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The Continuing Saga of *Saints*

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THE CONTINUING SAGA OF SAINTS

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Review of *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days: Volume 3: Boldly, Nobly, and Independent: 1893–1955* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022). 757 pages. \$6.90 (paperback).

Abstract: *Volume 3 of Saints is a readable and engaging narrative discussing a dynamic and transitional period of the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As with the previous volumes in the series, it is approachable and enjoyable for almost all reading audiences.*

The *Saints* series has undertaken what, at face value, appears to be an almost impossible job — to tell the story of the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a readable and engaging narrative. With each volume it naturally gets more difficult to achieve that goal because of the expanse of the unfolding chronicle.

Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days: Volume 3: Boldly, Nobly, and Independent: 1893–1955 takes a number of disparate stories and deftly and delicately interweaves them into a smooth narrative discussing the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a dynamic and transitional period. The result is a beautifully interwoven fabric that includes not only corporate and elite history but also inspiring stories of common, everyday members of the church.

Among the numerous stories that help set the scene and move the history forward are those of Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith, Heber J. Grant, John and Leah Widtsoe, Susa Young Gates, Amy Brown Lyman, Clarissa Williams, and Zina Young. Of the common, everyday members of the church whose interesting stories also move the narrative along are Paul and Connie Bang of Cincinnati, Ohio;

Helga Birth of Germany; Jeanne Charrier of Valence, France; the Daniels family of South Africa; Len and Mary Hope, African-American Saints in Alabama; Anna Kullick and other German expatriates residing in Argentina; Rafael Monroy of San Marcos, Mexico; the Maori Whaanga family of New Zealand and Utah; Toshiko and Tokichi Yanagida of Nagoya, Japan; and a host of others. Furthermore, as women and people of various races and ethnicities have played an important role in church history, they also play an important role in this volume.

For the most part, this volume of *Saints* doesn't shy away from potentially difficult and uncomfortable topics. For example, the book discusses post-Manifesto plural marriages and the confusion this caused among some members (83–86, 106–108, 113–14); the forced resignations of apostles Matthias Cowley and John W. Taylor due to political pressure during the Reed Smoot hearings (115–16); Mexico's Third Convention movement and estrangement from church leadership (369–70, 373, 485–88); the excommunication of Helmuth Hübener in Germany before he was executed by the Nazis (439); and George Albert Smith's continued problems with anxiety and depression (517–19).

Despite the refreshing willingness to discuss difficult historical information, the authors still shied away from some topics. For instance, no mention is made of Fawn McKay Brodie, a niece of David O. McKay, at that time a counselor in the First Presidency, and her controversial book, *No Man Knows My History*.¹ Despite flaws and questionable analysis, Brodie's book is considered ground-breaking and caused a resurgence in researching and writing about Joseph Smith. Indeed, there are some who suggest her book encouraged a new approach that produced the new Latter-day Saint history which has had significant influence on historical research in the church.

Furthermore, while Richard R. Lyman is mentioned in the book, his 1943 excommunication is completely ignored. Lyman's excommunication for breaking the law of chastity sent shock waves through the Latter-day Saint community and should have been discussed in relation to media coverage as well as continuing attitudes and ambivalence regarding plural marriage. For that matter, there is absolutely no mention of the fundamentalist Latter-day Saint movement, which caused enough trouble for the church that the Grant administration felt the need to address it in what has come to be called the Third or Final Manifesto, which was read in General Conference in 1933 by J. Reuben Clark.

1. Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945).

Notwithstanding these omissions, it should be remembered that *Saints* “is not a comprehensive history, nor is it the only possible telling of the Church’s sacred history” (610). The authors by necessity had to pick and choose what would be in the book and some important events and stories didn’t make the final cut. Nevertheless, the book is still an entertaining and inspiring read. But the entertainment factor should not make readers think it isn’t a scholarly work. “This volume is a work of narrative nonfiction based on hundreds of historical sources” (610). In fact, there are over 120 pages of endnotes and primary and secondary sources cited.

Ultimately, *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days: Volume 3: Boldly, Nobly, and Independent: 1893–1955* is approachable and enjoyable for almost all reading audiences. It is well worth the time and effort to read and is another wonderful addition to the planned four-volume series.

Craig L. Foster earned a MA and MLIS at Brigham Young University. He is also an accredited genealogist and works as a research consultant at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. He has published articles about different aspects of Latter-day Saint history. He is the author of two books, co-author of another and co-editor of a three-volume series discussing the history and theology of plural marriage. Foster is also on the editorial board of the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*.

