

DAVID S. HOOPEES and ROY HOOPEES. *The Making of a Mormon Apostle: The Story of Ruder Clawson*. Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1990. xv; 330 pp. Photographs, chronology, index. \$24.95.

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It is a biographer's maxim that good lives seldom make good biography. According to this view, a saintly life lacks the human tension, contradiction, and dramatic color for a sustained narrative. If this is an accurate generalization, Roy and David Hoopes's biography of their maternal grandfather, Ruder Clawson, provides a well-written exception to the rule.

Elder Clawson, of course, was a long-time Latter-day Saint Apostle who was appointed to the Quorum in 1898 and rose by seniority to become President of the Twelve. He died serving in that capacity in 1943. Not given to flourish, Elder Clawson lived a life of devotion and dedication. As the Hoopeses repeatedly remind the reader, he was by temperament and early profession a bookkeeper, given to system, calculation, and precision. The authors suggest their subject was a quintessential Latter-day Saint, a conclusion that is not necessarily flattering to either Elder Clawson or to Latter-day Saints generally. As one who inherited his religion rather than having been emotionally converted to it, Elder Clawson was, argue the authors, loyal, dutiful, and hard working. But in their view he was also narrow, he was literal to a fault, and he often appeared to be without introspection—at least on matters of life and religion. Such a description will bring a mild protest. We Latter-day Saints hope, we fervently pray, our religion involves more than unquestioning, cramped, routine devotion.

How can such a character be made biographically interesting? Fortunately Elder Clawson was one of those people who always seemed at the center of things. His missionary companion, Joseph Standing, was brutally shot in northwest Georgia as Elder Clawson stood helplessly by. Both at the time of the murder and later at the trial of the "mobocrats," Elder Clawson courageously looked his persecutors in the eye. He was at Brigham Young's bedside when that Church leader died. Circumstances also placed him at the start of the federal crusade against plural marriage. Among the first polygamists to be convicted, he defended religion and conscience at his trial and once more became a Latter-day Saint hero. He was one of the first "cohabs" to be jailed at the infamous Salt Lake "hotel," the territorial prison at present-day Sugar House Park. Still later he presided during a difficult time over the Box Elder Stake in

Brigham City, lent his accounting skills to the Church in the financially troubled Lorenzo Snow era, and again faced unruly persecutors during his European Mission presidency from 1910 to 1913. Here the Hoopeses end their story, providing only a brief epilogue for the final three decades of Elder Clawson's life—the very years of his highest Church responsibility. The authors justify their emphasis by their inability to secure material at the LDS Church Archives. They do not seem overly wrought about the restriction. They sense, perhaps rightly, the difficulty of constructing a dramatic life in the final years. There are no more “dramatic” events to tell.

The book is designed not to give offence, though perhaps it will. What is presented is honest, “warts and all,” biography, something not always essayed for the Church's leading men. Placed beside Elder Clawson's virtues is his sometimes groping humanity. He seems naïvely unaware that his mother apparently stage sets his first marriage. Indeed, two of his three marriages fail, supposedly in part due to his insensitivity. His sexuality, heightened by prison restriction, flares openly in love letters to second wife Lydia Spencer: “Ere you realize it, my beloved sweetheart, I shall be a free man, full of life and vigor and all the fire of an ardent and overwhelming lover” (117). In contrast, their later relationship seems distant. The two eventually consummate a legal-sounding financial agreement that gave Ruderger an apparently inactive role; perhaps the document accurately measured their mature relationship. Grandchildren later recalled Lydia filling a room with her presence, while Ruderger was quietly unobtrusive. Allowing Church concerns to overwhelm family life, he apparently was not an active father, grandfather, or even husband.

Elder Clawson was stubbornly insistent about the “Principle.” Almost half of the Twelve took plural wives after the Woodruff Manifesto, choosing to interpret the document narrowly and legalistically. But after President Joseph F. Smith's Smoot Hearings testimony, the First Presidency issued a second, and what was meant to be a binding, manifesto. Nevertheless, Elder Clawson, a born-and-bred and utterly convinced polygamist, rebelliously took a third wife. Though the Hoopeses treat the episode gingerly, it had all the particulars of an incendiary disaster—for Elder Clawson and for his church. If it had become publicly known, Elder Clawson at the very least would have been removed from office and probably disfellowshipped, while the Church's enemies would have railed at its perfidy and unrepentant polygamy. The Church's delicately balanced attempts at national reconciliation were thus put at risk. The bookkeeper could surprise!

Here the book best succeeds. We sense character and personality, striving and failing, and courage and foolishness—qualities, as Elder Clawson's conduct suggests, that are often mirrored distortions of the other. In short, we get the inner sense of a very human, striving man.

The authors' background and experience serve them well. Both are professional writers and editors, though Hoopes's experience in the popular press apparently dominates the final draft. Moreover, they are simultaneously "insiders" and "outsiders." Bred within the Church setting, they are sensitive to cultural nuance. But because of their Latter-day Saint disbelief, they also have the necessary distance to provide insights that are too infrequent to Latter-day Saint biography.

But, while sensitivity and distance aid the portraitist, the historian requires more. The narrative steps less securely when placing Elder Clawson within the complicated texture of his times. There are pesky errors of fact. While unannounced in Utah, the 1857 Federal expedition was hardly a "secret" (34). The "massive" Salt Lake Theater did not seat 7,500 or anything like that amount (39). Angus Cannon was never a member of the Twelve (79). Lorenzo Snow's aphorism, "As God once was, man may become . . ." probably antedated instead of summarized Joseph Smith's teaching on the subject (121). The authors are either too terse or they misread two incidents: President Lorenzo Snow's unwillingness to fund the Bullion, Beck Mine (192) and the Moses Thatcher episode, when the fiery apostle from Logan found himself at odds with his colleagues in the Quorum (208). Finally, while Elder Clawson no doubt performed a great service auditing Church finances after President Woodruff's death, it is certainly too much to say he was the "man of the hour" (176). Almost at the moment of Woodruff's demise, a large majority of the Twelve, led by President Snow, determinedly worked to set the Church on a new financial course.

The difficulty probably lies in the authors' scope. They are content to tell their story largely by using family papers, aided by a few dozen secondary works. Accordingly, they mine neither the larger body of secondary literature nor the primary materials available outside the LDS Church Archives. Both sources might have given their work additional depth. But we should be grateful for what is given. The Hoopeses present a narrative built around the dramatic episodes that readily emerge from Elder Clawson's life and papers. Theirs is vignette biography, fixed in scope and modest in endeavor. And it succeeds. That it does so is a reminder that any life ably and honestly told has interest. And there is a corollary: perhaps, after all, even the saint has unexpected dimension.