

From "Zion's Attic"

The Mormon Presence in Canada edited by Brigham Y. Card, Herbert C. Northcott, John E. Foster, Howard Palmer, and George K. Jarvis. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990, xxvi + 382 pp., \$30.00. Distributed in the U.S.A. by Utah State University Press, Logan, Utah.

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LATTER-DAY SAINTS ARE an even smaller minority in Canada than they are in the United States. To put their numbers into perspective, if Canada were California (the populations are approximately equal), the Mormon community would be the equivalent of one of California's smaller counties, like Humboldt or Merced. It can't even be said that Mormons have a heartland in Canada comparable to Utah in the U.S., although the small area called "Mormon Country" in the southwestern corner of Alberta fills a similar function. In spite of this, the LDS experience in Canada has been interesting—even significant—and *The Mormon Presence in Canada* makes a very good start (although only a start) in telling this story.

The book's editors are all well-known LDS academics in Canada: Brigham Y. Card, Herbert C. Northcott, John E. Foster, and George K. Jarvis are all professors at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton; Howard Palmer is a professor at the University of Calgary. The contributors are mostly either LDS academics at Canadian universities (such as Richard E. Bennett and Keith Parry) or expatriate Canadian academics at U.S. universities (such as Maureen Ursenbach Beecher), or well-known U.S. Latter-day Saint academics whose main interests are not primarily in Canadian studies but in general LDS history. Essays from this latter group, which includes Leonard J. Arrington and Armand L. Mauss, provide a general background against which the specifics of Mormonism within Canada can be

appreciated, or a "U.S." counterpoint to a specific "Canadian" viewpoint.

The book's first essay, "Historical Roots of the Mormon Settlement in Southern Alberta" by Leonard J. Arrington, puts the history of Canadian Mormonism within the broader context of the great settlement of the late nineteenth century, when Cardston was Zion's northern terminus. Arrington's summary is excellent, but his essay will immediately strike most Canadians as being limited in tone. For example, he outlines "four patterns of social and economic organization developed in the American West . . . the miners' frontier, the cattle frontier, the lumber frontier and the Mormon frontier" (p. 9). He then parenthetically states that most Canadian historians "believe" the Canadian frontier differed from the U.S. frontier(s) because of the greater degree of central government control, as if this belief were peculiar to Canadian historians. In fact, this very real difference is vital to understanding the history and social milieu of all early Canadian settlers, including Canadian Mormons. Ironically, as an example of the "miners' frontier," Arrington refers to the "mining West," which he sees as starting in California in 1848 and continuing on to the "Alaskan territory of the Yukon in the 1890's" (p. 9). To Canadians' ongoing irritation, even well-informed Americans continue to think that the Yukon was part of Alaska and that the Klondike gold rush was therefore as lawless as the California and Nome gold rushes. Stories of "Mounties" greeting predominantly U.S. prospectors at the top of the treacherous Chilkoot Pass with demands that they leave their guns at the border are well-known in Canada but seemingly unknown in the U.S. Perhaps popular novelist James A. Michener's recent novel *Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1988) will dispel some of this misunderstanding. The important point is that Mormons who came to Canada encountered an entirely

different political and social environment than they had left behind. If Arrington's essay fails to emphasize this (and in all fairness, his purpose is to weave the Canadian experience into the overall tapestry, so he shouldn't be faulted for this), other contributors explore this difference in much greater detail—most notably A. A. den Otter in "A Congenial Environment: Southern Alberta on the Arrival of the Mormons."

Armand Mauss's "Mormons as Ethnics: Variable Historical and International Implications of An Appealing Concept" is an even more obvious—even deliberate—counterpoint, in this case to Keith Parry's "Mormons as Ethnics: A Canadian Perspective."

If I were to pick any nits with the book overall, it would be primarily with the cartography. The maps themselves are graphically excellent, but suffer from numerous minor errors: there is no Old Man River, for instance, except maybe in the Jerome Kern song—Alberta's waterway is spelled Oldman River; the lower New Brunswick-Maine border follows the St. Croix River, not the St. John River; Colborne, the town Joseph Smith visited, is west of the Grand River and is today a suburb of Simcoe (not the same as present-day Port Colborne). Also, Robert J. McCue's insertion of "[sic]" after the phrase "Her Majesty's Government are . . ." is unnecessary, as "corporate" nouns always take the plural in British English, even today. On the plus side, the book is very well manufactured, and its cover is graced with a pleasing artist's rendition of the renovated Cardston Temple.

I noted earlier that this work (which, by the way, grew out of a conference held in Edmonton in 1987) was an excellent "beginning." The Canadian Mormon experience can be meaningful to more than just Canadians. As the book's authors hint, a variety of topics deserve greater study. One would be the rather obvious fact that Canada isn't the United States (touched upon in Dean R. Louder's fascinating essay, "Canadian Mormon Identi-

tity and the French Fact") as tautological as this idea seems, it is fraught with implications. Because Mormon incursions into Canada (both the first missionary effort very early in the Church's history, in Upper Canada, and the colonizing effort in Southern Alberta at the end of the nineteenth century) saw Canada as not really a foreign country; Canadians then and now basically speak the same language (with the exception of that troublesome group up there in Quebec!) and act similarly—to U.S. eyes, at least. However, Canadians are very sensitive to the differences that do exist, and Canadian Mormons are no exception. Perhaps we are more sensitive because, to a greater degree than most other independent nations, our culture and history have been dominated by other countries (specifically Great Britain and the U.S., and to some extent, France). In addition, our sense of "Canadianism" is still evolving. As one popular tongue-in-cheek expression puts it: "We don't know what we are, but whatever we are, we're not Americans!"

In fact, however, our interesting differences and unique experiences should spur Canadian LDS scholars and intellectuals to contribute to the greater body of LDS thought. For instance, Canada has always been more "ethnic" than the U.S., encouraging a "mosaic" culture rather than a melting pot. How does this affect missionary work in the country, and how has this affected Canadians' sensitivity to other cultures? Canada's official policy of bilingualism is another potential source of ideas: it is, I think, fairly well known that Canadians have been over-represented within francophone missions (France, Switzerland, Belgium, and French Polynesia) because of their familiarity, if not fluency, with French. The Canadian government's choice to settle our western frontier and deal with our native people in a much more organized, ordered fashion than in the U.S. could yield some interesting reflections on the differences between the native Indian experience in both countries. The more liberal political

attitudes of Canadians, which Canadian Latter-day Saints share, on the whole, have always prompted our intellectuals to comment on our powerful neighbour as sympathetic critics, like Scottish preachers to English imperialists. The Canadian novelist, Robertson Davies, coined the whimsical phrase, "North America's attic" for this viewpoint. At its worse, it can be condescending, but at its best it can serve as a liberal yeast in the rather imperialistic, conservative batter that seems to have brewed in U.S. domestic and foreign politics since the end of World War II.

What can be said by Mormons who

live in a country which is part of Zion, in the sense of the Book of Mormon, and culturally very similar to the U.S., yet is populated by people who are not Americans? Being a Canadian Mormon can seem, at times, like living in an Orson Scott Card story of a parallel world which asks the literary question: what would it be like if Zion hadn't ended up all being one political entity? Of course, it turns out that we live in just that world, and Canadian LDS intellectuals have the challenge to contribute their unique views from "Zion's attic" for the edification of the rest of the Saints.

