



1-1-1968

Orrin Porter Rockwell: Man of God, Son of Thunder Harold
Schindler

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Recommended Citation

Alexander, Thomas G. (1968) "*Orrin Porter Rockwell: Man of God, Son of Thunder* Harold Schindler," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 18.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol8/iss1/18>

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HAROLD SCHINDLER. *Orrin Porter Rockwell: Man of God, Son of Thunder*. Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1966. 400 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index \$7.50.

Almost anyone who has heard anything about Mormon history has heard of Porter Rockwell. The legend of this man stands at the pinnacle of Mormon folklore. Harold Schindler has undertaken the difficult—perhaps even impossible—task of attempting to uncover the facts of a life so shrouded by myth and mystery and to interpret them in a way which will give meaning to the man and his work.

Rockwell was a man who was loved and hated with equally extreme passion. He was a man to whom dedication to his Church meant more than all else. His epitaph said that "He was brave and loyal to his faith, true to the prophet Jos. Smith." Rockwell was one of the early converts to the Church and an early friend of the Prophet. After his birth in Massachusetts and his move to New York, he endured, with the Saints, the persecutions of Independence and Far West as well as those of Nauvoo. Rockwell was a Danite in Missouri, though not a leader. Indeed, he was such a minor figure that his Missouri career is often difficult to follow, and Schindler's account is often conjectural. In Nauvoo, he was a close friend to Joseph, one of his bodyguards, and the man who rowed him to Iowa to begin the abortive journey to the Rocky Mountains. After Joseph's murder, Rockwell was involved in the war which raged between the Mormons and Gentiles of Hancock County.

After being acquitted on murder charges which grew out of the Hancock County war, Rockwell joined the Saints on their move west. He was a member of the advance party which entered the Salt Lake Valley in July, 1847. After his arrival in Utah, Rockwell lived and carried on business at several places, including Salt Lake City, Point of the Mountain, and Tooele County.

He participated in the Utah War as a leader of a guerilla band and died in 1878 while under indictment for murders which took place during that war.

Though Schindler's work is good, especially as a life-and-times account, it raises in the mind of this reviewer several questions. The author presents quotations from a number of

authors using the term "Danites" and other related terms, but he never really comes to grips with the problem of the existence of Danites in Utah Territory. Indeed, the bulk of the evidence which Schindler presents would tend to contradict the view that such an organization existed in Utah. He gives a great deal of credence to the statements of a pseudonymous Achilles, whose book, *The Destroying Angels of Mormondom*, purports to be a sketch of the life of Rockwell. Schindler sets as his goal "the history of a myth, a folk legend, not less than the history of a man" (p. 10). He has attempted to judge the accuracy of the sources; but the reader is left at the end without knowing where O. P. Rockwell, the man, ends and "Old Port," the folk legend, begins. It is clear that Schindler does not believe some of the extreme accounts such as those of Fitz Hugh Ludlow; but he presents, on the unsubstantiated word of Achilles and others, accounts of Rockwell's alleged complicity in murders including those of an old lady and a Negro.

On the other hand, Schindler's evidence that Rockwell may have been responsible for the murders for which he stood indicted at the time of his death (pp. 273-79) appears fairly reliable. Even here, however, some questions are raised in the reviewer's mind. What was Rockwell's motive for the acts? The author suggests the theft of the money being carried by the men (pp. 271 and 273), but Rockwell's whole pattern of life as Schindler has painted it would contradict the assumption that such a motive would appeal to Rockwell. The murders took place during the Utah War, but Schindler presents little to suggest that the war itself or even the reformation which was going on at the time might have played a significant part in the murders.

Schindler is convinced that Rockwell was probably guilty of the attempted assassination of Lilburn W. Boggs. Here, the principal evidence is Rockwell's presence near Independence at the time and a report by Wilhelm W. Wymetal that Patrick E. Connor said that Rockwell told him he had shot Boggs. Schindler says that Rockwell "did not lie" (pp. 79-80). If, as Schindler says, Rockwell did not lie, how does one explain Rockwell's assertion that he was seven miles north of Independence on the night of the crime (pp. 84-85)? There are a number of other problems with Schindler's evidence. It is difficult to determine how Rockwell could have escaped *indict-*

ment for the crime had there been a shred of evidence against him. The argument that Rockwell might have been trying to fulfill prophecy (p. 72) is specious. Rockwell should have been aware, according to Joseph Smith's own statement, that everything which the Prophet said was not to be taken as the word of God.

Schindler has covered the available primary evidence quite thoroughly, and it is not from his lack of research that lacunae remain in Rockwell's career. The account of his activities in Missouri is sketchy, and were it not embellished by description of the general situation, there would be little to say of Rockwell except that he lived there with his family and operated a ferry. In spite of his thorough research in contemporary records, Schindler has left out of consideration some more recent accounts which might have helped supply a general picture of many problems. Norman Furniss' account of *The Mormon Conflict* is not cited. Dallin Oakes' article in the *Utah Law Review* on the *Nauvoo Expositor* case might have thrown more light on the state's case against Joseph Smith. Gustive O. Larson's article in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* on the reformation of the late 1850's might have helped in interpreting that period. Also, in the opinion of this reviewer, Schindler's discrimination in the use of anti-Mormon sources is often questionable. Nevertheless, because of the depth of primary research, and in spite of its shortcomings, this account will undoubtedly stand for some time as the standard volume on the subject.

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