

*Clogs and Shawls:
Mormons, Moorlands, and the Search for Zion*
By Ann Chamberlin

Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019

Reviewed by Amy Harris

Born in turn-of-the-century Bradford, Yorkshire, the eight Whitaker sisters were raised as Latter-day Saints, all eventually immigrated to Utah, and all remained members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints throughout their lives. Their lifelong faithfulness was an important cornerstone of their family story, a story Ann Chamberlin, a granddaughter of one of the sisters, situates within a larger narrative about their family culture—both its positive and negative elements and the parts that tipped into becoming family mythology.

The book is family biography, family story, and family memoir—and accordingly shifts perspectives, often in a gentle stream-of-consciousness way. Chamberlin's structure—a short novella, a straightforward narrative of the sisters' lives interspersed with the author's family memories, and then a sudden insertion of a non-family member's account of a holiday excursion—is a conscious narrative choice that undergirds her overall story. But for readers expecting a straightforward history or more traditional memoir, they need to be prepared for a more varied and literary structure.

Clogs and Shawls covers more than a century of Whitaker family life; the first sister was born in 1897, the last sister died in 2006. The account is based on, and sometimes quotes directly from, hours of taped interviews Chamberlin conducted with the sisters—sometimes one-on-one, other times as a group, or in the midst of family gatherings. The tapes were produced in the early 1980s, but the writing was done in recent years and is clearly augmented by the author's personal memories as well as some input from other descendants of the sisters. The taped information is further supplemented with a transcribed travel diary of one of the girls' friends from 1917, selected transcribed correspondence between the Utah and England branches of the family from the 1920s to

the 1940s, and a novelized account of the early lives and courtship of the sisters' parents, Mary Jane Jones and Ralph Robinson Whitaker.

The book consists of three major sections, each in a different genre, covering the Whitaker sisters' lives, interspersed with Chamberlin's memories of the sisters. The first section, the novelization of Mary Jane Jones's and Ralph Whitaker's lives, covers their childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in the late nineteenth century. It also recounts Mary Jane's conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The second section (the largest) covers the sisters' births and childhood. The final section describes the different paths the sisters took in adulthood. Sprinkled across the last section are transcribed letters and a diary. Organized thematically and roughly chronologically, the book covers the sisters' experiences with work, home, church, schooling, immigration, marriage, death, and motherhood.

The family mythology is referenced multiple times to good effect—highlighting places where memory and events blur in order to craft a story of meaning for the family (246). At one point, Chamberlin insightfully refers to the Whitaker family mythology as the “family's theology” (262). All families, with varying degrees of consciousness, craft narratives about their pasts and their values. The Whitaker sisters were particularly conscious of their narrative. The sisters' family theology covered straightforward views of their loving father and hardworking mother, an account of financial precariousness and thrift, a rose-colored view of what life in American Zion would be like, and an assertion of unmatched uprightness and faithfulness. The Whitaker narrative revolved around a sort of pride in their resilience despite poverty and around an identity as Latter-day Saints in their Yorkshire context (sometimes in tension with what they perceived and then experienced of the American, or Utah, church context).

Chamberlin's narrative shines in her account of the individual sisters' stories—when their group experience diverges as they pursue schooling, training, marriage, and immigration to Utah. At times they are pious or irritating; at others they are deeply marked by tragedy and loss.

There were places where I appreciated Chamberlin's subtlety in drawing out that narrative without analyzing it too closely in a way that would crush the story. And there were places where I wanted more precision.

I sometimes wondered how the taped interviews could be supplemented by consulting original documents beyond the family's own preserved documents and stories. For example, the family told a story of their mother's conversion to the Church as occurring in 1894, but

they also related how the Church misplaced the baptism record, and therefore she had to be rebaptized in 1901. The Church record of both baptisms, however, does survive. So, the question becomes, why did claiming the original record was lost become part of the family's narrative? Why did their mother perpetuate, or perhaps even start, that way of framing her two baptisms? It is possible that she had been told the record was missing and was rebaptized in ignorance of the record's survival, but the fact that between those two dates she married a man who was not a Latter-day Saint, conceived her first child before that marriage, and had her first two daughters christened into the Church of England suggests there might have been other factors that influenced how she framed the story of her conversion. Chamberlin notes that the family knew, but did not often comment on, the eldest daughter being born only six months after their parents married. But using the documentary context of their mother's two baptisms and the sisters' christenings might provide additional insight into the family mythology. Families tell stories, and do not tell other stories, to highlight what is important to them; these are not deceptions but choices. Additional details beyond the family memories might have changed how the Whitakers' choices are understood or interpreted.

The sisters' feelings of deprivation regarding the Church—the missing baptism record, the missionaries who forgot them once they returned home, the lack of full appreciation for what they did for the Bradford branch, the lack of access to temple ordinances—were important parts of the family myth (262–65). But it is not always clear why the sisters held on to these when some of them represented short-term or only partial deprivations. For example, three of the six sisters who immigrated did so in their twenties and thirties and were endowed and sealed not long afterward. As the sisters sometimes admitted to Chamberlin, the family mythology did not allow for a more nuanced family narrative (375, 384). Chamberlin seems to want that to be the point, but it is not always clear why the myth lingered—what it was doing for the sisters when its content contradicted their own lived experiences.

Particularly evocative are the times the sisters confide, *sotto voce*, to Chamberlin about the gaps or tensions in the family narrative of hard work and unwavering faith. There was a time when the “myth was lived and breathed” (385)—as the sisters dreamed of joining Zion in Utah—but the reality of their lives in Utah and the realities of their descendants feeling ever more distant from the myth's origins in working-class Bradford erode some of the myth's power.

While references to Zion, life as a millworker, the struggles of being poor, and the Yorkshire moors all appear in the title, none of those is really the center of the story. Those topics are the scaffolding of the writing, but they are not the heart of the story. It is the sisters and their durable connections who are the heart of the narrative, no matter the setting they found themselves in. Chamberlin's skill lies in peeling away some of the mythical layers to reveal a story made all the more powerful because it is embedded in the sisters' humanity and in the poignancy of human frailty.

Amy Harris is an associate professor of history at Brigham Young University, an accredited genealogist, and the program coordinator for the Family History BA program. Her research focuses on family, women, and gender in eighteenth-century England.