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## VASCO M. TANNER — A PIONEER IN CONSERVATION

Walter P. Cottam<sup>1</sup>

To be invited to contribute to this commemorative issue of the *Great Basin Naturalist* honoring the life and labors of Dr. Vasco M. Tanner is a distinct honor for many of his old associates who witnessed the birth of this scientific journal and know that Dr. Tanner was the father of the idea and the midwife at its delivery. Most important, it was he who nurtured the infant journal, successfully rearing it to become an informative and influential disseminator of biological knowledge to both scientist and layman throughout the Great Basin and far beyond these borders. Such accomplishments alone should elevate this man to a prominent niche in the Scientific Hall of Fame, but in my opinion his accomplishments as a teacher and department head at Brigham Young University far exceed those as the founder and publisher of a successful new journal.

It was in Dr. Tanner's role as scholar, teacher and field researcher that he most intimately touched my own life. Both of us were graduates of BYU, and by the midtwenties both were members of the BYU faculty, he as a zoologist and I as a botanist. Each of us headed departments and each comprised the teaching staff of these two large biological fields until the late twenties. During these years our association was most intimate because we had agreed upon joint field trips with a number of our most promising students, and we spent almost two complete summers in the hinterlands of Utah, where Model T Fords were a good match for the roads of that day, and where the fauna and flora along them remained unknown and largely unrepresented in the meager biological collections in our universities. These were fruitful and gloriously exciting months under the open sky that glows away from civilization.

Under such circumstances of semisolitude brought about by our temporary removal from the "petty ill concerns and duties" generally attending the captive city dweller, this small group of students and teachers experienced an extraordinary solidification of friendships that surely can never perish in the flesh. I feel that none of us can ever forget the nightly impromptu forums held under starlit skies or around the campfire where all appropriate subjects were limited only by our competence to discuss them. Most frequently these discussions were stimulated by our observations of the day, but time after time they ended with the consideration of some aspect of the conservation of our intricate biological resources. The late twenties were years when much of our beloved Utah landscape was raw with sores resulting from decades of grazing abuse and from the damaging drought of 1898-1904. Dr. Tanner's demonstrated knowledge of the cause and effects of wild land deterioration was an

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inspiration to us then, and a prophecy of his attitudes and activities in conservation during the decades to come. It can be safely said, I believe, that few voices have been raised in Utah with such force, with such clarity, or with such authority on the nature of our resource problems and their solutions. The marvelous rehabilitation measures applied by the Forest Service to the high Wasatch Mountains east of Provo, in the vicinity of Provo Peak, were in large measure stimulated by this wise and good scientist. Our great governmental agencies such as the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Park Service—all charged with the responsibility of managing and conserving the priceless heritage of our wild lands—are cognizant of Dr. Tanner's eminence in the field of conservation and freely seek his advice.