Ronald Warren Walker

October 12, 1939 ~ May 9, 2016

Ronald Warren Walker--husband, father, friend, mentor, and prominent Mormon historian--succumbed to cancer on May 9th. He was 76.

Over his forty year career, Ron published over one hundred articles and eight books. His meticulous primary research and mastery of the historical narrative earned him numerous awards. Walker played an instrumental role in the "New Mormon History" movement. He courageously approached difficult subjects, never flinching from historical truth. Perhaps the best example is his book Wayward Saints.

Ron's encyclopedic knowledge of primary historical documents, mastery of context, and charitable treatment of subjects made him a valuable voice during the development of the discipline. He often waded into the most contentious subjects with grace, charity, and kindness, and the confidence that truth would prevail in the marketplace of ideas. Walker approached people with opposing viewpoints with a generosity of spirit which forever broadened his circle of friends and admirers.

Born in Missoula, Montana, he was the youngest of Estella and Lawrence Walker's four sons. His family moved to Bakersfield, California, where Ron stood out in academics and high school debate.

After a distinguished undergraduate collegiate experience, he planned to attend law school. Those plans were disrupted when he felt inspired to apply for an LDS mission. He served in the Church's Southern States mission, 1961-1963.

Upon returning, Ron studied history at Stanford University. There, he met and married Nelani Midgley. Pressed to provide for his family, he succeeded as a manager in the Pacific Telephone company (1968-70), but his work left him unfulfilled. He quit his job and pursued his passion: teaching in the LDS Seminary and Institute programs. He acted as Director of the program in San Francisco.

The Walkers then moved to Salt Lake City where Ron pursued his doctorate at the University of Utah while teaching in the university's Institute program. He caught the eye of Leonard Arrington, who recruited him to join the burgeoning LDS Church Historical Department. He quickly distinguished himself for his writing and meticulous research.

In 1980, the Church moved many Historical Department employees into the newly created Joseph Fielding Smith Institute at BYU. Ron was made a professor and he continued his passion for mentoring and teaching students.

A love of politics born during his childhood dinner-table discussions inspired him to run for the Salt Lake School Board. During his nine-year tenure he acted as a key vote in the controversial decisions to close South High School and redraw school boundaries. His civic commitment continued when he served as Vice President of the Ensign Peak-Indian Park Historic Preservation Association, with the mission to preserve and disseminate understanding of

the community's important historic sites. Ultimately, the effort led to the creation of the Ensign Peak Park.

Generations will remember Ron for his contributions to Mormon history, but his family and friends will remember a generous man who cared deeply about people as individuals. He loved to be around young children, rough housing and reading to them in his expressive voice, and enjoyed playing board games. His whimsical side would often emerge: naming a roguish cat Robespiere, wearing a moose hat through the Canadian Rockies, or celebrating the winter solstice with dance. He loved hiking in the outdoors, running in the sun, and visiting Hawaii. Ron served in his local congregation as bishop and willingly served in numerous capacities in the Church. He had an unwavering commitment to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a strong belief in both the redemptive power of Christ and the truth of the restored gospel.

He is survived by his wife Nelani Midgley Walker; children Jennifer (Michael) Thomas, Allison (Jonathan) Toronto, Jonathan (Launi), Elizabeth (Donald) Mehr, David (Karen), Peter (Maret), Andrew (Sarah); 21 grandchildren; and, his brother Richard Walker.

Funeral services will be held Friday, May 13, 2016 at 11:00 a.m. at the Ensign Peak Ward, 125 East North Sandrun Road. Friends and family may visit Thursday evening from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Larkin Mortuary, 260 East South Temple, and Friday at the Ward from 9:30 to 10:45 a.m. prior to services. Interment will follow at the Salt Lake City Cemetery.