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Introduction to Reviews

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Book Reviews

Editor's Introduction

Paul H. Peterson

Juanita Brooks died on 26 August 1989 in St. George, Utah, at ninety-one years of age. I first heard of her during my student days at Brigham Young University when Dr. Eugene Campbell, in a Utah history class, described her book *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* as having heralded a new age of Mormon historiography. At the time, this comment meant little to me, but when Dr. Campbell said that Juanita would, on occasion, become so immersed in writing that she forgot to eat, I was impressed. At that period in my life, writing was an onerous burden (and to an extent will always be such), and I remember wondering how anyone could become so absorbed with writing as to lose track of mealtime.

A few weeks later, I had the privilege of meeting Juanita at the Church Historian's Office. It was in the old days when there were just two rectangular tables available for scholars on the third floor of the Church Administration Building on South Temple Street. The close quarters brought a kind of intimacy among researchers and made it possible for a novice like myself to work at the same table with a noted historian like Juanita Brooks. As I recall, I initiated the single exchange I had with her. I said I was writing a thesis on the historical development of the Word of Wisdom. In a firm but polite manner, she responded, "Well, young man, I think you ought to tell it like it was."

Juanita Brooks, of course, was noted for telling it like it was—even when the telling dealt with sensitive events such as Mountain Meadows or controversial people such as John D. Lee. But neither candor nor grit alone would have carried her so far along the path that, in retrospect, she seemed destined to follow. Her insatiable curiosity and determination were complemented by an uncanny ability to locate primary documents. She was a fine stylist who wrote with clarity, grace, and sympathy. Although she enjoyed

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meaningful friendships with scholars of a naturalistic bent, she diverged sharply whenever their assessments tended to ignore or deny the divine. Indeed, her faithfulness was as remarkable as her feistiness. And while her scholarly achievements are obvious, they are no more notable than her domestic accomplishments. She was a devoted wife and mother who lived a life that can only be described as highly principled and morally upright. In short, Juanita Brooks had impressive credentials both as a historian and as a human being—credentials that were bound to be noted by some aspiring biographer.

Levi S. Peterson, a professor of English at Weber State College, first became interested in Juanita Brooks in 1973 and began writing her biography in 1985. It would seem that Peterson, who had won awards for his novels and short stories, successfully made the sometimes tricky transition from novelist to biographer. *Juanita Brooks: Mormon Woman Historian* received the David W. and Beatrice C. Evans Award for biography in 1987, the Mormon History Association Best Book Award in 1988, and a special citation from the Association for Mormon Letters in 1989.

BYU Studies is committed not only to reviewing all important works that deal with the Mormon experience, but to giving special attention to works of unusual significance. In keeping with this policy, we invited three scholars to write review essays on *Juanita Brooks*. Newell G. Bringham, a professor of history at the College of the Sequoias, is currently compiling materials for a projected biography of Fawn M. Brodie. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, a research associate professor in the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at Brigham Young University, is completing a biography of Eliza R. Snow. Louis C. Midgley is a professor of political science at Brigham Young University and a critic of what some have called the “New Mormon History.”