

Not Quite What Was Promised, But Much More

Merchants and Miners in Utah: The Walker Brothers and Their Bank, by Jonathan Bliss (Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1983), 429 pp., \$20.

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Merchants and Miners in Utah is a misleading title, for Jonathan Bliss's volume extends far beyond the boundaries of territorial Utah, extensive though they were, to tell the epic story of the Walker Brothers and their influence in the development of the Intermountain West. Even the subtitle, "The Walker Brothers and Their Bank," fails to correct the misleading title, for only seven of seventeen chapters concern the banking enterprise. The author devotes the first two chapters to the English background of the Walker clan and the next five to their pioneering journey to Utah. Chapters 9 and 10 trace their highly successful mining ventures, including the epic story of the Emma mine in Alta and the less notorious but more lucrative Montana mines in and around Butte — especially the Alice mine and Walkerville, the town which grew up around it.

Although the title is unfortunate, the volume is excellent. Bliss is a professional writer, and this ability is demonstrated in every chapter as he tells the story of the Walker Brothers and their rise from abject poverty in Salt Lake Valley to positions of wealth and influence which came to extend far beyond Utah. Bliss includes much more than just family history, for he has done his homework and relates interesting descriptions of the times and situations in which the Walkers developed. One of his best backdrops for the Walker Brothers

drama is his word picture of the woolen industry in nineteenth-century England and the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the English midlands where Matthew Walker, Sr., made and lost a fortune.

The Walkers' experience with Mormonism is handled with considerable tact. It is difficult to discover whether Matthew and Mercy Walker experienced a genuine conversion or simply saw the Mormon emigration program as "a cheap way of getting to the new world." Matthew, Sr., died in St. Louis at thirty-seven before his faith was really tested, and Mercy failed to impart whatever faith she had to her four sons. The author asserts that "with Mercy's death [in 1861], the last religious claim on her sons ended. From then on there seemed a gradual escalation of debate in both public and private forums between the Walker brothers and Brigham Young" (p. 149). They opposed the Church's attempt to levy a 50 percent surcharge on all liquor sold at Camp Floyd and became agents for the anti-Mormon newspapers *The Mountaineer* and *Peep O'Day*, both printed at Fairfield, next door to Camp Floyd. A formal break with the Mormon Church came soon afterwards when Brigham Young rejected their monetary contribution with the imperious demand that the brothers pay an honest 10 percent or face excommunication. The Walkers returned the check (in pieces) with the promise that there would be no more contributions. They added that they had never believed the Mormon doctrine. Brigham Young "convened a solemn conclave and did cut off the Walker Brothers from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and added that henceforth all good Mormons would spurn the firm of Walker Brothers and Company" (p. 141). Bliss