A Foray into Leonard J. Arrington’s Legacy

This summer, the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business was honored to host the Leonard J. Arrington Centennial Conference which was sponsored by Cache Valley Bank and Siegfried—Jensen.

Dr. F. Ross Peterson, USU emeritus professor of history and current adjunct professor in the Huntsman School, organized the celebration of Dr. Arrington’s 100th birthday. The event featured guest speakers from across the country who have been deeply affected by Arrington’s work and his personal example. Speakers included USU current and emeritus faculty, colleagues from the LDS Church History Department and BYU, family members and several others who were taught or mentored by Arrington. Dr. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich from Harvard University was the Keynote Speaker
Born in Twin falls, Idaho in 1917, Arrington graduated cum laude from the University of Idaho where he studied agricultural science during the depression. He began his graduate studies in Economics at the University of North Carolina, where he also married Grace Fort before embarking on a troop transport ship bound for North Africa during World War II. After war service there and in Italy, he completed his graduate work at UNC and then accepted a position at Utah State Agricultural College (now USU) in 1946. While a young economics professor, he developed a cadre of like-minded scholars who began to conduct seminars in LDS (Mormon) and Western economic history. He served as a Fulbright Professor of American Economics at the University of Genoa in Italy in 1958. Upon returning to Utah, he wrote numerous biographies on individuals who figured prominently in both the LDS Church and the development of the Utah economy, including Brigham Young, Charles Redd, Charles C. Rich, David Eccles, and William Spry.

From 1972 to 1982, Arrington was the first professional historian to serve as the official Church Historian of The LDS Church, a decade which came to be known as “The Camelot Years” due to scholars’ open access to the LDS Archives under Arrington’s direction. Also in 1972, Arrington became the Founding Director of the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at BYU, where he held the Charles Redd chair in Western History. During his time at BYU, he taught, mentored, and encouraged hundreds of students before retiring from the faculty in 1987 at age 70. He is widely recognized as the “dean of Mormon History,” as a principal pioneer of the “New Mormon History,” for his many biographies, and for his seminal work, Great Basin Kingdom, published by Harvard University Press in 1958.

Arrington donated his papers, journals, and other artifacts to USU in 1995, which are housed in the Special Collections and Archives at the Merrill-Cazier Library.

View all sessions from the conference below.

https://www.youtube.com/embed/videoseries?list=PLZ3khUxaJ Ui2Ej0IVmLTfMclE6wGrxQi3001500Arrington Centennial Conferencetrue