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Guide to Mormon Diaries & Autobiographies Davis
Bitton

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BITTON, DAVIS. *Guide to Mormon Diaries & Autobiographies*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977. xi + 417 pp. \$29.95.

Reviewed by Chad J. Flake, Curator of Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

A few years ago I took a class in which Samuel Pepys, the noted British diarist, was discussed at some length. Our teacher observed then that if one wanted to find a specific fact, a history book could be consulted; but it was in the diaries that the period came to life. This is certainly true of Mormonism with its seemingly inexhaustible supply of diarists. Mormons were encouraged early in Church history to keep records, and this advice has been reiterated several times in various ways, for example, in 1890 when Andrew Jenson toured the various stakes admonishing people to write autobiographies and to keep current diaries. But Mormon studies have been hampered by the lack of good bibliographies of retrospective materials. It is, therefore, with great anticipation that we have waited for Davis Bitton's *Guide to Mormon Diaries & Autobiographies*; and the published work is certainly not a disappointment. Some 2,894 items are included, which makes it, to date, the most significant bibliography of Mormondom.

In format, the bibliography lists the writer's name, the type of item (journal, diary, or autobiography; the distinction between journal and diary being explained in the preface), the dates, form (holograph, typescript, printed, etc.), followed by its location indicated by code. (I find the mixing of codes a bit irritating: If the code UHi for the Historical Society is taken from the Union List of libraries, then why isn't the code USIC from the same list used for the Church Historical Department, or Huntington Library designated CSmH instead of "Huntington." These are standardized codes, universally accepted and easily understood.) Following this coded location is a summary of the diary. A master index accompanies the text which the user will find invaluable.

Two areas merit criticism: scope, and the unevenness of the notes.

In the preface the author indicates the most important repositories of Mormon diaries to be Utah libraries; i.e., Brigham Young University, Church Historical Department, University of Utah, Utah State University, and Utah State Historical Society. Only these are given an exhaustive treatment, even here with some omissions. No attempt is made to update the 1971 Mary

Washington Bibliography of Manuscripts at Utah State University, which could have been accomplished with very little difficulty.

Specifically omitting the Huntington Library from the list of important libraries shows a lack of knowledge of how significant their holdings are. I checked a random sample from a list of diaries at the Huntington put together by the late Newburn Butt, the man responsible for Brigham Young University's typescript diary collection, and found that less than twenty percent of the diaries on his list appear in Bitton's bibliography. It should have been as easy to have these diaries searched by a student living in the area as it was to have the local institutions examined. A larger percentage of holdings in the Bancroft Library and the Library of Congress is included because there are available inventories to these collections.

The second problem, the unevenness of the annotations, is due partially to the fact that the raw data was collected by different researchers. The problem here is that one researcher would emphasize entirely different aspects than would a second one. But even more critical than unevenness are the items just plain missed. For the Arza Adams Journal, the note states that he returned to Nauvoo after the death of Joseph Smith. It does not mention that he brought with him important letters from John Taylor and Willard Richards. An interesting item from the Lucy Hannah Flake diary notes the practice among women of the nineteenth century of laying their hands on each other's head to pronounce blessings, bless pregnancies, etc.—not mentioned in Bitton's annotation. In the journal of Abraham A. Kimball, one gets a significant view of the problems of polygamy from the man's point of view. Polygamy is mentioned in the note, but some indication that he found it very hard—as, he says, did his father, Heber C. Kimball—should have been included. Also, the account of his term in the Utah Penitentiary, one of the most graphic in any diary, warrants only two words, while his getting drunk on the Fourth of July gets six.

If, however, the limitation of libraries involved and the use of different studies to do the research made it possible to publish the bibliography in 1977 rather than 1987, then one can live with these problems and be grateful that such an excellent bibliography is available to us now. We can always await volume two while making use of the present volume.