

Editor's Letter

Recently, I read a book by Jana Richman called *Riding in the Shadows of the Saints*. In the book, Richman recounts her experiences while riding a motorcycle across the Mormon Trail. With a lagging testimony in her Latter-day Saint religion, she undertook the journey in an attempt to understand the faith that kindled in the hearts of five generations of women preceding her.

As she left the prairie and neared the mountains, Richman realized that she was going home. She wrote: "According to Geographer Robert Hay, the depth of one's bond to a place is affected by one's ancestral and cultural sense of place. Generations of family on certain land and spiritual connections to that land create a deeper bond with a place than can be created simply by length of residence. Hay finds that developing a sense of place is a basic need common to humanity."¹

I have felt this bond of place in Philadelphia County and neighboring Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Nine generations back takes me to the beginning of Germantown, Pennsylvania, now part of Philadelphia. Thirteen families left Germany in 1683 to come to America for religious freedom, settling on land purchased from William Penn. They were the first people of Germany to settle in America. Two of those heads of households were my direct ancestors.

I have driven Philadelphia streets. I have photographed churches, burial grounds, schools, and sites of homes now lost. I have wandered the cemeteries of St. Peter's and St. Michael's Lutheran churches, running my hand over worn gravestones. I have researched census records and tried to read church records written in German. I have analyzed maps and family relationships. I even traveled to Germany where I ate a "low rhinish meal" with a distant cousin and walked through homes built at the time and in the place where my ancestors lived. And, from the first time I searched the Philadelphia Branch records ten years ago in the Community of Christ Library-Archives (formerly RLDS) in Independence, Missouri, I knew I had to publish an issue focusing on Pennsylvania.

Through the generosity and support of Ronald E. Romig, archivist for the Community of Christ, I was given permission to transcribe the membership list of the Philadelphia Branch, 1840–54. I was aided by a transcription by the late Winnie Piepengerdes of the Community of Christ. David J. Whittaker, who had also transcribed the record several years ago, provided me with his Philadelphia files and maps and consented to write an introduction to the branch records. Ardis Parshall helped transcribe the microfilmed copy of the minutes found in the LDS Church Archives.

Fred E. Woods, continuing with his research into immigration, has written a comprehensive account of the three years that immigrants came through the Philadelphia ports. As he usually does, he skillfully blends the story of the ships, the landing, and the experiences of those early Saints while they traveled to Zion.

Stories and folklore, recounted by J. Taylor Hollist, are from a different location in Pennsylvania—that of the Susquehanna River valley. For forty years, Hollist has lived in the Susquehanna region where he heard accounts of Joseph Smith’s walking on water. In his article, he recounts those stories and other items of folklore about the Prophet Joseph.

Stephen J. Fleming discovered two letters, or sets of letters, written about and to early Latter-day Saints in Pennsylvania. These letters are found in the Document Section of this issue. Evan Pugh, first president of Pennsylvania State University, joined the LDS faith at the age of twelve and left his home in Chester County for Nauvoo. Six letters from his family to a cousin discuss his so-called misguided baptism and address means used to get him away from his new church. Edward Hunter, also from Chester County, joined the Church in 1840. Several years later, a neighbor and would-be convert wrote to Hunter asking his advice about being baptized. Fleming, along with coauthor David W. Grua, provides the historical background to this letter.

We are pleased to add to our collection of interviews honoring historians of our day. Steven C. Harper’s interview with Milton V. Backman Jr. provides a look at how Backman defined history through people, places, sources, and stories. An impressive bibliography of Backman’s works is included in this article.

Mormon Historic Sites Foundation is involved with three projects in this issue. Their first Junius F. Wells Award honored President Gordon B. Hinckley. The remarks by Kim R. Wilson, chair of the foundation, and the response by President Hinckley are printed. Additional information about the event is given by Derek J. Tangren.

A new Icelandic Monument was placed in Spanish Fork, Utah,

upgrading one placed there in 1938. Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, president of Iceland, was in attendance at the dedication program. David A. Ashby, past president of the Icelandic Association of Utah, is responsible for information about the monument. In addition, Jonathan W. Bullen, a member of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation board, provides information on the new visitors' center/museum located at the Mormon Fort State Park in Las Vegas. This facility was dedicated as part of the Mormon Fort sesquicentennial anniversary.

When Leonard J. Arrington bequeathed his papers to Utah State University, he requested that an annual lecture on some area of Mormon History be given. Each of the lectures was then printed in a small booklet. The first ten lectures have now been combined into a compilation by Utah State University Press. J. Spencer Fluhman reviews this collection for us, whetting our appetite with the variety of subjects presented in the lectures.

As in the past, many people worked in the background to bring about this issue, including Heather McClellan, Derek J. Tangren, Ron E. Romig, Ardis Parshall, and William W. Slaughter, as well as members of the *Mormon Historical Studies* board whose efforts are much appreciated.

Maurine Carr Ward

Notes

1. Jana Richman, *Riding in the Shadows of the Saints: A Woman's Story of Motorcycling the Mormon Trail* (Canada: Random House of Canada Ltd., 2005), 227.

