Reviews

James B. Allen. *No Toil Nor Labor Fear: The Story of William Clayton.*

Brigham Young University Press, 2002. xxv. 442 pp. Index. ISBN: 978-0-842-52503-9.
Reviewed by Melvin Clarno Johnson, Mesquite, Nevada.

James Brown Allen, an American historian of Mormonism, died at the age of ninety-seven last year. An Assistant Church Historian of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) from 1972 to 1979, he resigned due to the displeasure of LDS apostles, particularly future Church President Ezra Taft Benson, who was concerned with the "secularization" of Church history. He then returned to Brigham Young University as a professor of history. Allen's biography *No Toil Nor Labor Fear: The Story of William Clayton* (2002) continues to resonate more than two decades after its publication. Clayton, recognized among scholars and readers of early Mormon history, was deeply embedded in the unfolding of the Nauvoo period and the westward migration. Clayton's contributions as a scribe, devoted believer, and builder of the faith, are well-explored by Professor Allen.

As the current substream of "Joseph was a monogamist" dialogue has appeared in Restoration discourse, Clayton's papers, authorized Church writings, and letters have been scrutinized by defenders of either side of the argument on Josephian polygamy. Allen's biography, though more than two decades old, is professionally researched and is still deeply reverberating for proponents on either side.

Allen was one of the few researchers granted access to Clayton's Nauvoo-era journals. He prepared a detailed typescript, from which the Nauvoo sections of this biography are derived. The second edition of the book (2002) includes a valuable appendix comparing various entries in the *History of the Church* that were clearly drawn from Clayton's journal. This comparison is especially intriguing for those questioning whether Joseph Smith practiced polygamy, as it traces how specific journal entries were selected, adapted, or omitted in the construction of the official Church history. The appendix helps readers assess how Clayton's original accounts were shaped into institutional memory and may illuminate editorial choices made to either highlight or obscure polygamy-related content.

Allen tells of how Clayton immigrated to the United States in 1840 and went directly to Nauvoo, Illinois. During the tumultuous years of 1842 to 1844, Clayton acted as a letter writer and secretary to Joseph Smith and documented key events in LDS history. The details in his journal are among the best of the era, full of the quirks and nods and notions of human life. Allen weaves the entries of February to July 1843 into the now familiar polygamy narrative, capturing secrecy and tension surrounding the practice, Clayton's personal fear and

emotional turmoil, and even the inconsistencies in his accounts, though these are delicately handled.

Although he was not present at Carthage Jail during Joseph's assassination, Clayton did document its aftermath and helped to develop the historical record. He wrote the powerfully unique hymn, "Come, Come, Ye Saints," a work that captures the soul of the Mormon push to the Rocky Mountains and the Salt Lake Valley. Epitomizing Clayton, and to some extent Allen, the hymn is doctrinal optimism crafted into verse.

From the 1840s to the 1870s, Clayton served in numerous civil and ecclesiastical roles. As Allen demonstrates, Clayton was a theorist and an advocate of Mormonism, as well as a man trying to live his faith in a time of constant upheaval. Professor Allen does an excellent job explaining how Clayton's literary efforts were worked into the historical record of the LDS Church.

As Clayton moved west and settled in Utah, his commitment to church and community did not waver, despite personal losses and persistent health problems. His work frames the nuances of church leadership, civic roles, and community development. Allen shows us a man who, while not perfect, remained committed to his beliefs and his community. Clayton shared the communal and personal suffering of frontier living associated with trekking, and then created a new civilization out of the earth and water of virgin territory with the members of his church. Clayton's experiences with polygamy are presented with clarity and restraint, aligning him with James Henry Martineau and James G. Bleak, historians and polygamists of the 19th century in southern and northern Utah. They, like Clayton, were believers in the Restoration brought about by Joseph Smith and accepted Brigham Young's leadership and guidance in establishing a new society in the West.

Professor Allen recounts Clayton's ecclesiastical, public, and community life that was, appropriating a line from Noel Carmack's biography of James Henry Martineau, "useful to the Church and Kingdom." He continued in that role among the thousands of middle-level organization men and women who made the Church such a success.

Clayton's thorough recordkeeping proved invaluable to Church leaders and historians alike. He was present at many pivotal moments in Church history, and his writings offer a rare window into the daily lives and spiritual struggles of early Latter-day Saints. Allen contextualizes these sources without burdening the reader with excess technicality, enabling many audiences to appreciate their significance.

The art of good history incorporates the art of good literature. The writing is appealing and focuses on the critical and important aspects of the story. Professor Allen's use of maps, photographs and extensive extracts of Clayton's own words concentrates the interactions of the subject and the larger community. I have always believed in the author letting the subject speak for himself whenever possible. Professor Allen does this well, bringing authenticity to the biography.

No Toil Nor Labor Fear by Professor Allen is timely, since Clayton is currently garnering attention as his Nauvoo journals are being prepared for publication. In past years, Clayton has been one of the more misunderstood figures of nineteenth-century Mormon history, rivaling Martineau and Bleak as one of the lesser-known writers of the life and times of Mormons in the West. Allen's biography helps the reader contextualize both Mormon culture and evolving life in the Rocky Mountains. It also shows the devotion and complexity the Saints gave to their way of life.

Though already recognized for his role in clerking for Joseph Smith, this work deepens our understanding of a man who helped to build a movement from the ground up. Alongside Martineau and Bleak, Clayton emerges as one of the most consequential chroniclers of nineteenth-century Mormon life. His life story helps readers more fully grasp the complexity of early Mormon culture, the demands of faith, and the lived reality of polygamy. While nuanced, this biography does not significantly entertain counter-narratives about Mormon polygamy's origins. However, those interested in Clayton's personal struggles and the Church's institutional development will find value in Allen's work. *No Toil Nor Labor Fear* stands as a worthy and enduring biography of William Clayton.

Andrew Kimball. *The Blood in Their Veins: The Kimballs, Polygamy, and the Shaping of Mormonism.*

Signature Books, 2025. viii. 466 pp. Appendix, Bib., Index. ISBN: 978-1-560-85522-4.
Reviewed by Kevin Folkman, Redmond, Washington.

Heber C. Kimball "can be understood without polygamy. But without polygamy the story of his extensive family can hardly be conceived." Thus begins *The Blood in Their Veins: The Kimballs, Polygamy, and the Shaping of Mormonism*, an exhaustive and well-documented series of family anecdotes from the first few generations of the man who married forty-three women and fathered sixty-four children.

Author Andrew Kimball has previously written a biography of his grandfather and former Church president Spencer W. Kimball, a grandson of Heber C. Kimball. Now, in this book, he meticulously documents and details the lives of Heber's first few generations of descendants. In addition to Heber's grandson Spencer, many others are well known, including Heber's daughter Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, his storied son and Seventy president J. Golden Kimball, and his grandson and apostle Orson F. Whitney. Others are not so well known. Regardless, Andrew Kimball does not shy away from telling both the good and the bad. Many of Heber's descendants left the Church. Many struggled with poverty, depression, alcoholism, failed marriages, and even suicide. In other words, the Kimball family, apart from

the practice of polygamy, did not differ much from the families in our current era.

Heber himself struggled with the dynamics of polygamy. Sixteen wives left him for various reasons. Managing his sprawling households was difficult, as many of his wives maintained different residences, with only a limited number living under the same roof. In a letter to wife Ann Alice Gheen, he remarked, "I have no time to teach children. I teach you and you teach them" (p. 344). He also remarked in a sermon that "I have one or two women that I cannot control, and never did. I have not given them a word of counsel for the last eight years but what they have murmured or rebelled against and called me a hard man . . . the little complaints and murmurings of women are the most tedious" (pp. 344-345).

As many members of the Kimball family participated in plural marriage, Andrew Kimball does not turn away from the issues associated with that participation. Not all polygamous marriages were blissful, and some did not work out. The author includes stories of Heber's daughter Helen Mar Kimball writing extensively, including about her own struggles with sister wives, despite her fierce defense of "The Principle," as it was known. Polygamy for many, including Kimball's family, was synonymous with poverty, as men served church missions, leaving plural wives at home trying to support multiple families. Real property left by Heber to his families quickly became diluted in value when factored over multiple generations and households. Heber appears as a mostly hands-off father, failing to teach his family any profession other than subsistence farming and hired labor. Some dabbled in business with varying success, including a notable collapse of a mining company in Cache Valley involving son J. Golden Kimball and other family members.

The Blood in Their Veins specifically points to a broader concept, dynastic sealings, of which nineteenth-century polygamy was a part. Following Heber's death in 1868, hundreds of non-relatives were sealed to Heber, just as Heber had been sealed to Joseph Smith, Jr. rather than his own father. This echoes the earlier sealings to Joseph Smith, Jr., following his martyrdom, as well as sealings to other Church leaders in the decades that followed. There is subtext in "The Blood in Their Veins" that references a view held by many that being a blood descendant of early notables in the Church brings special blessings and privilege. M. Russell Ballard, former apostle and descendant of Joseph F. and Hyrum Smith, often referred to the concept of "believing blood" in sermons and firesides, suggesting that one's divine potential was enhanced by inherited traits from notable Church members. Other interpretations could include a descendant having a greater responsibility to live gospel principles based on the lives and actions of faithful ancestors. In the Kimball family, son J. Golden Kimball served as a President of the Seventy, grandson Orson F. Whitney as an apostle, grandson Spencer W. Kimball as President of the Church. Current apostle Quention L. Cook is a Kimball descendant. This concept, though frequently hinted at in *The Blood in Their Veins,* was not limited to the Kimball and Smith families. The belief is reinforced by the many general Church officers down through current times who have been descendants or relatives of earlier

Church leaders, and thus heirs to special blessings.[1]

A particular example was seen in a debate at Brigham Young University in 1979 between BYU faculty members Eugene England and Joseph McConkie, son of Apostle Bruce McConkie, and grandson of Church President Joseph Fielding Smith, discussing the principle of eternal progression. Disputing some of England's ideas, McConkie invoked privilege through the "...prophets whose blood flows through my veins."[2]

While the practice of dynastic sealings ended around the beginning of the twentieth century, there remains in the Church a sense of pride in pioneer family heritage and ancestors who made great sacrifices to join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That nineteenth-century sense of elevated privilege runs throughout *The Blood in Their Veins*. In contrast, members are now routinely sealed to their birth parents either through covenant birth, sealing ceremonies in the temples, or via proxy ordinances for their ancestors, regardless of the Church status of those ancestors.

As with any retelling of early Church polygamous practice, the issue of plural marriages after the 1890 manifesto declaring the practice ended is discussed. A decade after 1890, a few of Heber's sons were still looking to add additional wives in secret. One example has Apostle Matthias Cowley encouraging Heber's son Andrew Kimball, living in Mexico at around 1900, to take another wife. Andrew had been quietly corresponding with Mary Wallace as a potential plural wife, and Cowley agreed to work on Andrew's behalf. Correspondence between Andrew and Mary continued for some time but suddenly ceased. Andrew finally received a letter from Mary, regretting her inability to join him as a wife. Only later did Andrew discover that Cowley had also approached William Smart, president of the Wasatch Stake, about joining with Mary in a polygamous marriage. By the time that Andrew discovered the truth, Mary already had a two-month-old child with Smart (pp. 380-383).[3]

The Blood in Their Veins is full of hundreds of such interesting anecdotes, all meticulously documented. However, this reviewer found that in over four hundred pages, there is little that resembles an actual narrative arc. Some chapters are more cohesive than others, but there seemed to be a randomness to the full text. The author also has a habit of changing from given names to family nicknames in mid-paragraph, leading to a few occasions of

[1]For example, see M. Russell Ballard, "Joseph F. Smith and the Importance of Family," in Craig Manscill, ed., *Joseph F. Smith: Reflections on the Man and His Times* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2013); and M. Russell Ballard, "The Tapestry of God's Hand," address at the Joseph Smith Memorial Fireside at Utah State University, February 13, 2011, *LINK*.

[2]Terryl L. Givens, *Stretching the Heavens: The Life of Eugene England and the Crisis of Modern Mormonism* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 163; Kristine L. Haglund, *Eugene England, A Mormon Liberal* (University of Illinois Press, 2021), 63.

[3]Apostle Cowley, along with Apostle John W. Taylor, were both later dismissed from the Quorum of the Twelve over performing post-manifesto polygamous marriages that continued beyond the 1904 second manifesto.

head-scratching over just who "Caddie" or other nicknames were referencing. There is also this presumptuous statement regarding the physical attractiveness of two of Heber's wives, spinster sisters that he married late in life, and who bore him no children:

> Laura was then fifty-five years old. Although no picture survives of the Pitkin spinsters, they presumably lacked the beauty that stirs desire in a husband or uneasiness in a first wife or carries power and sway with the world (p. 336).

Readers should approach this volume with some caution. There exists a huge amount of information about the family of one of the Church's foremost leaders, all of it well documented.[4] But the lack of a firm narrative structure can make the reading tedious at times. *The Blood in Their Veins* is best seen as a collection of anecdotes with references to primary source materials about a family that is central to the Church's nineteenth century history.

[4]Sources include the Church History Library, the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University, the J. Willard Marriott library at the University of Utah, and other publicly available archives.