

# Honoring Leonard Arrington

*Stanford Cazier*

HOW DOES ONE CAPTURE LEONARD ARRINGTON? It is a pleasure to attempt, but certainly no easy task. I see Leonard as scientists see nature: in four dimensions. But just as scientists are now discovering and exploring the fifth dimension and beyond, my portrait of Leonard will be incomplete. First, I see Leonard, the Man; the gentle and kindly optimist. Second, there is Leonard, the Scholar; the indefatigable producer of articles and books, the exemplar of the mind in action. Third, there is Leonard, the Mentor; the friend of would-be scholars, the source of steady encouragement, the reservoir of ideas to be explored. And finally, there is Leonard, the Institution; the standard-bearer of an era, the entrepreneur of a genre that some refer to as the New Mormon History.

Leonard, the Man, charges the atmosphere of every encounter with the energy of his personality but never offends. Even in moments of triumph, he does not raise his arms in victory but stands aside in unassuming modesty. He insists on sharing any accrued glory with others, with his "team." Many have been lifted by his buoyancy, his resilience, and his steadiness. His constant friendship is predictable, genuine to the core.

His concern for others, his good will, his careful avoidance of self-pity are well known. I have known Leonard for more than a quarter of a century, and I have never seen him upset over any personal abuse or slight. If he has displayed righteous indignation, it has always been in behalf of a colleague who might have been misinterpreted or misrepresented, or in defense of a moral issue.

Maureen Ursenbach Beecher captured this dimension of Leonard well. She wrote in 1987 about her years on the staff at the Church Historical Department when Leonard was its director:

When, after three years' employment on Leonard's staff, I was going to lose my job because I was about to give birth and the policy was then in force against the mothers

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*STANFORD CAZIER, long associated with Utah State University, now serves as its president.*

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of small children, he fought a very important bureaucratic battle. On the very day my baby was due, we were both summoned to the Church employment office to hear the decision in this case. No longer was it the matter of a waiver of policy in my behalf, but we were hoping to alter the policy across the board. The First Presidency had decided in our favor, and in the favor of all married women employees. It would thereafter be women's own decision whether or not to keep working after having children, and women applying for jobs would not be discriminated against by virtue of their motherhood.

From incidents such as these, I have learned of Leonard's high conscience, his devotion to principle, his compassion, his warmth and immediate acceptance of all people, his defense of his own against bureaucratic machinations, and the value he placed on personal autonomy, his own and others.

The electricity many feel in Leonard's presence is a reflection of his energy. In *Reflections Without Mirrors*, Louis Nizer wrote: "I have sought common characteristics among people of great accomplishment. There is only one common denominator — *energy*" (1978, 25).

Leonard exudes energy. I wonder how many GI's during World War II mastered the language of the countries in which they were stationed. Probably only a small minority. Leonard's energy drove him to capture Italian, if not Italy, before he returned to the States following the war. It was that command of Italian that earned him a Fulbright lectureship to Genoa later in his career. While in Italy, Leonard did not just lecture but also published a book and several articles in Italian — all products of his indefatigable energy and will.

Leonard's role as Scholar hardly needs citation. His monumental achievements have become part of our folklore. He accepted a position at Utah State University in 1946 and brought his lovely wife, Grace, from North Carolina, along with a trunkload of curiosity and enthusiasm. His colleagues in the economics department, the history department, the LDS Institute, and elsewhere on campus became his friends. A small group of these colleague-friends, including George Ellsworth, Eugene Campbell, and Wendell Rich, met regularly to discuss economics, history, the West, and Mormon culture. Leonard picked their brains, and they, his. George Ellsworth, in particular, introduced Leonard to the tools and methodology of the historian; Leonard soaked up ideas like a sponge. Davis Bitton has suggested that Leonard moved rapidly along the spectrum from agricultural economics to economics, to economic history, and finally, to history.

Methodically, Leonard began to explore those diverse ideas he has absorbed. In 1950, he published his first article. From then on, his career was not unlike the pace lap at the Indianapolis 500. Once the pace car was out of the way, Leonard put the "pedal to the metal" and, defying the co-efficient of friction, moved deftly from the back of the pack to the lead car, where he has stayed for the past thirty-seven years. He never even bothered to get out of the car long enough to change clothes. Grace, and later Harriet, have had to drop them on him along with food every dozen laps or so.

Leonard did not build to a crescendo; he leapt to it. He disciplined himself to a regular yearly output of articles, interspersed frequently with books.

During the mid-sixties, my wife, Shirley, and I had seats next to Leonard and Grace for the USU football games. Publication commitments and deadlines forced Leonard to miss as many games as he watched.

David Whitaker has compiled a thirty-page bibliography of Leonard's publications, published in the festschrift, *New Views of Mormon History: Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington* (Bitton and Beecher 1987). The diversity of Leonard's publications is as compelling as the quantity: economic history, institutional history (ranging from banks to defense installations), intellectual and interpretive history, and biography. As Dean May has reminded me, invariable Leonard was concerned with "the dispossessed (the study of Topaz), the poor, and the neglected (women in our history)" (1987). Davis Bitton did not exaggerate when he wrote, "Leonard James Arrington is the single most important Mormon historian of his generation" (Bitton and Beecher 1987, vii).

That should be accolade enough for any person, but Leonard was anxious to bring others along with him; he has been Mentor to a legion of scholars. Any young scholar with even the slightest potential for performance and productivity received his avid encouragement and ample opportunities to develop his or her potential.

Ross Peterson remembers going to see Leonard about a potential dissertation topic. A half hour later, he left with forty-two topics; all were western and none Mormon, in the event he wanted to return to Utah. There has been no end to Leonard's willingness to help as a teacher.

I have a vivid recollection of attending the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association with Leonard in San Diego in the 1960s. I found it incredible that first, Leonard seemed to know everyone; second, he knew what they were working on; and third, he encouraged them to finish their projects and move on.

Thomas Alexander shared with me in 1987 Leonard's impact on him as a young man:

My first contact with Leonard was as a student at Utah State University. I took his course on American Economic History and a seminar on Economic History. Like so many since, he asked me to work as a research assistant for him. For me, it was the opportunity of a lifetime. The first project I did was a history of the Utah State University Stake. I am not sure just what happened to it; I assume that it was not published, but he gave me my first chance at professional writing.

Next he asked me while I was still a graduate student at Berkeley to work with him on a series of articles on the Defense Department installations in Utah. My wife Marilyn was very much against my working on the project. It would have meant that I would have to return to Utah each summer while at Berkeley to do research. I said that it would undoubtedly help me in my professional career, and I think that may have been the only time in our married life when I made a decision with which she did not agree. At any rate, for the four years we were at Berkeley, we returned to Utah each summer, got an apartment in Logan or lived with her parents in Ogden, and I conducted research and wrote on the defense installations. The result was a series of articles published by the *Utah Historical Society* and the *Pacific Historical Review*. After that, we began working on reclamation and several other projects together.

Thus, largely because of Leonard, by the time I received my Ph.D. I had already published a number of articles. I am sure that his prestige helped in getting them published. After that, I joined the faculty at BYU, and I am sure that his recommendation helped me to get the position here.

At one time, Leonard thought that I had promise as a historian. He invited me to share my master's thesis with the Cache Valley Historical Society. The fact that I later had a small part in the creation of the Mormon History Association in 1965, was part of the team that helped found *DIALOGUE* in 1966, and was associated with the board of editors of *BYU Studies* for five years were all due to Leonard's encouragement. However, realizing Leonard's high expectations, I accepted an offer to pursue a career in academic administration rather than history.

Leonard's dimension as Institution originates from his roles as scholar, mentor, and finally, as head of the Church Historical Department. Davis Bitton, in his introduction to *New Views of Mormon History*, reports that important reorganization was taking place in the Church Historian's Office in the late sixties and early seventies. I would suggest that a key person in that reorganization was Elder Harold B. Lee. The responsibilities handed down to Elder Lee during this period cannot be overstated. I predicate this observation on my association with him as a nephew by marriage during a ten-year period prior to his death in 1973. I was pleased then to learn of his appreciation for history. He knew what a great treasure the Church Archives housed. Also, he was clearly cognizant of the rich human resource the Church had in its professionally trained historians.

On several occasions during that period, I spoke with him about the organization and operation of the Church in general, the role of the Correlation Committee, the use of consultants in the business affairs of the Church, the value of public higher education, and the specific role of Brigham Young University. I did not offer suggestions during our conversations but was fundamentally a grateful listener. I did not need to inform Elder Lee of Leonard's extraordinary accomplishments. But because I was a colleague of Leonard's, I could confirm what Elder Lee already knew. When Leonard was selected to be the Church Historian, no one had higher expectations and hopes for the office than President Lee; and during his short presidency, he was proud of Leonard and the profile of the new office.

Davis Bitton and others have referred to their experiences in the History Department in the 1970s as a decade in Camelot. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher has shared with me the atmosphere that Leonard created for his co-workers:

Stuck as I was in comparative literature, on a topic for which I [had] read nothing after 1742, I had never heard of Leonard Arrington. Out of the blue, he called and invited me to come in. I had no idea it was a job interview; I just knew he sounded interesting on the phone.

Warmly, as though we were old friends, Leonard ushered me into what had been Joseph Fielding Smith's office on the third floor of the old building. Pulling a chair for me behind his desk — Leonard seldom let his desk stand between himself and anyone he was talking to — he plopped himself into his own chair and we began talk-

ing. Here, I discovered in the first minute, was a kindred spirit, one to whom I could express my most radical ideas as well as my most spiritual yearnings, and find acceptance. He, for his part, shared with me aspects of his career: his experience at USU (he had hated to leave there); his homesickness for Grace (she having not left Logan yet); his education as an economist and what that viewpoint meant for Mormon history; his optimism about the feasibility of writing good history for disparate audiences; and his ambition some day to write Mormon theology.

Two hours passed before we separated, having barely touched on the matter of employment. . . . I [was] hardly aware of why I was there at all, Leonard had made it all so very comfortable.

I took the job, and began a new career in Mormon history under Leonard's tutelage. He was proud to have a woman on his staff, I think, and worked very hard (too hard — one staff member accused him of reverse discrimination in my behalf) to place opportunities before me. Pygmalion-like, he turned a teacher of literature into a writer of history as he has done for many other fledgling scholars. (1987)

Douglas Alder, though he did not participate in the Historical Department experience, is a professionally trained historian and a spiritual fellow traveler with those who were directly involved in the Camelot experiment. He shares my perspective that because of Leonard's leadership in that important venture and his other inimitable achievements, he has become an institution. Alder says:

Like Lowell Bennion and a few other giants, Leonard is a person for whom no title or office would be an elevation. His name alone stands for an era and a standard.

Perhaps Leonard's major achievement will really be as the entrepreneur of the so-called "New Mormon History." He generally knows every person in the world who is working on this topic. He shares his files with these scholars, he helps them apply for funds and seek publishers. When Leonard served as Church Historian he sold the Church leadership on the idea of writing the history of the Church instead of just collecting documents. He engaged many bright young scholars on fellowships. He helped them start their careers. He encouraged scholars not of the LDS faith to come to Salt Lake and use the Archives. He built ties to colleagues in the Reorganized Church who shared the idea of scholarly history. The driving idea of this movement was to use the professional craft of history as taught in the best graduate schools — objective examination and documentary corroboration — to examine the Mormon past. He argued that we had nothing to hide and that casting light on the subject from all directions would benefit in the long run.

Much continues from the grand experiment of professionalizing LDS Church History from the inside. The Oral History program continues. The Joseph Fielding Smith Institute continues. The historians continue to write. The Mormon History Association continues. And its fine journal continues—under Leonard's editorship. Especially Leonard continues — firm in his commitment to the two principles of his life, faith and scholarship. (1987)

If Davis Bitton is correct that the history division of the Church in the 1970s can be described as Camelot, Leonard was no Lancelot at Arthur's table. He cast no covetous eye toward Guenevere but brought to the court his own lady — Clio. Her charms were not physical and emotional but intellectual and cultural. All could share those charms without losing their virtue. They could remain loyal to Arthur. They could keep the faith and be enriched and blessed by leadership in quality scholarship as well.

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Fan back willow chair, Shawn Clark (Provo, Utah), 31"×42"×28", willow, 1983; (Utah) State Art Collection.