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An Important Year in History

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AN IMPORTANT YEAR IN HISTORY

Craig L. Foster

A review of *Turtle Bunbury, 1847: A Chronicle of Genius, Generosity & Savagery* (Dublin: Gill Books, 2016). 388 pages, \$43.00, hardback.

I'm one of those people who love finding out when people's lives have crossed each other in reality or even in time-span, such as the fact the last veteran of World War I was born in 1901 and died in 2011. He was born four years before the last veteran of the War of 1812 died. That man was born in 1800 and died in 1905.

I also love finding out what happened on certain dates or in certain years, how diverse events can be, and how fascinating the people can be who experienced these events. Happily, I am not alone in being fascinated by certain days and years.

Turtle Bunbury, a gifted and award-winning Irish historian, has taken a single year and woven a remarkable tale of people and events from around the world. As Bunbury explains about 1847, "In my mind, there is no doubt that an inordinate number of curious, brilliant and dreadful events took place during those particular 12 months" [ix]. Curious about events in 1847 — the same year that construction of "Lisnavagh," his family's home, was commenced — the curiosity soon turned into an obsession and later a book. In 36 chapters he describes 38 events or people with colorful imagery and page-turning narrative.

Among the remarkable people and stories Bunbury discusses are of John O. Muesebach and his German colonies in the Republic of Texas; Ben Forbes, an opium trader who sent supplies to famine-devastated Ireland; Irish actress, dancer, courtesan, and mistress Lola Montez; the shelling of Huế, Vietnam, by the French in the beginning of what eventually became the establishment of French Indochina; the capture and beheading of Kenesary Kasymov, the Khan of the Middle Horde in what is now Kazakhstan; the coming of ballet to America; the fall of

Carlo di Borbone, the last Prince of Capua, in what was one of the great royal scandals of the nineteenth-century; Hanson Gregory of Rockport, Maine, the inventor of the doughnut; and, the explorer Richard Burton in Karachi doing what Richard Burton did best.

But of particular interest to *Interpreter* readers is Turtle Bunbury's chapter entitled "Mormons on the March: Of Roadometers, Choirs & Baseball." It is the largest chapter in the book and I think one of the best. Given the fact Bunbury is Irish, it is only fitting that he begins the chapter talking about Irish-born Howard Egan, who was among the 1847 pioneers and five years later stood trial for killing the seducer of his wife.

Bunbury then gives a quick overview of Church history up to the time the Saints left Nauvoo. At this point, the pace slows a little, allowing more detail of the creation and historic journey of the Mormon Battalion, the journey of the Vanguard Company, and even the story of the *Brooklyn* Saints. The result is an excellent overview with fun tidbits such as the invention of William Clayton's roadometer, forerunner of the modern odometer, and a story of the Battalion members playing the first baseball game in California.

Informative and entertaining, the book is also well researched, including the chapter on the Mormons, albeit most of the sources are secondary. Probably the best feature of the book is that it helps put a very important year in Mormon history into a broader historical context. I heartily recommend *1847*. As the book is published and printed in Ireland, do not expect to find it at your local Deseret Book. However, it is available online at Amazon and presently at a significant discount.

Craig L. Foster earned a MA and MLIS at Brigham Young University. He is also an accredited genealogist and works as a research consultant at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. He has published articles about different aspects of Mormon history. He is the author of two books, co-author of another, and co-editor of a three-volume series discussing the history and theology of plural marriage. Foster is also on the editorial board of the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal.

