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## **Duncan James McMillan: Missionary to the Mormons**

**By R. Douglas Brackenridge**

Apart from the ubiquitous Sheldon Jackson, no individual made a more significant impact on early Utah Presbyterianism than Duncan J. McMillan. Although his Utah ministry lasted only eight years (1875-1883), McMillan played a pivotal role in establishing an extensive network of denominational mission schools and churches which, at one time, stretched from St. George, Utah in the south, to Malad, Idaho in the north. Of those institutions, First Presbyterian Church and Wasatch Academy in Mt. Pleasant, Utah continue to serve the denomination today. He was also instrumental in founding Westminster College, which will celebrate 125 years of educational activity in Salt Lake City in the year 2000. Beyond these accomplishments, McMillan acquired a national reputation as an anti-Mormon polemicist whose approach to “the Mormon problem” had a great impact on denominational policies in the nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries.

Mormons remained virtually insulated from outside influences from their arrival in Utah Territory in 1847 until the completion of a transcontinental railroad system in 1869. Following that event, non-Mormon immigrants came in increasing numbers, some to make a fortune and some to save souls. Among the latter were a contingent of Presbyterians led by Sheldon Jackson who had recently been appointed superintendent of missions for the western territories. Under his leadership, Presbyterian missionaries began systematic efforts to topple the kingdom of Brigham Young and his followers in Mormon Zion. Along with Native Americans and Hispanic Catholics, Mormons were classified in Presbyterian missionary terminology as “exceptional populations,” people who did not fit into the traditional mold of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Banker 1993:3-10).<sup>1</sup>

Mormons presented a unique problem, however, because they were largely Anglo-Americans of western European stock and converts from Protestant Christianity. As a youth, Joseph Smith had close ties with the Presbyterian Church, attended services and revivals, and interacted with relatives who were communicant members. When Brigham Young led his band of devout followers into Utah territory in 1847, he and most of his group leaders had received their early religious training in evangelical Protestant denominations. Puzzled by this anomaly, Presbyterians frequently employed the adjective “deluded,” when referring to Mormons, suggesting that converts to the new religion were somehow psychologically susceptible or intellectually weak (Banker 1993:35-36).

During the nineteenth century, Presbyterians produced a barrage of polemical books and pamphlets denigrating Mormonism. Respected historians reached wide audiences with their negative assessment of the new religious tradition. Terming Mormon theology materialistic and immoral and deeming their communal theocracy a threat to constitutional separation of church and state, Presbyterian historian Robert Baird summarily dismissed Mormonism as a religious aberration produced by a combination of cunning leaders and deluded followers. In

his monumental *Religion in the United States of America* (1844:647-649) Baird ranked Mormons at the bottom of a list of non-Christian sects and described them as “the grossest of all the delusions that Satanic malignity or human ambition ever sought to propagate.” He summarized his exposition by observing that “the Mormons are a body of ignorant dupes, collected from almost all parts of the United States, and also from the British Isles.” Baird believed that like other “fanatical sects,” the Latter-Day Saints would have a short-lived existence after their leader, Joseph Smith, had been murdered. Most Mormons, he concluded, would either revert to traditional Christianity or languish as disillusioned atheists or agnostics.

Other Presbyterian writers took an equally dim view of Mormonism as a theological system and a religious community. In particular, they focused on the practice of plural marriage, a keystone Mormon doctrine, and called for federal intervention in Utah to end polygamy. *The Rocky Mountain Presbyterian*, edited by Sheldon Jackson, regularly featured anti-Mormon articles written by missionaries who had personal experience with Mormon marriage practices. Their inflammatory language created an atmosphere of tension in which relationships between Presbyterians and Mormons rapidly deteriorated.<sup>2</sup>

Mormons were equally defamatory when combating their Presbyterian antagonists, especially when the campaign against polygamy began in earnest after the Civil War. Harsh treatment by Protestant clergymen and church people in New York, Ohio, Illinois, and Missouri had deepened Mormon resentment for denominational Christianity which they considered apostate and moribund. They countered anti-Mormon polemics with portraits of greedy, amoral, pretentious, and dogmatic “outsiders” whose avowed goal was to exterminate Mormonism. Termed “hirelings,” Presbyterian clergymen were depicted as licentious power mongers obsessed with seducing Mormon women and acquiring personal fortunes. At every opportunity, Mormon apologists caricatured Presbyterian doctrines such as the Trinity, predestination, and eternal punishment, and ridiculed their belief in a God who lacked “body, parts, and passions.” Such charges intensified once Presbyterian clergymen took up residence in Utah and pursued a vigorous campaign to conquer Mormon Zion.<sup>3</sup>

Beginning slowly, Presbyterians established a few churches in predominantly “gentile” (non-Mormon) towns such as Corinne and Alta where they had small but stable congregations. During his western travels, Sheldon Jackson visited Salt Lake City in 1871 and recognized the opportunities for Presbyterian expansion in the Mormon capital. Within a month, Josiah Welch, a recent graduate of Union Seminary in New York, accepted a commission as missionary for the Board of Home Missions in Salt Lake City. He began work immediately and within a few years had succeeded in gathering a congregation of about sixty members and in erecting an attractive new brick church within the shadow of the Mormon Temple, then under construction (Reherd 1949:2,678-681).

By 1875 Presbyterians had mustered sufficient strength to organize a presbytery. On March 1, 1875 in the First Presbyterian Church of Salt Lake City, Sheldon Jackson, accompanied by a few laymen and several clergymen including Josiah Welch, assembled to convene the Presbytery of Utah. Attending that meeting was Duncan J. McMillan, one of Sheldon Jacksons most colorful, charismatic, and controversial recruits. His Utah career was

about to begin (Reherd 1949:2,681).

Duncan James McMillan was born in Giles County, Tennessee on June 2, 1846, the son of Edward and Mary Ann Brown McMillan. His father, a Presbyterian clergyman, served as chaplain of the 32nd Illinois Infantry during the Civil War, accompanied by his fifteen-year old son, Duncan, who went as an unenlisted orderly. Following his fathers death, Duncan recruited a squad of men and enlisted in the 7th Illinois Infantry, serving with distinction until hostilities ceased. He subsequently worked as a salesman, farmhand, and teacher in order to accumulate money for an education. After graduating from Blackburn College in 1870, McMillan served as superintendent of schools in Carlinville, Illinois for two years. Ordained to the Presbyterian ministry in 1872, he accepted a call to the Walnut Grove Presbyterian Church near Carrollton, Illinois, where he labored for two years (McMillan 1939:8-19).

Shortly after assuming the pastorate, McMillan contracted a lingering throat and bronchial condition exacerbated by rescuing several young women from a smoke-filled building. At age twenty-nine, he left his family home in Illinois in February 1875, in search of a moderate climate and an opportunity to test his evangelistic skills as a home missionary. In Denver McMillan met Sheldon Jackson with whom he had corresponded regarding assignments in New Mexico, Montana, and Utah. Preferring Utahs milder weather, he traveled by rail to Salt Lake City, arriving in time for the inaugural session of Utah Presbytery (McMillan n.d.:1-2).

Sheldon Jackson introduced the visitor with the following words:

We read in St. Johns Gospel “there was a man sent from God and his name was John.” There came to Salt Lake City a man whose name is Duncan J. McMillan, a genuine Scotchman and full of the spirit.<sup>4</sup>

As a corresponding member, McMillan participated in discussions about how to expand the minuscule Presbyterian presence in Utah. Jackson urged him to organize a new church in Ogden, a growing railroad center about forty miles north of Salt Lake City with a large non-Mormon population. Instead, McMillan opted for southern Utah, where no Protestant minister had ever attempted a permanent ministry. Despite warnings of bloodthirsty Danites and primitive living conditions, he selected Mt. Pleasant, a Mormon village of some 2,000 inhabitants in Sanpete County, where some disaffected Scandinavians had reportedly formed a small Liberal club in defiance of Mormon church authorities. Using these apostates as a nucleus, McMillan (n.d.:2) intended to organize a Presbyterian Church and rescue the populace from what he considered to be a superstitious and theologically deficient religious tradition.

Traveling by rail, stagecoach, and mail wagon, McMillan (n.d.:3-4) completed a 150 mile journey to Mt. Pleasant on March 3, 1875. Approaching the village, he asked his driver to take him to the best available hotel so that he could rest after the arduous trip. “There is no hotel in Mt. Pleasant,” was the reply. “Where do strangers stay when they come to town?” McMillan queried. “There are no strangers. Strangers do not come here. You are the first gentile I ever hauled into this valley,” responded the driver. McMillan then requested to be taken to the post office where perhaps he could find someone willing to provide

accommodations. The friendly postmaster, Jerry Page, an apostate Mormon, offered him free use of a back room and gradually introduced him to the leading citizens of the community. Page worked out a series of hand signals to identify them for McMillan. When he introduced an apostate, Page stroked his mustache with his right hand. When he introduced a devout Mormon, he used his left hand. And when their commitments were doubtful, he did not touch his mustache. "Now, remember faces and names," Page advised, "and keep your mouth shut and you will soon get the situation."

Attending his first Mormon meeting, McMillan heard a speaker mention that a Presbyterian minister was on his way to Sanpete County to recover his health. "We will have a picnic over him," the man proclaimed, "either make a Mormon of him or chuck him under the sod in less than two weeks." Despite those initial inflammatory remarks, McMillan was treated kindly by Mormon authorities. Bishop W. S. Seeley invited McMillan to speak at several Mormon Sunday evening meetings and placed the meetinghouse at his disposal for Protestant services. Mormons listened politely to McMillan's sermons, which were brief, nonpolemical homilies on basic Christian doctrines. "Even the Bishop," McMillan (1879:4) acknowledged, "thanked me for the sermon."

Although he cultivated relationships with Mt. Pleasant residents as an outsider in their midst, McMillan wrote disparagingly about them in an article published in *The Rocky Mountain Presbyterian in 1875*. In "An Appeal to Christian Women," McMillan (1875:2) records his impressions of life in a Mormon village and refers to the people as poor, ignorant, deluded, degraded priest ridden serfs. The men stand about their customary loafing places with their hands up to their elbows in their pants pockets, their old hats on the backs of their heads and their mouths open, utterly incapable of comprehending an intelligent thought; the women are literally servants of servants, and the children are legion.

When fellow ministers in Salt Lake City read the article, they confiscated and burned copies of *The Rocky Mountain Presbyterian* to conceal the derogatory remarks which they believed would provide rich fodder for Mormon counterattacks. Josiah Welch warned McMillan to exercise better judgment in future articles.<sup>5</sup>

McMillan soon ventured out into nearby towns and villages to preach Protestant principles and doctrines to whomever would listen. At Moroni, eight miles west of Mt. Pleasant, a good crowd turned out to hear the visiting evangelist. At the close of the service, a Mormon who had converted from Methodism, came to McMillan with tears in his eyes saying, "Your sermon came very near getting me, but when you sang 'Coronation at the close, that fetched me. I couldn't stand it any longer.'" He also preached at a nearby mining camp, speaking to miners while they ate their supper. Although treated kindly everywhere he went, McMillan failed to record one solid conversion. He returned to Mt. Pleasant perplexed about the future of his ministry in the Sanpete Valley.<sup>6</sup>

McMillan (1875:2) became convinced that traditional evangelistic strategies--building churches, holding revivals, and organizing Sunday schools--would have little impact on adults whom he believed unshakable in their commitment to Mormonism. Moreover, efforts to attack Mormonism seemed only to build barriers and stiffen resistance especially among Latter-Day Saint authorities who enjoyed considerable influence over their constituents.

Influenced by successful local day schools already established by Episcopalians and Methodists in Salt Lake City, McMillan envisaged a network of Presbyterian day and boarding schools in Utah that would provide high quality education at a minimal cost. With no free public school system in Utah Territory, McMillan reasoned that denominational schools would bridge cultural gaps and attract Mormon children who in turn would draw their siblings and parents (Banker 1993:72-73).

Mormon apostates in Mt. Pleasant offered to sell their newly constructed hall below cost if McMillan promised to renovate it for educational purposes. Even though he lacked denominational funding, McMillan signed a promissory note and advertised the imminent opening of a new day school. Unable to find a suitable teacher, McMillan reluctantly assumed the position of schoolmaster in addition to his preaching duties. When Mormon authorities at the last minute decided not to lend him benches from an unoccupied ward schoolhouse, McMillan borrowed hand tools and carved benches from rough lumber. Encouraged by an endorsement from Bishop Seeley, McMillan commenced classes on April 19, 1875, marking the beginning of the present-day Wasatch Academy.<sup>7</sup>

McMillan's school evoked a positive response from Mt. Pleasant residents. Even the local mayor attended classes and boasted that they were the best in the entire Sanpete valley. By early summer the enrollment had reached 109, with a waiting list for students. Some day school students also attended a Sunday school where the curriculum focused primarily on Biblical studies and doctrine, but many Mormon parents, wary of Protestant indoctrination, refused to let their children attend. Nevertheless, despite financial and staffing problems, McMillan's experimental ministry in Mormon territory appeared to be off to a promising start.<sup>8</sup>

At this point, McMillan's amicable relationship with Mt. Pleasant Mormons came to an abrupt halt. On June 22, 1875, Brigham Young arrived in town with an entourage of Church authorities who were on an extended tour of southern Utah to promote the United Order and the erection of temples in Salt Lake City, St. George, and Manti. During a major speech, Young raised concerns about the proliferation of denominational schools in Utah. Ostensibly founded for educational purposes, Young argued that they were covertly envisioned as a subtle means of weaning children away from the family faith. "Take your children to some one who is full of the gospel and cast away your hypocrisy and be at peace, and in union, not as the pretended Christians who contend and fight for their attainments." He further advised residents to avoid social contact with the Presbyterian minister and any of his teachers.<sup>9</sup>

Relating Young's speech to Sheldon Jackson less than two weeks after the event, McMillan told how the Mormon president began by calling him "a wolf in sheep's clothing, a serpent that charms only to devour," and warned townspeople to take their children out of school or face dire consequences. "This gentile devil," he quotes Young, "will send sorrow and distress into many a mother's heart, will bring irreparable disgrace and ruin upon your daughters." McMillan also told how Young chastised church leaders for being beguiled with promises of free education.

Why, what could you have been dreaming about? . . . Don't you know that all gentile

ministers are libertines and sodomites? Beecher, you know, is one of the best and purest among all of them and yet he keeps 28 mistresses. This man whom you have received in your midst and who is gaining the hearts of your children is, without the shadow of a doubt, of the same stripe.<sup>10</sup>

Although Mormon accounts of Youngs speech lack McMillans colorful language, they agree that Young strongly disapproved of the Presbyterian school and urged non-attendance. Whatever Young said, either publicly or privately, he failed to dissuade residents from sending their children to McMillans school. Enrollment soared to 150 students, and with assistance from the Board of Home Missions, McMillan was able to employ a teacher to relieve him from classroom duties. By December 1876, McMillan reported to Sheldon Jackson that everything was well in hand. “All the machinery is in gear, oiled and running now, the priests are whipped and with their caudal extremities dropped, their fierce barking has given place to a melancholy growl.”<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, McMillan continued to report incidents of physical harassment from some local citizens. On several occasions groups of men and boys pelted his house with stones and then disappeared into the darkness. At an oyster supper to which he had been invited by several young Mormon men, they attempted to seize him and force whiskey down his throat. He resisted their efforts and left unscathed. One evening, hearing a rustling of the window-curtain, he discovered a masked man climbing into his room. Thrusting a revolver into the intruders face, McMillan told him to “Git” and he left. According to various accounts, other efforts to discourage McMillan from pursuing his ministry in Mount Pleasant proved equally ineffective (Jackson 1876:2).

At the nearby village of Ephraim, McMillan encountered opposition that vaulted him into celebrity status as an anti-Mormon crusader. According to the initial account in *The Rocky Mountain Presbyterian*, McMillan had been advised not to preach in Ephraim where a hard core of Mormon fundamentalists dominated religious activities. Warned of a possible attempt on his life, McMillan nevertheless proceeded to his speaking engagement bearing both a Bible and a revolver. “Carrying his weapons into the pulpit--like Cromwell, ’trusting in Providence, and keeping his powder dry, [he then] read the scriptures, poured out his soul in prayer, and preached such a loving gospel that enmity for the time being was disarmed” (Jackson 1876:2).

The “Bible and revolver” story surfaced periodically well into the twentieth century as a classic example of Presbyterian struggles with “deluded Mormons.” Hans P. Freece (1931:556-557), one of McMillan’s student converts and later an anti-Mormon journalist, recounted a dialogue between Bishop Canute Peterson and McMillan. Cited here only in part, Freece’s narrative represents the culmination of a long period of literary development.

Peterson: “Are you that damned Presbyterian devil who is preaching at Mt. Pleasant?”

McMillan: “I am the Presbyterian minister who is preaching in Mt. Pleasant.”

Peterson: “What do you want here?”

McMillan: “I came here by invitation of some good people.”

Peterson: “Who dared invite you?”

McMillan: “They are respectable gentlemen of good standing.”

[McMillan then invited the Bishop to hear him speak, assuring him that he would hear nothing unpleasant proclaimed.]

Peterson: “I don’t care what you preach. You can’t preach in Ephraim. If you step on to the platform, you won’t come off alive. I have been a true friend to you in giving you good advice. If you value your neck, do not try to preach.”

McMillan: “I have half a pound of lead here, [exhibits his revolver] and I can pull a trigger as quickly and put the bullet as near to the mark as any man in Ephraim. I’ll be ready for you.”

Peterson: “What can you do against a town of two thousand people?”

McMillan: “Nothing, I am at your mercy, but I will not be the first man to bite the dust. I hope you will be present at the service and I hope you will hear nothing that will be offensive to you.”

And so he preached. “With the Sword of the Spirit in one hand and a ‘Swamp Angel’ in the other, he commanded the respect of Brigham Young’s ‘Destroying Angels.’”<sup>12</sup>

Newspaper editors throughout the country avidly reproduced Jacksons colorful account of McMillans persecution. *The Salt Lake Tribune*, *Rocky Mountain Christian Advocate*, and *New York Evangelist*, for example, copied the article and supplemented it with sympathetic editorial comment. Even *Harpers Weekly* found McMillans struggles newsworthy. Commenting that “a preacher going armed into the pulpit is an unusual style for the United States,” the editor concluded: “This is true courage; but is it not time that the laws of the United States were enforced in Utah?”<sup>13</sup> The *Herald and Presbyterian* observed that McMillans hardships “would seem incredible did we not know that Brigham Young and his followers are terribly bitter against anything calculated to bring that people to a knowledge of the Truth,” and ended with a plea for donations to the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions.<sup>14</sup>

Mormon authorities argued vehemently that McMillans story was a fabrication or at least an exaggeration devised as a means of stirring up financial support for Utah missions among Presbyterians in the East. They claimed that no minister or missionary had ever been denied freedom of speech and certainly none had been forced to display a weapon in the pulpit to guarantee personal safety.<sup>15</sup> Despite accusations and counter-accusations, decades of controversy regarding the veracity of the “Bible and revolver” story appeared to result only in a stalemate of “my word against your word.” One thing was certain, however. The story made McMillan a hero in Presbyterian missionary lore and a villain in Mormon apologetic literature.

Resolution of the incident did not come until 1903 when McMillan visited Salt Lake City en route to a meeting of the General Assembly on the west coast. At that time he repeated the Ephraim incident and evoked considerable media coverage in the local press. A reporter

for the *Salt Lake Herald* requested McMillan to verify his statements about persecution in Utah. Trustworthy witnesses, he asserted, both Mormon and non-Mormon, had testified that they had never seen McMillan carry a revolver into the pulpit. Were they lying or simply mistaken? Confronted with this choice, McMillan responded very directly.

That remark is a metaphor. I did not go into the pulpit with a drawn pistol, but I went armed. One of the officials of the Mormon church told me that my life was in danger, and advised me to go armed. . . . I was determined I would not bite the dust first.”<sup>16</sup>

Following this admission, which he never repudiated, McMillan apparently stopped telling the “Bible and revolver” episode in public addresses.

McMillan's success in the Sanpete Valley encouraged others to begin missionary careers in Utah. During trips East to raise money for Utah missions, McMillan visited Presbyterian seminaries to recruit additions to the growing missionary force in Utah. Despite the obvious effectiveness of day schools as mission enterprises, however, the Board of Home Missions held steadfastly to its policy of funding only traditional pastoral ministries, believing that education of children was the provenance of public schools. Board executives also questioned the wisdom of sending single women to serve as missionary teachers in territories like New Mexico and Utah where living conditions were primitive and physical safety questionable.

Despite opposition from some of his colleagues, McMillan advocated commissioning women as teacher-missionaries for “exceptional populations” such as the Utah Mormons. He argued that “women worked cheaper than men would, and were more willing to exercise the necessary self-denial than men are.”<sup>17</sup> At a meeting of Utah Presbytery in February, 1877, McMillan drafted an overture to the General Assembly, requesting the Board of Home Missions to undertake the support and supervision of schools for Mormons and other “exceptional populations” in western territories, and to authorize the employment of female teachers. After a discussion that lasted into the small hours of the morning, presbytery commissioners approved the overture. The presbytery designated McMillan a commissioner to General Assembly and Sheldon Jackson arranged to have the young missionary address the Assembly on the importance of Utah day schools. Passionate speeches by McMillan and Henry Kendall played important roles in convincing commissioners to approve the overture. From this action emerged the Womans Board of Home Missions and its extensive educational missionary program of schools, colleges, and hospitals (Banker 1993:71-72).<sup>18</sup>

In addition to his work in the Sanpete Valley, McMillan also served during 1876-77 as interim pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Salt Lake City. Josiah Welch, the installed minister, had contracted tuberculosis and died while on a trip East in an unsuccessful attempt to recuperate. McMillan's dynamic preaching and careful pastoral oversight provided needed continuity for the young congregation. Although most members of First Presbyterian Church joined by letter of transfer from some evangelical Protestant denomination, occasionally some joined by profession of faith. Among McMillan's converts were several Mormons who severed their relationships with the Latter-day Saints and joined First Presbyterian Church. McMillan enthusiastically reported his success to Sheldon Jackson as evidence of the rewards of patience and perseverance in the mission field.<sup>19</sup> When

congregants called Robert G. McNeice to become pastor in 1877, McMillan was relieved of his responsibilities in Salt Lake City (Reherd 1949:2,682).

McMillan quickly resumed his educational and missionary work in the Sanpete Valley where Presbyterian churches and day schools were springing up alongside Mormon tabernacles. In order to establish schools in Ephraim, Manti, Monroe, and Springville, he obtained financial help from churches, societies, and individuals. He made a survey of the entire Territory and devised a master plan for a system of schools that would place an academy or high school in the principal town in each of the six great Mormon valleys with a half dozen or more primary schools in contiguous villages. To complete this educational network, McMillan proposed to establish a college in Salt Lake City. At meetings of the Presbytery of Utah in American Fork in 1878 and the Synod of Utah in 1883 commissioners endorsed the program, but it would take twenty years for it to be implemented.

On one of his frequent trips east, McMillan married Emily Kent Johnston in Carlinville, Illinois. He returned in 1879 with his bride to Mt. Pleasant where the couple resumed religious and educational work in the Sanpete Valley. The couple brought with them a new Mason and Hamlin pump organ, the first such instrument in Mt. Pleasant. An accomplished musician, Emily McMillan captivated local residents with recitals and encouraged wide participation in various choral programs (McMillan 1939:10).

In recognition of his outstanding work, McMillan was appointed synodical superintendent of missions for Utah, Montana, and Idaho in 1880, charged with the responsibility of staffing and opening new schools and securing ministerial recruits for new mission fields. With “oceans of work lying in every direction,” one of his first acts was to commission eighteen new teachers for the growing Presbyterian school system.<sup>20</sup> Always on the move, McMillan kept in close touch with even the smallest enterprise in Utah. In one letter he described his varied and exhausting duties:

I am worn out and sick from the unusual rush of the past six weeks. Since June 1st I have driven through heat & dust 1050 miles--prepared & delivered 20 sermons,--conducted four prayer meetings & four S.S. besides some teachers meetings and 50 missionary letters.<sup>21</sup>

During his three-year tenure, McMillan supervised the establishment of forty mission schools and twenty-three churches. Through the medium of *The Rocky Mountain Presbyterian* and frequent speeches to eastern audiences, McMillan kept Presbyterians informed about the growth and development of missions in Utah. At the same time, he contributed to the growing national sentiment to eradicate polygamy by writing numerous articles opposing the practice and calling for federal regulatory legislation.<sup>22</sup>

But McMillan's Utah ministry was marred by controversy with his peers over methodology and competition for publicity and funds. He frequently complained to Sheldon Jackson that his work did not garner sufficient recognition in the East and that colleagues in Utah were jealous of his success. McMillan had a long-standing feud with John Coyner, principal of the Salt Lake Collegiate Institute, a Presbyterian school founded just a week before the Mt. Pleasant day school. McMillan felt that Salt Lake Institute was not really a missionary operation because its students were primarily non-Mormon and because it operated in a

cosmopolitan environment unaffected by the hostility facing school teachers in remote Mormon villages. He did not hesitate to convey his feelings to denominational leaders in New York. Writing to the president of the Womens Executive Committee, McMillan said:

The Mormons are not half so much afraid of courts of justice and government officials and colleges and fine buildings away off at Salt Lake City, as they are of the Christian woman with the Bible in her hand and Christ in her heart. The leaders dont care a fig how many *Salt Lake Collegiate Institutes\_& St. Marks Academies & Rocky Mountain Seminaries and St. Marys Institutes* the various denominations establish there, but *how* they squirm wherever a devoted ‘school marm’ goes with the Bible in her hand to one of their towns.<sup>23</sup>

McMillan also clashed with members of Utah Presbytery over control of missionary churches and schools in Utah. As superintendent, McMillan considered it his prerogative to make decisions about placement of schools and hiring and firing of personnel. Members of the presbytery wanted a more active role in determining missionary strategy. When McMillans commission as district superintendent came up for renewal in 1883, the presbytery “did not see their way clear to recommend his reappointment to the position” because “there [was] such a lack of harmony between his views and feelings and the views and feelings of Presbytery in regard to the proper method of carrying on the work within its bounds.”<sup>24</sup> Although the Presbytery acknowledged McMillans knowledge and experience as valuable assets and offered to retain him as a pastor in one of the mission churches, McMillan decided to look elsewhere for employment of his administrative skills.

Shortly after Utah Presbytery adjourned its summer meeting, McMillan accepted a call to become president of the College of Montana, a position that he held until 1890 when he became corresponding secretary of the Board of Home Missions in New York City. Although McMillan had severed geographical ties with Utah, he remained throughout his career an advocate for Mormon missions and a forceful anti-Mormon activist. In his administrative capacity with the Board of Home Missions, McMillan was consulted on mission policy decisions and carried considerable influence with the Womans Board of Home Missions, the organization responsible for financing and staffing mission schools in the southwest. Letters on file attest to his involvement in the appointment of teachers and missionaries. A recommendation from McMillan usually guaranteed a commission. A negative response invariably resulted in a candidates rejection.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to his administrative duties, McMillan continued to be a featured speaker at denominational and ecumenical gatherings. He also found time to turn out popular articles on Utah missions and biting critiques of Mormon polygamy and other theological doctrines. His byline frequently appeared in the *Home Mission Monthly*, the national womens magazine, and *The Assembly Herald*, the official denominational organ.<sup>26</sup> A signal literary accomplishment was his collaboration with scholars on a major article on Mormons in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Jackson 1956:9-21). Utilized as a standard reference work in most Protestant theological seminaries, the *Encyclopedia* had a great impact on young ministers and theologians.

During the decade of the 1890s, McMillan made one additional contribution to Utah Presbyterianism by facilitating the founding of Westminster College in Salt Lake City. Since

their arrival in Utah, Presbyterians had envisaged a college to complete their system of day schools and to provide an alternative to Mormon dominated higher education. At a meeting of Utah Presbytery on March 28, 1892, Robert McNeice, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Salt Lake City, affirmed that the time had come to establish a college in Salt Lake City that would “furnish a thorough classical and scientific course of education equal to any institution in the East.” His report recommended the election of a Board of Trustees consisting of five clergy and four laymen to secure incorporation, locate a suitable campus site, and seek financial support necessary to underwrite such an undertaking.<sup>27</sup>

As had been true in previous efforts to found a college, financial backing loomed as the most difficult obstacle to overcome. Several attempts to raise money through speculative land development schemes failed miserably and generated unfavorable publicity for the proposed college. Still reeling from repercussions of failed land deals, college trustees found themselves embroiled in an inter-denominational controversy with Congregationalists who accused Presbyterians of usurping the prospects of their college operation. Active in Utah educational missions through its network of day schools conducted through the New West Education Commission, the Congregationalist Church opened Salt Lake Academy in 1878 and proposed to raise it to college status in 1894.<sup>28</sup> Traditionally keen and cordial competition between Presbyterians and Congregationalists erupted into an energy-draining, acrimonious debate that dragged on for more than five years before the Congregationalists withdrew from the field.

As one of the secretaries of the Board of Home Missions, McMillan was intimately involved in negotiations between Presbyterian and Congregationalist College Board officials. Representatives from both boards met in New York in 1895 to discuss ways of resolving the Salt Lake City conflict. Sheldon Jackson and McMillan, whose opinions carried considerable weight with College Board officials, advised that cooperative ventures never panned out well theologically and that endowment campaigns involving two denominations were usually unproductive.<sup>29</sup> McMillan was convinced that Congregationalists were “determined to head us off in the college enterprise in Salt Lake City,” but with typical dramatic flair boasted that his defense of Presbyterian educational credentials had “blown the Congregational craft into smithereens.”<sup>30</sup> The meeting disbanded inconclusively, with both sides determined to promote their college programs in Salt Lake City.

Informal discussions between the two groups continued for several years with McMillan and Jackson functioning as key Presbyterian participants and Arthur Little representing Congregational interests. Even though Congregationalists were willing to settle for minority representation on Presbyterian college board in return for transfer of Salt Lake College buildings and assets, Presbyterians remained committed to an independent course of operations.<sup>31</sup> After extended correspondence between executives in both denominations and public debate in denominational journals, the Presbyterian College Board of Aid finally rejected the proposal for a “Presbygational” College in Utah.<sup>32</sup>

McMillan also secured a benefactor to underwrite the proposed Presbyterian college. Sheldon Jackson had accumulated a considerable sum of money through inheritance and

wise investments. He desired to established a Presbyterian college in the west and had tentatively settled on Santa Fe, New Mexico as the best location. Jackson spent a week with McMillan in New York before leaving for Alaska in 1894. During their time together, McMillan (1922:11) convinced Jackson that Salt Lake City was preferable to Santa Fe because of its strategic rail connections and business opportunities, its lack of competition from other colleges, and its proximity to the network of Presbyterian schools already in place in Utah.

As a result of these conversations, Jackson offered the Presbytery of Utah \$50,000 to charter Sheldon Jackson College, provided that it include Biblical studies in the curriculum and maintain legal ties with the Presbyterian Church. Classes opened in September, 1897 with six students enrolled. Despite support from Jackson and McMillan, the college experienced prolonged financial exigency and on numerous occasions faced imminent closure. Changing its name to Westminster College in 1902 and becoming more inter-denominational in orientation, the college survived and continues today as the only private, non-Mormon four-year college in Utah.<sup>33</sup>

Institutional founders frequently credited McMillan as a driving force in keeping the institution alive during its darkest days. In 1902, after Sheldon Jackson turned down an offer to become president, trustees seriously considered McMillan as a candidate for the position. After consulting with some of his peers, however, they removed his name from their list. While acknowledging his denominational connections and long experience with the Utah scene, the trustees concluded that “he was a difficult person to work with” and therefore not suitable for the Westminster presidency.<sup>34</sup>

In 1899, McMillan returned to the pastorate as senior minister at the New York Presbyterian Church until 1911 when he became secretary of the Board of Church Election (1912-1915). He concluded his career as general secretary of the New York Sabbath Committee (1915-1933). McMillan died in Denville, New Jersey on June 27, 1939, in his ninety-fourth year. His obituary in *The New York Times* eulogized his career as clergyman, educator, and administrator. It also noted that McMillan had traveled “to the heart of Mormon Utah, where no missionary had ever ventured, and where he often preached with his pistol on the pulpit.”<sup>35</sup> A legendary figure in his own lifetime, McMillan continues to be remembered as a charismatic figure who greatly influenced the development of religious and educational life in Utah.

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## Notes

1. For an excellent introduction to Presbyterian missions in the southwest, see Banker 1993.

2. For example, see "The Fruits of Mormonism," *The Rocky Mountain Presbyterian*. May, 1879:2.
3. For typical Mormon-Presbyterian exchanges, see Penrose 1884a:2 1884b:2.
4. Minutes of Utah Presbytery (PCUSA), 1 March 1875, Presbyterian Historical Society Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Hereafter, PHS Archives.
5. Letters, Josiah Welch to Sheldon Jackson, 3 April, 16 April, and 3 May 1875, PHS Archives.
6. Letter, Duncan J. McMillan to Sheldon Jackson, 17 March 1875, PHS Archives. See also, "School Work," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 13 January 1878:2.
7. Letters, Duncan J. McMillan to Sheldon Jackson, 31 March and 21 April 1875, PHS Archives.
8. Letter, Duncan J. McMillan to Sheldon Jackson, 1 May 1875, PHS Archives.
9. An account of Youngs speech can be found in Mt. Pleasant Meeting, 23 June 1875, typescript, 6, Mount Pleasant Stake, Historical Department Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
10. Letter, Duncan J. McMillan to Sheldon Jackson, 3 July 1875, Sheldon Jackson Scrapbook, 6:50-52, PHS Archives.
11. Letters, Duncan J. McMillan to Sheldon Jackson, 6 December 1876 and 8 January 1877, PHS Archives.
12. For a detailed account, see Brackenridge 1995a.
13. "Religious Intelligence," *Harpers Weekly*, 15 April 1876:311. Unidentified clippings in Sheldon Jacksons Scrapbook, 6:165-66, PHS Archives, attest to the storys wide distribution.
14. "Fair Warning," *Herald and Presbyter*, 10 May 1876:1, and "Presbyterianism in Utah," 18 April 1877:2.
15. Mormons frequently argued that McMillans story was simply a rehash of one told by Methodist minister C. P. Lyford, who claimed that his life had been threatened while serving in Provo, Utah. See "Poor Creatures," *The Desert Evening News*, 27 May 1879:2, and "Fathering Falsehoods," 12 September 1881:2.
16. "Puts Blame on Brigham Young," *The Salt Lake Herald*, 17 May 1903:4. For a full discussion of this incident, see Brackenridge 1995b:103-104.
17. "Utah and New Mexico," *The Chicago Tribune*, 23 May 1877:2.
18. An account of McMillans speech can be found in *The Chicago Tribune*, 23 May 1877:4-5.
19. Letter, Duncan J. McMillan to Sheldon Jackson, 19 October 1876, PHS Archives.

20. Letter, Duncan J. McMillan to Sheldon Jackson, 16 October 1880.
21. Letter, Duncan J. McMillan to Henry Kendall, 19 July 1880, PHS Archives.
22. For example, see McMillan 1899.
23. Letter, Duncan J. McMillan to Mrs. F. E. Haines, 30 July 1880, PHS Archives.
24. Minutes of the Presbytery of Utah, Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 20 and 22 August, 1883, PHS Archives.
25. Copies of these letters can be found in Record Group 305-15-52 in PHS Archives.
26. For example, "Pioneers of the Cross," *Home Mission Monthly*, (December, 1920):29-31.
27. Minutes of the Presbytery of Utah, 28 March 1892, PHS Archives.
28. *The Church Review*, "Salt Lake College," 4 (December 29, 1895):59-60.
29. Letters, Sheldon Jackson to Duncan J. McMillan, 22 April and 29 August 1895, and Robert J. McNeice to Duncan J. McMillan 24 April 1895, PHS Archives.
30. Letter, Duncan J. McMillan to Sheldon Jackson, 26 August 1895, PHS Archives.
31. Letter, Robert G. McNeice to Sheldon Jackson, 26 April 1898, PHS Archives. Jackson told the Presbytery of Utah in 1898 that if they changed the college charter to accommodate the Congregationalists, potential donations exceeding \$100,000 would immediately be lost. Letter, Robert G. McNeice to E. C. Ray, 12 November 1898, PHS Archives.
32. Letter, Robert G. McNeice to John Eaton, 18 February 1899, PHS Archives.
33. For a brief history of Westminster College, see Nyman 1975.
34. Letter, Robert McNeice to Sheldon Jackson, 1902, PHS Archives.
35. "Duncan McMillan Retired Minister," *The New York Times*, 28 June 1939:21.

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[Main Table of Contents](#)