Brief Notices

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Spencer W. Kimball: Resolute Disciple, Prophet of God, by Francis M. Gibbons (Deseret Book, 1995) and Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower, by Lucile C. Tate (Bookcraft, 1995)

Boyd K. Packer and Spencer W. Kimball served together in the highest councils of the Church from 1970 to 1985, a remarkable period in Church history. These two recently published biographies by veteran biographers provide a new understanding of the lives of these extraordinary men and their influence on the Church.

The definitive biography of President Kimball, written by his son and grandson, was widely read and became a model for biographies on living Church leaders. However, it was published in 1977—before the revelation on the priesthood, before the organization of the First Quorum of Seventy, and before the dedication of the sixteen temples completed during President Kimball’s administration. The new biography is succinct but gives a full account—including the remarkable accomplishments of the last ten years of President Kimball’s life. Francis Gibbons, secretary to the First Presidency, gives a good sense of the struggle that President Kimball faced with the priesthood issue. The report of President Kimball’s 1977 conversation with Helvecio Martins provides unique insight into the culminating revelation of 1978. President Kimball’s decision to sell the Church’s cottage at Laguna Beach, which had provided a peaceful escape for Church presidents for several decades, is included as evidence for his emphasis on work.

In her book on Boyd K. Packer, Lucile Tate gives us a comprehensive look at the man who now presides over the Quorum of the Twelve. The book is well organized into major themes, reflecting President Packer’s assignments and contributions, including his roles in the publication of the LDS scriptures, the revelation on the priesthood, reemphasis on the family, simplification of Church programs, and budget policy. The author weaves a well-told story of a young boy stricken with polio who becomes a pilot, artist, teacher, administrator, and priesthood leader. The story gives the reader an understanding of the experiences that shaped the thoughts and commitments of one of the Church’s great leaders and teachers, as well as insight into important events in Church history in recent years.

—Clark B. Hinckley
**The Legacy of Mormon Furniture: The Mormon Material Culture, Undergirded by Faith, Commitment, and Craftsmanship,**
by Marilyn Conover Barker, photographs by Scott Peterson and others (Gibbs Smith, 1995)

Appreciation of Mormon material culture has come a long way. We now have a beautiful coffee-table book on Mormon furniture! This book tells the early Mormon story through the work of the LDS cabinetmakers and wood-carvers who crafted furniture from the 1840s through the late nineteenth century. The history is illustrated with photographs of chairs, tables, cupboards, and beds.

This furniture underscores the massive effort the early Saints made to recreate the genteel and refined middle-class culture they left behind in England and Scandinavia and on the East Coast. They chose not to live the free frontier life of the open West. The powerful yearning for respectability, seen in photographs of pioneers with neat, starched aprons and white picket fences against the wind-swept desert, can also be seen in this furniture.

Barker rightly links the production of silk with the creation of furniture, showing the lengths to which Mormons were willing to go to upgrade their material lives. Just as they would care for worms in order to wear finery, so they took the simple woods available to them and applied faux finishes, striving for a finer appearance.

Mormon pioneers included many good carpenters and cabinetmakers who worked the pine into square and blocky cupboards, simple rail chairs with turned legs, heavy rocking chairs, and bedsteads and settees with cutout headboards. Unlike Shakers whose simple furniture was ideologically based, Mormon furniture was derived from contemporary styles, perhaps because the Mormon leader was an eastern-trained cabinetmaker: “At no time did the Mormon Church sponsor design style that could represent their religious philosophy. Mormons were encouraged to sponsor excellent craftsmanship, but design was left to the choice of the individual cabinetmaker and buyer” (26).

Arranged for reference use, this book offers profusely illustrated chapters on furniture types, cabinetmakers, county histories of local craftsmen (but where is the county map?), the work of cooperatives, and finally a section on faux graining techniques. The gorgeous illustrations contrast wonderfully with their simple, spare subjects. The book’s subtitle suggests that the early Mormon material culture reveals the faith and commitment of the pioneers. The photographs and the earnest tone of the text underscore that claim.

—Claudia L. Bushman

**Beyond the River,** by Michael Fillerup (Signature Books, 1995)

Jonathan Reeves is an LDS golden boy growing up in a small town in California. Athletic, cocksure, and indifferent towards his schoolwork, he goes to the tutoring center only under threat of
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being cut from the track team. His tutor turns out to be Nancy Von Kleinsmid, a tall, brilliant, friendless girl, who badgers him, spurs him, challenges his every belief and intuition, and encourages his writing. Despite the fact that Nancy is not LDS, Jon falls in love and determines to marry her and pursue a literary career. He cannot understand why she slips away from him. Within a year of his leaving for college, she is found dead at a local swimming spot, an apparent suicide.

Jon serves a mission in Mexico. His mother dies during his absence, and his relationship with his father deteriorates after Jon returns home. While the narrative has been linear to this point, Jon's adult life emerges through a jumble of flashbacks as he tries to make peace with his past. He has married and postponed his dream of becoming a writer. He is struggling with a daughter's crippling illness and the pressures of teaching remedial English in a California school. As in all too much serious LDS fiction, Jon carries around near-debilitating remorse for petty sins, carelessness, and things beyond his control. Such attitudes surely exist among the LDS people but have never struck me as typical.

The book is about loss, deferred dreams, and appeasing old ghosts. But Fillerup's story leaves room for the Spirit. Jon receives almost audible, at times physical, impulses that encourage him and keep him from making mistakes. One crucial time he fails to listen. In his previous fiction, Fillerup has tended to undermine such passages with sociological observations or competing spiritualities. That tendency is mostly absent here. In Beyond the River, religious experience comes almost as a matter of course, an aspect, among others, of Mormon life. Few literary novels attempt such straightforward depictions of LDS spirituality, though that is at the heart of what Mormon literature ought to do. Beyond the River is a passionate book and a readable one. On the spiritual count alone, it is an important contribution to LDS letters.

—Benson Y. Parkinson

Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Illinois, edited by H. Dean Garrett
(Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1995)

The bittersweet experience of the Church's brief sojourn in Nauvoo will always remain a romantic yet realistic construct in the minds of the Latter-day Saints. If any reader has ever wanted to travel to Nauvoo with a group of religious educators from BYU, to listen as they analyze and ponder some of their favorite images and reflections on the Nauvoo period, this volume is a fine surrogate. The essays are personable and sincerely reflect the feelings and knowledge of their authors.

This is the latest volume in the regional studies series published by the BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine. It contains eighteen original papers, plus an index, in a large and interesting collection. Topics include Joseph Smith (represented by several
essays), the Nauvoo Temple, doctrinal teachings in Nauvoo, disease and sickness in Nauvoo, the political environment in Illinois in the 1840s, and Zelph. The collection also offers biographical studies of such interesting figures as Almon Babbitt, Joseph Smith III, John C. Bennett, Howard Coray, Martha Coray, and Steven A. Douglas, as well as two papers on Mormon and Jewish topics. Although this volume does not attempt to present a systematic, comprehensive review of the history of the Church in Illinois, it contains many significant resources, including a useful bibliography.

—John W. Welch

_Nurturing Faith through the Book of Mormon: The 24th Annual Sperry Symposium, Brigham Young University, 1995_ (Deseret Book, 1995)

 Seeds sown by Sidney B. Sperry during his forty years of teaching and research at Brigham Young University are still bearing fruit. New generations of scholars, nourished by Dean Sperry’s example, are casting their seeds on fresh fields, inviting us all to reap the harvest. All of the authors in this book “are recognized authorities on the Book of Mormon” (vii); Ludlow, Elder Holland, Rasmussen, Matthews, and Millet have each served as deans of religious education, succeeding Sperry.

The 1995 Sperry Symposium, “Nurturing Faith through the Book of Mormon,” celebrates the centennial of Sperry’s birth. Scholars pay tribute to Sperry by counseling us to “learn by study and by faith as much as possible about the history, practices, principles, and doctrines found in the scriptures” (xi). In an introductory chapter, Ellis Rasmussen reveals the roots of Sidney Sperry’s philosophy as a teacher, a scholar, and a man: “Brother Sperry hoped to deepen the faith of Latter-day Saint students” (xv) and “believed that understanding the historical setting in which each prophet lived and worked” (xxxiii) was vital to understanding their message.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the life-nourishing force that flows through the Book of Mormon and is its most “commanding figure . . . from first chapter to last” (2). Elder Jeffrey Holland invites us all to “rend the veil of unbelief” in order to behold the revelations—and the Revelation—of God (Ether 4:15)” (24).

Daniel Ludlow thoroughly explores “The Destiny of the House of Israel,” using as his tools the “background and experience of the Prophet Joseph Smith . . . [who] understood more about the destiny of the house of Israel—including its origin, history, and prophesied future—than any other person then living upon the earth” (31-32).

According to Robert Matthews, the records written by the Book of Mormon prophets are like preserved fruit that we can enjoy seasons later: “How enjoyable in January to feast on the harvest of the previous August. And how fortunate in the twentieth century to be spiritually fed by the doctrinal discourses of the Savior and the prophets of centuries ago” (89-90).
The results of eating the forbidden fruit—the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the Atonement—are the subjects of Robert Millet's tender treatment of the plan of salvation as taught in the Book of Mormon. Millet sums up its message: "The plight and the promise, the malady and the medicine, the Fall and the Atonement—that is the burden of the Book of Mormon" (120).

Reflecting Sperry's reliance on both faith and reason, John Welch offers an extensive description of the relationship between intellect and spirit in the context of a person identifying evidence and using it in nurturing faith. The Book of Mormon especially, with its "precision, consistency, validity, vitality, insightfulness, and purposefulness," yields a flow of evidence that "nourishes and enlarges faith" (158).

Each essay in this volume gives readers spiritual and intellectual nutrients to strengthen seeds of faith and produce a harvest of understanding.

—Nancy R. Lund

appeared in a variety of publications that feature Mormon history, including such publications as the Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, Journal of Mormon History, Utah Historical Quarterly, and Dialogue.

The authors of these essays represent a broad range of scholarship, religious orientation, academic institutions, and scholarly approaches. These writers are generally recognized as authorities in their fields of academic specialty. Some of the subjects these authors cover include the Nauvoo Charter, the Nauvoo Legion, the press in Nauvoo, religion in Nauvoo, polygamy in Nauvoo, the Martyrdom, and relations between Emma Smith and Brigham Young.

For anyone with any interest in Nauvoo, this book of essays will save time and energy. For one thing, the editors have provided a complete index that gets the reader into relevant material from several articles. The book promises to be a useful tool.

—Donald Q. Cannon

Kingdom on the Mississippi
Revisited: Nauvoo in Mormon History, edited by Roger D. Launius and John E. Hallwas
(University of Illinois Press, 1996)

This attractive paperback volume is the creation of two well-known scholars of the Nauvoo period. It constitutes a ready reference to a wide range of articles on Nauvoo in the 1840s. The fourteen essays appearing in this volume are all reprints. They originally