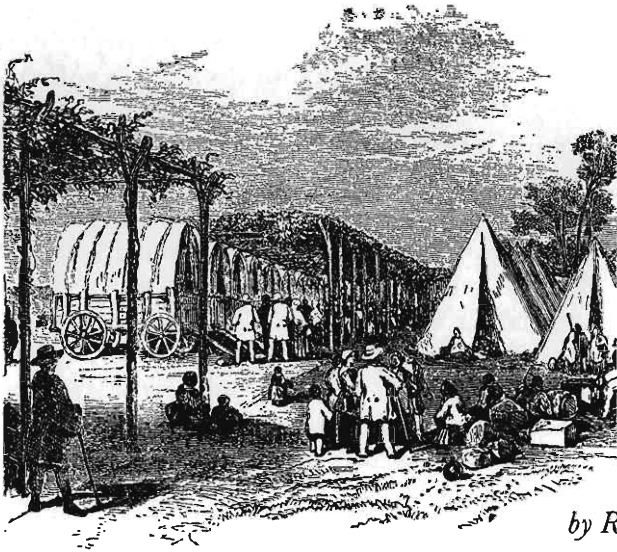


Robert Bruce Flanders, "Writing the Mormon Past." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 1 No. 3 (1966): 47–62.



Mormon Tabernacle Camp.

## WRITING ON THE MORMON PAST

*by Robert Bruce Flanders*

The Latter-day Saints are today a recognized and accepted part of the fabric of American life. The sharpness of Mormon-gentile conflict has long since faded, and acculturation and accommodation have taken its place. There has begun to be in the present generation a corresponding trend to detach the Mormon past from American mythology or hagiography and to fit it satisfactorily into the main stream of American history where it belongs and where it can be better understood. The folklore of funny stories and bad books still exceeds the competent historical literature both in bulk and in circulation. But now a third generation of Mormons and anti-Mormons has largely passed away; fears, hatreds, and tensions keenly and painfully remembered not many years ago are now merely "history." Animosity is giving way to curiosity; the appeal of polemics lessens and that of inquiry and analysis grows apace. The time is ripe for the study of Mormon history to emerge on a new plane of maturity.

Understanding Mormon history involves appreciating some of the formidable obstacles which confront those who seek to write it. There is still sensitivity among Mormons to probing that might bring embarrassment to cherished official views of Latter-day Saint origins, martyrs, or heroes (unfortunately not as yet balanced by a hope that a more accurate and penetrating presentation of that past would in many instances have the opposite effect). There are alleged instances of the suppression or destruction of historical materials feared to be damning should they fall into the "wrong hands." While abundant primary sources exist for the historian's use, many are scattered and

most need to be evaluated with care, produced as they were in the climate of controversy and contention surrounding early Mormon history.

The writing of Mormon history seems to be a profession especially unforgiving of emotional and intellectual shortcomings in its practitioners. More than sympathy and skill are necessary for success. There must be, for example, an adequate framework of ideas and assumptions underlying the work — a reasonable and plausible solution in the mind of the scholar to the basic “problems” of Mormon religious origins. To oversimplify for illustration: Is Mormonism conscious hoax, is it psychologically induced delusion explainable in terms of a unique milieu, or is it understandable only as involving genuine religious experience in association with mystical and supernatural phenomena? Is it even the working out step by foreordained step of a Heavenly Plan — all the predestined will of God? Or is it perhaps a subtle and disarming mixture of all of these? The student of Mormonism can only avoid such questions; he cannot escape them. His assumptions about them may be intimately related to his reasons for writing in the first place, and certainly they will color his work.<sup>1</sup> Finally, and perhaps of greatest import, the historian needs to come to terms with the multiverse of writings about Mormonism, so much of it bizarre and confusing, that has been accumulating from the beginning of the movement. The primary concern of this article is to assay the nature of that literature.

Since 1830 a great many people have written about Mormons and Mormonism, and for many reasons; the extent and peculiarity of the literature is bewildering. In the nineteenth century the bulk of it was anti-Mormon writing that may be termed a literature of exposé. Histories, autobiographies, pamphlets, articles, and depositions exposing the delusions, perversions, and dangers of Mormonism assailed mid- and later-nineteenth century America and did much to form and perpetuate anti-Mormon stereotypes and shibboleths in both the forum of public opinion and the councils of state. The authors of such works were typically Protestant ministers incensed over Mormon “sheep stealing” among their flocks, ambitious journalists who recognized the public taste for the shocking (there is a strong flavor of the lurid in Mormon exposé, including blood, sex, and sin, reminiscent of tabloid journalism and the Sunday supplement), aspiring politicians, or disgruntled ex-Mormons who had

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<sup>1</sup>For a penetrating discussion of the sacerdotal phenomenon of Mormon authoritarianism, see Mario De Pillis, “The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism,” *Dialogue*, I (Spring, 1966), 68-88.

left the Church for various reasons and were anxious to join the chorus of denunciation. Some wrote who had no base motives but only a desire that The Truth should prevail and that marriage, motherhood, and America should survive. A sample of the titles of exposé writing is instructive as to their *genre*:

Alexander Campbell, *Delusions; an Analysis of the Book of Mormon* (1832)

Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* [sic] . . . (1834)

E. G. Lee, *The Mormons; or Knavery Exposed* (1841)

John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints; or an Expose of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (1842)

Joseph H. Jackson, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Experiences of Joseph H. Jackson in Nauvoo, Exposing the Depths of Mormon Villainy* (1844)

William Hall, *The Abominations of Mormonism Exposed* . . . (1852)

Fanny (Mrs. T.B.H.) Stenhouse, *Tell It All; The Story of a Life's Experiences in Mormonism* (1874)

Ann Eliza (Webb) Young, *Wife No. 19; or, The Story of a Life in Bondage, Being a Complete Expose of Mormonism* (1875)

John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled* . . . (1877)

Jennie A. Froiseth, ed., *The Women of Mormonism; or, The Story of Polygamy as Told by the Victims Themselves* (1881-82)

Rev. C. P. Lyford, *The Mormon Problem; an Appeal to the American People* (1886)

Lou B. Cake, *Old Mormon Manuscript Found, Peepstone Joe Exposed* (1899)

A. F. Gray, *The Menace of Mormonism* (1926)

Of interest also are the publications, shortly after 1900, of a group calling themselves "The National League of Women's Organizations to Protect the Country Against the Treasonable and Polygamous Teachings of the Mormon Hierarchy, and to Maintain Christian Ideals of Marriage."

Certain appurtenances and tendencies of Mormonism, notably political and cultural parochialism, a mystic *hauteur* among its believers, the apparent union of church and state, and especially polygamy, lent a credence to these writings that helped them gain general acceptance as unimpeachably valid. A good example of the literature of exposé is John C. Bennett's *The History of the Saints; or an Expose of Joe Smith and Mormonism*, the earliest and one of most influential of such works to reach a national audience. A suave gentleman-dandy who was a kind of professional adventurer, Bennett for a short time occupied a position of trust in Nauvoo. Governor Thomas Ford later wrote of him:

This Bennett was probably the greatest scamp in the western country. I have made particular enquiries concerning him, and have traced him in several places in which he lived before he joined the Mormons, in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and he was everywhere accounted the same debauched, unprincipled, profligate character. He was a man of some little talent, and in 1840-1841 had the confidence of the Mormons, and particularly that of their leaders.<sup>2</sup>

In 1842 Bennett himself was exposed, and he lost his position in the Mormon hierarchy. He then began the publication of a series of scurrilous and well-publicized articles in anti-Mormon Illinois newspapers. It was the sensational journalism of the day and provoked a wave of anti-Mormon feeling in the Middle West. In the fall of 1842 Bennett published his book in Boston and quickly received national attention. "The Mormon hierarchy," wrote Bennett in a memorable passage,

are guilty of infidelity, deism, atheism, lying, deception, blasphemy; debauchery, lasciviousness, bestiality, madness, fraud, plunder; larceny, burglary, robbery, perjury; fornication, adultery, rape, incest; arson, treason, and murder; and they have out-heroded Herod, out-deviled the devil, slandered God Almighty, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Angels . . . . (p. 257)

Such lurid attacks not only influenced a credulous reading audience in the 1840's, but have had a continuing influence upon many historians who have accepted them as valid judgments by reliable contemporary observers. Historians ought to have known better (probably some of them did). The literature of exposé gives little insight into the Mormon movement, but it does provide a clue to the origins and character of anti-Mormon feelings which reached a fever pitch on a number of occasions in the nineteenth century.

Mormonism was less alarming to Americans as a false and deluded religion than it was as a threat to republican government, middle-class morality, and the general conformist spirit of Jacksonian America. There were faiths abroad in the land which the majority considered heretical but whose adherents were left alone. The Mormon Church however was an aggressive, dynamic, fiercely independent corporation given to talk about its own government, the "Kingdom of God." All this seemed subversive to a generation much concerned with internal threats, real or imagined, to a traditional American way of life. The attacks upon Mormonism were a kind of "nativist" attack similar to those which have appeared from time to time in American history in response to suspected subversion. The American

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois* (Chicago, 1854), p. 263.

Party, or "Know-Nothings," of the 1850's, the Klans of the 1920's, and "McCarthyism" in the 1950's are examples of such phenomena. Although Mormonism was indigenously American in its origins, to the majority of citizens it began to appear, from the characterization of the exposé writers, to be non-conforming, un-American, anti-American, and dangerous. There were concurrent and similar exposés of Catholics, Masons, abolitionists, and "slave-power conspirators," as well as the better-known attacks of the Know-Nothings upon foreign immigrants. Not surprisingly, all the literature of exposure is much alike, regardless of what is under attack. Wrote one historian of this occurrence:

If Masons, Catholics, and Mormons bore little resemblance to one another in actuality, as imagined enemies they merged into a nearly common stereotype. Behind specious professions of philanthropy or religious sentiment nativists discerned a group of unscrupulous leaders plotting to subvert the American social order. Though rank and file members were not individually evil, they were blinded and corrupted by a persuasive ideology that justified treason and gross immorality in the interests of the subversive group. Trapped in the meshes of machine-like organization . . . these dupes followed orders like professional soldiers and labored unknowingly to abolish free society, to enslave their fellowmen, and to overthrow divine principles of law and justice. Should an occasional member free himself from bondage . . . he could still be disciplined by the threat of death or dreadful tortures. . . . According to nativist prophets, leaders of such groups chose to subvert American society because control of America meant control of the world's destiny.<sup>8</sup>

Mormon exposé literature, read in this context, does much to illustrate the dark, irrational milieu of countersubversion. Such a climate of thought sustained the anti-Mormon persecutions and threats of persecutions that finally helped to make Mormons a defensive and culturally isolated people.

Early Latter-day Saint writers responded to the attacks of the exposers by producing a literature about their own movement which was apologetic and defensive as well as evangelistic. Their response was naturally colored by the nature of the provocation, and it is difficult to understand early Mormon polemics apart from the persecution which provoked them. In 1840 Apostle Parley P. Pratt wrote a pamphlet entitled *Late Persecutions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Ten Thousand American Citizens robbed, plun-*

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<sup>8</sup> David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Countersubversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, LXVII (September, 1960), 208. This important essay develops the thesis quoted above and concludes that the countersubversive mania had its origins in the insecurities and rootlessness of a rapidly changing society.

dered, and banished; others imprisoned, and others martyred for their religion in order to publicize the Far West, Missouri, persecutions. Other similar tracts followed through the years, developing the notion that all unfriendly gentiles were "enemies" in league to destroy God's kingdom and that the history of the Latter-day Church was a kind of divine drama on Earth, in which the ultimate design of deity was being worked out in every act and would in the end prevail against all odds. Even serious setbacks were but a test of the faithful.

The traditional genre of Mormon history is perhaps most clearly illustrated in a mass of juvenile and "faith promotion" literature which seeks inspiration in the deeds of founders and pioneers. It is not really history, but historical myth spun into morality plays, where hero fights against villain, knight jousts with dragon, and good contends against evil. Even in more professional writings polemics persist, as is illustrated by the works of Brigham H. Roberts, official historian of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints until his death in 1933. His *Comprehensive History of the Church — Century One* (6 vols., Salt Lake City, 1930) was the centennial history. In formative and useful, it displays throughout the hand of the competent historian. It is nevertheless an official apologia and evidences the strong flavor of Mormon-style historical determinism. For example, after a fairly comprehensive and fair-minded treatment of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, Roberts concludes:

. . . let the finger of accusation point at whom it may, and the just verdict of history pronounce guilty whom it will, this much I hold to be clear, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bears no stain, and carries no responsibility for bloodshed at any time or any place. Her law was announced from the beginning, by the Son of God, saying, ". . . Thou shalt not kill; and he that kills, shall not have forgiveness in this world, nor in the world to come . . ." (IV, 176-177)

Such testimonials are common in the historical writings of Mormons and betray values and motives which, however commendable in other settings, have no legitimate place in historiography.

The Mormons created a unique society and economy in the hostile Great Basin environment at a considerable human cost in sacrifice and deprivation. Pride in the accomplishments of pioneer forebears, common in histories of the American West, is in Mormon history coupled with a conviction that the survival and relative prosperity of the mountain kingdom of the Saints is a vindication of the Church and the Mormon religion itself. Zion was destined to be built "in the tops of the mountains" according to the ancient prophet; the feat was in compliance with the Divine Will and accomplished by the Mormon pioneers. So Utah Mormon history emphasizes the westering,

trans-montane, pioneering aspects. The early formative period of the movement in the Midwest has traditionally been viewed as merely preliminary to the Great Basin experience. The trials and failures of the pre-Trek years were but a necessary, even foreordained time of troubles, out of which the final accomplishment was born. Mormon chroniclers have seemed impatient to get the early Saints on the trail west to the land of saddle, sagebrush, and Great Salt Lake. The frames of reference for early Mormon history traditionally set by Mormons themselves have been far-western rather than mid-western or national, religious and social rather than economic or political, polemical rather than critical, defensive rather than objective. Thus Brigham Young rather than Joseph Smith is seen frequently as the central figure of early Mormon history, and relatively little history of the period before 1847 has been written by Mormons.

A crippling feature of the work of Utah Mormon historians and those influenced by them is that they tend to dismiss dissensions and conflicts within the Church and to ignore the schisms and divergent sects that resulted. Dissenters were apostates, and thus "enemies" — outside the purview of historical concern. This omission is a grievous one, since internal conflict and controversy were as influential in shaping Mormonism as was strife with the gentile world. There were "apostasies" at Kirkland, at Far West, and several times in Utah. The most serious occurred at Nauvoo in association with doctrinal controversy, the death of Joseph Smith, the accession of Brigham Young to power, and Young's program to remove the Church to the West. Young had both competition and opposition to his authority and policies, which were to become institutionalized in a number of anti-Brighamite Mormon sects, mostly centered in the Middle West. Such groups remained a goad to Young and a harrassment in his attempts to restore unity to Mormonism under his sceptre.<sup>4</sup>

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is the only one of the churches of the Mormon dispersion to produce an historical literature. Begun by anti-polygamous, anti-Brighamite Mormons who had not gone to Utah, it achieved a degree of maturity under the leadership of sons and grandsons of Joseph Smith the Prophet. Like the historical writing of the Utah Mormons, that of

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Dale L. Morgan, "A Bibliography of the Churches of the Dispersion," *Western Humanities Review*, VII (1953), 107-181; Milo M. Quaife, *The Kingdom of St. James* (1930); Robert Flanders, "The Mormons Who Did Not Go West," unpublished Master's thesis, U. of Wisconsin (1954); Inez Smith Davis, *Story of the Church* (1949); H. H. Bancroft, *History of Utah* (1889), pp. 641 ff., and Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (1965), Chapters 9 and 11.



the Reorganized Church has been primarily polemical and "faith promoting." In addition to claiming as its own the common Mormon past prior to the "breakup" of 1844-47, Reorganized Church history has been at great pains to prove that Brigham Young was an usurper; that "Utah Mormonism" was aberrant and corrupt in doctrine, economy, and polity; and especially that polygamy was an abomination neither originated, practiced, nor sanctioned by Joseph Smith. The best illustrations of the nature of historical writing in the Reorganized Church are Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith, *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (4 vols., 1896-1903) and Inez Smith Davis, *The Story of the Church* (1948). Both works are officially sanctioned; each is distinctly polemical. The former is a somewhat ill-digested collection of primary documents of various kinds and is more valuable as source than as history. The latter is selective in the subject matter that it treats and is apologetic and filio-pietistic. It emphasizes some of the dispersive movements of the post-Nauvoo period (including that of Lyman Wight, from whom Mrs. Davis was descended) and almost completely ignores "Brighamite" history. It represents the historical viewpoint still common in the Reorganized Church. "Reorganite" history is especially conscious of the Nauvoo dispersion because many Reorganized Church founders stem originally from Wightites, Strangites, Hedrickites, Bickertonites, Thompsonites, Cutlerites — even Brighamites.

While the historical viewpoint operative in the Reorganized Church is inadequate as a key to the Mormon past, just as is that of the better-known Mormon group, and partly for the same reasons, it is at least different; and it dispels the kind of monolithic concept of Latter-day Saint development that is so prevalent. Mormon history not only could have taken another path than that which led to Utah; it actually did.

Mormon historical writing of a class different from any yet discussed is that of the "apostate" who neither affiliated with any dissident sect nor joined the ranks of the typical exposé authors. Two such men were John Corrill and T.B.H. Stenhouse. Corrill, a high priest who left the Church in 1838 during the Far West, Missouri, episode because of procedural rather than doctrinal differences, straightway wrote a history of Mormonism which is surprisingly sympathetic yet perceptive and critical in its treatment.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately Corrill wrote too early to include the momentous decade of the forties. Stenhouse, who wrote a generation later, missed the

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<sup>5</sup> John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1839).

forties too. He was a Scots convert, a man of culture and ability who was a missionary in England, Italy, and Switzerland, where he published a church periodical in French and was president of the Swiss Mission, 1850-54. In 1859 he emigrated to Utah, where he later published his own newspaper.<sup>6</sup>

Stenhouse was sufficiently prestigious within the Church to be an emissary to the Lincoln administration. He became an associate in the "Godbeite Heresy" of 1869, a rebellion of a group of able and influential Mormons directed in part at the threat to individualism posed by the monopolistic aspects of church polity and the ironclad rule of Brigham Young (who drove the dissidents summarily from the Church). Leaving Utah for the East, Stenhouse published *The Rocky Mountain Saints; A Full and Complete History of the Mormons* (New York, 1873), constituting, together with a work by his wife giving the distaff point of view, the most sensational exposé of Mormonism since John C. Bennett in 1842.<sup>7</sup>

Like the run-of-the-mill exposers, Stenhouse saw the Mormon theocracy as subversive and portrayed Brigham Young as a tyrant. But in other important respects there is dissimilarity. Stenhouse saw the Mormon faith as delusion, not hoax or fraud; he was critical of Smith and Young but did not doubt their sincerity; he considered polygamy perverse but saw polygamists generally as misguided zealots rather than as basically immoral or lecherous. He displayed a great deal of understanding for the Mormon people and their problems, and in purview of the Mormon experience he stood to some extent outside of and beyond any of the historical frames of reference yet discussed. *The Rocky Mountain Saints* is therefore something of an early landmark in Mormon historical writing, a forerunner of later descriptive and analytical works. It has been used since by less sympathetic or fairminded authors who have emphasized its sensational aspects.

Mormons and their establishments have been "tourist attractions" almost from the beginning, and travellers' accounts abound. Unfortunately, the observer often saw only what he wanted or expected to see and departed but little better informed than when he arrived. This is not to dismiss travellers' accounts as irrelevant, but only to suggest the obvious about what they often said. Certainly they are no sure key to truth as primary sources, but many are valuable. In 1844 Josiah Quincy and Charles Francis Adams stopped at Nauvoo. Their

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, IV, 385.

<sup>7</sup> Ray B. West, *The Kingdom of the Saints* (New York, 1957), pp. 283, 294 ff.

visit with Joseph Smith provides one of the rare appearances of the prophet in literature as a real (albeit somewhat extraordinary) mortal.<sup>8</sup> In 1859 the intrepid Horace Greeley stayed in Salt Lake City while on his way to California and wrote his extensive impressions with refreshing honesty, wit, and candor.<sup>9</sup> Two foreign travellers, Jules Remy and Richard Burton, also visited the city of the Saints in the fifties and later published works of remarkable objectivity.<sup>10</sup>

Two writers whose accounts might be described as observations-at-length were Charlotte Haven and Thomas L. Kane. They were both gentiles who had extended contact with Mormons at one time or another and who were not unfriendly to them. Charlotte Haven was a young New Hampshire woman of wit and intelligence who came to Nauvoo in 1842 to live with a relative, also a gentile. Her letters constitute a record of impressions that change perceptibly from an early contempt to an easy tolerance and even sympathy. The Charlotte Haven letters show Nauvoo as it was seen by one neither a pro- nor anti-Mormon zealot.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Leiper Kane was a young Philadelphia lawyer with humanitarian instincts and Washington connections who espoused the cause of the driven Saints in 1846. He was their champion for many years, finally serving as a negotiating agent between Brigham Young and President Buchanan at the time of the "Utah War" of 1857-1858. Kane was one gentile whom the Mormons adopted as friend and brother, and whose accounts show both sympathy and a painstaking attempt at accuracy.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Josiah Quincy, son of the Josiah Quincy who was mayor of Boston 1823-28 and President of Harvard (1828-45), became mayor of Boston in 1845. Quincy wrote a chapter on Smith in *Figures of the Past* (Boston, 1883) which is excerpted in William Mulder and A. R. Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons* (1958), pp. 131-142. *Among the Mormons* is a fascinating documentary of the early Mormon experience.

<sup>9</sup> "An Editor Goes West; Salt Lake City and the Mormons," in Warren S. Tryon, ed., *A Mirror For Americans*, III, 729-745; from Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859* (1863).

<sup>10</sup> Jules Remy, *Journey to Great Salt Lake* (1861), and Richard Burton, *The City of the Saints* (1861). These works are discussed in West, op. cit., pp. xviii and xix, and excerpted in Mulder and Mortensen, op. cit., pp. 278-281, 328-334.

<sup>11</sup> First reproduced in the *Overland Monthly* (San Francisco) for December, 1890, as "A Girl's Letters from Nauvoo," they are excerpted in Mulder and Mortensen, op. cit., pp. 116-127.

<sup>12</sup> See T. L. Kane, "The Mormons — A Discourse delivered before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, March 26, 1850," in Pennsylvania Historical Society Address, vol. I; O. O. Winther, ed., *A Friend of the Mormons, the Private Papers and Diary of Thomas Leiper Kane*; and Mulder and Mortensen, op. cit., pp. 195-213.

In addition to the works mentioned above there were also Charles Mackay, *The Mormons or Latter-day Saints* (London, 1851); John W. Gunnison, *The Mormons or, Latter-day Saints, in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake . . .* (Philadelphia, 1852); and Samuel M. Schmucker, *The Religious, Social, and Political History of the Mormons* (Auburn, N.Y., 1852).

Perhaps the first real historian to write seriously about Mormonism was that ubiquitous and prodigious scholar Hubert Howe Bancroft. Bancroft began in 1880 to seek the confidence of the Utah Church authorities in order to gain admittance to private church documents, assuring them that he wanted to be fair to the Mormons while not ignoring the "gentile point of view." After considerable negotiation he succeeded. His history was written using Mormon sources to be sure, but it also utilized much Mormon guidance in the writing. It consequently reflects throughout the historical viewpoint of the Utah Church. *The History of Utah* (San Francisco, 1890), published as volume twenty-six of Bancroft's compendious series, is not without integrity. It is especially important for its use of interviews with eye-witnesses and participants in the events described. "Even today, after sixty-five years," wrote a commentator in 1954, "it is still a useful standard narrative and is indispensable as a bibliographical guide for the first forty years of Utah's history of settled occupation."<sup>18</sup>

The first half of the twentieth century has produced a group of books on the Mormon past which have quite a different aspect; they are both "objectivist-realist" (rather than polemical or sensational) in approach, and, to an extent, scholarly in method. William A. Linn, *The Story of the Mormons* (1902); I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith Jr.* (1902); M. R. Werner, *Brigham Young* (1925); Harry M. Beardsley, *Joseph Smith and His Mormon Empire* (1931); and Fawn McKay Brodie, *No Man Knows My History; The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet* (1945) — all have such traits in common despite varying emphases, styles, and particular choices of subject within the generality of Mormon history. As such they are in a real sense pioneering works that play a part in the evolution of Mormon historiography. Unfortunately they tend to share the same serious limitations: They are all at heart books of exposé; and while they seek to expose the frauds, delusions, and dangers of Mormonism in a less Victorian and a more intellectually sophisticated mode than do their nineteenth century antecedents, they still do not escape the general frame of interpretation found in the earlier works. The exposure of Mormonism was for these writers apparently such a satisfying and final accomplishment that they were unable to ask or answer questions of larger

<sup>18</sup> George Ellsworth, "Hubert Howe Bancroft and the History of Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXIII (April 1954), 100. Bancroft's manuscript sources were not fully utilized by the historian himself nor have they been exploited yet by later scholars. They are housed in the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California. See George Ellsworth, "A Guide to the Manuscripts in the Bancroft Library Relating to the History of Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXII (July 1954), 197-247.

historical significance. Thus, despite their important contributions to the scholarship of the Mormon past, they did not achieve a maturity in the endeavor. They might be called "neo-nativist," using as they do the same techniques to the same ends as an earlier generation, but clothing them in impressive, sometimes informative and provocative, modern dress.<sup>14</sup>

Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*, a biography of Joseph Smith, deserves special consideration. The latest of the serious "neo-nativist" histories of Mormonism just alluded to, it is in a sense the culmination, the ultimate, of the type, and represents both the best and the worst of the tendencies common to the group. Mrs. Brodie's book is so exhaustive in its coverage and painstaking in its use of primary sources that it has become a recognized standard work on Mormon origins and early history. Doubtless in this respect the work is unparalleled in the field, and may remain so for some time, a guide to those who undertake less ambitious studies.

However, Mrs. Brodie was so anti-Mormon in her own intellectual orientation that she succumbed to the temptation to bring nineteenth century literature of Mormon countersubversion uncritically and in large doses into her own work.<sup>15</sup> The seemingly contradictory theses of *No Man Knows My History* are that Joseph Smith was a charlatan (and Mormonism a conscious, premeditated hoax) and that the main force perpetuating the Mormon religion through the generations is the persistent magnetism of Smith's personality. Mrs. Brodie's zeal to create the grand and ultimate exposé of Mormonism knew no bounds, and she utilized all the techniques previously devised to advance that purpose, including those of Linn, Werner, Riley, *et al.*, her neo-nativist predecessors on whom her work relies heavily, if tacitly. For example, *No Man Knows My History* displays Linn's tendency to dismiss the complex or arresting in Mormon history as ludicrous or absurd.<sup>16</sup> There is in both Brodie and Linn incredulity that anything connected with Mormonism (excepting its abominations) could ever be taken seriously. From Werner's *Brigham Young* came the grudging admiration reserved for the enormities of only the greatest, most magnificent rogues, together with a Twainesque humor that maintains urbanity in the presence of the

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<sup>14</sup> Linn and Werner are still influential and widely relied upon. Indeed, they remain two of the most useful books written about Mormonism, despite their parochialism.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Mrs. Brodie devotes thirty-one pages to documenting the existence of forty-eight plural wives for Joseph Smith, proof so alleged, *ex-post-facto*, and circumstantial as to be unconvincing to this reader. See Brodie, pp. 434-465.

<sup>16</sup> Linn's response to Smith's intriguing views on national politics in 1844 was simply, "It seems almost incomprehensible that the promulgator of such political views could have taken himself seriously." Linn, *History of the Mormons*, p. 253.

impossible. From Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism*, Mrs. Brodie took the tool of psychoanalysis, more a hatchet than a scalpel in the hands of a crusading journalist; and finally from Beardsley, *Joseph Smith and His Mormon Empire*, came the style of flippant irony and the sly humor of the bawdy.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, Mrs. Brodie's work, though synthetic, is ultimately her own, a subtle yet emphatic declaration of spiritual and intellectual independence from her Mormon origins and antecedents, set in a format of wide research and a popularized journalistic writing style, with an abundance of blood, sex, and sin.<sup>18</sup> Mrs. Brodie is a modern "apostate," her book an exquisite modern exposé. *No Man Knows My History* is a transitional work; while itself an emotional and intellectual captive of the primitive sectarian conflict, it demonstrated the possibilities for Mormon history that inhere in scholarly investigation.

In the generation since Mrs. Brodie wrote, the appearance of a whole new corpus of professional works has begun to revolutionize Mormon historiography. Some are authored by juring Mormons, some by Mormons only nominal in affiliation, and some by gentiles. They tend to have in common a desire to free the writing of Mormon history from the various parochial strictures of the past and to make it a part of a larger historical whole. Their writings recognize that the unique is not necessarily the aberrant or the pathological; furthermore, they tend to ignore or dismiss the subversive possibilities of Mormonism that so much obsessed earlier writers. Important examples of such works are: Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (1950); William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia* (1957); Thomas O'Dea, *The Mormons* (1957); Ray B. West, *The Kingdom of the Saints* (1957); Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (1958); Juanita Brooks, *John Doyle Lee; Pioneer, Zealot, Scapegoat* (1962); and Robert Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (1965).

The publication recently of several well-edited volumes of documents throws much additional light on Mormon history. They include: William Berrett and Alma Burton, eds., *Readings in L.D.S. Church History* (3 vols., 1953-1958); Robert Cleland and Juanita

<sup>17</sup> Ray B. West in the preface to *Kingdom of the Saints* has written an original and stimulating essay about some of the problems of the Mormon past, including a penetrating analysis of *No Man Knows My History*.

<sup>18</sup> Sensational writing which utilizes Mormon historical subjects seems not to die. See for example Irving Wallace, *The Twenty-seventh Wife*, which sports such chapter titles as "The Rebel of the Harem" and "The Adulteress."

Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848-1876* (1955); William Mulder and A. R. Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons* (1958); and Juanita Brooks, ed., *On The Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout* (1964). A somewhat special case is the publication of the journals of Joseph Smith, Jr., as *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Period I*, edited by Brigham H. Roberts (6 vols., Salt Lake City, 1902). This is an official publication of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the editorial comment is frankly an extensive piece of Mormon apologetics. It has been alleged that the work is not a reliable edition of the original, which is presumably in the closed archives of the Church. Such allegations are unproven, however.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to book publications there have been in the present generation many scholarly periodical articles of which the following list is but a small sample: three articles by the economist and historian Leonard J. Arrington, "The Settlement of the Brigham Young Estate," *Pacific Historical Review*, XXI (1952), 1-20; "Early Mormon Communitarianism: The Law of Consecration and Stewardship," *Western Humanities Review*, IV (1953), 341-369; and "An Economic Interpretation of the Word of Wisdom," *Brigham Young University Studies*, I (1959), 37-49; M. Hamlin Cannon, "Migration of English Mormons to America," *American Historical Review*, XIII (1944), 136-150; R. Kent Fielding, "The Mormon Economy in Kirtland, Ohio," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXVII (1959), 331-358; Gustive O. Larson, "Land Contest in Early Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XX (1961), 309-325; and James Lancaster, "By the Gift and Power of God," *Saints Herald*, CIX (November 15, 1962), 798 ff., a study of the translation of the Book of Mormon.

Finally, there is a large and growing body of unpublished doctoral dissertations which, although they are of uneven quality, are important sources in themselves and are a harbinger of increasing scholarly production in the field of Mormon history. Important examples are Therald Jensen, "Mormon Theology of Church and State" (University of Chicago, 1938); S. George Ellsworth, "History of Mormon Missions in the United States and Canada, 1830-1860" (University of California, 1951); and J. K. Melville, "The Political Ideas of Brigham Young" (University of Utah, 1956).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Smith's journal was first published from the 1840's to the 1860's in the periodical *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion and assessment of doctoral dissertations and other recent scholarly writings on Mormon history, see Leonard J. Arrington, "Scholarly Studies of Mormonism in the Twentieth Century," *Dialogue*, I (Spring 1966), 15-32.

As hopeful as these trends in historical writing may be, the fact remains that both factual knowledge of Mormon history and adequate intellectual constructs to explain it are scant. There is no satisfactory biography of either Joseph Smith or Brigham Young, and there are not likely to be such biographies in the near future. There is no adequate survey of Mormon history as a whole. There is very little written about the period before 1839, and the period before 1830 is almost as hazy as fable. Utah Church history since 1900 is as yet unexplored, and no scholarly work has been published about the history of the Reorganized Church. More disturbing than all of this is the fact that the chief "clientele" for Mormon history, i.e., Latter-day Saints themselves, do not as yet demand good history. Mature historical writing is most likely to result when thoughtful people raise important questions about the present which can only be answered by a resort to their past. The prevailing climate within Mormondom is as yet characterized by unconcern or timidity about such questions.





General Joseph Smith reviewing the Nauvoo Legion.