The Historians Corner

Edited by James B. Allen

In this issue of the Historians Corner, we present two quite different items. The first, by Ted J. Warner, suggests the continuing need for historians to reevaluate the printed word and update their research. His essay on the historiography of B. H. Roberts is not a criticism of Roberts but, rather, a reminder that continued scholarly research and the frequent discovery of new resources creates a continuing need for historical revision. Professor Warner is a nationally known scholar of the Spanish borderlands. Recently he has been deeply involved in editing for publication the journal of the Domínguez-Escalante expedition, in connection with the 1976 bicentennial observance of that expedition.

The second item, submitted by Richard O. Cowan, should be enjoyed by those who are interested in the strictly human side of Latter-day Saint history. The problem of maintaining personal physical fitness is one that confronts us all, and Professor Cowan gives us a brief insight into how Presidents Heber J. Grant and Joseph Fielding Smith felt about it.

B. H. ROBERTS ON A NON-MORMON TOPIC: AN EXERCISE IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Ted J. Warner

For more than forty years B. H. Roberts' *Comprehensive History of the Church* has been accepted by readers almost as an official interpretation of LDS Church history. One recent historical assessment of it concluded that even if modern scholarship has left certain chapters obsolete, the work is still an important starting point, is still worth reading, and no Mormon need be ashamed of Roberts as a scholar or historian.[1] This thoughtful appraisal of the

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[1]Davis Bitton, "B. H. Roberts As Historian," *Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3(Winter 1968):25-44.

Comprehensive History is clearly justified insofar as its coverage of the Mormons is concerned, but there are some weaknesses and even some errors in topics on which Roberts was not an expert. In such cases, almost all of Roberts' problems stem from his relying upon secondary sources, rather than doing the kind of primary research he did in Mormon history.

One example of an historiographic problem is the section "The Salt Lake Region Before the Advent of the 'Mormon' Pioneers."[2] In a long footnote on the first page of this chapter, Roberts states that it is customary to begin any explanation of Spanish penetration of the present Utah region with a discussion of the 1540 expedition of Captain García López de Cárdenas, noting that this expedition dispatched from "Cibola"[3] by Don Francisco Vásquez de Coronado sought to locate a large river reported by the Indians as lying far to the northwest of their village. Roberts says that with "twelve men" [there were actually twenty-five horsemen in the party], López de Cárdenas proceeded in a northwesterly direction until after many days his progress was halted by a huge canyon of the Colorado River which lay within the boundaries of the present state of Utah, thus implying that the actual discovery of what is now Utah occurred in 1540.[4] But Roberts does not discuss this further, because "the expedition led by López de Cárdenas did not enter the Great Basin," which was the area of his immediate concern. His mere mention of this expedition has helped perpetuate among some Church members a major error concerning the first "known" white men in Utah. The 1540 expedition of García López de Cárdenas did not, in fact, enter Utah. Because of Dr. Katharine Bartlett's careful 1949 study of the old Indian trails in this region, we now know that López de Cárdenas, guided by Hopi Indians, followed a

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[2]B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I,* 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 3:244-47.

[3]Roberts is referring to the Zuni village of Hawikuh, the ruins of which are located thirteen miles south of the present pueblo of Zuni on the Arizona-New Mexico border, some thirty-nine miles south of Gallup, New Mexico. The Spaniards renamed this pueblo, "Granada." See Frederick W. Hodge, *History of Hawikuh* (Los Angeles: The Southwest Museum, 1937).

[4]See Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah* (San Francisco: San Francisco History Company, 1889), pp. 2-6. On page 5 Bancroft includes a map he labels "Probable Route of Cardenas," which shows the expedition reaching the Colorado River in what is presently the state of Utah. This was apparently the source used by Roberts and subsequent early writers on Utah history. See also Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1892), p. 289, and Levi Edgar Young, *The Founding of Utah* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933, 1924), p. 46.

well-travelled trail from waterhole to waterhole in a more westerly direction than was formerly believed and was finally stopped on the south rim of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River at a place called "Grand View" in Arizona.[5]

While it is customary to accord the honor of the discovery of Utah to the expedition of two Franciscan friars, Fray Francisco Atanasio Domínguez and Fray Silvestre Vélez de Escalante, who came into this region in 1776, scholars are convinced by documents in the Spanish Archives of New Mexico and Mexico that Spanish traders penetrated the southeastern corner of the present state some years prior to that date. There are allusions to such expeditions in the extant documents, but it is not yet possible to identify these traders.

Roberts' discussion of the Domínguez-Vélez de Escalante expedition also contains a number of important errors because he relied on the first English translation of the Domínguez-Vélez de Escalante journal published in 1909 by the Reverend W. R. Harris in his *The Catholic Church in Utah,*[6] which was assessed by an historian in 1930 as "practically worthless."[7] Roberts' reliance on this work rather than a copy of the original manuscript or even the Spanish version published in Mexico in 1854 is responsible for many of his mistakes.

The leader of the expedition, Father Domínguez, arrived in New Mexico in 1775 as canonical visitor of the Custody of the Conversion of St. Paul, an appointment given only to clergymen of the

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[5]Katharine Bartlett, "How Don Pedro de Tovar Discovered the Hopi and Don García López de Cárdenas saw the Grand Canyon with Notes upon their Probable Route," *Plateau* 12(January 1949):37-45.

[6]Manuscript copies of the Domínguez-Vélez de Escalante Journal *Diario y Derroterro* are located in the Archivo General de Mexico, *Historia,* Tomos 26 and 62. Another manuscript is in Seville, Spain, in the Archivo General de Indias, Audiencia de Guadalajara, legajo 516. The Ayer Collection in the Newberry Library, Chicago, has the earliest known manuscript copy of the journal. It is in the hand of Father Domínguez' secretary and was copied from the original in January 1777. The original journal has not been located. The journal was first published in Spanish in *Documentos para la historia de Mexico,* Segunda serie, Tomo I (Mexico: n.p., 1854). The first attempt at an English translation was that of the Reverend W. R. Harris in *The Catholic Church in Utah* (Salt Lake City: Intermountain Catholic Press, 1909). Two later English translations of the journal have been published. Herbert S. Auerbach, *The Journal of Father Escalante, 1776-1777* (Salt Lake City: Utah Historical Quarterly, 1943), and Herbert E. Bolton, *Pageant in the Wilderness* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1950). Neither of these translations and notes is entirely accurate or satisfactory despite the statement by the Utah Historical Society in the preface to Bolton's work that "the present study very nearly approaches the ideal and the final word" on the subject. There are numerous errors in Bolton's translation as well as in his long "Historical Introduction."

[7]Joseph J. Hill, "Spanish and Mexican Exploration and Trade Northwest from New Mexico into the Great Basin, 1765-1853," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 3(January 1930):8.

highest caliber. In addition to his instruction to visit and inspect each of the New Mexico missions, he was to investigate the possibilities of opening a land route from Sante Fe to the newly-founded Franciscan missions in California. Learning that the missionary friar serving in the village of Zuni was interested in such an enterprise and had in fact made some preliminary expeditions in that direction, Domínguez ordered that priest, Fray Silvestre Vélez de Escalante, to report to him in the capital to discuss plans for such an expedition and to accompany him on it. Roberts was not the only writer to mistakenly accord the leading role in this expedition to Vélez de Escalante. Even later scholars, including Herbert E. Bolton, have tended to minimize the role played by Father Domínguez. The journey is generally referred to as the Escalante expedition with Vélez de Escalante receiving the lion's share of credit.[8] Roberts recognized that Atanasio Domínguez was there, but did not give him the leading role he held.

On 15 April 1776, Father Domínguez ordered Vélez de Escalante to join him in Santa Fe as soon as possible for discussion of the project of locating a route from Santa Fe to Monterey. Escalante arrived on 7 June. Plans were completed and the date set for the departure was 4 July 1776. There were several unavoidable delays, however, including a sudden illness which struck Escalante, so the expedition did not get underway until 29 July 1776, although for some unknown reason Roberts says 29 August.

By following the Harris translation, Roberts gets particularly snarled in his discussion of the rivers in Utah Valley. The original journal mentions four rivers which discharge into the lake and calls them the Río de Aguas Calientes (identified today as the Spanish Fork), the Río de San Nicolás (Hobble Creek), the Río de San Antonio de Padua (the Provo River), and the Río de Santa Ana (the American Fork River). Harris and Roberts call the Río de San

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[8]Today in Utah there is an Escalante Desert, an Escalante Valley, an Escalante River, the Escalante Mountains, the town of Escalante, and the Escalante Petrified Forest. None of these names was affixed by the travelers themselves, all being given later by others who assumed that Escalante was the leader of the expedition. To my knowledge there is not a single place name in Utah which perpetuates the name of Domínguez. Even some of the other members of the expedition had their names commemorated, but not Domínguez. It is as if he had not even been on the expedition and yet not only was he a full partner in the enterprise, he was the senior partner. The journal which should be referred to as the Domínguez-Vélez de Escalante Journal is generally referred to as Escalante's Journal, but a careful reading of it as well as Vélez de Escalante's later letters reveals that Escalante himself always referred to the account as "our diary." He understood his role in the expedition, even if later scholars did not.

Nicolás the Provo River, the Río de San Antonio de Padua the American Fork, and the Río de Santa Ana the Jordan, which places the Provo too far from the Spanish Fork, ignores Hobble Creek, and has the Jordan flowing in the wrong direction.

Roberts accurately reports that the fathers established friendly relations with the natives living on the eastern shores of Utah Lake, whom they met in great numbers. They told them of God, and of obedience, and promised that they would send priests to teach of Christ, and Spaniards to live among them and teach them to cultivate the soil and raise cattle, "so that they could be able to eat and to dress like Spaniards, to obey the law, and to live as God had commanded."[9]

The padres were not able to fulfill this promise to the Utah Lake or Laguna Indians because when they returned to Santa Fe on 3 January 1777, they found conditions so bad that it was all they could do to maintain what missions they already had. Some years earlier missionaries had requested funds to extend the mission frontier but had been told that "for colonial purposes the faith was sufficiently spread out," and that if "every proposal for the foundation of presidios (and missions) were acceded to, the treasury of Midas would not suffice."[10] The expulsion of the Jesuits from the New World in 1767 had made it necessary that their missions be taken over by other orders and there were simply not enough missionaries available or money in the treasury to extend the Spanish mission frontier into Utah. Since the Spaniards did not return to establish the missions and villages which Domínguez and Vélez de Escalante had promised, the Utah Indians were left alone for another seventy-one years except for an occasional illegal visit made by Spanish traders from northern New Mexico to the Laguna de los Timpanoguitsis.[11]

Roberts states that the Indians told the padres of the Salt Lake in the next valley northward and of the "wonders of it to the native mind." Since they did not visit the lake, Roberts apparently as-

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[9]Domínguez-Escalante Journal in Bolton, *Pageant in the Wilderness,* p. 180.

[10]Pedro de Rivera to Viceroy Casafuerte, El Paso, 26 September 1726, AGM, Historia 394.

[11]From the standpoint of the future history of Utah, the failure to follow up on the promises made to these Indians had important results. When Brigham Young led his followers to a new home in the West in 1847, he was looking for isolation. Had the Spaniards returned to Utah with missions, pueblos, and presidios, we would no doubt have on the Utah map today such place names as Santa Catarina, Dulce Nombre de Jesus, San Andres, and San Antonio de Padua, instead of Lehi, Nephi, Moroni, and Bountiful.

sumed that the fathers "did not become sufficiently curious to visit this wonderful lake."[12] On the contrary, the Spaniards were very interested in the body of salt water which the Indians informed them was "noxious and extremely salty," and that a "person who moistens any part of his body with the water of lake immediately feels much itching in the part that is wet."[13] But they were not curious enough to take the time to journey north because of the lateness of the season, the distance they had yet to travel, and the primary purpose of the expedition which precluded their making unnecessary sidetrips.

Roberts does not mention at least one important observation in his interpretation of the expedition. Bernardo Miera y Pacheco, the retired military captain and engineer who accompanied the group, produced a map of the regions traversed and included some intriguing descriptive notes on it, one that tantalized the Spaniards by reporting:

> They say there are many large tribes of Indians on the other side [of Utah Lake] who live in organized communities. The timpanogos Indians say that the tribes living on the west side of their lake, and on the high ridge of mountains which is seen in that direction from their huts were formerly their friends and that they make the tips of their arrows, lances and macanas of a yellow metal, in accordance with ancient traditions.

Surely the mention of yellow metal, which might be gold (but was probably copper from the Bingham Copper area), would have interested the gold-hungry Spaniards. No doubt it did, but conditions were such in New Spain in the last quarter of the eighteenth century that they could do nothing to confirm these reports. This is a further indication of how far the Spanish regime in the New World had slipped, and one of the reasons the Mormons and the Indians had Utah all to themselves in 1847.

Certainly B. H. Roberts' minor errors and omissions are not serious enough to challenge his credibility as a historian, but they do serve as a worthwhile exercise in historiography and a reminder to the rest of us historians that no matter how well done a history seems to be, continued research and updating will always be necessary.

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[12]Roberts' *Comprehensive History,* p. 247.

[13]Domínguez-Escalante Journal in Bolton, *Pageant in the Wilderness,* p. 186.