St. George and throughout Utah. Despite her accomplishments, she was also deeply insecure about her work, her abilities, and the consequences of her writing.

Brooks was a letter writer at a time when letters required real effort. This one-volume collection of 220 select letters presents correspondence dating between 1939 (several years after she began her writing career) and 1978, about the time dementia began whittling away her memory and about a decade before her death. The general theme shaping the selection is Brooks as an actor in the story of Utah and its past, but much else is captured as well. The curation of the letters itself is quite affecting, drawing in not only professional correspondence but select personal correspondence as well, including a meek and perfectly honest letter to a neighbor about their dog. Brooks was a terrific letter writer. Her letters are not as long or detailed as those of her fellow professionals, such as Bernard DeVoto, Dale Morgan, or Wallace Stegner, but her personal communications possessed a quality of artless sincerity and quiet competence, qualities that seem absent from her contemporaries. I don’t think a similar collection of their letters would be nearly as interesting.

While the book is structured chronologically, it is divided into chapters essentially by major writing project, each chapter introduced by the editor Craig S. Smith in a few well-chosen pages of biographical and historical context. The editor has filled in contextual notes and citations for the benefit of later scholars.

Like any book, the finished work is neither comprehensive nor exactly representative. This is fundamentally a work about Brooks, not her correspondents. Although the editor collects and presents only Brooks’s half of a correspondence, it is delightful reading. The letters, chosen for their interest and readability, miss a few that I wish would have been included—specifically her October 4, 1962, letter to Dale Morgan written upon completing the editing for Hosea Stout’s diary, the comment of an honest, earnest, and still-vulnerable student talking about her work to her mentor. It is also unfortunate that no photographs of any correspondents are included in the volume. Letters represent people, and people have faces that provide context. Unfortunately, the volume simply stops after its last letter in 1978, but Brooks lived for another decade. Although her dementia was covered briefly in the chapter introduction, the edited collection of letters would have profited from some concluding biographical comment and wrap-up of the volume.

Since publicly available digital collections are now common, published book-length volumes of collected correspondence are becoming outdated, and surely the next step for someone of Brooks’s stature is a large-scale digital project collating her widely scattered papers. The key importance of these primary sources on Brooks and her work allows glimpses of her significance throughout the volume without being stated overtly. Brooks’s approach and commitment to factually inclusive, forthright, unapologetic tellings of the past seems to be the message in her letters. The “see what the evidence suggests and tell the truth about it” approach to history she learned and adopted has come to be the accepted standard for Utah and Latter-day Saint history. That is why Brooks remains important. This is a good book, a contribution to regional literature, and a pleasure to read.

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Volume 1: Church Historian, 1971–1975
Edited by Gary James Bergera, foreword by Susan Arrington Madsen, introduction by Rebecca Foster Bartholomew

From 1974 to 1977 I had the good fortune to know and work with Leonard Arrington at the Church Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Even though I worked in the Archives Division and not the History Division, I considered him a colleague and friend, then and after. As I have talked to