

Local History, Well Done

Corinne: The Gentile Capital of Utah by Brigham D. Madsen, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, 1980. xii + 339 pp., photographs, maps, and index. \$17.50

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According to a myth which circulated in Utah during the 1870s, Brigham Young had placed a curse on the town of Corinne and prophesied that the community's ungodly existence would be short-lived. In *Corinne: The Gentile Capital of Utah* Brigham D. Madsen has masterfully chronicled the rise and eventual decline of this colorful frontier town which, for nearly a decade, attempted to challenge Mormon dominance of the Great Basin. Those who associate Corinne only with a peaceful farming village located a few miles west of Brigham City in northern Utah should read this enlightening book about its earlier years.

Local history has achieved a prominent place in the efforts of recent scholars as such diverse communities as revolutionary Concord, Massachusetts, or nineteenth-century Jacksonville, Illinois, have been studied. The success of such an undertaking depends, to a large degree, upon the skill of the author in integrating a seemingly-isolated topic into the regional and national experiences of which it was a part. Professor Madsen has ably accomplished this task. The efforts of a virtual handful of Gentiles to attack the supposed follies of the Mormonism played a major role in the development of this tiny hamlet. Their actions won the applause of some in the eastern United States and served notice to the Latter-day Saint hierarchy that a threat to their ecclesiastical control of the government and economy of Utah Territory was imminent.

Corinne was a child of the transcontinental railroad finally completed at a site north of the Great Salt Lake in May 1869. Non-Mormon entrepreneurs, fearful of rivalry with the LDS competitors in Salt Lake City and Ogden, proposed to construct a gentile capital on the Bear River and to secure a large share of the anticipated trade with Idaho and Montana. But economic considerations were not their only motivation. Many of the initial investors in Corinne also sought to extend Federal jurisdiction over Utah and thus destroy the Mormon kingdom. The creation of a haven for Gentiles was envisioned as a vehicle whereby the territory might be reformed once and for all.

The promotion of Corinne as a legitimate rival to Salt Lake City was a chore to which the town's newspapers applied themselves with vigor. For example, in 1870 the editor of the *Corinne Reporter* boasted that the community ranked second only to Sacramento on the Central Pacific rail line. He went on to predict that within a few years the "burg on the Bear" would rival any city in the western United States. San Francisco and Chicago were described by the local paper as locked into fearsome competition for access to the Corinne trade. As was to be expected, the *Deseret News* and the *Ogden Junction* regularly derided these delusions of the Gentiles, but Corinnethians were confident that a prosperous future was theirs.

The story of the rivalry between Corinne and Utah Mormonism was told on many fronts: in the arenas of politics, cultural development and economics. Gentiles constantly lobbied in Washington, D.C., to seek legislation which would destroy polygamy forever and deprive the Latter-day Saints of political power in Utah. Corinnethians were elated with the introduction of the Cullom bill in Congress in 1869-70. The legislation was intended to abolish the abuses of Mormonism and restore Federal control in

Utah. When the House of Representatives passed the Cullom bill, a massive celebration was held in Corinne. However, when the Senate refused to endorse the act, its Utah proponents looked for other allies.

For a brief period the Corinne Gentiles aligned themselves with the Godbeite schism of the Mormon Church. Both groups shared a common dislike for Brigham Young and his theocratic government, but the Corinnethians never fully accepted the former Saints because of their reluctance to denounce polygamy. A political union between the Gentiles and the Godbeites was attempted with the founding of the Liberal Party in 1870, but it was a dismal failure at the polls. The movement did enjoy some success which it never really appreciated, as it provoked notable reforms within the church-controlled political system of Utah. In response to these non-Mormon pressures, the territorial legislature passed a female suffrage bill in 1870, and the LDS hierarchy encouraged the creation of Republican and Democratic parties in 1872. Because both developments, noble in appearance, were intended to perpetuate Latter-day Saint political power, they were denounced by the Corinnethians.

Professor Madsen's chapter on the cultural development of the Gentile capital is a fascinating study of life in late-nineteenth-century Utah. As was customary for a frontier community trying to bolster its image and provide amusement for its

residents, Corinne completed an opera house in October 1870. The social activity most frequently held in this structure was dances, although occasional dramatic performances took place as well. The opera house also hosted a number of lectures on the popular topic of polygamy. Among the notable orators who addressed that subject were Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse and Ann Eliza Young.

Three fraternal organizations maintained lodges in the community: the Odd Fellows Association; the Good Templars, who were concerned with moral reform movements and, most successfully, the Masonic Order. A number of the founders and later town leaders of Corinne were members of this brotherhood, first organized in 1872 with twenty-nine members, then expanded to forty-five the following year. The eventual decline of the community was accompanied by the disappearance of Masonry.

Just as Corinne had come into existence as an economic appendage of the railroad, it died with the completion of the Utah and Northern Railroad into Montana in 1878. The freighting business so important to Corinnethians quickly became a thing of the past as the population declined from almost fifteen hundred at its peak in the early 1870s to a dismal three hundred by the end of the decade. But for nearly ten years Corinne had served as a symbol of resistance to Mormon control of the Utah Territory. As the faithful Saints would have anticipated all along, Brigham Young's reported curse carried the day.

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