



1-1-1995

The Diaries of Charles Ora Card: The Canadian Years, 1886-1903
edited by Donald G. Godfrey and Brigham Y. Card

William G. Hartley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hartley, William G. (1995) "*The Diaries of Charles Ora Card: The Canadian Years, 1886-1903* edited by Donald G. Godfrey and Brigham Y. Card," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 35 : Iss. 1 , Article 21.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol35/iss1/21>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

DONALD G. GODFREY and BRIGHAM Y. CARD, eds. *The Diaries of Charles Ora Card: The Canadian Years, 1886-1903*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993. xxxviii; 644 pp. Illustrations, maps, appendix, index. \$45.00.

Reviewed by William G. Hartley, Associate Professor of History and Research Historian at the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History, Brigham Young University.

As a diligent diarist, Charles O. Card provided a banquet table loaded with rich and nutritious historical information about the period 1886 to 1903. These diaries in published form are a monumental contribution of source material on the Intermountain West, western Canada, the LDS Church, and late-nineteenth-century family life, society, and folklore. The book presents the diaries in seven sections covering two to five years each: exploration, migration, the Canadian Mission, Church and community business, irrigation development, completion of the settlements, and closing years.

Before these diaries began, Card was a stake president, school board member, businessman, teacher, supervisor of construction of the Logan Tabernacle and Logan Temple, and Logan, Utah, city councilman. He married Sarah (Sally) Birdneau in 1867 and Sarah Jane Painter in 1876 and lived with both wives for seven years. Birdneau divorced him in 1884. That year he married Zina Young Williams, a daughter of Brigham Young and Zina D. H. Young. In 1885 he married Lavinia Clark Rigby and planned to move to Mexico to avoid federal marshals, who were earnestly trying to arrest him. Instead, Church leaders sent him to explore western Canada for LDS colony sites—at which point the diaries published in this book commence. Cardston, Alberta, is named after him.

Dust-jacket enticements correctly state that these diaries make “a major contribution” to studies of the Canadian West and are “the single most important resource for Southern Alberta history.” The settlement of that area and the development of its industries, irrigation, agriculture, politics, society, customs, and LDS culture are richly documented.

Card’s almost daily entries also deal extensively with himself—his beliefs, personal ups and downs, struggles to earn a living, concerns about being a husband and father to three families—and his

efforts on behalf of Church and community in Utah, Idaho, and Canada. In these pages, I met a quality human being who shored up my faith in humankind and won my respect and admiration for his balanced capabilities and wisdom. I learned from his attitudes, manner of reasoning, and the choices he made. While reading these diaries, I caught myself more than once thinking about my own life and asking, “How would Card handle this situation?” His diaries give especially useful information on the following topics:

People and Personalities. Card comments on the LDS and non-LDS people he interacted with regularly in Cache Valley, Salt Lake City, Idaho, Alberta, and Winnipeg—family members, friends, business leaders, government officials, and Church officers, particularly Apostles John W. Taylor and Moses Thatcher.

Transportation. Card’s many trips from Alberta to attend general conference and visit his families in Utah and Idaho produced diary details about railroad routes, schedules, and equipment and about hotel stopovers between trains at Butte, Great Falls, and other towns. He also describes shorter local trips by buggy and wagon, as well as sled and train trips to Winnipeg.

New Technology. His diaries mention his awareness of the camera (June 17, 1898), his use of a telephone (April 23, 1893), and his first purchase of a typewriter (December 28, 1899; January 22, 1900).

Health and Medical Realities. Card mentions climate and frontier conditions, along with illnesses, epidemics, attempted remedies, dentistry, unreliable doctors, alcoholism, and deaths. His diary tells, for example, about his use of a painful catheter for a time to help his prostate problem (July 1900). In Salt Lake City, he had four corns extracted from his toes “by a lady corn doctor” (March 17, 1896). Mounted Police brought an LDS man to him, “our wayward brother becoming insane” (November 30, 1894), causing Card to research relevant laws and finally decide it best to send the man to the asylum (December 1, 1894). Card notes that the poor man from his youth “had been addicted to drinking Spirituous Liquor Hence his Sad condition” (December 1, 1894).

Upon the death of an LDS boy whose father did not call for a physician, Alberta government officials investigated (July 31 and August 3, 1899). Card, as stake president, then advised the Saints “to always apply for a Dr as it was required by Law in confinement

& dangerous illness & we could afford to observe the Law agreeable to our articles of faith” (August 5, 1894). He advised Relief Society sisters to send for elders first and then “if necessary you could call a physician” (September 2, 1899).

Community and Social Life. Entries reveal everyday events including community celebrations, dances, holidays, birthdays, people’s generosity and meanness, commerce, voting, setting up schools, banking, and law enforcement. Card enjoyed watching a “game of Base Ball” between Cardston and Mountain View area boys (May 24, 1895). At Great Falls, Montana, he “went to a ball game between the Boston Girls & the Lethbridge 9” (July 18, 1900).

Current Events, Trends. Card particularly notes political changes, land-use policies, new farming technology, road development, new buildings, and economic shifts, such as the depression of 1893—“In these days men of cash rule as it were especially in the way of high interest” (May 5, 1893). In 1895, Card’s store had to discontinue granting credit to customers (November 30) because “through sympathy the credit system has been extended too far & people fail now to pay” (December 21).

Personal Testimony. Card’s comments constantly reflect and embrace LDS beliefs and values. He was a devout believer. Often he recorded expressions such as “I have just laid it before the Lord in my secret prayers this morn & expect to continue until relieved” (November 14, 1895). He records numerous answers to prayer.

Polygamy from a Male Viewpoint. These diaries provide insights into the ways polygamous males responsibly handled relationships with spouses and children, housed and provided for families, and dealt with separation and loneliness. His entries regarding family should temper those who ignorantly smirk that males in polygamy “had a good thing going.” His affection for his wives and children is evident in his writings, as is his sometimes desperate concern about how he can see them again and provide for them. Some particularly poignant entries read: “As I am sitting alone my thoughts turn homeward to my wives, children, parents and many friends. . . . Would like to enjoy a sacrament meeting with them. I would enjoy the caresses of my wives and children could we be free from the hand of tyrants” (November 7, 1886). “Feeling weary . . . I have had to toil very hard to keep the wolf [*sic*] away from my door of my 3 families” (July 31, 1898). In 1897 he wrote, “I have been here

now over 10 yrs apart from 2 of my families only visiting them occasionally & Seemingly close[d] almost the sadest week of all. No hope of living with either family for several yrs” (June 19).

In 1891, Card attended a Young Ladies’ Mutual meeting where a sister read an essay on the situation of young ladies, which “showed that the females were in excess of the males and as many males were miners and many of our boys partook of the habits of the world, what were the pure daughters of Israel going to do for good Later Day Saint husbands?” (May 2).

LDS Church Organizational Operations. Entries throughout the diaries describe conferences; ward and stake operations; ordinances; uses of tithing; meeting schedules; activities of Relief Societies, Sunday Schools, Mutuels, Primaries, priesthood quorums, home missionaries, and block teachers; and the roles of bishops, high councils, and visiting General Authorities.

General Conference. In order to report back home on the general conferences he regularly attended, Card diligently summarized talks given at the semiannual gatherings. Several of these talks are not otherwise readily available to researchers. Some intriguing historical details mentioned in these talks include comments in the 1890s that Joseph Smith’s face shone like amber when he met with the Twelve for the last time (April 7, 1895; October 4, 1896), that Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith were attacked by devils in England and saved by three messengers in robes who laid hands on the missionaries, causing the spirits to depart (October 5, 1896), and that when Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith were ordained Apostles after the Far West temple dedication, they were kneeling on the temple cornerstone (April 6, 1891).

LDS Doctrine and Theology. Card recorded numerous statements about Church policies and practices or about doctrinal and theological teachings of the day, particularly tithing, the return of wayward children, paid ministers and Church officers, second anointings (October 8, 1900), and the impending redemption of Jackson County, Missouri. For example, President Lorenzo Snow taught: “Many of you who are here will have to go back to Jackson C[ou]nty if you will keep the word of wisdom & do right” (April 6, 1898; see also October 7 and 21, 1900). Card’s diaries document several priesthood blessings that healed and fasts that seemed to miraculously bring rain.

Speaking in Tongues. Card's diaries contain numerous mentions of meetings where Saints, almost always sisters, spoke or prophesied in tongues. With Elder Lorenzo Snow present at a fast meeting in Cardston, several sisters spoke in tongues, prophesied, and blessed Card and "also the apostles." Other sisters interpreted tongues, after which "Prest Snow led in the shout of Hosanah, Hosanah, Hosanah to God & the Lamb amen & amen & amen, repeated 3 times" (September 3, 1896).

Rebaptisms. Although rebaptism had been customary for people going to the temple or coming home from abroad, Card heard President Joseph F. Smith preach, "This is not required. It is not necessary except he or she has sinned especially" (April 8, 1895). With Apostles Lorenzo Snow and John W. Taylor attending the service, one new member was baptized, four were rebaptized, and one was baptized for health (September 1, 1896). A year later, Card's general conference notes say President George Q. Cannon "spoke against Rebaptism, it Should be [for] Repentance" (October 6, 1897; cited in February 5, 1898, entry).

Fast Days. Card documents the change in fast days from Thursday to Sunday, noting he "had the clerk read the address of the first Presidency changing fast day from the first Thursday to the first Sunday in each month" (November 29, 1896).

Prayer Circles. Stake presidencies and high councils held prayer circles on many Sunday mornings (1897-1901).

Public Repentance of Serious Transgression. In a Church meeting, a sister asked forgiveness for adultery and fornication she had committed two years before. She had been "severed" from the Church. The Saints in the congregation forgave her and consented to her rebaptism (November 13, 1898).

Guardian Angels. Card told lesser priesthood youths they should do right and not offend the Spirit "that they may not offend & cause their guardian angel to with draw" (September 13, 1896).

Birth Control. During a visit to Canada, Apostle Ruderger Clawson "spoke of the forms & sins of the world. Curtail not posterity. The curse of God will rest upon such" (October 21, 1900).

Tithing in Kind. At a Cardston stake conference, Saints were urged to "pay tithes & offerings in their kind & best" (November 21, 1898).

Tithe Handlers' Pay. Church custom then was to allow bishops and stake clerks some remuneration for expenses incurred

to “receive & disburse” tithing. Card notes the high council decided how to divide among bishops and the clerk the 10 percent of tithes earmarked for that purpose (October 7, 1899).

Sacrament Meeting inside the Temple. Card met with General Authorities in the Salt Lake Temple in 1893 and after prayer circle together, moved to the Presidency’s room and had a sacrament of bread and wine (April 20, 1893).

Sealing Ordinances outside a Temple. Card notes Apostle Francis M. Lyman sealed a couple “for time & all Eternity” in a member’s home. The couple had been married by a Mormon official two days before (October 28; cited in October 30, 1900, entry). Apostle George Teasdale similarly sealed a couple for time and eternity at Cardston long before a temple was built there (September 4, 1901).

Dancing. Card agonized about an improper dance held at Leigh’s Creek, involving eight LDS, five gentile, and several part-member families. The dance opened with a waltz instead of prayer and continued until 5:00 A.M. “Many of the ladies were completely exhausted,” Card wrote, “for about 3/4 of the dance was round dancing” in opposition to First Presidency counsel. “I felt I had fallen [in]to the midst of unbelievers” (February 22 and 23, 1895). Later that year, Card advised Saints in Aetna “to curtail dancing to one round dance aside from the square dances & quit at midnight but they could commence at 1 P.M. if they desired” (November 17, 1895).

Calling Each Other Brother and Sister. One of Card’s general conference notes records that Apostle Francis M. Lyman “spoke of the digression of [not] calling each other Brother and sister. Latterly many called each other Mr & Miss or Mrs. Preferred [is] Brother & sister among the Latterday saints” (October 4, 1896).

Setting Apart. Card recorded George Q. Cannon as stating that “it is not necessary to set teachers apart in our S.S.” (October 6, 1895).

Paid Temple Workers. Card said Elder Rudger Clawson told general conference attendees, “Put more of your means into the Temple & give the poor work in the Temple” (October 5, 1900).

This is a big book devoted almost totally to diary text. A preface, introduction, biographical note, and prologue introduce the diaries. Each of the seven sections of the diaries has its own table

of contents prepared by the editors. Creative typesetting allowed for the original diaries' inserts to appear in the margins sideways or in other patterns (see February 10 and 14, March 12, 1890). The editors include several samples of original handwriting (see August 4, 1887; May 27, 1890; November 4, 1894; and January 1, 1896). Maps are useful but would serve readers better if printed on end papers so they could be consulted easily. The appendix lists helpful information. The index works well for personal names but includes only a perplexing selection of a few social topics.

In assessing this “must” reference book, a few limitations should be noted. Minimal footnote commentary and explanation by editors saved on book costs but shortchanged readers. Granted, to keep the diary within one cover, the publishers used narrow margins and small typeface and still filled 644 pages. The value of these diaries would increase at least 25 percent if the editors provided thorough explanations in footnotes—like Juanita Brooks' notes on Hosea Stout's diaries in *On the Mormon Frontier*—even if it meant publishing Card's diaries in two volumes instead of one. But even without the crucial commentary, this book is invaluable.

A few historical lapses show that the editors are not veteran historians. For example, they misread Card's handwriting and give the LDS Church a new Apostle named Elder M. Fleweling (April 7, 1898), who in fact is M. F. Cowley. Also, in square brackets, they interpret an assignment for two young men to labor together as a call to missionary service, but in fact the men were called to be the equivalent of today's home teachers (April 4, 1891). The editors should inform readers if the life sketch Card finished on November 25, 1902, and mailed to the Church is in the Historical Department's biographical sketch file today. And the editors could have compared Card's summaries of general conference addresses with transcriptions of those talks and assessed in explanatory footnotes how his versions compare.

These Card diaries will generously reward all who will consult them for historical information about particular times or subjects but especially those who will plow through them thoughtfully during a long, slow read.