

Book Reviews

RICHARD E. BENNETT. *We'll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846-1848*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997, xix + 428 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index, hardbound, \$19.95.)

Reviewed by David R. Crockett, coeditor of LDS-Gems, Infobase Inc.

Richard E. Bennett is presently a faculty member in Religious Education at Brigham Young University. He holds a Ph.D. in American history from Wayne State University and has served for nearly twenty years as head of the Department of Archives and Special Collections at the University of Manitoba. He has authored many articles on LDS pioneer history. He also authored the award-winning book, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846-1852: "And Should We Die,"* published by Oklahoma Press in 1987.

Richard Bennett's *We'll Find the Place* is a remarkable new history on the Mormon pioneer exodus. Historian Leonard J. Arrington states in the foreword that this work is "a definitive new history that is refreshingly different from most earlier works on the topic" (xi).

We'll Find the Place is essentially a sequel to Bennett's award-winning classic, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846-1852: "And Should We Die."* This previous work is a comprehensive history of the Nauvoo exodus, the trek across Iowa in 1846, and the encampment in Winter Quarters on the banks of the Missouri River. *We'll Find the Place* continues this history. Bennett presents and analyzes the historic pioneer journey in 1847 and the establishment of the Mormon settlement in the Salt Lake Valley.

Although numerous books have been written on the historic pioneer crossing, Bennett shares a refreshing new analysis of this history. In the preface, he observes:

Each new generation, however, must wend its own way across the landscape of history and see and feel for itself what previous generations of writers saw and interpreted for their own time and place. While so much has been written, the surprise is that so much of the story has never been told. New manuscript sources continue to come to light, demanding not only a retelling but also a reinterpretation (xiii).

In addition to pioneer journals that are typically used to tell the tale of this historic trek, Bennett incorporates new manuscript sources including unpublished journals, letters, numerous autobiographies and reminiscences, and minutes of Church meetings. In addition, Bennett uses many non-Mormon contemporaries' observations that add a fascinating perspective and balance to the history.

Bennett weaves in quotations masterfully that invoke understanding and deep feeling in the reader. For instance, at the conclusion of his introduction, he sets the stage by quoting an 1847 pioneer, Isaac Haight:

Here we are exiled from the United States without a home, dwelling in tents and wagons exposed to the inclemency of the weather. We are even like the saints of old having no abiding city but we are wanderers and pilgrims on the earth but we count the present sufferings not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to his Saints.¹

The humanistic side of these pioneer legends is revealed as Bennett incorporates candid observations such as this excerpt from a letter from Thomas Bullock to his wife:

I shall be very glad when I shall change both my bed and bedfellow. . . . I sleep in the wagon I drive, and George Brown is my bed fellow and the most uncomfortable one I ever slept with. If it was night only I could do well . . . but he is a disagreeable, saucy, idle fellow by day. I am tired of him and I pray God, my return journey may be by myself or another person, not him.²

Bennett points out that the original pioneer company came in contact with many other travelers and emigrants along their journey, a fact that is often overlooked. He includes fascinating eyewitness accounts of non-Mormons who came in contact with the historic wagon train. John Craig wrote in a letter this reference about the pioneers:

On the 11th of July we met 83 wagons being an advance party of the Mormons on their way to the lake intending (as they informed us) to sow buckwheat and establish a colony around this and the Uataw Lake. . . . The party numbered about two hundred men with eight or ten females.³

Bennett dispels oft-told myths about the pioneer trek. For instance, he helps the reader to understand that the Mormon leaders did have a general idea of their destination. It was the rank and file who were unaware of their goal (10). The Church leaders did have an understanding of the trail ahead. Bennett helps the reader understand that the original pioneer company of 1847 included men who had already traveled a large portion of the trail. John Brown had journeyed along the Oregon Trail to Fort Laramie in 1846 with a company of Saints from Mississippi. John Tippets and Thomas Woolsey contributed their knowledge and

experience based on a journey from Pueblo, Colorado, to Winter Quarters during the winter of 1846–47 (76–77).

A few historic items were left out of *We'll Find the Place* that perhaps would have been worthy of mention. Tarlton Lewis and Stephen Goddard should be recognized as the first of the 1847 pioneers to leave Winter Quarters, as they were sent to the Elkhorn River, perhaps as early as 30 March 1847, to construct a ferry to be used by the company.⁴ Bennett makes reference several times to “Revenue Cutter” but never fully explains the significant role contributed by this “boat wagon” that assisted with river crossings, helped to catch fish in lakes, and served as a stand for Brigham Young as he uttered historic speeches along the trail.⁵ When Bennett lists the pioneers included in Orson Pratt’s advance company, who entered the valley ahead of Brigham Young (as recorded in the journal of Horace K. Whitney), he neglects to point out that this company also included several women and children. These forgotten individuals were from the Mississippi families (22, fn 23).⁶

As with any monumental historic treatment, a few minor inconsistencies can be found. Bennett recounts how the 1847 pioneers met three brethren at Fort Laramie—members of the Mississippi company who wintered at Pueblo. The narrative leads one to believe that Brigham Young was learning for the first time that the Mississippi Saints and Mormon Battalion sick detachments had spent the 1846–47 winter in Pueblo. However, this was really “old news” to Brigham Young because John Tippets and Thomas Woolsey, members of the pioneer company, had already relayed all that news from Pueblo when they arrived in Winter Quarters during February 1847 (173).⁷ In reality, the additional news discovered at this time centered on the recent deaths at Pueblo since Tippets and Woolsey left and the alarming news that Captain James Brown might be leading the sick detachment Battalion members to Santa Fe instead of to Fort Laramie.

Bennett makes one historical mistake that is worthy of correction. When members of the pioneer company arrived at Green River, they met up with Samuel Brannan, the leader of the *Brooklyn Saints* who had sailed to Yerba Buena (San Francisco). Bennett’s narration leads one to believe that Brannan had traveled through the Salt Lake Valley on his way east toward his historic meeting with Brigham Young (194–96, 206). However, Brannan did not take this route and had not yet seen the valley. He journeyed along the California Trail to Fort Hall (near present-day Pocatello, Idaho) and then along the Oregon Trail to Fort Bridger, in Wyoming.⁸

At one of the climaxes of the book, when Brigham Young proclaims his approval for the valley, Bennett appropriately discusses the difficulties associated with knowing exactly what words were uttered by President Young on that historic occasion. Bennett does not discuss the possibility that this famous event might have taken place on Big Mountain, rather than at the mouth of Emigration Canyon.⁹

We'll Find the Place does not stop with the arrival of the first pioneers. Bennett provides an excellent history of the eventful journey of the "Big Company" of hundreds of pioneer families who arrived later in the fall of 1847. This second 1847 historic pioneer trek is usually overlooked and forgotten because of the attention drawn to Brigham Young's first company. He tells how these follow-on companies struggled with accident and death along the trail. Five-year-old Robert Gardner died as a result of injuries from being run over by a wagon. On a later return journey, his father visited the gravesite. Bennett includes this moving quotation from the family history: "They found that the wolves had uncovered the grave and his bones were scattered about. The sight was too much for kindhearted [cousin] John. He wept and wailed and tore his hair. They tenderly gathered up the bones, reinterred them and sadly journeyed on."¹⁰

We'll Find the Place contains about sixty-five pages of endnotes full of rich information as interesting as the narrative. Primary sources are carefully documented, and very helpful pointers are given to the interested reader for more details.

This work, certain to be a classic in Mormon history, closes with a description of the struggles experienced by the settlers in the valley and an account of Brigham Young's return trip to Winter Quarters during the fall of 1847. Bennett quotes pioneer Ezra T. Benson who looked over the budding valley settlement and proclaimed: "We have now laid the foundation for our coming day" (339).¹¹

Bennett limited his history to the first two years of the pioneer migration, explaining that those events laid the foundation for all that was to come. "In one sense, the exodus was over in 1848, just as the migrations began" (xiv). Now that this foundation has been laid, one can only hope and wonder if Richard Bennett will produce yet another follow-on work to study the later important migrations along the Mormon Trail.

Notes

1. Journal of Isaac Chauncey Haight, 16 September 1847, LDS Church Archives.
2. Thomas Bullock to his wife, 14 May 1847, Bullock letters, Thomas Bullock Papers, LDS Church Archives.
3. John Craig to George Bossinger, 4 October 1847, papers of F. Bossinger, Huntington Library.
4. Preston Nibley, *Exodus to Greatness: The Story of the Mormon Migration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1947), 353.
5. See Andrew Jenson, "Revenue Cutter," *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Company, 1941).
6. See a list of the advance company members, including women and children, in David R. Crockett, *Saints Find the Place: A Day-by-Day Pioneer Experience* (Tucson, Arizona: LDS- Gems Press, 1997), 354, fn 16.
7. Tippets and Woolsey arrived in Winter Quarters on 16 February 1847. See Charles Kelly, ed., *Journals of John D. Lee 1846-1847 and 1859* (Salt Lake City:

University of Utah Press, 1984), 75–90.

8. Brannan's route is mentioned in his letter from Fort Hall. See "S. Brannan's Letter," *Latter-Day Saints Millennial Star*, 15 October 1847, 305-06.

9. Mormon Trail expert Stanley B Kimball has expressed this view. "It was also here [Big Mountain pass] and not where the This is the Place monument is today that Brigham Young uttered his famous words 'This is the Place, drive on.'" Stanley B. Kimball, *Historic Sites and Markers Along the Mormon and Other Great Western Trails* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 128. See also a treatment of this possibility in David R. Crockett, *Saints Find the Place: A Day-by-Day Pioneer Experience* (Tucson, Arizona: LDS-Gems Press, 1997), 385.

10. Delila Gardner Hughes, *Life of Archibald Gardner* (Draper, Utah: Review and Preview Publishers, 1970), 39, quoted in Bennett, 265

11. General Church Minutes, 14 November 1847.

ANDREW F. SMITH. *The Sainly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997, xiii + 271 pp., \$26.95 hardback.)

Reviewed by Paul H. Peterson, Brigham Young University.

About twenty-five years ago, I heard that most gentlemanly of Mormon historians, the late T. Edgar Lyon, tell a group of BYU Church history teachers that someone needed to write a biography of John C. Bennett. Lyon agreed that Bennett was hardly a candidate for sainthood but insisted he was more complicated and multifaceted than we had supposed—that among other things, he was involved in chicken breeding, medicine, and tomato culture.

Indeed, it was tomatoes, or more precisely, Bennett's role in promoting tomatoes, that first attracted author Andrew Smith to Mormonism's number one profligate and scamp. Smith, while doing research on nineteenth-century household management and dietary fare, stumbled across a "Bennett" who was an important, early advocate of tomato eating. Ultimately, he explored other facets of Bennett's turbulent, "Barnumesque" (xii) life and was drawn to write a biography of him.

This is a helpful and informative study. An experienced journalist and writer, Smith obviously spent a fair number of hours acquainting himself with early Mormon history and, at the same time, traced a plethora of tidbits on Bennett in a number of Midwestern libraries. I was impressed with his diligent research, his clean writing, and his objectivity.

What kind of a man did Smith unearth? He found Bennett to be morally flawed but absorbing. Of his moral laxity, there is abundant evidence. Smith readily catalogs his lies, his debauchery, his infidelity, and his incredible desire for affluence and power—whatever the cost. Smith even maintains, contrary to

the opinions of John Taylor and B. H. Roberts, that Bennett's motives for casting his lot with the Church were impure from the beginning. But, unlike most LDS depictions of John C., Smith's Bennett was also a man of some ability and accomplishment. At various times (and sometimes interspersed among his evil activities), he successfully practiced medicine, functioned as a first-rate lobbyist, and made legitimate contributions to horticulture and animal husbandry. Indeed, Bennett deserves credit for popularizing the tomato and possibly for introducing Plymouth Rock fowl to American breeders. And, Smith points out, in Iowa where Bennett lived the last several years of his life until his death in 1867, he was generally respected by community contemporaries.

Regarding Bennett's nefarious activities in Nauvoo, Smith provides the most detailed summary to date; but he did not, unfortunately, uncover further information that provides additional light on some of the most vexing and controversial matters. For example, despite Smith's extended discussion of the triangular imbroglio involving the Prophet, Bennett, and Sarah Pratt, the issue still remains a bundle of perplexing allegations and counter allegations.

Although I strongly recommend this volume to students of Mormon history, I think a couple of qualifications are in order.

First, I was pleased that Smith examined Bennett in a larger historical framework, choosing to understand some of his doings and promotions in a "booster spirit or context," but I wonder if the author overplayed his hand.¹ Bennett's "energy, questionable schemes, ingenuity, and eclectic interests," Smith argues, "aptly reflect the robust spirit of a nation moving westward and leaving behind traditional society, with its conventional mores and commonplace customs" (187). In addition, Bennett was, according to Smith, "an eccentric entrepreneur who partly helped create the nation in which we now live" (187).

To be certain, Bennett imbibed heavily of the booster spirit. Nauvoo was an upstart western city with a press, a university, and its own grand hotel. Bennett, in some respects, was a typical pre-Civil War businessman, a "tall talker" who thrived on opportunity and who could transfer loyalties instantaneously. And some of Bennett's actions typify a booster mentality rather than a deeply entrenched hatred of Mormonism. Bennett did retire from the anti-Mormon lecture circuit as soon as the interest, and especially the money, dried up. Furthermore, after Joseph Smith's death, Bennett did not hesitate to return to Nauvoo to become an integral part of the succession discussion. Later, sensing yet another opportunity for power and acclaim, Bennett became involved in Strang's organization. In short, it appears that Bennett was essentially a non-grudge holder—one who could easily embrace a people he had earlier castigated in an effort to satisfy his unbridled ambition.

But the cloak of boosterism is not large enough to cover all of Bennett's misdeeds. Bennett didn't just exaggerate—he was a calculated liar. The complete chameleon, he would embrace virtually any institution or philosophy under the

sun if he thought it would elevate his name. In his early years, Bennett poisoned just about every organization he affiliated with. And his string of seductions, in many cases a matter of sweet talking or misrepresenting religious ideas to well-intentioned but naive females, is reprehensible. Author Smith admits that Bennett was unsympathetic. I am not confident that John C. Bennett, a man who during his lifetime brought considerable pain and hurt to others, had the capacity to feel pain or hurt.

Second, although I clearly learned a good deal about Bennett, I never did feel that Smith was quite able “to get inside” his subject—the ultimate challenge for any biographer. In large part, this shortcoming is not caused by any lack of energy or ability on Smith’s part but rather is caused by a lack of source material. In his preface, Smith points out that Bennett’s “coveted hoard of documents, letters, and papers which he collected diligently throughout his life, has not turned up” (xi). Also, while hardly asking that Smith put Bennett “on the couch,” I would have liked to have the author dally with John C.’s psychological quirks.

But I suppose most historians and biographers, whatever the availability of sources, lament about the “missing pieces.” We should be grateful that author Smith, through diligent combing of archives, did find hundreds of new references to Bennett that permit us to better understand the man and the era that he lived (and sometimes thrived) in. Until further information surfaces, Andrew Smith’s fine biography of John Cook Bennett will remain the definitive reference to this capable, enigmatic, and sometimes-evil man.

Notes

1. In his classic 1965 study, *The Americans: The National Experience*, Daniel Boorstin discusses Boosters (a retrospective term—in their day, they were called businessmen) who created “upstart communities” in the period between the Revolution and the Civil War. See pp. 43, 113–68, 296–98.

ROGER D. LAUNIUS. *Alexander William Doniphan: Portrait of a Missouri Moderate*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997, 316 pp., \$37.50.)

Reviewed by Kenneth W. Godfrey, retired from the Church Educational System, past president of the Mormon History Association, and researcher and writer in the field of LDS Church history.

Roger D. Launius, the chief historian of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), is one of the most prolific writers in the field of Mormon studies. He has authored, to select only a few titles, an award-winning

biography about Joseph Smith III, a history of Zion's Camp, and a volume regarding Latter-day Saint dissenters, as well as a plethora of articles that have appeared in a multitude of journals.

To add to his distinguished list of titles, in 1997, as part of the Missouri Biography Series, he published a book detailing the life of Alexander W. Doniphan, a man most Mormons admire. Launius argues that Doniphan "always represented a moral position tempered by moderation." He was, in addition, firmly committed to loyalty, hard work, the sanctity of the republic, and Christian charity. Doniphan, Launius writes, "represented the middle ground of American politics and throughout his life represented persistent moderation" as well (xi).

This book interests Latter-day Saints because Launius treats, in a balanced, even-handed way that would have pleased his subject, Doniphan's relationships with Latter-day Saints who resided in Missouri in the 1830s. Doniphan, with the help of other lawyers, forged an equitable settlement for the "wrongs" Mormons suffered in Jackson County. It was only because revelation prevented them from selling their holdings in that county that the Mormons received no monetary redress for their losses. Doniphan had done all he could to forge something approximating justice from an unfortunate and unfair situation.

Launius's description of the Missouri economy into which the Mormons moved is impressive, as is his discussion of the parties and political climate that greeted the Saints who made Missouri their home. His research fleshes out the Mormon Missouri experience and makes it more understandable than when only Mormon sources are relied upon.

It is well known that it was Doniphan in 1838 who prevented the execution of Joseph Smith. Doniphan's conduct reflected his belief in justice no matter how unpopular the defendant. Launius sets the stage for Doniphan's heroics backed with scenery (such as the Missouri side of the difficulties), unfamiliar to many students of Latter-day Saint history, thus adding much to our knowledge of this important event.

He describes, too, the Mormon War of 1838 and Doniphan's role in that conflict, giving both sides their due. However, Launius perhaps relies too much on the interpretations of historian Stephen C. LeSueur and could have profited from reading Alexander L. Baugh's 1996 Brigham Young University dissertation titled "A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri." Still, after finishing the chapter on this conflict, the reader is convinced that Launius has clearly and carefully crafted a fairly balanced account. Doniphan's role as a moderating figure emerges clearly. Launius shows, too, that his law practice flourished, even though Doniphan defended the unpopular Mormons. Latter-day Saints will be pleased with the man who emerges from the pages of this book and with his encounters and relationships with their ancestors. He was one of only a few Missourians who treated the Saints fairly if not with total compassion.

There was more to Doniphan's life than his involvement with the

Mormons, however, and Launius moves on to other things. One of the highlights of the book is the heroic role Doniphan played in the Mexican-American War. The long march of the soldiers under his command is graphically told, as are the battles of El Brazito and Sacramento and the occupation of Chihuahua City that made Doniphan a national hero.

To his credit, Doniphan was not active in the Blue Lodges presided over by his old friend David Atchison (a name familiar to Latter-day Saint historians), which were established to encourage proslavery communities in Kansas in the 1850s. The members of this secret fraternal organization also threatened anti-slavery settlers in Kansas. Less laudable is Doniphan's sympathy for these lodges and his disgust for people who opposed the extension of slavery into that territory.

The final chapters of the book follow Doniphan through the difficulties in Kansas just prior to the Civil War, his activities during the Civil War, the decline of his law practice, and other financial failures. The deaths of his two sons and his wife and the last years he spent living alone in a Richmond, Missouri, hotel finish out the book.

Prior to, and during the Civil War, Doniphan argued for the preservation of the Union and gradual emancipation; but he had no love for Abraham Lincoln who, he said, was "a man of no intelligence—no enlargement of views" and whom "he considered the culprit in any failure to effect a compromise" (247–48).

Launius clearly shows that had Doniphan possessed more ambition, more drive, and more willingness to play the political game, he might have become governor of Missouri or a United States senator. Instead, he was only a major regional figure, even though his fame as a military leader went beyond the border of the Show-Me State.

Overall, this book is finely crafted and well written. At times, Launius puts together some memorable sentences. He began Chapter 12 by writing, "The air hung heavy, like wet and limp denim on the line." Chapter 10 concludes with the descriptive sentence, "Doniphan decided to pick up the tempo of the waltz—not quite to a jig, but he was willing at least to try a grand march." As a final example of fine writing, we read, "He [Doniphan] entered the sea of politics hesitantly, but he did wade in."

Launius is correct in titling his book "a portrait of Doniphan." The reader learns a great deal about Doniphan and what he did with his life; but the man himself, his emotions, his feelings, and his thoughts remain as obscure as the sun during a summer rainstorm. Readers are left wondering what Doniphan was like as a husband and father and what really made him tick.

Forced to rely on government reports, newspaper articles, public speeches, court records, and a few official letters to flesh out Doniphan's life, Launius has produced an admirable book. He would have been able to more fully develop Doniphan had Doniphan kept a diary or were there more personal letters extant

to his wife and children. Like a picture hanging on a wall, we see the outside of the man, but what he was like inside remains obscure. I would have liked, too, to know more about Elizabeth Jane Thornton, Doniphan's wife. Throughout the book, she remains a shadowy figure who seldom appears on stage. The reader never catches a glimpse inside her world. There is little about his children and how they related to him and he to them. Launius leaves his readers wanting to know more about the Missouri moderate.

Though Doniphan's inner self, his feelings, and his emotions remain obscure, it is not because Launius was lazy and overlooked important papers. A perusal of the bibliography and footnotes discloses the thoroughness of his research. He studied documents in all the important libraries and consulted a multitude of collections, and his list of primary sources is especially impressive.

Latter-day Saint readers will learn much about Doniphan and the Mormon Missouri experience from this book. It is well written and thoroughly researched and presents an impressively balanced view of an extraordinary man of principle and decency.