

## Truly Significant

Edward Leo Lyman. *Candid Insights of a Mormon Apostle: The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon, 1889–1895*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2010. liii, 794 pp. Introduction; Cannon family pedigree; frontispiece portrait, biographical sketches; footnotes; index. Cloth: \$125.00, limited edition; ISBN: 978-1-56085-210-0.

*Reviewed by Jonathan A. Stapley*

Abraham H. Cannon was Mormon aristocracy. The son of long-time First Presidency member George Q. Cannon, he accepted a call as an apostle at age thirty. During the latter portion of his life, the period covered in *Candid Insights*, he was also deeply involved in some of the most prominent business concerns of Utah Territory—banks, securities, printing, mines, and more. He served in these areas during the tumultuous period of the first Manifesto and the economic depression of the 1890s leading up to statehood. Also from the age of nineteen until the time he died at thirty-seven, he kept a diary.

The original Abraham H. Cannon diaries were donated by the Cannon family (save the last seven months of the journal, which are not known to be extant) to L. Tom Perry Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, with photocopies available in various repositories in the state.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Utah State Historical Society has made available online William C. Seifrit's excellent content review and voluminous index of the diaries.<sup>2</sup>

Edward Leo Lyman was one of the first researchers to access the Abraham H. Cannon diaries after they became available, and he mined their beautiful script for his elucidation of territorial politics and economics. In *Candid Insights*, he presents a lightly annotated single volume of Cannon's apostolic diaries. While Dennis Horne previously edited a volume of these diaries (*An Apostle's Record: The Journals of Abraham H. Cannon* [Clearfield, Utah: Gnolaum Books, 2004]), Lyman states that *Candid Insights* offers roughly double the text of the Horne edition, largely by the inclusion of entries relating to Lyman's areas of expertise (xxvi note

35). Horne also claimed to have redacted some material that he deemed too sensitive for public distribution.<sup>3</sup> The publisher claims that Lyman was generally inclusive of such material, but he also deemed it inappropriate to include the text of the Mormon temple sealing ceremony as written by Cannon in one entry (358). Beyond these omissions, compiling a single volume did require redactions; for example, material related to the Millard County irrigation project was not included (xxv note 33). Moreover, daily entries are regularly omitted. While not meeting the threshold of relevancy for this volume, sometimes these entries include important information. For example, of the entries describing Cannon's weekly prayer group in the Salt Lake Temple, only one out of every dozen or so is included in *Candid Insights*.<sup>4</sup>

The diaries themselves are simply extraordinary. They are well deserving of inclusion in Signature Book's Significant Diary Series. They rival and often surpass Wilford Woodruff's diary in detailing the interaction and discussions of the LDS Church's governing quorums. My recent article on adoptive sealing rituals and a co-authored history of baptism for health would have been dramatically less comprehensive without access to these diaries, which comprise approximately 4,000 holograph and typescript pages. Whereas Lyman has mostly been interested political and economic matters, the pages are saturated with details of Latter-day Saint liturgy, belief, and practice as well as general territorial life. My notes from these diaries are more dense on a per-page basis than any other diary from the period. I don't hesitate to consider the Cannon diaries essential reading in Mormon history.

*Candid* is an accurate descriptor of Cannon's journalizing. His entries regarding his brother Frank's binge drinking are explicit. Cannon coolly describes events around him with an air of detachment that could hardly be considered personal. For example, he notes the death of his daughter without pathos, and he had failed to note the birth of the same child seven days earlier (250–51). The moments of greatest emotion are those when his financial security was most in peril.

Lyman uses his extensive experience to realize a generous presentation, though it is one with an emphasis on the diaries' content and not the documents themselves. Lyman only lightly edited the material and occasionally included bracketed clarifications.

Footnotes are generally sparse and seemingly capricious. However, with the volume pushing 800 pages, a minimalist approach to annotation is understandable. Lyman often points people to his own work, which is not out of place considering his expertise and voluminous corpus relating to the period. However, occasionally, he does miss more relevant contextual material.<sup>5</sup> Several notes are very helpful; for example, he includes transcripts for related diary texts held by the LDS First Presidency (396 note 10; 439 note 33). Occasionally a note contains intriguing material, like Lyman's claim to be the source for a text canonized as part of the 1981 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (196 note 10). Chapter 6 feels as if it were annotated afresh without consideration of earlier material, resulting in notes introducing concepts that were frequently discussed in earlier portions of the diaries.

That the diaries of a Mormon apostle who died more than 110 years ago would have a surprising relevance to political and economic issues today might startle some. Harry S. Stout recently commented on his rereading of *From Puritan to Yankee*: "No one can read Bushman's economic characterization of Yankee culture today without being uneasily aware of the resonances with our present: reckless speculation and people 'living beyond their means,' shopkeepers and merchants who 'extended credit ever more liberally,' creating a downward spiral where 'indebtedness embittered relations all across the complex web of credit.'" <sup>6</sup> The resonances of Cannon's diaries today are similarly discomfiting: housing bubbles, opaque securities, credit webs, and failed banks. There are, however, important contrasts as well as parallels. It was the details surrounding Mormon disfranchisement and self-isolation that most stirred my thoughts while reading. With viable Mormon candidates for the U.S. presidency in the running and other prominent Mormon politicians in key leadership positions, there are only faint echoes of Mormons' chasmal otherness.

*Candid Insights of a Mormon Apostle* is more than worth the price of purchase. It is a splendid addition to the scholar's bookshelf, handsomely bound and accessibly typeset. It places thousands of interesting and insightful historical bits within reach, latently awaiting incorporation into our grand narratives. There were only 500 copies printed, however; I recommend getting one while you can.

### Notes

1. Note that the Perry Special Collections has digitized and made available online the first three volumes of these journals: [http://lib.byu.edu/digital/mmd/diarists/Cannon\\_%20Abraham.php](http://lib.byu.edu/digital/mmd/diarists/Cannon_%20Abraham.php).

2. [William C. Seifrit], "Register of the Journal of Abraham Cannon, 1879–1896," Utah State Historical Society (accessed September 17, 2011), <http://history.utah.gov/findAids/B00105/welcome.htm>.

3. Dennis Horne stated: "In the original Abram Cannon journals, there's a page dealing with higher blessings; I took that out of my publication. There is a sentence or two dealing with instructions to temple workers that I omitted; I took out a word-for-word rendition of the temple marriage ceremony when Abram Cannon did a sealing for a relative; that is not in there. In the original journals there are a few pages where the Adam-God theory is referenced and George Q. Cannon talks about it—I took it out of my book[.]" Jared Tamez, typescript notes of Horne's comments, "Notes from the 2009 Eborn Book Event: Dennis Horne on Abraham Cannon and Other Projects," *Juvenile Instructor*, <http://www.juvenileinstructor.org/notes-from-the-2009-eborn-book-event-dennis-horne-on-abraham-cannon-and-other-projects/> (accessed September 17, 2011).

4. See, for example, entries dated October 31, November 7, 14, and 28, December 5, 12, and 26, 1894, January 2, and 9, February 6, 13, 20, and 27, and March 20, 27, 1895.

5. For example, in his discussion of the Parrish-Potter murders (447 note 40), Lyman failed to cite the two most complete discussions of the events, namely those by Polly Aird. In his note about Latter-day Saint prayer circles, Lyman overlooked D. Michael Quinn's treatment. Instead, he relied on faulty material and consequently made erroneous claims (466 note 9). Polly Aird, "'You Nasty Apostates, Clear Out': Reasons for Disaffection in the Late 1850s," *Journal of Mormon History* 30 (Fall 2004): 129–207; Polly Aird, *Mormon Convert, Mormon Defector: A Scottish Immigrant in the American West, 1848–1861* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2009), chaps. 12–15; D. Michael Quinn, "Latter-day Saint Prayer Circles," *BYU Studies* 19 (Fall 1978): 79–105.

6. Harry S. Stout in "A Retrospective on the Scholarship of Richard Bushman," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44 (Fall 2011): 13.