

Friendly History

Glen M. Leonard. *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002). xxiv, 828 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index.

Reviewed by Gary James Bergera, managing director, the Smith-Pettit Foundation, Salt Lake City, Utah.

GLEN LEONARD'S LONG-AWAITED HISTORY OF NAUVOO is friendly history at its finest. It gently questions some deeply held beliefs about the Saints' tumultuous sojourn at the fringes of western Illinois. The writing is readable and engaging, the meaning clear. The tone is respectful, the analysis charitable, especially of some of the city's more notorious residents. It should be required reading for all inquisitive students of Latter-day Saint history.

I was fascinated by Leonard's discussion of Nauvoo's growth as a city, including its economic make-up and demographic profile, as well as by his discussion of the city's problematic involvement in municipal, county, and statewide politics and elections. His treatment of the induction of a large portion of the city's adult male population into Masonry answers many questions about this unlikely alliance. (His admission of Masonry's "mythic" ancient origins is particularly welcome [315].) His description of the temple endowment, and mention of the full-

ness of the priesthood ordinance, is equally illuminating (257-61). His analysis of the Council of Fifty and its narrow role in the church is noteworthy (and makes a convincing case for the release of this not-so-secret body's minutes). His discussion of Joseph Smith and plural, or celestial, marriage is at once sensitive and frank.

I was captivated by his narrative of Joseph's decision in mid-June 1844 to return to Nauvoo rather than to escape to the west (a recital that does not blame his wife, Emma), and eventual removal to Carthage Jail; his downplaying of some of the myths surrounding Joseph's martyrdom; his treatment of the stand-off between Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon for control of the church (and his conclusion that Hyrum Smith had been Joseph's designated successor); his portrayal of Nauvoo after Joseph; his recounting of the church's preparations prior to its departure into the wilderness (and the fact that its leaders did not know precisely where they were going until less than two months before leaving); and his description of the exodus from Nauvoo, the Desolate City (618).

While my own knowledge of Nauvoo is limited, I did note several relatively minor errors. Jane Law was married to William, not Wilson, Law (145). Missouri ex-governor Lilburn W. Boggs was wounded in 1842, not 1843 (320). Theodore Turley was not the second polygamist in Nauvoo (346). (Evi-

dence now demonstrates that Turley married his first plural wife in March 1844.) Eliza and Emily Partridge are called orphans, but in fact only their father had passed away when they moved into Joseph and Emma Smith's house; their mother, Lydia, did not die until 1878 in Utah (348). Again on page 348, the best evidence now suggests that both John E. Page and Lyman Wight contracted plural marriages prior to Joseph Smith's death. Francis M. Higbee brought suit against Joseph Smith in May 1844, claiming that Joseph had slandered him, not that Joseph had attempted to seduce Nancy Rigdon (361). (Joseph's proposals to Nancy in 1842, and their fallout, did remain for Francis a wound that never healed). Finally, it was Hyrum Smith, not his brother William, who read Joseph's revelation on celestial marriage to the Nauvoo High Council in August 1843 (363).

The best history is always heuristic; and Leonard's is especially stimulating. For example, he concludes that Joseph Smith did not translate the Kinderhook Plates (212). Yet William Clayton, writing in his diary, doesn't seem to leave much room for doubt when he recorded on 1 May 1843: "Prest J[oseph]. [Smith] has translated a portion and says they contain the history of the person with whom they were found & he was a descendant of Ham through the loins of Pharoah king of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the ruler of heaven & earth."¹ On the other hand, Leonard refers to Joseph's Book of Abraham project, not as a translation, but as a

revelation, explaining, "Joseph Smith's biblical studies relied more upon supernatural knowledge than earth-bound book learning" (211).

Leonard rejects Todd Compton's conclusions regarding the total number of plural wives Joseph married during his lifetime (345). He favors not thirty-three wives, but twenty-eight, relying on the research of Daniel Bachman and more recently of Scott Faulring and Richard Anderson. Curiously, Leonard does not cite Compton in this context (though he does list Compton's book in the bibliography); Leonard does cite Faulring and Anderson, whose work appeared as a review of Compton's book. Compton has responded to Faulring and Anderson, and I believe that Compton's arguments are the more persuasive.²

Leonard is commendably balanced in his treatment of John C. Bennett, the traitor Mormons love to hate. However, he asserts without question that Bennett was excommunicated (248). Bennett always insisted that he first withdrew with Joseph's blessing but that later the historical record was altered to read that he had been formally expelled. My own guess is that Bennett was allowed to withdraw but that the record was changed to read that the church had formally acted to expel him. Leonard also seems to imply that Bennett was alone in using Joseph Smith's name to introduce women to his counterfeit of the prophet's teachings. In fact, Joseph's own younger brother William told at least two women that the prophet privately sanctioned such relationships.

1. Quoted in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1991, 1995), p. 100.

2. See www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/7207/rev.html.

Leonard also, in my opinion, simplifies the situation regarding Bennett and Orson and Sarah Pratt (352). He accepts the claim that Bennett attempted to seduce Sarah. Yet Sarah blamed her own and Orson's temporary withdrawal from church participation on Joseph's overtures, not Bennett's. Sarah's biographer, Richard Van Wagoner (whom Leonard does not reference), concluded sixteen years ago that Sarah's name was not associated with Bennett until after Orson had confronted the prophet. I think the evidence better accommodates the conclusion that Joseph did in fact invite Sarah to become his plural wife during Orson's absence to England but perhaps (and this is a big "perhaps") only to "test" her virtue.

Leonard's treatment of the succession of Brigham Young as *de facto* president of the church is thorough and reasonable. As already mentioned, he believes that Joseph appointed Hyrum as his successor. Leonard also believes that the Quorum of the Twelve was Joseph's next choice, that the possibility of alternative options may have been viable at specific moments in church history, but that by 1844 Joseph had arrived at certain conclusions about his successor. Leonard may be correct. Still, it is not as apparent to me that Joseph had managed sufficiently to foresee the need for a successor. I wonder if Joseph actually believed that he would die a young man. I think the evidence is compelling that he fully expected he would live to lead his church into Texas or the Pacific Northwest. The Twelve may have been, in retrospect, the most logical or prepared choice to succeed Joseph, but I'm not entirely convinced that's what Joseph actually had in mind.

Finally, a concluding thought on Leonard's use of sources. While his

notes and bibliography seem comprehensive, they in fact omit reference to some works that, to my mind, are conspicuous by their absence. I realize that Leonard may not have had sufficient time to review all relevant works, or may have felt their contents were not germane, or perhaps he or his publisher did not want to draw the attention of his target audience to some works, for whatever reason. I have already noted his partial omission of Compton's *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Other omissions include: M. Guy Bishop's articles "What Has Become of Our Fathers?" Baptism for the Dead at Nauvoo" and "Eternal Marriage in Early Mormon Marital Beliefs"; Martha Sonntag Bradley's *Four Zinas: A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier*; David John Buerger's *Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (or his two *Dialogue* articles on the same topics); Andrew F. Ehat's BYU master's thesis, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question"; Scott Faulring's *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (though Leonard does cite Dean Jessee's editions of Joseph's diaries); Michael Homer on "Mormonism and Masonry"; Myrtle Hyde's *Orson Hyde: The Olive Branch of Israel*; D. Michael Quinn's *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (though Leonard does reference three of Quinn's published articles); and Richard Van Wagoner's *Mormon Polygamy: A History* and his *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*. (Reference to the latter would have greatly bolstered Leonard's discussion of Rigdon's "mood swings" [447].)

Leonard's sympathy for the Saints may be his greatest strength as well as, for more critically minded readers, his

greatest weakness. Indeed, after reading *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise*, it is difficult to think of a more persecuted, more misunderstood, but ultimately more honest and well-meaning people in all of American history than the city's Mormon population. Of course, this is debatable, and I believe Leonard would be the first to admit that most nontraditional religions would describe themselves using similar terms. I realize that Leonard's interpretations occasionally

differ from mine, even when we're both reading the same sources. What I most appreciate is his ability to make the hopes and aspirations of Nauvoo's Saints comprehensible. Leonard has helped me to feel what it was like to have walked the same muddy streets as Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and Brigham Young, John C. Bennett, William Law, and Wilson Law, Emma Smith, Eliza R. Snow, and Lucy Mack Smith. And I am grateful for the experience.

Book of Mormon Stories

Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives, by Mark D. Thomas (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000), 236 pp.

By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion, by Terryl L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 320 pp.

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AFTER DECADES OF NEGLECT BY SCHOLARS, theologians, and even rank-and-file Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon may be finally getting its due. Recently, several books have underscored the importance of this controversial work of scripture, including a flawed but potentially pioneering study by Mark Thomas and a graceful synthesis by *Viper on the Hearth* author Terryl Givens.

If there is a central thesis in Givens's *apologia*, it is that "the message of the Book of Mormon was and continues to be inseparable from the

story of its origins—a story involving angels, seer stones, and golden plates" (37). What follows is a sort of rescue operation, an erudite argument for the intellectual respectability of faith in the Book of Mormon as an ancient and divinely inspired text. If, as Givens claims, the Book of Mormon's message is in fact "its manner of origin" (84), then the burden lies with Latter-day Saints to demonstrate that its origins are credible.

Givens opens with several fine chapters that set the stage for understanding the Book of Mormon, its significance, and its organization and content. He addresses what we know about the translation of the plates and argues that there is evidence that the Book of Mormon was indeed dictated orally and not copied from written sources. He also shadow-boxes with Dan Vogel and others who claim that declarations about the Book of Mormon's divine origins can be dismissed because the three witnesses may have been victims of group hallucination. Givens points out that "Dream-visions may be in the mind of the beholder, but gold plates are not subject to such