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## EDITORIAL

*David M. Morris*

*Editor*

In a year that some have described as the *Mormon Moment*, due to the media exposure of a Mormon standing for the US presidency, Mormon Studies once again enlarges the academic world. One need only look at current releases of university presses, which demonstrate this interest, many of which are reviewed here. In this issue articles are featured on intellectual and historical foci, as well as theological analysis.

We, as always, extend our appreciation to those who took time to blind peer-review articles and review books fairly and formative as possible. As an editorial board we hope you will enjoy the contents of this issue.

If you wish to make a comment or suggestions on its improvement, please feel free to email us at [editorial@ijmsonline.org](mailto:editorial@ijmsonline.org).

REVIEW – MORMON CONVERT, MORMON DEFECTOR: A  
SCOTTISH IMMIGRANT IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1848–1861

*Reviewed by David M. Morris*

Polly Aird, *Mormon Convert, Mormon Defector: A Scottish Immigrant in the American West, 1848–1861*, (Norman, Oklahoma: Arthur H. Clark Co., an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2009). Hardcover: 320 pages ISBN-13: 978-0870623691. \$39.95

Polly Aird's recent book, *Mormon Convert, Mormon Defector: A Scottish Immigrant in the American West, 1848–1861* (Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2009) describes the journey of Peter McAuslan, a nineteenth century Scottish Presbyterian, a calico print designer by trade, and Mormon convert travelling from his homeland in Scotland to California via Utah.

The study of dissent, which arguably is this book's main genre is yet to receive much attention by scholars. Some have attempted to write about dissent but have become polarised by a confessional or an anti-LDS position. Interestingly, where research has been published, it has been authored on account of their own familial relationship to the main character in their narrative, rather than being an attempt to particularly fill an emerging genre. This certainly seems to be the case with this book. Aird relies mostly on McAuslan's documents that were written after he had left Mormonism. One letter in 1860 to Robert Salmon, one of his 1849 Scottish converts, is particularly insightful in understanding the feelings and circumstance of McAuslan.

In terms of positioning this book within recent publications, it could easily sit with Edward Leo Lyman, *Amasa Mason Lyman, Mormon Apostle and Apostate: A Study in Dedication* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009) and to some extent the latter part of Ron Watt's excellent biography of G. D. Watt (*The Mormon Passage of George D. Watt: First British Convert, Scribe for Zion* (Utah State University Press, 2009). While these accounts are all of former Mormon converts, the main difference is found in the hierarchical location of each narrative. Lyman's work is from the perspective of a dissenting Mormon Apostle,

Watt's book is from the perspective of a prominent Mormon convert and Utah industrialist, and Aird's is from below from the perspective of the grassroots Mormon.

As Aird states in the prologue 'we must first turn to [McAuslan's] background to begin to discover the man that he became.' (30) Therefore Aird commences this book with two contextual chapters detailing the state of the industrial revolution, printing processes, social unrest and agitation in Scotland. Chapter Three continues in the same vein with a contextual background in terms of the religious landscape of the 1830s and 1840s in Scotland and the accompanying religious excitement and fervour. By 1843, this religious fervour had spread to McAuslan's wider family (Adamson) who began to respond to the message of Mormonism, a new religious order based in America. As part of the Mormon belief system, they began to anticipate emigrating to America. However, following the death of Joseph Smith Jr., the religion's prophet and charismatic leader, British emigration was put on hold for nearly four years. By 1848, the *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, the Mormon periodical in Britain, began advertising and encouraging emigration once again (66). By February 1848, Peter's grandmother and uncles began to depart for America and at this point Peter appears to begin 'seriously considering Mormonism for himself.' (67). However, he was not baptised until eight months later in October 1848 (73).

The following year, 1849, McAuslan's friends and lodgers, Robert and Mary Salmon were baptised into Mormonism, having experienced a vision. By 1851, McAuslan had baptised at least three more persons (81). Aird informs us of contention and disruption in the Glasgow conference of the Mormon Church during 1851, resulting in over 100 excommunications and difficulties with church leaders, especially Elder Clements. Shortly thereafter, the leader in question ordained Peter an elder. Peter at this stage continued to baptise and did not appear to be disillusioned (84). Even with the Church's public announcement of the practise of polygamy in 1852, a great proportion of Peter's family, including parents and a sibling, continued to emigrate, leaving Peter and his two sisters behind (90). Peter followed in 1854 with his fiancé whom he married prior to sailing at Liverpool (97).

As part of a larger group of Scottish Mormons they commenced the seven-month journey and the first of three voyages towards the Americas. The first voyage was through the means of a steamer to Liv-

erpool, and then the onward Atlantic voyage to New Orleans on board the *John M. Wood*. During the Atlantic voyage, a clear pattern of community and discipline was enforced (112) as well as the occasional event of birth, marriage and death. Chapter Eight describes the third voyage on-board the *Josiah Lawrence* from New Orleans to Kansas City via the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. This voyage reminded some of being transported like cattle. Aird also details the outbreak of cholera (118) and the 'tricks' used by the captain to bypass official inspections or minimise delays due to overloading or disease while sailing to Kansas City (123). Seeds of discontent were beginning to develop; however, it was not until the conclusion of their journey where these seeds began to develop into a paralysing burden.

In Utah, the realisation of abrasive relationships with the United States and the locally imposed martial law caused many families to become discouraged. Apparent acts of violence were seemingly perpetrated under the direction of Mormon Bishops, leaders of the Seventy and ultimately Church President Brigham Young. Particularly poignant were the murders in Springville during March 1857 of William Parrish and his son, who having become disillusioned had decided to relocate to California. However, they were mortally prevented from doing so. Simply known as the 'Parrish-Potter murders', the murders of William R. Parrish, his son and Duff Potter (killed mistakenly for one of the Parrish's) (176) were followed by an apparent lack of judicial address that led McAuslan to have difficulties in dealing with the apparent consent of Mormon leaders. This act was followed by reports of castrations and other punishments in the community. Within six months the massacre of 120 Arkansas emigrants on their way to California at Mountain Meadows, Southern Utah, led Peter McAuslan to seek the protection of the now resident US Army. With their protection in 1859 he requested safe passage to California where he lived out his remaining years until 1891 when he died at the age of 78 (285).

Aird's narrative of the McAuslan family's journey from Scotland to Utah to California is an excellent, well-researched and fluid read. It is particularly strong in terms of contextualization and scene setting. What enhances this work is the treatment of tumultuous events during complex times of nineteenth century upheaval. The writing focus is the main protagonist, Peter McAuslan, who provides a rare insight to pioneer Mormon studies. While some might claim it is a study of dissent, or others detailing it as a narrative of apostasy, it is



undeniable that there were voices at odds with the Church's leader Brigham Young, including McAuslan's former mission president Orson Pratt.

Examining local leaders, who administered or interpreted Church leaders' instructions on the periphery, enhances the discussion of the role of discipline in Utah and the Church. Aird weaves a fair assessment of the facts available and is even handed in their interpreting them. However, one difficulty that might be contended is the way that the complex dynamics of Mountain Meadows murders, local punishments beatings including castration, impending military action and the aggressive Reformation can all be rolled into a seamless singular narrative. It seems too simplistic on occasions.

What is at the heart of this book is the struggle between blind obedience and exercising one's own agency. Perhaps it is this quandary that leads an author into developing a study of dissent. While reading *Mormon Convert*, *Mormon Defector*, there was a *feeling* of familiarity of Fanny Stenhouse's account of migration, polygamy and the emphasis on Mormon leaders' control. Similarly, the apparent inequality of the conditions in which leaders travelled, as compared to migrant converts travelling from the British Isles to Utah, where leaders were riding carriages, taking trains and berthing in on-board cabins rather than the basic conditions that emigrants suffered.

While the narrative itself runs fairly smoothly, I am concerned that the intent or actions of the protagonist are frequently speculative. This highlights the frailty of supporting empirical evidence of earlier episodes of Church life and family conversion. For example phrases such as:

'Although it is impossible to know if Peter held similar sentiments' or

'One can imagine Peter's emotions' (72)

'Probably' (86)

'Peter must have regularly visited' (91)

'Peter left no writings on his thoughts about these explanations' (120)

'The possibility of employment may well have attracted Peter to Spanish Fork'. (172)

'Although Peter McAuslan did not record his thoughts for 1858, one can follow the probable tracks of his increasing disillusionment.' (206)

The most concentrated first-hand accounts from McAuslan are found in the Epilogue and penultimate chapters and are presented in the form of letters written between 1884 and 1886 (264) to family members and others including early converts in Scotland. Each letter reflects an aspect of post-Mormonism. It would have been nice to hear more about the dislocation and feeling of isolation or fellowship that his extended family experienced as they remained in Utah and Mormonism. I wonder whether they perceived McAuslan's actions a rejection of Brigham Young's authoritarianism or if other difficulties existed. For example, was tithing (a requirement of the Mormon Reformation), the only obligation that McAuslan failed to observe, or did he reject invitations to participate in plural marriage; Aird denies that polygamy was part of the reason. (180) Thankfully, this is the nature of historical research, one that continues to ask further questions.

One concern that I have are the sweeping statements that appear to reinforce a notion that Utah and its leaders were lawless, violent and bloodthirsty. There is also the characterising of individuals in a sensational manner for example; 'Four Mormons went with them, including the notorious killer Porter Rockwell' (201). As an historian, I am uncomfortable with this characterisation, not so much from a theological position, but from that of empirical evidence. Questions come to mind, such as who considered him to be notorious, at what point in his colourful life was he being identified, was it when he was a bodyguard to Joseph Smith or Brigham Young, or when he was an appointed marshal? Even his biographer, Harold Schindler, conceded that there were only a handful of verifiable accounts, mainly in connection with his role as a lawman. I am sure that Schindler would have been more than happy to connect multiple deaths with Rockwell if the case was proven.

In conclusion, even with its minor shortcomings, Polly Aird has invested many years in this familial research. It remains authoritative on the experience of Peter McAuslan and sheds light on discipline in Utah in the 1850s. It has also become a reference for the Parrish-Potter murders. I would gladly recommend this book, as it considers those who have been socially and spiritually ignored or redacted from history.

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