1-1-1972

The First 100 Years: A History of the Salt Lake Tribune, 1871-1971 O. N. Malmquist

Eugent E. Campbell

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol12/iss1/18

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in BYU Studies Quarterly by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

(Reviewed by Eugent E. Campbell, Ph.D., professor of history at Brigham Young University. Dr. Campbell has authored numerous articles on western and Mormon history.)

The story of the Salt Lake Tribune is a paradoxical one. The author expressed this idea when he wrote: "That their newspaper survived in the face of obstacles confronting it was a kind of miracle. Even now it is difficult to sort out the reasons why the Tribune lived on. . . ." When one considers that the Salt Lake Tribune was started by a handful of dissident Mormons, the so-called Godbeites, who challenged the economic and ecclesiastical policies of Brigham Young and the Mormon Church at a time when the population of Utah Territory was overwhelmingly Latter-day Saint, one can understand the choice of the phrase "a kind of miracle." The Tribune continued to attack important leaders such as Brigham Young, John Taylor, George Q. Cannon, Charles Penrose, Joseph F. Smith, and Reed Smoot, through approximately 60 of the 100 years of its history, often accusing them of dishonesty and immorality. It also led out in the crusade against the practice of plural marriage, using this "Achilles heel of the Church" to stir the federal government into action to help the Tribune owners achieve their purpose of breaking "Brigham Young's economic and political grip on his people." Despite the fact that the Tribune's early years were spent in such active opposition to the Church which had founded the territory and which exercised extraordinary control over its members, it continued to survive. Mormons constituted over 85 percent of the population well past the turn of the century and still claims over 60 percent of Utah's people today, and yet, the most popular newspaper is the Tribune, with its record
of opposition to Church policies and with personal attacks on its revered leaders. What is the explanation?

Mr. Malmquist gives two answers to the survival problem during the early years. The Godbeites, who were wealthy men, lost a sizable fortune before giving up the enterprise. After a short interval in which the successors to the Godbeites lost money also, the mining magnate, Thomas Kearns, acquired control. His statement that "it takes a great mine to run a newspaper" indicates that the Tribune was not a profitable investment. Two other reasons for its survival seem apparent in Mr. Malmquist's history. The Tribune became the organ for the Republican party in Utah at a time when that party was growing in popularity in the state. But perhaps the most important reason for survival and success was quality—the Tribune gradually became a superior newspaper.

The book is a very readable one. Mr. Malmquist's forty years of service with the Tribune have given him a feeling for its operation and a knowledge of its policies and personnel. His commitment to objectivity is everywhere apparent in his book. He tries to see the Mormon viewpoint, despite the fact that he is a "Tribune man," and is quite critical of the Tribune's vindictiveness at a time when the Church was trying to move in the direction the Tribune had advocated. He commented:

Viewed in retrospect, it appears that affairs in Utah were working out in accordance with the desires expressed in The Tribune for years; that the changes it had been predicting were taking place with remarkable rapidity; that the territory was indeed being "Americanized." It was perhaps the editor's belated, and seemingly reluctant, recognition of the dramatic changes that prompted the remark, attributed by the editor of the Manti Times-Reporter to Frank J. Cannon: "The Tribune is like an old hag—blind and deaf, mumbling and grumbling, praying for the dawn, when the sun is already shining brightly."

There are a few weaknesses in Mr. Malmquist's history. His preoccupation with politics gives it an unbalanced view. In fact, it is so concerned with the political campaigns and elections that it might be more accurately entitled "The Political Opinions Expressed by the Tribune During Its First 100 Years." This political emphasis is relieved occasionally by a biography. One can understand the author's desire to in-
clude his research on Thomas Kearns, who financed the paper for so long, and whose family still owns the Tribune. One can also forgive the many pages of praise and adulation for John F. Fitzpatrick, who was "Mr. Tribune" for forty-two years, and who obviously commanded the respect of Mr. Malmquist, as well as many of the leaders of the Church, state and nation. But one wonders about the inclusion of a chapter on the "Silver Queen," Mrs. S. B. E. Holmes. She is first mentioned as a guest of Senator Kearns at a charity ball in Washington, D. C., and then the remainder of the chapter is devoted to a chronicle of her life. It is an interesting episode in Salt Lake City history, but has really nothing to do with the history of the Tribune. One Mormon leader, Anthony W. Ivins, is described as being a favorite of the Tribune. The sterling qualities listed give added evidence of the need for a careful study of this important man and his role in helping the Church adjust to the twentieth century.

The book is handsomely bound and printed in clear, bold type. One of the unusual features is that the quotations, which are numerous and sometimes lengthy, are double-spaced rather than the usual single-spaced pattern. This makes for easier reading although it is not always clear where a quotation begins and ends. The book also includes 36 pages of interesting photographs, drawings, and historic front pages.

O. N. Malmquist, the Salt Lake Tribune, and the Utah State Historical Society are all to be congratulated for making this important book available. The theme of the latter chapters, "accommodation," contains a message for all of us and may even be a ray of hope. For if the factions of a community, as bitterly divided as the Salt Lake community was, can learn to accommodate each other to the point that their opposing newspapers can merge into a single agency, joining together to promote the welfare of the people of the state and region, there is always hope that the rationality and good will of the human community on a larger scale may accept the principle of accommodation or, better still, may develop understanding and appreciation.