

Clarice Short, scholar and teacher, might have expected to leave behind her a legacy of learning. Her poems will add lasting beauty to that legacy, as seems fit-

ting for one who loved the world as she found it—and left it even more elevated through the quality of her spirit, manifested in her poetic writings.

## Utah's Original "Mr. Republican"

*Reed Smoot: Apostle in Politics* by Milton R. Merrill (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1990), 426 pp., \$37.50.

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I first encountered Reed Smoot more than two decades ago while researching the life and political career of Parley P. Christensen, a Utah political maverick who became the Farmer-Labor party nominee for president in 1920. As I studied Christensen's efforts to reform the Utah Republican party in the Progressive era, I came to view Smoot as one of the "bad guys": a rock-ribbed Republican intent on opposing progressive reforms; a fiscal conservative tied to big business; the leader of the "Federal Bunch," Utah's first political machine; and the link between the church hierarchy and the Republican political establishment.

My initial assessment of Smoot has stayed pretty much the same over the years, though I have also come to understand that he was the closest thing to a truly national political figure that Utah has produced. When I began my research in the early 1970s, the single best source of information on Smoot was Milton R. Merrill's 1950 Columbia Ph.D. dissertation. In many ways—though Signature Books will bring out an edited collection of Smoot diaries in late 1992—Merrill's study is still the standard source for understanding the apostle-senator and an invaluable reference tool for assessing Utah politics during the critical decades when the Beehive State moved from a Mormon fiefdom to a participant in national political patterns. Consequently, it is significant that Utah State University Press has recently made Merrill's dis-

sertation available in book form with a forward by Judd Harmon and an introduction by F. Ross Peterson.

Smoot was born in Salt Lake City on 10 January 1862, the son of Abraham Owen and Anne Kirstene Morrison Smoot. His family was both prominent and successful within the religious, political, and economic life of territorial Utah. Smoot's father served as mayor of both Salt Lake City and Provo and as president of Utah Stake. After graduation from the Brigham Young Academy, Smoot gradually built a financial career so that by the time he was thirty-five, he was worth at least a quarter of a million dollars. Smoot's business enterprises ranged from banking and real estate to mining. In 1900 he was called to serve in the Council of the Twelve Apostles, though prior to this call he had maintained only a perfunctory involvement in the Church—due more to indifference than hostility—with exception of missionary service and a five-year stint as a counselor to Utah Stake President Edward Partridge. By the time he was elected to the Senate, Smoot was essentially "a small town boy in a frontier community [who] had come far" (p. 6). As a U.S. senator, Smoot would extend his horizons well past what he might have ever dreamed possible.

In assessing the political career of Reed Smoot, it is important, as Merrill observes, to realize that several ambitions "dominated the driving, tenacious, intense personality of Reed Smoot as he moved from the narrow confines of a rural village to the broad and glamorous stage of the United States Senate." First, he was determined to "protect the Mormon Church from further persecution and attack and . . . bring the church into full

communion with the rest of the United States." Second, he sought to help expand the national prosperity he believed characterized his time in public office. For Reed Smoot these goals could be "comfortably, even luxuriously, accommodated within the confines of the Republican party" (p. 395).

Smoot's service in the Senate was preceded by an attempt to prevent him from being seated. A series of Senate hearings were as much an attempt to discredit the Mormon Church as to squelch Smoot's senatorial ambitions. The long and much publicized hearings—focusing on Smoot's ties to plural marriage and his standing as an LDS apostle—brought the Utahn into the national limelight for the first time. Ironically, though Smoot enjoyed his service in the Senate from 1903 to 1933, and the contacts it bought him with the rich and powerful, he saw that role as secondary to his ecclesiastical calling. As Merrill notes:

Critics in and out of the church insisted that the religious role was a pose and that the Senator was as fundamentally irreligious as certain of his iconoclastic colleagues. This criticism was invalid. Smoot was first and last a Mormon. His public statements and his private files both confirm the fact that he never questioned the divinity of his church during his senatorial years. Stimulated by his political opponents the opinion was quite common in Utah that Smoot was a political apostle with only academic interest in the tenets of the church. This again was false. The Senator adhered to every principle of the faith with which he was familiar with a firm unyielding tenacity. (pp. 397–98)

Smoot was also a thoroughgoing capitalist who felt very much at home in the business-oriented Republican decade of the 1920s. He saw material prosperity as not only wholly desirable, but as an important goal that required government encouragement and protection. As part of that policy, he became identified with the Smoot-Hawley tariff, the decade's center-

piece of Republican protectionism. His commitment to economic expansionism and governmental involvement not only found favor within the GOP, but would "bring no censure from the Mormon church" (p. 400). In 1932, however, when he faced the voters for the final time in the midst of the Great Depression, Smoot was buried in the FDR-Democratic landslide in large measure for his championing of Republican economics, which many believed had hastened the Crash of 1929.

On balance, Smoot was no pioneer in the political or economic field. His views did not change much in the years he served in the Senate. His defeat in 1932 largely reflected the passing of his political generation. Indeed, Merrill's assessment seems on the whole, quite accurate:

The Apostle-Senator . . . had no talent for innovation. By nature he was opposed to change; moreover, there was no need for any. His goal was not to create a new society but to defend the one presently functioning. He was not an architect, he was a builder. To this kind of building process he brought inhuman physical energy, a colossal industry, personal honesty and integrity, a prodigious memory, a remarkable eclecticism in the accumulation of statistical facts and a fabulous loyalty to those at the head of the enterprise. Lacking a sensitive, creative mind, as well as a warm dynamic personality of the popular purveyor of ideas, he operated to the full limit of his capabilities. (p. 400)

While it is clear that Merrill admired his subject, *Reed Smoot: Apostle in Politics* is a balanced and thoughtful study. Merrill demonstrates the significance of a man who, as much as anyone, brought both the Mormon Church and the state of Utah under the banner of the Republican party. It is a legacy that continues to this day. Utah State University Press should be applauded for putting the account of one of Utah's most significant citizens into the hands of another generation of students of Beehive State history.