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Uranium Fever, or No Talk Under \$1 Million Raymond W. Taylor
and Samuel W. Taylor

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RAYMOND W. TAYLOR AND SAMUEL W. TAYLOR. *Uranium Fever, or No Talk Under \$1 Million*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970. 400 pp. \$8.95.

(The reviewer, Thomas G. Alexander, is associate professor of history at Brigham Young University. He is currently on leave to assist in editing the papers of Ulysses S. Grant under a fellowship from the National Historical Publications Commission.)

About a year and a half ago, Ray Taylor and this reviewer rode together on an excursion sponsored by the Utah Valley

Branch of the State Historical Society. At that time, Ray said that he and his brother Sam were collaborating on a new book on the uranium boom of the 1950's. It then seemed to the reviewer that Ray would probably do the usual work of the amateur historian. The book, however, changed those views radically. What might have been either a superficial account or a slick popularized job, turned out, in fact, to be a well-written memoir by a man who had, himself, been a victim of "uranium fever."

Ray got the infection from members of the famous Short Creek band of polygamous fundamentalists, who, because of recent raids by the Arizona authorities and mutual distrust of those living around them, called upon Ray Taylor to stake claims around theirs in order to prevent encroachments. As a grandson of John Taylor and a son of John W. Taylor, both practicing, convinced, polygamists, it seemed to him the thing to do. From this beginning, Ray staked nearly a thousand claims on the Colorado Plateau, especially in the Houserock Valley of northern Arizona. Into his company, Consumers' Agency, he and a number of relatives and friends, including his mother, poured their savings in the hope of striking it rich. To top it all off, Sam, a professional writer, interested Warner Brothers in a documentary on the uranium rush, and Ray was selected to play the lead.

The story has all the marks of the classic Western. The adventures of Ray Taylor, uranium paper-millionaire include violence, sex, hardship, success (generally others'), a brace of frontier types, and even a religious fanatic. In the desolate country of southern Utah and northern Arizona, Ray nearly met death both from dehydration and bushwhacking. Two nubile young daughters of one of the polygamists almost backed him into "The Principle." The only reason he came out with anything at all was because of what amounted to a felony perpetrated upon the State of Utah in some land transactions near Glen Canyon. In a nostalgic final section, Ray and Sam cover the ground they had previously crossed only to find that apparently only the big companies and the polygamists had realized much from the uranium frenzy.

The book is weakest in those parts where Ray and Sam get furthest from their experiences and into the interpretation of the activities of the Atomic Energy Commission and the large

companies. These chapters, particularly the two entitled "Uranium Age" and "The Big Boys Take Over," are written largely from a conspiratorial point of view and the selection of material is such as to put the AEC and the larger businesses in the worst light. This is perhaps only to be expected, because it was largely the decision of the AEC to curtail uranium production which dealt the death blow to the Taylors' business and those of their friends.

As a first person account, however, the portions of the book dealing with Ray's experiences provide not only interesting reading but an excellent source for future historians of the uranium boom. The book must be used with caution because, in order to protect themselves from possible libel suits and to shield certain people, especially the polygamists, from unwanted publicity, the Taylors often used fictitious names. Though it is interesting, the researcher will undoubtedly have to be careful in his acceptance of the dialogue supplied. It seems unlikely that anyone's memory is good enough to remember exact words a decade after the events. The reviewer supposes they were added for interest. With these minor strictures, however, both the specialist and the generalist will find *Uranium Fever* a delightful excursion into the world of high finance and low comedy.

Features in the WINTER 1971 Issue:

- The Eclipse of the School of Berlin by Hugh Nibley
 Thomas L. Barnes: Coroner of Carthage by Stanley B. Kimball
 The Meaning of "Sensen" by Hugh Nibley
 The Gentle Blasphemer: Mark Twain, Holy Scripture, and *The Book of Mormon* by Richard H. Cracroft
 The Search for Love: Lessons from the Catholic Debate over Moral Philosophy by Louis Midgley