

*The Legacy of Mormon Furniture: The Mormon Material Culture, Undergirded by Faith, Commitment, and Craftsmanship*, by Marilyn Conover Barker, photographs by Scott Peterson and others (Gibbs Smith, 1995)

Appreciation of Mormon material culture has come a long way. We now have a beautiful coffee-table book on Mormon furniture! This book tells the early Mormon story through the work of the LDS cabinetmakers and wood-carvers who crafted furniture from the 1840s through the late nineteenth century. The history is illustrated with photographs of chairs, tables, cupboards, and beds.

This furniture underscores the massive effort the early Saints made to recreate the genteel and refined middle-class culture they left behind in England and Scandinavia and on the East Coast. They chose not to live the free frontier life of the open West. The powerful yearning for respectability, seen in photographs of pioneers with neat, starched aprons and white picket fences against the wind-swept desert, can also be seen in this furniture.

Barker rightly links the production of silk with the creation of furniture, showing the lengths to which Mormons were willing to go to upgrade their material lives. Just as they would care for worms in order to wear finery, so they took the simple woods available to them and applied faux finishes, striving for a finer appearance.

Mormon pioneers included many good carpenters and cabinetmakers

who worked the pine into square and blocky cupboards, simple rail chairs with turned legs, heavy rocking chairs, and bedsteads and settees with cutout headboards. Unlike Shakers whose simple furniture was ideologically based, Mormon furniture was derived from contemporary styles, perhaps because the Mormon leader was an eastern-trained cabinetmaker: "At no time did the Mormon Church sponsor design style that could represent their religious philosophy. Mormons were encouraged to sponsor excellent craftsmanship, but design was left to the choice of the individual cabinetmaker and buyer" (26).

Arranged for reference use, this book offers profusely illustrated chapters on furniture types, cabinetmakers, county histories of local craftsmen (but where is the county map?), the work of cooperatives, and finally a section on faux graining techniques. The gorgeous illustrations contrast wonderfully with their simple, spare subjects. The book's subtitle suggests that the early Mormon material culture reveals the faith and commitment of the pioneers. The photographs and the earnest tone of the text underscore that claim.

—Claudia L. Bushman

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*Beyond the River*, by Michael Fillerup (Signature Books, 1995)

Jonathan Reeves is an LDS golden boy growing up in a small town in California. Athletic, cocksure, and indifferent towards his schoolwork, he goes to the tutoring center only under threat of

being cut from the track team. His tutor turns out to be Nancy Von Kleinsmid, a tall, brilliant, friendless girl, who badgers him, spurs him, challenges his every belief and intuition, and encourages his writing. Despite the fact that Nancy is not LDS, Jon falls in love and determines to marry her and pursue a literary career. He cannot understand why she slips away from him. Within a year of his leaving for college, she is found dead at a local swimming spot, an apparent suicide.

Jon serves a mission in Mexico. His mother dies during his absence, and his relationship with his father deteriorates after Jon returns home. While the narrative has been linear to this point, Jon's adult life emerges through a jumble of flashbacks as he tries to make peace with his past. He has married and postponed his dream of becoming a writer. He is struggling with a daughter's crippling illness and the pressures of teaching remedial English in a California school. As in all too much serious LDS fiction, Jon carries around near-debilitating remorse for petty sins, carelessness, and things beyond his control. Such attitudes surely exist among the LDS people but have never struck me as typical.

The book is about loss, deferred dreams, and appeasing old ghosts. But Fillerup's story leaves room for the Spirit. Jon receives almost audible, at times physical, impulses that encourage him and keep him from making mistakes. One crucial time he fails to listen. In his previous fiction, Fillerup has tended to undermine such passages with sociological observations or competing spiritualities. That tendency

is mostly absent here. In *Beyond the River*, religious experience comes almost as a matter of course, an aspect, among others, of Mormon life. Few literary novels attempt such straightforward depictions of LDS spirituality, though that is at the heart of what Mormon literature ought to do. *Beyond the River* is a passionate book and a readable one. On the spiritual count alone, it is an important contribution to LDS letters.

—Benson Y. Parkinson

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*Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Illinois*, edited by H. Dean Garrett (Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1995)

The bittersweet experience of the Church's brief sojourn in Nauvoo will always remain a romantic yet realistic construct in the minds of the Latter-day Saints. If any reader has ever wanted to travel to Nauvoo with a group of religious educators from BYU, to listen as they analyze and ponder some of their favorite images and reflections on the Nauvoo period, this volume is a fine surrogate. The essays are personable and sincerely reflect the feelings and knowledge of their authors.

This is the latest volume in the regional studies series published by the BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine. It contains eighteen original papers, plus an index, in a large and interesting collection. Topics include Joseph Smith (represented by several