



10-1-2000

Brief Notice

Jed L. Woodworth

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

Recommended Citation

Woodworth, Jed L. (2000) "Brief Notice," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 39 : Iss. 4 , Article 20.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol39/iss4/20>

This Notice is brought to you for free and open access by the All 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 scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Brief Notice

A City of Refuge: Quincy, Illinois, edited by Susan Easton Black and Richard E. Bennett (Millennial, 2000)

Some books plow ground, other books break it. *A City of Refuge: Quincy, Illinois*, breaks ground and breaks it in a style uncommon in Latter-day Saint regional histories. Histories of the Church in early New York; Kirtland, Ohio; northern Missouri; and Nauvoo, Illinois, have long been available. These works were written by Latter-day Saints. Now comes a collection of symposium papers, written by LDS and non-LDS scholars, that chronicle the winter of 1838–39, when most of the Saints resided in Quincy, Illinois.

The papers were initially presented at a Quincy History Symposium held in Quincy, Illinois, November 5–6, 1999. The brainchild of Loren and Annette Burton, LDS public affairs missionaries in Nauvoo, this conference drew support from public and private nonprofit entities. It was designed to “honor the humanitarian efforts of the citizens of Quincy that saved the lives of thousands of Latter-day Saint refugees who were then in flight from their Missouri homes in the winter of 1839” (xiii). Conference participants included Quincy-area conservators, librarians, historians, and newspaper reporters; BYU historians; and Illinois government officials.

This collection’s sixteen papers divide neatly into two camps. Mormon-related papers discuss the Missouri persecutions, Mormon demographics in Quincy, the Twelve in Quincy, apostasy and return, and Mormons in Quincy newspapers. Mormons are scarcely mentioned, however, in the papers on subjects such as the Quincy mounted riflemen, early Quincy architecture, Quincy-area riverboat stories, and folk culture.

The bulk of this work, of course, discusses the events of 1838–39. The book does well at narrating the Latter-day Saint side of that winter. The editors’ contributions are particularly engaging. First-hand accounts help modern readers understand the difficulties of those days and appreciate the gratitude the Saints must have felt for the kindnesses of Quincy citizens. This is vital narration. But given the theme of the symposium, I was surprised this book did not say more of the Quincy citizens themselves. Nowhere do we find quoted any of the Quincy residents who lent a helping hand. A plat map or a map reconstructing the city of 1839 would have helped readers visualize the logistics of what one Quincy historian calls one of the “greatest humanitarian gestures in the United States” (67).

Given the focus on humanitarianism, sociological analysis would have improved this collection. Why did Quincy citizens lend a helping hand when most of the Saints’ neighbors elsewhere did not? This, it seems to me, is the central question of the Quincy experience but one that remains unanswered. If the lesson of that winter can be located in “Christian service” (101), a demographic study of local religion would have been in order. Finally, since Democrats were apparently more eager than Whigs to assist the Saints, some exploration of this tension *viz a viz* political tensions in Missouri would have helped readers discriminate eager helpers from reluctant ones.

Despite these reservations, the book is a big step forward. Readers—Latter-day Saint or not, Quincy resident or not—will come away from the text inspired to go and do likewise, and little else can be more important than this.

—Jed L. Woodworth