

Book Reviews

LAWRENCE R. FLAKE. *George Q. Cannon: His Missionary Years*. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998, 250 pp, illustrations and photographs, index, \$17.95, ISBN 1-57008-561-7).

MICHAEL L. LANDON, ed. *The Journals of George Q. Cannon: Volume 1, To California in '49*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999, xxviii +187 pp., 5 appendices, maps and photographs, index, \$22.95, ISBN 1-57345-465-6).

DAVIS BITTON. *George Q. Cannon: A Biography*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999, xiv + 554 pp., 3 appendices, maps and photographs, index, \$34.95, ISBN 1-57345-490-7).

Reviewed by Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Brigham Young University

James E. Talmage, educator, scientist, and future Apostle of the LDS Church, noted trenchantly yet insightfully in his diary on Friday, 12 April 1901: "This morning word reached the city that President George Q. Cannon died in Monterey, California at 1:20 A. M. . . . Truly a great man has gone."¹ Talmage captured the quintessential description of George Quale Cannon (1827–1901) in his brief diary characterization. Cannon was truly a "great man."

On Wednesday, a few days later, amid the tears of thousands under a "serene sky, in the balmy air of as beautiful a spring day as nature could bestow," Cannon was laid to rest in the Salt Lake City cemetery.² What was evident at the time, as noted by numerous condolence letters, editorials, and obituaries as well as by speakers' comments at the funeral, was the profound influence Cannon exerted in the LDS Church and in Utah and the western United States, especially during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

As might be expected for someone of Cannon's stature, decades after his death, attempts were made to keep his memory and legacy alive in the LDS community. Two books, published in 1927 and 1967 respectively, highlighted the Cannon family, including material on George Q. Cannon himself.³ Additionally, Jerreld L. Newquist brought together extracts from some of Cannon's most important discourses and writings in a two-volume work published in 1957, later reprinted by Deseret Book in 1974.⁴ Newquist provided his readers a lengthy biographical sketch published in the first volume, which became the means to help readers recall who Cannon was and what he had done.

These publications have long since gone out of print—at the same time when the populations of Utah and the LDS Church have grown exponentially, increasing Cannon's obscurity among the general population in the West and in the LDS Church.

The situation could change as the result of three publications appearing within months of each other on the shelves of bookstores in North America in 1998 and 1999. If any nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint deserves such attention so long after his or her passing, Cannon is rightfully one of them.

Even those who know Cannon's name and grasp to some extent the strategic place he held in regional politics, in business, and in the expansion of Mormonism during the same period will be surprised by what they glean from these recent efforts to memorialize, recall, and recount his life and labors. Each author/editor's efforts provide readers a different emphasis, approach, and, ultimately, view.

Lawrence R. Flake's *George Q. Cannon: His Missionary Years* is a well-written introduction to Cannon's five missions beginning with the 1849 "Gold Mission" to California through his last mission—in Great Britain from 1860 until 1864. Substantially, with relatively few changes, the book is a reproduction of Flake's 1970 dissertation.⁵ The dissertation was an important source for historians because Flake had access to Cannon's diaries for the periods covered in the book. These diaries continue to be closed to researchers, except in a few notable exceptions (see Landon and Bitton below). Readers should be grateful that this dissertation finally made its way into print, making it more accessible than before. Flake's admiration and strong affection for Cannon are obvious. The book is a glowing tribute by the author to Cannon's missionary zeal. A former LDS Church mission president, Flake teaches college-age students about LDS missionary work.

Flake provides his readers a brief introduction, basically chronicling what people said about Cannon and ostensibly justifying this book (chapter 1: "Introduction," pp. 1–6). The author then provides a brief overview of the Cannon family's conversion to Mormonism in the British Isles, immigration to

the LDS gathering place in Illinois, life in Nauvoo, and, finally, George Q. Cannon's departure across the Mississippi River into Iowa (chapter 2, "The Preparation," pp. 7–27). The next chapter is, therefore, the first that deals directly with the subject at hand, Cannon's missionary activity (chapter 3, "The Gold Mission," pp. 29–52). However, the reader continues to wade through material that should probably have been included with the previous chapter, "The Preparation," highlighting the journey from Sugar Creek, Iowa, the trip to the Great Basin, and, finally, Cannon's life in Salt Lake. Only then does the book come to the so-called first mission, "The Journey to the Gold Fields of California" (p. 40). At this point, readers come to Flake's real contribution, quotations from Cannon's personal diaries, which have not been available to most researchers. Moving between this primary, contemporary source and a reminiscence published twenty years after the fact, Flake provides a lively narrative about a previously little-known aspect of LDS Church history—Mormon missions to the gold fields during the heady days of the California Gold Rush.

In chapter 4, "The Hawaiian Mission"; chapter 5, "The *Western Standard* Mission"; chapter 6, "The Eastern States Mission"; and chapter 7, "The European Mission," Flake follows the same format as noted above, utilizing many previously unused sources from the LDS Church Archives. Each chapter presents a fairly balanced discussion of what Cannon did, why it was important, and how it helped prepare Cannon for future leadership in the LDS Church.

Some may wish that Flake had updated his work (originally written in 1970), providing insights from the past three decades of prodigious and groundbreaking historical work germane to the subject. Flake has produced a readable and faith-promoting account of five remarkable missions undertaken by Cannon. Finally, Flake paints a compelling word-picture that captures the emotion, dedication, effort, and significance of Cannon's labors in behalf of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Michael L. Landon's *The Journals of George Q. Cannon: Volume 1, To California in '49* is the first volume in what may well be one of the most significant diary series in LDS Church history to be published to date paralleling the release of Wilford Woodruff's diary more than twenty years ago.⁶ Under the general editorship of Adrian W. Cannon and Richard E. Turley Jr., this first volume is more than simply a typescript of Cannon's diary covering the period from 6 October 1849, when Cannon was in the midst of preparing to leave Salt Lake City on his first mission, through 9 December 1849 as he climbed the Cajon Pass, the last obstacle before reaching the end of the trail—Isaac Williams' ranch at Rancho Santa Ana Del Chino.

The book is a "gold mine" itself, providing readers a view of Cannon as a young man before he became a well-known, important, and strategically placed person in the LDS Church leadership.

Although Flake's and Bitton's works rely heavily upon Cannon's diaries to tell their stories, here the diary itself is the story. Nevertheless, the book is more than the diary. Landon provides those interested in LDS, Gold Rush, and western history a veritable treasure trove of information. The maps, appendices, and biographical and geographical registers are "pure gold" for historians and trail buffs interested in this unique period of American and LDS Church history.

The appendices are useful and informative and provide important context to the diary. Appendix 1, "Maps" (pp. 83–88), contains digitized maps with detailed information on exact locations, including probable and possible site locations along the trail from Utah to California. Apparently, the information included on the maps is based on research on site utilizing Cannon's diary, as well as other primary source material, to help make the written record and the topographical record become one. Appendix 2, "Geographical Register" (pp. 89–117), provides exact and detailed information generated from numerous sources and individuals intending to be "a guide to the reader along George Q. Cannon's trail from Great Salt Lake City to Williams' ranch in California" (p. 89). Appendix 3, "Period Maps" (pp. 119–23), includes four period maps (including detail closeups). Appendix 4, "Documents Related to George Q. Cannon's 1849 Journey to California" (pp. 125–50), is another important addition to the book, producing some previously unknown rosters and giving historians a better list of who was involved in Jefferson Hunt's wagon train. I suggest that future volumes consider publishing pages of Cannon's diary (pp. 126–27) at the point where the portion is transcribed in the publication. Appendix 5, "Biographical Register" (pp. 151–64), has now become a standard feature for similar publication. Landon goes beyond providing genealogical data on each person mentioned in Cannon's diary and also provides "the dates of the entries relevant to the person the journal describes" (p. 151).

Landon should be particularly praised for his use of graphics that not only enhance the text itself but also provide the reader with more information than is usually given in Mormon historical publications today. One lapse, however, is the captions for the modern photographs appearing in the book; see "California Hollow" (p. 27), "Cannon's entry point into the Parowan Valley" (p. 28), "Antelope Range, site of Willow Spring" (p. 29), "Upper Beaver Dam Wash" (p. 39), "Henry W. Bigler's initials in Beaver Dam Wash" (p. 40), "Joshua trees in Beaver Dam Wash" (p. 43), "Beaver Dam Wash near the Lytle Ranch" (p. 44), "Meadow Valley Wash" (p. 46), "Road leading to north end of Arrow Canyon" (p. 54), "North end of Arrow Canyon" (p. 55), "Spanish Trail marker near Moapa, Nevada" (p. 56), "Resting Springs" (p. 65), and "Spanish Canyon" (p. 67). Readers can easily imagine an unborn generation of historians trying in the future to figure out where they can find the original photographs appearing in the book and attempting to answer questions concerning the photographer—just as current historians ponder over nineteenth-century photographs while try-

ing to guess when, by whom, and where they were taken and, in some cases, the locations shown in the originals.

As noted above, the diary is the heart of this work, but Landon's annotations are invaluable. In them, Landon demonstrates his expert knowledge and love for historic trails, people and places connected to them, and an equally in-depth familiarity of LDS Church history and sources. Although readers might be tempted to make the diary fit the annotations, Landon keeps Cannon in focus all the way through the numerous and illuminating notes. One important aspect that strengthens the book is the liberal use of contemporary and parallel sources, specifically those of Henry Bigler and Charles C. Rich. Landon is truly one of the brightest and most energetic young scholars working in the field, and we are indebted to him for his painstaking efforts to bring to publication such an important project as this Cannon diary.

One last comment about content. In a small volume such as this, an author or editor can provide readers a more comprehensive bibliography (pp. 165–79) than larger works that are already struggling with space limitations. Landon chose to do so, and we are all benefited by his decision.

Published in collaboration with the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *To California in '49* is destined to become a classic and a model for future editors and publishers of diaries to follow. Packaged beautifully, the cover in this case matches the content.

Davis Bitton's *George Q. Cannon: A Biography* is equal to Leonard J. Arrington's seminal biography on Brigham Young (1985).⁷ Not only has Bitton provided a detailed and well-written study of one of Mormonism's important leaders but also he demonstrates that biography, well crafted and honest, is as engaging as historical fiction. Hopefully, those who have never taken the time to read impeccably researched history like Bitton's latest effort will discover that the life stories of flesh-and-blood Latter-day Saints are genuinely more compelling and believable than the factitious characters created by modern writers—now an unavoidable part of the Latter-day Saint historical memory.

The book consists of thirteen chapters, preface, epilogue, and three appendices (a helpful chronology, a listing of wives and children, and Cannon's last will and testament). Among all that is found in this book, there is only one area of criticism that does not affect the scholarship of the biography in the least and that is meant to sound a clarion call to historians in general.

Bitton's *tour de force* would have been enhanced if he and the publisher had chosen to provide critical information for each image in the captions. What important information that would certainly be helpful to photographic historians could Bitton have provided if he had checked the Cannon diary for references that would have illuminated the historical setting of the photographs contained in the book (dates, photographers, etc.)?

Nevertheless, Bitton should be praised for his efforts to move beyond the traditional collections of images found in institution repositories in Salt Lake City (LDS Church Archives and Utah State Historical Society). He provides several images from the Cannon family collection, relating to Cannon's life and the world, that will delight even those who are most familiar with nineteenth-century images—for example, a beautiful portrait of Elizabeth Hoagland Cannon (p. 71), photographs of Sarah Jane Jenne Cannon (p. 91), George Q. Cannon in 1862 (p. 118), Martha Telle Cannon (p. 154), and family group photographs (p. 324).

Some marvelous and truly delightful images, including some previously unpublished, are those of Cannon and party taken on board a ship during a cruise to Alaska in 1895 (p. 361), Eliza Tenney Cannon, with her two sons peering into the lense of the camera from bushes (p. 378), and a Salt Lake City Railroad car overloaded with people on the way to some destination (p. 397).

Beyond the photographs and illustrations, readers will be well rewarded for their efforts to plow through this tome of some 554 dense and fact-filled pages. The endnotes are full of important and significant nuggets that should not be missed. In some cases, Bitton provides the reader more beyond the text by substantial endnotes. One such example is the memorable letter Cannon wrote to his brother, Angus M., in 1882. It was a time of trouble and personal anguish for Angus M., who was confronting the apostasy of one of his sons. Only religiously dedicated persons can possibly understand such turmoil, so many LDS readers will quickly respond to the situation. Cannon writes: "I am deeply pained at the news you send me, and if any words of mine or anything I could do, would have the effect to lighten your load, how gladly would the relief be extended! . . . If children do wrong, upon them the load must rest. They have their agency and are responsible for its exercise, and while it is difficult to avoid taking part of their load, I am sure it is not right for us to do so to our own injury or unhappiness" (p. 260). The letter continues by providing a balanced view on the challenge of parenting. Often, readers might wish that an author would have included more from primary sources; in this case, Bitton does. In endnote 160 (p. 506), the reader is treated with twenty more lines of this moving letter!

Bitton also challenges other historians, as is the case with his discussion regarding an important document produced by the LDS Church Presidency in 1891. He argues that this document "has been overlooked as a landmark pronouncement of the Latter-day Saint political position in 1891" (p. 319). Not only does the author provide important extracts from this document (answers prepared by Woodruff, Cannon, and Smith for a newspaper reporter) but also he provides interpretive material helping reveal the underside of the issues involved.

Many readers will be easily overwhelmed by Cannon's activities and impact, wondering how one person could be involved in so many things. Yet Bitton has

a knack for providing an intimate portrait of a man dealing with struggles, heartaches, setbacks, and real physical and emotional wounds that most people can relate to in their own lives. In this portrait, Bitton does more than provide a blow-by-blow account of these experiences of mortality. He provides a context and an evaluation of them (“Epilogue,” pp. 451–57).

Bitton tells us more than what the primary sources explicitly state, though his interpretation is thoroughly grounded in the sources. I especially was taken by his questions and insights: “It must have been a harrowing life. How could anyone experience happiness when separated from loved ones when children in whom he had placed his hopes failed him, when close associates censured him, and when the cause dearest to him, his religion, was consistently on the defensive, usually in retreat, and finally on some practices forced to capitulate? Such pressure, such disappointments surely could have turned him into a misanthropic Scrooge. One might expect George Q. Cannon to have been a dour, miserable man” (pp. 452–53).

Carefully, Bitton leads readers to possible conclusions based on the question raised in the above paragraph and from their reading experience. Then, he skillfully provides a resounding answer to his own question. “Yet the fact is otherwise,” Bitton argues. “Cannon’s face looks out at us from photographs, cherubic, cheerful, unruffled. It is hard to picture him rending his garments in anguish. Temper tantrums were not his style. Through it all, he was fundamentally a happy man” (p. 453).

In the end, Bitton provides ample evidence that Cannon not only was a remarkable human being but also, in many ways, was unique among his fellows. The Cannon that emerges from the pages of this book has great intellectual prowess, natural practicality, and tremendous spirituality—three human characteristics that do not often find themselves evident in one person.

Readers will come away knowing Cannon and knowing about his many endeavors. In addition, readers will come away with fresh, important, and new insights of LDS Church history. Providing this larger context to Cannon’s life was a brilliant, but not necessarily unintended, act. In the end, readers will learn a tremendous amount about LDS, Utah, and western history as Cannon’s legacy is remembered, celebrated, and outlined in flawless detail.

Bitton stands among the best chroniclers of the Mormon past. This latest effort confirms what we have come to expect from the hand, mind, and heart of a gentle colleague and careful scholar.

Anyone interested in George Quale Cannon and his world will benefit from taking time to read and enjoy the efforts represented in these three publications. From Flake’s faith-promoting introduction to Cannon’s five missions through Landon’s carefully annotated reproduction of Cannon’s 1849 journal, including Bitton’s believable portrait of Cannon, readers are served well by a renewed interest in one of Mormonism’s most remarkable individuals, George Q. Cannon.

Notes

1. James E. Talmage Diary, 12 April 1901, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
2. "Remains Now Rest in the Grave," *The Deseret Evening News*, 17 April 1901, 1.
3. John Q. Cannon, *George Cannon, the Immigrant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927) and Beatrice Cannon Evans and Janath Russell Cannon, *Cannon Family Historical Treasury* (Salt Lake City: George Cannon Family Association, 1967).
4. Jerreld L. Newquist, ed., *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Zion's Book Store, 1957) and Jerreld L. Newquist, ed., *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974).
5. Lawrence R. Flake, "George Q. Cannon: His Missionary Years" (D.R.E. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1970).
6. Scott Kenney, ed., *Willford Woodruff's Journals: 1833–1898 Typescript*, 9 vols., (Midvale: Signature Books, 1985).
7. Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

Preview "George Q. Cannon by Lawrence R. Flake. George Q. Cannon: His Missionary Years. by. Lawrence R. Flake. 4.20 Rating details. 10 ratings 1 review. In a year that seems to present new challenges for us at every turn, Julia Alvarez's latest novel, *Afterlife*, has arrived at the perfect time. Read more 18 likes 6 comments. Trivia About George Q. Cannon: No trivia or quizzes yet. Add some now ».