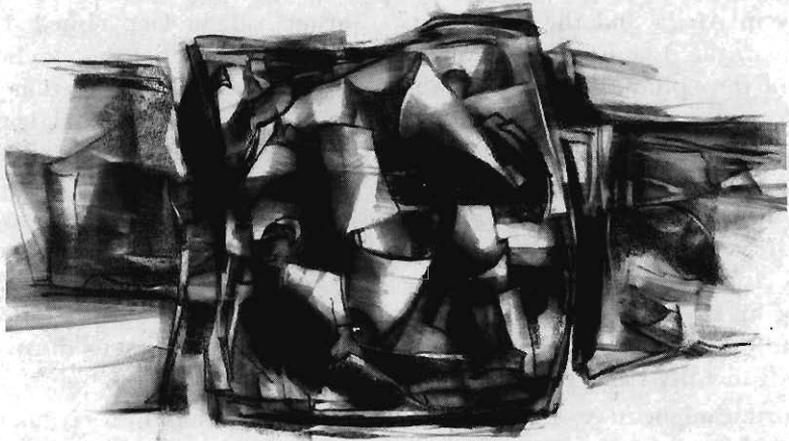


T. B. H. Stenhouse, and which marred his *Rocky Mountain Saints*; it is not saturated with the fervor which made the works of one such as Parley Pratt religious tracts rather than literature; it did not have the preconceived Gentile viewpoint of outrage which could warp even so great a talent as a Mark Twain; nor, finally, was it subjected to the gutting of ruthless censorship that butchered so much work of a B. H. Roberts. Whether *City of the Saints* is or is not the best book on the Mormons published in the nineteenth century, I must admit that I have failed the challenge of the superlative. If it isn't, it must at least stand until a better one is put forward.



## MRS. BRODIE AND JOSEPH SMITH

*Max H. Parkin*

*Exploding the Myth About Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet.* By F. L. Stewart. New York: House of Stewart Publications, 1967. x, 75pp. \$2.50. Max Parkin, who teaches in the Church's weekday religious education program in Salt Lake City, has done extensive work on Fawn Brodie's biography of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History*.

Few books about Joseph Smith or the Mormons have been extolled or berated with such intensity as the imaginative biography *No Man Knows My History*, by Fawn M. Brodie. After eight printings and twenty-three years of vigorous sales, the book is not only still supplying a continuing market of a thousand copies a year, but is also being considered for a revised edition in honor of its twenty-fifth anniversary. In it, Brodie theorizes that Joseph Smith created Mormonism — in part accidentally — as he, through his gifted personality, synthesized elements from his New England environment to produce a religion peculiarly appropriate to the land.

Naturally, at the first appearance of the book, Mormon writers deftly accused Mrs. Brodie of shoddy scholarship, alleging that she quoted sources

out of context, developed a predetermined thesis, and generally produced a biased, unreliable, non-historical volume. A Church committee made the first refutation in an article in the *Church News*, May 11, 1946, which was also printed in pamphlet form; the same year Dr. Hugh Nibley entered the controversy with his critique, *No Ma'am That's Not History*. Milton R. Hunter denounced the book in *The Pacific Historical Review* in 1947, and his work was soon followed by Francis W. Kirkham's refutation in the first volume of *A New Witness for Christ in America*. None of these, however, seemed to affect the wide acceptance Brodie's Book enjoyed outside the Church.

Why such acceptance? Probably Brodie's professed scholarship, her attention to the often ignored human qualities in Joseph Smith's personality, and her acceptance of the fashionable assumption that things and people are pre-eminently a product of the social environment are largely the reasons for the book's wide appeal.

Except for Nibley's *The Myth Makers* in 1961, for two decades Mormon critics neglected Brodie until F. L. Stewart entered the controversy. Miss Stewart, who uses her maiden name for this book, is a New York screenplay writer working professionally under the pseudonym Lori Donegan. Her interest in *No Man Knows My History* began when she undertook research for a screenplay on the life of the Mormon Prophet. Her associates highly recommended *No Man Knows My History* as a technical guide to the life of Joseph Smith. After reading Brodie's biography and checking the footnotes, Miss Donegan found the book to be totally inadequate and untrustworthy as a source. Her awareness of the prominence *No Man Knows My History* enjoys and further research into its sources induced Miss Donegan to undertake her present effort.

The resulting book, *Exploding the Myth About Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (Mrs. Brodie's book is the myth being exploded), contains eleven short chapters subdivided into sixty-three arguments against Mrs. Brodie's scholarship, plus a chapter reviewing Joseph Smith's alleged trial of 1826. Her approach is easy to follow (although more footnotes to Brodie would be helpful) and her objections to *No Man Knows My History*, which are generally supported by her own research, will make convincing reading to the believer and should induce further inquiry by non-Mormons. Stewart contends that Brodie is contradictory, makes unfounded statements, ignores available evidence that would have changed the complexion of the book, and makes numerous miscellaneous errors.

For example, Stewart points out that Brodie portrays the parents of the Prophet as undesirables by associating them with people of another time and place. Mrs. Brodie relies upon the diary of Nathan Perkins, who, Brodie states, visited central Vermont in 1789 and found a "people . . . nasty . . . poor . . . and low lived." Stewart states that Reverend Perkins did not travel to central Vermont at all, but to western Vermont, as his diary makes clear, whereas the Smiths lived in eastern Vermont. Furthermore, Asael Smith, the Prophet's paternal grandfather, and his son, Joseph Smith, Sr., did not move to Vermont until three years after Perkins' visit, and the Prophet's mother, Lucy Mack,

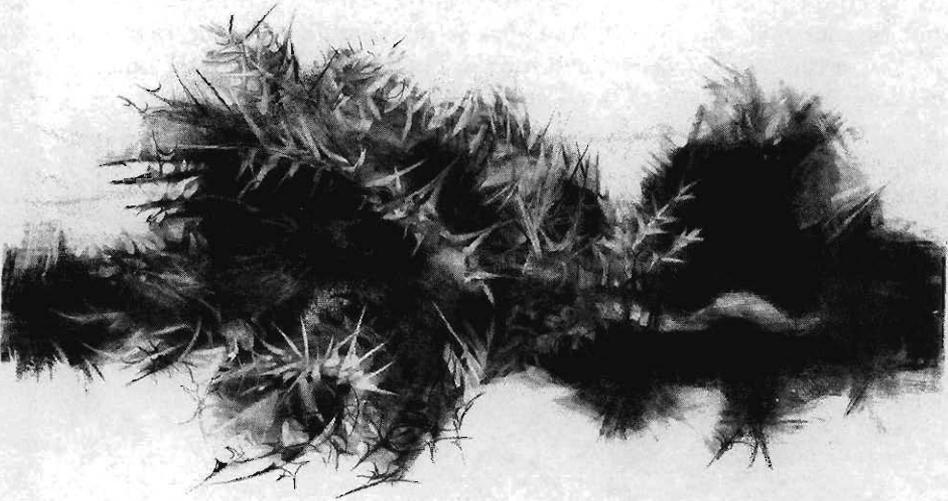
did not move there until six years after. The facts challenge Brodie's assertion that the Smiths were from a low-bred society.

Stewart suggests that Brodie, besides perverting the circumstances, also ignores facts, which if considered would have compelled a different conclusion. Joseph's early claim to religion is a case in point. Although the *Wayne Sentinel* of June 26, 1829, contained an article reporting that Joseph had made religious claims "for some time past" and other similar articles followed, Brodie preferred to quote Obadiah Dogberry, an acknowledged enemy of Smith's, in the *Palmyra Reflector* a year and half later, saying that Joseph had "never made any serious pretensions to religion" until the discovery of the Book of Mormon. The context of Dogberry's article suggests that he was writing about Joseph's affiliation with institutionalized Christianity, but the inference Brodie draws is that he had no spiritual experiences prior to his Book of Mormon claims. The same month that Dogberry's article appeared, February, 1831, another *Reflector* article stated that Joseph "had seen God frequently and personally." From this article it is impossible to determine the date of the stated spiritual experiences, but it seems evident that Brodie avoids such statements to impose upon her subject an attitude of irreligion. To further accomplish this objective Brodie uses affidavits gathered by the apostate Philastus Hurlburt which she says cannot be "dismissed by the objective student." Whitney R. Cross, however, observes that every circumstance of these affidavits seems to invalidate them as "obviously prejudiced testimonials." Brodie uses the affidavits, Stewart contends, to malign Joseph, and draws from them those statements that would tend to discredit her subject. In such ways Brodie's unfair technique soon manifests itself. "The early religious experiences of Joseph Smith are denied, burlesqued or ignored," Stewart writes. "Early newspaper articles confirming Joseph's religious claims are suppressed, and the reader is given selected later articles that question his religious motivations, and is told that these are the first" (p. 27). Stewart points out that Brodie is also inconsistent in ways that discredit the Prophet, calling him cynical when it suits her purpose and at another time suggesting that there was "no evidence of cynicism even in Joseph's most intimate diary entries" (p. 50). It is Brodie's distortion of Joseph Smith's personality by careful selection of sources that deprives the book of historical plausibility. It is essentially the same weakness as displayed by the Mormon apologists who have produced an equally implausible and often highly saccharine picture of Joseph Smith.

While criticizing Brodie for the luxury of speculation, Stewart occasionally indulges herself. In defending the Prophet, Stewart speculates that Joseph's use of wine was always in conjunction with the sacraments — including the sacrament of marriage; there is, however, evidence to the contrary. For instance, in 1836, Joseph drove members of his family to Painesville, Ohio, where they "procured a bottle of wine, broke bread, ate and drank . . . ." (*History of the Church*, II, p. 447; cf. V, p. 380). In her treatment of the First Vision, Stewart errs in assuming that the references to "the vision" in the *History of the Church* are evidences of general knowledge of the First Vi-

sion within the Church during the 1830's (p. 22). Actually, "the vision" references allude to the Vision of the Degrees of Glory which Church members for a while were told not to repeat because conflict often ensued.

But despite its shortcomings, the evidence in Stewart's book demonstrates that *No Man Knows My History* is an inexact portrait, not a history of Joseph Smith, and that scholars may profit by a serious re-examination of the popular biography. Stewart aims to alert the reader to Brodie's deliberate manipulating of her sources, and to urge him to proceed with caution and not complacently accept all that Brodie propounds as history. Hopefully, from a springboard such as *Exploding the Myth About Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* a more trustworthy biography of the Mormon Prophet will emerge and the historical Joseph will be found.



## SHORT NOTICE

*Out of the West.* By Lu Jones Waite. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1968.

Richard Tracy, a champion rodeo performer, ropes Michael Van Vlete, III, a cowboy-man of the world and Harvard graduate, into going home with him to the Rocking T Ranch. Mike likes his new environment ("What an empire! What a way of life! Michael Van Vlete felt prickling goose bumps . . ."), and likes even more Richard's sister "Lovely Linda" ("teeth as even as matched pearls," "twin dimples," "round, hard and desirable"). *Out of the West* is the story of a Mormon family and the cowboy who becomes a part of it.

No one can quarrel with Mrs. Waite's sincerity; she no doubt sees the book as an inspirational guide to the problems and heartaches common to many L.D.S teenagers. Deseret Book Company anticipates that "this intriguing story will bring both tears and laughs to all who read it, and will help build faith and testimony. . . ." But the world she describes is old-fashioned,