

July speech that aroused “non-Mormon” (never “anti-Mormon”) ire, and—in what many readers may at first think a misprint—writes that the “Mormon militia plundered non-Mormon settlements” (xv). Factually correct, perhaps, but what does such a fact mean when the author neglects to mention the slaughter of Mormons at Haun’s Mill and never even hints that attacks, house burnings, mobbings, and murder took place against Mormons? Even the riot to prevent Mormons from voting at Gallatin is sanitized here as an “electoral altercation” (xv), thus preserving the editor’s narrative agenda: Mormons were the only real instigators and perpetrators of violence in Missouri. This is “history” in the same sense that Bennett’s book is a “History,” and the lack of objectivity is

as transparent as it is bewildering in a university press publication.

Even accepting the legitimacy of some of Bennett’s charges about the beginnings of secret polygamy in Nauvoo and Joseph’s theocratic designs, his sheer rhetorical and sensationalistic excess led the editor James Gordon Bennett to conclude in 1842 that the book’s publication “utterly disgraces its publisher” (xxxii). Perhaps the same can’t be said of its re-publication. But justifying the decision by appealing to “titillation” will not do. And promising, in a uni-dimensional introduction, that the book will reveal Mormonism’s “real ways of operating” does not remove us as far from 19th century sensationalism as we could wish.

Henry William Bigler: Mormon Chronicler of Great Events

Henry William Bigler: Soldier, Gold Miner, Missionary, Chronicler, 1815-1900, by M. Guy Bishop. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998). 208 pp., \$36.95.

Reviewed by Violet T. Kimball, Writer and Photographer, Glen Carbon, Illinois

M. GUY BISHOP HAS MOVED AWAY from famous Mormon church leaders to delve into the life of a minor member who had a major appointment with American history. Henry William Bigler’s life is one that has both historical and religious significance. He left “thirteen day books and journals and an autobiography/journal telling much about mid-nineteenth century California” (xiii). One of his most im-

portant entries was made January 24, 1848 at Sutter’s Creek: “This day some kind of mettle was found. . .that. . . looks like goald.” (59). Bishop’s purpose is to present “Bigler’s written record [which] offers an unsophisticated mirror of his activities and thoughts, convincingly sincere in intent and formidable in sheer volume” (xii). By all standards, Bigler was a common man who did not know he had a date with destiny when he marched out of Iowa with the Mormon Battalion on July 21, 1846, to the strains of “The Girl I Left Behind Me.” Bigler, however, did not leave a girl behind.

Henry William Bigler was born in Pennsylvania in 1815 and joined the Mormon church with most of his immediate family in 1837. They migrated

to Missouri soon afterwards where they were among the beleaguered Mormons who saw and participated in the conflicts with Missourians in 1838 before fleeing to Illinois in 1839. These trials cemented his allegiance to the church, and his faith and loyalty never faltered thereafter. In 1846 in Iowa, he was asked to join the Mormon Battalion to help fight the war with Mexico, a request he hesitated to accept until his leaders pressured him to obey counsel.

Bigler wrote in his journal that he was "willing to obey counsel believing all things would work for the best in the end" (31). As he began the march, he carried some of the curse of the Midwest with him—the *ague* (malaria)—but he was never too sick or weary to record his thoughts. We have a greater appreciation and knowledge of the journey of the Mormon Battalion because of Bigler's detailed account. Bigler's willingness to obey counsel ushered in a year of much hardship and trials, followed by a year of relative ease and historical significance.

After much suffering and near starvation, about 400 of the original 500 battalion members and a few women reached San Diego in January of 1847. A year later Bigler was still in California, better fed and farther north at Sutter's Creek. He was at the American River the day that James Marshall discovered gold. This incident gave Bigler a front row seat for one of the major events in American history. His diary entry is the only contemporary record to mention the discovery on the day it occurred. Fifty years later Bigler was among the celebrities invited to commemorate California's Golden Jubilee.

Bigler's devotion to the church is obvious, and while Bishop makes this

observation, he does not minimize the problems nor downplay the real church history. That Mormon Battalion Saints gambled, drank, and bought tobacco is not general knowledge. Bishop also mentions that whiskey was delivered to Bigler's group at Sutter's Creek in 1848. He lets the record speak for itself.

Bigler's devotion to the Mormon church was typical and puzzling. Admittedly a devoted family man, he nonetheless accepted from Brigham Young a third mission call to work in the St. George Temple in 1877, a year after his first wife Jane Whipple died. To do this, he left his three young motherless sons with others: "I bid my children good by praying in my heart for God to bless them and all who may befriend them" (129). In a modern, family-friendly church, this kind of obedience stings. Bigler saw these sons occasionally, but he lived out his life in St. George with a new family.

The volume includes 24 illustrations, but I found it disappointing that none were of any of the women in Bigler's life. Surely some images exist of his children, especially of his youngest daughters, Maud and Eleanor, from his second wife, Eleanor Emmett.

I would also have liked more details about the battalion funds sent back to relatives in Winter Quarters, much of which ended up in the general church fund administered by Brigham Young. This did not please the relatives in Winter Quarters, who nearly starved to death. More details about conditions in Utah when Bigler arrived in 1848 would have been helpful while I think less might have been written on Bigler's two missions to Hawaii. Bigler's California trail diary also sheds interesting light on interactions with Native Americans and offers

chilling accounts of dead bodies from the Donner party:

Passing down the mountain to the head of Truckee River. . .we came to a shanty built last winter, and about this cabin we found the skeletons of several human beings. I discovered a hand. It was nearly entire. It had been partly burned to a crisp. The little finger was not burnt. . . I judged it to be the hand of a woman. . . .

Bigler reports that his group found a cabin of bodies—some with limbs, ribs, or brains removed—and was told later at Sutter's Fort that "children were saved but not till after they had eaten of their dead parents."¹

Bishop's book is an easy, interesting, read. It is seldom that one finds such a rich source of American, Western, Utah, and church history in 160 pages (followed by an extensive bibliography). I finished reading wanting

more than Bishop had included. There are many fascinating tidbits such as the following:

"Because public polygamy could no longer be a demonstration of loyalty, the new agenda for the devout became an increased emphasis upon tithing [and] stricter observance of the. . .health code known as the Word of Wisdom" (144).

We also learn that men who practiced plural marriage prospered more than those living in monogamy (142). Bigler earned less than \$900 a year.

I heartily recommend Bishop's biography of Henry Bigler. Much research and work went into this book, and if it is true that "good things come in small packages," this certainly qualifies.

"A Happy, Go-Ahead People"

Mormon America: The Power and the Promise, by Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 454 pp., \$17.00.

Reviewed by R. Jonathan Moore, Ph.D. candidate in American religious history, University of Chicago Divinity School.

THE GENERAL PUBLIC'S KNOWLEDGE of Mormonism tends to be thinly mediated through certain stereotypical images: the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, well-scrubbed young missionaries, polygamy, large families, genealogy, sacred underwear, sentimental television commercials, upright (if not prudish) living. Thus *The Onion*, a satirical

magazine, can still count on laughs from the headline "Mormon Teen Loses Inhibitions after Third Benadryl." In a new book, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*, the husband-and-wife team of Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling explore and explain the reality behind these images. Their lively and judicious account ensures that Americans will no longer have any excuse to be shallowly informed about the country's most successful homegrown religious tradition.

The authors are outsiders: Richard, one of America's most capable religion reporters and currently the Associated Press religion writer, and Joan, a freelancer, describe themselves as "conventional" Protestants. Building upon the interest generated by