And maybe, if I'm lucky, Treasure Island will be a clear metaphor for Adam-ondi-Ahman.

Notes

1. Warren Spector, "The Master of Mickey Epics," introduction to *Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse: "Race to Death Valley,"* 8.

2. "Middle-Euro Mouse," 168.

Woodruff's Private Mindset

Reid L. Neilson, ed., *In the Whirlpool: The Pre-Manifesto Letters of President Wilford Woodruff to the William Atkin Family, 1885–1890*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. 232 pp. Notes, illustrations, index, appendices. Hardcover: $29.95. ISBN: 978–0–87062–390–5.

Reviewed by Stephen C. Taysom

When I first learned that Reid L. Neilson, the managing director of the LDS Church Historical Department and an old friend from BYU days, was planning to publish a few dozen letters from Wilford Woodruff to Neilson's ancestors in southern Utah, I was a bit skeptical. The life of Wilford Woodruff is among the most well-documented of any Latter-day Saint's. Woodruff left behind an archive that includes thousands of sermons and more than six decades' worth of daily journal entries. Many of the sermons and all of the journals have been published and are relatively easy for researchers to access. Woodruff is also among the very few LDS presidents who have enjoyed the attention of a scholarly biographer. All of this led me to wonder why a collection of forty-six letters from Woodruff to a relatively obscure, if unflinchingly stalwart, southern Utah pioneer family was worth publishing. Before I was finished reading the first letter in the collection, I was adequately convinced of the book's value.

Woodruff's life during the years between 1885 and 1890 were difficult ones. He was advancing in age and he lamented the gradual erosion of the physical capacities that he had relied upon for recreation and survival for his entire life. Moreover, Woodruff

was a fugitive and, like other church leaders, moved from place to place along the "polygamy underground" to avoid arrest and prosecution for plural marriage. It was at one stop on the underground that he came to know and love the Atkin family. The Atkins provided Woodruff with a relatively comfortable hideout in the small settlement of Atkinville, just a few miles south of St. George, Utah. Here, Woodruff could indulge his love of hunting and fishing with relatively little fear of being discovered by the U. S. Marshals who were on his trail. Also during this period, Woodruff became the de facto head of the LDS Church upon the death of John Taylor in 1887, and was sustained as president of the Church in 1889.

Woodruff's letters to the various members of the Atkin family are valuable in part because they provide references to these various large-scale issues with which he was dealing. He mentioned, for example, that he "did not sleep much" on the night he learned of Taylor's death. But that is perhaps the least useful dimension of these letters. More significant is that the letters provide a glimpse of Woodruff without the public posturing that he assumed in his sermons as well as in his journals. Both the journals and the sermons were crafted for public consumption and thus required a certain level of rhetorical posturing. Woodruff was performing in both of those genres as his social persona. In the letters, by contrast, Woodruff appeared more relaxed, and seemed to express himself with less self-consciousness. He mixed his well-known penchant for eschatological rhetoric with the banal tasks of daily life. Consider, for example, a letter written by Woodruff on December 28, 1885. In a single letter, he mentioned watching the "signs of the times," said that he was "too old to go to prison or hide in the mountains," expressed in one sentence his theodical notion that God was allowing the polygamy prosecutions as a way both to "cleanse Zion" and to allow the "nations" to prove their wickedness, attested to the reality of a personal devil, mentioned plowing and pleasant weather, and lamented that he "cannot be seen openly, go nowhere only in the night, but it is a prisoner's life but better than to be in the pen for obeying the Lord for he is as unpopular today as he was in Jerusalem but he will not be so when he comes again." This single letter represents, in miniature, a

good many of the important facets of Woodruff's personality and worldview. Other letters bear witness to supernatural concerns, such as Woodruff's firm belief in an afterlife. In fact, he recounted in one letter that during his final minutes with his dying first wife, he instructed her (rather matter-of-factly) to "send my love to my friends in the spirit world" (128). Much detail is given in the letters regarding the heavy press of church business that constantly occupied Woodruff when he was in Salt Lake City. In the fall of 1887, for example, he complained in a letter that "we are in council for days at a time and a flood of business and have 10 to 40 letters in a day on private and public business, and from 20 to 50 [temple] recommends to sign daily" (142). Woodruff freely admitted in these letters that he "has never been in deeper water in church matters in my life," and that he was "nervous" about what the future might hold (165).

Woodruff also demonstrated in these letters a wry sense of humor and a capacity for playfulness. After visiting the newly completed Manti Temple, he wrote that it was "the most beautiful building we have ever built—cost over $1,000,000—it ought to be good" (157). In another letter written to Nellie Atkin, one of the family's young children who had apparently offered to serve as Woodruff's bodyguard, he wrote that while he appreciated the offer, he wouldn't need Nellie's protection because "I have a large and stout man who goes with me everywhere day and night. Carries 2 pistols and a double barrel shotgun and says he will shoot the Marshals if they come to take me." Woodruff then added, conspiratorially, "don't tell anybody of this" (143).

It should be clear from the few examples I have cited above that the letters provide valuable insight into Woodruff's private mindset during what he believed to be the most important and difficult period of his life. Neilson must have been presented with something of a dilemma, however, when it came to deciding how best to publish the letters. There is insufficient material in the letters themselves to justify an entire book. So he includes several other contributions that help to contextualize the letters and provide heft to the volume. Neilson provides a fine introduction to the Atkin family and discusses at some length the history and dynamics of the family's relationship with Woodruff. Neilson identifies himself as an Atkin descendant, and this connection allows

him to provide unique insights into the relationship between Woodruff and the Atkin family. Less useful is Neilson's lengthy discussion of his editorial method and a preface that might better have been folded in with his general introduction. Also included are essays by Thomas G. Alexander and Jan Shipps. No one can question the colossal stature of these two figures in the world of Mormon scholarship. However, I was somewhat disappointed to see that Neilson chose to reprint essays that, while valuable and insightful, are each more than twenty years old (Alexander's was first published in 1991, Shipps's in 1984) rather than commissioning new essays, perhaps even work based upon the letters themselves. Those minor issues aside, I highly recommend that anyone interesteded in Woodruff, or late nineteenth-century LDS history, spend some time with these letters. They do not disappoint.