

## Book Review

CONWAY B. SONNE. *Saints on the Seas: A Maritime History of Mormon Migration, 1830–1890*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983. 212 pp. \$20.00.

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Liking Latter-day Saint immigration history, I prize this book, which sits on my library shelf next to the classic LDS migration studies by William Mulder, P. A. M. Taylor, Gustive Larson, and LeRoy Hafen. Nevertheless, *Saints on the Seas* feels like a *Reader's Digest* version of something longer and richer that does not exist. Regrettably, the six hundred page saga the subject so richly deserves is not found here. Perhaps the author's plans for a forthcoming LDS maritime encyclopedia caused this volume to be brief.

*Saints on the Seas*, like a fine (but small) ship, sails successfully into previously uncharted historical waters. Conway Sonne, a trustee of the National Maritime Museum Association, wrote this book because "little has been written about the rich maritime tradition of the Mormon Church" (ix). He describes the LDS migration "over water"—missionaries outbound and immigrants inbound—from 1830 to 1890.

Stepping aboard Sonne's book, we find it to be a hybrid—a mix of monograph, reference book, and maritime chronicle. Rudderless the book is the massive data Sonne has collected—prodigious research is evident—concerning about 325 ocean and river vessels, or nearly every important vessel that carried the Saints. Always his focus is ships—their types, sizes, speeds, schedules, passenger capacities, builders, and captains. Despite its large cargo of facts and statistics, the book frequently pulls us easily "out to sea" where we taste salt breezes, hear gruff sea captains, squint at masts and riggings, and smell musty holds below deck.

Sonne serves us eight chapters: one on the LDS "gathering," one on missionaries' voyages, two on sailing ships, one on riverboats, two on transoceanic steamers, and a final statistical assessment. He also provides eleven appendices (twenty-seven pages) packed with original calculations and tables.

Readers seeking full discussions of LDS emigration find only short synopses here and should consult the detailed monographs by Mulder and Taylor. However, several of the "best" voyage stories—the *International*, *Olympus*, *Julia Ann*, and riverboat *Saluda*, for

example—are briefly retold here. Too often LDS migration is thought of in terms of the Atlantic Ocean and Europe, but Sonne reminds us of the ignored Pacific aspects, too.

Avoiding parochialisms that plague much LDS history writing, the author puts LDS water travel into the larger context of international maritime history. To explain the safety of LDS voyages in the 1840s, for example, he gives statistics on 1840–41 ocean wrecks in general. While his narration proceeds chronologically forward through six decades, he keeps readers abreast of technological changes affecting water transport. For landlubbers, he defines differences between ships, barkentines, brigantines, brigs, schooners, and barks. Here and there he sprinkles in bits of maritime color, such as this ditty about the speedy-or-else Black Ball line on which Saints sometimes sailed:

'Tis larboard and starboard on deck you will sprawl  
For kicking Jack Williams commands the Black Ball.

(52)

The narrative is peppered with historically valuable maritime details not known before. Sonne calculates, for example, that sail voyages from Liverpool to New Orleans averaged fifty-four days; from Liverpool to New York, thirty-eight days; and by steamer from Liverpool to New York, eleven days. The average size of LDS immigrating companies was 271. While no one can know exactly how many Saints emigrated between 1830 and 1890, Sonne's figures are as reliable as any—85,000 emigrants out of about 91,600 LDS passengers. Noah Rogers, he says, was the first Mormon to sail around the world (1845).

His chapter about riverboats the Saints used on the Hudson, Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi rivers breaks new paths (or should we say charts new routes?). To 1855, 17,600 of 18,500 LDS immigrants churned up the Mississippi River on dozens of riverboats—Sonne identifies fifty-three by name. Against a backdrop of general U.S. river history, he describes several LDS upriver voyages.

Notable too is his discussion of twenty-one transoceanic steamers that carried LDS emigrants, starting in 1868. Almost half of all LDS emigrants (1840–90) came on such steamers. In two chapters he describes specific steamers, voyages, and the maritime context. (Readers should supplement these chapters with Richard Jensen's "Steaming Through: Arrangements for Mormon Emigration from Europe, 1869–1887," *Journal of Mormon History* 2 [1982]: 3–23; Sonne relies for some of his interpretation on Jensen's earlier piece without making adequate acknowledgment.)

Of Sonne's eleven informed appendices, appendix one bears particular importance for LDS historians. It is the fullest and most reliable chronological list ever compiled of LDS emigrant companies.

It is better than (and should replace) the LDS historical department's standard list because it adds non-European voyages, arrival as well as departure dates, and details about vessels. Another appendix lists the twenty-four LDS voyages with highest death tolls—statistical proof that LDS companies enjoyed remarkable safety at sea. Other appendices list shipmasters, vessels carrying the most passengers, shipbuilders, steamship lines the Saints used, and construction facts about specific vessels.

A rich bonus, the book's forty-six illustrations create the best picture gallery in print of LDS-hired sailing, steam, and river vessels. Also valuable, Sonne's nine page bibliography lists many LDS and especially non-LDS maritime sources that would be next to impossible to discover by anyone not a seasoned maritime scholar.

However, a few minor errors and omissions appear. In 1841 the *Caroline* (*Collina* in some accounts) made two, not one, LDS voyages, according to Quebec newspaper accounts. *Monarch of the Sea* emigrants in 1861 were not crammed together (56); instead, as diarist Johanna Nilsson Lindholm noted, "It is an excellent vessel, large, roomy" (in *Our Pioneer Heritage* [Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1961], 5:49–50). The discussion (123) of Castle Gardens (New York arrival depot) abruptly cuts into a steamer's chapter, giving readers the erroneous impression that the depot had slight importance for sailing Saints. Sonne's use of Linforth's list of emigrant occupations for the 1850s (29) should be accompanied by passenger occupation analyses for other decades, such as that found in Gordon Irving and Richard Jensen's study of *Amazon* passengers (Pacific Coast Branch of American Historical Association paper, 1979). Sonne's reasons why emigration diminished around 1890 (144–45) do not include the most important one—overpopulation of Utah and Idaho valleys, as Richard Sherlock noted in "Mormon Migration and Settlement after 1875," *Journal of Mormon History* 2 (1975): 54–56.

It is regrettable that in a reference book of LDS vessels, Sonne did not design his bibliography to help the public know how to locate what ship their ancestors sailed on (emigration index cards and passenger lists at the LDS Church Archives) or where to find firsthand accounts of particular voyages (Paul Smart's list in his and David Pratt's World Conference on Records paper, "Life Aboard an Emigrant Ship").

Nevertheless, *Saints on the Seas* is a "fit ship"—packaged well with pleasant layout and design, generous illustrations, scholarly endnotes and bibliography, index, maps, solid binding, quality printing, and archival grade paper.

This book is entertaining reading, valuable history, and a vital reference book. As volume 17 in the University of Utah's Publications in the American West series, it is a "spanking" credit to the series' editors and publisher.