

# Obscure Believers: the Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler

Barbara Hands Bernauer

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*Obscure Believers: The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler*, by Biloine Whiting Young. St. Paul: Pogo Press, 2002. 236 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$16.95 paper.

Reviewer Barbara Hands Bernauer is assistant archivist for the Community of Christ (formerly Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). Her research interests include the Mormon remnants who settled in south-western Iowa.

*Obscure Believers* is a title aptly chosen because its subject is a splinter group of Latter-day Saints unknown to most people. Perhaps only Mormon scholars are familiar with Alpheus Cutler. Cutler was not obscure in his own day, however. He was an ardent follower of Joseph Smith, active in the Mormon priesthood, and a member of the select (and secret) Council of Fifty. He was a stonemason who helped build both the Kirtland (Ohio) and Nauvoo (Illinois) temples.

Cutler clashed with Brigham Young, however, and was expelled in 1851 from the Utah-based church. Convinced that he was called to lead the church founded by Joseph Smith, Cutler organized a new church, rebaptized his followers, and established communities of believers. He moved his family and followers to Manti, a settlement he founded near present-day Shenandoah, Iowa. The Cutlerites were among several other factions of the LDS church in southwestern Iowa by the late 1850s with several thousand adherents.

As a descendent of the Cutlerites, author Biloine Whiting Young brings a wealth of family memories to her historical account. She begins her story with the departure of many of the families from Manti in 1865 at the start of a typical Iowa snowstorm. One wonders why a group with small children would pack up wagons and start off for some unknown destination far to the north in winter. The author provides the intriguing answer to that puzzle. Following their religious beliefs, they eventually settled in Clitherall, Minnesota, northwest of the Twin Cities in Otter Tail County. Like Manti in Iowa, it is not on any map today.

Young tells a good story; her narrative flows smoothly, and her writing style is easy to read. She includes four chapters dealing with Mormonism and its early history that give general readers an overview of events leading to Cutler's split with mainstream Mormonism. She also shows the influence of folk magic and superstitions that were present in early Mormonism and continued into the practices of this group. An added bonus is the introduction by Robert Flanders, author of *Nauvoo Kingdom on the Mississippi*, also a Cutlerite descendant.

One of Young's main contributions is her research into the significant role that some American Indians played in the history of the Cut-

lerites. Besides sharing the gospel, Cutler wanted to convert the Indians, use them to attack residents of Missouri, and reclaim the land the Saints had been driven away from in 1834 (53). Eventually, it was an Indian Mormon, Lewis Denna, who led the group to Otter Tail County.

This book has a scholarly basis, but it also meets the needs of a general audience interested in the social and cultural dynamics on the Iowa and Minnesota frontier. Young borrows extensively from Danny Jorgensen, a Cutlerite descendant and University of South Florida sociologist who published an article on the Cutlerites in this journal in 1999. She credits Jorgensen along with others who have also researched and published on the topic. This book should not be the last word about the Cutlerites. Those interested in early Iowa history, for example, will want to know more about the years the Cutlerites spent around Manti.

"Like the Indians they came to convert, the Cutlerites have departed, leaving only the faintest trace on the land of their passing" (201). The obscure Cutlerites deserved to be brought to our attention. Young traces the genesis and decline of a Mormon faction that happens to include her own family. She also provides a look into the beliefs and dwindling membership of the group today. Her book lays a solid foundation for further detailed, scholarly publications.

*Writing the Pioneer Woman*, by Janet Floyd. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002. ix, 228 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$32.50 cloth.

Reviewer Jane Simonsen is assistant professor of English and American studies at the University of Central Arkansas. Her research interests include the history of the American West and nineteenth-century women's literature and culture.

Janet Floyd's study of the "figure of the pioneer woman" is a necessary evolution in scholarship on emigrant women's writing. Floyd brings new perspectives from postcolonial studies and diaspora theory to bear on familiar western narratives such as those by Caroline Kirkland, Eliza Farnham, Mollie Dorsey Sanford, and Elinore Pruitt Stewart, arguing that these autobiographies are best read in the international contexts of migration, literary markets, and industrialization. Such contexts, she argues, undermine the question that preoccupied historians who revived the figure of the pioneer woman in the 1970s and 1980s: whether emigrant women's struggles to maintain their domesticity in western spaces were successful, or whether domestic work took on new meanings in the West. Instead, Floyd shows that prairie narratives by Anglo emigrants in both the United States and

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