

# Reviews

## **Corinne: The Gentile Capital of Utah**

Brigham D. Madsen  
Utah Historical Society, 1980  
331 pages, \$17.50



Should any town whose effective life lasted less than ten years and peak population totaled barely 1500 souls deserve an in-depth study of 331 pages? That was my first question when asked to review Brigham

Madsen's *Corinne: The Gentile Capital of Utah*. Certainly no other Great Basin town comparable in size and lifespan has received a similar published tribute.

Madsen's work, it must be stated, is more than a narrow community history. The study not only analyzes Corinne in a local context, but in a regional and national one as well. Moreover, the book has the overtones of an epic tale of two cities: "a city of infidels" versus "the city of God," with the "Great Basin Kingdom" the prize to the victor.

The serpentine Pacific railroad's intrusion into the Saint's "Garden of Eden" in 1869 set the stage for a ten-year struggle between Gentile Corinne and Mormon Utah Territory. Influenced by a nation's general anti-Mormon sentiment, the upstart railroad town's journals bitterly denounced anything and everything inspired by the teachings of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. Needless to say, the Latter-day Saints' newspapers, while somewhat more restrained in their attacks and counterattacks, had a few choice things to say about "that sin-filled city of Gentiles." Madsen gives the reader a generous taste of the salty fare.

At times, the conflict took on the appearance of a "holy war." Believing themselves the single bastion of civilization in the midst of a barbaric people, the "Corinnethians" assaulted

the political and economic foundations of Mormondom with missionary zeal. "They attempted to get one of their citizens appointed territorial governor, endeavored to have Corinne named the capital of Utah, tried to divide the territory by annexing the northern area to Idaho, and opposed statehood which would have placed Utah completely in Mormon hands . . . Corinne worked assiduously to gain control of Box Elder County affairs and particularly rejoiced in the success of its free market in attracting Mormon farmers to its shops and mercantile establishments."



In the final analysis, Corinne fared rather poorly in this battle to the death. The telling blow came in the years 1877-78 when the Utah Northern Railroad was completed into Marsh Valley, Idaho Territory. There the road intersected the Montana trail—the commercial lifeline of Corinne—and Ogden began to reap the sizeable profits associated with the traffic to and from Idaho and Montana territories. After ten years as a regional freighting and trading center and as the

Gentile thorn in Mormon Utah's side, "the Burg on the Bear" rapidly passed into obscurity. For the time being, the Great Basin Kingdom, including Corinne, belonged uncontested to the Saints.

The history of Corinne, then, is a study of nineteenth-century Gentile-Mormon relations in microcosm, and for that reason alone deserves the in-depth treatment it has received. If there is any significant shortcoming, it is that more attention could have been devoted to the "vice trade"—gambling, prostitution, and divorce—which freely proliferated in the heartland of Zion for ten years. That criticism aside, the book is well organized, pleasingly illustrated, and thoroughly documented. The Utah State Historical Society, as the book's publisher, is to be commended for a handsome product. And Brigham Madsen is to be applauded for a first-rate contribution to the annals of Utah, the Great Basin, and the American West.

Guy Louis Rocha

GUY LOUIS ROCHA is Interim Director of the Nevada Historical Society

## **Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story**

Truman G. Madsen  
Bookcraft, 1980  
459 pages, \$9.50



To anyone who ever heard B. H. Roberts speak on Mormonism he was simply the greatest preacher of the gospel the Church had. A fierce lion of a man, he possessed vast knowledge of the self-acquired kind and combined with it an intensity, an intellectual and spiritual power, that was unforgettable. He died in 1933, but to this day those who remember him say that he was "the greatest."

What is it that makes the life of B. H. Roberts so compelling and so significant? Others lived through approximately the same years, so it cannot be only that he provides an informative focus for seeing the Church in transition from its pre-1890 posture to the "accommodation" we have become familiar with in the twentieth century. Other Church leaders were missionaries, writers, preachers, administrators. But it is impossible to find any in whom the combination, the convergence of experiences, matches that of Roberts. He was an immigrant waif from England; leader of the early MIA organization at Centerville; a

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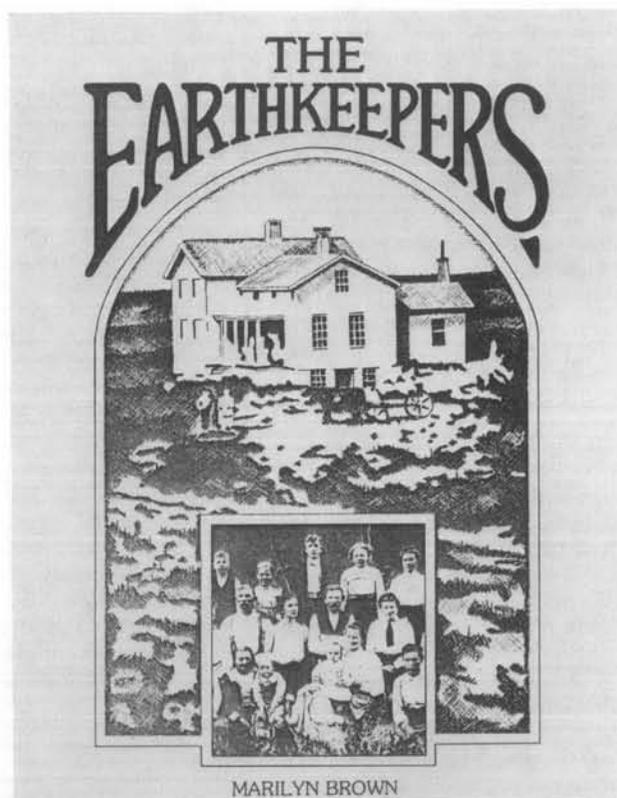
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blacksmith's apprentice; at the University of Deseret a Horatio Alger type of student who overcame formidable odds to graduate; husband (eventually of three wives); missionary and mission president in the years of persecutions and martyrdoms; prolific writer and editor; general authority in the First Council of Seventy; politician and Democrat who was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1898 but, after a committee investigation, was barred from his seat; orator at Utah's constitutional convention in 1895; chaplain in World War I; and, finally, the greatest historian produced by the Church during its first century. Who else combined into one life all these strands? Add the strong, vivid personality of the man, and we can perhaps understand his drawing power, his acknowledged fascination as a subject for students of Mormon history.

Despite the obvious intrinsic interest, there has been no biography, no way of introducing Latter-day Saints to this, one of the most colorful personalities the Church ever produced. Robert H. Malan's *B. H. Roberts: A Biography* (Deseret Book Co., 1966) may have been an acceptable master's thesis, but it fell far short of being a satisfactory biography. A few articles on specific phases of Roberts' life have appeared, but none pretended to be the biography. Now, at last, Truman G. Madsen's labors of many years have borne fruit. In the next generation at least, his will stand as the standard life of Mormonism's great warrior.

There are many things to commend in Madsen's treatment. First, as is only appropriate when writing on someone known for eloquence, Madsen has a flair for the English language. An experienced speaker and author of other books, he brings to his biographer's role the ability to describe vividly, to summarize deftly, to insert quotations and comparisons tellingly—in short, to make the subject live. One comes away from the book with a satisfied feeling of having known a man well worth knowing. Madsen's own religious intensity, his sensitivity to the things of the spirit, enable him to capture that element in Roberts without which any biography, however convincing in other respects, would fall flat. It is safe to predict, I think, that this biography will be well received by Church members. Not only will they enjoy becoming acquainted with a colorful subject but also they will find it "inspiring"—an unbeatable combination for the Mormon audience.

The author seems to have done his

homework. He has used the partial autobiography left behind by Roberts, sermons, quotations from publications, and letters to family members and friends. To judge from the footnotes, Madsen has corresponded with and interviewed many people—including especially Elsie Cook, Roberts' secretary, whose recollections provided valuable details.

There are excellent chapters and exciting sections of smaller scope. Noteworthy are the opening chapters on Roberts' incredibly oppressive childhood in England and perilous journey across the Plains; his teen-age years in Utah, when he almost became a derelict; fascinating experiences as a missionary in the days of debates and persecution, before the standardization of the program; exciting confrontations between Roberts and such zealous anti-Mormon crusaders as William Jarman in England; a term in the Utah penitentiary "for conscience sake"; and many other passages. Especially impressive is the listing of "the paradoxes of his personality" (pp. 385-86), which elevates Madsen's interpretation into a class by itself in Mormon biography, for however common such awareness is in other traditions, Mormons have preferred their heroes simple and unilinear.

Yet the work falls short of being what it might have been, given the subject and the author. Madsen has a tendency to overwrite. A final revision for pruning adjectives, "fine writing," and a score of infelicitous phrases would have raised the book's stylistic competence. Such a revision might also have removed most of the explicit moralizing the author indulges in. Acceptable enough in a sermon, gratuitous editorializing—and there are a number of examples—will turn off readers who prefer to draw their own moral conclusions and get on with the narrative.

The footnote references induce confidence that the work rests on solid documentation. But for many details that are far from common knowledge there is no indication of the author's source of information. Where, for example, did he find the verbatim prayer delivered by Roberts at the graveside of his grandson Paul (p. 379)? And is not the reader entitled to know the date and location of the Emmeline B. Wells letter recalling details about Joseph Smith (p. 388)? Many other such examples convince me that neither the author nor his editors have consistently applied the standards of proper scholarly documentation. This, after all, is not the retelling of a life whose documentary foundation has already been laid; it is the

first, the only, thorough treatment of its subject.

The bibliography is inadequate in all three of the functions one expects it to fulfill. First, all the published works by Roberts are not listed. Admittedly, the thousand or more separate articles, pamphlets, and sermons—Madsen's estimate—would have filled a fifty-page bibliography. But I wonder if a small type size combined with a clearly stated statement of purpose would not have permitted a complete listing of all the Roberts works except for sermons and newspaper articles, which could have been accounted for in a brief bibliographical essay. Second, a bibliography should list secondary sources, books, and articles relevant to the study. Not all of these are in the footnote references. Third, and probably most important, the unpublished primary sources are not clearly listed. One can of course use the footnotes, but there are too many such as the following: "From a journal of B. H. Roberts, 2 April 1883." Where is this journal? The same question has to be raised about other primary sources, including the letters and interviews collected by the author, which I hope have been deposited in a recognized repository.

There are a few problems with the book that are more serious. I am uncomfortable with the handling of Roberts' editing of the so-called documentary history. It is misleading to label this work as "the journal of Joseph Smith" (pp. 289-90). It is inaccurate to say (p. 438) that "the History of the Church had been dictated by Joseph Smith in third person." Even a sentence that says "much of it [was] gathered and dictated with the help of scribes" (p. 290) fails to give a correct picture of the process of creating this work. Dean Jessee's thorough reconstruction of the process (published in *BYU Studies* 11 [1971] and the *Journal of Mormon History* 3 [1976]) is not cited. To say that Roberts chose the Wentworth letter version of the first vision as "the later source written by Joseph Smith himself in preference to earlier sources which were dictated to scribes" shows a faulty understanding of the production of that letter, not to mention lack of respect for the integrity of documents. I assume Truman Madsen does not wish to argue that the "documentary" history is reliable by today's standards. It is not, and the recent publication of excerpts from it under the title *Journal of Joseph* is a display of ignorance and crass exploitation of an audience whose tradition has not trained them to discriminate.

## Footprints in the Wilderness:



## A History of the Lost Rhoades Mines

By Gale Rhoades and Kerry Boren

Back in print after ten years, the long awaited reprint of the classic work on the Lost Rhoades Mines in the Uintah Mountains is now available. Completely revised with new material, maps, and photos of Indian and Spanish gold mines, this fascinating account is must reading for anyone interested in Utah history. The clothbound edition will make an excellent gift for the holidays and can be delivered before Christmas.

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To my mind there is too much playing fast and loose with chronology. In describing the "turn-around" in Roberts' life at about age twenty-one, Madsen says, "Now he began his literary baptism by immersion." An incredible list of historical and philosophical works follow with author Madsen's occasional editorializing on what Roberts would have gleaned from the individual works. While the survey is useful in the general sense of calling attention to a voracious appetite for reading, we are left in the dark as to whether the reading program was largely completed in Centerville at age twenty-one or extended over a lifetime. It is implausible to me that Roberts at that age ("the better part of a year") read, at least with any comprehension, a 42-volume set of the Church Fathers. This kind of problem recurs.

One wishes that more space had been allowed. Many subjects are touched upon, leaving the reader thirsting for more information, more in-depth discussion, more follow-through. To be sure, some of these subjects—Roberts' testimony of the Book of Mormon and his unfinished master work "The Truth, the Way, and the Life", have been treated more fully by Madsen himself in separate articles (See *BYU Studies* 15 [1975]: 259-92 and 19 [1979]: 427-45). The omissions may have been necessitated by the publisher's demands. One does not envy Dianne Higginson, who undertook what Madsen calls "the grim task of reducing the thousand pages of manuscript to six hundred" (p. xiv).

But some omissions are critical. If he was anything, Roberts was controversial. He seemed to relish being in the thick of the fray. Indeed, a natural if one-sided approach to his life would be in terms of a series of controversies. Not a decade passed, I think, from the 1880s to his death that he failed to become embroiled in at least one scrap. Here I am referring not to his polemical defense of Mormonism against outside critics but to fights within the circle of Mormon leaders. The Thatcher-Roberts incident of 1895 was followed by a series of differences between Roberts and his fellow general authorities. The role of the Seventy, the relationship of science to Genesis, the implications of secular scholarship to the Book of Mormon—these are but three of the issues over which the blacksmith orator crossed swords with his "brethren." Although Roberts valued harmony and characteristically deferred to his colleagues rather than prolong an argument when it was obviously deadlocked, he did not back down easily and was not one to state his opinion

timidly. These controversies tell much about Roberts as a person and about the inner dynamics of Church leadership. But in the present biography they are muted, downplayed, or omitted. It is well and good to wish to include other things, to give credit to Roberts for the many constructive achievements of his life, but I cannot help but feel that the essence of a scrapper has been partially lost.

I do not think we will raise the standards of the works purveyed to Mormon audiences by our regional, specialized publishers until we demand adherence to minimal standards. Most everything I have found lacking in the present work could have been taken care of by a modicum of extra effort. It is such things as the final polish of style, refraining from "preachy" moralizing, and thoroughly professional documentation in footnotes and bibliography that raise a work to the level that will receive respectful reading by the larger audience and professional journals.

Having frankly stated my disappointments, having noted some of the flaws that will deprive the book of a hearing in academic circles, I wish to conclude on a positive note. It is a mistake, Hugh B. Brown used to say, to keep our attention so focused on the sun spots that we miss the brilliance of the sun. This is a very good book. I learned something from every chapter. Few Latter-day Saints will fail to gain from it both inspiration and knowledge. I predict for it a long and deserved success. It stands among the top half-dozen of Mormon biographies and for now may well head the list.

**DAVIS BITTON** received his PhD from Princeton in history. Co-author of *The Mormon Experience*, he is currently professor of history at the University of Utah.

### The Farley Family Reunion

Written by James Arrington

Directed by Lynn C. Frost

With original music by Jerry Williams and set design by Stewart Wakefield.

Somewhere in the foggy limbo between Zion and Babylon lies contemporary Mormon culture, perpetuating itself. It is either openly criticized by Church members where it is firmly entrenched and feels no fear of extinction (Utah, Idaho, Southern California), or deliberately nurtured by clusters of faithful LDS hovering together for protection amid the more populous gentiles (New York, Chicago). Happily, perhaps now that we are an expanding, international church, it is becoming possible to distinguish between our revealed religion and the culture that

grew up around it—enough at least to laugh at the latter without feeling irreverent.

The popularity of Calvin Grondahl's cartoons demonstrates with what relief we temporarily unload the burden of being a light to the world and chuckle at our peculiarities. And even the *Ensign* is willing to admit the numerous possibilities for humor in the Mormon lifestyle with its regular feature, "Mirthright."

But it took James Arrington, who feels no need either to reinforce or ridicule Mormon Society, to write a play—a comedy, strictly about our culture and completely free from self-consciousness.

*The Farley Family Reunion* is a collection of broad character sketches which include four generations of the Farley family who loyally show up for the annual summer reunion—a day long event complete with family farm reports, genealogy and council updates, the obligatory program, and lunch (if you have paid for it). Arrington, widely known for his one-man show *Here's Brother Brigham*, authored and co-stars in this two-man production with Allison Hickman. Together, they give us 26 delightful characters with Hickman playing "some of them" and Arrington providing "the rest of them."

We get some strong clues as to the tone of the evening by the look of the play's printed program. It includes an agenda for the reunion, dotted with misspellings that often cannot be distinguished from the typographical errors. On the back is an elaborate pedigree chart in impressive calligraphy. Upon close examination it shows a helter-skelter posterity with relationships bewilderingly obscured, and given names indigenous only to Utah.

The family association's president, Heber C. Farley, ceremonially welcomes the audience to the reunion, and with an intricate test of the microphone and sound system, the fun begins.

Viola Waddups opens with the family's theme song, "Climb Every Mountain," singing in a vibrato (with no accompaniment) that pales every parody of Jesse Evans Smith. The audience applauds spontaneously as Heber interjects, "And she's never had a lesson in her life." We hear a hilarious story from Pearl Akselson, the family genealogist, about a pioneer ancestor who singlehandedly killed a buffalo as food for her starving children and sick husband, slept inside its carcass for warmth and when she awoke to find wolves gnawing on the meat, cut two holes in the buffalo hide, grabbed hold of

the wolves tails, and drove herself and the family's dinner 12 miles back to camp.

The whole family is spunky, especially Aunt Minnie June who has been in poor health all her life and carries her X-rays around in her purse. "I always take home what I pay for," she points out. Another lively character portrayed by Hickman is Arvilla Farley, the organization's secretary. In and out of the house while continually adjusting her rhinestone-studded glasses, Arvilla keeps order, cooks huge amounts of food, fields phone calls from family members too far away to come but wanting to say their hellos, and demands confessions from nasty children we never see, but who disembowel dolls with cherry bombs and torture the cat (which needs to be replaced every year). Marva Bingham and Geneva Farley, in the same housecoats they wore all over Europe, show us slides of the trip: the Cathedral of Notre Dame, "named after our college here"; Venus de Milo whose missing arms "undoubtedly held her towel after her bath"; and Michelangelo's defoliated David, with a prudent hand upon the screen to replace the absent fig leaf.

Arrington's Heber Farley, as a favor to the cousin who provided all of the meat for the noon meal, announces "the Annual Regional Christian Patriot's Defense League Freedom Festival Citizen's Emergency Defense System Picnic and Small Bore Rifle Marksmanship Competition at Camp Custer up Freedom Fork in Mac Arthur Canyon"—a case of parodying personality types by imitating them almost exactly. And of course there are the awards, the most amusing of which went to the parents of eight girls and one boy named respectively Arizona, California, Colorado, Idahona, Montana, Oregona, Utahna, Wyoma and little Brick.

In spite of this nonsense the characters are not revolting but endearing. Though unsophisticated and having achieved nothing by way of worldly success, (of the 47 Farleys attending college this year, most tried real hard for a while or got married), there is something healthy about characters who feel no need to justify their place in the cosmos. Their idiosyncrasies are harmless. It is the extended family support system at its best. As we recognize some of our zany, pesky relatives and ward members in the play we are almost persuaded to organize a family reunion of our own if we could be assured of as many laughs as we had at *The Farley Family Reunion*.

One serious flaw, however, occurs at the

end of the play when a third-generation Farley who has been missing for years returns incognito to the reunion.

Contrite, for reasons which she tried to explain but we never fully understand, the young lady claims that she is no longer embarrassed by her family and is prepared to acknowledge them. It is an attempt to justify the writing of the play, and to let the audience know that having a family means having a heritage that should be valued and improved upon. But the moment is awkward and unnecessary because by intermission, we have learned that lesson for ourselves.

Character acting is Arrington's forte. Trained at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, he can paint a personality in a few seconds with broad swift strokes, believably creating, for example, the 99-year-old Farley patriarch with the tilt of his head and the manipulation of his tongue and voice. He is an entertainer whose energy increases whenever he has contact with the audience, whether onstage as Chester setting up the sound equipment before the show, or as Heber sharing potato chips with the audience during intermission. The real proof of his unpretentious performance becomes clear when Arrington plays some of the female roles in drag without the slightest cause for offense or innuendo.

No stranger to family reunions, Arrington has created his characters and written material for them over a period of years. Impressed with Hickman's previous performances at BYU, he developed characters especially for her. And she holds her own, though she is somewhat less experienced than Arrington.

The play's initial run was at BYU under the generous auspices of Dr. Harold Oaks, who, as chairman of the Department of Drama and Cinematic Arts, has allowed professionals in the theatre to use the resources at the University, and given credit to drama students who work on productions outside of the department. This is in refreshing contrast to the "play it safe, take no risks" policy that has strangled quality theatre activity at BYU in the past.

A tour of *The Farley Family Reunion* is being organized for other cities in Utah and should reach California and Arizona by February.

Merilee Van Wagonen

**MARILEE VAN WAGENEN** is a homemaker and mother of four children. She studied drama at BYU and the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco.