

probably did shoot and kill that Salt Lake grocer and his son and that the I.W.W. did cynically exploit Hillstrom's execution in order to make him a martyr and strike a blow at the "system" they abhorred. What troubled this reviewer, however, was the failure on the part of the authors to recognize that just as important as the question of Joe Hill's guilt or innocence was the question of whether he received an absolutely fair trial or whether, partly because of anti-Wobbly sentiment in the area, certain of his civil liberties were violated and his guilt was not *proven* beyond a reasonable doubt. The student of this dramatic episode in Utah history should ask himself if, with the same elements of objective circumstantial evidence against him, a hypothetical son of a member of the L.D.S. Council of Twelve would ever have faced the firing squad. Instead, the insensitivity of the authors to the deeper implications of this case for the cause of Justice and their obvious resentment of the Wobblies and all they stood for unintentionally give the reader some insight into the mood that must have prevailed in the Salt Lake Valley in 1915.

Other shortcomings could be noted. Footnoting and documentation is not as thorough as it should be for what purports to be a serious work. One wonders why, if Woodrow Wilson's intercession in the Joe Hill case aroused the wrath of Utahns to such a degree, Wilson carried the state with ease a year later while Spry was being retired to private life. But there is no need to dwell on minor defects. While the suspicion lingers that few people outside of Governor Spry's own family will want to read this volume from cover to cover, it can be of limited use to the research scholar. Moreover, if the sources available on Spry's career are as uneven and often unrevealing as this treatment would suggest, the job of providing him with a biography will probably never have to be done again.

## Our Uncle Will

THOMAS E. CHENEY

*Uncle Will Tells His Story.* By Juanita Brooks. Salt Lake City: Taggart and Company, Inc., 1970. 249 pp. \$12.50.

In the final chapter of this book appear the words:

Someone has said that writing a man's life is like sending a bucket into a deep well and drawing it out full, then dipping a cup into this, spilling some in the process, and drinking the bit that is left. It is so with this summary, for each chapter leaves more unsaid than it records. I read it over and think, 'why should anyone be interested enough to read this?' Except for my immediate family and friends perhaps no one else should care. I have never become famous; I never have become even moderately wealthy. I have a large family and many friends. My wealth lies mostly in my descendents.

The book is surely of more interest to the immediate family and friends of Will Brooks than to others. Yet the work is, as A. R. Mortensen says in the Forward, "the epitome of all of us whose roots go deep into the isolated and

empty spaces of the great West." If a man with a good memory and a talent for experience drinks up the very spirit of Mormon frontier country as a laborer, student, store clerk, rancher, farmer, storekeeper, sheriff, and postmaster and lives to be emeritus to them all; and if he has a gifted wife, whose talent for experience is even greater, who can amplify his memory with her own and record it all interestingly and skillfully—their product is good, the folk history of the race, the lore of the people.

For writing this book Juanita Brooks received first place award from the Utah State Institute of Fine Arts creative writing competition for autobiography in 1969. In this award, however, is a dichotomy, for Juanita, not Will, prepared the book. From the Introduction the reader learns that Will Brooks taped his recollections. Juanita used these tapes to record her husband's story. But those of us who know Juanita see in the book Juanita's own story as well as her husband's, told simply, beautifully, and honestly, in her own lucid style, revealing her own attitudes. Whose autobiography is it? Uncle Will Brooks', of course. It is also, in part, Juanita's. Here is the recorded proof of two in marriage becoming one.



Four years before his death Will Brooks was made an honorary member of the Dixie High School Pep Club. Students gave him their love, honorary seating at their functions, and gifts, the most prized of which was a quilted lap robe to use at football games. It was a lovely thing, patterned with a huge white D on a background of blue and in the center white letters, "Our Uncle Will." He was Uncle Will to the people of St. George.

The autobiography covers the life of the man from birth to death, 1881 to 1970. Born in St. George, William Brooks was dyed with the red of the hills,

filled with the grit of the dry earth, fed with the clean air of the wide spaces of the Southwest. Although he doesn't say it, his land, his earth, allows no interpolation other than wholesomeness. Yet neither Juanita as writer nor Will as informant weaken nostalgic reflections with didacticism or sentimentalism, as is so commonly done in family autobiographies. Some present day cynics may condemn the work; they may say Uncle Will and Juanita are too good, the revelation of character too ideal. Yet the early West with its sparse population produced thousands of people who, like the Brookses, emanated kindness in every act.

Sheriff Brooks provided home-like help for people in trouble with the law. Instead of arresting a boy for theft he talked the youth into returning the tithing money he had stolen. When two boys, 12 and 13, stole a car in Las Vegas and drove it to St. George where the Sheriff caught them, he took them home. Juanita washed them, fed them, and as the Sheriff put them to bed, he asked them if they wanted to say their prayers. Both boys knelt by the bed, one crossed himself and both lips moved as they whispered prayers.

The most exciting story of the book, a perfect unit in itself, is that of Lew Fife and Jack Weston. Weston, a professional thief, completed his final robbery with the help of his common-law wife, Daisy Butler, just before he was apprehended and fatally shot by the Sheriff of Iron County, Lew Fife. The stirring story of Fife's courage and ingenuity is too long to tell in detail here. Though left handcuffed to a tree, he escaped and survived. But the thief, who operated only in rural areas, died of wounds and was buried in a shallow grave by his accomplice. Then Sheriff Brooks captured Daisy Butler and put her in the St. George jail. It was Juanita who searched her, gave her articles of clothing, felt sorry for her, and led her to confess, to tell her whole story and pay her debt to society.

Local color strengthens the book. The reader sees the barrel of water by the house, refilled each day for household use, the two outdoor toilets behind the courthouse, used by the courthouse clientele as well as the school children, the brass band gathered as part of a celebration to welcome home Dr. Higgins after he served a prison term for polygamous cohabitation.

The folklorist finds interest in the revelation of customs. For example, the Indian wedding, the prisoner released for a half day to attend L.D.S. quarterly conference, the man who was said to have died of exposure after they gave him a bath and removed layers of dirt.

The publisher did a commendable job of makeup. This is a book to put on the stand by the bed in the guest room. The photographic display of folk artifacts amplifies its historical value.

The potpourri of folklore, folk history, folk characterization, local color, and family history is indeed a tasty dish. Even though it contains some triviality and items of family interest only, these are few and become lost in the whole so that they neither add nor subtract from the entire offering.

Readers who finish the book will come away better informed and, moved by the tone of the book, feeling that life is full of a number of good things, interesting and good people, and happy experiences. They will come away knowing that Uncle Will had courage, good judgment, and charisma, that he was truly the kind who never had a teacher he didn't like, that he held no ill will toward any man.