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Charles Shumway, A Pioneer's Life Kenneth Godfrey

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Godfrey, Kenneth. *Charles Shumway, A Pioneer's Life*. Provo, Utah: J. Grant Stevenson, 1974. 188 pp. \$7.50.

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Mormon biography has typically been a small province bordered on three sides by family pride, and on the fourth by misspelled words, to paraphrase Guedalla.

Kenneth Godfrey breaks out of this province in his excellent study, *Charles Shumway, A Pioneer's Life*. The pioneer patriarchs often seem to have been selected by destiny for greatness. The long trek across half a continent and half a century turned bland New England farmers into charismatic leaders, who, seen from a distance, tower like mountains between the foothills of their ancestors and the plains of their descendants. If they had several wives, as Charles had, their fourth generation descendants are usually of sufficient number to justify publication costs for a biography, and the Shumway family is fortunate to include a Dr. Godfrey to undertake this job.

Since Charles Shumway was a man of action and not of the written word, the author has had to rely largely on secondary sources which tell us where Charles went, what he did, but not, however, what he felt. Godfrey places the narrative in the context and background of the history of the Church.

Born in Massachusetts in 1806, Charles Shumway joined the Mormon church in Illinois in 1840. His family name is of mysterious origin. It sounds English, but is not, and may have come from the French *chamois*. In any event, like his Huguenot ancestors of the 1600s, Charles Shumway fled religious persecution. Even after he reached the safety of the Great Basin, though, he continued to travel. *A Pioneer's Life* traces Shumway's many moves, always pushing out the borders of Zion: Manti in 1849, Cache Valley in 1859, Kanab in 1875, and

finally the virtual exile of the Little Colorado Valley in Arizona in 1879. Wherever he went, he built mills and left grown children who had taken root. As a career pioneer, he was always on the colonizing edge of Brigham Young's vision of empire.

He died at the age of 92 in Shumway, Arizona, a small town in the northern part of the state named for him, and which in this century has exported much produce—and many Shumways—and like many other Mormon villages, is now in a state of decline.

A measure of conflict was endemic in the Shumway family, as in most families, and it is to Dr. Godfrey's credit that he includes the warts and blemishes in his story. Thus, the difficulties between Charles and his son Wilson are chronicled, and Shumway is portrayed as an eccentric grandfather who presented a trimmed toenail to a grandson as a keepsake, and who made his own casket years before his death and tried it out periodically to see if it were still the right size.

These human insights ensure the story will be read and valued, for simple eulogies defeat their own purpose. A true, human picture of an ancestor is more inspiring and serviceable to his descendants than one which has been sanitized through editing.

Charles Shumway emerges from these pages not as a smooth, symmetric, Appalachian hill, but as a craggy, rough mountain on the divide of Mormon history. He was a mountain that could be moved by faith, and frequently was:

“Brigham Young had told father that he desired to see him farther south,” his son Wilson records. “Father considered that a call, and he believed in being responsive to all calls when they came from the right source, and as that was the right source he decided to sell out at once and go to the land of cotton.”

His response seems casual and undramatic: yet this was the caliber of obedience that built a church and kingdom. Dr. Godfrey, in “looking back to his origins with love and trust” has done a service, not only to the large Shumway family, but to all who share an interest in Mormon history and the men and women who made it.