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## *One Hundred Steps Down Mesa's Past* W. Earl Merrill

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W. EARL MERRILL. *One Hundred Steps Down Mesa's Past*. Mesa: Lofgren Printing Co., 1970. 244 pp. \$8.00.

(Reviewed by Kenneth W. Godfrey, a division coordinator of seminaries and institutes of religion. Dr. Godfrey has written many articles on topics important to the history of the Church, and has contributed to several magazines and publications of the Church.)

Having lived for three years in Arizona, and having visited most of her towns and cities at least three or four times, it was a pleasant experience to go to Mesa-Lehi again through the pages of Mr. Merrill's book. This work, not written for the historian or the serious scholar, provides many insights into the settlement, colonization and daily life of those people who settled this part of Arizona in the 1870s. From this collection of very short articles, which originally appeared in the

*Mesa Tribune*, we glimpse, however briefly, the courage, faith, and devotion of those men and women who braved the heat, infrequent yet sometimes severe flash floods, the dust and the wind of pioneer Arizona.

Through the diaries of Henry C. Rogers and Dan P. Jones, together with many Pomeroy letters, the reader is allowed inside the minds of those hearty frontiersmen. Their hopes and dreams become his own through their own scanty records. On page 36, we are given a list of the entire colony, while on page 43 we begin an article that discusses wild hay and rattlesnakes. Should the reader of this review wonder what the two have in common, he, upon reading the book, will find that almost every clump of wild hay contained a rattlesnake probably seeking shelter from the intense heat. One of the most fascinating articles concerns what might be an apocryphal story of how the settlers outwitted the crows by putting "horse hair through every kernel of corn." Other articles describe the early crops of the Mormon pioneers, how they harvested grain, and the building of the Mesa canal so that water from Salt River could be spread over the land and allow farming on a scale hardly thought possible in the early settlers' native Utah. Because of Mr. Merrill's research, we learn how dependent early pioneers were on the mesquite tree, which not only provided food for the people themselves, but also for their livestock. Even the pods shed by this tree became a valuable part of their diet.

Briefly we go to the marriage altar with Dan P. Jones and Mary Ellen Merrill that hot sultry 26 August in 1877, as they won the distinction of being participants in the first wedding performed in Mesa—at least in recorded time. Having followed with interest their romance, the reader is glad to vicariously feast on the wedding meal of venison provided by a sheepman from the Fort McDowell hills, and then begin married life with the poor yet happy couple. Through a letter never before published, written by Emily Stratton Pomeroy, the reader sits alone through one of those awful summer thunderstorms, with only a tent for protection on 14 July 1878. Mrs. Pomeroy describes her experience, complete with severe wind, loud thunder and pelting rain. Not only does she have to face the storm alone, but we find out at the end of the article that she was seven-months pregnant.

Anyone who has resided in the Salt River Valley for any length of time has wondered how the early settlers lived through the heat of those long air-conditionless summers. During June, July, and August it is commonplace even today to discuss this topic with the older settlers. In the short article titled, "Summers Were Hot Then, Too." Mr. Merrill provides some very interesting, and often tragic accounts of the effects of the Arizona heat. Those who have never lived through day after day of temperatures over 110 degrees will find this article most enlightening.

In spite of its many good qualities, this book is not without some serious faults. For example, greater care could have been taken in the selection of articles to become a part of this work. The reader is often left hanging as he leaves one article discussing pioneer life, turns to the next article and begins reading about an 1887 earthquake hardly felt in Mesa; or having read about the trek to San Pedro, finds himself on the next page reading what archaeologists say about the Hohokan Flying Birds. Mr. Merrill also tells of the dedication of the Roosevelt Dam in 1911 well before his discussion of the Mesa Canal's completion by the early pioneers in 1878. Though such sequencing must have made interesting and timely reading in the newspaper, the chronology makes for some frustration in a book. I also found his article on pre-Mesa history less than convincing and hardly necessary. Greater care and selectivity and much more attention given to the sequence of events would have made this a better book. Had the writer wanted to have written a really fine history of Mesa, he should have spent more time in original records, journals, letters and diaries. He relies too heavily upon the published autobiography of Dan W. Jones, and secondary sources such as Leonard Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom*, and Thomas Farish's *History of Arizona* to name only two.

Still, with few if any books in print specifically relating to the settlement and history of Mesa, Arizona, Mr. Merrill's book does fill a need, and perhaps its appearance will stimulate Arizona historians to do the needed research to give us a thorough history of that important southwest community.

This reviewer found Mr. Merrill's book worth reading, insightful, and for the most part a valuable contribution to at least a beginning understanding of Mesa's history.