

Thomas G. Alexander. *Edward Hunter Snow:  
Pioneer—Educator—Statesman.*

Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2012.

*Reviewed by Benjamin A. Johnson*

Thomas Alexander, prominent historian of the American West and author of *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* and *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet*, has completed a well-researched biography of Edward Hunter Snow (1865–1932), one of the early home-grown leaders of St. George, Utah.

Son of Julia Spencer Snow and Apostle Erastus Snow, Edward was a second-generation Mormon pioneer. Erastus was appointed to lead colonizing efforts to southern Utah in 1852 and, in the next decade, promoted self-reliance by encouraging efforts to raise subtropical crops in the “Cotton Mission.” Edward built on this pioneer heritage. He maintained his father’s entrepreneurial spirit (such as by founding the Bank of St. George and the Southern Utah Telephone Company), served as a Utah state senator, played a key part in the first-ever Utah State Tax Commission, helped found what is now Dixie State University, and served as St. George Stake president, assisting Mormons with both spiritual and temporal challenges.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the pioneer community of St. George had become the most important city in southern Utah. Edward was a progressive force in the area, setting ambitious goals and bringing the cotton colony out of isolation. As Alexander points out, “Utah’s Dixie was no place for the weak” (26). The desert climate certainly challenged Edward’s abilities. His goals as stake president were far more civic oriented than the goals of stake presidents today, including setting up electricity and a water system, securing an ice plant, and creating a high school for St. George. In the foreword, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, a St. George native, states, “Men like Edward H. Snow, who could have prospered and excelled anywhere he chose to live, chose to live in

Dixie.” Elder Holland continues, “In that generation Edward H. Snow is by all reckoning the principal leader of those who stayed and soldiered on to bring educational, commercial, cultural, and religious maturity to a setting that had seemed so hostile to all such hopes” (10).

Alexander charts the life of Edward chronologically, but starts by providing forty-one pages of context before discussing him in much detail. Alexander chronicles Erastus’s role through early Church history, including Erastus’s marriages, his exodus from western Illinois in 1846, his part in “the first pioneer company on its journey to the Salt Lake Valley” on July 21, 1847, and his role in helping to “promote self-sufficiency” in the Iron Mission in Parowan and Cedar City (21–22). Some readers may find it challenging to wade through what may appear to be gratuitous familial or genealogical context of Edward’s aunts, uncles, grandparents, and great-grandparents, while others may be thankful for this context and appreciate the carefully researched background for understanding Edward. Alexander points out, “The Snows were a dynasty of pioneers in business, education, religion, and philanthropy,” owning farms, mills, and storage centers (15).

Interestingly, Alexander’s narrative highlights the Snow’s family history that spans significant events during the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, broaching such topics as polygamy, Erastus’s involvement in the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, and his involvement in negotiations with the federal government during the Utah War in 1858. Alexander also provides amusing sidelights by depicting, albeit sometimes briefly, humorous incidents involving chamber pots, spankings, unmarried transient couples looking for a quick wedding, and embarrassing moments when General Authorities stayed at the Snow house (30, 250–52).

Edward’s education included classes from prominent professors Karl G. Maeser and James. E. Talmage at Brigham Young Academy, and he graduated with a degree in 1884 after three years of study. He taught school, became superintendent of county schools, and chaired state and civic organizations, including the board of trustees of Dixie College, the Utah State Tax Commission, and the Washington County Red Cross. As a state senator, Edward was unsuccessful in obtaining support for a teachers college in Beaver but proudly introduced legislation to establish what would eventually become Southern Utah University in Cedar City. Clearly, Edward was interested in helping others gain access to quality education.

In an era when it was not uncommon for young male Mormon missionaries to leave wives and children to serve, Edward left for the Southern States Mission nine months after marrying Sarah Hannah Nelson. During the nineteen months that he was away, Edward was partially supported by his young wife, who worked as a seamstress for a dollar a day. Erastus also contributed financially to support his son's mission efforts. According to Alexander, Hannah "suffered from depression" and performed in community plays to help her cope with her husband's absence. She had been concerned that Edward would take on another wife while he was on his mission. To this, Edward replied that he had "no disposition" for it, and he never did join in plural marriage (58). Alexander compares Edward and Sarah's account with others who served in the same mission. "It seems probable," Alexander continues, "that many of the wives suffered from depression caused by separation, increased responsibilities, and loneliness as Hannah did, and that they had a difficult time helping to support their husbands in the mission field" (69).

After his mission, when Lorenzo Snow, a distant cousin, visited St. George in May 1899 and delivered his now-famous sermon on the value of tithing that could open up the windows of heaven, Edward was finishing up his service as stake tithing clerk (1889–1899)—a powerful and salaried position at this time that included the collection and appraisal of in-kind goods. Edward also played a financial role at the state constitutional convention, helping to institute Utah's income tax and to modernize Utah State government as it progressed toward statehood.

Drawing extensively and often primarily from Edward's own sources, including Edward's journals, correspondence, and autobiography, Alexander skillfully summarizes and analyzes episodes from Edward's life. Alexander draws information from a non-Mormon visitor to Edward's home and thoughtfully compares information from mission journals with that of Edward's correspondence, showing that, for example, Edward did not mention to his wife how ill he actually was or his "confrontation with the Klu Klux Klan" (58). Alexander's other sources include guided tours, emails, interviews, and government documents, as well as sources from the Church History Library and BYU Special Collections. Footnotes serve to discuss the author's disagreement with some sources, to explain Latter-day Saint jargon for those who may be unfamiliar with certain terms, and to provide concise descriptions and references for further reading.

Sometimes shifts between time periods within the text's body take over the flow of the narrative. For example, the text vacillates between Edward's experience as a boy and his early adult life at the Normal School at Brigham Young Academy (38–41). There are a few distracting editing mistakes, and sometimes Alexander is a bit too abrupt in his treatment. For example, when he describes an instance in which Edward was asked about why Mormons practice polygamy, he writes, "Edward explained the reason," but Alexander does not further elaborate (53). For the reader, a little more explanation here as to what specific reasons were given or an acknowledgement that those reasons are unknown could help.

Overall, Thomas Alexander's treatment of Edward Snow is detailed, informative, and sometimes even amusing. Readers will appreciate *Edward Hunter Snow's* useful photographs and illustrations, such as the map of St. George and its vicinity (280–81). Including a basic map of the whole of southern Utah might have helped further situate the geographic context for the reader, and including a timeline would have been useful for keeping track of the major events and roles in Edward's life. While there are some limitations, *Edward Hunter Snow* significantly contributes to the growing body of literature on the development of Southern Utah and second-generation Mormon pioneers around the turn of the twentieth century.

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