what he regarded as misconceptions of it. Most important of such misconceptions was the idea that Joseph Smith, Jr., taught and practiced plural marriage. Against overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the son held and taught that plural marriage was an idea introduced by others and unknown to the founder. Believing that Utah Mormonism's plural marriage doctrine and theocratic organization were both wrong and the source of hostility to the movement, Smith devoted special attention to opposing them through persuasion and political action.

The Reorganized Church itself grew modestly, moved its headquarters from Plano, Illinois, to Lamoni, Iowa, established a liberal arts college, and began to plan for an eventual move to Independence, Missouri. A faction emerged in the 1870s opposing Smith's legalism, literalism, and administrative authority; but Smith successfully challenged it and maintained control of the church. Before he died, the church named his son Frederick to succeed him in the presidency. Launius believes that Smith made the Reorganized Church "a practical, viable institution" (369). This may be true, but a reader less sympathetic to Joseph Smith III will find in his personality and leadership some of the explanation for the failure of Reorganization to flourish.

Launius has written extensively on Mormon history, and this carefully researched biography grew out of his Louisiana State University dissertation. It traces Smith's public career chronologically, examines his personal and family life, and offers a positive assessment of Smith's leadership. Facts are almost always correct, though Beaver Island is in Michigan, but interpretations and generalizations do not always ring true. For example, the image of Smith that Launius creates is far more legalistic and autocratic than he seems willing to admit. Nonetheless, Smith was certainly an honorable man who lived an interesting life and deserves a biography. Those who know only the Mormonism of Utah will understand the movement and its history better after reading this volume.

Spirit Fruit: A Gentle Utopia, by H. Roger Grant. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988. xiv, 203 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $22.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY CARL J. GUARNERI, SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA

This affectionate, well-researched little book chronicles the story of a religiously inspired midwestern communal group that remained largely intact at three successive locations from 1901 to 1930. Spirit Fruit's founder, Jacob Beilhart, blended the Social Gospel, Theosophy, and laissez-faire sexuality into "Universal Life," a vague Christian commu-

nalism reflecting his own gentle personality. As the century began, ten full-time Spirit Fruiters gathered on a farm in Lisbon, Ohio, published Beilhart's sermons, and paired off into informal monogamous relationships. After William Randolph Hearst's *Chicago American* exposed Spirit Fruit as an "awful free-love nest" in 1904, the commune moved to Ingleside, Illinois. Beilhart died suddenly in 1908; without his inspired preaching Spirit Fruit turned inward, retreating in 1914 to a hilltop ranch in northern California, from which members went their separate ways after a second key leader died in 1930.

The course this tiny utopia took from conception to fruition and demise provides the book's organization. Successive chapters portray in detail Jacob's background and ideas, the troubled cast of characters who made the society their new family, and their building and farming accomplishments at each location. At times Grant pauses to compare Spirit Fruit to other American communal groups; he is especially adept at teasing out the society's indirect connections to the Arts and Crafts movement and late nineteenth-century anarchism. What gives his account its unique texture and homey charm, however, are the personal reminiscences, letters, and photographs provided by two surviving "love children" born into the Spirit Fruit family.

Spirit Fruit begins to disappoint only when the author generalizes beyond his modest subject. In the final chapter Grant repeats Beilhart's claim that "utopia is possible," attributing the commune's apparent success to sociologist Rosabeth Kanter's oft-cited "commitment mechanisms." I wish Grant had given more credit to the group's unique chemistry, intimate size, and outside patrons than to Kanter's precooked categories. When admiring Spirit Fruit's "nice people" (163) and their nonresistance credo, Grant fails to recall the "forced exodus" (152) of a bullying pretender to Jacob's crown. His assertion that Beilhart's group helped form a "vital . . . link" (xiii) between pre–Civil War utopias and the communes of the 1960s is never demonstrated. Still, *Spirit Fruit* portrays an engaging and little-known American utopia with precision and humanism. This "gentle utopia" has found its gentle historian. No communal group could ask for a more careful remembrance.

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