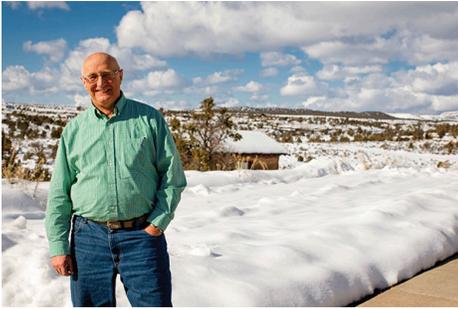


A Good Fellow

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Dr. Bob McPherson standing outside his unique one-room office building on the Blanding campus that he affectionately named "Walden".

History writers can be history makers too, such as when Bob McPherson became the first Utah State University Eastern faculty member not housed on the Logan campus to receive promotion and tenure as a full professor back in 2012.

Now more history for the Blanding campus is being made with the naming of this resident expert in Native American history and culture as a fellow of the Utah State Historical Society, the first USU Eastern professor to be so recognized.

"It's a wonderful honor," he says. "I love the Utah State Historical Society. I love what it does. I love the people."

The feelings are mutual.

"He is an unassuming fellow, modest, incredibly intelligent and hardworking," says Brad Westwood, director of the Utah Division of State History. "He is a gifted historian. No one is more constant when he puts his mind to a project."

The naming of new fellows coincides with the division's annual conference held in the fall. It is considered the State Historical Society's most prestigious honor. It is presented to individuals with long and distinguished careers in scholarly research and writing or who have made extraordinary contributions to state history, historic preservation or archaeology.

"Their reputations will endure for generations to come," Westwood says.

McPherson fits the bill with his 18 books and four monographs, 150 oral histories and a lifetime commitment to teaching and mentoring students. After nearly 40 years of writing and teaching, however, instead of slowing down, he seems to be speeding up, cranking out nearly a book a year since 2009. And even though he plans to retire next year, do not expect him to hang up the hat or put down the pen. So long as there is something new to learn, there is a new book begging him to write.

"This is my thing," he says. "I just love to learn — I really love to learn — and I don't learn it until I sit down and work it over and write about it."

And still at the top of his "list of things to learn" are the cultures of the Four-Corners region, particularly the Navajo and Ute ways of life. Among his books on Native American history are *Navajo Land*, *Navajo Culture: The Utah Experience in the Twentieth Century*, *Comb Ridge and Its People: the Ethnohistory of a Rock* and *As if the Land Owned Us: An Ethnohistory of the White Mesa Utes*.

Westwood says McPherson is likely one of the state's most prolific historians living today. What makes his productivity especially remarkable is how much of it has been done without help from research assistants, as is commonly the case. Also, how much of it has been done far away from the quiet and comfortable confines of university libraries.

"The whole county and all of southeastern Utah is one big library of history that people haven't really touched, and not just history, but culture too," McPherson says.

"And so, basically, I'd rather be here than have to depend upon the libraries of the big campuses. I kind of specialized in this area and made this my library."

It is because of his work with rural and often-isolated groups that McPherson acquired an "everyman sensibility," Westwood says. "He exemplifies the Utah State Historical Society's commitment to make history approachable to all citizens."

He has been equally accessible to his fellow historians throughout his career. For 21 years, McPherson has served on the Utah Historical Quarterly's Board of Editors and presented papers at Utah's annual history conference for three decades. He also served on the Utah Board of State History for eight years and has written for the Utah Historical Quarterly throughout his career.

Being named a fellow no doubt demonstrates how much colleagues value him for this work and service. Being named a fellow in the tradition of Dale Morgan, Wallace Stegner and Juanita Brooks, demonstrates the extraordinary degree of this value. Most gratifying of all to McPherson is that one of his mentors, the late Leonard Arrington, considered the dean of Mormon history, is also among this august group of scholars.

He was once a graduate student of Arrington's and was even asked by him to become his research assistant. He says he was not only a teacher, but a friend to him. His influence and encouragement, from helping him get his first article published, to showing him the importance of finding one's niche and voice, has been key to his own success as a teacher and writer of history.

Over the years, he, too, has encouraged his students to write and get published. During the past three years, he has co-authored with three of his undergraduates. Their articles appeared in the Utah Historical Quarterly, the very publication that gave him his start. Three more fellows in the making. Fellow historians.

~ John DeVilbiss