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*Church, State, and Politics: The Diaries of John Henry Smith* Jean Bickmore White, ed.

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JEAN BICKMORE WHITE, ed. *Church, State, and Politics: The Diaries of John Henry Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books and Smith Research Associates, 1990. xxx; 700 pp. Index. \$75.00.

Reviewed by Paul H. Peterson, Associate Professor of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University.

Apostle and counselor in the First Presidency, prominent politician and co-founder of the Republican Party in Utah, consummate businessman and community activist, John Henry Smith (1848–1911) was an influential Latter-day Saint churchman in a turbulent and transitory era. In volume 4 of the Signature Press Diaries Series, Jean Bickmore White has edited Smith's extensive diaries into one, albeit weighty, volume. Smith left over thirty-six volumes of personal journals as well as extensive papers and letters, making White's selection responsibility both delightful and difficult.

John Henry, a son of Sarah Ann Libby and George A. Smith, an apostle and counselor to Brigham Young, was a candid chronicler. Told by President Joseph F. Smith that "I must keep an accurate history of facts as they occur" (33), John Henry surely did not disappoint his church-leader cousin. From the mundane and superficial to the gut-wrenching, John Henry described events with frankness and candor. I found myself alternately amused and saddened by his frank disclosures. I was amused (and empathetic) with missionary Smith's observation that dinner at a Brother Cardwell's featured "the dirtiest table and meal" (10) he ever saw and interested in his contrasting of the "homliest women" and "hardly average men" (40) of Berlin with their handsome counterparts in Paris (43). I was saddened to read of the comparatively few, but highly unfortunate, sexual indiscretions of certain elders and the resultant regret and anguish they experienced.

But a journal must be more than candid to be a great journal. This is a good journal but certainly not vintage Abraham Cannon or Wilford Woodruff. John Henry Smith was seldom reflective and not particularly literary. His seeming modesty and reserve make it difficult for the reader to get inside the man. Seldom did John Henry reveal himself—even when recording events that would seemingly evoke passion and

feeling. Thus it was that he noted the deaths of loved ones, wrote of his elevation to the Apostleship and First Presidency, and even recorded seeing the Savior with a dispassionate detachment that I found baffling. Surely he must have felt keenly about each of these events, but rarely could I discern any overt sentiment in his journals. Apparently John Henry, restrained and modest by nature and writing under the conventions of his day, was inclined to bridle his emotions.

Having said that, I would still maintain there is much to reward the reader who can thrash through the hundreds of ordinary and routine entries and finish the book. Both knowledgeable historians and novices will come away with a deeper understanding of the workings and challenges of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Church. They will readily note that the Church truly had both a temporal and spiritual dimension. They will realize, perhaps more fully than before, that the Brethren were human and reflected their environment as often as they transcended it. Some readers will be taken aback by the occasional accounts of internal disagreement among General Authorities. Certainly, John Henry was not hesitant to record his concern (and oftentimes the concern of other Quorum members) with what he perceived to be the authoritarian tendencies of President John Taylor and the determined leadership and economic direction of President George Q. Cannon. But balanced readers will also observe, perhaps even be impressed by, the ability of capable, strong-minded men to disagree sharply then resolve their differences without rancor or bitterness. In the end, with few exceptions, their united devotion to the kingdom transcended their personal differences.

And what of John Henry, the man. Though reluctant to talk about himself, the sheer number of his recordings affords us some glimpses into his character. Diary entries reveal that he was a highly literate (but not especially literary) man. A voracious reader, he apparently spent every free day reading. While interested in many subjects, he seemed to be singularly fond of history and biography. He also enjoyed theater and attended performances whenever he could. But John Henry's greatest loves were reserved for his wives, family, and Church. His devotion to his wives and children and his dedication to his



Church set him apart as a man of strong loyalties. He was also endowed with a remarkable ability to relate to the broad spectrum of humanity. As White notes in her prefatory biographical sketch, the *Salt Lake Tribune* was not in the habit of lavishing praise on Mormon leaders in the early twentieth century but was unabashed in its praise of this particular Mormon Apostle. I was also impressed with how often John Henry was able to solve internal squabbles in the various stakes and wards of Zion. Clearly, Elder Smith was a peacemaker.

Editor White did not take her editorial duties lightly. In addition to an introduction, she included a chronology, biographical tables, and an extremely helpful listing of all prominent characters mentioned in the journal. Rather than succumbing to the temptation of many editors to limit annotation because it displays pedantry or self-promotion (a lame excuse in many instances for failure to do one's homework), White has provided explanatory notes that are comprehensive and, I would add, essential for most readers. Certainly, this fine volume is one of the most professional and polished of any that Signature Books has produced.