

The ongoing “lifelag” experienced when change outstrips your normal “slow-motion pace” is particularly evident, says Bell, when returning from an extended vacation:

If you’re lucky, things seem pretty much the same at first. You find the same cobweb by the water heater that was there when you left, the same grease spot on the sport shirt you forgot to wash before storing, and the same curvature of the spine in the back fence. But the world has turned in your absence. You return to your office, slip in a computer disk—the very same disk you used twelve months ago—only to learn that the whole institution has “upgraded” its hardware, its software, AND its cadre of technicians. There is nary a familiar face to troubleshoot for you. You can’t even manage to call up your files. Once more, life has made you a freshman. (p. 85)

Though Bell may feel like a neophyte when it comes to new technology, she doesn’t hesitate to pass on sage advice regarding modern modes of communication, whether by phone, fax, or e-mail. Yet she champions the old-fashioned personal letter as the most satisfying form of correspondence—“like a magical canteen that always gives you a sip of sweet water each time you put it to your lips” (p. 60). She also feels no compunction about slipping back into the role of teacher. For example, in re-

calling the end of a day spent playing childhood games, she imparts a bit of language history: “And as darkness draped the alleyway [came] the final, safe incantation, ‘Olly, olly, olly oxen free.’ In the magic-loving minds of children, those strange words rang more potent and protective than their probable ancestors: ‘All ye, all ye, all ye outs in free’” (p. 10).

Mormon readers will find Bell’s musings on the significance of a single letter in a general authority’s name, be it the O in David O. McKay or the B in Harold B. Lee, amusing, as well as her unofficial guide to Utah culture for those visiting during the Olympics: “Utah drivers honk to let you know they love their families. And the Jazz. And Franklin Covey. And Orrin, who keeps it all safe” (p. 106).

When Bell ventures into more personal territory like her mission in France, where converts were baptized in the rococo bathtub of a former embassy, or the tough but loving memories of her “pugnacious” father (the best essay in the collection), she mines a gentler vein of humor. With these essays Bell reveals her personal pleasures—grand opera, the farmlands of Eastern Idaho, and her beloved hats. Though Bell grieves the loss of her favorite corduroy cap, she isn’t quite ready to replace it with the belled fool’s cap that sits on her closet shelf. No doubt, when and if she finally does, like her prose it will be ridiculously sublime.

A Travelogue Nonpareil

Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons, by Jan Shippo. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 400 pp.

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"MORMONISM, UNLIKE OTHER modern religions, is a faith cast in the form of history," argues historian Jan Shippo in this outstanding collection of articles and essays (p. 165). Implicitly, the volume presents an argument for the central and vital role of the historian in reaching an understanding of the nature of the LDS experience in its entirety. Shippo's work is a model for historians: she asks interesting and important questions; she thinks through them clearly and carefully; she conducts research in all available and appropriate sources; and she presents her findings in language that is a pleasure to read.

This book is a major contribution to Mormon historiography; it will be of particular interest to those who seek not for "just the facts," but for large conceptual and interpretive frameworks. Shippo's writing is focused not only on events and trends within Mormon history, but also on how that history can best be explained and how it can be elucidated by perspectives developed in religious studies and sociology. The book is divided into five sections, each based on a different conceptual approach to writing religious history. Fourteen of the eighteen articles and essays in the book have been published previously, though they are here revised and expanded. As all but one of these appeared outside of the familiar circle of Mormon-related journals, the contents of this book will be new to many, if not most, non-specialists.

The good, big questions Shippo asks of Mormon history are the kind only those with both an awareness of broader contexts and close familiarity with the details are prepared to posit. These include: Why have the Mormons been neglected by historians of the American West? How have Mor-

mons' and non-Mormons' views of each other changed over time? How has the notion of the "gathering of the Saints" changed and developed in the twentieth century? What is at the heart of recent tensions between church authorities and some within the LDS intellectual community?

Shippo is fascinated with the Mormon transition from "peoplehood to church membership" (p. 30). This process, which Shippo places in the half-century following World War II, includes a weakening of Mormon "ethnicity," an ascribed cultural identity that was a product of the Saints' rich nineteenth-century experience. Regardless of their geographic or national origin, Mormons gathered in the Great Basin kingdom as a communally-oriented people; they "had to 'choose to be chosen'" and work to build Zion in the tops of the mountains, separate from the rest of frontier America. "The end result," Shippo writes, "was the creation of a group that took on ethnic characteristics nearly as distinctive and important as the ethnic characteristics of Chicanos, Asians, and Native American groups" (p. 35).

By the end of the twentieth century, however, LDS Church members were spread throughout the world, and Mormon distinctiveness—its otherness—was in serious decline, Shippo explains. Performance of temple ceremonies and possession of the *Book of Mormon* still make them stand out, but in most other ways Mormons today appear little different from members of other Christian denominations. The vigorous, tribal nature of Mormon cultural life prior to the 1970s, with its busy ward chapels and independent auxiliaries, has been replaced by a correlated, strictly hierarchical church with a consolidated meeting schedule. Mormon ethnicity, though weakened,

is still extant today in Mormon areas of the American West, but elsewhere, "what was once Mormon ethnicity has turned into distinctive practice, which is a very different thing" (p. 37).

Shipps refuses to interpret religious activity as an epiphenomenon, that is, as a reflection of other social or political issues within a community. Such approaches "do not recount and explicate what happened in a manner that makes their histories meaningful for members of faith communities" (p. 171). This approach produces a particularly insightful essay on Brigham Young, whose primary achievement, Shipps argues, was the "making of Saints." The Mormon leader "created a cohesive, self-conscious body of Latter-day Saints whose primary identity was Mormon and whose understanding of Mormonism paralleled his own" (p. 249).

Shipps's years of immersion in the Mormon historical sources and decades of association with LDS church members has made her what she calls an "inside-outsider." Like serious, dedicated historians of a foreign people, she has learned the language of Mormons and has an understanding and empathy toward the Saints that is rare among non-Mormon scholars. LDS readers unfamiliar with Shipps's work will be surprised at how familiar Mormons and Mormonism seem in her analyses, even when she is writing for a non-Mormon audience. This is clearly evident in an essay on Joseph Smith and the development of Mormon theology in which Shipps describes an accumulation of layers of doctrine and practice: the initial restoration was followed by a "Hebraic overlay" (literal gathering, building of a temple at Kirtland, separate lesser and greater priesthoods, declarations of lineage, keys granted to Joseph and others), followed by the culminating "fulness of the Gospel" (patri-

archal order of marriage, proxy baptism, doctrines of eternal progression and tiered heavens). This final layer of teachings "located human life between pre- and post-existence states and placed the ordinances of the temple. . . at the very core of Mormonism." These doctrines were combined with "the merged gospels of Jesus Christ and Abraham" to form the Mormon plan of salvation (pp. 294-96).

Many readers will also find fascinating the autobiographical material found in several of the chapters and section introductions. Shipps describes her first encounter with Mormons in Cache County, Utah, in 1960, the highlights of her graduate training in history, and her subsequent experiences as a professional sojourner in the realm of LDS history. (She is currently professor emerita of history and religious studies at Indiana University—Purdue University, Indianapolis.) Most of the autobiographical sections comprise intellectual, not spiritual or emotional autobiography. An exception is a moving description of how she came to understand the LDS concept of proxy ordinances while taking communion in her own Methodist church in Indiana shortly after the excommunication of personal friend Lavina Fielding Anderson and several others in September 1993.

Shipps does not dwell long on where Mormonism is headed—indeed, that is not the task of the historian—though she does think the LDS Church will continue in its programs the current intensification of emphasis on Christ over discussion of events in Mormon history. Her analysis of contemporary Mormonism is not free of missteps, however. She writes of a growing rhetorical shift toward the use of the terms "Mormon Christian" and "Mormon Christianity" by Church mem-