

SSSML Newsletter

SOCIETY FOR THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF MORMON LIFE

Vol. 11, No. 1
March 1989

David J. Buerger, Editor
Don Lindsay, Reporter-at-Large

IN THIS ISSUE:

Announcements	1
Recent Conferences	2
A Commentary	2
Conferences in Near Future	5
Recent Publications	5

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Conspicuously missing from our newsletter's head is Armand Mauss' name as Reporter-at-Large. Due to the press of the time commitment he must devote as the new Editor of the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, he had to resign his Reporting assignment for SSSML. He is to be congratulated for his success in upgrading the quality of the newsletter from its early beginnings and packing it with interesting and timely information. His shoes are not going to be easy to fill. At the moment, nobody is more acutely aware of this than I am while temporarily filling in as Reporter-at-Large until the task can be reassigned on a more permanent basis. At last word, Larry Young has agreed to take over once his dissertation is finished. Until now, I had taken for granted the scope of Armand's resources he so ably used to produce past newsletters. My appreciation for this has increased immeasurably the past few weeks. Again, thanks Armand, on behalf of the SSSML membership, for your excellent work!

Since we sent out our Annual Dues Statement

And News Sheet with December's newsletter the response has been generally good with some old members returning to the fold paid in full and adding some new members. In our next issue we plan to spread some of the new news we have received about old and new members. We urge those of you who have let this matter slip by to drop us a newsy line and of course, a check. Return to: Kristen L. Goodman, Research & Evaluation—18th Floor, LDS Church Office Building, 50 East North Temple, Salt Lake City, UT 84150.

During our annual business meeting last summer, a number of ideas were considered about ways to stimulate greater interest in SSSML activities. One idea was to solicit contributions to our newsletter from the membership in the form of letters to the editor, perhaps short essays, commentaries, editorials or the like. It was an idea whose time has come. We would like to hear from you and seriously consider publishing items of interest to SSSML members. Thus, this edition includes a commentary that was encouraged in order to bring a new dimension to our newsletter. The encouragement mentioned here is from others, not a slippery self encouragement that a very much a novice reporter-at-large conjured up for ego consumption.

The SSSML session planned for April's Pacific Sociological Association's Annual Meetings had to be canceled because enough papers were not received. Several things appear to have contributed to the lack of Mormon interest in these meetings.

Some dissatisfaction with the site selection has been voiced by not only SSSML members but a number of other sociologists as well. A little bit of Nevada apparently goes a long way. The Western Social Science Annual Meetings appear to have provided a source of competition for PSA participation. Perhaps contributing most to the situation, a number of scholars interested in Mormon life are working on presentations slated for October's SSSR/RRA meetings.

RECENT CONFERENCES

The 1989 Sunstone Symposium West met in Concord, California March 3-4. Its proceedings were marked by a number of interesting sessions and presentations. Most notable was the opening plenary session which looked at the implications of the "Mormon forgery murders" and the fate of convicted murderer and forger extraordinaire (giving the devil his due), Mark Hofmann. More about this topic is dealt with in this newsletter's "A Commentary."

Other Sunstone West presentations that may be of particular interest to SSSML readers include Allison Walkers' "Theological Foundations of Patriarchy: Why the Patriarchal Order Has No Basis in Mormonism"; Claremont Theological Seminary graduate student Leena Pullnen's "The Only True Church?" Mormonism and the Challenge of Religious Pluralism"; and "The Appropriation and Evolution of Religious Symbolism." The meetings' plenary session closed with a look at "Juanita Brooks as a Model for the Mormon Insider Dissenter" and "Author Juanita Brooks: Mormon Woman Historian and The Backslider," by Levi S. Peterson. For more information about the program, taped presentations, abstracts etc., contact the Sunstone Foundation, 331 South Rio Grande Street, Suite #30, Salt Lake City, UT 84101-1136 (Phone: 801/355-5926).

It can't be called a conference exactly, but the SSSML Redd Lecture was held this month at

BYU. Keith Parry, a non-Mormon scholar of Mormonism was selected to present this year's annual lecture. His topic was: "Confrontation At Cardston: Trouble On The Mormon-Indian Boundary." The Abstract of his lecture reads as follows.

In 1980, through a series of blockades and boycotts, Blood Indians confronted the residents of the small southern Alberta town of Cardston. More particularly, the Indians joined issue with the Mormon majority among Cardston's townspeople. Tactics which, in the first place, drew attention to Indian land claims soon became a vehicle for the expression of other grievances and frustrations. With the aid of the media, the Indians were able to turn such parochial matters into national news. This paper explores the confrontation at Cardston as an ethnic boundary process in which Indians pit themselves against Mormons, as a people and as a Church. In quest of material and symbolic values, Indian activists call upon other Indians to reject the moral and secular ascendancy of the Mormons—the first incipient, the second more substantial. The Mormons, in response, express an array of worldly and religious concerns. Comparison with a confrontation in New Mexico suggests that the events at Cardston reflect a tension which is endemic on Mormondom's North American frontier, where Indian nationalism encounters Mormonism in its communal as well as its missionary aspect. There, the two vie with each other in seeking to strike a congenial balance in an emergent field of Mormon-Indian relations.

Keith Perry is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Lethbridge, Canada. The paper upon which his presentation was based is to be published in a forthcoming collection edited by John Sorenson, University of Utah Press, tentatively entitled, *Anthropological Perspectives on Mormons*.

A COMMENTARY AND REVIEW THE MORMON FORGERY MURDERS: THE AFTERMATH

After working as a USMC criminal investigator for a few years, I was feeling quite clever and deftly proclaimed that "never again will I read another detective story." That was over thirty years ago. Detective stories (true or otherwise), my fledgling experience told me that such stories were either "old hat," trivial, mundane or any combination thereof. My dogmatic resolve was further hardened by many more years in law enforcement with a good portion of my time spent working as a detective and investigator for the Salt Lake City Police department and the Utah State Attorney General's Office. After all of this and my sociological training as a criminologist and years spent researching and teaching about police work, I was no longer a tenderfoot. My absolutist resolve was firmly set in concrete now, always and forever.

Of course I have now found that I am guilty of using absolutes in vain (never say never!). Moreover, I am three times guilty. Since late last December I began reading and became engrossed in completing three detective stories: Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith's (1988) *The Mormon Murders: A True Story of Greed, Forgery, Deceit and Death*; Robert Lindsey's (no relation) "True Story Of Money, Murder and Deceit" in *A Gathering of Saints*, also a 1988 publication; and Linda Sillitoe and Allen D. Roberts' (1988) *Salamander, The Story Of The Mormon Forgery Murders*. Nothing "old hat," trivial or mundane here, it must be admitted.

When the news stories initially broke about the bizarre debacle Mark Hofmann created, I followed them with my usual "ho hum" interest in seriously pursuing anything further to do with cops and robbers. What piqued my interest and curiosity sufficiently to break my "irrevocable" decree three times in such short order, involves a certain wave of controversy and degree of emotional agitation the three books appear to

evoke. In contrast to LDS "rank and file" membership, these reactions seem most prevalent among "Sunstoners" and "Dialoguers" and others attracted to Author Meets Critic sessions at Sunstone Symposiums. Also pushing me toward reading these books was Armand Mauss' brief but pointed mention of them in our newsletter last fall.

I was finally pushed over the edge after reading a curious Los Angeles Times joint review of Lindsey's and Naifeh and White's version of the tragic 1985 happenings. Written by David Johnson (once a Mormon Elders' Quorum president), the review appears at once as three things. One, an apologetic to justify the role Church leaders played in the Hofmann affair e.g., "deceit, lying and cover-up." Two, in the process of apology he paradoxically seems to make an assertive public declaration of Church guilt which many might view as akin to firing a unwarranted shot across the bow of the Church's "ship of state." Three, he critiqued the books' relative merit.

Parenthetically, we should expect that more of this is yet to come as there are further indications that one or more of the three written versions will become grist for the cinema or a television movie. Already we have seen the Hofmann saga recently featured on television's "Crimes of the Century," which included a couple of "hokey" reenactments of Hofmann's malevolence.

After reading *Salamander*, Armand's remark that Mormon authors Sillitoe and Allen's book was "by far the most scholarly and balanced in nature." seems justified. Indeed, it is the most scholarly of the three and least potent in its potential to stir controversy. Convincing on this point is a careful reading of the book's preface and hearing Sillitoe's personal recounting of the books preparation. Heard during the 1989 Sunstone West meetings, Sillitoe related some particulars that were taken to make *Salamander* as correctly "informational" as possible and still tell a "good story." Out of these efforts, Sillitoe and Allen's book derives the "balance" Armand Mauss noted.

On the other hand, their "informational" approach ends up offering a somewhat arrested story line that falls short in depicting just how high various stakes were for a number of people involved with the case and the uncommon intensity with which so many actors played out their roles in Hofmann's deadly game. The upshot of this element in writing about the case involves a need to gain a clear understanding of the way in which desperate passions motivated specific actions of a number of players who contributed to final outcomes affecting all concerned. This holds for individuals and institutions alike. How a person sees this, however, is more likely to be determined by one's perspective in relationship to the Church.

To help illustrate my meaning with a final personal note, reading Lindsey's and Naifeh and Smith's versions was in a sense like experiencing multiple *deja vu*. The pages I was reading vividly called up old imagery and feelings of clashes that easily transferred to the heightened rekindling of personal and professional jealousies, the often spiteful politics and conflicts within and between local law enforcement agencies, the County Attorney's Office, public and/or private defenders. Add to this concern all around about what the news media might do to hurt you or your case, the inevitable church-state politics which pervade Utah and often complicate enforcement matters involving the Church or those well placed in relation to its hierarchy. Last, is the high anxiety that attends not knowing which way the winds that blow will sway the ultimate arbiters of justice — the courts.

Being no stranger to a number of the personalities and organizational entities involved in the case I find that Lindsey, Naifeh and Smith captured these penetrating realities with exceptional clarity whereas a number of these and other agonies are too down played or not addressed in *Salamander*. *Salamander* is a good book but it can be profitable to read it alongside one of the others.

Returning to other observations about the three books and their impact on readers, Armand also noted in our newsletter: "The Lindsey book too seems generally to be a responsible treatment..." of the Hofmann affair. Not only does it seem a responsible treatment, it stands between the other two books with the story it tells. That is, the somewhat under-told story by Sillitoe and Allen and Naifeh and Smith's overbearing story by way of what the L.A. Times review accurately characterized as "at times openly hostile to Mormon beliefs." To this must be added, the Church hierarchy, past and present. It is this latter criticism which largely and justifiably prompted Armand Mauss to cite Naifeh and Smith's "handling of the subject [as] in the time-honored tradition of salacious Mormon-bashing."

While both books, Johnson noted, serve as "much the same indictment of the duplicity of church leaders" involving faith promoting/destroying documents, attempts to cover-up events and thwart a public trial for Hofmann, Naifeh and Smith fall short in presenting a "focused indictment." On this point, *Salamander* is more an outline from which an indictment might be prepared. Such criticism does not speak well of Harvard trained attorneys' ability to prepare of all things a focused indictment, but they at least invite it on this and perhaps on other counts as well.

As several students of Mormonism observe, they fail to demonstrate a sufficient understanding of Mormon theology, Church history and the cultural understanding of the context in which certain events occurred. This shows in their book with some extraordinarily caustic extrapolation from details associated with Hofmann's festering divergence from the Church to historical as well as more recent actions of its people and leaders. In preparing their indictment they used a shotgun approach rather than aim for a tight grouping of a few well placed rounds that would have sufficed to make their point: that members of the Church hierarchy were not entirely innocent victims and contributed to Hofmann's ability to defraud them.

It was this type of unsympathetic shotgun exposition that sustains charges that Naihef and Smith are guilty of "Mormon-bashing," despite disclaimers stating readers should not construe what they were writing as exactly that. Other charges arose in last August's Author Meets Critic session at the Sunstone Symposium. Among them it's reported, were heated exchanges that erupted over whether Naifeh and Smith manufactured certain statements attributed to some people whom they interviewed and wrote about in their book. The accusations may or may not be true. It is not unusual for things to be told to reporters by people while assuming certain statements are not for the record and which are later recanted because of a need to appear good in the eyes of certain others. This issue, and other misapprehensions about the authors conduct in producing their book was also much in evidence at the Sunstone West meetings, held March 3-4.

During these meetings' plenary session, "Murder She Wrote: Insights and Implications of the Hofmann Story," Linda Sillitoe was the featured author (Robert Lindsey was also scheduled but had to cancel his appearance) and spoke to a capacity crowd of Mormons and non LDS which listened with rapt attention for nearly two hours. Such was the intense interest that evolved during the question and answer period, that a short break was taken and most of the audience returned for another hour. Emotional chords and deep concerns were clearly touched as implications for the aftermath of the Hofmann affair were considered. They cannot be addressed in any detail here other than to say there are long and short range implications, some more profound than others.

For example, aside from the initial damaging publicity about the bombings to Hofmann's conviction and incarceration, what effects have these books had or possibly continue to have, especially The Mormon Murders. What if it might become the grist for a movie? Within this framework arise such concerns as, to what extent

has the Church missionary program be harmed?

To what degree might individuals' faith in the Church, its leaders or both be damaged. What are the long range consequences for scholarly research, particularly the historians? What are the possibilities and consequences of Mark Hofmann eventually being seen as a folk hero with the Church for a backdrop, viewed as the heavy who partly caused his undoing and got what it deserved? These and other sociological implications were much on the minds of people present.

Of one thing I think we can be fairly certain, the specter, cast by the legacy of Mark Hofmann, is not going to go away soon. Toxic waste, as we all know, is difficult to eliminate from the landscape. When it resides in human consciousness it presents a much greater problem.

CONFERENCES IN THE NEAR FUTURE

Through the efforts of Stan Weed, Marie Cornwall and a number of others, SSSML will make a strong showing at the joint meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Religious Research Association in Salt Lake next October. Six sessions dealing with different aspects of Mormon life are on the drawing board. Titles of some presentations and listing of participants remains too tentative to include here but the session titles are firmed up. They are:

- Growth and Change in New Religious Movements: Mormonism as Case Study (Plenary Session)
- The Changing Landscape of Institutional Mormonism
- An Examination of Mormon Society and Culture, session 1
- An Examination of Mormon Society and Culture, session 2
- Minority Relations
- The Mormon Missionary

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

With apologies for such an abbreviated listing this time around, there are three new publications that should be of interest to many of our readers. All appear in Spring edition of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1989. First is a major article by Armand Mauss entitled "Assimilation and Ambivalence: The Mormon Reaction to Americanization." It is thought provoking in light of some thorny issues Armand raises about certain problems that attend successful Church efforts to gain respect in the eyes of others. He points to some serious implications that come with increased Mormon assimilation and the respectability that brings but

not without a loss in that peculiar identity that has given Mormonism its richness.

Second, is Dorice Williams Elliott's, "The Mormon Conference Talk as Patriarchal Discourse." It is an interesting literary analysis of conference talks by general authorities and the characteristics of such speeches which bear on LDS women's issues.

Last is a research note by Robert J. McCue. In his "The 'Restoration' in British Columbia: The LDS and RLDS Churches on Canada's West Coast," he briefly examines some conflicts consequences for Mormons from both groups as they migrated and settled in B.C.