

REVIEWS

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.

Reviewed by Eugene E. Campbell, Professor of History Emeritus, Brigham Young University.

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

failed to add that the Mormon leader also turned the brothers "over to the buffetings of Satan."

From 1861 on, the Walkers were on the side of the non-Mormons, supporting, among others, the Godbeites, the Liberal political party, and the Masons. Bliss notes that the Walker Brothers' bank and the Mormon-backed Deseret National building stood at opposite ends of the block "like book-ends bracketing all the banking and business community of Salt Lake. Nothing could have better symbolized their opposite roles in the history of the society they served. One represented the Mormon Church, the other the non-Mormon movement" (p. 212).

Such a position in the Mormon-dominated community could have led to financial disaster, but the Walkers were in the right place at the right time. They not only survived but prospered as a result of the sale of Camp Floyd, the Civil War, and their involvement in the mining boom including developments in Utah's Park City, Alta, and Ophir, Nevada's Virginia City, and Butte.

Bliss is able to make even such things as banking financial reports seem interesting. He brings the four brothers — Sharp, Rob, Fred, and Matt Walker — to life. And although the biography was sponsored by the Walker descendants, he doesn't cover up their weaknesses. Sharp's drinking and Fred's involvement in the occult and unfortunate second marriage are described in detail. Although his reiterations of the

brothers' ability to anticipate the future are probably exaggerated, the text contains its own corrective by recanting their failure to take advantage of Silver Reef and the invitation to become partners in Marcus Daly's Anaconda Copper empire.

Unfortunately, Bliss is not quite as good a historian as he is a writer and is guilty of several historical errors. Millard Fillmore is listed as president in 1854 (p. 97) and he has Colonel Steptoe leaving the territory in 1865 (p. 98) instead of 1855. He uses the term "Mormon Corridor" incorrectly (p. 99) and suggests that the Mormons had a colony in Montana. He was careless about the spelling of Albert Sidney Johnston (p. 112, 130) and implied that Brigham Young sent the Utah militia to protect the overland telegraph without Lincoln's request that he do so (p. 142). His description of Patrick Conner as a "shameless bigot and an unabashed murderer" is a questionable assessment, probably the result of projecting Conner's post-Utah career backwards. Most of the errors seem to be in the early period of Utah's history and there is no reason to believe that the other parts of the book are similarly plagued.

My interest in the story was sustained as the author moved into the twentieth century and dealt with the banking problems caused by the Great Depression and the solutions of the New Deal; as well as the newer generations of the Walker Family.

I believe that every student of Utah's history would profit from reading this excellent volume.

Another Attempt at Understanding

The Principle by Kathryn Smoot Caldwell (Salt Lake City: Randall Books) 1983, 193 pp., \$7.95.

Reviewed by Pamela Gillie Carson, English teacher at Murray Community School, Murray, Utah.

The Principle, Kathryn Smoot Caldwell's first novel, received the significant encour-

agement of first prize in Randall Book's 1983 LDS Novel Writing Contest — \$500 plus a \$1,000 advance on royalties. (Second and third place winners Carol Lynn Pearson and Marilyn M. Brown received advances on royalties for *The Lasting Peace* and *Goodbye, Hello*, respectively.) It is devoutly to be hoped that this contest will become an annual feature, as Randall Book