

**Persons for All Seasons:  
Women in Mormon History**



# Persons for All Seasons: Women in Mormon History

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It is an honor to be invited to be here, and it is a special pleasure to know that you find, as I do, the study of women's history to be a fascinating and illuminating introduction to civilization in general, and to Utah and Mormon history in particular. And let me also express personal thanks to a number of very bright and energetic women historians who have helped the Church History Division: Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, Jill Mulvay Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Becky Cornwall, Moana Bennett, Susan Oman, Claudia Bushman, Grethe Peterson, and others, I'm sure, who could be named. I am grateful to all of them. I also wish to acknowledge the opportunity of looking through a nearly completed volume on the writings of women significant to Mormon history, edited by Audrey and Ken Godfrey and Jill Derr, which is scheduled for publication later this year by Deseret Book Company. Some of the accounts I've used in this paper are drawn from that interesting and delightful collection.

Two or three years ago, when Davis Bitton and I were finishing our book of Mormon history, *The Mormon Experience*, a book published by Alfred Knopf, we were told that our chapter on Latter-day Saint women lacked focus. We went to Maureen and Jill and Carol and asked them to help us out. They suggested that throughout Mormon history women members have perceived themselves as having a triple identity: They are *daughters*—individual children of God responsible for making choices and actualizing potential. They are also *mothers*—partners in the bearing and rearing of the spirit children of God. And third, they are *sisters*—essential contributors to the Kingdom of God upon earth. While at any moment all three identities have been acknowledged and recognized both privately and officially, there were periods when one or the other was given particular emphasis because of the condition of the Church and Saints and because of different interests and inspiration of those who directed the affairs of the Kingdom. But all three identities have coexisted from the beginning to the present day and represent the triple identity of Mormon women.

For this paper I have divided Mormon history into seven periods and have attempted to suggest the principal theme of each period and the major role models of women during that period. I attacked this assignment with gusto and ended up with a paper of forty pages—far too much

to present. So I'll use primarily the first half of the paper—the first three periods of Mormon history. Perhaps, if this has any merit, I shall have an opportunity sometime in the future of presenting the other half.

### 1830–1845

The early years, 1830 to 1845, were years when Mormon leaders were very young. In the early 1830s Joseph Smith was still in his twenties. Others still in their twenties included Oliver Cowdery, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, and, indeed, most other leaders of the Church. Considering the ages of these persons, it is perhaps natural that they should have given greatest emphasis to the role of women as mothers. Great reverence was shown, both formally and informally, to Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the Prophet, and Elizabeth Whitmer, mother of the Whitmer brothers, who were among the earliest leaders of the Church. These were the primary role models for women, but others included women of the Bible: Sarah, the wife of Abraham and mother of Isaac; Ruth, the wife of Boaz and grandmother of David; and Mary, the wife of Joseph and mother of Jesus. There was no clear portrayal of a mother in the Book of Mormon that might be used as a role model, but there were inevitable references to the mothers of the thousand young Lamanites who followed Helaman in Alma (56:46 and 57:21), who taught their sons to have faith in the Lord.

We should emphasize that Joseph Smith thought highly of women. He respected their interests and status and thought they should participate actively in church meetings and ordinances. One of the reasons for this, no doubt, was his respect for his own mother and her important role in the Smith family and for his wife Emma, a woman of spirit who, from all the evidence, was a full partner with the prophet in their marriage—a business partner, a trustworthy spokeswoman, a person he regarded as worthy of being consulted and of occupying a leadership position. And of course this was ratified when she became president of the Relief Society when it was organized in 1842. Her associates regarded her as a gracious, intelligent, and effective leader.

The women in the early Church, it appears, had access to church programs primarily through the men in their lives—their husbands, brothers, and fathers. Let me give two examples. The first is Sarah Melissa Granger Kimball, who was fifteen years old when her family went to Church headquarters in Kirtland, Ohio.<sup>1</sup> There her inquisitive mind was stimulated by explications of the doctrines and revelations of Joseph Smith which she read in the Mormon newspapers and magazines, the *Evening and Morning Star* and the *Messenger and Advocate*. Sarah eagerly discussed some of this reading with her father and, at his invitation, she attended the School of the

Prophets, a gathering of the priesthood-bearing elders to study the gospel and gospel-related topics. In later years she proudly reminded her sister(s) that she had attended that school, perhaps to underscore the importance she placed upon doctrinal study among LDS women.

A second example is Caroline Barnes Crosby, a native of Massachusetts, who was baptized there in 1835 at the age of twenty-seven.<sup>2</sup> She and her husband migrated to Kirtland in the next few months, and there her husband was ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood and was often called upon to preach. He was invited to attend the Kirtland School of the Elders, which succeeded the School of the Prophets, and there learned Hebrew, theology, geography, and other subjects. At Caroline's urging he brought home all of his books, including Bibles, grammars, and lexicons, and Caroline studied these and became herself a well-educated person. This becomes very evident in her diary, which is that of a highly literate woman.

One interesting item is an editorial by Apostle Parley P. Pratt in the *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, published in Liverpool in 1840, on "Duties of Women."<sup>3</sup> This was written in response to a letter of a certain elder who was disturbed that some early women members were "a little disposed to get out of order." In his response, Elder Pratt quoted from the Apostle Paul, who admonished women to "marry, bear children, and guide the house"; to "submit to their husbands, as unto the Lord"; to be sober; to "teach good things"; to love their husbands and children; and to be discreet, chaste, and obedient. Then Parley P. Pratt commented: "And while the brethren are watching the sisters very closely to see that they do not get out of order, we hope they will notice some of the gentle admonitions to themselves."

Many of the things Parley P. Pratt and the Apostle Paul described are precisely what the early Relief Society became involved in: care of the poor, improvement of the household, and participation in various programs of the Church. There was considerable emphasis on the family, as indicated by the inauguration of ceremonies for sealing and adoption, and the ordinances for dead family members. The letters and diaries of the women of the time suggest that they were particularly grateful for the opportunity of doing things for their families, such as baptisms and sealings for dead children, dead husbands, and dead parents and grandparents.

The indisputable role of Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the Prophet, is indicated in the minutes of a conference of the Church held in Nauvoo on 8 October 1845. On that day, according to the minutes, "Mother" Lucy Smith, as she was referred to, made the following remarks:

I raised up 11 children, 7 boys. I raised them in the fear of God. When they were two or three years old I told them I wanted them to love God with all their hearts. I told them to do good. I want all you to do the same. God gives

us our children and we are accountable. . . . I presume there never was a family more obedient than mine. I did not have to speak to them only once. . . . I want you to teach your little children about Joseph in Egypt and such things, and when they are four years old they will love to read their Bible. . . . Set your children to work; . . . Don't let them play out of doors. . . . Remember that I love children, young folks, and everybody. . . . I call you brothers and sisters and children. If you consider me a Mother in Israel, I want you to say so.

According to the minutes, Brigham Young then arose and said, "All who consider Mother Smith as a Mother in Israel, signify it by saying yes." There were loud shouts of yes, according to the clerk.<sup>4</sup>

### 1846–1869

We now come to the second period, the exodus and post-exodus years, 1846 to 1869, when the Saints were driven from Nauvoo and migrated to the Salt Lake Valley and elsewhere in the West. During these difficult years, circumstances dictated that stress would be placed upon community survival and building the basis for the Kingdom. So the primary emphasis was the role of women as sisters, and the primary role models were women who were leaders among the sisters in preserving unity, reinforcing faith, and assisting the cause of the Kingdom—such women as Eliza Snow, Patty Sessions, and Sarah Kimball. These women were leaders of the special spiritual sessions held by women; they were the ones who led out in performing ordinances. They organized the Indian Relief Societies in the middle 1850s and directed the organization of the Relief Societies in all the wards and settlements beginning in 1867. The comments of Brigham Young and other members of the First Presidency suggest also the use of the ancient Hebrew woman of Proverbs (31:10–31) and the Puritan mother as role models, for they were women who did not waste, who were self-sufficient, who were resourceful, and who were loyal to the programs designed to make the Lord's work succeed and prosper.

The sisterly support system of the exodus and post-exodus years included both kinship and community responsibilities. In fact, Maureen Beecher has a splendid paper appropriately entitled "Sisters, Sister Wives, and Sisters in the Faith" which delineates these functions. The diaries and reminiscences of three women—Mary Haskin Parker Richards, Patty Sessions, and Lucy Meserve Smith—illustrate these sisterly themes: their closeness to their sister wives and sisterly associates in the cause of the Mormon people. For example, the diary of Mary Haskin Parker Richards, who had a close relationship with her husband's brother's wife, Jane Snyder Richards, shows the way women strengthened themselves through the women in their families. Mary migrated from Great Britain to Nauvoo in 1841, lived with her parents until 1846 when, on the eve of leaving Nauvoo,

she married Samuel W. Richards, nephew of her missionary friend in England, Willard Richards. Samuel was called on a mission to Great Britain a few months later, leaving Mary in the care of his parents. She adopted the whole Richards family, refers to her mother-in-law as Mother and her father-in-law as Father, and frequently notes spending a day or an evening with Samuel's Aunt Rhoda, Uncle Levi, and Uncle Willard and his wife Amelia. Much of her time was spent with Jane Richards—"Sister Jane," as she always refers to her—the wife of Samuel's brother Franklin, who was also serving a mission in Great Britain. Mary and Sister Jane sewed, washed, and visited together, and commiserated over the absence of their husbands. Singly and together, they visited many other women who were also lonely. Illustrations of the sisterly theme are furnished in regular entries in their diaries. For instance, the following are typical entries for December 1846, when Mary and Jane and several thousand of their sisters were in Winter Quarters, Nebraska, preparatory to migrating west:<sup>5</sup>

Thursday 17th [December 1846]. A cold day. Was writing in my letter. Evening, Jane came to stay with me, I being alone. She was writing a letter to Franklin, and I was writing in my Journal. She read me her letter, and I read her most of mine.

Sunday, 27th [December 1846]. The weather pleasant. . . . Had a good meeting. Came home and read a while in the Book of Mormon, and helped mother get supper, after which Elcy Snyder called to go to singing school with me. On our way there we called on Abigail [Smith] Abbott, and took her with us. Bro Goddard led the choir for the first [time] since the dedication of the [Nauvoo] Temple. We had a good sing. Enjoyed ourselves much. Went and slept that night with Sister Jane.

Tuesday 29th [December 1846]. The weather cold. Spent the day with Jane sewing. In the evening was reading until 8 o'clock. Then Jane, Elcy, and myself spent about two hours trying to see which could compose the best poetry. Then retired to bed.

On Tuesday, 26 January 1847, Mary went to a house and quilted for a few hours, then to a party at the Council House or community hall where she and others "praised God in the dance," as she expressed it. When the first figure was formed,

Bro Rockwood being at the head, according to order, we all knelt down and he offered up a prayer. We then arose and danced the figure, and so praised God in the dance. . . .

About 11 o'clock [she wrote], every man took his partner or partners and marched three times round the room. We were then dismissed with the blessings of God.

Patty Bartlett Sessions, our second example, was a remarkable blend of things temporal and spiritual.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps because she was a midwife who daily ushered new spirits into life, she had a gift for tying together heaven

and earth. Having lost six of her nine children, Patty might, in all seriousness, ask a dying friend to take word to her six children in heaven and then, an hour later, join with other Saints in community dancing. As Jill Derr commented, Patty was as comfortable prophesying in tongues as she was in planting horseradish.

Born in Maine, Patty was only seventeen when she married David Sessions. They were baptized Latter-day Saints in 1834 when she was thirty-nine, after which they joined the Mormons in Missouri, where David was a farmer and stockraiser. Because of anti-Mormon persecutions they lost their property and moved to Nauvoo. There Patty became known as “Mother Sessions,” an experienced midwife whose assistance was to be in demand among Saints for several decades. In connection with her midwifery, Patty was skilled in the medicinal use of herbs and served, in that sense, as one of the few “doctors” accompanying the Saints westward. Her journal, particularly poignant during the Winter Quarters period, focuses on the sisters-in-the-faith aspect, with its account of what she called blessing meetings.<sup>7</sup>

Thursday 4 [February 1847]. My birthday, fifty-two years old. . . . In the Camp of Israel, Winter Quarters. We had brandy and drank a toast to each other desiring and wishing the blessings of God to be with us all and that we might live and do all that we came here into this world to do. Eliza Snow came here after me to go to a little party in the evening. I was glad to see her. Told her it was my birthday and she must bless me. She said if I would go to the party they all would bless me. I then went and put James Bullock[’s] wife to bed. Then went to the party. Had a good time singing, praying, and speaking in tongues. Before we broke up I was called away to Sister Morse, then to Sister Whitney, then back to Sister Morse and put her to bed [at] 2 o'clock.

Friday 5. This morning I have been to see Sister Whitney. She is better. I then went to Joanna [Roundy]. She said it was the last time I should see her in this world. She was going to see my children. I sent word by her to them. I then went to a Silver Grey party [Old Folks’ party]. Eliza Snow went with us. Mr. Sessions not being well, I danced with Br Knowlton. Joanna died this evening.

Friday 23 [April 1847]. We visited the sisters and brethren all day. In the evening David went to a party. They prayed and danced and prayed again. Sylvia, her Father, and I with a few more sisters met at Brother Leonard’s. He was gone but Mr. Sessions presided and we had a good time. We prayed and prophesied and spoke in tongues and interpreted and were refreshed. . . .

Saturday May 1st [1847]. Sylvia and I went to a meeting to Sister Leonard’s. None but females there. We had a good meeting. I presided. It was got up by E. R. Snow. They spoke in tongues. I interpreted. Some prophesied. It was a feast.

The accounts of Mary and Patty suggest that the nuclear family during the exodus often merged into an extended family and even community

family. Mary's accounting of the dances and the time she spent with other men, women, and children reveal that she found outside the limits of her own home a family in which she was treated as a *sister*. Patty traveled to various homes, healing and blessing, often in the company of both men and women.

Insight into sister-wife relationships and also sisterhood in the community through work as well as in the early Relief Societies is also found in the journals of Lucy Meserve Smith.<sup>8</sup> Baptized as a Latter-day Saint in Maine in 1837, Lucy worked in a cotton factory in Lowell, Massachusetts, became a skilled weaver, and earned enough money to migrate to Nauvoo, Illinois. There she married George A. Smith, an apostle of the Church and cousin of Joseph Smith. She ultimately shared George A. with five other wives. When she first arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1849, she lived in her wagon, cooked and washed for ten persons, looked after the baby of a sister wife, and after she had given birth to a stillborn son nursed another sister wife's baby for six months. Each winter she taught some fifty-six pupils in the Salt Lake Seventeenth Ward School. She later moved to Provo and remained there seventeen years helping to raise two boys of a deceased sister wife. Her journal tells how she helped get up parties, dances, suppers, and other entertainments. She wrote:

When things got a little more plenty, [a number of us] took our spinning Wheels and went to a large room in the seminary [ward schoolhouse] and tried our best to see who could reel off the greatest number of knots from sunrise to sunset. Sister Terrill reeled one hundred knots. Sister Holden not quite so many but better twist on hers. Sister [Hannah] Smith and I made the best yarn [but we also had fewer knots]. . . . On the whole we concluded we all beat. We had refreshments four times during the day. We took solid comfort in our day's labor, and our association together.

Lucy then tells of being set apart and blessed to preside over one of the Provo ward Relief Societies. The most memorable test of their effectiveness, she wrote, was helping the handcart immigrants who arrived in the late fall and early winter of 1856—those who, while in the Wyoming mountains, suffered from freezing because of an early winter. News of the handcart immigrants' plight came during the opening session of the October 1856 general conference. Upon hearing the news, she wrote, President Young dismissed the conference and asked all to do what they knew had to be done. Men and teams were prepared to carry clothing and provisions to the beleaguered Saints. "The sisters," Lucy wrote, "stripped off their petticoats, stockings, and everything they could spare, right there in the Tabernacle, and piled them into the wagons to send to the Saints in the mountains." And when she got back to Provo, Lucy and the other sisters got together so much clothing and quilts and food that, to use her words, "the four bishops could hardly carry the bedding and other clothing we got

together. . . . When the handcart companies arrived, the desks of the seminary were loaded with provisions for them. . . . We did not cease our exertions till all were made comfortable.” She went on, “My counselors and I wallowed through the snow until our clothes were wet a foot high to get things together. . . . We pieced blocks, carded bats, quilted, and got together I think twenty-seven quilts [for the needy in just that winter], besides a great amount of other clothing.”

Close on the heels of that effort was supplying the army of defense called out to meet the threat of the Utah Expedition, the federal army under the command of Albert Sidney Johnston, on its way to punish the Mormons for their allegedly rebellious behavior. Lucy’s Relief Society provided bedding, socks, and mittens for the Mormon soldiers. She wrote: “We sat up nights and knitted all that was needed till we made out a big load with the quilts and blankets which we sent out into the mountains to the brethren.”

The next project, wrote Lucy, was supplying a “nice flag” for the Provo Brass Band.

They chose a committee, and sent to me, desiring me to boss the concern. I said to the sisters, “Let’s go to the field, glean wheat and pick ground cherries to pay for material and make the Band a Flag.” No sooner said than done. We paid br. Henry Maiben part dried ground cherries and the balance in money for the gilding. Part of the silk was donated. The rest we paid for in wheat, which we had gleaned. The middle of the flag was white lutestring silk, with an edge of changeable blue and green, let in the shape of saw teeth, and a silk fringe around the edge of that. Sister Eliza Terrill embroidered the corners with a hive and bees, butterflies, roses, etc.

The gilding was imitation of two sax horns crossed in the middle or centre and gold letters across the top of the flag: “Presented by the Ladies of Provo to the Provo Brass Band. United We Stand.” Our flag took the prize in the big territorial fair.

She then tells of manufacturing carpets for the new Provo Tabernacle, organizing a Sunday School, and other similar activities.

It is obvious from Lucy’s and other diaries and reminiscences that, through the Relief Society, women were called upon to work along with the men in a mutual cause. That the sisters were aware, to use Brigham Young’s phrase, of their “equal usefulness,” along with the brethren,<sup>9</sup> is suggested in the remarks of Relief Society leaders. In her address at the “Great Indignation Meeting” in Salt Lake City in January 1870, at which several thousand women met to protest the Cullom Bill which was being considered for passage by the national Congress, Eliza Snow, general leader of the Relief Societies, stated:

We . . . speak because we have the right, [because] justice and humanity demand that we should, and . . . [because we are] women of God—women

filling high and responsible positions—performing sacred duties—women who stand not as dictators but as counselors to their husbands, and who, in the purest, noblest sense of refined womanhood, [are] truly their helpmates.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly every person, male and female, adult and child, was important to the survival of the community. And this led inevitably to an emphasis on the individual, which is the underlying theme of the next years, which we might call the *Exponent* years after the name of the magazine the women all read and supported.

### 1870–1900

By 1870 the railroad had been completed, Zion was prospering, and the physical basis of the Kingdom had been established. Greater emphasis could now be given to self-fulfillment, self-realization, and cultural and social development, and so the primary emphasis was on the role of women as daughters. Brigham Young organized the Retrenchment Society, which was converted into the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association, with this kind of purpose in mind. The young women felt free to use their own initiative in advancing causes helpful to themselves as well as to the Kingdom. Romania Pratt, Margaret Shipp, Ellis Shipp, Martha Hughes Cannon, Alice Louise Reynolds, Susa Young Gates, and others went east to study medicine, literature, home economics, and other subjects. Lula Green (Richards), only twenty, founded the *Women's Exponent* and after five years as editor turned it over to Emmeline B. Wells, who made it more explicitly an advocate of women's causes. This is the period when women agitated for and received many rights: the right to serve as principals of coeducational schools, the right to attend political conventions, the right to serve on juries, the right to vote, and the right to serve on the boards of trustees of coeducational institutions. This is the period when women engaged in the development of cooperative stores and sericulture; when they contributed reams of poetry and wrote the first novels of Mormon life; when they engaged in political activities; when they actively participated in the national women's suffrage organization; when they came into their own as administrators of domestic, farm, and business enterprises. These are "sisters" functions, of course, but the emphasis here was more on personal development than on group survival. This is illustrated in the diary entry of one sister about the new political freedom brought about by the granting of the franchise to women in 1870:

I attended a meeting today for electing delegates to the County Convention. Political meetings are something new to me. There were several ladies present, and we said "aye" sometimes by way of exercising our rights, and went home feeling the importance of our positions.<sup>11</sup>

Role models during this period were virtually all women who made contributions outside as well as inside the home: Eliza R. Snow, Emmeline B. Wells, Romania Pratt, and Ellis Shipp—women who achieved in an individual or personal sense, and who provided inspiration and encouragement to the young women of the Church.

Eliza Snow sounded the keynote of this era in a talk to the junior and senior Retrenchment Societies: “What do I want to retrench from? [she asked]. I want to retrench from my ignorance and everything that is not of God.”<sup>12</sup> The junior group, as I mentioned, evolved into the Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Association, and you are all aware of the kinds of activities they engaged in. The senior group met together semi-monthly until at least 1914, and they studied physiology, politics, Mormon theology and spent many hours discussing woman and woman’s sphere and responsibilities.

That Brigham Young agreed with this new emphasis on womanly self-reliance and independence there can be no doubt. In an 1867 letter to a sister interested in setting up a class for midwives, he declared that she must not hesitate to do it independently—on her own:<sup>13</sup>

Dear Sister: The plan which you suggest in your letter for fitting up a suitable house for sisters to be confined in, and for the teaching of midwifery, is without doubt a good one. If you could get your friends to assist you, and a house that would suit you, it would be a very good plan to have such an establishment. But for myself I have so many calls and so many duties, which are more pressing, to attend to that you must excuse me from doing anything in the matter.

Your Brother,  
Brigham Young

This is consistent with his statement in a General Epistle in 1868.<sup>14</sup> The Church has opened the University of Deseret to regular classes for young men and women, the Epistle declared. The courses for the young ladies are designed to give them

a thorough business education. . . . There are already some one hundred scholars. . . .

We are much pleased that ladies are privileged with admission to this school, for, in addition to a knowledge of the elementary branches of education and a thorough understanding of housewifery, we wish the sisters, so far as their inclinations and circumstances may permit, to learn bookkeeping, telegraphy, reporting, typesetting, clerking in stores and banks, and every branch of knowledge and kind of employment suited to their sex and according with their several tastes and capacities, that they may be competent to participate in and promote every interest within their power, and thus, by enlarging their sphere for usefulness, release [their] brethren—the Elders of Israel—to the more arduous labors and appropriate duties devolving upon them. Thus trained, all, without distinction of sex, will have an open field,

without jostling and oppression, for acquiring all the knowledge and doing all the good their physical and mental capacities and surrounding circumstances will permit. . . . We hope an early opportunity will be given for instruction in anatomy, surgery, chemistry, mineralogy, geology, physiology, the practice of midwifery by the sisters, the preservation of health, and the properties of medicinal plants.

Some of the latter, of course, came to fruition with the opening of the Deseret Hospital in 1882. The hospital was initially managed by a female board of directors and was staffed by female Mormon doctors trained in Eastern medical schools. Funded through the contributions of the Relief Societies, Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Associations, and Primary Associations, the Deseret Hospital treated sick and injured persons and handled difficult obstetrical cases. With its classes in nursing and midwifery, it became the first nurses' training school in Utah.

Brigham Young also was pleased with the role which women increasingly played in the educational, social, and political affairs of the territory. He would have approved of an editorial which Emmeline B. Wells published in the *Women's Exponent* four years after his death. The editorial is entitled "Self-Made Women."<sup>15</sup> We have heard many times the term "self-made men," she wrote. But who has ever supposed that there may also be "self-made women"? She was rather tired, she wrote, of hearing people talk of self-sacrificing women, as if self-sacrifice was inevitably synonymous with woman's state. "Woman," she went on, "has really undertaken to do her own work, to make her own record. . . . Man begins to acknowledge . . . her individuality and power of active thought." This being obvious, "man [now] approaches her as a being of understanding, one who has pronounced opinions of her own, and who is free to choose, if need be, her own vocation, and can, when needful, 'eat her own bread and wear her own apparel,'" as the expression goes. Her attitude, and Brigham's attitude during this period, was expressed very movingly by our beloved Camilla Kimball, wife of President Spencer W. Kimball, in a talk to BYU women here a few months ago. Her talk was entitled "A Woman's Preparation," and she said: "I would hope that every girl and woman here has the desire and ambition to qualify in two vocations—that of homemaking, and that of preparing to earn a living outside the home, if and when the occasion requires."<sup>16</sup> After pointing out that some women must support themselves because they are single, that others are forced to do so because of the illness or death of their husbands, and still others must be prepared to fulfill a vocation because not all of their lives are completely filled with the demands of a family, home, and children, she concludes: "Keeping mentally, physically, and spiritually growing constantly is the way to continue the happy, useful life." This wise counsel echoes the spirit of this period of womanly achievement.

For reasons which are perhaps obvious, Latter-day Saint women in the last third of the nineteenth century expressed their personal feelings with less reticence and embarrassment than in earlier periods. And they wrote more. The *Exponent* certainly encouraged this, as did the *Young Woman's Journal*. By 1900 Mormon women had published more than three dozen books of poetry, autobiography, and history. These, plus the hundreds of interesting autobiographical essays, some still not published, contributed to women's sense of self and demonstrated a rising sense of awareness of womanhood and a willingness to engage in introspection. In a diary entry Emily Dow Partridge Young wrote: "The organization of the Relief Societies are for a purpose; not merely to feed and clothe the poor, but to administer to the mind."<sup>17</sup> At a General Relief Society Conference in 1892, Sarah M. Kimball stated: "One of the speakers has said that he honors the First Presidency of the Church, the Twelve Apostles, and the priesthood of God. Well, we my sisters, must do this," she said, "but we must also honor women."<sup>18</sup>

Two women's diaries which exemplify the emphasis on self-realization are those of Mary Jane Mount Tanner and Emmeline B. Wells. Mary Tanner, a Relief Society president and mother of J. M. Tanner, president of Brigham Young College, Utah State University, and later the Church-wide Commissioner of Education, and the grandmother of Obert Tanner, our famous Utah philosopher and philanthropist, found self-fulfillment in poetry and submitted her poems regularly to the *Exponent*. Then she worked up the courage to consider publishing them as a book. Here is her diary entry for 5 May 1878, the day she closed the deal:

We got the work done up and I made myself tidy and sat down to rest. Looking out I saw Messrs Tullidge and Brandel, publishers from Salt Lake. They had promised to call and inspect my writings. . . . I read them my poems with which they were very much pleased, and strongly urged me to publish; selecting such pieces as seemed to them suitable. They said I had enough to make a book of a hundred pages that were well worthy of publication. It would cost \$350 for a thousand copies. I should like very much to publish, but should be sorry to spend so much money and not have the book appreciated. If I could but have a foresight to know how my book would be received I should have more courage to proceed.

I read some of my prose writings which also pleased them very much and they encouraged me to proceed with an article I am writing. They stayed all night. . . . Marion [her son J. M., the future college president] came in and I was proud to introduce him. He conversed with them to good advantage. They talked of science and religion and I was pleased to see him so well informed. I thought he was better than a book and if I did no other work, the honor of having such a son is more pride and pleasure than a dozen books.<sup>19</sup>

Mary Jane did indeed published her *Book of Fugitive Poems* (Salt Lake City, 1880), as she titled it, and even today it is regarded as a jewel.

Emmeline B. Wells, the second example of a woman growing into self-realization, was a remarkably intelligent and accomplished woman. General president of the Relief Society and long-time member of the general board, she was also president of the Utah Women's Club, editor of the *Women's Exponent*, chairman of the Women's League of the Republican Party, candidate for the state legislature, and officer of the National Council of Women.

It comes as a surprise to learn that Emmeline was not always so self-confident and assured. On one occasion she made the following entry in her diary: "I was alone today, feeling too gloomy even to write—crying most of the time, and my heart nearly bursting. . . . O how hard it is to endure unto the end; I am not sure if it be possible for me. Sometimes I think I have too much to bear."<sup>20</sup> This from a woman who did indeed endure to the end—lived to be 93 and received, in her last years, an honorary Doctor of Letters from BYU, the first honorary doctorate given by that university.

In 1876, according to Carol Madsen, Brigham Young called Emmeline to his office and announced that he wished her to lead the women of the Church to save wheat against a day of famine. "I felt very timid, and was just about trembling, when I went to talk the matter over with President Wells [her husband]," she recalled. "I told him what President Young had said, and added: 'You will have to help me.' He replied, 'I am not going to help you; you can do it yourself.'" Emmeline also went to Sister Eliza R. Snow but she too "said she couldn't help me—it was given to me to do." Despite her initial hesitation, the pages of the *Exponent* were soon replete with admonitions to buy, glean, and harvest wheat and with instructions on "How to Build a Granary on Nothing."<sup>21</sup> A diary entry for 1878 shows that within two years of her call from Brigham Young she had developed her own independence to the point that she was insisting on similar independence for her five daughters as well:

I feel very sad indeed [she wrote in her diary]. My husband's affairs are very complicated indeed and we are obliged to practice the most rigid economy. I am determined to train my girls to habits of independence so that they never need to trust blindly but understand for themselves and have sufficient energy of purpose to carry out plans for their own welfare and happiness.<sup>22</sup>

As general president of the Relief Society, Emmeline began the Society's first uniform plan for weekly lessons in the newly founded *Relief Society Magazine*, was the first to assume responsibility for making and distributing temple and burial clothing, and supported the United States government during World War I by buying bonds and selling Relief Society wheat. This tiny woman, who enhanced her white hair by wearing pastel dresses with long flowing scarves and chains at her neck, was a woman of

stubborn determination—a lovely confirmation of the fact that Mormonism could develop spirited and independent women and that they flowered during the two generations that followed the coming of the railroad to Utah.<sup>23</sup>

Let me close the discussion of the *Exponent* years by reading a verse from just one of the songs in the *Utah Woman's Suffrage Song Book*, a verse which demonstrates their spirit and awareness as daughters of Zion. One can picture the sisters in their own Relief Society hall, singing this, directed by Lucy Smith, Susa Gates, or Emmeline Wells. This is to the tune of “Hope of Israel,” and I think I’ll try to sing it. The words, incidently, were composed by Lula Greene Richards, who founded the *Exponent*.<sup>24</sup>

Freedom’s daughter, rouse from slumber;  
See, the curtains are withdrawn  
Which so long thy mind hath shrouded;  
Lo! the day begins to dawn.

Chorus:

Woman, ’rise, thy penance o’er,  
Sit thou in the dust no more;  
Seize the scepter, hold the van,  
Equal with thy brother, man.

Well, you get a little of the flavor of the raising of consciousness that occurred in the Church in the years from 1870 to 1900. We now go through a similar cycle of emphases in the twentieth century, with the emphasis on women as mothers from 1902 to 1916, on women as sisters from 1917 to 1945, and on women as daughters from 1946 to 1964. These are the three periods that I’m going to mention only very briefly, with a more extended treatment of the “modern” period.

### 1902–1964

The fourth period, running from 1902 to 1916, may be called the period of motherhood training because motherhood training was the featured course of study in Relief Society—these were the years of very large families and also the years family home evenings came to be officially sponsored as a Church program. The *Relief Society Magazine* carried an open-ended series entitled “Mothers in Israel,” in which outstanding mothers were the subject of lead articles. This is when lesson writers developed the image of the spiritual self-sacrificing mother exemplified by Mary Fielding Smith, the mother of the Church president during these years. Characteristic of this theme is the lead article in the *Relief Society Magazine* for May 1920, which reports the final achievement of woman’s suffrage. The article is entitled “Suffrage Won by the Mothers of the United States.” Suffrage was not achieved by the women, you will note, but by the mothers! Susan B. Anthony, you may turn over your grave!

The fifth period covered the years of World War I, the depression of the 1920s and 1930s, and World War II, and so the emphasis of the Relief Society and conference sermons and Church periodicals was on women as sisters working to build better wards, better communities, a better society. Role models included Amy Brown Lyman, Louise Y. Robinson, Priscilla Evans, each of whom had given many years to community service. During the years of the sixth period that followed, the emphasis, once more, was on the achievement of personal, spiritual, and intellectual growth.

### 1965–1979

Finally, the seventh period covers the recent years 1965 to 1979, when women have played a greater variety of roles, perhaps, than in earlier periods. There have been so many influences pulling in opposite directions: the racial unrest, student agitation, anti-war riots, popularization of the counter-culture, and militant women's liberation movements. This is the period of intense concern about the decline of the family, rise in the divorce rate, breakdown in moral standards, disregard of the rights of children, and so on. The Church has responded with an unmistakable emphasis on strengthening the family. There have been strongly worded sermons from General Authorities, re-emphasis on family home evening, and the increasing discipline which has come about as the result of the institution of correlation. The role models furnished in Church publications have been women whose primary activity has been in the home—wives of General Authorities, mothers of General Authorities, and mothers of large families.

But the years since 1965 have also been years of heightened "woman awareness," both in the Church and in the larger society of which we are a part. The impact on Latter-day Saint women, particularly young women, has been all the greater because of the large number of them who have attended universities. Further strengthening this influence has been the large proportion of women who have worked, and have expected to work, for wages. Something like 35 to 40 percent of active Latter-day Saint women now work part time or full time outside the home. Studies have shown even greater percentages of earning women in some wards in Utah and California.

Grappling with these diverse influences, and the problems they have created, some of the more "aware" of our women published *Exponent II*, a tabloid-like magazine which has offered as desirable role models for women today the women of the original *Exponent* years, along with similar career women and mothers of today—women like Belle Spafford, Lenore Romney, Florence Jacobsen, Elaine Cannon, Carol Lynn Pearson, and Emma Lou Thayne. The women who were most active in *Exponent II* also

published *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*, a book which strengthened the images of early Mormon women. This was followed by some splendid biographical essays of nineteenth century women in *Sister Saints*, edited by Vickie Burgess-Olsen and published by BYU Press.

Thus, in recent years one seems to find a bifurcation of women's roles within our culture. On the one hand, women's primary role is in the home; on the other hand, not entirely: women are also daughters and sisters, and one can be comfortable with an expansion or heightening of these aspects of women's identity. If younger Latter-day Saint women seem a little confused, it is surely a result of pressures from many directions. Life is complex, individuals are different, and varying circumstances and personalities produce various life-styles.

The dominant theme in LDS publications for women, obviously, is the importance of the woman as wife and mother. The insistence on this as the number one priority began with Harold B. Lee's talk to the Relief Society Conference of October 1964, which was entitled "The Place of Mothers in the Plan of Teaching the Gospel in the Home." The importance of the mother, President Lee emphasized, is pinpointed by the person who said: "When you teach a boy, you are just teaching another individual, but when you teach a woman or a girl, you are teaching a whole family."<sup>25</sup> Motherhood and mother-teaching was to be not just one dimension of woman's life, but *the* dimension. The prime purpose of the Relief Society, the Church magazines proclaimed, is to help build homes.

As stated by the late President Hugh B. Brown at a Relief Society conference:

Our concept of heaven itself is little more than a projection of the home and family life into eternity. . . . The family is the central pillar of the Church, the key to the arch of civilization. . . . The government in the home is the basis of all successful government. . . . The mother is the principal disciplinarian and teacher in early life, and her influence determines, in a great measure, the ability of her children to succeed in manhood and womanhood in the larger responsibilities in Church and State. She is initially the instrument in the hands of providence to shape and guide the destinies of nations, because she trains the children while they are young and sends them out to accomplish the duties that are to devolve upon them.<sup>26</sup>

This is capsulized even more briefly by the late President Joseph Fielding Smith in a Relief Society conference in 1970: "To be a mother in Israel in the full gospel sense," he said, "is the highest reward that can come into the life of a woman."<sup>27</sup>

But, as I have suggested, from their own tradition and their sense of our history, some LDS women—some of you—have given this message a broad interpretation. On the one hand women are honored in their capacity as

mothers; on the other hand honor is also bestowed on women who achieve professionally—women who become judges, like Christine Durham; women who become writers and editors, like Maureen Beecher and Moana Bennett; women who become educators and politicians, like Stella Oaks and Lucille Reading and Algie Baliff; and so on—all of whom, of course, manage to be good mothers as well.

My own prediction is that in the years to come neither women as individual daughters nor women as exclusively mothers will win out—that the role model which will be most honored in future years will be women as sisters. As the Church grows internationally, women will be called upon to help build the Kingdom in a variety of ways. Women will assist their sisters in Mexico, in Latin America, in Asia and the South Pacific, in Africa, and in the central cities of the United States, to help build little Zions around the world—to help improve the lives of their sisters who need guidance in doing so. And in this effort hopefully they will be partners with their fathers, husbands, sons, and brethren.

These are difficult years and the role of women—and indeed the role of men as well—is in a state of flux. There are ambiguities in the goals of nearly all of us. The irony of one position is perhaps best expressed by a former neighbor of ours who told his wife, with some vehemence, “Stick to your washing, ironing, scrubbing, cleaning, and cooking, honey; no wife of mine is going to work!”

## **The Future**

Whatever the pattern of the future, Mormon history suggests that the combination of the doctrine of eternal marriage and the law of eternal progression requires equal emphasis on the development of the individual and on the strength of the family and community. Women, as well as men, have played significant roles in putting their shoulders to the wheel as teachers, presidents, board members, and executives on the ward, stake, and general levels of different church auxiliaries and activities. Women, as well as men, have been anxiously engaged in good causes and have been creative and inventive in suggesting and trying new approaches and programs. Women, as well as men, have sought and received the help of Deity in their different callings. And incidentally, men, as well as women, are subject to the counsel of those who are charged with directing the affairs of the Church.

Several years ago Dr. Thomas O’Dea, prominent Roman Catholic sociologist and acute observer of Mormon history and culture, wrote that he had been impressed with the intelligence, vitality, and ethical concern of the Mormon people. The flexibility of Mormonism, he wrote, and its viability under the most adverse conditions, augurs well for its future.<sup>28</sup> Our

oral history interviews with Mormon women of today suggest that in every important respect they are fully as worthy and valiant as the Mormon mothers, sisters, and daughters of the generations that are past.

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Leonard J. Arrington, director of the History Division of the LDS Church Historical Department, delivered this address 21 March 1979 at Women's History Conference, Brigham Young University, sponsored by Women's History Archives and Utah Women's History Association. The responses of the commentators Elizabeth Shaw and Helen Candland Stark are scheduled to be printed in a forthcoming issue of *Dialogue*.

1. See Jill C. Mulvay, "The Liberal Shall Be Blessed: Sarah M. Kimball," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 44 (Summer 1976):205–21.

2. See the Journal of Caroline Barnes Crosby, MS, Church Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter cited as Church Archives. Also Ann Gardner Stone, "Louisa Barnes Pratt: Missionary Wife, Missionary Mother, Missionary," in Vicky Burgess-Olson, ed., *Sister Saints* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), pp. 43–59.

3. "Duties of Women," *Latter-day Saints Millennial Star* (Liverpool), 1 (August 1840):100–101. Parley P. Pratt was the editor.

4. Conference in Nauvoo, 8 October 1845, General Minutes Collection, MS, Church Archives.

5. Journal of Mary Haskin Parker Richards, MS, Church Archives. I have taken a few minor liberties with abbreviations, spellings, and punctuation.

6. Susan Sessions Rugh, "Patty Bartlett Sessions: More Than a Midwife," in Burgess-Olson, *Sister Saints*, pp. 303–22.

7. Journal of Patty Bartlett Sessions, MS, Church Archives. I have taken a few minor liberties in making the entry more readable.

8. Journal of Lucy Meserve Smith, MS, Church Archives. Some corrections in spelling and punctuation.

9. Brigham Young remarks at the dedication of the Fifteenth Ward Relief Society Hall, *Deseret News*, 5 August 1869: "In their sphere they can be equally as useful as the brethren in theirs."

10. A full report on the meeting is in *Deseret News Weekly*, 19 January 1870.

11. Diary of Mary Jane Mount Tanner, MS, Church Archives, entry for 28 January 1878.

12. General Retrenchment Minutes, Salt Lake Stake Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association, 20 February 1875, MS, Church Archives.

13. Brigham Young to Nicoline Olsen, Second Ward, 15 August 1867, Brigham Young Letterbooks, MS, Church Archives.

14. General Epistle, January–February 1868, in Brigham Young Circular Letters, MS, Church Archives.

15. "Self-Made Women," *The Women's Exponent* 9 (1 March 1881):148.

16. Camilla Kimball, "A Woman's Preparation," *The Ensign* 7 (March 1977):58–59.

17. Journal of Emily Dow Partridge Young, entry for 12 August 1877, MS, Church Archives.

18. "Relief Society Conference," *Women's Exponent* 20 (1 May 1892):157. I have put it, as she would have uttered it, in the present tense.

19. Diary of Mary Jane Mount Tanner, 5 May 1878.

20. Diary of Emmeline B. Wells, MS, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo. See also Patricia Rasmussen Eaton-Gadsby and Judith Rasmussen, "Emmeline Blanche Woodward Wells: 'I Have Risen Triumphant,'" in Burgess-Olson, *Sister Saints*, pp. 455–78.

21. See Rebecca Anderson, "Emmeline B. Wells: Her Life and Thought" (Master's thesis, Utah State University, 1975).

22. Wells Diary, 7 January 1878.

23. See Eaton-Gadsby and Rasmussen, "Emmeline Blanche Woodward Wells."

24. *Utah Woman Suffrage Song Book* (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1870), p. 5.

25. Harold B. Lee, "Place of Mothers in the Plan of Teaching the Gospel in the Home," *Relief Society Magazine* 52 (January 1965):8.

26. Hugh B. Brown, "The Exalted Sphere of Woman," *Relief Society Magazine* 52 (December 1965):885–88.

27. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Mothers in Israel," *Relief Society Magazine* 57 (December 1970):883.

28. See Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), chap. 10, pp. 258–63.