

# REVIEWS

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## *Cartooning Mormons*

*Freeway to Perfection.* By Calvin Grondahl. Salt Lake City: Sunstone Foundation, 1978. 95 pp., illus. \$2.95.

Reviewed by GARY L. BUNKER, *Professor of Psychology at Brigham Young University.*

Caricaturing the Mormon experience is hardly a new venture, but the cultural context of the present differs drastically from the past. For nearly the first century of Mormonism, cartoonists, including such powerful image makers as Thomas Nast and Joseph Keppler, maligned the Mormons unmercifully. On the other hand, a few Mormons and even some non-Mormons sympathetic to the plight of Mormonism used the cartoon medium to defend the faith. They likened Orson Pratt to David against Goliath in the Newman-Pratt debate, caricatured Senator Cragin and Congressman Cullom for their anti-polygamy legislation, attacked the Godbeites for their heterodoxy, and chided the national media for the simplistic treatment accorded Reed Smoot. Of course, such humorous counterattacks were no match for the flood of anti-Mormon illustrations in the national press.

With Mormonism now more securely rooted in the modern social setting, the Mormon cartoonist can afford to be more introspective and reflective as opposed to the apologetic stance of his artistic Mormon forebearers. It is in this spirit that Calvin Grondahl has applied the cartoonist's tools of the trade to Mormon themes once again.

Grondahl has already established himself as a cartoonist well beyond the borders of the Wasatch front. Syndicated

nationally by the Newspaper Enterprise Association, his cartoons appear in more than seven hundred newspapers. His artistic commentary on the national scene is often the most profound and persuasive statement on the editorial page where it appears.

By and large Grondahl maintains the high standard of excellence in this collection of Mormon cartoons. According to Allan Nevins and Frank Weitenkampf the cartoonist's creative product can be judged by three criteria: wit, fidelity to reality and moral purpose. Judged against each of these requirements, Grondahl's work fares well.

Religious cartooning presents some special problems for the popular artist. The potential for misunderstanding and offending the sensibilities of the faithful is particularly acute. Despite touching on a wide array of themes encountered in the Mormon experience, including home teaching, courtship, large families, food storage, visual aids from the pulpit, pageants, the lost tribes, Relief Society rehearsals, E.R.A., "religious" fads, etc., with very few exceptions, Grondahl, manages to avoid the pitfalls of speaking lightly of the sacred and making fun of others. A cartoon portraying an old maid giving a family home evening lesson to plants exemplifies the exception because it perpetuates an unfortunate stereotype. Such cartoons are neither typical of the volume nor of Grondahl. On the whole, it is not the carnival mirror of distortion that is held up to us, but an insightful and entertaining reflection of the frustrations, moral dilemmas, foibles and challenges faced by Mormons.

Aside from the quality of the humor which readers of Grondahl have come to

expect, there is an equally compelling reason for seriously considering purchasing a copy. Proceeds from the volume to the publisher, the nonprofit Sunstone

Foundation, will support continued publication of *Sunstone*, a magazine which has already made its mark in behalf of Mormon thought.

## *A Minor Landmark*

*The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*. Edited by Richard H. Jackson. Charles Redd Monographs in Western History, No. 9. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978. 169 pp., maps, charts, graphs. \$6.95.

Reviewed by RONALD W. WALKER a research historian in Salt Lake City.

Ask any Mormon culture buff about *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, *BYU Studies* or perhaps the *Utah Historical Quarterly* and you will get an informed response. But the Charles Redd Monographs in Western History? The odds are better than even that all you will get is a blank stare and shrugged shoulders. These volumes deserve better. During the last seven years, the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University has issued nine volumes, sometimes uneven in format and quality but usually interesting and often important.

*The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, a compilation of seven essays edited by BYU geographer Richard H. Jackson, is the most recent and in some respects the best in this continuing series. While more carefully and expensively packaged than some of its predecessors, it nevertheless shares some of the earlier editorial pitfalls. There is no index, and pesky typos mar the text. Several tables are unclearly titled, while more than one map suffers from unclear definition and unexplained gobbledygook. Jackson would have pleased readers by providing biographical sketches of the contributors, several of whom are only beginning to make their professional way. And I fear some may sell this collection short because its introductory essay

does a better job summarizing contents than placing the book within its scholarly setting and attempting to assess its importance. If the Redd Monographs are to widen their appeal, they must continue to improve their readability.

Nevertheless the book is a minor landmark. Along with Richard V. Francaviglia's recently published *The Mormon Landscape* (1978), it is a clear declaration that Mormon geographers intend to extend what has been a rather low profile. Until now Mormon scholars have turned to Lowry Nelson and Donald Meinig or to a growing volume of graduate school theses and dissertations when looking for geographical insights. Mormon geographers have been reticent to speak beyond their professional peers to a broader audience. *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West* portends changing times.

The volume not only reaches out to the general Mormon reading audience, but it also communicates. Some of the essays display the paraphernalia of modern geography—age distribution pyramids, curlicue graphs which wiggle worm-like up a page, population density maps and over a dozen statistical tables. While this data and visual analysis may not be light bedtime reading, the material is not deadening. Generally the prose is lucid. The articles are written in lucid prose with the authors varying in perspective and methodology. Five of the essays are written by professional geographers and two by historians. The line between historical geography and geographic history is thin, and the blend is compatible.

Only the loosest of themes bind the subject matter—the interaction of nineteenth century Mormons, their culture and their environment. In the lead