Cyrus E. Dallin: Let Justice Be Done

Rell G. Francis

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Recommended Citation
Even for Mormon readers this book will be a revelation. One knew about ZCMI, probably about Orderville, perhaps of the cooperative origins of Brigham City. But how many Mormon scholars ever heard of the efforts to form United Orders in places like Paris, Idaho; Hyrum, Utah; or in Cave Valley, New Mexico? How many know that the Mormon cooperative movement was inspired via returned missionaries, directly from the English experiment at Rochdale? With a wealth of detail, guided by their sure knowledge of classical Mormon principles, and the impact of differing personalities in Church leadership (even down to the level of individual wards) these authors have restored the fabric of Mormon historical reality for Mormon readers, and for non-Mormon readers provided a fascinating introduction to a rich and largely unknown epoch in American social history.

The last chapters are concerned with the modern Mormon welfare system. Here the authors deal briskly with modern misconceptions; for example, that no Mormons were on public relief during the 1930s, or that the system has now removed Mormons from the grasp of state and federal programs. By one measure of historiographical achievement this book is a rare success: Leopold von Ranke's statement that the historian's central purpose is to discover "how it really was." One rarely experiences so vivid an evocation of the historical past as Building the City of God. There were not all that many Mormons in Brigham Young's Zion. Yet, like the Massachusetts Puritans, the Mormon frontiersmen and women seemed to be ingenious in the creation of social innovation. It is a story that should not be forgotten. In this book a valuable lesson is found that adversity has its positive uses, failures of one generation can inspire another.


Reviewed by Robert S. Olpin, associate professor of art history and chairman, Department of Art, University of Utah.

Radical stylistic changes in late nineteenth and twentieth century art and accompanying accommodations in taste have for many years
resulted in frequently undeserved scorn for more traditionally inclined or "academic" works of art from the same period. In the case of sculpture of the type, in fact, such attitudes have caused a virtual banishment of many fine and expressive pieces from public view to basement or attic storage areas (dependent upon their weight, one would suppose) or, even worse, into oblivion. Indeed, it was not before the late 1960s and 1970s that an effective countering of this broadly-based critical tendency began to make significant progress. Today, such art historians and museum curators as Wayne Craven, William H. Gerdts, John Dryfhout, and now Rell G. Francis in his concise, but somehow very full, study of Cryus E. Dallin's life and works, seek successfully to fill an informational and critical gap that has existed since the early writings of Lorado Taft and Chandler Post.

Mr. Francis states that the purpose of his study is "to introduce, interpret, and identify rather than evaluate," and establish "a factual basis upon which historians and art critics may build . . ." (p. xiv). Additionally, the author hopes his book "will help establish . . . Dallin in the position he deserves as one of the foremost American sculptors of the past century" (p. xv). Exceeding his first two objectives, Francis has written a book that is often very moving in its collected insights regarding the sculptor's triumphs, tribulations, and character.

However, it seems obvious from further reading in the volume that what the writer feels to be Dallin's deserved position may not correspond totally to the actual place in American art that is due him. For instance, a comparison made early-on by Francis and Frederic Remington (p. xiii), seems to finally imply that the cowboy-loving Remington (short-lived and "reared in the East") was able to establish a lasting reputation, while the Indian-loving Dallin (long-lived and born and raised in the West) was not, this based somehow upon their cowboy and Indian subject matter. The fact of the matter is, of course, that while Dallin was most often the designer of larger "monumental" forms possessing great dignity and believability, Remington was both the painter and sculptor of vivid and often remarkably convincing works expressive of compelling action on a scale more easily related to by more people over the years. Also, as both Francis and John C. Ewers (who provided the foreword to this volume) point out (p. xiv), people tend to be aware of and even admire "monuments" (quotations marks mine) without knowing the names of the artists who created them, while
tabletop sculpture and easel painting tend to be identified by the artist.

Yet Francis is correct in his belief that Dallin should be better known and understood than he is, and this book (if it is generally read) goes far to bring that about. It is excellently organized into two main parts and nine chapters with an epilogue and offers clear statements and careful documentation concerning: (1) Dallin’s early struggles over his well-known Paul Revere monument; (2) the artist’s Indian subjects (my own favorite chapter); (3) “Mormon Church Themes” (perhaps the weakest treatment in the book); (4) “Public Figures”; (5) “Ideal Subjects, Portraits, . . . and Other Works”; (6) “The ‘Pioneer Mother’ Controversy” (questionable as a subject deserving of a separate section); and then, regarding a second, more purely biographical part, chapters concerning (7) the man Dallin; (8) his “Family and Friends” (not as rewarding a study as it could have been, I think); and (9) a “Vindication” in connection with his almost lifelong struggle (called “Dallin’s obsession”) to get the Revere set into place in Boston.

The epilogue then gets the reader quickly through Dallin’s death, memorial services, burial, and, finally, the most recent tributes paid to the artist by the people of Arlington Heights, Massachusetts (an elementary school was named after him there in 1957), and Springville, Utah (bicentennial activities in both Springville and Arlington Heights, the former town’s events including not only publication of the Francis book, but a fine exhibition of Dallin’s works). The study also includes extensive and informative “Notes,” and an “Appendices” section contains listings of: (a) “Known Works” categorized, located (or unlocated), and dated; (b) “Brief Chronology”; (c) a “Partial List” of Gorham statuettes; (d) “Paintings” (thirty-eight landscapes); (e) “Awards, Degrees, and Honors”; and (f) “Major Exhibits.” Further, a telling selected bibliography and a good, workable index conclude the publication.

Profusely illustrated in black and white, the Francis book makes use of a tremendous variety of well-placed reproductions including a multitude of old photographs of lost works. The number of these “location unknown” pieces creates a sad commentary indeed upon the neglect that Dallin’s work has suffered to date.

Finally, as a result of reading this engrossing and surprisingly comprehensive study, both the student of American sculpture and the layman will, I think, discover that Dallin was a more sensitive
and profound and prolific artist, a more expansive mind, and, generally, a much richer and more complex personality than most of us had known him to be.


Reviewed by Thomas G. Alexander, professor of history and associate director of the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University.

Since the pioneering work of Robert J. Dwyer, historians, including Helen Papanikolas and T. Edgar Lyon, have taken an interest in the non-Mormon population of the Beehive State. Like Papanikolas, Simmonds has studied the development of a gentile community within a single region of Utah.

Simmonds' book begins with a description of Cache Valley in 1873 and moves to a discussion of the creation of a gentile enclave within the Mormon community. Unlike either Carbon County or Salt Lake City gentiles, the Cache County non-Mormons were largely apostates who had originally gathered as converts to Zion. This insight is undoubtedly the significant aspect of Simmonds' study. One suspects that the gentile population of most cities and towns in the Mormon domain were more like those in Cache County than those in Carbon and Salt Lake counties, where the gentile community consisted principally of outsiders with a sprinkling of apostates.

Simmonds assigns essentially four reasons for the apostasies which led to the establishment of the gentile community: (1) the establishment of the Episcopal Church in Logan, which became possible following the relatively easy access provided by the Utah and Northern Railroad; (2) the lynching of Charles Benson, son of the late Apostle Ezra Taft Benson; (3) the development of the cooperative movement; and (4) the construction of the Logan Tabernacle.

The evidence of the effect of the cooperative movement and the construction of the Logan Tabernacle seem to this reviewer conclusive. The missionary and school efforts of the Episcopal and other churches seem also to have had an effect. Most tenuous,