cultural history of the US setting in which Mormonism rose. This was under contract to Farrar & Rinehart but was never completed. Decades later a close friend published a volume that probably comes the closest to the study Dale imagined. Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), a volume of the Oxford History of the United States series.

¹³ Morgan was introduced to the Massacre and the challenges of documenting it in 1939 while revising the HRS Washington County historical sketch and in corresponding with Charles Kelly. The incomplete exchange between the pair is scattered between the alphabetically arranged files and the HRS file (carton 1) in the Morgan papers, and Kelly papers at UHi.

portion of the story only by inferring how things likely unfolded.

As a St. George resident, Juanita Brooks was personally interested in the Mountain Meadow Massacre because it was an unspoken reality all around her. Brooks knew personally at least one man implicated in the Massacre, Nephi Johnson. Juanita told stories well, but so much folklore, fear, family patriotism, and emotion were tangled among the narrative threads that storytelling about the Massacre—Brooks' practice at the time—was culturally perilous.¹⁴ Morgan also drew Brooks into a loose constellation of Utah's expatriate writers. Besides Morgan and Brooks, the circle's key members included Bernard De Voto, Wallace Stegner, and Fawn Brodie. Around Juanita and other writers also circulated Maurine Whipple, a novelist and self-promoter, and Nels Anderson, who has been mentioned. Each of these people and their relationships to Brooks belong in the second level I mentioned earlier. I'll discuss that in a bit, but the relationships and influences are too complicated to tease out in the limited space here, so in this first level I will concentrate on the interaction of Brooks and Morgan. The development of Brooks' *Mountain Meadows Massacre* is a useful lens through which to see their interaction, since it fits neatly into our snippet of timeline.

Juanita Brooks came to her subject independently, well

¹⁴ Since initially she had no publisher in mind Morgan suggested Harper's for her article on the Massacre. I am fairly sure Brooks thought about the story in terms of a Utah Historical Quarterly article, possibly (but not certainly) built around editing the two reminiscences she had found (see notes 15, 16). Morgan's publication of *The State of Deseret* may have provided her with a model how the subject might be approached. From their letters she clearly communicates that she is not yet confident in her ability or grasp of the subject.

before encountering Morgan. Historian Gary Topping points out that Brooks was an insider to her subject, bringing to it two invaluable qualities: first, being a local, with a local's access to material that would surely have been denied to anyone outside her community; second, being an insider, with an insider's comprehension of the community, its members, and the values which drove it.¹⁵ Brooks discovered two crucial first-hand Massacre documents in 1936 and 1937. In 1940, she made a preliminary presentation to the Utah Academic of Sciences, Arts, and Letters based on those documents.¹⁶ The Massacre story suffused the Jacob Hamblin biography which she wished to write. Brooks and Morgan certainly must have discussed their common interest at their first meeting in January 1941, but if not, she openly confessed her desire to Morgan in the summer of 1942 and sent him an article draft. He responded to her draft a full year later. The subject was too large and convoluted for an article, he thought, and suggested she think about the work in monograph length. He also provided her with essentially a research outline, facts and points she needed to settle to avoid criticism before she

¹⁵ Gary Topping, *Utah Historians and the Reconstruction of Western History* (Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 177-226. These points are on p.207. Edward Leo Lyman, "The Evolution of Treatment of the Latter-day Saint Past," *Mormon Historical Studies* 11, n.1 (Spring 2010): 61-90.

¹⁶ The documents were the anonymous first-hand account signed "Bull Valley Snort" (John M. Higbee), which became Appendix 2 in MMM, and an affidavit from Nephi Johnson, which became Appendix 1. Peterson, Brooks, 115, 129. An abstract of the presentation, "Sidelights on the Mountain Meadows Massacre," appears in *Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters* 17 (1940): 12. Beyond this abstract, no text of the presentation survives. She shelved rather than publish it, fearing social reprisal.

was properly prepared to write.¹⁷ In the opening months of 1945 Juanita sends Dale a much longer but very rough draft manuscript. He returned suggestions on the heavily marked up sheets, a detailed critique that focused chiefly on historical details and documentation in the sources, some of which he had ignored in earlier drafts.¹⁸ More importantly, he introduced Brooks to the basics of manuscript preparation (details like margins and note citations), and he suggested again that her topic was too large for an article. “You suggest a monograph,” Juanita replied, “I’m ashamed to admit that I’m not sure that I know what a monograph is.”¹⁹ Dale explained her narrative would be better presented as book, and Juanita set to work enlarging, trimming, and documenting a work of research for the first time in her life. The process changed her writing about the Massacre from storytelling to historical narrative. Over two years and many more letters to and from her mentor, she also learned about bias, innuendo, weighing evidence, the importance of documentation, and the elements of an historical approach—though she would not have called it that. By this stage in its development, Dale had provided more than half of the sources she quoted and cited, virtually everything unearthed from contemporary newspapers and everything from

¹⁷ JB to DLM, 11 September [1942] (10:1030); DLM to JB, 27 September 1942 (1:1835), Ms 486 1:1, UU-Ms. This was evidently a narrative and not a documentary edit.

¹⁸ DLM to JB, 2 June 1945, Ms B103 1:9, UHi.

¹⁹ JB to DLM, 11 September [1942] (10:1030). Morgan’s review itself is in DLM to JB, 15 May 1943 (1:1836), MSB 103 1:6, UHi.

federal archives.²⁰ Morgan reviewed and commented on the manuscript for a fourth time in June 1948, and at that point it was he (not the author) who approached first Wallace Stegner and then Stanford University Press to assess their interest in its publication.²¹ Asserting that there would not likely be a book-length treatment of *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* by Brooks except for Dale Morgan, involves not the slightest bit of exaggeration. As the book was going to press, Morgan recommended Juanita Brooks and her growing capability to the Utah State Historical Society. She was appointed to the Board of Control in 1949 and became his voice on it, pushing for creation of a publicly available research collection and real rigor in its publications.²²

This is the level of microhistory. On an interpersonal level, Juanita Brooks and Dale Morgan encountered each other at a

²⁰ Morgan planned to write on the MMM’s “long range significance to Utah-Mormon history” as early as May 1939, before he began corresponding with Brooks (DLM to Maurice Howe, 22 May 1939, 27:182–188). The pair formed a partnership to share relevant source material in which Brooks was the greatest beneficiary, which did not bother Morgan at all; he did the same for many other people through his career. cf. Karl Yost, “Introduction,” in Henry DeGroot, *Sketches of the Washoe Silver Mines, Reprints of Americana Series n.3* (Morrison, Ill.: Reprinted for Karl Yost, 1961).

²¹ DLM to JB, 15 June 1948 (1:1894); 11 August 1948 (1:1896), Ms 486 1:3[c], UU-Ms; DLM to Stegner, 11 August 1948, Ms 676 18:53, UU-Ms.

²² Morgan conceived the plan to professionalize the Utah State Historical Society as the state’s first real public research library. Brooks’ appointment was recommended by her mentor specifically to counter the Daughters of Utah Pioneers’ influence on the way history was documented and related in the state (DLM to JB, 3 October 1948 (1:1905); DLM to JB, 23 March 1949 (1:1921)). Marguerite Sinclair,

time when Brooks needed development, encouragement and insight. Morgan needed someone within his culture who shared his perspective about historical realities—a brave and capable peer to encourage. She was nearly old enough to be his mother, but he was the more developed researcher and writer. Juanita Brooks had the disposition and latent ability to write the great book that *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* is, but she would not likely have written it were it not for Dale Morgan. She gained from Dale Morgan source material, perspective, methodological tutoring, and a champion. Alone of her work, *Massacre* has the ballast of citations. None of her other works are documented nearly so well, and many have virtually no context or documentation beyond a general bibliography.²³

[22 cont.] *the Society's secretary-manager, relied heavily on Morgan's advice for building a book collection, organizing and housing transcripts, and physical arrangements of shelving and storage. Beyond his own letters (e.g., DLM to UHi board, 27 May 1945 [9:70]), Morgan's influence on the Utah State Historical Society can best be glimpsed in the Utah State Historical Society record series, 1117 boxes 1-2, 4, 3192, and 7323, and in Society Secretaries Marguerite Sinclair Reusser and Elizabeth Lauchnor's recommendations to USHS president Joel E. Ricks (Ricks papers, Utah State Univ. Special Collections). The Society gained its first professional director in 1950 when A. Russell Mortensen was hired, Morgan's direct influence effectively ended (although Morgan was almost hired as the first State Archivist for Utah).*

²³ *The Harper's articles are essays, almost short stories. Her first work of history, Dudley Leavitt: Pioneer of Southern Utah (Privately published, 1942), a biography of her grandfather, provides not a single footnote for context. All are excellent pieces of writing which spin the tale rather than document it or reach conclusions. An argument could be made (not here) that each piece fits within the Latter-day Saint presentist tradition of the time, asserting the underlying nobility of the characters and their struggles. John Doyle Lee: Zealot, Pioneer Builder, Scapegoat (Arthur H. Clark Co., 1961) and History of the Jews in Utah and Idaho*

It robs her of no credit to say that as a writer of history, Juanita Brooks was chiefly a chronicler and storyteller, not a researcher.

Both Brooks and Morgan were skilled writers; one had insider access and commitment, the other outsider detachment and perspective. With his help, she accomplished a remarkable work of history that is rightly an important book—but all we can do at this level of analysis is assert that it is an important book. *Why* it is such an important book cannot be seen at the level of microhistory. To see its significance we have to look at *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* and its writer (and its godfather) in a broader context—what made the book significant in terms of the time in which it was produced, and what set its author on the path toward hero status.

[23 cont.] *(Western Epics, 1973) rest on bibliographic essays. Look carefully at her writing and one notices that notes in On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout (Univ. of Utah Press and Utah State Historical Society, 1963) are chiefly citations of published primary documents and secondary material. Look very carefully and it becomes clear how indebted she is to Dale Morgan even for the cited material.*

PART II: A MACROHISTORY

Now let's step back a bit, broaden our perspective of Juanita Brooks' and Dale Morgan's time and place, and take a macrohistorical look at where their work is situated within the place and time. I'll mention again that Brooks has been widely described as a "fearless" writer. Why? What was there about the time that pursuing her craft in the way she did made her "fearless?" To look at that requires two bits of context.

The first bit is a short comment by Swedish scholar Moses Rischin. In 1969 Rischin published a short essay pointing to a perceived change in Mormon historiography, calling it "the new Mormon history."²⁴ He pointed to Thomas O'Dea's *The Mormons* (1957) as the departure point for the New Mormon History, followed immediately by Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom*, and in 1965 both the founding of the Mormon History Association and the commencement of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Later scholars propose that the change in Mormon history Rischin identified resulted from the emergence of professionally trained historians from within Latter Day Saint culture.²⁵ I am not so sure, because something was going on

²⁴ Moses Rischin, "The New Mormon History," *American West* 6, no. 2 (March 1969): 49.

²⁵ James B. Allen, "Since 1950: Creators and Creations of Mormon History," *New Views of Mormon History: Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington*, ed. Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Univ. of Utah Press, 1987), 407-438; Davis Bitton and Leonard J. Arrington, "The Professionalization of Mormon History," *Mormons and Their Historians* (Univ. of Utah Press, 1988), 126-146; Robert B. Flanders, "Some Reflections on the New Mormon History," *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, ed. George D. Smith (Signature Books, 1992), 35-45; Ronald W. Walker, David J. Whittaker, James B. Allen, "The New

[25 cont.] *Mormon History: Historical Writing since 1950*," *Mormon History* (Univ. of Illinois Press, 2001), 60-112. In a discussion of Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*, Roger Launius asserted that the change between the older style of historical inquiry and the "New Mormon History" was due to the professionalization of the field—the post-war involvement of young, academically trained historians interested in Mormonism as a research topic (Roger D. Launius, "From Old to New in Mormon History: Fawn Brodie and the Scholarly Analysis of Mormonism," *Reconsidering No Man Knows My History: Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect* [Utah State Univ. Press, 1996], 195-233.) I agree with Bitton, Arrington, and Launius to a point, yet concentrating on the flowering masks the real collision that stirred the soil from which that flower grew: what happened before the Arrington generation of scholars began actively writing. Considered from a slightly different direction, the New Mormon History is really the rise of a topical specialty within academically practicing and teaching historians. Davis Bitton points out that invoking the New Mormon History approach "have reference not to the fact of being produced recently but to distinctive approaches and questions asked" ("Mormon Society and Culture," *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and Lavina Fielding Anderson [Greg Kofford Books, 2004], 351). Grant Underwood, "Re-visioning Mormon History," *Pacific Historical Review* 55, no.3 (August 1986): 403-426. However, the Mormon History Association (and now John Whitmer Historical Association, with other Mormon-themed groups outside the US) specifically welcome the participation of non-specialists. Its conference attendance and readerships maintains a high number of untrained but energetic avocational scholars who attend, present, and discuss alongside the professors and emeriti; MHA and JWHA have thus far avoided spiraling into the trap of academic elitism into which the Western History Association descended in the 1980s.

years earlier, and both Dale Morgan and Juanita Brooks were in the thick of it. Like most changes, it had precursors and antecedents and was not clear-cut, but I think it can be seen in the books published within the timeline snippet this lecture addresses (see Appendix). I suggest that this earlier period of conflict smoothed the way for the rise of academic scholarship on Mormonism.

The second bit of context is more like a chunk: understanding of how history was written and distributed in Latter Day Saint and Latter-day Saint context when Juanita Brooks began writing. Before talking about philosophy, our third level of inquiry, we need to get an idea of what was being published about Utah history and Latter-day Saint history, specifically. How did Juanita Brooks' first important work, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, fit into History (with a capital H) of the time? How did Brooks and her work get to the place she earned in History? To understand the question I started with, why Juanita Brooks was a "fearless" or "heroic" writer, one has to understand when she lived and what about the writing history might have made her heroic in comparison. She has to be "heroic" in terms of the telling of Utah and Mormon history between 1935 and 1950.

It is helpful to admit up front that until nearly the 1960s, no one outside Utah was terribly interested in Mormons beyond sensationalism, certainly not historically. With few exceptions, Mormon history was generally written by Mormons for Mormons, whether Latter Day Saints or Latter-day Saints. In Utah, history was almost an outgrowth of church authority, the venue of encyclopedists like Andrew Jenson, compilers and analysts like B. H. Roberts, and doctrinarians like Joseph

Fielding Smith. There was little unofficial Mormon history written or marketed.²⁶ At the same time, there was a small but thriving culture of local and family history publications, especially with the church and state's pioneer founders a generation gone. The major publications were Daughters of Utah Pioneers lesson series, and the *Utah Historical Quarterly*. Utah was not unique by any measure; state and local historical journals across the country had presented the edited records of founders and pioneers for about fifty years by 1935. Such publications were fueled by a healthy strain of *antiquarianism*, or the study of the past for its own sake as an artifact. Publication was textual preservation, often reprinting primary works without comment. Memoirs and biographies appeared regularly as family publications, often including segments of diaries. Church leaders afforded larger biographies. The important point is that history (except for outright polemic) was written largely by Latter-day Saints for Latter-day Saints. This was history in terms of the Pioneer myth: stories told and books written to congratulate the living on their heritage, partly to gild the founders, and certainly to reinforce values and views.²⁷ One writer once observed privately that the Mormons

²⁶ One exception was M. R. Werner's biography Brigham Young (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1925). I don't want to imply that there was no such history published outside Utah. B. H. Roberts' "History of the 'Mormon' Church" was published serially in *Americana* 4, no.1 – 10, no.2 (1909 July – 1915 July) was later compiled into the Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7v. (Deseret News Press, 1930).

²⁷ *The Sons of Utah Pioneers' mission statement is openly ethical: "Come to know our fathers, and turn our hearts to them. Preserve the memory and heritage of the early pioneers of the Utah Territory and the*

had never adopted Scottish poet Robert Burns' invocation "O, would some Power the gift give us to see ourselves as others see us," but rather "Oh, would someone give the world to see us as we see ourselves."²⁸ An important problem with all this storytelling was that it was done chiefly by assertion and storytelling. The source material was chiefly personal narrative. Very rarely did anyone really explore very far to see how contemporary records compared. The single library in Utah with a substantive and available book collection was the Salt Lake Public Library—not the U, not BYU, the Utah State Historical Society barely existed, and USU had only a single rare-book collection.²⁹

By the 1930s, whether or not intended, the telling of the Latter-day Saint story had become closely entangled with church doctrine in the minds of key practitioners, and an attack on one was, by point of argument, necessarily an attack on the other. Histories tended to be produced in terms of church leaders' lives and their agency in the past, often written by well-placed younger leaders. The generation of witnesses was long gone and access to first-hand written source material was

[27 cont.] *western U.S. Honor present-day pioneers worldwide who exemplify these same qualities of character. Teach these same qualities to the youth who will be tomorrow's pioneers.*" <https://www.sup1847.com/mission-and-activities/>.

²⁸ Robert Burns, "O wad some Power the giftie gie us To see oursels as ithers see us!", *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Project Gutenberg; DLM to Emily Morgan, 20 November 1950 (21:694).

²⁹ *Stories of these library collections are collected in Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States*, ed. David Whittaker (BYU Studies, 1994).

dramatically limited, making official histories like *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (4v., 1897–1908) and the semi-official *History of the Church of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (7v., 1902–1912) both source material and commentary. Doctrinal histories like Joseph Fielding Smith Jr.'s *Origin of the Reorganized Church* (1907) and *Essentials in Church History* (1922) were at least openly polemic, but because writers on all sides tended to write *both* doctrine and history and argued about doctrine from a historical perspective, it was difficult for readers to meaningfully separate the assertive claims of doctrine from the common mortal realities that could have been merely factual. Wrapped up in proving what did or did not happen, writers tended to miss other issues that were socially relevant.

Everything in the budding cultural collision was on hold during the Second World War, as all turned their eyes heavenward for help and strength. On the heels of the Second World War, which ended with the heady "triumph of democracy," came the 1947 Utah Pioneer Centennial. A desire to celebrate and memorialize the past provided little room to question it.³⁰ Crawford Gates' *Promised Valley* pageant sang paeans to the Utah Pioneers. Preston Nibley edited a collection of *Faith Promoting Stories* (1943). J. Reuben Clark's October 1947 general conference address, published immediately as

³⁰ *Utah's 1897 settlement semicentennial, which had many of the original pioneers on hand, was a far less overt pageant than would be organized after that generation became merely portraits on walls and names on plaques. The church's 1930 centennial or the 1947 state centennial were exponentially more laudatory, grounded in the cultural need for enshrining heroes.*

To Them of the Last Wagon, capped the process, drawing the lowliest into the pantheon of “blessed, honored Pioneers!”³¹ Clarks’ emotional appeal sat alongside Ida Alldredge’s zealous laud of the Pioneer forebears, *They, The Builders of the Nation*. Her hymn was specific about founders’ qualities and accomplishments: “every day some burden lifted, every day some heart to cheer, every day some hope the brighter . . .”³² Really? Every day? Alldredge’s lyric ignored personal struggles, doubts, argument, and failures, to gild the entire founding generation and put them—all of them—high overhead on a very tall cultural pedestal. Clark’s respect for those who had suffered along the overland trail is no less sincere for its stentorian eloquence, but its message also carried a submessage, one that may or may not have been purposefully invoked: that Latter-day Saint history *should* hold out a clear, noble, inspired and inspiring example of the past—the veritable staff on which floated aloft an “ensign to the nations.” To these Pioneers should the rising generation look for its cultural and moral anchor, especially since they would soon no longer have those Pioneers in their midst. The underlying message was for those in the present to look to the faithfulness and nobility of those in the past.³³

³¹ J. Reuben Clark, *To Them of the Last Wagon* (Deseret News Press, 1947). The quoted phrase is from the chorus of “*They, the Builders of the Nation*” cited below.

³² “*They the Builders of the Nation*,” lyric by Ida R. Alldredge, music by Alfred M. Durham, *Hymns* (1948), no. 173.

³³ In 1938, Clark delivered a landmark address on the subject of education. That talk, later published as “*The Charted Course for Church Education*,” is still regarded as the central statement behind the Church Education System—albeit not the church’s higher-ed institutions. In it Clark served as the voice of the First Presidency, laying out the goal of education “to bring to the young people of

[33 cont.] the Church an increase in their testimonies” (Clark to R.K. Bischoff, 8 September 1938, Clark papers, BYU). Preparing them for careers, sharpening their God-given talents, or any other purpose, was distinctly secondary. If history was to be included in education (and it was, surely), Clark felt deeply that questioning the story of the nation’s or church’s past, or the prominent figures belonging to either, questioned their integrity and was thus inherently disloyal. For Clark, education, and history used in education, served an immediate, fundamentally ethical purpose. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “*The Charted Course for the Church in Education*,” *Improvement Era* 41 (September 1938): 520–521. His work was not merely about the superior value of religion and education; Clark employed overtly cultural overtones. cf. “*The university has a dual function, a dual aim and purpose—secular learning, the lesser value, and spiritual development, the greater. These two values must be always together, neither would be perfect without the other, but the spiritual values, being basic and eternal, must always prevail, for the spiritual values are built upon absolute truth*” (Clark, inaugural charge to Howard S. McDonald, “*The Mission of Brigham Young University*,” *Brigham Young University Quarterly* 46, no. 1 [1949 Aug]). Brooks observed to Morgan in 1945 that in Clark’s view there was no purpose to knowledge beyond the ethical. The “*Reubenization*” of history and education, in her view, involved “the writing out of every program, every speech . . . [anything beyond] the attitude that he gave out to the seminary teachers—that ‘you are not hired to think, you are hired to teach’—and then outlining certain things which he considered basic and the interpretation which he wanted placed on them” (JB to DLM, 4 June 1945 [10:598], reproduced in Quicksand and Cactus: A Memoir of the Southern Mormon Frontier [Howe Brothers, 1982], xxxiii). In 1947 DUP president Kate Carter once addressed a BYU faculty group on the subject of source material. “When she talked of ‘editing’ journals, one of the audience . . . asked specifically what it was that she called ‘editing.’ She explained that she omitted material that seemed not important or that was repetitious and then said, ‘I never allow anything to go into print that I think will be injurious to my church, or that will in any way reflect discredit upon our pioneers. I hope that if I ever do, I shall lose my position and my power to do’” (JB to DLM, 6 March 1947, 10:687). Brooks twice expressly rejected Carter’s bowdlerizing approach in “*The First One Hundred Years of Southern Utah History*,” *Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters* 24 (1946–1947): 71–79; reprinted, *Encyclopaedia retrospective issue* (1983): 89–98; and in “*Let’s Preserve Our Records*,” *Utah Humanities Review* 2 (July 1948): 259–263.

By the late 1930s, through the 1940s, and into the 1950s, Latter-day Saint culture held clearly established ideas about how the past should be regarded, and how it was appropriately used within church's culture of belief and participation. Maurice Howe wrote a friend about his experience starting the Historical Records Survey in 1935 that "LDS historians were jealous of our work at first because they thought we were trespassing in their fields . . ." ³⁴ The Mormon story was proprietary. As late as the 1920s, key writers among the Latter-day Saints were used to thinking of history and the present understanding of the past as a mortal manifestation of revealed truth. History became a form of uncanonized scripture; challenge accepted history and one assaulted God's word and the prophets and apostles. As late as the 1930s the Latter Day Saint establishments were tangled in a historiological binary: the church and its past was true, as stated by prophets and apostles, or it was under attack by the forces of Satan, continuing the War in Heaven with an attack upon Truth on earth. The perspective was not limited strictly to church leaders, either. It is also clear that a popular desire to memorialize the founders sparked many family publications that worked to establish a place for their grandfather or grandmother within the founding stories of the church, the settlement of Utah, or of a particular locality.

That patriotic, inspirational, culturally affirming history is one side of the equation. What could possibly be a problem with that approach if it works? Well, what happens when a new set of facts are brought up that seem to contradict or question the

³⁴ Maurice Howe to DLM, 19 May 1942 (26:987).

stories of established tradition? That was a real problem for the affirming history of Mormonism between 1935 and 1950. I'm not talking about academic scholarship. Scholarship involving the Mormons cropped up occasionally, but mostly in the form of masters' theses and dissertations read by nobody besides the committee. A few of these actually made it to print, including E. E. Eriksen's *Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life* (1922) and *The United Order among the Mormons* (1922). My grandfather completed his PhD in sociology in 1936 at the University of Wisconsin with a dissertation on social perceptions and adherence to the church's health standard. Despite the subject, he made an international career in rural sociology, not the Mormons. A few people read scholarship, but it was not many; such work written about the Mormons was generally unread even among Mormon academics.³⁵ That began to change during our snippet of timeline. Since academic scholarship wasn't very influential (or upsetting), I'll focus here on two important factors that were. One was the activity of a new generation of Utah-born but externally practicing writers who were willing and able to put their culture onto a national stage—that expatriate constellation

³⁵ Leonard J. Arrington, "Scholarly Studies of Mormonism in the Twentieth Century," *Dialogue* 1, no.1 (1966): 15-32; Ephraim E. Erickson, "Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life" (PhD, Univ. of Chicago, 1922); R. Welling Roskelley, "Attitudes and Overt Behavior: Their Relationship to Each Other and to Select Factors" (PhD, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1938). Please excuse the personal indulgence; I mention grandpa's dissertation because Arrington missed it in the list compiled for the article. *The Latter-day Saint experience with scholarship is explored in Thomas W. Simpson, American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism, 1867-1940* (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2016).

I mentioned earlier. Another was the archives and writing projects of the New Deal. We'll talk through the latter first.

Brooks' transcription project and Morgan's HRS historical work both challenged the traditional forms of Utah/Mormon history, which focused on founding figures and political institutions. The Depression discredited the country's industrial and political barons of the Gilded Age. Depression motivated a quest for a new approach to the nation's history, and they found it in a new historical approach that came from Britain: *documentary*.³⁶ "Documentary," wrote historian William Stott, "deals with people 'a damn sight realer' than the celebrities that crowd the media." Influenced by the work of photographer Lewis Hine, documentary focused on the experiences and records of non-elite populations. Early forms of documentary emphasized common people, work routines, daily life. "The Depression stimulated, even compelled, a documentary approach."³⁷ This new approach required an entirely new set of source materials. The previously available memoirs and writings of community and business leaders—the basis of traditional history—was only marginally significant compared to the diaries,

³⁶ "Documentary is the presentation or representation of actual fact in a way that makes it credible and vivid to people at the time. Since all emphasis is on the fact, its validity must be unquestionable as possible ('Truth,' Roy Stryker said [head of the Farm Security Administration photo office], 'is the objective of the documentary attitude'). Since just the fact matters, it can be transmitted in any plausible medium." "The heart of documentary is not form or style or medium, but always content." "Social documentary . . . shows man at grips with conditions neither permanent nor necessary, conditions of a certain time and place." William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 14, 20.

³⁷ Stott, *Documentary Expression*, 56, 71.

letters, and memoirs of those who had been nothing more than followers and common citizens. This approach to history broadened the perspective about "what really happened" away from elite figures and onto the often-conflicting experiences of everyone else. And yes, it was a factor in Utah as well. "Mormonism really was compounded out of the lives of hundreds and thousands," Morgan wrote to Bernard De Voto in 1942, referring to the diary of a man otherwise unknown to Church or Utah history. "There is more to Mormonism than the lives of Brigham Young and Joseph Smith."³⁸ Importantly, bringing up the differing perspectives of documentary often challenged or complicated official stories all across the country, not just in Utah or among the Mormons.³⁹ Do you see the budding problem? Church leaders and their records were Mormonism's cultural elite, and dredging up new records from people with very different and sometimes conflicting experiences looked like a challenge to the master narrative. By the end of the war, documentary approach proved powerful enough that it began reshaping American memory.⁴⁰

Now for a hard example of the collision. At about the same time as Morgan and Brooks began corresponding, a young

³⁸ DLM to Bernard De Voto, 2 March 1942 (2:2147).

³⁹ Stott, *Documentary Expression*, 104–117; Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935–1943*, 2/e (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), *passim*.

⁴⁰ *Ethical enterprise was alive and well, personified by illustrator Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms paintings and the Office of War Information's highly effective propaganda campaign, which successfully challenged pre-war isolationism by linking World War II*

woman from Huntsville, Utah and another University of Utah graduate, Fawn McKay, a niece of First Presidency member David O. McKay, quietly surrendered her family faith and determined to embark on a biography of the Prophet Joseph Smith. She met both De Voto and Morgan, was influenced by their thinking, and became a close friend of the latter, drawing on him for source material and editorial advice. Between 1940 and 1944, Fawn McKay Brodie mined resources from outside Latter-day Saint history and records. In 1943, her proposal won the Biography Fellowship offered by New York publisher Alfred A. Knopf. In 1945 her biography *No Man Knows My History* appeared, a volume that has not since been declared out of print. The social history revolution of the 1960s and 1970s shook the ivory tower of American academia over years and across many venues. Fawn M. Brodie's biography of Joseph Smith compressed a similar challenge to traditional Mormon history into a single, explosive shockwave.

The great challenge to Latter-day Saint psyche posed by *No Man Knows My History*, and a few years later by *The Mountain*

[40 cont.] *with the Revolution, thus converting military service from involvement in foreign affairs into a crusade for "liberty" and "freedom." During and after the war a school of history known as Consensus approach grew partly out of the national unity engendered by the war effort. Their work tended to minimize the nation's cultural and racial diversity to concentrate on "shared" heritage, the "melting pot" myth of cultural integration, and broad national stories (which privileged white heritages). cf. Peter Novick, That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), ch.11; Peter Charles Hoffer, "The Rise of Consensus History," Past Imperfect: Facts, Fictions, Fraud (PublicAffairs, 2004); Mario DePillis, review of History's Memory by Ellen Fitzpatrick (Harvard Univ. Press, 2002) in Journal of Social History 37 n.4 (Summer 2004): 1116-1118.*

Meadows Massacre—and the potential threat that Morgan's work on the Mormons represented—was not in the writers' interpretations, but rather that those interpretations rested on a body of largely unimpeachable contemporary documentation. It was difficult to get around the issue that here were presented a set of documents that told an entirely different history to the one so long accepted by church members. Here is where the conflict came into the open: rather than simply accepting the old history as a settled reality—a canon—these new researchers began dredging up new sets of evidence, new sources, and brought new questions asked of the well-established facts. All of a sudden, the accepted stories began looking a bit threadbare, privileging some evidence or sources while gliding past, omitting, or ignoring others. To many, Mormonism's inspirational story became much more human and much less inspiring.

Defenders among the Latter-day Saints knew how to handle ill-informed detractors and sensationalists, they had done so effectively for two generations, but they were unprepared for the assault of source material that appeared in Anderson's and Brodie's work. The biography's reviewer in the *Saturday Review of Literature* captured the ethical view of the Prophet, noting that "vilification of [Joseph Smith] has largely disappeared with his generation, while among his followers faith and the will to believe have worked upon his memory, expurgating his history of the grotesque, the absurd, or the merely inconvenient, softening his faults, and investing his character with a sweet serenity and an infinite love—a being who withstood the devil and all his archangels and died a martyr. But if their feelings are to have any weight outside their own sentiments, they

will have to unearth from their archives facts to modify or to contravene Mrs. Brodie's conclusions."⁴¹ Suddenly the Latter-day Saints' faith-affirming accounts and personal testimonies were no longer the only facts. First Anderson, then Brodie, and then the others began pulling handfuls of new facts out of re-emerging documents that challenged the comfortable old ones. Robert Dwyer hit an important point that defined the collision described here: what does one side do when the other side simply dismisses the argument and uses another standard to measure the claim?⁴² How could the Mormons argue *against* a factual context for history? For those who operate with an ethical view of history, the most direct method is by denial and denunciation—dismissing the dismissal. Yes, of course there was a backlash. J. Reuben Clark, Joseph Fielding Smith, Milton R. Hunter, Levi Edgar Young, and Kate Carter all challenged the uncomfortable new questions by reasserting the nobility of the past and questioning the motives of those who did not accept their versions of history.⁴³

⁴¹ Dale L. Morgan, "A Prophet and His Legend," *Saturday Review of Literature* 28, no. 47 (24 November 1945): 7–8. Much of what Brodie invoked was well-known, but like Peter Carroll observed about his own education, Mormons had been inured by their expectations not to see these inconvenient facts (Peter N. Carroll, *Keeping Time: Memory, Nostalgia, and the Art of History* [Univ. of Georgia Press, 1990], 90).

⁴² Robert Dwyer realized how Brodie's biography changed the historical landscape. "Here was a book without anger and without the distortion of bias [i.e., did not automatically accept the Mormon version of events], written with as near an approach to a single eye for historical truth as is morally possible. To ignore it would be blind; to face up to it perilous" (Fr. Robert Dwyer, review of *No Man Knows My History*, in *Intermountain Catholic Register*, 27 January 1946).

Once the issue of document based, contradictory narratives was in the open, it could not be tucked back where it came from. There were, these new scholars would argue, perfectly natural explanations for the belief that one claimed visions, dreams, or other communications. In other words, the key argument was that Joseph Smith and the Mormons existed within history, and their experiences had to exist within historical limits as well. These new writers on Mormonism all looked trustingly to the social sciences to help them revisit the past in terms of proliferating new and rediscovered contemporary documentation.

Now let's go back to the writers of this new history. This first generation—Brodie, Brooks, Morgan, De Voto, Stegner, and Nels Anderson—are also writers that fit within what Edward Geary once called more broadly "Mormondom's Lost Generation."⁴⁴

⁴³ The response to Brodie specifically was formulated officially in an unsigned editorial by Albert E. Bowen, "Appraisal of the So-Called Brodie Book," *Church News* 4, no. 20 (and the *Church* section of *Deseret News*, 11 May 1946), reprinted and distributed twice in pamphlet form, and unofficially in Hugh Nibley, *No Ma'am, That's Not History: (Bookcraft, 1946)*. The unofficial response to Morgan was J. Reuben Clark's effort to pressure the Guggenheim Foundation to quash publication of his Mormon history. Documentation of this effort is Clark's letters to D. D. Moffatt in the Clark papers, BYU and Morgan's applicant file in the Guggenheim Foundation archives.

⁴⁴ Edward A. Geary, "Mormondom's Lost Generation: The Novelists of the 1940s," *BYU Studies* 18, No.1 (Fall 1977): 89–98; the attribution was applied beyond novelists in Newell G. Bringham, "Fawn M. Brodie, 'Mormondom's lost generation,' and No Man Knows My History," *Journal of Mormon History* 16 (1990): 11–23. Even two of the key practitioners recognized the importance of this circle (Davis Bitton and Leonard J. Arrington, "The Bridge: Historians Without Degrees," *Mormons and Their Historians* [Univ. of Utah Press, 1988], 108–125); Topping, *Utah Historians*, *passim*.

They were lost in the sense that they had strayed from the security of Utah's mountain fastness and cultural insulation. It is important to note that all of them published or planned to publish their works outside of Utah for non-Mormon readers. Each one approached the Mormon story as a facet of a broader American story rather than a *sui generis*, self-existent story of the Restoration.

To bring this back to Juanita Brooks specifically, I think it fair to say that she has been called a "heroic writer" from two directions. First, from the outside of Mormonism looking in, chiefly because she was willing to bridge gaps in her chosen slice of history inclusively with documented fact, challenging the omissions of faith-promoting narratives. Second, from inside Mormonism (as stated now, not during her early career), in that Brooks "voic[ed] her contrary opinions unequivocally" with the courage of not only conviction, but the moral rightness of factual inclusivity. Whether or not she actually said that "Nothing less than the whole, unvarnished truth is good enough for the church I belong to," she insisted on bringing cold, hard, and frequently uncomfortable fact to her study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' past and its people. Her fame rests specifically on three works: *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, publication of the John D. Lee journals in *Mormon Chronicle* (1955), and of her Lee biography (1961). To Juanita Brooks this meant facing up to uncomfortable historical realities, stripping the varnish and filling in the omissions of faith-promoting narratives. In the context of her time and culture, that was a bold new and somewhat risky assertion or stance to take.⁴⁵ To answer my question in terms of this second level, Juanita Brooks was a brave or heroic writer because

while being within the Latter-day Saint culture, she chose to practice her craft by adopting a perspective that would emerge as an article of faith within the "New Mormon History." Morgan himself summed up the value of her work as *Mountain Meadows Massacre* came from the press:

The point of view it expresses in the long run is the point of view that must prevail about the whole of Mormon history. Nothing the leaders of the Church may do, regardless of prejudice, resistance to change, or vested interest can prevent this. Your book will serve to shape, even as it now expresses, the social force that will bring it about. In time to come, the pioneer value of your book will be entirely appreciated, fear not.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ "It was Juanita's elaboration of a single complex theme within the history of Dixie which made her into, not merely a respected historian, but an authentic Utah hero" (Levi Peterson, "In Memoriam: Juanita Brooks," *Sunstone* [October 1989]:7); Peterson, Brooks, 422; Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1950); Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848-1876* (Huntington Library, 1955); Brooks, Lee (1961). *It is not my intent to critique the works individually but to show that they fit into a much broader whole; Topping, Utah Historians, 194-206 briefly considers the foibles and values in these works.*

⁴⁶ DM to JB, 20 December 1950, Mss B103 2:10, UHi (1:1966). *To be fair, Brooks occasionally allowed broad tolerances in the way she hewed to historicism's line for the sake of personal comfort or to tell a story. cf. Topping, Utah Historians, 207-219, 220-226. The "new Mormon history" has a broad critique in David Earle Bohn, "Unfounded Claims and Impossible Expectations: A Critique of the New Mormon History," in Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History, ed. George D. Smith (Signature Books, 1992), 227-261. The entire volume is relevant to this paper; in fact, much of what I craft in the third section is also argued in that volume.*

PART 3: CONFLICTING PHILOSOPHIES

With Morgan's observation ringing in our ears, let's go back to the root question of this presentation: what makes Juanita Brooks a "heroic" writer of history? This time, let's express the question more broadly, acknowledging that heroes emerge from conflict of some sort: why did Juanita Brooks' writing conflict with received Utah and Latter-day Saint history? Why was there even an argument about what history was? To answer that, it is helpful to step outside of history to do a bit of philosophical exploring. Steven Prothero noted that,

there are two ways to talk about religion. There is the religious way of synagogue prayers and church sermons—the way that religious people preach their creeds, their gods, their rituals. But there is also a secular way to talk about religion. This second way does not assume that religion in general, or any religion in particular, is either true or false, because to make such an assumption is to be talking about religion religiously. It aims instead simply to observe and to report, as objectively as possible, on this thing human beings do, for good or for ill (or both).⁴⁷

Prothero's assertion is a very modern view, one that we understand today, but which was entirely foreign to Utah or to its majority culture as Juanita Brooks and Dale Morgan began their careers. As documentary approach began challenging the Pioneer myth in the 1930s and 1940s, it opened an argument between two broad perspectives about what the study of the past itself could accomplish—what *History* was and what it could do.

⁴⁷ Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World—and Why Their Differences Matter* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 336.

The simple answer to my thesis is, that history is *never* about the past; it is always—*a/ways*—about the present. In 1965, novelist and social critic James Baldwin made an insightful comment about the topic of this presentation. History, he said, "does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations."⁴⁸ The past is a matter of record and experience, but *history*—the recounting of the past—is a matter of interpretation and value. Historians live and function within their world and all of its complexities, and their work is always compiled and published in the here and now. Whether written to "set the record straight" or to look at the past through a different interpretive lens to see what new can be learned, history is always written for current readers. So to some extent, the adoption of documentary approach and later the rise of the New Mormon History represents a succession, a new generation needing new and better explanations of the past for itself.

Because history is an exercise in the *now*, as I look at this period between 1935 and 1950 I think I see that there was a broad, slow collision between two ways to approach the way

⁴⁸ Baldwin's comment was made in a 1965 debate with William F. Buckley at Cambridge Union Debating Society, Cambridge University. The full National Educational Television film of the debate, "Has the American dream been achieved at the expense of the American Negro?" (still a classic) is available on YouTube. Baldwin invokes a sentiment from William Faulkner novel: "The past is never dead. In fact, it's not even past." (Requiem for a Nun [Random House, 1951].)

that the past is understood and related. This is the lofty layer of historiology. To make sense of concrete, microhistorical things like the Brooks-Morgan relationship and The *Mountain Meadows Massacre* at this altitude I have to toss out a couple of terms from historical philosophy: one is *presentism*, and the other is *historicism*.⁴⁹ Yes, there were other things at play and the broad contest that I am trying to illustrate was neither simple nor discrete, but generally this is a useful way we can understand what was happening, and it helps explain why Juanita Brooks gained the reputation she holds.

Though they had small and focused audiences, writers of Latter-day Saint and Latter Day Saint history in the 1930s and 1940s were not self-existent, hothouse plants. They learned from and drew upon the work of earlier generations of writers. This is important because leading up to Dale Morgan and Juanita Brooks' time, LDS writers pursued their craft from an approach best described as *presentism* or *ethicism*. As a point of view, an ethicist/presentist perspective holds that retelling the past (any history, not merely religious history) should communicate a message of value to the present and future—history should *mean something* to readers; the purpose of recounting the past is to inform and guide development now, to teach. Presentism makes history entirely or partly a persuasive, moral enterprise. When described negatively or

⁴⁹ Both are relevant to Latter Day Saint epistemology, or the branch of philosophy that concerns how one knows and understands. Epistemology incorporates discussions of evidence, relevance, assumption, and elements of argument.

⁵⁰ Without going deeply into commemorative sociology, a solid overview is Davis Bitton, "The Ritualization of Mormon History," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43, n.1 (Winter 1975): 67-85.

derisively this approach is sometimes called *utilitarianism* or *patriotic history*. Ethical history is compiled with an unabashed agenda. As mentioned of the Pioneer Centennial commemorations, ethical narratives need not be written works; they include built and decorative works like monuments and murals, and performed works like music and pageants.⁵⁰ Ethical narrative relates the past by beginning with a purpose (or conclusion) and then fitting the story around it. Every time you or I tell a story to illustrate or emphasize a point, we engage in presentism.⁵¹ This kind of storytelling is a cultural tool. Latter Day Saints are not alone. We tell faith-promoting

⁵¹ *Telling the Story of Mormon History*, ed. William G. Hartley (*Proceedings of the Symposium of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History*, 2002). Let me digress a bit to point out that presentism closely aligns with LDS scriptural injunctions to remember, or make the past relevant or meaningful in the present. The best illustration of this injunction is the sermon recorded in Alma LDS ch.5, Alma CC ch.3. Good examples of LDS historical presentism are the seventeen volumes of the intentionally titled Faith Promoting Series, published by George Q. Cannon and George C. Lambert through the Juvenile Instructor Office: The full texts are available digitally at <https://mormontextsproject.org/2015/09/29/complete-17-book-faith-promoting-series-now-available-free/>. An example closer in time to our period is the historical writing of Joseph Fielding Smith. Smith rarely addressed topics in a fashion accepted as historical even as measured by the standards of the day; he hardly wrote except in context of prophecy, scriptural authority, or church doctrine. He was not a historian, rather a churchman who approached the past in religious terms. History fit into prophetic realities: what had and would happen to believers and unbelievers. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (*Deseret News*, 1905); *The Origin of the Reorganized Church, the Question of Succession* (*Skelton Publishing*, 1907); *Essentials in Church History* (*Deseret News Press*, 1922) and later editions. The model for historical presentism is the Roman historian Livy, whose books intentionally fostered allegiance to the Republic, a "patriotic fervor which overlooks immoral immediate expedencies for the ultimate 'greater' glory of the nation" (P. G. Walsh, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods* *Cambridge Univ. Press*, 1961], 36, cf. 39-43.).

stories for several reasons, none of them necessarily “wrong,” but useful to understand:

1. as a personal witness to God that we see his hand in action;⁵²
2. to assure ourselves as a people that God is with us outside the scope and bounds of empirical evidence;
3. as an ethical tool
 - a. to let readers/hearers know what to expect within the society: that experiences like these are a standard that should be expected of believers; because “it” happened once to someone, it should/can happen to you;
 - b. to illustrate what it means to be a believer, or of what a believer need be wary, or of the consequences of disbelief; they demonstrate what it means to be a Latter day Saint and how one who is living correctly should expect heaven to work in their life
 - c. to encourage allegiance to the asserted ideals and purposes of an earlier generation and encourage repetition of their asserted qualities.

To cite a contemporary example, at the dedication of the This Is The Place Monument in 1950, J. Reuben Clark flung out to the crowd the apotheosis of ethical narrative in this challenge: “What of us? Can we keep and preserve what they [the Pioneers] wrought? Shall we pass on to our children the heritage they left us, or shall we lightly fritter it away?”⁵³

⁵² In the sense of D&C LDS 59:21, D&C CC 59:5b. *The Doctrine and Covenants is organized and versified differently between Utah and Missouri traditions; citations to both Latter-day Saint (LDS) and Community of Christ (CC) editions are given for readers' convenience.*

⁵³ Clark, “The Pioneers,” *To Them of the Last Wagon*, 39–41.

It makes sense that Latter Day Saints would employ historical presentism. From its beginning, Latter Day Saint doctrine was not content to allow believers to retreat within the fold and accept the status quo of occasional growth. It mandated that the human enterprise could be—must be—moved forward. The church, the leading force in this making of history, must carry forward, preparing the saints and warning the world of the impending Second Coming. In the sense of the church’s *missiology*, its mission, the road through history was linear, predetermined, and could be marked off. If progress along the path wavered, it was only slight. The sense of mission and ordination contributed little space for individual choices or setbacks of any sort. History was less a set of bumbling mortals in earthly circumstances than it was a matter of God-led progress along a single line directly from the First Vision to the Second Coming. Each day brought a believer and the world around them closer to the inevitable. This generalization was not a carefully thought out rationalization, visible in the writings of contemporaries. It was rather a perspective and set of assumptions that allowed Mormons to look at themselves and the world around them and see things in a certain way.⁵⁴

The problem is that presentism sets an epistemological trap for practitioners and for readers: it communicates a message

⁵⁴ I here invoke theology rather than ritualization. The Latter Day Saint sense of mission is exemplified in a statement reportedly made by Joseph Smith in 1834 as related by Wilford Woodruff: “You know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother’s lap. You don’t comprehend it. . . . This Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world” (Wilford Woodruff, *Conference Report, April 1898*, p.57, also in *Collected Discourses*, ed. Brian H. Stuy, 5 vols. (BHS Publishing, 1987–92), 3:85. The parody of Robert Burns cited earlier (note 27) is also appropriate.

or theme chiefly by selective omission, choosing evidence and interpretation to reinforce the message or moral and occasionally bending things a bit if reality is not sufficiently inspiring.⁵⁵ This is *faithful history*, history that inspires, teaches, and affirms. Unfortunately, that sort of ethical history is easily discredited by its own assumptions and omissions when those assumptions are studied by someone from the outside. In 1966, Leonard Arrington rather uncharitably (and uncharacteristically) characterized Mormonism's earlier generations of "faithful history" as "undeviating pictures of sweetness and light."⁵⁶ An ethical, affirmative approach to the past provides a firm foundation but it also risks being a brittle foundation, which can shatter when struck by a stray contradictory fact or careful rationalization. The "faithful history" of presentist bent is vulnerable to challenge on grounds of ignored evidence and susceptible to counter

⁵⁵ *Ethicism is not limited to religion; it has been widely adopted in nationalistic histories. cf. editor's Foreword to David Ramsay, The History of the American Revolution, ed. Lester H. Cohen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1990), v.1. More broadly, a good critique of American patriotic history relating to the Revolution can be found in Ray Raphael, Founding Myths: Stories that Hide Our Patriotic Past (New Press, 2004). During the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, the New York Public Library's Harlem librarian A. A. Schomburg and groups like the Negro Society for Historical Research encouraged study of African history, specifically suggesting that black history should be used to stimulate an emerging color patriotism or racial pride. John Edward Bruce even argued that white Americans feared black history because the age and stability of African civilization predated the West, and that key developments like the alphabet had antecedents there rather than in Mesopotamia (August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Era of Booker T. Washington [Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1968], 258-259.)*

⁵⁶ Arrington, "Scholarly Studies of Mormonism," 25.

narratives.⁵⁷ Employing presentism *does not necessarily* create inaccurate views of the actual past, but it does conduct functions with a sense of certainty.

The counter to historical presentism/ethicism/utilitarianism is *historicism*, or more loosely, *empiricism*. Historicism is the perspective that the writer should not impose an *a priori* interpretation on the past. Evidence must be gathered and the story rendered to account for all the facts, not just ones we like. Events, characters, choices, and data must be understood within the limits of their social, temporal, and environmental contexts. Sometimes equated inaccurately with "objectivity," historicism is a quest for context and finer understanding rather than for meaning, an attempt to understand not merely *what* happened but *why* it happened (sound familiar?). Historian Edward Cheyney argued in 1901 that, "the simple but arduous task of the historian was to collect facts, view them objectively, and arrange them as the facts themselves demanded."⁵⁸ That

⁵⁷ One aggrieved father wrote David O. McKay, "I have lost from the Church my three well educated sons because of too much mythical and unrealistic teachings" (D. R. Peterson to David O. McKay, 31 January 1955, Joseph Fielding Smith papers, Church History Library). The presence of the original letter in Joseph Fielding Smith's papers hints that McKay may have put it into Smith's hands to emphasize just such a point directly. A contemporary personal comment is D. Michael Quinn, "My Journey from Essentials in Church History to The Mormon Hierarchy Series," Journal of Mormon History 44, no. 2 (April 2018): 60-74.

⁵⁸ Edward Cheyney, "Proceedings," American Historical Association Annual Report, 1 (1901): 29. The classic study of objective empiricism is Novick, *That Noble Dream, which is standard reading in many history graduate programs (it was in mine)*. Topping, *Utah Historians, 147-151 takes on Morgan's evidentiary objectivity specifically in critiquing his Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West (Bobbs-Merrill, 1953); the criticism certainly applies to Morgan's broader approach to reconstructing the past. Without going deeply into*

is an admirable, but dated ideal and it is saddled with its own problems.

Historicism is not the methodological *good* to presentism's *bad*. Historicism sets its own epistemological trap for its practitioners: by aiming chiefly for comprehension and precision, the resulting narrative is *never* really complete and is always subject to revision—sometimes wholesale dismissal—when new evidence comes to hand. Most importantly, historicism does not provide a foundation motivating a reader to *do* anything with the knowledge of the past they gain. Historicist narrative lacks the power to motivate because it does not *mean* anything at all. As we'll see, the first generation of Mormon historicists accepted Cheyney's perspective as an article of faith but had trouble staying true to the faith. Grounded in the pursuit and exclusive use of documentary sources (empiricism), employing historicism *does not necessarily* create accurate views of the actual past but does conduct functions with a sense of certainty.

A couple of thousand years ago Classical Greek thinkers began the quest for ultimate irreducibility, matters or points or arguments or realities which do not change when viewed from any perspective. Sadly, ideas and the facts of human existence are not spherical; they are lumpy, bumpy things that look different any which way you turn them. That's why historians adopt different interpretive structures using magnifying perspectives like race, class, gender, economics, environment,

[58 cont.] *argument, historicism is not necessarily equivalent Novick's objectivity, and it is helpful to remember that an ideal or philosophy is never as clear in application as it is in discussion. "Historical objectivity," observes Novick, "is not a single idea, but rather a sprawling collection of assumptions, attitudes, and antipathies" (p.1).*

and world systems to understand the past. That means, however, that there never is and never will be one complete story of the past or of any small slice of it.

From the 1850s until the 1940s, the mainstream of Mormon history had been intentionally "faith-promoting," written for a single purpose. Comparing the newer evidentiary approach against the ethical "sweetness and light" of faithful history, Mormondom's early historicists felt that they had tumbled to the "real" story of Mormonism and its beginnings as a purely social or personal creation of Joseph Smith and the other early saints.⁵⁹ Since they defined away inspiration, there were, they felt, entirely natural explanations for visions, angels, and revelation. Their focus as writers was to emphasize in Mormon history the non-inspired human decisions, social forces and connexions, and ignored accounts. To be fair, these were complexities that had largely been dismissed, overlooked, left unsaid, been intentionally glossed over, or minimized in the official and in the unofficial but inspirational personal accounts of Latter Day Saint history. Dale Morgan saw the promise of historicism but he did not see its pitfall: he expected detail-driven context to answer for Truth. Empiricism and historicism was only a means, the core of the interpretive issue within

⁵⁹ *Topping, Utah Historians, passim. Excepting George Arbaugh's Revelation in Mormonism: Its Character and Changing Forms (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1932), Brodie's No Man Knows My History (1945) is the earliest and best-known example. She had personally rejected Smith's status as a prophetic character long before writing, but it was in looking at new evidence (mostly from non-LDS sources) and looking anew at known evidence that allowed her to build her characterization of the Prophet. Whether hers was a fair or accurate picture is not at issue here. Arbaugh's value as a study was panned for its bias even at the time (Nels Anderson, review, American Journal of Sociology 39, n.1 [July 1933]: 148).*

its historicists was that each had adopted a naturalistic view of Mormonism's sacred events—they *had already* imposed an interpretation on the evidence of the past. In their careful study through “new facts,” the practitioners of 1940s historicism employed their own suite of interpretive flaws. The stiff naturalism of Fawn Brodie, Dale Morgan, their never-published associate Stan Ivins, and others, eventually proved quite as dogmatic as the utilitarian views held by Mabel Harmer, Milton R. Hunter, Leland Creer, Levi Edgar Young, or Kate D. Carter.

To be entirely truthful, there were writers among at least the Latter-day Saints who tried very hard to straddle both presentism and historicism. B.H. Roberts, one of the few moderates of his generation, did not question the fundamental triumphalism of the historical message and its written expressions but consistently sought to return history to hard sources.⁶⁰ Chemist, University of Utah president, and later apostle, John A. Widtsoe spent years trying to strengthen Latter-day Saint narrative with hard evidence.⁶¹ Francis W. Kirkham was convinced that a complete empirical historical record would vindicate a central tenet of the Latter Day Saint

message, the divine origin of the Book of Mormon.⁶²

To be sure, Dale Morgan, Fawn Brodie, Bernard DeVoto, and their skeptical peers were pioneers, and pioneers get things wrong as often as right—but that does not lessen their significance as pioneers. Within a few decades, the interpretations of the first-generation Mormon historicists were challenged by a younger generation, the one Moses Rischin identifies, who began to understand more clearly the limits of basing history solely on straightforward facts. Most of these were, in fact, formally trained historians. Morgan sighed with resignation in a 1967 letter to Brodie that “We

[61 cont.] in *The Improvement Era prior to his death in 1952. Widtsoe even approached Morgan about the documentary context for the First Vision (Widtsoe to DLM, 31 August 1949 (20:822); DLM to Widtsoe, 1 September 1949 (9:238); “When Did Joseph Smith have the First Vision,” Evidences and Reconciliations n. 106, Improvement Era 49, no.7 [July 1946]: 1849). Widtsoe’s personal book collection was sold to the Univ. of Utah Library and formed the basis for its scholarly collection on Mormonism (Leonard H. Kirkpatrick, Holdings of the University of Utah on Utah and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [Univ. of Utah Libraries, 1954]).*

⁶² A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon (*Zion’s Printing and Publishing Co.*, 1943) was expanded in 1947. In 1951 Kirkham rushed to publication a second volume to the work at Widtsoe’s urging, specifically to put uncomfortable new documentary discoveries used in Fawn Brodie’s *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1945) into an LDS context ahead of Dale Morgan’s history of the Mormons, which he (and everyone else) believed would be published imminently (Dale Morgan on the Mormons: *Collected Works, 1938–1970*, ed. Richard L. Saunders, 2v., Kingdom in the West v.14–15 [Arthur H. Clark Co., 2012–2013], 2:44–45). Morgan’s work (in the latest form the incomplete manuscript exists) is available in 2:57–252. Widtsoe’s involvement, and Kirkham’s remarkable cross-country trip with RLDS president Israel A. Smith to confront Morgan personally about his history are documented in P 13 f1818–f1840, *Community of Christ Library and Archives, Independence, Mo.*

⁶⁰ Roberts was among the first within the Church Historian’s Office to return to primary documents to confirm stories and personal testimony. He carefully steered away from the logical trap of infallibility but accepted without reservation the historical influence of divine authority, continuous revelation, and a heavenly mandate. (Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:vii–ix).

⁶¹ Simpson, *American Universities*, 63–67; Clyde D. Ford, “Materialism and Mormonism: The Early Twentieth-century Philosophy of Dr. John A. Widtsoe,” *Journal of Mormon History* 36, n.3 (2010): 1–26, cf. 10–17. Widtsoe, not Joseph Fielding Smith, was the most practiced and active public interpreter of LDS history. His work appeared regularly in the “Evidences and Reconciliations” column published monthly

were well-meaning, and all right in our day, but of course the new generation of Church-oriented historians are more solidly grounded and have a greater maturity.”⁶³ The central figure remembered in this development was economist Leonard J. Arrington. Trained to appreciate the limits of human knowledge, Arrington chose not to assert that historical truth was a measure of absolute truth, but did point out that revelation addressed specific human circumstances. In his introduction to *Great Basin Kingdom* he noted an important point that Morgan and Brodie had previously asserted—but with a blunt object, namely, that “it is impossible to separate revelation from the conditions under which it is received.” At the same time, he also asserted what the early historicists could not, that merely because there was a temporal expediency to be met did not disprove the reality of divine revelation.⁶⁴ For a long while Morgan held Arrington at a distance. He could not accept that Arrington’s failure to criticize the church and its past leaders was restrained more by the natural limits of rigorous historical inquiry than by the economist’s church membership.

⁶³ DLM to Fawn Brodie, 21 August 1967, in Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism, ed. John Phillip Walker (Signature Books, 1986), 207. He was referring specifically to professionals, most of whom were church members, which had formed the Mormon History Association in 1965.

⁶⁴ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom* (1958; Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1966), ix.

CONCLUSION

So here we are, nearing the end. Let me return to the thesis and hypothesis and see where we stand; I hope we haven’t lost sight of these two friends from this philosophical high altitude. The subtitle to my presentation talks about the quest for truth, fact, and perspective within Latter Day Saint history. Hopefully, you can now see how the lecture series’ namesake fits in. Hopefully you can appreciate a bit better the historiological context in which Juanita Brooks’ work exists.

The uncomfortable encounter between practitioners of the Pioneer myth (i.e., Latter-day Saint presentism) on the one hand and a small number of writers wielding historicism on the other, is the “contest for truth, fact, and perspective” in my subtitle. During the 1930s and 1940s the Latter-day Saints met the first real argument about what their history was. Is Latter Day Saint History (with the capital H, again) properly inspirational and to encourage the rising generation, or is properly limited to a mortal function of contextual and factual understanding?

With this contest now visible and before us on the table, it becomes easier to see why Juanita Brooks can be recognized as a “fearless” or “heroic” writer: at a macrohistorical level, Brooks was virtually the first writer within Latter-day Saint culture to challenge its inspirational presentism in print. With the guidance and substantial reinforcement from Dale Morgan, she constructed her breakthrough study *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* on a foundation of factual inclusivity, without apology or direct condemnation of the principals.⁶⁵ Juanita’s nature

⁶⁵ Brigham D. Madsen reportedly heard Brooks publicly tell Kate Carter “You can defend Brigham Young if you want, but I won’t.” Regrettably,

and disposition was to tell the truth—but now we can see that in terms of human History “the truth” can have different meanings. If you look back to my opening paragraph, notice that those who called Brook fearless and heroic are those of her contemporaries and in succeeding generations who side with the goals and premises of historicism. Those among Utah’s community and Latter-day Saint culture who placed a greater value on presentism, the ethical message of history, expressed different views of her enquiry (and of works like it).⁶⁶ Here was the contest. Among Juanita Brooks’ patriotic generation, the challenge of historicism was upsetting to some, and frustrating to others. It was expressed in a slow swirl of feelings, emotions, values, assertions, and trust—precisely how humans negotiate conflicting values in the face of change. From the 1930s through early 1960s, the formal discussion about the Mormon past in books, in magazine and in journal articles, plowed the cultural ground from which could grow the “new Mormon history” Moses Rischin identifies.

Let me address my own thesis and hypothesis by asserting that there is no single, unassailable body of usable facts, no single *past*, and no single *history*. Presentism and historicism

[65 cont.] *his gem does not appear in his autobiography and with Brig’s passing can now only be documented as folklore or hearsay (cf. Will Bagley, Journal of Mormon History 36, n.3 [Summer 2010]: xiv).*

⁶⁶ *Feeling their values were under attack, this sentiment tended to be expressed more often privately and informally than formally in print (for instance, Brigham D. Madsen, Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Western Historian [Signature Books, 1998], 213). The official response to Brodie and the unofficial response to Morgan was cited in note 43. The unofficial response to Brooks’ forthcoming John Doyle Lee (Arthur H. Clark Col, 1961) is related in Peterson, Juanita Brooks, ch.7.*

do different things. Challenges exist in the logical extremes of each approach. Religiously and culturally useful views of the past do not (or possibly “should not”) involve choosing either one side or the other. History is neither a binary of mutually exclusive “faithful” or “skeptical” studies, nor of “true” and “untrue” facts, nor either “fair” and “unfair” or “biased” and “objective” approaches—though histories may be each of those. The past *will* look different to the Latter-day Saints, because in the Plan of Salvation and the mission of the Church they apply a rubric that is broader than history itself. Strip away that rubric—say, adopt a stance within evidence-based, objective historicism—and suddenly some of the saints become venal, fanatical, or just unlikeable and inexplicable characters. However, to stand firmly on historicism, to accept accurate history as a quest for appropriate context, a scholar must accept the idea that saints conducted their lives within their own rubric. Perhaps this is one reason Latter Day Saint history may seem contradictory, exploitative, or opaque to many outside the culture, or to those inside the culture, like Dale Morgan, who reject the fundamental religiosity of the movement and its adherents.

Because there *is* more than one way to look at history, and because history written on its own terms can be easily and convincingly discredited does mean, however, that writers will be wise to be very careful about the genuine limits bounding what can be recovered from the past, and they must be equally careful what they assert. Narrative grounded in presentism gets into trouble because it communicates its meaning by simplification, sidestepping complexity or embarrassments to present a unified message—opening itself to dismissal because

it risks becoming only superficially truthful. It risks becoming *counterfactual narrative*—fiction (or misdirection) that extracts conveniently the lessons it wants from history and often ignoring what is not useful to inspire. Mormon literature is full of work like this, most recently the novels of Gerald Lund and the absurd blend of patriotism and LDS sentiment by Timothy Ballard, which begin with a premise or story line and go looking for illustrative evidence to support their assertions.⁶⁷ For its part, narrative grounded in empirical historicism gets into trouble because it lacks any mechanism to motivate beyond factual awareness—it's telling does not *mean* anything.

The 1940s argument over evidence and narrative in Mormon history illustrates the root problem with both viewpoints: that each may be agenda-driven—ethical history certainly is. Where critics of presentism charge that historical presentism defines away or ignores inconvenient truths to establish idealized perspectives, in its radical form, historicism claims to accept only what may be reliably documented—the trick is, that historicists often emulate their utilitarian fellows, reserving the right to decide how “reliably” may be measured. While there are those who cry for a fair examination of “all the facts,” often a counter-narrative agenda is hidden behind historicism, playing loose with source material, focusing too heavily on precision, sequence, and collocation.⁶⁸ Sometimes less than rigorous in

⁶⁷ I won't list Lund's many novels; one can find them at *Deseret Book* and *Deseret Industries*. Timothy Ballard, *The Lincoln Hypothesis* (*Deseret Book*, 2016) and *The Washington Hypothesis* (*Deseret Book*, 2014).

⁶⁸ The works of Jerald and Sandra Tanner are the caricature of this problem. For a critique see *A Latter-day Saint Historian* [D. Michael Quinn], *Jerald and Sandra Tanner's Distorted View of Mormonism: A Response to Mormonism—Shadow or Reality* ([n.p.], 1977). For a broad

determining relevance, collecting and organizing facts risks becoming steps in a quest for proof, causality, and irrefutable empirical certainty.

The goal of objective or empirical historicism, as it was envisioned in Germany under Leopold von Ranke during the 1850s, was to cut through legend, assumption, and Whiggish teleologies to describe things *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*—things “as they really are” or “as they really happened”—a sentiment very close to the definition of truth Joseph Smith expressed in the Doctrine and Covenants.⁶⁹ Absolute impartiality is not only impossible, but undesirable.

[68 cont.] critique I recommend David Hackett Fisher's oft-reprinted *Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (Harper & Row, 1970).

⁶⁹ D&C LDS 93:24, D&C CC 90:5b. *The translation is imperfect; eigentlich has been rendered “as they really are,” “as they actually are,” and “as they essentially are”* (Felix Gilbert, “What Ranke Meant,” *American Scholar* 53, n. 3 [Summer 1987]: 393–397). “The attraction of Ranke's method lay in its promise to separate the subjective—teleological speculation, moral judgment, didactic lessons—from the objective truth of what happened” (Gary Grieve-Carlson, *Poems Containing History: The Twentieth Century American Poetry's Engagement with the Past* [Lexington Books, 2014], 17–18). “To view the writing of history as fiction does not mean that the writing of history is downgraded to flights of fantasy or to propaganda. It highlights the power [and necessity] of the imagination to redescribe a set of events. This view, which reminds the historian of the inevitable role of language . . . liberates the historian from the illusion that an absolute or objective view of history is possible” (John Degenaar, “Historical Discourse as Fact-bound Fiction,” *Facts and Values: Philosophical Reflections from Western and Non-western Perspectives*, ed. M. C. Doeser and J. N. Kraay [Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986], 71). Personally, I agree with Degenaar that Ranke's method aimed more at minimizing inherent subjectivity than reaching an ideally pure objectivity, a view with which he has often been tarred inaccurately and unfairly.

We can, however, identify our perspectives up front, include fairly even inconvenient and uncomfortable facts in the past, and minimize our expectations of what past *should* represent. We can allow our progenitors and their antagonists to be real people again, neither angels nor demons. Charting a new course through historical perspective will therefore also stand as a challenge for the Latter-day Saints to understand their church, families, and themselves as well. Biologist Jared Diamond phrased an answer to a similar question about the relationship between motives and understanding. There is, he explained, “a common tendency to confuse an explanation of causes with a justification or acceptance of results. What use one makes of a historical explanation.” Diamond reminds us with a cautionary note, “is a question separate from the explanation itself.”⁷⁰ As a believing people, let us be fair and generous about our complex and very human past. In my view, real people who have coped with cares and fears and choices and setbacks, are far more believable and inspiring than the flawless and ultimately hollow bronze heroic figures pushed patriotically atop cultural pedestals.

I mentioned Moses Rischin’s 1969 phrase as he discussed “the new Mormon history” that had emerged since the late 1950s. The Western History Association was formed in 1963,

⁷⁰ Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 19. For the same sentiment in an LDS context, Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 186–190; Charles L. Cohen, “The Construction of the Mormon People,” *Journal of Mormon History* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 25–64. I think one who wholly accepts an ethical approach would disagree with Diamond—the purpose is an important component of the explanation since it determines what is told (and what is not).

and the Mormon History Association was formed in 1965. A lot has changed in Western and Mormon history over the past half century. Now there are Mormon-related associations for European and Pacific Rim Mormon history, for Mormon letters, and media studies. Here we are, two generations later and the Mormon story and experience is no longer a field solely of interest to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or to the Community of Christ. Mormon studies are welcomed as branches of both US history and history of religion studies in places like Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and the Claremont Colleges.⁷¹ Utilitarian storytelling in the style of Cecil McGavin, Preston Nibley, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Gerald Lund is not exactly gone—it will never and should *never* be abandoned entirely by human kind—but within Latter Day Saint culture it does not hold the cultural position it once occupied. Even the Church Historian’s Press bends strongly toward historicism (albeit fueled by an entirely ethical purpose). It turns out that Juanita Brooks, Dale Morgan, and their friends really were at the beginning of something big. Maybe that makes these two friends heroic writers after all.

⁷¹ John-Charles Duffy, “Faithful Scholarship: The Mainstreaming of Mormon Studies and the Politics of Insider Discourse” (thesis, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2006).

APPENDIX: PASTS IN COLLISION, 1935–1960⁷²

STUDIES LEANING TOWARD PRESENTISM/ETHICISM

Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Essentials in Church History* (Deseret Book, 1922). 7/e 1940, 9/e 1942, 13/e 1953, 16/e 1960.

Hunter, Milton R. *Mormons and the American Frontier* (LDS Dept of Education, 1940).

Barrett, William E. *The Restored Church: A Brief History of the Growth and Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Deseret Book, 1936). 2/e 1940.

Kirkham, Francis W. *A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon* (Zion's Printing & Publishing Co., 1943). 2/e 1947, 3/e 1951.

Harmer, Mabel. *The Story of the Mormon Pioneers* (Deseret News Press, 1943).

Nibley, Preston. *Faith Promoting Stories* (Deseret Book, 1943).

Driggs, Howard R. *Ben the Wagon Boy* (Stevens & Wallis, 1944).

Hunter, Milton R. *Utah, The Story of Her People, 1540–1847: A Centennial History of Utah* (Deseret News Press, 1946).

⁷² This list of commercial and scholarly monographic histories is merely illustrative, not exhaustive. It omits four important classes of contemporary material involved in the contest as well: 1) historical monograph series, such as the *Daughters of Utah Pioneers* lesson volumes, 2) works of doctrinal history, such as Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation*, 4v. (Council of the Twelve Apostles, 1956–1959) or James L. Barker, *The Divine Church: Down*

Creer, Leland H. *The Founding of an Empire: The Exploration and Colonization of Utah, 1776–1856* (Bookcraft, 1947).

Romney, Thomas C. *The Story of Deseret* (Zion's Printing & Publishing Co., 1948).

Driggs, Howard R. *George the Handcart Boy* (Alladin Books, 1952).

Nibley, Preston. *L.D.S. Adventure Stories* (Bookcraft, 1953).

Nibley, Preston. *Stalwarts of Mormonism* (Deseret Book, 1954).

Hinckley, Bryant S. *The Faith of Our Pioneer Forefathers* (Deseret Book, 1954).

Driggs, Howard R. *When Grandfather Was a Boy* (Stevens & Wallis, 1957).

McGavin, E. Cecil. *The Mormon Pioneers* (Stevens & Wallis, 1960).

Burton, Alma P., and Clea M. Burton. *Stories from Mormon History* (Deseret Book, 1960).

^[72 cont.] through Change, Apostacy Therefrom, and Restoration, 5v. (Council of the Twelve Apostles, 1951–1956), 3) local histories, including ward, take, and mission histories, 4) privately published autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs. Of course, any list of books misses parallel development among articles in popular and scholarly journals.

STUDIES LEANING TOWARD HISTORICISM/EMPIRICISM

Morgan, Dale L. *The State of Deseret* (Utah State Historical Society, 1940).

Dwyer, Robert J., Fr. *The Gentile Comes to Utah: A Study of Social and Religious Conflict, 1862-1890* (Catholic Univ. of America, 1941).

Stegner, Wallace. *Mormon Country* (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1942).

Anderson, Nels. *Desert Saints* (Univ. of Chicago, 1943).

Brodie, Fawn M. *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1945).

Morgan, Dale L. *The Great Salt Lake* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1947).

Brooks, Juanita. *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1950).

Nelson, Lowry. *The Mormon Village* (Univ. of Utah Press, 1952).

Mulder, William A. *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1957).

O'Dea, Thomas F. *The Mormons* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1957).

Arrington, Leonard J. *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1958).

Furniss, Norman F. *The Mormon Conflict, 1850-1859* (Yale Univ. Press, 1960).

