

# A. C. Lambert: Teacher, Scholar, and Friend

*Roald F. Campbell*



A few months ago we were saddened to learn that Asael Carlyle Lambert had passed away. He was ninety years old and living in Los Angeles. Dr. Lambert was one of the giants to emerge from "Mormon Country" and I am pleased to be invited by the editors of *DIALOGUE* to pay personal tribute to him.

I knew this man for more than fifty years. From 1929 to 1950 our contacts were rather numerous. Within a month after I became a student at Brigham Young University in 1929 Lambert, then a faculty member, joined the Idaho Club students in a hike and party in Rock Creek Canyon. Later, as a member of the debate team, Professor Lambert, representing the Debate Council, accompanied two of us as we made a foray to the Northwest to meet other college teams in Montana, Washington, and Oregon. We had pre- and post-sessions for every meet. In 1932, Professor Lambert became chairman of my master's thesis committee and steered me through my first piece of research. During my tenure as superintendent of schools at Preston, Idaho, Lambert was one of the few people with whom I could share problems. After my joining the faculty of the University of Utah in 1942, we became professional colleagues, even though in different universities, in dealing with conditions confronting some school districts and certain state agencies and organizations.

In later years I went to the Midwest and Dr. Lambert went to California. Our contacts continued but they were less frequent. In the late 1960s, while I was at the University of Chicago, I received a large package by U.S. mail. It was from A. C. Lambert but there was no accompanying note in the package nor letter by separate cover. In the package there was a collection of manuscripts he had written. These manuscripts were of two kinds: research studies

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on school finance and related areas, and research studies on early Mormon Church history. I examined the manuscripts and made two decisions. I found the studies in school finance tied to specific places and times and in some cases related to materials that the author had already published; hence I discarded the papers.

The manuscripts on early Mormon Church history were quite another matter. They revealed a side of A. C. Lambert that I had hardly known. They dealt with early Church scriptures, early Church leaders, the origin of Church symbols and practices, and related matters. It was clear that these manuscripts represented long and persistent efforts to locate original documents followed by their careful examination. Clearly these materials were not available to most Church members. I took the collection to the librarian at the University of Chicago and inquired about their interest in the collection. They were delighted to house it as part of their larger collection of documents related to the development of religious groups in the United States, particularly those with origins in up-state New York.

Let us turn more specifically to the life and career of A. C. Lambert. He was born in Kamas, Utah, in 1893. As the son of a widowed mother he struggled to make the farm support the family. At age seventeen he was called to fill a mission in England. Upon his return he found his mother had remarried and was living in Rexburg, Idaho. Lambert joined his mother there but soon found that he had to make his own way. He took what work was available including the herding of sheep. Within a few years he managed to attend Albion State Normal School for a year and Ricks College for another year and thus earned an elementary school teaching certificate. In turn, he became a teacher of a one-room rural school, a principal, and a county superintendent of schools.

In 1914 Lambert married Florence Smith Ballif. They were the parents of six children, four of whom are still living. Ms. Lambert died in 1947. A few years later Lambert married Margaret Sayer Marr, who survives him. Also surviving him are twenty grandchildren and thirty-seven great-grandchildren.

Following his school experience in Idaho, Lambert completed B.S. and M.S. degrees at Brigham Young University. He was also on the faculty at Brigham Young University in a number of capacities from 1925 to 1950. At various times he was principal of the University High School, professor of elementary education, professor of educational administration, dean of the summer school, dean of the Graduate School, and director of University Libraries.

The highlight of his own education was completion of the Ph.D. degree in educational administration at Stanford University in 1935. Despite limited resources, the necessity to support a family on a very modest salary, and serious illness while at Stanford, he completed the doctoral program with highest academic honors. His dissertation dealt with factors that affect the need for the transportation of pupils. With some reduction in size, his dissertation became a book, *School Transportation*, and was published by the Stanford University Press, a distinction seldom accorded dissertations, in 1938. Professor John Almack, who wrote the foreword, said that the Lambert study "reveals

clearly the fallacies in the correlation method on which preceding workers have relied." Almack continued by saying that Lambert, "puts forward in definite and objective terms the laws of school transportation." This empirical work did much to establish a scientific basis for pupil transportation throughout the country.

In 1951 Dr. Lambert responded to an invitation to move to Los Angeles State College (now California State University at Los Angeles). While he said little, it seemed clear that he was weary of a continuing meagre salary and lack of official support for his work. BYU lost one of its most eminent scholars.

For the next twelve years at Los Angeles State College Dr. Lambert was professor of educational administration and successively administrative dean, dean of the college, and director of the Building Program and Projects of the college. In a sense, he was the prime mover in establishing the academic program and planning the physical facilities for a new and rapidly growing institution. While the institutional demands were heavy, he found some time to continue his consultation with school districts, colleges, and governmental agencies. In 1963-64 he returned to Utah to serve as the professional director of Governor Clyde's School Study Committee.

During his lifetime Lambert published more than 150 articles on school finance, taxation, and related matters. Many of his studies on early Mormonism were unpublished. In addition to the collection at the University of Chicago, referred to above, there are collections at Stanford University and the University of Utah. The collection at Utah, numbering thirty-five manuscripts, is in the Special Collections Division and has been carefully indexed.\* The collection occupies eighteen and one-half feet of shelf space and some manuscripts, now available, were restricted until after Dr. Lambert's death. The time to share his diligent effort and insight has come.

What did this unusual man mean to me? He touched my life in many ways. I understood his beginnings in rural Idaho. With a gleam in his eye and a few well-chosen words he guided, almost imperceptibly, two young debaters in self-appraisal and self-improvement. When time dragged on the long train ride (1930) between Bozeman and Spokane, he relieved the boredom by producing a deck of cards and teaching us to play solo (slough). When I was faced with the task of doing a master's thesis, he responded helpfully to my efforts to define a problem, to seek and collect evidence, and to organize and write a lucid report. Again, his direction was gentle but his standards were clear. Whether the problem was academic or practical Lambert listened before he offered counsel. Thus, while I never did have a formal class from Dr. Lambert, he became my mentor.

Even before I knew the term and, as I now see it, largely at a subconscious level, Dr. Lambert became my role model. On one or two occasions he shared with me the exhilaration he had experienced at Stanford University. At that institution, he enjoyed an open intellectual climate; thought, inquiry, evidence

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\* A five-volume handwritten work on Masonry and Mormonism is in possession of his son, Carlyle B. Lambert, of Provo, Utah.

were cherished. There were no restraints, no taboos, no questions that could not be explored, no prescribed positions that had to be protected. Little wonder that a man of Lambert's reach found the climate exhilarating.

His response to that Stanford experience was contagious. I sensed, at least in part, what that experience had meant to him. Perhaps I, too, was reaching out. There was not only the vision of open inquiry, there was also the example of the man himself. Here was a man with humble beginnings and no money who had stepped beyond the confines of his region and his tradition and found that he could not only cope but thrive in the larger world. Little wonder that I, too, decided to sample what Stanford had to offer.

For A. C. Lambert, I shall ever be grateful. I know that I speak for others who also felt his influence. Perhaps in all of this there is a larger meaning. A. C. Lambert lives in the lives of those he touched even though we falter in emulating his example.



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