



Washington Franklin Anderson, n.d. Courtesy of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers.

Washington F. Anderson

DOCTOR, GOLD RUSHER, MORMON

PHILIP LOCKLEY

WASHINGTON FRANKLIN ANDERSON (1823–1903) led an incongruous life in nineteenth-century America. Born into an educated southern family and trained as a physician at the Universities of Virginia and Maryland, Anderson extracted himself from the common expectations of society, culture, and kinship responsibility in the antebellum South and migrated west during the heady years of the mid-century Gold Rush. The dramatic diversity of those seized by gold fever is well-recognized, embracing “every class ... from every state and territory.”¹ Yet Anderson’s subsequent career in the West featured a more exceptional development: conversion to Mormonism. Dr. Anderson’s association with the Mormon faith and his move east into Utah in 1857 notably contrast with common membership and migration patterns within Mormonism in this period.² At the time, Anderson’s education and profession set him apart from almost all his co-religionists in Utah and further differentiated him from individuals typically drawn to millennial movements.³ He went on to become “the most prominent Utah physician of the nineteenth century” and a pioneer practitioner of both surgery and preventative

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1. On the diversity of participants in the Gold Rush, see especially Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1–2.

2. L. J. Arrington and D. Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 22–43; J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780–1850* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 186–92.

3. For a study of millenarian identities in this period, see Philip Lockley, “Who Was ‘the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott’? Millenarianism in Early Nineteenth-Century England,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 64, no. 1 (January 2013): 70–95.

health measures in the Rocky Mountain territories in the latter half of the century.⁴

Anderson is mentioned in numerous histories of Utah and Mormon medicine,⁵ and his position as the trusted personal physician of the Mormon patriarch Brigham Young (1801–1877) has also granted him occasional attention in broader Latter-day Saints historiography.⁶ Young was notoriously skeptical of the medical profession. He strongly discouraged use of the “poison medicine” routinely dispensed by many doctors and advocated moderation and the herbal medicine favored by Joseph Smith.⁷ Anderson’s professionalism contributed to a softening in the Mormon president’s attitudes to empirical medicine, opening the way for Anderson’s pathbreaking work in the territory, especially in modern surgery.

Curiously, even though a biographical sketch published in 1904 stated that Anderson was baptized into the Mormon faith, further accounts of Anderson and his Utah career assume he was not actually a Mormon.⁸ The origins of this view are traceable to the published reminiscences of Anderson’s daughter Belle A. Gemmel in the 1930s.

4. Linda P. Wilcox, “The Imperfect Science: Brigham Young on Medical Doctors,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 3 (1979): 32.

5. Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1904), 207–8; Blanche E. Rose, “Early Utah Medical Practice,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 10 (1942): 20–22; Ralph T. Richards, *Of Medicine, Hospitals, and Doctors* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1953), 247–49; Lester E. Bush, *Health and Medicine among the Latter-day Saints: Science, Sense, and Scripture* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 93–94.

6. Lester E. Bush, “Brigham Young in Life and Death: A Medical Overview,” *Journal of Mormon History* 5 (1978): 94–95; Bruce L. Campbell and Eugene E. Campbell, “Pioneer Society,” in *Utah’s History*, ed. Richard D. Poll (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 282; David L. Bigler, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Mormon Theocracy in the American West, 1847–1896* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998), 292. Despite Anderson’s prominence in Utah, few source materials on the man himself apparently survive within that state. Accounts of Anderson refer to two manuscript items held at Brigham Young University in Provo: a journal and a diary kept by Anderson during his journey from California to Salt Lake City in July and August 1857. Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections, Americana Collection, BX 8670 A1A no.112; MSS 40 1 Archival Manuscript Collection, 1130, Z11/2/C 6 1.

7. Wilcox, “Imperfect Science,” 27–31; Robert T. Divett, “Medicine and the Mormons: A Historical Perspective,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 3 (1979): 16–25.

8. Whitney, *History of Utah*, 4:207; Rose, “Early Utah Medical Practice,” 20–22; Richards, *Of Medicine*, 247–49; Bush, *Health and Medicine*, 93–94.

One of two or three Anderson daughters trained as physicians, Gemmel (1863–1960) asserted that her father held no personal belief in “the so-called ‘divine’ part of Mormonism”; rather, he only “admired the law and order that prevailed” in Utah.⁹ Since Gemmel, brief biographies have sought to offer a reason for Anderson’s decision to move to Utah in August 1857, despite his settled life and success in California. Blanche Rose’s explanation may stand for several: “In this period of its history California was a wild and wool[ly] community. Longing for a more civilized and orderly community, [Anderson] decided to move to Utah.”¹⁰ Although all accounts assume Anderson’s respect for Mormonism—he could hardly have won Young’s confidence otherwise—a law-abiding community is presented as the principal attraction. Standard studies of Mormon medicine describe Washington Anderson as a “Gentile,” a “non-Mormon physician,” thus enabling a pointed delineation to be drawn between the medical approaches of Mormon and non-Mormon (that is, scientific) worldviews in the period.¹¹

Assumptions about Washington Anderson’s personal convictions and allegiances, together with broader understandings of the worldviews prone to embrace or reject Mormonism in the mid-nineteenth century, are now thrown into sharp relief by new manuscript material in the Princeton University Library. Although the Library is well-known for the strength of its Mormon and wider Western Americana collections,¹² the case of Washington Anderson demonstrates how hidden aspects of these subjects may also be uncovered within apparently unrelated acquisitions, in this case the Robert Anderson Family Papers, acquired by the Library in 2007.¹³

9. Belle A. Gemmel, “Utah Medical History: Some Reminiscences,” *California and Western Medicine* 36 (January 1932): 44–47.

10. Rose, “Early Utah Medical Practice,” 20.

11. Wilcox, “Imperfect Science,” 34; Bush, *Health and Medicine*, 93; Richards, *Of Medicine*, 248.

12. Mormons and Mormonism Collection, 1831–1975 (WC019), Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Alfred L. Bush, “Princeton University,” in *Mormon Americana: A Guide to the Sources and Collections in the United States*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1995), 281–86. The discovery of Anderson’s story through a keyword search further highlights the invaluable innovation of digital finding aids.

13. Robert Anderson Family Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (hereafter RAFF). The collection was acquired in large part for its numerous letters from William Tyler

Robert Anderson (1790–1859) was a wealthy Virginia merchant, landowner, and Whig politician who took an active—and financial—interest in the educations and careers of his extended family, including his nephew Washington. In addition to two bulky folders of correspondence written by Washington to his “Uncle Bob” between 1842 and 1857,¹⁴ the collection includes letters from Washington’s brothers Leroy and William Henry Washington, also doctors, and other relatives.¹⁵ Robert Anderson’s diaries, kept from 1836 to 1858, also testify to the close ties maintained, for much of the 1840s at least, between a benevolent uncle and a favored nephew.¹⁶ In their totality, the Anderson Family Papers represent an especially rich and insightful body of source material on southern kinship networks. When sifted specifically for their evidence of one notable family member, they enable a new narrative to be written of an eclectic American life composed of apparently successive identities—medical doctor, participant in the Gold Rush, and Latter-day Saint. The papers set Anderson’s actual religious sympathies in new context while also disclosing notable details of his educational, professional, and overland migration experiences.

DOCTOR

Washington Anderson was born in Williamsburg, Virginia, on January 6, 1823, the son of Leroy Anderson—a teacher of classical and modern languages—and Hannah Wright Southgate.¹⁷ Sometime after 1830, this branch of the Anderson family moved almost a thousand miles southwest, to Alabama, where Washington’s father held teaching positions.¹⁸ Relations were maintained with his parents’ connections in Virginia throughout Washington’s upbringing; in particular,

Anderson (1799–1876), who lived in Princeton and served as cashier for the Delaware and Raritan Canal.

14. Anderson, Washington F. 1842–1857; RAFF, box 2, folders 2–3.

15. Anderson, Leroy H., 1830–1858; RAFF, box 1, folders 7–8. Anderson, William Henry, 1852–1858; RAFF, box 2, folder 5.

16. Anderson, Robert, Diaries, 1836–1858; RAFF, box 1, folder 12. The diaries contain brief descriptions of the Virginia merchant’s daily whereabouts and activities, including household slaves, guests, and traveling companions over three decades.

17. Gemmill, “Utah Medical History,” 44.

18. Leroy H. Anderson to [aunt] Ann Camp, May 24, 1830, RAFF, box 1, folder 7.

his mother retained ownership of “lands in Greenbrier and Harrison Counties.”¹⁹

Washington’s lengthy correspondence with his uncle Robert commenced in January 1842, when, aged nineteen, he was still resident in Alabama. Anderson’s early letters reveal a restive spirit and endearing, youthful indecision over which path to pursue in life. In consecutive letters he sounds out his uncle on the possibility of funds to secure his prospects, first by “obtaining a Midshipman’s warrant in the navy,” then to attend the University of Virginia to study medicine.²⁰ “I feel every day more and more in need of the advantages resulting from a collegiate education,” he implores his uncle at one point, before declaring an equal enthusiasm for “going to Texas to help the Texans fight their invaders the Mexicans ... what a glorious opening there [is] at present for a young man.”²¹

Medical studies rather than westward adventure won out, at least for the meantime; his next letter was written from the University of Virginia just days after his matriculation.²² In this and subsequent correspondence from Charlottesville, Anderson provides insights into both his own character and the continuities and differences in medical education and American campus life between the 1840s and today. Describing his daily routine, Anderson claims to spend “the better half of the 24 hours ... pouring over the page of science—from 9 to 2 o’clock in the lecture room—the whole afternoon either in reviewing or dissecting and I never retire before 11, seldom before 12 and breakfast the ensuing morning at seven.”²³ Doubtless, such an account of dedicated study was meant to reassure the uncle from whose pockets the costs of such an education were paid. Yet Anderson’s reports are consistent with the man he would become—applied and committed to learning, and engaged by the value of critical observation. Aged twenty, Anderson insists that there remains “a deal of humbuggy in

19. Washington Anderson (hereafter WA) to Robert Anderson (hereafter RA), Jan. 5, 1842, and June 6, 1842, RAFF, box 2, folder 2.

20. WA to RA, Jan. 5, 1842, and June 6, 1842; RAFF, box 2, folder 2.

21. WA to RA, June 6, 1842; RAFF, box 2, folder 2.

22. WA to RA, Oct. 8, 1842; RAFF, box 2, folder 2. This letter corrects existing accounts of Anderson’s career, which assume he began his medical training in 1841. The University of Virginia School of Medicine was the tenth medical school established in the United States and opened in 1825.

23. WA to RA, Jan. 8, 1843; RAFF, box 2, folder 2.

the science of medicine.” Crucial for “a secure foundation” in diagnosis and treatment, he continues, is “the study of anatomy ... a correct knowledge of this seems to be indispensable to the physician.... Happily we have a most excellent lecturer on this branch.”²⁴

Anderson’s correspondence describes the pedagogical techniques employed at a notable public school during a transitional point in the history of modern medicine.²⁵ “Each student is subjected daily to a strict, very minute and impartial examination on the subject of the previous lecture,” Anderson informs his uncle, revealing continuous assessment to be nothing new in the American classroom. “[A] *daily record* of these examinations is kept which will count for or against the student at the final one.”²⁶ Further passages resonate with the familiar experiences of college life. From the apologetic opening lines of the first letter from Charlottesville, the timeless theme of the penniless student plays out: “I am very sorry to trouble you so soon for money ... I shall try after this to make out with as little as possible.”²⁷ Anderson then lists his expenses to the cent, from “Fees to Professors” (\$75.00) to “Fuel and candles” (\$14.34). An especial grievance is the cost of superfluous textbooks, “which served only to promote the interest of the professors”:

We have a very excellent text book on Medical Jurisprudence (Beck’s) which costs some 5 or 6 dollars. Now independently of this, Dr Howard thinks it necessary to publish *here* what he calls his “Outlines on Medical Jurisprudence” one of the poorest affairs I think I ever read, ... and for this apology for a book he makes us pay 2 dollars ... so you can see we are all hemmed in and hampered at all corners and money is abstracted from us from every side.²⁸

24. WA to RA, Jan. 8, 1843; RAFF, box 2, folder 2. Anderson’s lecturer in anatomy—named in his letter of Oct. 8, 1842—was Professor James L. Cabell (1813–1889), later elected first president of the short-lived American National Board of Health. W. G. Smillie, “The National Board of Health 1879–1883,” *American Journal of Public Health* 33, no. 8 (August 1943): 926.

25. William F. Norwood, *Medical Education in the United States before the Civil War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944); John S. Haller, *American Medicine in Transition 1840–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

26. WA to RA, Dec. 5, 1842; RAFF, box 2, folder 2. Emphasis in the original.

27. WA to RA, Oct. 8, 1842; RAFF, box 2, folder 2.

28. WA to RA, Dec. 5, 1842; RAFF, box 2, folder 2. Emphasis in the original. The volumes mentioned are Theodric Romeyn Beck, *Elements of Medical Jurisprudence* (Albany, 1823), and Henry Howard, *Outlines of Medical Jurisprudence* (Charlottesville, 1842).

Perhaps the clearest contrast between Anderson's university education and today's medical training was his anticipated length of study. Barely into his first semester, Anderson discussed the possibility of graduating within nine months.²⁹ In fact, he left the University of Virginia after just one year, although he enrolled in a further course of study at the University of Maryland in Baltimore, and so graduated with his medical degree in spring 1844, after eighteen months' study.³⁰

In Baltimore, Anderson secured, alongside his studies, an especially instructive placement at the almshouse, the charitable institution for the city's elderly and destitute. With more than two hundred patients, "almost every variety of disease is met with among them," Anderson eagerly informed his uncle. "[E]ach one that dies is subjected to a rigid examination, so that we have an excellent opportunity of contrasting the appearances after death with the symptoms presented during the life of the patient."³¹ Anderson would remain at the almshouse until 1845, recognizing the value his position afforded his professional development. Nevertheless, at points in this period his regular letters to Virginia reveal a restless soul still pining for the adventure he delayed by pursuing medicine. "I have been thinking lately of going to South America (Rio Janiero)," he wrote shortly before graduating. "I am told young doctors are in great demand there. What do you think of the project?"³²

Anderson resigned his position in Baltimore in April 1845 and set out, not for South America, but for familiar haunts in Alabama, by rail and steamer, "via Cincinnati, New Orleans and Mobile."³³ He soon set up his own practice in Mobile but reported in March 1846 that business was slow and unrewarding: "I was a comparative stranger here, and the profession being pretty well stocked, the competition ... is very great." Mobile's dependence on cotton exports left it vulnerable in periods, like the mid-1840s, when "Cotton ... is selling very low."³⁴

29. WA to RA, Dec. 5, 1842; RAFF, box 2, folder 2.

30. WA to RA, May 12, 1842; RAFF, box 2, folder 2.

31. WA to RA, Dec. 24, 1843; RAFF, box 2, folder 2. See also Katherine A. Harvey, "Practicing Medicine at the Baltimore Almshouse, 1828-1850," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 74, no. 3 (September 1979): 223-37.

32. WA to RA, May 12, 1844; RAFF, box 2, folder 2.

33. WA to RA, April 24, 1845; RAFF, box 2, folder 3.

34. WA to RA, March 24, 1846; RAFF, box 2, folder 3.

At this stage in his life, Anderson purportedly first turned his attention westward. Belle Gemmel narrates that her father “practiced his profession ... in Mobile, until the outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846, when he joined the Alabama Regiment and served in the ranks as orderly sergeant of his company.” She goes on: “At the expiration of his service he was honorably discharged. He then removed to Yorktown, Virginia ... until 1849, when he emigrated to California, arriving ... at the height of the ‘Gold Rush.’”³⁵

The Anderson Family Papers disclose a rather different pattern to Washington Anderson’s life from 1846 to 1850, one more mundane and consequently more revealing of the man. The young doctor’s letters notably make no reference to his involvement in the Mexican War. His uncle’s diary, meanwhile, records Washington’s presence in Virginia for most of the course of the conflict. In the latter months of 1846 and for all of 1847, Washington Anderson was not crossing the Rio Grande with Zachary Taylor or marching on Mexico City with Winfield Scott; he was two thousand miles away in Yorktown, still practicing medicine and dining regularly with his uncle Bob.

Robert Anderson recorded that “W.F. Anderson” arrived in Yorktown by steamboat on August 7, 1846.³⁶ Washington’s actual enlistment in the 1st Alabama Infantry Regiment on May 23, 1846 (days after the declaration of war), is confirmed in military records.³⁷ However, the same records offer a vague discharge date of “November 1846.” Given Washington’s presence in Virginia by early August, his three months in service will have barely afforded the opportunity for meaningful participation in the war. Diary entries throughout the height of the conflict during 1847 indicate that Washington was a frequent visitor to his uncle’s home and even assisted his uncle’s political career, supporting him at area election meetings for the state senate.³⁸ For the time being, then, Washington Anderson had still not succeeded in escaping the apparent monotony of professional practice in the South. Writing

35. Gemmel, “Utah Medical History,” 44.

36. Entry for Aug. 7, 1846; Robert Anderson Diaries, 1836–1858; RAFFP, box 1, folder 12.

37. “Veterans with Federal Service Buried in Utah, Territorial to 1966: Washington Franklin Anderson, Apr 1903.” <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/FLR9-5M3>; accessed Oct. 3, 2012.

38. Entries for Sept. 7, Sept. 16, and Oct. 2, 1846, and March 22, April 5, and April 8, 1847; Robert Anderson Diaries, 1836–1858; RAFFP, box 1, folder 12.

to his uncle from Yorktown in late 1847, he lamented there was “nothing of importance stirring here ... my patients are all in *statu quo*.”³⁹

GOLD RUSHER

If Belle Gemmel inflated her father’s military career, her depiction of Washington as a “forty-niner” also misleads.⁴⁰ Anderson did indeed make it to California, but not until 1850.⁴¹ From his uncle’s diary, it is clear that Washington Anderson fully intended to number among the original mass migration to California of 1849, which is thought to have involved some 80,000 people, both overland and by sea, from every state of the Union and other continents.⁴² Yet, Washington’s correspondence reveals that he yielded initially to the emotional censure and appeal of family. In Alabama his mother put “an absolute veto on my proceeding ... to California,” while a brother begged him to “give up my trip to California this Spring and take charge of his practice.”⁴³ The domestic dramas provoked across America by the Gold Rush are easily forgotten, as sons, husbands, and fathers sought to release themselves from the clasp of kinship loyalty and responsibility. Where so many denied family for the chance of fortune, Washington Anderson did not. “As you must be aware,” his uncle was informed, this “is a considerable sacrifice to my present feelings and wishes, but it is one which I feel it my duty to make.”⁴⁴

A year later, in May 1850, Anderson was finally on his way west. A one-page letter, dated from Independence, Missouri, exudes exhilaration as he announces his intended departure for the plains the following day. After only a few days in crowded Independence—“the principal outfitting place for the California and Santa Fe trailers”—Anderson had acquired not only a wagon and animals, but also “a driver to perform the drudgery of the journey.”⁴⁵ Having heard many reports of

39 WA to RA, Nov. 17, 1847; RAFF, box 2, folder 3.

40. Gemmell, “Utah Medical History,” 44.

41. WA to RA, Oct. 30, 1850; RAFF, box 2, folder 3.

42. J. S. Holliday, *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 48; Andrew Rolle, *California: A History*, 4th ed. (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1987), 166.

43. WA to RA, April 16, 1849; RAFF, box 2, folder 3.

44. WA to RA, April 16, 1849; RAFF, box 2, folder 3.

45. WA to RA, May 6, 1850; RAFF, box 2, folder 3. Independence, Missouri, is

the trail during his passage so far, with some representing “the journey across the plains as hazardous in the extreme” and “others extol[ling] it to the skies as the most healthful and best way of travelling,” Anderson chose to “pay little attention to these accounts, being determined to test it by personal experience.”⁴⁶ Anderson would next write to his uncle from “Big Can[y]on, El Dorado County, Cal.,” October 30, 1850, providing a rich description of his recent experience along one of the more common routes to California, the Oregon Trail, then southwest through the Sierra Nevada.⁴⁷

Surviving descriptions of the overland journey to California during the Gold Rush are legion. Malcolm Rohrbough has contended that the experience “generated an outpouring of diaries unequalled in the history of the nation to that point.”⁴⁸ Such unprecedented eagerness to record, describe, and chronicle—common to migrants with vastly differing levels of literacy—stemmed from a sense of participation in a “heroic enterprise,” a unique moment in the American story. Historians have been sifting the results of this outpouring of private and published travel writing for decades.⁴⁹ Within this embarrassment of contemporary archival riches, Anderson’s narrative of his westward journey in 1850 retains historical value for his insights into the experiences of migrants in the second year of the Gold Rush and his perspective as someone who was leaving the stultifying atmosphere of professional life in the South for the purpose—it subsequently becomes clear—of setting up practice in the new society of the West.⁵⁰

of course a place of significance in Latter-day Saints history and theology. Joseph Smith visited the area in 1831 and received a revelation that it would be the site of the New Jerusalem.

46. WA to RA, May 6, 1850; RAFF, box 2, folder 3.

47. WA to RA, Oct. 30, 1850; RAFF, box 2, folder 3. A similar route was covered in 1849 by William Swain, the pioneer featured in Holliday, *The World Rushed In*.

48. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold*, 300.

49. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold*, 295–305; Holliday, *The World Rushed In*; Enos Christman, *One Man’s Gold: The Letters and Journals of a Forty-Niner* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1930); H. B. Scharmann, *Scharmann’s Overland Journey to California* (Freeport, N.Y.: Library Press, 1969).

50. Less scholarly attention seems to be paid to participants from southern states. One correspondent, according to Rohrbough, “commented that the emigration from Virginia would be especially great because ‘she possesses a greater number than any other state of men too lazy to labor and too proud to remain contented in poverty.’” *Days of Gold*, 313.

From Independence, the wagon trail took Anderson “a due Northwest course ... passing over magnificent country of almost boundless prairie.” Reaching the Platte River, Anderson depicts this stage as easy navigating: “Passing Forts Kearny and Laramie we continue our course up its South bank for upwards of 500 miles or about 26 or 8 days with an ox train.” Nonetheless, the threat of disease was at its height: “the cholera prevailed during our whole march up the Platte river, and occasionally one might see as many as five or six persons laid together in one common grave.”⁵¹

Meeting the Sweetwater River (in modern-day Wyoming), Anderson and his company continued for a further week, before auspiciously reaching South Pass—the natural crossing point between the central and southern Rocky Mountains—on Independence Day. “Here we halted several days to rest and refresh ourselves and our cattle”; beyond lay “the deserts and mountains.” From here Anderson’s description captures more of the sensations of the journey. As the party made their “tedious and toilsome march” over the Bear River Mountains, the weather was “so excessively cold, that tho’ we were in midsummer, when we awoke from our bivouacks in the morning, our blankets were invariably white with frost, and ice formed in our casks several inches in thickness.”⁵² Crossing the tops of what are now Utah and Nevada, Anderson further details the frustrating experience of following a river downstream from its headwaters for “a distance of several hundred miles,” before it “suddenly disappears leaving no trace of its existence save a few alkaline ponds.” In such toxic, bewildering spaces, which led on into desert before reaching further mountains, “many of the emigration lost their whole outfit, the oxen being poisoned by the sulphurous and alkaline water, ponds and springs.” Along with perhaps seven hundred dead animals, “hundreds of wagons were also left, their owners preferring to pack thro’ on foot.”

As August drew to a close, Anderson’s team entered the Sierra Nevada, “and after passing over banks of snow many feet in depth, and being saluted on the Summit with a violent snow storm we descended and reached the Sacramento Valley safely on the 10th of September.” He found “Sacramento city” to be “a real business town,” where “every thing seems to be going ahead rapidly—energy and enterprise

51. WA to RA, Oct. 30, 1850; RAFP, box 2, folder 3.

52. WA to RA, Oct. 30, 1850; RAFP, box 2, folder 3.

depicted on every countenance.” Anderson devotes his last lines to his current situation. “[T]he mines are not so productive as last year,” he observes, “but still large quantities of gold are being daily exhumed.”

[M]y present location is in the mining district some 45 miles east of Sacramento city, and while I now write the picks, shovels and rockers are at work all around me. A day or two since two men working close by got out 80 dollars in a few hours. Hundreds of others however work hard, and make only from one to ten dollars a day—At some future time perhaps, I will give you some interesting particulars in relation to the mines and mining operations—At present my sheet is nearly exhausted and I must bid you a dieu...⁵³

MORMON

Anderson’s *adieu* to his uncle was a long one: he did not write again for seven years.⁵⁴ In the intervening period, he corresponded only with his mother, though the Anderson Family Papers reveal that Washington’s progress filtered through to Robert Anderson via other family members.⁵⁵ Washington initially sought to practice medicine in the gold fields, but by 1853 he was reported to be “settled on a little farm, where with his own hands he sowed his seed and reaped the harvest.” He had married “a nice woman,” someone “in every respect suited to make him happy.” Presumably, the three years in California had taught Washington “to give up his chase for the ideal bliss of life, [and turn to] appreciating what he considered real.”⁵⁶ By 1854, Anderson was an elected justice of the peace in Yolo County, northwest of Sacramento, and had once again resumed his practice of medicine alongside farming.⁵⁷

In 1855 the first mention of the Mormon religion appears in letters discussing Washington, though merely as an illustration of the exoti-

53. WA to RA, Oct. 30, 1850; RAFF, box 2, folder 3.

54. WA to RA, Oct. 20, 1857; RAFF, box 2, folder 3. The letter begins: “The last time I addressed you, I believe, was about this time in 1850...”

55. William Henry Anderson to Robert Anderson, Feb. 10, 1852; RAFF, box 2, folder 5.

56. William Henry Anderson to Robert Anderson, May 20, 1853; RAFF, box 2, folder 5.

57. Leroy H. Anderson to Robert Anderson, Sept. 6, 1854; RAFF, box 1, folder 7. William Henry Anderson to Robert Anderson, Dec. 20, 1854; RAFF, box 2, folder 5.

cism of life in the West as viewed from Alabama. Despite the daily dangers of “grizzly bears,” Leroy reported to his uncle, “Washington and his family ... appear to have a merry time of it out there. Dances and dinners, spiritual rappings &c are in high fashion, and many of the ladies appear to believe in Mormonism.”⁵⁸ By 1857, according to his brother William Henry, Washington himself appeared sympathetic to the new religion: “Wash wrote under date 8 Jany inst[.] that he and family are well. He seems to lean to the *Mormon* faith. I don’t know whether he believes in the *practice*. His wife being a little *old* however, might incline him that way....”⁵⁹ The suggestive linking of plural marriage—“the practice”—and the age of Washington’s wife notably illustrates the manner and tone of a family’s response to Mormonism, even while the question of full conversion remains ambiguous. In the final letter from Washington to Robert Anderson in the Anderson Family Papers, dated October 20, 1857, his Mormon identity becomes clearer: “While in Yolo, I became favourably impressed with the tenets of the Society called Mormons, and as the principle of gathering in one body is one of the peculiar doctrines of our people, I carried it out by removing with my family consisting of my wife and son ... to Salt Lake City in Utah Territory or Deseret as it is now called.”⁶⁰

This final letter, addressed from “Great Salt Lake City,” presents persuasive evidence of Anderson’s Mormon loyalties, as he tellingly uses the terms “we,” “us,” and “our people,” and relates the opinions of “our leader Brigham.” After narrating the recent course of his life and success in California, Anderson makes clear to his uncle that he would “have remained longer in Yolo, and continued business in that delightful climate, but the feeling against the Mormons became so strong.” His decision to join them brought a dramatic change in his fortunes:

From being the most popular man in the county, and being frequently solicited to run for the highest offices in the gift of the people, I

58. Leroy H. Anderson to Robert Anderson, July 6, 1855; RAFF, box 1, folder 7. “Spiritual rappings” is a reference to Spiritualism, the popular movement centered on communication with the spirit world through mediums. Its beginnings are commonly dated to 1848. Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 1–6.

59. William Henry Anderson to Robert Anderson, March 27, 1857; RAFF, box 2, folder 5. Emphasis in the original.

60. WA to RA, Oct. 20, 1857; RAFF, box 2, folder 3. All quotations in the remainder of this section are taken from this letter, unless otherwise indicated.

immediately became one of the most unpopular, and indeed believe it would not have been safe to have resided there any longer. I injured no one, interfered with no one, but simply exercised my freedom of conscience and speech, and had honesty and manliness enough to espouse an unpopular cause because I thought it was right.

A few lines describe the six-week journey to the Salt Lake Valley, followed by a longer, effusive description of “the city of the Saints,” where he found houses “principally of adobes, one, two and three story in height, painted and ornamented in every variety of style.” He pointedly adds, “There is not a single dram shop nor house of prostitution, no gambling house.” Aspects of this enthusiasm for Mormon society can, of course, be viewed as the understandable response of an observant doctor made all too aware of the health costs associated with California’s flourishing saloons and houses of prostitution and gambling.

Beyond offering a corrective to existing views of a distinctive Utah figure, Anderson’s October 1857 letter from Salt Lake City is arguably of broader significance for its perspective on a vital theme in the development of the American West by this date: Mormon separatist sentiments and hostility to the United States. Anderson wrote at the moment of greatest tension between the self-declared State of Deseret and the government in Washington—the Utah War—just weeks after the notorious massacre of more than a hundred members of an emigrant wagon train at Mountain Meadows.⁶¹ The latter half of Anderson’s letter to Virginia pointedly attests to the capacity of new Mormon converts to alter their personal loyalties and sense of allegiance dramatically when entering Utah Territory in this period. “At the present time,” Anderson informs his uncle, “the martial drum and fife with its inspiring notes, together with military training in the various wards, proclaim that war is expected.” He then proceeds to list, in animated language, the nature of the persecution suffered “while the Mormons resided in the United States”:

Driven from one place to another, persecuted, harassed on every side, their farms and improvements taken forcibly from them without the first show of recompense, men + and even children murdered in cold blood, wives, mothers and virgins ravished, lashed down to benches and abused by human fiends till Death kindly released them from their Suf-

61. Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict 1850–1859* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 119–47.

ferings. These are *facts* attested by living witnesses, and these outrages committed in the 19th century among a so called Christian people, and *permitted* by a nation calling itself Christian.⁶²

Washington Franklin Anderson, a man whose very name displayed his family's esteem for the Founding Fathers, repeatedly invokes the Revolutionary era within his rhetoric. "We are actually more grossly insulted and abused than our forefathers ever were under British tyranny and misrule," he declares. "[W]e intend to stick to the Constitution, and Deseret will probably be the only place where that Sacred Instrument will be preserved unimpaired, and be handed down unscathed to future generations."

I thank God I have escaped from such a damnable administration of Government, and that I have got among a people who are determined to be free, and who would rather *die fighting* for the liberty we are entitled under the Constitution than to live a minute under such a galling yoke as the present administrators of our government wish to place upon us.

In his closing lines, Anderson presents a pointed response to the "great fuss about Polygamy," as if to answer criticisms received from elsewhere:

[A]s practiced here it not only coincides with the teachings of the ancient saints, but is really far more compatible with reason and common sense than the monogamic [*sic*] system—women are more highly respected here than any place I have lived at— They are not made whores of as elsewhere, but after being impregnated they are sacredly respected by their husbands until their offspring is matured and even weaned—the consequence is we have healthy, blooming wives and noble intelligent children, and the women are as great if not greater advocates of the system than the men....⁶³

Here Anderson shifts his tone from his earlier pitch of defiance to language approaching a medical defense of "plural marriage." This defense notably differs from the two standard Mormon arguments, made until the abandonment of the practice at the end of the nineteenth century, that polygamy was not condemned in the Bible and was authorized in a divine revelation to Joseph Smith.⁶⁴

62. WA to RA, Oct. 20, 1857; RAFF, box 2, folder 3. Emphasis in the original.

63. WA to RA, Oct. 20, 1857; RAFF, box 2, folder 3. Emphasis in the original.

64. Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of*

THE IMPLICATIONS OF MORMON IDENTITY

Read alongside the letters written to his uncle between 1842 and 1850, this last epistle from Salt Lake City testifies to a marked change within Washington Anderson by 1857. Leaving aside the unprecedented passion, even posturing, of his rhetoric, a projected distance toward his uncle enters Anderson's letter when he requests to be remembered to "all the members of your family"; previously the sentiment was "our family."⁶⁵ Such change and distance highlights how far identification with Mormonism in this period involved not only subscription to distinctive religious doctrines but also an effective transfer of familial, societal, and even political allegiance.

Washington Anderson was a graduate of two public universities of founding states, he once volunteered to serve the federal government in the Mexican War, and he participated in Virginia politics through his patrician uncle. Even the rupture of westward migration and starting over in California, while it slackened his previous family ties, did not apparently affect Anderson's connection to the wider social inheritance carried over from the East. He assumed the role of justice of the peace and even reportedly became town magistrate.⁶⁶ Anderson was therefore strikingly representative—as far as any individual can be—of a particular cultural transfer across the American continent in this period. Amid the "mass transfer" of an eastern population drawn initially to labor in the gold mines, Anderson embodied the flow of a more educated elite able to establish itself in the first years of Califor-

the Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 201–4; Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986). It is unclear whether Anderson himself went on to practice polygamy. In his 1857 letter, Anderson names the wife he married in California as "Mrs Caroline Mathilda Dunlop, a widow whose maiden name was Stafford." Belle Gemmel was the daughter of Anderson's second wife, Isabelle Evans, whom he married in 1862 and with whom he had thirteen children (Whitney, *History of Utah*, 208; obituary in *The Deseret News*, April 24, 1903). Although Dunlop's death has not been traced, an ambiguous note relating to Washington Anderson on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints online family records site reads that "in 1894 he had a large number of wives sealed to him" yet "all ... were deceased." "Ancestral File v4.19," database, entry for Caroline Matilda STAFFORD (<http://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.2.1/M4DR-153>; accessed Oct. 3, 2012).

65. WA to RA, Oct. 20, 1857; RAFF, box 2, folder 3.

66. Rose, "Early Utah Medical Practice," 20.

nia's statehood and rapidly assume a settled professional life.⁶⁷ Even as diverse patterns of social behavior developed in the unique context of the American West, significant aspects of the emigrants' prior experiences, competencies, and social assumptions were also reproduced.

Anderson's decision to identify as a Mormon in California, to surrender his status and success within the state, and to migrate to Utah to be with "our people" casts his subsequent career within the territory in an alternative light. If Anderson had indeed numbered among the Gentile migration into Utah, as previously assumed, his position as a leading advocate for modern, empirical medicine in the region would largely fit a model of Mormon/non-Mormon roles within early Utah, where the introduction of eastern medical knowledge and professional competencies that so rapidly reached California relied on the far slower Gentile migration into Utah in the remaining half of the century.⁶⁸ The noted emphasis on herb remedies within the Mormon population, in addition to persistent advocacy of "faith healing" by church leaders for many decades, may be readily set within a framework of contrasting worldviews and mentalities, where the Mormon convert of the mid-nineteenth century remained reliant on faith, folklore, superstition, even magic, and suspicious of empiricism.⁶⁹ Instead, the pattern of Anderson's Mormon affiliation presents alternative possibilities for Mormon mentalities in this period. Anderson's litany of official appointments within the Mormon state—surgeon of the territorial militia, member of the Utah legislature, chairman of the Board of Medical Examiners, first president of Utah's medical society—were accompanied by successive innovations. He is credited with introducing written case records to Utah and with pioneering an antiseptic method in surgery.⁷⁰ Here, then, is an empirically minded

67. On the concept of "mass transfer," see James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 106–33.

68. R. J. Dwyer, *The Gentile Comes to Utah: A Study in Religious and Social Conflict, 1862–1890* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1941); Gustive O. Larsen, "The Mormon Gathering," in Poll, ed., *Utah's History*, 188.

69. Campbell and Campbell, "Pioneer Society," 282–84; D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1998).

70. Richards, *Of Medicine*, 248–49. According to Gemmel, "Early Utah Medicine," Anderson gave a paper entitled "A Plea for a More Exact System of Clinical Observation and Some Advantages of a Record of the Same" at one of the first meetings of the medical society.

man whose worldview was apparently squared with the millenarian mind of early Mormonism.⁷¹

In conclusion, it should be asked why Washington F. Anderson has for so long been assumed a Gentile. The answer surely lies in part in the fact that the most widely cited account of his life was written by Belle Gemmel, a figure assumed to have reliable insights into her father's religious views. Dr. Gemmel's own opinion of Mormonism by the time she wrote her reminiscences, aged sixty-nine and living in San Diego, are notably unknown.⁷² Other elements within her narrative are called into question by the Anderson Family Papers, such as his involvement in the Mexican War. In this light, Gemmel's effort to distance Anderson from too close an association with mid-century Mormon culture may be further questioned. Of course, Washington Anderson's own religious views by the end of his life remain unrecorded in the Anderson Family Papers, and it cannot be assumed, on the strength of a letter written when he was thirty-four, that his opinions remained unchanged or that he did not re-imagine his past life for the benefit of his oldest daughter. Even so, an alternative account of episodes in the incongruous life of Washington Anderson is now available to scholars of Mormonism, American medicine, and migrations to the West Coast. Our picture of the mentalities and motivations within each of these subjects is surely the richer for the insights of the Robert Anderson Family Papers.

71. On Mormon mentalities, see Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

72. One source describes Belle and her sister as "non-Mormons who left pioneer Utah to return with medical degrees." Kate B. Carter, comp., *Treasures of Pioneer History*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1952), 39.