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Introduction to "On Being Mormon in Canada and Canadian in Utah"

Nancy R. Lund

As part of the Asael and Maydell Palmer Lecture Series, Canadian Studies at Brigham Young University presented a program on March 14, 1996, entitled "Three Mormon Women: Reflections and Perspectives." The program featured three outstanding LDS women, all born Canadian—Elaine L. Jack, Ardeth Greene Kapp, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher.

The "reflections and perspectives" of these women provide windows into the experience of Latter-day Saints who grow up in Canada but have ancestral and, more especially, spiritual ties to the United States. Such international ties are not unlike those experienced by many members of the Church who are born in one nation, serve a mission in another, or attend school, work, or live in yet another.

Elaine Jack spoke of growing up in Cardston, a quiet, LDS community dominated by the "presence of the temple." In this small prairie town, Sister Jack learned there are "things you can count on—like winter and wind. . . . You could count on your home and family being the center of your universe. . . . You could count on looking out for each other. . . . You could count on the Church." After her marriage to an American, Sister Jack became a U.S. citizen, but of her native Canada, she said:

I always relish the feeling of going home, approaching the Canadian border from Montana, when all the familiar landmarks begin to appear. I have felt this way for 45 years. . . . I love how the land gradually flattens out from the Rocky Mountains into a prairie that grows buttercups and shooting stars and buffalo beans and wild roses and yarrow. . . . Canada made me and centered me.

Ardeth Greene Kapp compared her ability to appreciate the philosophies of both Canada and the U.S. to the capacity to love and be loyal to the two very different philosophies of the families that affected her life—the outgoing, innovative family of her mother and the orderly, peace-loving family of her father. “What are my feelings of loyalty, devotion, and allegiance to two countries and two families? How could I value one over the other?” she asked. “Is not each benefited by the uniqueness of the other?”

Sister Kapp, a U.S. citizen by the time she was called to serve in the Young Women’s General Presidency, also shared having loyalty to both a native and an adopted land with two members of the First Presidency:

One does not lose a sense of loyalty and love for one’s roots. President Romney of the First Presidency, who had his roots in the colonies of Mexico, set me apart. When he finished, President Tanner, also a counselor in the First Presidency and a Canadian by birth, said to President Romney, “Now you know she is a Canadian”; to which President Romney responded with that twinkle in his eye, “Oh, really? When I placed my hands on her head, I was sure she was a Mexican.”

Elaine Jack put into perspective allegiance to different nations and to the gospel by stating, “I was born in Cardston, eighteen miles from the border of Montana and another country. . . . But our lives there were influenced by the Church, and that mattered even more than territorial boundaries.”

Maureen Ursenbach Beecher’s essay, printed here, offers a universal expression of the mixed loyalties touching all who feel an allegiance to more than one country, and beyond national boundaries, to the gospel of Jesus Christ.