

Book Reviews

FRED E. WOODS, *Gathering to Nauvoo*. (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2001 [cover copyright 2002]. 261 pp, acknowledgments, illustrations, chapter notes, two appendices, list of illustrations, bibliography, index, \$19.95, hardback.

Reviewed by Lavina Fielding Anderson, editor of the Journal of Mormon History, editor of Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001). She is also working on a biography of Lucy Mack Smith.

There's no question that, even in the stunning efflorescence of a hundred temples before 2000, President Gordon B. Hinckley's announcement of the reconstruction of the Nauvoo Temple touched a special chord in Mormon hearts. The efforts to express those feelings and connect with that brief but brilliant period of Church history has produced a scholarly flowering of its own, among which this book takes its place.

Fred E. Woods, an associate professor in the Department of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University, has a special interest in migration history and has already coauthored a book, with Susan Arrington Madsen, about the transoceanic phase of Mormon migration. This volume focuses on the migration of Saints from the British Isles between 1839 and 1846, when Nauvoo was headquarters of the Church. This perspective excludes migration from Europe and other locations in the United States during the same period, but Woods is careful not to imply that British immigration was all, or even the most important part, of the stream of strangers who were becoming fellow citizens. His thesis is: "The triumphant synergism of British immigrants and Mormon proselytes gleaned from various pockets of North America resulted in the building of a grand city and a glorious temple.... As they toiled to build Zion, the Zion within them emerged" (2).

The book is organized into six chapters, beginning with the history of settlement in Nauvoo and the doctrine of the gathering. With this context in place, Woods then follows the logical three steps of the migration: embarkation and crossing the Atlantic (chap. 3), following the Mississippi from New Orleans, to St. Louis, to Nauvoo (chap. 4), and the challenges of assimilation into Nauvoo society (chap. 5). Although such an approach might tend to blur early and late experiences, that is actually not a problem given the conciseness of the six-year period under study. A final chapter describes the exodus from Nauvoo in 1845-46 while an epilogue describes the destruction of the Nauvoo Temple and the announcement of its reconstruction and its dedication, scheduled in commemoration of the martyrdoms in Carthage.

Particularly helpful research tools are the appendices. Appendix A lists each of the thirty-two voyages of British Saints to America, commencing with a table that lists date, port, name of ship, tonnage, leader of company, and emigration agent. This list includes two chartered voyages that did not appear on Andrew Jenson's useful list. Modestly, Woods discusses his discovery of two uncounted companies from Bristol in 1841 in a footnote (64 note 29). Woods also notes independent voyages by thirteen companies. He follows up the table with a company-by-company narrative that will be invaluable to anyone research a particular family or group. Appendix B is a chronology of migration-related events in Nauvoo.

My sole complaints are, first that Appendix B, though designed so that the months and days stand out brightly, does not show the year in either the running heads nor the individual entries. The reader must page forward or backward to the nearest "January." Maps are indispensable in a migration history; unfortunately the two in this volume are reproduced with such dark backgrounds that it is difficult to make out the names of cities against them. Also, some cities that are important sites in the narrative history do not appear on the map at all (Balize, for instance, p. 73). And finally, historian Bernard De Voto's name, though spelled correctly in the bibliography, is misspelled in both the text and accompanying note as "Bernhard" and not indexed at all.

The two indisputable treasures of this volume, however, are its illustrations and its personal voices. In addition to the beautifully designed four-color cover showing Ken Baxter's painting, *The Saints Embark from Liverpool*, there are, by my count, eighty-three illustrations—sometimes three or four per page. In addition to ships, the river cities that the Saints would have passed (such as St. Louis and Vicksburg), this text is rich in the faces of individuals—literally enabling the reader to "put a face" to the voice speaking on the page. I was particularly interested in Woods's careful

use of statistics to bring details into focus. His lively portrait of Liverpool, from which over 80 percent of Mormon immigrant voyages commenced, was colorful. In 1840, it had a population of “over two hundred thousand people and “some two thousand pubs,” but emigrants converged on it because of its “prime. . . rail connections” and “excellent navigable channels in the Mersey River.” By 1850, “two-thirds of the British emigrant trade belonged to Liverpool” (42; 62 note 10). Woods also cites estimates “that out of about 90,000 Latter-day Saint foreign converts who gathered to America during the nineteenth century [a time span that included far more than the Nauvoo period, of course], roughly 55,000 were British or 61 percent of the total converts. . . . About 25 percent of Nauvoo’s population by 1845 was British” (119 note 19). Woods gives a by-year break-down of British emigrants from 1840 to 1846 and summarizes research that results in estimates numbers and percentages (64-65 note 31).

Readers will enjoy vivid first-person accounts like this 1845 letter by Ann Pitchforth about a storm at sea told in gripping present tense:

The winds arose, and our fears with them; wave dashed on wave, and storm on storm, every hour increasing; all unsecured boxes, tins, bottles, pans, &c., danced in wild confusion, cracking, clashing, jumbling, rolling, while the vessel pitched, and tossed, and bounced till people flew out of their berths on the floor, while others held on with difficulty; thus we continued for eight days—no fires made—nothing cooked—biscuits and cold water; the waves dashed down the hold into the interior of the vessel, hatchway then closed, all in utter darkness and terror, not knowing whether the vessel was sinking or not; none could tell—all prayed—an awful silence prevailed—sharks and sins presenting themselves, and doubts and fears; one awful hour after another passing, we found we were not yet drowned; some took courage and lit the lamps; we met in prayer, we pleaded the promises of our God—faith prevailed. . . . (58-59)

Compared with the perils of the ocean crossing, most readers may think that the passage from New Orleans to Nauvoo was routine. Apparently Church leaders shared this feeling, for there were no Church agents to smooth out the thousand details of the migration, contract with boat owners and develop long-term amicable relationships, buy food at group rates, inspect the ships for safety, and lecture the immigrants on what to expect. As a result, according to Woods’s fascinating reconstruction of this leg of the journey, many members stopped out at New Orleans, St. Louis, or other river towns, sometimes rejoining the Saints after years of delay. Yellow fever and cholera took a deadly toll. They were cheated by the unscrupulous, shocked by slavery, called “Joes Rats” (79) and other names by anti-Mormons who also tried to set the boats on fire and had to be repelled at gunpoint. They suffered hunger, thirst, delays, and excesses of heat and cold.

In this context, the joyous welcome that awaited them at Nauvoo was especially touching. Joseph Smith came aboard the *Emerald* as it docked and greeted Mary Ann Pratt, Parley's wife, with her infant daughter only three or four days old. "I could not refrain from shedding tears," he wrote (86). Robert Crookston's account reads: "As we approached the landing place to our great joy we saw the Prophet Joseph Smith there to welcome his people who had come so far. We were all so glad to see him and set our feet upon the promised land so to speak. It was the most thrilling experience of my life for I know that he was a Prophet of the Lord" (86).

Understanding the British immigrant experience during the Nauvoo period is essential to understanding the Nauvoo mystique. Fred Woods has supplied just that experience.

~~~~~

BILOINE WHITING YOUNG. *Obscure Believers: The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Pogo Press, 2002. 233 pp. Photographs, maps, index, bibliography. Paper: \$16.95; ISBN 1-880654-27-X

*Reviewed by Richard E. Bennett, Professor of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University.*

Biloiné Whiting Young, in her new book, *Obscure Believers: The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler*, makes a very significant, long overdue contribution to our understanding and appreciation of Latter-day Saint history. As Robert B. Flanders states in his introduction (himself a Cutlerite descendant), Biloiné Young "lights another candle" (8) to our religious past. Although her study suffers from some major flaws in historical scholarship, it accomplishes much in presenting a comprehensive, albeit debatable, overview and interpretation of the history of the Cutlerite defection from Brigham Young's exodus west.

The book begins with a look at the life of Alpheus Cutler (1784-1864), his conversion to Mormonism, his life of devotion to the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr., and his strong beliefs in such core doctrines of the Restoration such as the Book of Mormon, Christ's millennial return to the New Jerusalem in Independence, Missouri, and temple work. An ardent believer in preaching the gospel to the Indians, Cutler felt a special commission to involve the "Lamanites" in the redemption of and return to Zion in Missouri and broke with Brigham Young and the majority of the Latter-day Saints at the Missouri. He and his small band of faithful followers eventually established their own small headquarters in 1852, in a town in south-

western Iowa they named Manti. His dream of returning to Missouri unfulfilled, a despondent Alpheus Culter died in Iowa in 1864.

Soon afterwards, convinced that God's vision for them was to live and preach for a season among the Indians in Minnesota, Cutler's followers, led by Isaac and Chauncy Whiting and their Indian scout and fellow-member Lewis Denna, set out northward in three different migrations in 1864 and 1865 settling in Clitherall, Otter Lake County, Minnesota, northwest of Minneapolis. Victims of internal dissension, vigorous proselyting attempts by missionaries of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (recently renamed Community of Christ), and the inevitable encroachments of modern life and values upon a tiny group of people set on their old ways, Cutlerism fractured and eventually lost its way and its identity. Biloine Young, in writing a history laden with fascinating stories and faith of her own courageous pioneer ancestors, gives us a rather sad case study of the secularization of a religious people. Or, as one of their own leaders, Chauncy Whiting, finally admitted, "the spirit of the Lord grieved and withdrew from the people and spirit of deception came in among them and led them off from the chosen place into a spirit of the world" (175).

There is much to commend in this book besides its sweeping overview of Cutlerism from 1846 to the near present. The author is a gifted story teller, "Enthralled by the stores that I heard of Clitherall and the Cutlerites from the time I was a four year-old, it was perhaps inevitable that more than half a century later, I should be the one to tell their story" (11). Given more to recounting colorful stories and reminiscences than to arguing a systematic pattern of belief, Young's writing is sometimes family history, sometimes local history, sometimes biography. Particularly good is her telling of the Indian connection in Cutlerite history not only by recounting Lewis Denna's key role as the original scout in finding Clitherall but also in showing the helpful influence of the Reverend John Johnson Enmogahbough (an Ottawa Indian) in securing safety and cooperation from nearby Indian tribes. Her account of these migrations, their hardships in settlement, their industry in woodwork and chair making, are all very good.

Of particular fascination to the Latter-day Saint reader is her contention that of all the contemporary chiasmatic groups from Mormonism, the Cutlerites shared more of its core belief than any other, including the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Paramount in this regard was their belief in the temple endowment, eternal marriage, and baptism for the dead. Plural marriage was, however, for them a two-edge sword with many Cutlerites denying the principle which Cutler himself once clearly did espouse. With so much in common with the parent religion, Cutlerism

seems less another church than it was a different interpretation.

All of which leads us to consider some of the serious faults in this book. Irrespective of one's religious convictions or traditions, certain rules of historical writing must always apply when writing credible history. Providing careful documentation is surely one of them. In *Obscure Believers*, there are far too many statements and assertions, even supposed quotations, that lack evidence or documentation. This is especially true in the first half of the book. For example, in the key matter of Cutler's commitment to the Native Americans, the author hangs much of her argument on a supposed blessing from Joseph Smith without providing evidence. She likewise argues that Cutler sought an alliance with the Indians to "redeem" Zion (52), but without evidence. Another key component and argument in her history is Cutler's break with the present Church and his supposed claim to succession and leadership based on his membership in the "Anointed Quorum," the Council of Fifty (54). Such an assertion deserves proof, not mere statement. There is even the conspicuous absence of evidence for the claim made by Cutler's followers that he prophesied where in Minnesota they would eventually go. Although the author argues that Cutler was headstrong and charismatic, she does not prove her point and does not shake off the impression of several scholars that an aging Cutler was led about by lesser men intent on redefining Mormonism without Brigham Young and without plural marriage.

Especially damaging is the author's decision largely to ignore Latter-day Saint primary sources. Keep in mind that Cutler served loyally for many years under both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young and counted scores of Latter-day Saint friends and relatives. The many diaries, letters, and church records available for the study of Nauvoo, Winter Quarters, and Exodus history would have greatly benefitted this study in its interpretations. There is so much more available on Cutler and his faction and teachings than is here given. It is as though her research went no further than the Missouri River.

Not only are Latter-day Saint archival sources largely ignored, but the author is either unaware of a spate of recently published research on the Mormons at the Missouri, on the Cutlerite missions of "Lamanism" among the westward-bound Saints at Kaneshville, or deliberately chooses to ignore them. Considering her emphasis on such root Mormon doctrines as temple worship, Zion, celestial marriage, and the Book of Mormon, to disregard such serious new research in these areas leads to incomplete history and faulty interpretations. And while she credits to the path to vesting works of Danny L. Jorgensen in his excellent articles on Cutlerism, many of his insights and interpretations are omitted. One wonders why these two Cutlerite scholars did not or could not collaborate on a fuller study of the topic. Young's interpretation poses an invitation to Jorgensen to respond

with a fuller treatment of his own.

This disregard of current research and sometimes contrasting opinion leads to serious questioning of the author's understanding of what Cutlerism really was. Young relies heavily on past arguments that Culterism was "consonant with the prevailing folk beliefs" (23) of the time, that it tended toward the "magical and otherworldly premises of Mormonism" (65), that they were given to belief in the "supernatural" and "the occult," a adept at "reading divine intention into [all] the events of their lives" (92). That there were some who believed in such things is a given, but be careful about equating the supernatural with the spiritual, the occult with conversion, the magic for the miracle. Deeper studying into primary sources may have tempered her views on the religious convictions of her own ancestors. Such would also be true of her handling of the plural marriage debate among the Cutlerites that some accepted, some rejected and others denied. So, too, the faltering attempts at establishing the "order of Enoch" or communitarian living.

Despite these serious shortcomings, *Obscure Believers* remains an interesting, highly informative read, an honest effort to bring to light an obscure history. Her last three chapters on "The Death of Old Clitherall," "The Return to Zion," and "Ghosts of Nauvoo Haunt Old Clitherall" trace the Cutlerite decline after Chauncy Whiting's death in 1909, their brief resurgence under Isaac Whiting, an eventual twentieth century split among surviving members between Clyde and Rupert Fletcher and the story of their splintered return to Independence in the mid-1950s and 1960s. As Young concludes, "the organization that had once presented a serious challenge to Brigham Young was now merely a footnote to Mormon history" (194).

She sprinkles throughout her manuscript excellent migrations and settlement maps, photographs, a useful index, an Epilogue which provides a sort of Who's Who of biographical sketches and inter-family relationship of now Cutlerite in Clitherall.

Now, if only printing houses would stop using cheap glue bindings on paperback books that fall apart after our one or two readings!