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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ HISTORY

Fred T. Perris in Deseret

Neil Jensen
AuthorHouse (Oct 8, 2012)
Softcover $12.95 (68pp)
978-1-4772-4831-7

Frederick Thomas Perris is recognized in Southern California as a significant part of the region's pioneer history. As county surveyor for San Bernardino County, he literally shaped the map of the largest county in the nation. As a railroad official, Perris supervised the construction of several key rail lines, including the busy Santa Fe Mainline over formidable Cajon Pass. The city of Perris, California, is named after him.

Perris's work in California is reasonably well documented in local history sources, but his life before arriving there in 1874 has remained relatively obscure. Neil Jensen's biographical study tells the story of those years, and it's quite a story. Although apparently a peaceful and honest man, Perris was involved in several notable controversies that wracked the Mormon State of Deseret during the tumultuous period from the 1850s to the early 1870s.

As a young immigrant convert inducted into the Mormon militia, Perris was present at the Morrisite War that erupted between orthodox and dissenting factions of the Mormon church. In his first railroad job, while surveying part of the route of the first transcontinental railroad, Perris ran afoul of Brigham Young's hard-nosed business practices and came under suspicion as a troublemaker. Through personal acquaintance with William Godbe and other would-be reformers, Perris became part of the local opposition to Young's monolithic power and was excommunicated. He responded to this by co-founding the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the only major non-Mormon-controlled newspaper in the area, and served as its only publicly identified business officer through a dangerous period in which both Mormons and anti-Mormons routinely threatened violence against each other. The *Tribune*'s critical and skeptical journalism would be Perris's lasting legacy to the future State of Utah.

Neil Jensen, a descendant of Perris's sister, uses both primary and secondary sources to tell this story. While admiring and sympathizing with Perris, Jensen acknowledges that all sides involved in the controversy had reasons for their actions. The book lists source notes for the benefit of researchers who wish to pursue them, but casual readers will find Jensen's writing easygoing and enjoyable, with the occasional slyly humorous aside.

There are a few shortcomings to the book, including a few minor typographical and grammatical errors. The illustrations, while appropriate and well chosen, are small and sometimes blurry; some of the maps are difficult to read.

Flaws notwithstanding, *Fred T. Perris in Deseret* is an admirably readable study of a fascinating individual. The tale it tells and the man it describes will appeal to anyone interested in the history of Utah or Southern California, and it will be of special interest to students of Mormon history, western journalism, and the long-running tug of war between religious authorities and the freethinkers who question them.

BRADLEY A. SCOTT (March 5, 2013)

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