

*A President, a Church and Trails West: Competing Histories in Independence, Missouri*, by Jon E. Taylor. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008. xxiii, 274 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, chronology, index. \$39.95 cloth.

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Independence, Missouri, is a town with a fascinating and complicated history. In 1831 Mormon leader Joseph Smith proclaimed Independence to be the New Zion and the New Jerusalem. In the months following his proclamation, hundreds of Mormon migrants came to Jackson County but were brusquely expelled from the area in 1833. The idea of Jackson County as the New Zion is important to both Mormons and members of the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), which moved its world headquarters to Independence in the 1920s. Members of the Community of Christ attempted to make Smith's vision of Independence as Zion come true. During the 1830s Independence was a major "jumping off point" for the Santa Fe, Oregon, and California trails. Finally, Independence was also the hometown of Harry Truman, the thirty-third president of the United States. Over the past 60 years, the National Park Service and Independence residents have worked to preserve Truman historical landmarks or, more generally, the entire neighborhood in which Harry Truman lived.

In *A President, a Church and Trails West*, Jon E. Taylor maintains that Independence has an unusual problem in that three competing historical narratives describe the city's place in the nation's history. Taylor maintains that the three different metanarratives of the city's historical role, while overlapping in some ways, have caused problems for the city's historic preservation community. In his introduction, Taylor provides a brief survey of the scholarly literature on public memory and commemoration. He contends that his study will examine the role these three competing histories have had on historic preservation in Independence. More specifically, Taylor states that his book will explain how these three historic identities have affected historic preservation decisions since World War II. At present, he argues, the Mormon and Trails West histories and historic sites have begun to impinge on the Truman history and historical sites.

The book is purportedly about all three of these competing histories and their role in the historic preservation decisions of Independence residents. However, the book is actually primarily about the preservation of the Harry Truman National Historic Landmark District—Truman's old neighborhood. The first two chapters offer a superficial discussion of the Mormon and trails history of Independence. Those two chapters comprise 68 pages of the book, while the following six chapters and 156 pages focus on a very detailed discussion of the Truman history and the issues facing the Harry Truman National Historic Landmark District. The later chapters include detailed accounts of meetings and interoffice memoranda produced by various Independence authorities and National Park Service officials concerning the future of the Truman National Historic Landmark District. It becomes obvious early in the book that it is really about the Truman history, while the other two "competing histories" are dealt with in an almost perfunctory fashion.

Most glaring is that there is no extended discussion of the views of the city's history by any of the prominent actors in the Independence community, regardless of their particular historical interest. There is no attempt to explain, for example, what the members of the Community of Christ were hoping to achieve in Independence. Were they really attempting to create Joseph Smith's "New Zion" in the city? Or did their worldview as to the role of the city change? Similar problems exist in the short chapter on the Trails West history as well.

The voices of the people currently living in Independence are also curiously absent. Was there no time for interviews? The reader keeps expecting a discussion of the conceptions of history of the three groups and how those affected their plans for Independence, or perhaps an insightful passage or two about the role that encouraging historic tourism played in all of these decisions. Sadly, however, these important topics are missing from the book.

Unfortunately, *A President, a Church and Trails West* promises too much and fails to deliver on the promises made in the introduction. Taylor thoroughly describes the evolving mindsets and plans of those involved in the creation and preservation of the Harry Truman National Historic Landmark District, but the same cannot be said about the Mormon history and Trails West sections. If readers wish to learn about how Harry Truman's neighborhood in Independence is being preserved, this is a valuable book. The title and introduction might lead one to believe that this is a book about how three very different competing histories and their advocates have interacted over the past 50 or so years in Independence, but this is simply not that book.