

# BOOK REVIEWS

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## Exploring the Mormon Past

DONALD R. MOORMAN

*Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* edited by Davis Bitton. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977, xi, 406 pp., index. \$29.95

Mormons have always had a passion for recording the experiences that shaped their lives—their dreams, ideals, intentions and conceptions of themselves. The sheer volume of their diaries, journals and other records stagger the imagination. Nothing so certifies this phenomenon than Davis Bitton's monumental collection, the product of more than a decade of hard work and tenacity. Taking the citations in their entirety, scholars can view the broad panorama of Mormon society—how money and power, along with a variety of religious, economic and historical influences entered the lives of pioneers and shaped their character as well as their assumptions about their world. From the writings of ordinary people, as well as from the exalted, the volume records their candid reactions to the many problems that haunted their existence. The result leaves a picture of a humane, gentle, hard-working and very opinionated Mormon population—a portrayal that goes a long way toward destroying the provincial, narrow-minded and puritanical image that lived in the minds of nineteenth-century enemies of the Saints. When contemplated together, the diaries and journals have the same fascination as a well-ordered history held together by the thread of the pioneer's common experience. Good witnesses to the crippled dreams and frustrations of the hard-scrabble life and to the haunting solitude indigenous to the wide-open frontier of the Great Basin are to be found in profusion among the nearly three hundred

sources in this *Guide*.

For those who spend a greater part of their productive years in the gloom of dusty archives, this volume is a breath of air. As most scholars realize, history is the gradual accumulation of assorted glimpses, each unimportant in itself, but collectively contributing to a written portrait. It is easier to skim off the most important and the readily accessible materials, usually papers of outstanding national figures or religious figures of regional importance. In Utah, the ruling hierarchy, along with those who enjoyed their close association and confidence, have received more than their fair share of attention while the unheralded many have generally been ignored. It is in this light that one must carefully look at Dr. Bitton's compilation.

Conscious of the increasing interest in all aspects of history, Dr. Bitton, assistant to the Mormon Church Historian and Professor of History at the University of Utah, has published this new study to encourage further research in the life and times of the Latter-day Saints. The editor has spared no pains in covering available materials in the local archives and has relied heavily on published lists in libraries outside Utah. Generally, he employs a rigorous and substantial scholarly apparatus to ensure accuracy in content and execution. Proofreading is uniformly careful, and the *Guide* is well-organized and clearly written, though many entries might be criticized for their brevity.

It seems carping then to find fault with Professor Bitton's work, yet minor irritants do deserve attention. Biographical entries are sometimes incomplete. This useful book is marred by a less than comprehensive index; the author omits

important place names and specific references to neighboring states. Having personally watched the progress of this work, this reviewer must note that the brief credits in the forward do not give deserved recognition to those who labored in gathering, writing and arranging the *Guide*. Even a token *et al* would be preferred to the passing manner in which they are recognized. Although the print

is clear and pleasing in size, the binding is so weak that one wonders about its longevity under heavy use.

This book is a collector's item, however, in spite of its awkward format (8½ inches wide by 11¼ inches) and its thirty-dollar price tag. All students of Mormon history will find themselves constantly referring to this useful volume.

## A Clash of Interests

RICHARD A. BARTLETT

*A Clash of Interests: Interior Department and the Mountain West 1863-96* by Thomas G. Alexander. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977, xii, 256 pp., appendix, bibliography, index. \$11.95

This excellent, provocative study breaks new ground in probing the history of the Intermountain West. It had its inception when Professor Alexander noticed the widespread dissatisfaction of the residents of the far western Territories with the Federal government. Why, he asked, did they grumble when that government clearly spent more money in the Territories than it took from them? Expanding his investigation, he had to answer still other questions: For what functions did Congress appropriate funds, and why? For what activities did Westerners want Federal funds appropriated? How well were policies planned and how well were they implemented?

For his study the author chose Utah, Idaho and Arizona Territories. They were geographically similar and their histories fitted into a relatively similar chronology. Arizona and Idaho Territories were created in 1863; Idaho achieved statehood in 1890 and Utah in 1896. Moreover, Idaho and Arizona would balance any tendency away from the norm due to Utah's Mormon population and

its conflicts with the Federal government.

In three parts, cut into nine chapters, Alexander analyzes these relations. Particular attention is paid to land policy as carried out under the General Land Office and Indian matters under the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He rightly identifies the Washington policy makers and probes their rationales. The Secretaries of Interior are given ample attention, but Alexander finds that for much of the period the real source of power was the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives. There the opponent of Western needs was ultraconservative, narrow-minded William S. Holman of Indiana.

Conclusions from this penetrating study are enlightening. Canards about the corruption of Indian agents, accusations about frauds in land acquisition, and widely believed premises about western attitudes toward land and Indians are exposed as totally inaccurate or, at the most, half-truths.

For almost the first time a competent western historian has written a book that defends Westerners from these widely disseminated accusations. The blame for so much wrong is placed squarely in the lap of Congress and the Eastern establishment. John Wesley Powell, that patron saint of western bureaucrats and certain well-known writers about the