

Brief Notices

Alexander William Doniphan: Portrait of a Missouri Moderate, by Roger D. Launius (University of Missouri Press, 1997)

“It is cold-blooded murder. I will not obey your order. . . . [I]f you execute these men, I will hold you responsible before an earthly tribunal, so help me God” (64). So runs one of the most spine-chilling lines in LDS history, spoken by a non-Mormon, Missouri State Militia Brigadier General Alexander Doniphan, whose refusal to obey the order of his superior, General Samuel Lucas, during the Mormon War of 1838 preserved the life of Joseph Smith and six of his associates.

In this fascinating volume, RLDS historian Roger D. Launius fills in the picture of Doniphan’s life as lawyer, politician, and military tactician. A portrait emerges of a man who tenaciously held to principles of honesty and decency throughout his life, yet who also “symbolized reason, understanding, and moderation” (280) in an era deeply divided by sectional conflict. This elegantly written biography argues that Doniphan’s moderation “speaks to the present crisis in American politics” where extremism crowds out “room in the middle for interchange and compromise” (xiii).

The bulk of this work chronicles major themes in Missouri political history before Doniphan retired from public life in the 1870s. Only one entire chapter in thirteen and parts of two others—or about 15 percent of the book—have anything to do with Mormons. Still, the seven years (1833–39) covered in these chapters were momentous in the movement of the Church and even today continue to swirl in misinformation and minor historical controversy. Some readers will observe that this work, building on the work of Stephen LeSueur (*The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987]), corrects

some inaccuracies about this period; others may feel that it creates a few of its own, in part because of its overreliance upon LeSueur and its persistent attempt to show bias on the part of the early Mormon leaders. Overall, Launius’s narration of the Mormon War is moderate, becoming of the evenhanded spirit of Doniphan himself.

—Jed L. Woodworth

The American Inns of Court: Reclaiming a Noble Profession, compiled and edited by Paul E. Pixton (Matthew Bender, 1997)

In August 1979, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger met with his administrative assistant Mark Cannon at a Utah summer cabin for a rest stop to visit with Dallin H. Oaks, then president of Brigham Young University, and Rex E. Lee, dean of the BYU law school. Out of that auspicious encounter emerged a nationwide program called the American Inns of Court. The Chief Justice had long campaigned to improve the professionalism and civility of lawyers practicing in the courts of the United States. Today, less than twenty years later, over three hundred law schools in the United States sponsor a chapter of the American Inns of Court to inculcate in future litigators high qualities of ethical skills in legal advocacy.

BYU law school was the first school to embrace the concept. Thanks to Judge Sherman Christensen, Clifford Wallace, and many others, the charter unit of the program was inaugurated in Provo in 1980. Pixton’s book tells the story of that founding of the American Inns of Court, which prepared the way for the program’s proliferation throughout the nation. Thoroughly documented with numerous memos, letters, and recollections, this interesting institutional history, produced