

The Boys from the Brooklyn Museum Venture to Zion

The Brooklyn Museum is the second largest museum in New York City, and one of the largest in the United States. Although now known primarily as an art museum, prior to the Second World War, the Museum pursued an aggressive acquisition policy in the field of Natural History and Archeology. Various members of the curatorial staff made expeditions to southern Utah to study plant and animal life. This paper will center on the work of George P. Engelhard, a Curator and Entomologist at the Museum, who made 4 trips to Utah and collected a wealth of materials for the Brooklyn Museum. While other museum's expeditions to Utah are well documented, little has been written about the expeditions conducted by the Brooklyn Museum.

The trials on the road to statehood are well documented in Utah's history. However, Utah's contributions in the area of early natural history are often overlooked not only by historians, but also by scientists in various fields who in the past and present have flocked to Utah to unlock her secrets in natural history.

Beginning in 1831, engineers from the United States Army, naturalists, and scientists explored Utah and the West and recorded numerous discoveries of various species of plant and animal life. Many of these expeditions are well documented; Bonneville, Stansbury, Powell, and Merriam and are just a few of the well-known names. Large, wealthy cultural and educational institutions such as the Peabody Museum at Yale University, the Museum of Natural History at Harvard University, and the Carnegie Museum of Natural History at the University of Pittsburgh came to Utah to explore her landscapes and discover and expose the natural secrets hidden in the fields of sage brush and beautiful red rock. Questions remain about the scientists and naturalists who came to Utah to study its diverse and beautiful lands: What were their impressions of this unique state,¹ its people, and its unique culture? To answer these questions, this paper will examine a German-born museum curator and entomologist named George P. Engelhardt from the borough of Brooklyn in New York City.

Engelhardt was born in Hanover, Germany, in 1871 and immigrated to the United States in 1902. The son of a civil servant, he was educated at the Gymnasium level in Germany (the most rigorous and academically demanding schools). Engelhardt began his museum career at the Children's Museum in Brooklyn, NY, and in short time moved on to the Brooklyn Museum, where he spent the remainder of his career as assistant curator and curator of the natural sciences before retiring in 1930.² In any other city in the United States, the Brooklyn Museum would be the crown jewel of cultural and scientific institutions; however, in New York City, the Brooklyn museum was easily overshadowed by its neighbors in Manhattan—the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Engelhardt was also a member of the New York Entomology Society and the Brooklyn Entomology Society, both founded by German immigrant scientists and naturalists in the beer gardens of Manhattan and Brooklyn who dominated the field of entomology during this era.^{3,4}

Engelhardt made his first visit to Utah in 1904 and made several other expeditions to Utah on behalf of the Brooklyn Museum. His impressions of Utah were always positive, and one can imagine the impression that his observations made on scientists and

naturalists who read his works and attended his talks at scholarly meetings at athenaeum and museum gathering in Manhattan and Brooklyn. In the days before radio and television, the cultural elite of New York City consisted primarily of educated members of the upper middle class. As a group, these individuals craved the type of intellectual stimulation that today might be found through public television or public radio. At the turn of the century, a common form of educating oneself, especially in the northeastern part of the United States, was to attend lectures at museums, or libraries or athenaeums.

Engelhardt's talks at the Brooklyn museum and the American Museum of Natural History after each expedition painted Utah in a positive light. At a time when Utah was still viewed by many as a quirky theocracy where each man had multiple wives, Engelhardt's discussions, talks, and scholarly articles promoted Utah in a much more positive light than the sensationalist newspapers of the day, where recent and bitter battles over the issues of polygamy and statehood were still revisited from time to time.

The first record of Engelhardt's expedition to Utah was published in 1904 in the Science Bulletin published by the Brooklyn Museum. Interestingly, it was not authored by Engelhardt but by J.A. Allen, an American naturalist and ornithologist and curator at the American Museum of Natural History. One wonders if this was due to Engelhardt's poor grasp of the English language, having just immigrated to the United States two years earlier.

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Engelhardt explored the area of Beaver County and collected approximately 75 mammals for the Brooklyn Museum. Upon his return, Allen inspected these specimens and determined that there were 16 new species among these mammals.⁶ In 1917, Engelhardt published announcements⁷ that he and another curator from the Brooklyn Museum would return to Utah to collect insects, mammals, reptiles, and other specimens. Later that year, the Journal of the New York Entomology Society⁸ states that Engelhardt presented his findings at a meeting of the New York Entomology society at the American Museum of Natural History, where he displayed species from the expedition that had previously been described in the George Wheeler reports from the U.S. Geological Survey. In 1918, Engelhardt published in the Brooklyn Museum Quarterly his account of the expedition to Utah, entitled "Dixieland of the Mormons."⁹

Engelhardt's 1918 account spoke not only of the physical beauty of southern Utah but also of its people. He descriptively portrays thrifty Mormon farmers and how the ancestors of early Mormons who settled in this area skillfully redeveloped the land for agriculture. He describes the culinary delight of Dutch oven cooking and his visit to a sheep farm at the Kolob Plateau. Overall, his description of his interactions with Utahans is extremely positive. Scientifically, Engelhardt writes about entomological findings and the gathering of small vertebrates. He describes traveling over the various physical landscapes of the area, climbing from 3000 to 9000 feet on horseback, encountering scorching heat one day and a blizzard the next. Furthermore, the article gives detailed accounts of encounters with rattlesnakes and coyotes while exploring for various species of lizards, chipmunks, butterflies, and a cougar. The article

contains photographs of the spectacular scenery of Southern Utah and surely must have made a deep impression on those individuals back east who read this article for scientific and travelogue content. Lastly, throughout the article, Engelhardt makes passing references to how the area had changed over time since his visit in 1904, primarily in the area of the development of irrigation. Sadly, detailed articles of Engelhardt's other expeditions to Utah were not written.

Engelhardt's work was praised by academics in the field of herpetology in the Western United States, led by Vasco Tanner of Brigham Young University, considered by many to be the leading authority on amphibians and reptiles in Utah. Engelhardt's expeditions also had very strong support beginning the 1920s from the Utah Office of Fish and Game.¹⁰

Engelhardt's death in 1942 was noted in the New York Times,¹¹ which even went so far as to single out his expeditions in Utah. Many professional journals in the natural sciences also noted his passing with long and glowing descriptions of his work. Colleagues at Brigham Young University noted his passing in the University's journal, *The Great Basin Naturalist*.¹²

Engelhardt's contributions to the natural sciences are well documented. However, his positive statements about Utah have been overlooked as some of the best public relations media that could have occurred in the first half of the twentieth century, enabling Utah to put its tumultuous quest for statehood in the background and concentrate on the future.

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- ¹ Washington Irving and Benjamin Louis Eulalie de Bonneville. *The Rocky Mountains; or, Scenes, Incidents, and Adventures in the Far West.* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1837).
- ² Mallis, Arnold. *American Entomologists.* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971)
- ³ "History of the New York Entomological Society 1893-1918," Journal of the New York Entomological Society 26 (1918): 129-133.
- ⁴ Charles W. Leng. "Reminiscences of the early days of the New York Entomological Society." Journal of the New York Entomological Society 26 (1918): 134-137.
- ⁵ J.A. Allen. "Mammals from Beaver County, Utah, Collected by the Museum Expedition of 1904." Bulletin of the Museum of Science, Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences 1 (1905): 117-22.
- ⁶ Allen, 117.
- ⁷ "Museum Notes." Brooklyn Museum Quarterly 1917(4): 169
- ⁸ George P. Engelhardt. "Faunal zones in Southwestern Utah." Journal of the New York Entomological Society, 26 (1918): 230
- ⁹ George P. Engelhardt. "Dixieland of the Mormons?" Brooklyn Museum Quarterly 1918 (5): 27-52.
- ¹⁰ "Museum Notes." Brooklyn Museum Quarterly 1923 (10): 134-135.
- ¹¹ "G.P. Engelhardt, Ex-Aide, 70" The New York Times, May 23, 1942.
- ¹² "George Paul Engelhardt, 57." Great Basin Naturalist, 1942

Works Consulted:

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George P. Engelhardt. "Museum expedition to Utah." Brooklyn Museum Quarterly, 1923 (10)

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