
THE JUANITA BROOKS LECTURE SERIES

presents

The 29th Annual Lecture

**Hopeful Odyssey:
Nels Anderson**

*Boy Hobo, Desert Saint, Wartime Diarist,
Public Servant, Expatriate Sociologist*

by Charles S. Peterson

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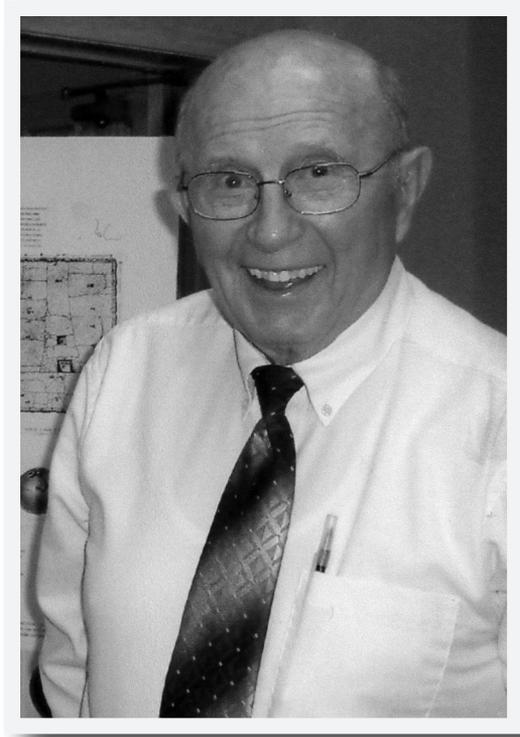
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Juanita Brooks was a professor at [then] Dixie College for many years and became a well-known author.

She is recognized, by scholarly consent, 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 College and the Brooks family express their thanks to the Tanner family.

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Charles S. Peterson was born in Snowflake, Arizona. He graduated from Brigham Young University, then also earned a Masters degree there in history in 1958. He taught at the College of Eastern Utah in Price, Utah for a decade and then went to the University of Utah where he obtained a PhD in history. He became the Director of the Utah Historical Society in 1969 and then a professor of History at Utah State University, where he taught until 1989.

Dr. Peterson has written three books — *Take up your mission; Mormon colonizing along the Little Colorado River, 1870-1900*, *Look to the mountains: Southeastern Utah and the La Sal National Forest, Utah: A History (States & the Nation)* — all still in print.

Dr. Peterson and his wife May currently reside in the Bloomington Hills area of St. George, Utah.

Hopeful Odyssey: Nels Anderson

Boy Hobo, Desert Saint, Wartime Diarist,
Public Servant, Expatriate Sociologist

By Charles S. Peterson

This Juanita Brooks lecture is an effort to call attention to the contributions sociologist Nels Anderson made to Mormon and Utah history, with special emphasis on his descriptions of life in Utah's Dixie. Runaway son, mule skinner, hobo ditched from a desert railroad, ranch hand, railway maintenance and mine prop carpenter, Anderson was a graduate of Dixie Academy, Brigham Young University, the University of Chicago, and New York University. He became a high ranking labor official in FDR's administration, wrote *Desert Saints*, and was also one of the most gifted of what I like to call the "Dixie School" of writers. In addition, he was a longtime State Department and U.N. official and a sometimes expatriate and suspect during Joseph McCarthy's purges.

Anderson's World War I diary came to my attention about five years ago as the result of a search I asked archivist David Whittaker to make of BYU's holdings with reference to northern Arizona's Snowflake Stake Academy.¹ At the L. Tom Perry Archives the 400-page handwritten account of Anderson's World War I experience had been referred to as the "Nels Anderson Doughboy Diary." Technically, however, as the diary makes plain, "doughboys" were infantrymen who manned the trenches and "went over the top" as suggested by Ogden-born Guy Empey's *Over the Top, By An American Who Went*.² Anderson's interest in engineering gave him a little different take on the war, as well as the opportunity to exercise skills gained in his Utah years. His diary had been donated to Brigham Young University in the 1970s by Nels' son Martin about the same time Marriott Library Curator Everett Cooley was making a drive to bring together the University of Utah's very fine Anderson Collection. As it turned out, this war diary also reflected Anderson's attitude during the period he was most closely connected to Mormons and Utah culture.

Although I had never met him, I thought I knew who Anderson was that first day as I leafed through the War Diary. I had heard Juanita Brooks tell of his role in getting a records survey project for Dixie of which my own family was a beneficiary when the journals of Levi Savage Jr. and his son Levi Mathers Savage had been transcribed. Anderson's book on Mormonism, the *Desert Saints* also became the direct departure point for my doctoral dissertation and my own first book. In time I also read his correspondence with Brooks and Dale Morgan, rejoiced when he reviewed my *Take Up Your Mission* in 1973, and was flattered when he sent greetings with mutual Canadian friends in the American Association for State and Local History. I truly knew little about this mythic figure and recall making occasional references that portrayed him as no more than a rootless derelict, rescued by Mormon ranchers and teachers. But I did understand my interest in the Anderson diary and turned to World War I specialist Kent Powell of the Utah Historical Society. Sharing my interest Powell transcribed the diary and traced Anderson's course through Europe. As it turned out, a search I thought might take two months to get ready for publication goes on yet. What follows is a first step toward a better understanding of Anderson and his Utah/Mormon history.

Fortunately an intense loyalty to his own roots permeates much of his copious writing. His own on-site experience and the legacy of his parental family are special hallmarks of his scholarly works from which any sketch of his life must draw. Among other things, they show a close family with strong ties. His father, Swedish immigrant Nels Sr., was born of peasant parentage and knew three languages, but was a virtual illiterate. The elder Nels was orphaned by cholera at nine and soon migrated to Germany where he worked for eighteen years. Continuing to America he hoboed through the East and Midwest, working mainly as a mason. At last he married a St. Louis girl of Scottish background and lived first in the late nineteenth century Hobohemia or skid row district of Chicago where tens of thousands of footloose wage workers congregated during off seasons and hard times. There, Nels was born in 1889. Then in a hopeful odyssey that lasted eight or ten years, the family canvassed the West with-

out finding the right kind of land before returning to Chicago where again they lived just off the Loop in the Hobohemia slum. Initially held out of school, Nels and older brother Bill “hawked” newspapers, shined shoes and became well acquainted with the area’s inhabitants and institutions before the family moved to Elk Rapids on the east shore of Lake Michigan.

There Nels Sr. finally acquired a farm and adjacent acreages for his sons but with domineering ways drove his children from both the land and the family while his wife’s example instructed the younger Nels in a remarkably advanced sense of social justice and patience. Nels Sr. acted out two harsh holdovers from his peasant past: 1) true security exists only in land, and 2) education is not to be trusted.³ On the latter point, he ultimately gave ground in Nels’ case; listening to local teacher Henry McNamus’ opinion that Nels had intellectual gifts that ought to be exposed to more than the four years’ schooling, which the elder Anderson insisted could be tolerated without leading the child away from the land’s security. Early in his teenage years, McNamus also arranged for Nels to live as chore boy for two years in one of the area’s upper middle class homes, enabling him to broaden his social outlook.

Unhappy in high school, where he was known as one of the “manure kids” because of Nels Sr.’s practice of collecting fertilizer to restore his farms, Nels ran away from home at fifteen, following his brother into the construction camps that were pushing the last of the railroad systems west. In a youthful display of travel savvy that impressed even seasoned hobos, he located his brother Bill who got him hired with an outfit grading a Santa Fe track southwest from Chicago. Before the summer was over he became a skilled mule skinner and displayed an affinity for the independent self sufficiency of the hobo workers. When his brother headed home for the winter, he stayed on tending the mules with Andy Clark, an old time “rounder” in whose stories and tutelage he found a continuing interest that when merged with sociology won him national recognition that survives yet. By spring he subscribed fully to the hobo jingle “Granddad, I want to be a hobo, That’s what I want to be, Help it if you can; when I get to be a man, I want to be a hobo too!”⁴

After participating in this transient work force himself for a few years, Anderson began to observe that hobos differed sharply from bums and tramps, that they were actually a necessary type of the genus vagrant; a work force that almost by instinct came together where and when need existed and when the need was filled disappeared again without bidding, protest or dispute. They were, he argued, not only the product of an essential phase in the process of the moving frontier but also a very sensitive barometer of seasonal change and economic cycles.⁵ Indeed as early as his second year in railroad construction, when impending winter shut down a Montana grading job and the hobo work force departed, crowding gondolas and box cars all along the eastbound railroads Anderson, still a teenager, sensed and saw the onset of the Panic of 1907–08 well before the newspapers began to announce it or the more stable labor marts at home tipped off his folks how threatening the collapse would be. Later, when he wrote about the importance of the hobo as an American labor phenomenon, he also recognized his role as an essential part of frontier development. As he pointed out, railroad construction, reclamation projects, mining, timber work, and crop and ice harvest all ran ahead of permanent urban populations demanding a disposable migratory work force that far exceeded the capacity of local populations. The result was a large body of homeless men flowing out from the various transportation centers in the spring and in the fall crowding back into the skid row centers.⁶ In good times it was a process that worked well but left hundreds of thousands unemployed in times of collapse.

Following this last winter at home, Nels struck out in the spring of 1908 into the Panic's jobless world. He beat his way on a succession of heavily policed railroads and through hostile cities, visiting the levees and wheat fields of Missouri and Kansas, and looking for mining prospects in Denver and Salt Lake City. Finding no work and convinced by a Wobbly philosopher in a Salt Lake park that the Panama Canal was the only sure work prospect, he headed south toward Los Angeles hoping to join a ship's crew there. His luck hopping trains held until somewhere south of Delta where railroad operators pulled him off the same train twice, the first time only to see him thumb

his nose at them as he re-boarded after the train was moving and the second more permanently, near the Utah-Nevada line from where he trudged on south along the tracks to Clover Valley, a tiny Nevada oasis where a railroad and a Mormon ranch competed for landscape and use rights as they still do, at what is now called Barclay.

Given a meal and a bed that first night, he soon settled into a “bed and board” relationship with the Woods/Terry clan who were devout Mormons but who spent most of their time on the range away from church. They were also committed to education and at ease with the primitive Mormonism commonly found on the outskirts of Mormon Country.⁷ The Terry patriarch had entered polygamy, his Woods counterpart had not, and the younger generations appear to have been leaving plurality as much by natural inclination as by obedience to the Woodruff Manifesto of 1890. Although after a two-year hiatus Anderson rejoined the hobo work force, the Woods and Terry ranches remained his home base for some ten years. And the pioneer Mormonism practiced there, on some of the world’s roughest and most isolated country, i.e. the Woods/Terry folkways, provided telling evidence of how the Mormon kingdom had first withdrawn and then expanded into utter wilderness. To Anderson, pioneer Lyman Woods, who chewed tobacco and took an occasional drink but stood unflinching at the post Brigham Young had given him, epitomized the best the desert saints, or for that matter any and all of frontier America, had to offer. Attractive, too, was the fact that no one but Tommy Terry who had just returned from a mission to England, undertook to convert him. Providing a different opportunity for indoctrination was the fact that at the ranches, where he tended stock during that first winter while families retreated to schools in Enterprise and St. George, were collections of Mormon books. These were primarily history and scripture, which in winter’s slack hours he avidly devoured. “Vaguely” troubled by theology that excluded blacks and about the historicity of the Book of Mormon but otherwise profoundly moved by the Mormon story of restoration, persecution, desert flight and expansion and thinking that polygamy was solving itself, he was baptized in 1910 by Tommy Terry in a desert spring.⁸

Still regarding the Woods/Terry ranches as home base, Anderson turned for a period of about eight years to a little different kind of blue collar, camp oriented work that he also associated with the hobo life. This time, however, construction and mining opportunities accommodated his growing interest in school and his military service. In addition to his recognition that the Panic was lifting and a sense that his "bed and board" arrangement had to end, his determination to rejoin the "bummery," as he called the hobo work force, was hastened by a series of disastrous floods washing out a hundred miles of Salt Lake, Los Angeles, and San Pedro track which created a plentitude of jobs on a seven day a week basis as the railroad put its line back in service. The only admitted Mormon in this all-male outfit, Anderson was soon dubbed "The Deacon" and ribbed heavily about multiple wives and schoolboy interests. But in quieter moments he was encouraged to continue his education and not let the hobo life take him permanently.

Among his Mormon friends, people his age were busily pushing on with their schooling and patriarch Lyman Woods confided that he planned to pay for Nels' schooling. Sensing others might resent it, Anderson evaded the prospect. His railroad job required that he shift from mule skinning to the rough carpentry of bridge and building maintenance, which paid better and as the flood repairs ended, opened mining and reclamation jobs to him as well. Like his earlier hoboing, this work kept him in camp but it lessened his need to bum rides on the railroad, although when called by family need he continued to beat his way to Michigan and back unpaid and often wrote proudly of being able to do the one way trip in as little as four days. His new trade also required him to invest in and carry a hundred pounds or so of tools, pick up new vocabularies, wear white overalls, and loosen his contact with the Woods, Terry and Hafen families where he lived or worked less often. The impact of this, however was abated by going to school with their sons and daughters and by contract construction work that he did in the neighboring settlements of Enterprise and Central. Although most of the people with whom he lived were ranchers and "cowboyed" regularly, Anderson never refers to himself as a cowboy and in his scholarly work complained

that the romantic myth attached to cowboys contributed to the generally negative view of hobos.⁹

Able to finance himself, Anderson resumed his schooling. By now in his early twenties, he at first found Brigham Young Academy's high school students to be immature and cliquish. To his surprise the Provo school was also little patronized by general authorities, most of whom he reported, sent their children to Salt Lake City schools and eastern universities. The next two years he continued high school at Dixie Academy in St. George where he fit better and where a student run discipline system had been set up by Principal Hugh Woodward that seemed to take care of some of the immaturity. Also, pedagogy at Dixie Academy was progressive enough to generate complaints about religious heterodoxy, which in time attracted an investigation by Church Commissioner of Education Horace Cummings. According to Anderson, this visit climaxed in a testimony meeting orchestrated by Professor Joseph K. Nicholes, among students who otherwise might have met Cummings with a protest, thus disarming his suspicions and keeping the popular Woodward out of trouble. Even the most independent students held their peace about Nicholes' image management until the issue passed over.¹⁰ About this time Anderson began to think about going into some professional or white-collar career and without being fully convinced, began to announce he would go into law. His associates at both Dixie Academy and the "Y" tended to have similar goals and were among the most progressive and vocal students.

Plying his work skills summers and during vacations Anderson felt more at home when he later returned to Brigham Young. This time he enrolled in the University division which numbered about 100 students, among whom he was more at ease and he formed friendships with Mormon young people from all over the West. He also brought a brother and sister to Utah for a year or two. During these years Anderson continued to talk about going into law but taught for short periods in Price, Utah and at St. Johns Stake Academy in northeastern Arizona, which fed idealistic ideas about teaching as a suitable lifetime career. In addition to Nicholes and Woodward at Dixie, Principal Ed Hinckley of B. Y. High and especially John

Swenson, professor of sociology and economics at Brigham Young University, were highly regarded Mormon teachers who influenced him profoundly. Swenson ultimately convinced him to drop law for sociology and pointed him toward the University of Chicago whose Sociology Department was rising to national but sharply contested eminence by 1920.¹¹

Back from war for the school year of 1920-21, the holding power of Anderson's Mormon connections began to weaken. In the main, this was probably a matter of other loyalties claiming him, but events at the "Y" also had a centrifugal effect. In contrast to the tide of World War II veterans, there appears to have been remarkably little student interest at the "Y" in the immediate post WWI period. The senior class of 1920, for example, consisted of perhaps sixteen students and certainly no more than twenty.¹² Thirteen are listed in the yearbook as graduates. With a bumper freshman class of eighty-four, the college studentbody totaled 166. Anderson was elected Senior Class President and became editor of the yearbook, *The Banyan*. His close Dixie associate LeRoy Cox, who was also headed into law, reorganized and renamed the student newspaper.

It was a time of considerable political unrest. Among other things, the powerful Republican apostle, Reed Smoot, was actively working against the League of Nations while Anderson, who to the extent that he understood his political interest was Democrat, supported the League along with many others at the "Y." Anderson got his foot in his mouth trying to make a joke at an illustrated lecture he was giving which attracted Smoot's animus, who publicly admonished the thirty-one-year-old Anderson and other students to remember they were students who should let their parents do the politicking. This stung "Y News" editor, LeRoy Cox who retorted privately, "When we went to War they called us men, but now they treat us like children."¹³

More damaging to Anderson's relationship with the church was the senior class's mismanaged effort to bolster an embarrassingly small cash gift with what was basically an idea about university policy in the way of the legacy it planned to leave its alma mater. With

its credits widely discounted at graduate schools and still closely associated with the BYA's lesser functions, the time seemed ripe to offer a progressive idea. As a consequence, the seniors called, with what they thought was a conscious effort to be polite, for the University to widen the gulf between itself and the Academy's programs, in effect to become a university in fact as well as name. Specifically they advocated more PhDs on the faculty, discontinuation of appointments as compensation for church service, and more books in the "less-than-adequate libraries." Although he worked to distance himself from the movement, Anderson's name was closely "associated with what was soon called the "demand furor." Indeed he was pinned directly to it by University President George H. Brimhall who, in a parable delivered before the entire student body, likened the class effort to a flea's boast that its bite could move a bull elk. The matter came to the attention of the Church Board of Education and despite the fact that Anderson was able to manage a friendly visit to President of the Church Heber J. Grant about a yearbook mistake, educator-apostle and Superintendent of Church Education David O. McKay was soon called to put the "demands" issue right. This he did by talking directly to Anderson, advising him sternly to "follow your file leaders." Offended to be left out of the negotiations and agreeing with Anderson that they had "been chastened unfairly," the entire senior class "packed in[to] four cars," along with chaperones, and took off for a spring outing at the head of Provo Canyon. The incident was ignored by the administration but class members became increasingly aware that they had offended the "high[est] authority."

Anderson soon had reason to think that the incident marked him as a "trouble maker" and that it would likely alter his future. A few days after graduation, he appeared before Commissioner of Church Schools Adam S. Bennion to apply for a position in one of the church academies. "Under no conditions," he was informed, could Bennion "recommend me for a teaching job. It would have a bad influence on the students."¹⁴

Feeling that a B.A. made his blue-collar options less meaningful and that Bennion had closed the door to his best white-collar option, Anderson began to plan seriously to go to the University of

Chicago. He and LeRoy Cox spent the summer in an unsuccessful effort to sell Utah Woolen Mills goods through the upper Midwest. They also took two University of Utah classes to bolster sagging BYU credits which they were sure would be discounted twenty-five percent at Chicago University. And somehow, Nels conducted a survey of the unemployed in the Utah and Idaho railroad towns of Salt Lake City, Ogden and Pocatello where he interviewed 400 migratory workers in a study that became part of *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* in 1923.

The Chicago Sociology Department quickly recognized Anderson's special preparation for a study of the homeless men that inhabited Hobohemia, his boyhood home. As noted earlier, his hard pressed parents had cut school entirely from his young life to sell newspapers and hustle the odd nickel running errands for prostitutes, Wobbly philosophers, mission do-gooders, small time politicians, and saloon keepers until he knew the Hobohemia area and its inhabitants like the back of his hand. He had also visited it now and again during his own "go-about hobo days." Indeed he was so much a man of his past that his scholarly experience in 1921 and later was complicated by class lines, prudish academic standards, and reservations that attached to onsite investigations into what were considered to be marginal if indeed not criminal groups. For Anderson the result was a year of prodigious work in a Chicago slum, which culminated with the publication of *The Hobo* under his own name. Countersigned by an unlikely committee of sociological greats, city reformers, and figures who in some quarters were considered to be underworld characters, it became a bestseller before it was signed off as a master's thesis. It made a lasting contribution to the University of Chicago Sociology Department's famed methodology of "participatory observation."¹⁵

The Hobo both blessed and blighted Anderson's way for the rest of his life. It makes him a still-quoted authority on a group of marginalized homeless men, and opened an array of administrative opportunities before him but frustratingly closed the door of scholarly appointment for which he so longed until he was seventy-five years old. After several years of research, further publication, and

reform work in Chicago's underworld he more or less escaped to New York University in the late 1920s. There an administrative pot-pourri of research projects, adjunct teaching assignments at Columbia, welfare jobs, sticky labor assignments involving Great Lakes sailors and the New York Bonus Army marchers, free lance writing, and research projects brought a PhD at New York University in 1930. More importantly, it also made him indispensable to Harry Hopkins, Franklin D. Roosevelt's right hand man and certainly one of the nation's foremost figures in opening the "welfare state," first in New York State government and after 1933 in the New Deal's welfare and labor related programs.¹⁶

During World War II, Anderson went on to wartime work with seamen and shipping that took him to India, the Persian Gulf, and Kuwait. In the latter, he supervised the shipment of Lend Lease aid to Russia and prepared for Post War and Cold War service in Europe with the U.S. military government of Germany until mandatory age requirements brought him to retirement. Thereafter he spent an additional decade in Europe as director of a UNESCO office of research before returning to Canada and, at long last, to professorial appointments in the Newfoundland and New Brunswick universities where he remained the last decades of his long life.

It is difficult to know what role Utah's Dixie and Mormonism played in this continuing life. One guesses that by either ordinary Mormon or scholarly standards we have not gone far in understanding its importance. He married twice, both times out of the church. He states several times that in his Utah period he avoided entangling alliances with Mormon girls because schooling came first. However, the World War I diary may be a superior source of information although even in it some reading between the lines may be needed to make diary entries into statements of romantic interest. Yet there is a suggestive between-the-lines kind of disappointment that one or two of them didn't write often enough nor say exactly what he wished they would. I have heard no oral suggestion of a love affair from St. George people that remember their parents or of an older sibling's talking about Nels' affairs, although a romantic interest of his brother Lester is remembered.

There is no question that he took little time for worship in Chicago. During the first year he worked night and day and his time thereafter was filled with time consuming reform efforts that some judged to be of a questionable nature. After missing church for his first few months in Chicago, two missionaries visited him with soul saving in mind. Thereafter he was visited a time or two by Arthur Beeley, another graduate with interest in the social sciences and, Anderson suspected, at least tacit authority to shepherd the student flock in Chicago. LeRoy Cox, later a well-known St. George judge, tended to take Anderson's shift from law to sociology personally, especially after Nels failed to look him up during the first months in Chicago. Mormons who did look him up had heard reports of the shady aspect of his research and/or welfare work and to Nels seemed more interested in sensationalism than in him personally.¹⁷

Finally, his first wife, Hilda, a Jewish immigrant from Russia, who worked in the Chicago Public Library, had what seems more a class-related than a religious interest in upgrading Nels from social work to literary writing. In a mid-twenties trip through Utah's Dixie, she was at best disinterested and probably dead set against his reactivating his Mormon relationships. Later, after they moved to New York, her pressure led him to do "articles for good magazines in 1927," which he termed "a successful year for a beginner." About the same time he co-authored the first ever urban sociology text, and trying to move away from *The Hobo*, wrote a parody of it called "The Milk and Honey Route" under the nom de plume Dean Stiff. Whatever her position, he attended the Mormon Church more in New York than he had in Chicago but found little need to involve himself in the full package of LDS participation in these years which in many ways were a secure and happy time as his family got started. Hilda, who later became unhappy in their marriage, seemed at least to be at ease.¹⁸

While he had an important, time-consuming job during his Washington years, Anderson made what were undeniably more than courtesy bows in the direction of his Mormon past when he did the Utah research for *Desert Saints* beginning in 1934, when he also got the Dixie Records Survey started. A few comments about this visit

to and a brief analysis of his *Desert Saints's* contributions to Mormon and Utah history will conclude this effort to introduce Nels Anderson.

He found southern Utah in the depths of Depression. Although word of a more hurried 1970s visit may still be heard among older descendants of the Woods, Terry, and the Hafen families, I have heard no remembered comment about the longer research visit of the mid-thirties except Juanita Brooks' Utah Historical Society speech in 1962 and a *Dialogue* oral history in 1974. Anderson himself recalled that his work, including certain records housed in the temple, provoked suspicion among some. However, George Whitehead, the temple president was cordial and cooperative as were the stake president and Stake Relief Society President Juanita Brooks. But one gathers that Thomas Wolf and Wallace Stegner were correct in their conviction that one can rarely return home. Though not actually met by hostility, it seems likely that Anderson was not met by any larger show of welcome. Much later in his career he renewed cordial relationships with several classmates and Utah acquaintances and carried on significant correspondence with them. Included were Lowry Nelson, Dean Brimhall, Robert Hinckley, George Ballif, and Ernest Wilkinson.¹⁹

Although in writing *Desert Saints* Anderson abandoned early outlines for a more sympathetic, straightforward presentation of the Mormon experience, the book was not enthusiastically received by representatives of the church, and the compliment he had meant it to be fell flat.²⁰ Nevertheless he persevered, working on it for eight years. He almost certainly used his Washington savvy to gain access to important Utah/Mormon records including census data going back to 1854-1900. The book was published first in 1942 with what might be called twelve "History of the Church" chapters with a moderate sociological bent. Anderson also presented four Dixie-oriented chapters written with a recognizable "Chicago School" sociological spin. These last were titled: XIII "Priesthood Government in Zion," XIV "Economy of Faith and Plenty," XV "Social Implications of Polygamy," and XVI "The Mormon Way of Living," in which data and focus are frequently drawn from the "Dixie Experience." A paperback University of Chicago edition appeared in 1966 with a

superb preface where Thomas O’Dea acknowledges Anderson’s early recognition of the “near nation” and “native ethnic group” concepts prominent in his own *The Mormons* (1957). While Anderson undertakes an informative postpartum in his own preface, the later edition appears otherwise to be identical to the earlier one.

I will conclude here with the personal opinion that together with perhaps a dozen Mormon articles, this single book *Desert Saints* qualifies Anderson as one of the foremost Utah/Mormon historians of the Depression and early World War II era. Except possibly in closeness of their association and a spirit of protest that illuminated much of their work, he qualifies as a worthy peer to Juanita Brooks, Bernard DeVoto, Dale Morgan, Wallace Stegner, and Fawn Brodie — the five great writers Gary Topping reclaimed for Utah in his book: *Utah Historians and the Reconstruction of Western History* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2003). Along with the work of several of those writers, *Desert Saints* brings what may be called a “Brigham Young as the great Latter Day prophet thesis” into a clear and objective statement. Similarly, the book is a classical statement of the Mormon experience as escape, social and economic experiment, desert conquest, and re-entry to national fellowship; this latter as shaped by my friend Leo Lyman and others in similar schools. In it, as in much of Anderson’s sociological work, Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis is also put to effective use.

Perhaps most importantly, Anderson’s 1942 history lays out in limited but specific form several of the great themes that occupied Utah/Mormon writers in the next half century. To name a few, we need to consider carefully the indebtedness of Robert Flanders and Leonard Arrington to his sections on geographic expansion, communalism and the independent economic commonwealth. In his sophisticated and graceful treatment “of the gathering,” William Mulder also followed patterns well understood by Anderson, as do many who have dealt with polygamy. Although he touches on it only briefly and that deep in a footnote the census derived question of how John D. Lee’s capital assets could have skyrocketed ten times as fast between 1854 and 1860, as did others in comparable circumstances on the earlier date, suggests a complicity in the Mountain

Meadows Massacre on Lee's part that neither Juanita Brooks nor the recent author Will Bagley really cope with. Similarly my own interest in Mormon expansion into Arizona and in the Mormon village grew directly from passages of Anderson's, calling Utah's Dixie "the inland center of a primitive Mormon culture" from which expansion proceeded to several surrounding states. Set very much apart from the Wasatch Front, which defending the hinterland from invasion fought fire with fire that primitive culture remained in the memories of most in 1942 and was clearly recognizable in my Mormon Country boyhood in northern Arizona of the 1930s.²¹

Finally, he discusses the Mormon drive to make education and knowledge promote the Kingdom of God into a force not altogether unlike the "opportunity" role played earlier by the frontier and available natural resources. As he points out, there was a time when it was held to "be a sin to 'approximate after the things of the world.'" This was no longer true after 1900 by which time he avers Zion both "turned from insularism to identification" and from importing people to the exportation of young people "expensively educated in the knowledge of the world." Between 1900 and 1940 he estimated "as many as 100,000" young people had been exported—and still guessing but guessing wisely, he calls it a number equal to the emigrant converts who had been imported earlier. Then calling the decade of the 1860s the time of maximum effort when "every sacrifice was the sacrifice of investment," he points out that by 1940 sacrifices were pursuant to sending young Mormons out and concludes with a question: "Is this...the long-predicted expansion of Zion to the world? Is it another kind of missionary movement?" And suggesting Anderson's continuing relevance, this is a question re-iterated in the Republican Party Primary playoffs underway even now.

Aware of the fact that from beginning to end his scholarship and his life were closely related to his own identity, should we join in asking, "Is this dilution process thinning out the old distinctiveness? Will Mormonism spread and adapt until it loses its identity?" Let me counter with a concluding question: Does his abiding affinity for *Desert Saints* (people more than the book) add dimension to the long sojourn of a life spent as a dyed-in-the-wool-mendicant have a

vitality that continues? Do the “career public servant” and, at last, the expatriate scholar add to the regional Dixie self consciousness — in an interest in the “boy hobo,” the “sometimes Saint?” Is he a continuing advocate of a unique expression of pioneer life? I tend to believe they do and that many of you here tonight still find inspiration in the person and life of Nels Anderson.

Thanks to each of you for coming tonight. Special thanks to Dixie State College and to the Juanita Brooks Lecture Series that continues to do her honor. Thanks also to Doug Alder for his friendship and leadership, to Elaine Alder for her editorial work, to Kent Powell of the Utah State Historical Society for services too important to mention, and to Ron Woodland for putting it in print, as well as other friends and members of my own family.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Nels Anderson, "Doughboy Diary 1918-1919," manuscript copy in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University and an electronic copy in my possession.
- 2 Arthur Guy Empey, "*Over the Top,*" *By An American Soldier Who Went* (New York & London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1918), p. 60.
- 3 Although he became a proud citizen, illiteracy slowed Nels Sr.'s adaptation to modern values. Throughout life he believed elves went about by night sizing up how one treated his animals and blessing or cursing farm operation as a result. See "On Workers and Their Culture," 1/24/80 Anderson Collection at the University of Utah. The Armand Mauss Collection at Utah State Historical Society also has considerable Anderson correspondence and manuscript papers.
In this respect, Nels Sr. reminds one of "Bret," the haunted wife in O. E. Rolvaag's classic Norwegian novel, *Giants in the Earth*, New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1927.
- 4 Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1923.
- 5 On Hobo work force as a second phase of the opening frontier see "On Workers and Their Culture," among other papers at the University of Utah Special Collections.
- 6 See "The Education of a Sociologist: the Autobiography of Nels Anderson," hereafter cited as "The Education of a Sociologist." As far as I know, this exists only in a manuscript of some 350 pages apparently written in 1977. It brings together much of his work but exists in some cases in more detail in other autobiographical works.
- 7 See Charles Peterson, "One Man's West: The Mormon Village," *The Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 3, (1976), p. 3-13; and Klaus J. Hansen, "The Long Honey Moon, Jan Shipps Among the Mormons," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol 37 No. 3 (Fall 2004): pp. 3 and 12-13. Among the best accounts of Anderson's arrival in Mor-

mon Country was one made available to me recently by my good friend Douglas Alder, the “Joseph Alma Terry, Voices of Remembrance” Oral History Foundation, account of his arrival in Clover Valley, pp 23-24, Dixie College Library.

- 8 Ibid. See also Nels Anderson, “On My Being a Mormon,” Paper delivered in the 1970s, Armand Mauss Papers, Utah Historical Library.
- 9 Anderson, “Autobiography of a Sociologist” and other autobiographical writing.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 The Banyan in 1920 shows thirteen graduating, six from Provo, seven scattered from Arizona to Idaho and no one graduating who gave a Salt Lake City address. In one place Editor Anderson says there were sixteen seniors, and in another twenty. Interestingly seven of the graduates were women.
- 13 James B. Allen, “Reed Smoot and the League of Nations,” Brigham Young University Studies, Vol. 14, 1973, pp. 72-78. Also see “Autobiography of a Sociologist,” p. 179.
- 14 Ibid. p. 183.
- 15 For an example see Foundations of Qualitative Research for Education, especially pp 5- 9, which consists of a section on “Chicago Sociology, a label applied to a group of sociological researchers teaching and learning at Sociology Department of the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s....“Chicago sociologists shared certain common theoretical and methodological assumptions. They all saw symbols and personalities emerging from social interaction” (Faris, 1967). “Methodologically, they depended on the study of the single case, whether it was a person, a group, a neighborhood, or a community” (Wiley, 1979). They also relied on firsthand data gathering for their research.... Robert Park,” one of Anderson’s foremost mentors “came to the University after careers as a reporter, and a public relations representative focusing on issues of race for Booker T. Washington....

Whatever they studied, they did so against the backdrop of the community as a whole, what Becker has called the scientific.” Anderson arrived just as this Chicago School was cranking up and was under heavy fire from more theoretical schools of thought and without too much in the way of published data to carry their case. In this situation *The Hobo* was among the very first things published and was seized upon eagerly by defenders and attacked vigorously by all others. As a new graduate student with almost no background in the formal aspects of the system he was at the head of the attack and faced major professional difficulties as a result. See “Autobiography of a Sociologist.”

- 16 There is likely a large amount of public data that documents Anderson’s Chicago, New York, and Washington D. C. experience. However, in interest of time and distance, I have depended entirely upon several of his own works including *Desert Saints* and his unpublished “Autobiography of a Sociologist” and a dozen or so papers he read that summarize his career. On the Records Project related information may be found in Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: the Federal Writer’s Project 1935-1943*, (New York: Little Brown and Company, 1972).
- 17 “Autobiography of a Sociologist”, pp. 198-205.
- 18 Ibid, pp. 223-226.
- 19 See Nels Anderson Collection, Marriott Library, U of U.
- 20 *Desert Saints*, xxi-xxiii.
- 21 *Desert Saints*, especially Thomas O’Dea’s “Foreword” and “Preface to the 1966 Printing” by Anderson and fn. 31, p. 192 on Lee’s relative prosperity.

