

Beginning the Trek

Richard E. Turley. *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992. 345 pp., appendix, notes, index.

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THERE IS MUCH TO PRAISE in the long-awaited "inside" explanation of both why and how officials of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints responded to the forgery phenomena of Mark Hofmann. Utilizing the theory that the church, as well as Kathy Sheets, Steve Christensen, their families, and all others deceived by Hofmann were victimized, Richard Turley has simply titled the book *Victims*. Obviously, Turley challenges many assumptions and interpretations of the three journalistic books that appeared in 1987 and 1988. Linda Sillitoe and Allen Roberts, *Salamander* (1982); Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *The Mormon Murders* (1988); and Robert Lindsey, *A Gathering of Saints* (1988) are all still in print so comparisons are inevitable.

This volume does not add significantly to an understanding of Mark Hofmann, the forgeries, motivation for murder, or the subsequent criminal investigation. Turley's sole purpose is to explain how LDS church leaders allowed this deceptive and questionable character into their inner circles and how they became part of one of the most despicable, pre-meditated crimes in Utah history. Turley's effort deserves both commendation and criticism. A

reader must carefully examine the sources the author used because the depth of primary research is very impressive, but it also reveals a source selectivity that hampers objectivity. As assistant managing director of the church historical department, Turley gained access to the diaries, journals, letters, notes, and minutes of general authorities and their meetings. This utilization of personal sources unavailable to previous authors and journalists who wrote about the case gives Turley an advantage over other scholars.

Turley successfully observes the series of events relating to Hofmann's initial document "discovery" in 1980 through Hofmann's conviction and plea-bargained confession six years later. Turley's thesis is that the LDS church and its officials were duped by the forger as were a variety of historians and document dealers. He chronicles church officials' knowledge of Hofmann, the documents, and the serendipitous movement of monies, documents, and people. The three other volumes published in the aftermath of the trial are more journalistic in nature in that they are based on oral interviews and newspaper stories as well as archival research. Consequently, none are footnoted and the indexing is less than adequate. Of course, their purposes differ in that Lindsey's *A Gathering of Saints* is written as a mystery story much like his *Falcon and the Snowman*. Naifeh and Smith want to expose a church-engineered cover-up in *The Mormon Murders*,

and their attempt is weakened by sensationalism and the inclusion of irrelevant material such as the wording of the temple endowment. *Salamander* is the best and most serious attempt to describe the forgeries, murders, and investigation. Sillitoe and Roberts published before Hofmann's confession was released and they received little cooperation from LDS authorities, yet their research is thorough and unbiased with no hidden agenda.

Turley responds to the other books through extensive annotated notes, not in the text. In chapters eight and nine, "In the Aftermath" and "Deep Concern," he answers printed allegations relative to the pre-bombing relationship of general authorities—specifically Gordon B. Hinckley, Dallin Oaks, and Hugh Pinnock—to the victims and the perpetrator. With his access to telephone log books, appointment books, and notes of meetings, Turley demonstrates that the church leaders were forthright in their dealings with the press and the police and that Steven Christensen, a bombing victim, and Mark Hofmann did not have as easy access as they led others to believe. Some of the church leaders' verbal inconsistencies are discussed, but others are ignored. An example is Gordon B. Hinckley, who publicly admitted that he did not keep a journal, yet he did allow Turley access to "notes" he kept for certain days or meetings.

The power of Turley's defense is weakened by the last two chapters of the book. Instead of maintaining the integrity of a historical approach, the author taps into his trained profession, the law, and reports the preliminary hearing, the plea bargain sentencing, the infamous prison interviews, and the hearing before the board of pardons. His analysis suffers as he summarizes the above events. There is no discussion of the

comparative injustice of such a plea bargain when compared to other pre-meditated crimes of violence. He does not analyze the failure of the prosecutors to obtain full disclosure in the prison interviews, and ignores the larger question of indirect, but perceived church influence on Utah's system of justice.

Turley does chronicle one aspect of the case that makes *Victims* even more tragic. While church authorities were arranging loans and trying to purchase historical documents that might be damaging, they failed to realize that they already possessed a substantial William McLellin collection in their vault. In their fear of history, compounded by a lack of faith relative to individual commitment, the church had dismantled its own office of church history. Consequently, they were vulnerable to a Hofmann who gained the confidence and support of high church officials. To be sure, LDS historians did not distinguish themselves professionally by accepting Hofmann's forgeries as authentic. Yet they too operate in an atmosphere of fear. If the general authorities (church leaders) had faith and confidence in the specific authorities (historians), they might have realized they already owned a collection Hofmann had not yet forged—the papers of early LDS apostle William E. McLellin—and that they have nothing to fear from their own organization's history. Furthermore, had they fully disclosed their holdings, including the McLellin papers, the legal process would very likely have been considerably shortened.

This volume is significant for a number of reasons. By allowing Turley access to primary sources never opened to historians, church leaders might be willing to allow other scholars access to similar historical materials. In all prob-