

## The Old Young Years

*Brigham Young: The New York Years* by Richard F. Palmer and Karl D. Butler (Provo, Utah: Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, 1982), 106 pp., \$9.95.

Reviewed by Larry C. Porter, Director of Church History, Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University.

THERE IS A DISTINCT ADVANTAGE in being a New Yorker when tracking one down in your own backyard. Richard Palmer's second great-grandfather, Noah Palmer, came to Palmyra in 1810 and owned land adjacent to the Martin Harris farm on the west. Richard was born in Canadaigua and lived in Palmyra for the first twelve years of life. Currently a reporter for the *Syracuse Herald Journal*, he is a homebred Yorker with a recognized facility for local history, geography, and the vernacular to match. These pluses are of particular value when tracing Brigham Young and his kin through a patchwork of homesteads in western New York.

The Brigham pump was primed when Richard and his coauthor, Karl D. Butler were granted permission to republish a 66-page softbound work by Mary Van Sickle Wait, *Brigham Young in Cayuga County, 1813-1829* (Ithaca, N.Y.: DeWitt Historical Society, 1964). Finding the account sketchy, lacking documentation and minus the Salt Lake City sources, they decided to start over. *The New York Years* is a product of more than a decade of intensive research at ground zero plus a pair of summer sessions in the LDS Church Historical Department. Fortunately, its Brigham materials were simultaneously being catalogued and yielded bountifully.

In a majority of the Brigham Young accounts written thus far, the real Brigham doesn't stand up until age thirty-one or thereabouts, already on his way across America with Joseph Smith. The pre-Church years are left in obscurity. But not now. A primary portion of the stimulating

text is concerned with the early life of Brigham Young and family members ending with Brigham's conversion and a brief rehearsal of his earliest missionary labors to 1841. Thirty-one photos have been tastefully selected.

Of course, the authors use some of the standard sources, but happily a bevy of new facts emerge. They have been able to garner many local items which are often difficult for the hit-and-run historian to absorb. There are local histories, oral traditions, cemetery, and surrogate records, not to mention a familiarity with the lay of the land. A thorough knowledge of Brigham's living at this site or that and his building this wing or that fireplace requires some prolonged and meticulous homework—at home.

The reader also comes away with a new recognition of the Young family structure. Numerous details concerning Brigham's brothers and sisters, their spouses, and their church affiliations add depth to the filial relationships extant in the expanded John Young, Sr., household. We have been exposed to Phinehas, Joseph and Lorenzo in previous encounters with the Youngs, but what of Abigail, Miriam, and Clarissa? New personalities begin to emerge for our inspection. It is difficult to know the whole Brigham until one becomes acquainted with those who interacted so intimately with the man himself.

Similarly, Brigham Young's religious experience prior to his exposure to Mormonism has been examined with insightful perspective. The authors have not strained to show him as being overreligious or underreligious in his search for the eternal.

I was also pleased to meet Brigham Young the carpenter, glazier, and painter. It was also interesting to meet Brigham Young the debtor. The authors affirm that he ultimately paid every debt, sometimes many years later. Despite his seemingly limitless capacity for work he was caught in

the bill bind. The account of his determination to satisfy old creditors is a tribute to the tenacity for detailed research described in text by these writers. Palmer and Butler have unraveled fact from fiction to produce a chronology of Brigham's places of employment and residences. They have also defused many myths of what Brigham actually made with his hands. It is a creditable job.

The comparative dearth of source documents for those initial years is the major problem. The authors acknowledged

to me: "We only wish that there was more information. We just plain ran out of material to write about." Wisely, they did not protract the volume beyond the available documents.

Although a number of writers have recently ploughed new ground on Brigham Young and more prospective contributors are poised in the wings, the Palmer-Butler volume is a refreshing and well-searched resource, the standard for the otherwise eclipsed era of the old Young years.

## An RLDS Leader

*F. M. Smith: Saint as Reformer 1874-1946* by Larry E. Hunt (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1982), 2 vols., paper vol. 1, \$11; vol. 2, \$12.

Reviewed by Robert D. Hutchins, teacher of American history at Sandwich High School, Sandwich, Illinois. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in educational administration at Northern Illinois University.

FEW SCHOLARS OF MORMONISM have studied the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and fewer still have studied its leaders. Larry Hunt, in this two-volume study follows the life of Frederick M. Smith, son of Joseph Smith III and second president of the RLDS Church. He is a complex man who sought to fulfill his spiritual calling as a member of what many consider a "chosen" family. Hunt traces Smith's roots from childhood through the development of his intellectual background to his confrontation with the Reorganized version of Mormonism's Kingdom of God on Earth. The reader then follows Smith's struggle as prophet and president to centralize the administration of his church, culminating in a hollow victory of obtaining "supreme directional control." Finally, Hunt places this story in the framework of the Progressive Era and mugwumpery which he claims had an overwhelming in-

fluence upon the direction Smith led his church.

According to Hunt, mugwumpery was the most influential as the focus of a reform vigor tempered by "the vision he appropriated from his communitarian heritage" which Smith felt would lead his church closer to God. "No scholar to this date," says Hunt, "has attempted to relate a leader from the broader Restoration tradition to the history of American reform in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (vol. 1, p. 19). Since few studies have ever focused on the Reorganization, the reader is given a rare view of the man, seen by his membership as an authoritarian prophet-executive chosen by God, as he attempts to move the RLDS church toward greater relevancy in modern America and furthermore "to inch America closer to social and economic justice" (vol. 1, p. 20).

The book is exceptionally honest and straightforward as is evidenced by an insightful treatment of Smith's embarrassment over the incompetence of a lay ministry called from among his peers while he sought a more systematic and disciplined group of spiritual leaders. The reader will also find a more thorough discussion of Smith's extensive involvement with Masonry than has hitherto been available. The book sheds further light on the