

elected in 1896 as one of Utah's first United States senators, but when his initial two-year term expired in 1898, the Utah legislature refused to reelect him.

Joseph W. Musser, born into a Latter-day Saint home in 1872, at an early age proved to be a faithful, dedicated member of the church. It was his strong belief in plural marriage that resulted in his excommunication by the Granite Stake High Council in 1921.

The last five essays deal with people active in the last half of the twentieth century.

Fawn McKay Brodie's controversial book, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, was published in 1945. One year later, on a charge of apostasy, she was excommunicated.

Maurine Whipple is remembered for her 1941 novel, *The Giant Joshua*, which told the story of polygamy and the settlement of St. George in southern Utah. She was disappointed by what she perceived as the unenthusiastic reception of that work and her only other book, *This Is the Place: Utah*, which appeared in 1945.

Richard Price is noteworthy because of his vigorous opposition to recent liberal changes in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. An opponent of ordaining

women to the priesthood, Price now is regarded as "the leading strategist and publicist of Reorganization fundamentalism" (319).

Jerald and Sandra Tanner, both reared in Mormon families, have been dedicated for more than thirty years to exposing and trying to destroy Mormonism. They have reprinted and made generally available many basic Mormon documents that were out of print, thus helping to stimulate the professional historical examination of a variety of Mormon subjects.

Sonia Johnson, as a result of her leadership of Mormons for the Equal Rights Amendment and her criticism of official Mormon church opposition to the ERA, gained national notoriety when she was excommunicated by a bishop's court at Oakton, Virginia, on 5 December 1979. Today she lives in a small community of women near Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Each of the seventeen essays is scholarly and interesting. For some readers, some of the essays may be more informative than others.

A few proofreading errors may be noticed in this otherwise well-edited book. For example, on page 313 the word "immorality" appears in a context which seems to call for the word "immortality."

A Western with Gray Hats

A Ram in the Thicket: The Story of a Roaming Homesteader Family on the Mormon Frontier. By Frank C. Robertson (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1994).

Reviewed by Ross Geddes, who works for the Department of Defense in Brisbane, Australia.

MY INTRODUCTION TO FRANK C. ROBERTSON was at the age of eleven

when someone gave me a copy of one of his juvenile westerns called *The Young Nighthawk*. Years later I discovered that Robertson had a Mormon background, but it was not until I read this reprint of his 1950 family memoir that I learned the details of that background.

By the time he died in 1969, Robertson had written more than 150 books, most of them formula westerns, countless short stories, and a long-running column in the Provo *Daily Herald*. As a professional writer of genre fiction, Robertson knew his market and gave his readers what they wanted. He achieved popularity in his day, but his writing has not outlived him—with one exception. The new edition of *A Ram in the Thicket*, first published almost half a century ago, is one of a reprint series called *Idaho Yesterdays* developed by the Idaho State Historical Society under the general editorship of Judith Austin. It is enhanced by a perceptive introduction from regionalist historian Charles S. Peterson and a retrospective by Robertson's son Glen.

I would have to dispute Mari Sandoz's statement (quoted from the 1959 edition) that "Mr. Robertson is no stylist." I was lassoed right from the first sentence: "My father and mother considered themselves farmers, but they seldom owned a farm" (1). The vigorous, spare style of that opening is typical of the whole book. And it immediately identifies Robertson's major protagonists. Both parents obviously dominated his early life as they do the first two-thirds of his book. Will Robertson's "ungovernable temper" made life hell for his family, "chang[ing] him in an instant from a jovial, pleasant companion to a roaring incarnation of fury" (9). Nor were

his tantrums quickly spent: he could keep a quarrel going for days, picking up his tirade each morning where he had left off the night before. When the temper was on him, he gave his children some fearful whippings. On the other hand, he was the one who sat up nights with a sick child or went from house to house during a diphtheria epidemic doing whatever needed to be done.

Mary Robertson submitted to her husband's abuse, but she was no doormat. A former schoolteacher, she developed a reputation as a formidable debater and was not afraid to take on—and beat—the local Methodist and Baptist preachers. As a Campbellite, she had a strong faith "that in the last extremity the Lord would provide a ram in the thicket" (2), and despite her family's skepticism, "the ram in the thicket . . . was always there" (45).

Will Robertson's other notable characteristic was his restlessness. The family moved frequently—first, from Nebraska to Moscow, Idaho, then from one homestead to another in western Idaho and eastern Washington. Mormonism caught up with the Robertsons just before the end of the nineteenth century outside Moscow. It was probably inevitable that the newly-converted Will Robertson would catch the spirit of the gathering, but as his son wryly notes, "as usual, the Robertsons were swimming against the main current" (130), for while they headed for Zion, the physical gathering was ending and the era of expansion beginning.

Robertson draws a valuable picture of Mormonism in the early years of the twentieth century in several rural communities—particularly Chesterfield in southeastern Idaho. But it is not the sort of picture we are usually

shown of pioneer Mormons. Robertson sees more humanity than divinity in the church his parents—and later himself but not his two older brothers—joined. Some of his anecdotes would never appear in the faith-promoting brand of Mormon autobiography written to inspire descendants to live the gospel, but somehow they are more believable than many of the other sort. He writes of a bishop who tells a dirty joke and is promptly put in his place by Mary Robertson; of deacons' quorum meetings largely devoted to ribaldry and fighting; of a respected brother whose "speaking in tongues" sounds suspiciously like the Latin in which he tutors young Frank; and of a new convert who drops a clanger by testifying "that old Joe Smith was a true prophet" (158).

Robertson's parents reacted differently to life in Zion. His father felt right at home in this patriarchal society, but his mother was offended by much that she saw. Eventually she stood in fast and testimony meeting and castigated the Saints for their "back-biting, fault-finding, covetousness and vanity," neglect of the Word of Wisdom and tithing, dishonesty, pride, and cruelty to animals. The long, tense silence that followed was finally broken when the bishop stood

and said, "I endorse and say amen to every single thing Sister Robertson has said" (148).

To his credit, Robertson is not afraid to include stories that could even qualify as faith-promoting; for example, he tells how his father, through a priesthood blessing and two months of devoted caring, saved a boy's leg from amputation. But although Mormonism undoubtedly made Will Robertson a better man, it also gave him yet more opportunities to argue with his wife, whom he accused of not sustaining the priesthood (that is, him) as she should.

As a prolific writer of western fiction, Robertson was used to portraying goodies and baddies, white hats and black hats, but he has avoided any simplistic stereotyping here. The people who figured in his own life—whether his parents, fellow Saints, or gentile neighbors—wear hats of various shades of gray. That is, they are people much like ourselves or those we know. *A Ram in the Thicket* is Frank C. Robertson's best and truest work and deserves to live on. This new edition, for which all concerned should be congratulated, will introduce the book to a new generation and ensure that it survives a little longer.