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Christensen

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SCOTT R. CHRISTENSEN. *Sagwitch: Shoshone Chieftain, Mormon Elder, 1822–1887*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1999. xviii; 254 pp. Illustrations, maps, index. Hardback, \$39.95; paperback, \$19.95.

Reviewed by Larry EchoHawk

After publishing a few articles on Native American history and studying the Shoshone language, Scott Christensen has completed his first full-length work, *Sagwitch: Shoshone Chieftain, Mormon Elder, 1822–1887*, which won the Evans Handcart Award at Utah State University. Christensen is to be commended for this well-written documentary of the man who was a leader of the Northwestern Band of Shoshone Indians as Indian-white relations developed in early Utah history.

Sagwitch's life is significant in many ways and deserves the attention Christensen has given him. Sagwitch was born in 1822, a time when his people were enjoying the last days of the traditional life they had known for centuries. After the Mormon pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley in 1847 and as western territories saw more and more exploration and settlement, the Northwestern Band of Shoshone were forced to forever change their patterns of living. Sagwitch was a wise man and a gifted speaker, and he fell naturally into the leadership role that he maintained among his band throughout his life. A survivor of the Bear River Massacre in 1863, Sagwitch believed his people would best survive by assimilating with the Latter-day Saints who were inhabiting the traditional Shoshone lands. He and his band converted to Mormonism and attempted to follow their church leaders' directions in learning to farm and raise livestock. This book details the life of Sagwitch and his band as they interacted with the White pioneers and with other Native American tribes.

Faced with the possible disappearance of his culture and people, Sagwitch painfully tried, but with only partial success, to help them adjust and assimilate. Although at times they prospered at farming in northern Utah and southern Idaho, Sagwitch's people eventually became "landless Indians" in comparison to the Shoshone Indians who were placed on reservations in Idaho, Wyoming, and Nevada. Only recently, in 1988, has the band formally organized themselves into a tribal government and received federal recognition as a tribal entity. Today's Northwestern Band of Shoshone, including Sagwitch's descendants, are armed with their own constitution and are striving to provide housing and other services for their tribal members on 185 acres of land near Washakie on the Utah-Idaho border, an area near some of their original hunting and gathering spots.

Christensen has done extensive research for this volume. It is well indexed, has detailed notes, and includes numerous photos, maps, and

documents. Most impressive is his use of an exhaustive list of sources, including census records, photos, ledgers, maps, correspondence, journals, personal histories, discourses, personal interviews, books, newspapers, periodicals, annual reports of the commissioner of Indian affairs, records of the Bureau of Land Management, and materials from the LDS Church Archives. There appears to be much new information contained within this small volume.

For the most part, this book is an easy-to-read, well-organized narrative. The author never presupposes or draws explicit conclusions of his own, nor does he insert overt personal judgments. Christensen is also skilled in developing all sides of each event. He goes to great lengths to present various views of the events that he describes in great detail. To do so, Christensen uses not only local and state sources but also out-of-state and national sources. The result is a biography that draws the reader deeper and deeper into the life of Sagwitch and his band of followers.

The author also meets the challenge of conveying a factual, unbiased report of the events surrounding Sagwitch's dealings with members and leaders of the LDS Church. Because Christensen is a member of the Church and works as an archivist in the Church's Historical Department, it would have been easy for him to paint a very different picture than the one his readers view. He is to be complimented for letting history speak for itself. Scott Christensen has written a significant history of Sagwitch and the Northwestern Band of Shoshone that can take its place alongside Brigham D. Madsen's chronicles of the Bannock and Shoshone peoples.<sup>1</sup>

Readers with an interest in the early history of Utah Native American tribes would also do well to watch for Christensen's current projects. He is working on two biographies: one about Chief Little Soldier of the Weber Utes and the other about Dimick B. Huntington, the LDS Church's Indian interpreter from the early 1850s until his death in 1879.

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1. Brigham D. Madsen, *The Shoshoni Frontier and the Bear River Massacre* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985); Brigham D. Madsen, *The Bannock of Idaho* (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1996).