

lar institution — completely ignoring, they say, its spiritual dimensions. Yet the authors did not set out to explore Mormon theology or the character of Mormon community life (for which they gained great respect). They sought instead to explain the rise of Church involvement in the larger society, from the politics of opposing the Equal Rights Amendment to the intricacies of financing a global religious organization. In my view, the Church cannot claim immunity from secular criticism when it acts in the secular sphere. In the long run, efforts to secure such immunity

can only be self-destructive. Without the honest perceptions of outsiders, we will not be stimulated to ask the difficult questions that can renew our courage to examine discrepancies that inevitably crop up between our spiritual values and our organizational practices.

America's Saints has become a best-selling book among the Mormons precisely because we need the kind of frank examination that Gottlieb and Wiley have provided. One hopes we have retained the capacity to learn from those with whom we share less than complete accord.

The Ultimate Stegner Interview

Conversations with Wallace Stegner on Western History and Literature by Wallace Stegner and Richard W. Etulain (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), 200 pp., \$15.

Reviewed by Gary Topping, curator of manuscripts, Utah State Historical Society.

WITH THE POSSIBLE exception of Louis L'Amour, Wallace Stegner has probably been interviewed more frequently than any other living Western writer. This is an impressive tribute to Stegner's accessibility to representatives of both scholarly and popular publications, and to his seemingly perennial appeal to audiences at many levels. Even taken together, though, the Stegner interviews have not, until recently, given us a truly comprehensive view of the man, his ideas, and his literary craft. Richard Etulain's cycle of ten interviews with Stegner — conceived, prepared, and edited with great skill — at last bridges those gaps.

The theme of the interviews is the complex mix of autobiography, history, and literature in Stegner's work. Few of his books stand squarely in any of those categories alone, and anyone who would understand them must learn to work the literary trigonometry that Etulain carries off so expertly. Roughly half of the interviews

are devoted to Stegner's life and, chronologically, each of his books, with one entire interview on his masterpiece, *Angle of Repose*. The remainder of the interviews deal with topics of especial significance in Stegner's life and thought: the Mormons, the land, and other writers of Western fiction and history.

The interviews contain a few surprises. The ending to his prize-winning *Angle of Repose*, for example, eluded Stegner until a publisher's deadline forced him to come up with something on very short notice. *Mormon Country*, he reveals, was primarily an exercise in nostalgia for a homesick Utah boy trapped in the East. These are amusing and unexpected disclosures for Stegner fans accustomed to appreciating his care and craftsmanship, but they show that Stegner even in offhand moments is still very good indeed.

Stegner is one of the rare non-Mormon writers who have written with sympathy, sensitivity, and perception about the Mormons; and the Latter-day Saints have repaid him with their respect and loyalty. Curiously, Mormon readers have allowed him to make critical comments, both in *Mormon Country* and *The Gathering of Zion*, that few if any Mormon writers would have been permitted. Stegner ad-