

From Gadfly to Watchdog

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The First 100 Years: A History of the Salt Lake Tribune, 1871-1971. By O. N. Malmquist. Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1971. 454 pp. \$8.00.

For every serious student of Utah's history, there is a first time to visit the dusty archives or the microfilm files of the *Salt Lake Tribune* of half a century or more ago.

Two impressions usually emerge. One is of a newspaper filled with vitriolic, anti-Mormon diatribes, each day's outpouring more bitter than the last, each likely to provide grounds for a dozen libel suits. Another impression is of a lively journal fighting to stay alive in a competitive market by vigorously tackling a variety of controversial issues. By comparison, today's *Salt Lake Tribune* — and most other metropolitan dailies — offers bland fare. No one would want to go back to the *Tribune's* anti-Mormon period, but it may be fair to ask why today's "responsible" journalism often succeeds in being dull.

The great virtue of this long-awaited book by the former political editor of the *Tribune*, O. N. Malmquist, is that it brings back the turbulent years when no one could call the *Tribune* dull. The reporting was often exciting, the writing vivid, the editorial point of view apparent to the most obtuse reader. The chapters devoted to these years will add to an understanding of Utah's territorial history and will be welcomed by those who like their history with a bit of journalistic color.

Those who felt this book might be a "house history" whitewashing the *Tribune* were mistaken. In fact, the publishers of the *Tribune*, until about 1911, are perhaps too frequently portrayed as opportunistic and petty. The fact that Church leaders did have the means of controlling political decisions within the territory is acknowledged only obliquely. The fact that ballots were not secret and that groups like the Council of Fifty played an important role in Utah political affairs may have had something to do with the *Tribune's* frequent outbursts against "ecclesiastical control of politics."

Malmquist makes no effort to mask the economic motives behind the newspaper's editorial policies. Founded as the *Salt Lake Daily Tribune and Utah Mining Gazette* in 1871 by a group of excommunicated Godbeite or "New Movement" members, the newspaper started out as an instrument of moderation but soon moved into direct conflict with the economic and political policies of Brigham Young. The publishers, William S. Godbe and E. L. T. Harrison, soon found that "the irrepressible pressures of the times were in the direction of a gloves-off fight on ecclesiastical as well as economic, political, and social issues. . . ." There were not enough moderate gentiles and Mormons to make a moderate, independently critical newspaper economically viable.

Soon the Church leaders and the *Tribune* — under a succession of different owners — became locked into opposite positions centering around the "irrepressible conflict" — the struggle over polygamy and Church domination of territorial and local elections. This furnishes a central theme for much of the book. Malmquist skillfully traces the history of Mormon-Gentile hostility, the years of accommodation following the 1890 Manifesto, the drive for statehood, and the early years of statehood.