

## Mormon Country

*The Mormon Landscape: Existence, Creation, and Perception of a Unique Image in the American West.* By Richard V. Francaviglia. New York: AMS Press Inc., 1978. xviii + 177 pp., illus., biblio., index, \$13.25

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Those interested in the Mormon landscape should scan or, to use the author's favorite verb, *note* this study. Whether they decide to scan it by quick inspection or careful examination will depend on how closely they have looked at Mormon villages and their environs. Casual viewers will find this survey an informative introduction to the features that have differentiated Utah townscapes and landscapes from the rest of the Intermountain West. Even though close observers will find it quite superficial, they will probably applaud its holistic approach.

Whether scanners of either type decide to buy the book may also depend on their willingness to pay a 1980 price for a volume of 1970 vintage. Neither author nor publisher acknowledges the fact that, except for the index, *The Mormon Landscape* is simply a reprint of a University of Oregon Ph.D. thesis in geography. The most obvious sign of its origins lies in the bibliography that cites no sources after 1969. The book does read better and faster than any dissertations, partly because it features one page of maps or photographs for every two of text. That ratio, though, leaves less than 100 pages for elaboration of the "existence, creation, and perception" of the Mormon imprint upon the land, not nearly enough space for such a broad scope.

If only the publisher had allowed the author to expand the thesis and enlarge, rather than reduce, its graphics, it would rate a more positive review. Suggestive of its potential is Francaviglia's fine essay on

"The Passing Mormon Village" in *Landscape* (Spring 1978) which summarizes the book, updates it somewhat, and assesses Utahns' attitudes toward preservation of the cultural landscape. Since our landscapes do indeed "display us as cultures," what we need is a greatly expanded version of *The Mormon Landscape* or, even better, a series of studies by a variety of interpreters. (For a general guide, see the collection of essays edited by D. W. Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, Oxford University Press, 1979.) In reviewing the major themes of Francaviglia's work, I shall identify several directions that a revised edition or a new set of monographs might take.

*The Mormon Landscape* seeks to answer five questions set forth in the introduction, each of which becomes the focus for an entire chapter:

- 1) Is there really a distinctive landscape associated with rural-village Mormon settlement? If so, what is it?
- 2) How do these elements vary in space and time?
- 3) What were the primary factors in creating such a landscape?
- 4) How have writers and artists attempted to render the visual composition that is the landscape?
- 5) Are the Mormons themselves aware of any difference between Mormon and non-Mormon landscapes?

The first chapter, as expected, concludes that a distinctive rural-village landscape does characterize Mormonism. The author identifies as its most striking features: a gridiron town (never termed a "village" by Mormons themselves) centered on a church and surrounded by open fields and sage- or cedar-covered mountains; large square blocks separated by wide ditch- and three-lined streets; widely spaced brick or stone homes of Nauvoo style separated by gardens and unpainted barns, fences,

and granaries. These elements he effectively combines into a generalized "Canaanville" situated in a typical Wasatch valley. However, his small-scale diagrams and photographs, which favor the townscape over the landscape, fail to convey the visual impact of the scenes he describes nearly as well as Gary B. Peterson's slide-sound "Impressions of Mormon Country" (Master's thesis, University of Utah, 1974) or the photographic essays that have appeared too infrequently in *Dialogue* and even the *Utah Historical Quarterly*. In addition to larger and better photographs, one would welcome large-scale maps and aerial photos of actual villages and valleys. Such graphics would help resolve the much-debated question, how similar to or different from LDS settlements are Gentile places?

For a sample of forty-two agrarian towns scattered across the Intermountain West (varying in population size from 300 to 2000), Francaviglia mapped about twenty features of "The Mormon Landscape Through Space and Time" (Chapter 2). The religious architecture and farm-like look of the towns proved uniquely Mormon, but only in predominantly LDS places did he find five or more of his elements. Thus the combination of traits rather than single characteristics have set Mormon Country, especially the most rural and isolated areas, apart from adjoining regions. Not surprisingly, Francaviglia found that Mormons themselves readily recognized their own townscapes when shown photographs of Gentile and LDS places.

In treating the Mormon landscape through time, the author tries to date and locate the origins of its different features. He decides from limited evidence that most of them, at least as ideas, were brought by the Saints from their homelands or else adopted soon after their arrival in the West. Lacking, however, is any sense of the changes that occurred in the nineteenth century Utah landscape when homesteading and dry farming were introduced. Charles Peterson has described this "Imprint of Agricultural

Systems on the Utah Landscape" (in *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, BYU Press, 1978), but no one has demonstrated its development in graphic fashion. A comparison of Mormon settlement patterns by means of maps and photos at key times would show us when various elements appeared in (or disappeared from) the scene. Certainly the regional rural landscapes of Utah in the 1970s differ markedly from those of the 1920s which in turn looked quite unlike those of the 1870s. Perhaps the only way Utahns can preserve their changing landscapes is to reconstruct them in the form of graphic books for their coffee-free tables. (Charles van Ravenswaag's *The Arts and Architecture of German Settlements in Missouri*, University of Missouri Press, 1977, provides a model study of a vanishing culture in the Midwest that students of Mormon Country ought to examine.)

Chapter 4 comes closer to a bonafide treatment of the Mormon landscape through time by surveying the attempts of various writers and artists to capture the visual essence of the LDS environment. However, he treats them much too briefly and primarily to identify the obvious elements of Utah's landscape that caught their eye. Francaviglia also overlooks some keen observers (e.g., Phil Robinson) and, ironically, ignores the photographic medium that he himself uses most—e.g., *The Utah Photographs of George Edward Anderson* (University of Nebraska Press, 1979), Charles Savage, and others. The sketchy nature of this chapter makes one all the more eager to see the work of Tom Burnside on the history of Mormon art and artists.

In trying to interpret the Mormon landscape (Chapter 3), Francaviglia quite rightly turns to the motives and methods of the founding fathers. He suggests that church leaders not only dictated the location of settlements but also strongly influenced their architecture and overall visual appearance. He argues that Mormon isolation and internal mobility also contributed to the evolution of uniform patterns across Utah, and that the Saints' frugality added a ramshackle look to their