

# The Early Development of Latter-day Saint Women's History

## An Interview with Jill Mulvay Derr

*Cherry Bushman Silver*

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**Silver:** Jill, we are grateful that you entered the field of women's history, but it might never have happened. Will you describe your background and how you made the transition from educator to research historian?

**Derr:** Thank you, Cherry. I grew up in Salt Lake City and graduated from the University of Utah in English; I then went on to the Harvard Graduate School of Education and took a master's degree of arts in teaching. I taught in the Boston public schools for two years, and while I was living in the Cambridge area, I heard Maureen Ursenbach [Beecher] give a lecture. Leonard J. Arrington had recently become Church Historian, and Maureen had signed on with him as an editor in the new History Division.<sup>1</sup> One of her first assignments was biographical research on Eliza R. Snow. So, the Boston women who had initiated an

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1. Leonard J. Arrington was appointed Church Historian in January 1972. Subsequently, what was formerly the Church Historian's Office became the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with Arrington as head of research and writing in the department's History Division. See Gregory A. Prince, "Church Historian: The 'Camelot' Years," in *Leonard Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 152–91.

institute class to study Latter-day Saint women—Claudia Bushman, Laurel Ulrich, and others—invited Maureen to come and talk to them about what she had discovered about the life of Eliza R. Snow. Claudia made an open invitation to everyone in all the Cambridge wards to attend. I hadn't been affiliated with the Boston women's group—I was single, and most of them were married—but I went to that lecture. It was stunning to me. I had no idea that this person Eliza R. Snow had been such a prominent, accomplished figure. I was blown away. I remember asking Maureen, "How did you find all this out?" She talked about her work in the History Division, and that was essentially that.

I had already decided, after two years of teaching, that I would return to Salt Lake and get a teaching job in Utah. But once I returned, I couldn't find a job in the schools. Then another associate from Cambridge, Kathryn Hansen [Shirts], told me about internships in the newly organized Church Historical Department.<sup>2</sup> They were looking for young scholars, and without a job, I thought I could at least work as an intern during that fall. I went to the east wing of the Church Office Building and had a wonderful conversation with Church Historian Leonard Arrington and his assistants, Davis Bitton and James B. Allen. When they hired me to work with Maureen on Eliza R. Snow, I couldn't have been more thrilled. My initial assignment was to work on Eliza's poetry. I started with her two volumes of poetry, then began going through the *Woman's Exponent*, the *Deseret News*, and the *Juvenile Instructor*—everywhere I might find and collect her poems. I had a little box that held 3" × 5" index cards. We were being very scrupulous about supplies, so these were not new cards but old library catalog cards that I turned over. For each poem, I typed the title, its first line, and the place where it had been published. I kept adding sources to the card if I found the same poem in other publications. That was the beginning of the poetry project and my acquaintance with Eliza Snow.

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2. In 1972, the Church Historian's Office was renamed the Church Historical Department. In 2000, it merged with the Family History Department to form the Family and Church History Department. In 2008, the two departments split, with the history side becoming the Church History Department. In this interview, we use the appropriate name for the time period being discussed, even though three different names apply to the same department.

**Silver:** And how happy for all of us that the research came to fruition, some years later, in the form of a volume of Eliza's collected poetry.<sup>3</sup> You had some other assignments while employed in the Church Historical Department. Tell us about those.



Jill Mulvay Derr. Photo by Melese Spaulding Miller.

**Derr:** I was, as many of us start out, a checker of footnotes, footnotes for the then-forthcoming book assembled by the Boston women and compiled and edited by Claudia Bushman: *Mormon Sisters*, published in 1976.<sup>4</sup> I checked footnotes for the essays in that book and

also added an article of my own. Since I had been teaching school, I did a piece on Latter-day Saint schoolmarms.

**Silver:** That book has been very useful to many of us.

**Derr:** When my internship was finished, I was given a full-time position in the History Division in connection with the newly funded James H. Moyle Oral History Program. My work on Eliza continued, but as part of the oral history program I had the opportunity to do many interviews with women leaders. I interviewed Belle Spafford and LaVern Parmley, both of whom had recently been released from their long-term service as General Presidents: Belle Spafford as president of the Relief Society and LaVern Parmley as president of the Primary. That was an eye-opening assignment for me. It plunged me into the *Relief Society Magazine*, which I loved. This was, as you can see, sort of on-the-spot training. I was looking through the *Deseret News*, the *Woman's Exponent*, and other periodicals searching for the

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3. Jill Mulvay Derr and Karen Lynn Davidson, eds., *Eliza R. Snow: The Complete Poetry* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009).

4. Claudia L. Bushman, ed., *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah* (1976; Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997).

poetry of Eliza R. Snow, and I was also delving into the *Relief Society Magazine* to look at Belle Spafford's life. She became a member of the Relief Society General Board in 1935 and was released as president in 1974, so my research and interviews provided great exposure across many decades, and I loved it.

This was an exciting time in Latter-day Saint women's history. Leonard Arrington was committed to getting women's stories into Latter-day Saint history, as he had done in his seminal article, "The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women," published in the *Western Humanities Review* in 1955.<sup>5</sup> He not only assigned Maureen this work on Eliza Snow but lent support to various other projects as well. He gave researchers access to the incredible files he had been assembling on individual women for years and years. Maureen was a gifted networker and called together women who might be interested in working on individual Latter-day Saint women. This great team of intelligent women, mostly with little or no academic training in history, drew upon Leonard's files initially to work on the lives of various Latter-day Saint women. Vicki Burgess-Olsen pulled their work together in a very early compilation of biographical essays titled *Sister Saints*, published here at Brigham Young University in 1978.<sup>6</sup>

A second effort that grew out of this time of awakening was the Emma Hale Smith biography. Linda Newell and Val Avery were committed to writing about Emma Smith.<sup>7</sup> The Church hadn't had a serious biography of Emma, and Leonard fully supported the project. Maureen helped facilitate some of that early work and access to the archives. In addition, Maureen and I began meeting every Wednesday for lunch at the Lion House to

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5. Leonard J. Arrington, "The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women," *Western Humanities Review* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1955): 145–64. See also Leonard J. Arrington, "The Search for Truth and Meaning in Mormon History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 61–62, where he emphasizes the critical importance of including women in Latter-day Saint history.

6. Vicky Burgess-Olson, ed., *Sister Saints*, Series Studies in Mormon History, vol. 5 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978). The next year, Carol Cornwall Madsen and David J. Whittaker published an overview of women's history sources and scholarship. "History's Sequel: A Source Essay on Women in Mormon History," *Journal of Mormon History* 6 (1979): 123–45.

7. Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe, 1804–1879* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984).

discuss ongoing projects together with women researchers who came regularly to the archives, such as Linda Newell and Lavina Fielding Anderson, who was then with the *Ensign*. That helped us share information and ideas, fueled the Emma biography, and resulted in other good things that happen when people collaborate. That little luncheon group always gathered at a round table, so sometimes there were eight or nine people, all interested in various research and writing projects. For example, Linda Wilcox had an interest in *Mother in Heaven* and was doing her early work on that topic. Eventually those projects came together under the direction of Maureen and Lavina.

**Silver:** Did *Sisters in Spirit*, that compilation, grow out of your Wednesday group?<sup>8</sup>

**Derr:** Exactly. That was one fruit of that discussion group.

**Silver:** Notable essays.

**Derr:** Leonard had also asked me to help complete work on *Women's Voices*, a manuscript which Kenneth and Audrey Godfrey had begun around 1974 before leaving for a mission. That was a collection of historical documents—selected personal writings of women—that we arranged chronologically from 1830 to 1900. It was a very simple sampling of diaries and letters and autobiographies, a project that fascinated and further educated me.<sup>9</sup> Originally, the volume was to be part of an official Mormon Heritage series featuring historical documents and published by the Historical Department in collaboration with Deseret Book. The first in the projected series was Dean Jessee's *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons*, published in 1974. As changes came to the History Division around 1980, several official projects were turned over to individual authors, and that was one of them.<sup>10</sup> *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day*

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8. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

9. Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr, eds., *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982). Paperback editions were released in 1991 and 2000.

10. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974). See Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 165–66, 168, 171.

*Saints* was still completed in cooperation with Deseret Book, and with Leonard's full support, but not as part of an anticipated documentary series.

**Silver:** And *Women's Voices* has been useful for many of us by making original diaries and documents easily accessible.

**Derr:** I wanted to mention two other things. This was a period when one-volume histories were being compiled. We hadn't yet had an overview of Latter-day Saint history compiled by Latter-day Saint scholars. Leonard had earlier been asked by the publisher Knopf to do a one-volume history of Mormonism, and that came to be published by Knopf as *The Mormon Experience*.<sup>11</sup> The volume needed a separate chapter on women, which Maureen and I worked on together. Also, Richard Poll's work entitled *Utah's History* was a single-volume collection about Utah history, with chapters by various authors. I worked on a chapter about Utah women with Ann Vest Lobb.<sup>12</sup> It was an exciting period because we were seeing a new recognition of women's place in history and a desire to include them in various ways.

**Silver:** Did you have any connections with BYU at that time?

**Derr:** There are two ways I developed connections with BYU. The first began with my involvement in the 1977 conference convened in Utah as part of the U.S. response to the antidiscrimination objectives of International Women's Year (1975). Utah's IWY conference is most remembered for the heated controversy it stirred between feminists and traditional homemakers.<sup>13</sup> Lesser-known

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11. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1979; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

12. Ann Vest Lobb and Jill Mulvay Derr, "Women in Early Utah," in *Utah's History*, ed. Richard D. Poll and others (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1989), 337-56.

13. As part of an ongoing and extended effort to eliminate discrimination against women, the United Nations designated 1975 as International Women's Year (IWY), and the beginning of a Decade for Women. A National Plan of Action developed by IWY organizers in the United States was discussed and voted upon in individual state IWY conferences convened in 1977, in preparation for a national conference held in Houston that year. Instead of advancing unified action, the 1977 conferences "provided a battleground for the supporters and opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment." Since the National Plan called for ratification of the ERA, and the First Presidency and Relief Society General President Barbara B. Smith had already stated their opposition to the amendment, the Utah conference became particularly contentious. See Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women*

components of that year were various IWY task forces. Along with Maureen, I was assigned to work on the Task Force on Women in Utah History, which included people from the University of Utah, the state archives, and other repositories, with the intention of getting together registers of women's documents. That committee started to identify what the Utah State Historical Society, as well as the Church Archives and BYU Special Collections, possessed in terms of women's documents. Putting these registers together was a great aid for me as a scholar because, for the first time, women's documents were listed in a visible and accessible way. The collaboration generated by the IWY history task force proved so productive that the group organized the Utah Women's History Association, which held conferences and promoted studies of Utah women until 2005, when its long run was capped by publication of *Women in Utah History*, an important collection of articles addressing such topics as women in religion, politics, the workforce, art, and literature.<sup>14</sup> BYU hosted several early conferences of that organization, in which women began to present papers on their studies of Utah women and Latter-day Saint women.

**Silver:** As we listened to each other and learned about each other's research, women's history got more and more exciting.

**Derr:** Yes. A second connection to BYU came through the opportunity to teach an honors seminar there focused on Utah women's history, and that was a new adventure for me—putting together curriculum from the bits and pieces that had been published and actually being able to share those recent findings with students who were excited and interested.

**Silver:** I know that later on you were able to teach a History of Mormon Women class at BYU, but there were changes in your personal life. You could not stay with historical research full time. What happened?

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*of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society*, 369–74. An extensive study is Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005).

14. Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher, ed., *Women in Utah History: Paradigm or Paradox?* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005). Listed on the title page as "A Project of the Utah Women's History Association, Cosponsored by the Utah State Historical Society." The book's introduction includes history of both the association and the project.

**Derr:** Yes, I married my remarkable husband, Brooklyn Derr, in 1977, and I began to reduce my hours at the Church Historical Department and worked part time for quite a while. When I went to half time in 1979, Carol Cornwall Madsen came to the department and took up the other half of my position. She was still at the University of Utah working on her own degree and was employed there, I believe, in the Women's Resource Center. She came to the History Division highly qualified and most willing to take up the other half of that slot. She jumped in and started on the history of the Primary. The beginnings of that work had come out of my association with LaVern Parmley and President Parmley's desire to have a history of the Primary. Carol took that up along with Susan Staker [Oman], and they published a fine book on the history of the Primary.<sup>15</sup> Children made my family life more happily complicated, and I retired for the time being from the Church Historical Department. It so happened that changes in my personal circumstances coincided with the decision to move the History Division to BYU and rename it the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History.<sup>16</sup> I was well aware of the transition but not part of the move, although I reconnected with the Institute later.

**Silver:** I wanted to talk a little about the publication of another book, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society*, which was published in 1992.<sup>17</sup> I know its beginnings were earlier. To me, it offers an essential look at the founding of the original Relief Society and then at each administration up to 1992. Elaine Jack, then the Relief Society General President, called the publication of this book "a gentle, quiet coup," expressing her amazement that this major work could be finished at all and then that it could be published as it had been written. I understand that the publication required approval from General Authorities, with

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15. Carol Cornwall Madsen and Susan Staker Oman, *Sisters and Little Saints: One Hundred Years of Primary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979).

16. Some Church leaders disapproved the academic approach to Latter-day Saint history taken by Arrington and his History Division colleagues. See Gregory A. Prince, "Storm Clouds" and "Disassembly," in *Leonard Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 276–305, 328–51.

17. Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

careful reading from Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Neal A. Maxwell. What are your reflections on this *Women of Covenant* project?

**Derr:** It was a great blessing to me personally. I loved doing the research and being engaged with Janath Russell Cannon. Before this project, I did not know Sister Cannon at all. She had recently served as a counselor to President Barbara B. Smith in the Relief Society General Presidency and then served a pioneering mission in Africa with her husband. Months before the History Division moved to BYU from the Church Historical Department, Elder G. Homer Durham had been appointed as the department's executive director. He felt that some good work could and ought to be accomplished by independent scholars. While those engaged at the new Smith Institute at BYU could continue to research and publish, Elder Durham believed other work could be pushed forward outside of that entity. President Barbara Smith discussed with him the need for a new history of the Relief Society. Histories had been published in 1942 and 1966 by the Relief Society General Board, but they did not include the kind of new scholarship then underway in the Church Historical Department and elsewhere. Elder Durham did not endorse the department undertaking such a project, but he encouraged Barbara Smith to work out an arrangement with Deseret Book. Consequently, she invited Janath Cannon and myself to consider working with Deseret Book on a new Relief Society history. We signed up for that early in 1980, after I had left Arrington's History Division. It ended up being a long-term project with several interruptions. Important roles in the project were played by many people, including Eleanor Knowles, who was then a central editor and manager at Deseret Book. She shepherded our work from beginning to end. She used to joke that of all the books on her list, we had been there the longest.

I also have to say that we had the full support of all the Relief Society presidents who administered Relief Society during that period—Barbara Smith, Barbara Winder, and Elaine Jack—all immensely helpful. At the time we began the project, we worked in a small office in the Relief Society Building, and we continued there until the building was remodeled. That was a great opportunity for me. I had access to some of the records in the vault

and felt the spirit of that building and the women who occupied it. Janath and I felt that we didn't really have a model for institutional history, so *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* by James Allen and Glen Leonard served as our handbook.<sup>18</sup> We included a lot of American historical context in our discussion, as they had. We divided the book into two parts. I worked on the first part, which went up through the administration of Emmeline Wells, and Janath worked on the second part, which went up to the current Elaine Jack administration. Of course, Janath had been part of the board and in the presidency for part of that time.

The project was delayed somewhat because Brooke and I and our children, due to Brooke's work, spent time away in France and Switzerland, a total of about three years altogether. My former History Division colleagues, by then part of BYU's Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History, were very interested in supporting the project and seeing it come to fruition. Before we went to Switzerland in 1989, I asked Maureen Ursenbach Beecher to come aboard and help finish the manuscript, especially the last of my nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century chapters. She worked with both Janath and me as editor of the entire book; she was invaluable. I still remember those days in Switzerland when I went to Brooke's office, and we faxed copies of chapters to Maureen at the institute. I remember sitting down with Maureen at one point and saying, "I don't know how we are going to present this history with its ups and downs as something comprehensible to our women readers. Why do women stay committed to an institution that from time to time disappoints them keenly?" We talked about how faith was an essential principle for women and that their covenants were an anchoring principle, and that's how we came up with the title *Women of Covenant*.

**Silver:** A most appropriate title.

**Derr:** You asked about a review of the book manuscript. This was not a publication that had to be officially cleared from the beginning, but at the request of institute director Ronald K. Esplin, it was reviewed by the institute's advisors, Elder Oaks and Elder Maxwell, and also by the Relief Society General Presidency. Although

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18. James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976).

women's input was not part of the decision-making process that affected them at many points in Latter-day Saint history, Elder Maxwell and Elder Oaks wanted the Relief Society presidency to be part of it this time. There was a lot of new and surprising information for many people: the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes themselves, the temple-centeredness of women's experience, women's healing, and the wide variety of projects women engaged in as well as the disappointments they endured along the way.

**Silver:** I was on the general board of the Relief Society at that time and was asked to consider a couple of those points of concern. It seemed to me the balance was just right, never denying the history but also looking at it in the context of the modern-day reader who needed to understand what the background was. I can see links going forward to *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* in the way you explained matters to those readers.<sup>19</sup>

**Derr:** Thank you. I will say that for many feminists the book fell short because it did not delve more deeply into theological issues, particularly the question of women and priesthood. Other scholars and other works coming out at the same time took on some of those controversial questions—most notably Maxine Hanks in her edited collection, *Women and Authority*.<sup>20</sup> Women's authority to heal the sick and the nature and extent of women's ecclesiastical authority were touchy issues. Janath and Maureen and I did not want to ignore them, nor did we want to drift toward the kind of theological speculation in which some scholars were engaging. Zealous pursuit of some of those questions led to painful excommunications, which I think frightened many would-be participants in Latter-day Saint women's history.<sup>21</sup> While it

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19. Jill Mulvay Derr and others, *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016).

20. Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

21. During September 1993, "in the span of one month, [D. Michael] Quinn and [Maxine] Hanks along with four other writers and scholars were excommunicated (or disfellowshipped, a lesser sanction, in one case). . . . The most common factor was scholarship that challenged orthodox narratives—whether about the meaning of Isaiah, details of Heavenly Mother doctrine, or Latter-day Saint history. The disciplinary actions were widely perceived as orchestrated by the leadership as a powerful warning about the limits of intellectual inquiry that would be tolerated." Terryl L. Givens, *Stretching the Heavens: The Life of Eugene England and the Crisis of Modern Mormonism*

was a great period, it was also a period laden with cautions for people who were writing. The preface to *Women of Covenant* makes clear that in spite of the review process and the foreword by Elaine Jack, the book presents the authors' "own interpretations and is not an official history."<sup>22</sup>

**Silver:** Probably the move from the Church Historical Department to Brigham Young University and the forming of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History looked like a loss to some of those leaders and scholars. On the other hand, beautiful things have come out of that era. Let's talk a little bit about the Smith Institute and what projects concerning nineteenth-century women were fostered there.

**Derr:** As I mentioned previously, I wasn't part of the initial group that moved down to BYU, but Carol Madsen and Maureen Beecher were, and they were a strong presence for Latter-day Saint women's history during that period. Maureen continued to work on Eliza Snow, both the biography and the poetry, and she also was very interested in the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes. Veteran transcriber Edyth Jenkins Romney at the Church Historical Department had made a transcript of those minutes that Maureen probed and used in many presentations and shared circumspectly. Maureen highlighted the importance of those minutes and had a great interest in publishing them, although that seems not to have been possible at the time.<sup>23</sup>

**Silver:** It wasn't possible, because even the general board had to use that transcript when they commemorated the sesquicentennial of the Relief Society. There was nothing published or officially available for them to study.

**Derr:** Exactly, exactly. I think some of the tensions around women's history helped fuel the new, less controversial direction that Maureen headed. She became excited about the possibility of publishing the personal writings of Latter-day Saint women. She connected with John Alley at Utah State University Press to produce a new series entitled *Life Writings of Frontier Women*.

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(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 245. This superb intellectual history provides fair and comprehensible context for this and other controversies.

22. Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, xiii.

23. The minutes, introduced and annotated, were finally published in 2016. Jill Mulvay Derr and others, *First Fifty Years of Relief Society*.

Many important volumes came out of that connection, not only Maureen's work on Eliza Snow's autobiography and journals but also solid documentary editing by various scholars on the personal writings of Patty Sessions, Mary Haskin Parker Richards, Caroline Barnes Crosby, and others.<sup>24</sup>

**Silver:** I see that as an off-shoot of the earlier volume, *Women's Voices*, that you did with the Godfreys. The whole series is well edited with fine introductions.

**Derr:** Yes, you are right. That came about in part because of new excitement about documenting women's lives and the formulation of new guidelines and principles for editing documents. Maureen was very eager to have documents reproduced carefully and with appropriate references, using the best current style for documentary editing. Carol Madsen brought her master's and PhD work on Emmeline B. Wells to the Smith Institute in hopes of doing a larger biography of Wells and working on Wells's extensive

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24. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, ed., *The Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, Life Writings of Frontier Women, vol. 5 (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000). Utah State University Press began publishing The Life Writing series in 1996 under the general editorship of Maureen Ursenbach Beecher. She explained in the foreword to the first volume, "The life experiences of frontier women inform a new history that over the past two decades has begun to appear. . . . In order that scholars in all the disciplines might use these texts with confidence, the transcriber-editors of each manuscript have observed the most rigid standards of documentary editing. . . . In addition, each volume editor has provided commentary, documentation, maps, and photographs to help the reader or researcher to understand the circumstances surrounding the writer's narrative." Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "Foreword," in *Winter Quarters: The 1846-1848 Life Writings of Mary Haskin Parker Richards*, ed. Maurine Carr Ward, Life Writings of Frontier Women, vol. 1 (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), xi-xii. Volume 2 appeared in 1997, the diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions, edited by Donna Toland Smart; volume 3 in 1998, Louisa Barnes Pratt, edited by S. George Ellsworth; volume 4 in 1999, Effie Marquess Carmack, edited by Noel A. Carmack and Karen Lynn Davidson; volume 5 in 2000, Eliza Roxcy Snow, edited by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher; volume 6 in 2003, Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, edited by Charles M. Hatch and Todd M. Compton; volume 7 in 2005, Caroline Barnes Crosby, edited by Edward Leo Lyman, Susan Ward Payne, and S. George Ellsworth; volume 8 in 2006, Patience Loader Rozsa Archer, edited by Sandra Ailey Petree; volume 9 in 2007, Mary Lois Walker Morris, edited by Melissa Lambert Milewski; volume 10 in 2008, Fanny Stenhouse, edited by Linda Wilcox DeSimone; volume 11 in 2009, Helen, Owen, and Avery Woodruff, edited by Lu Ann Taylor Snyder and Phillip A. Snyder; volume 12 in 2011, Margaret E. P. Gordon, edited by Claudia L. Bushman; and volume 13 in 2012, Mabel Finlayson Allred, edited by Martha Bradley-Evans.

diaries.<sup>25</sup> She also moved in a documentary direction. Carol's book *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* drew from women's personal writings to focus in on women's experiences in Nauvoo.<sup>26</sup> It's a wonderful book, and her introductions are, as always, spot on. Then she took on the larger work of documenting the westward trek, the Mormon Trail, through personal writings. Her book *Journey to Zion* brilliantly used both men's and women's documents.<sup>27</sup> This set an important precedent in integrating men's and women's experiences.

The book was an important contribution to the 1997 anniversary of the trek. Carol also contributed greatly to BYU Women's Conferences, and, significantly, she taught a course in American women's history. That was a pioneering effort at BYU and exposed many students to a broader history of American women's lives and, as part of that discussion, Latter-day Saint women's lives and how they fit into that larger context.

**Silver:** It is always useful to see our people or our particular interests in that larger context.

**Derr:** Absolutely! I reconnected with the Smith Institute in about 1986, bringing with me the Relief Society history project. I was still connected with Maureen on Eliza R. Snow's poetry and other aspects of Eliza's life.

I worked at the Smith Institute part time for . . . I guess about fifteen years. In addition to research and writing, I had the opportunity to teach classes in religious education. Then Carol Madsen, Ronald Esplin, Richard Jensen, and I put together a syllabus for a course in Latter-day Saint history and culture that featured recent scholarship on various topics, including women, and we introduced that course at BYU through the honors program. We had many fine students in that class over the years, including Matthew Grow, for example, who is currently managing director of the Church History Department. During those years, the 1990s, we made an attempt to reach out to other scholars of

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25. Madsen completed an award-winning biography. Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Emmeline B. Wells: An Intimate History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2017).

26. Carol Cornwall Madsen, *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994).

27. Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Journey to Zion: Voices from the Mormon Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997).

religion through presentations at academic organizations such as the American Academy of Religion and the American Society for Church History. This was a moment in time when there was a growing interest in religious studies and the history of religion around the country, and many universities were setting up new departments, not to train people for the ministry but to study religion or the history of religion as academic fields.

One of the first of those scholars was Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp. Upon the recommendation of well-known historian Jan Shippo, I invited Laurie to present the Tanner Lecture for the 1999 meeting of the Mormon History Association. The Tanner Lecture provided an opportunity for scholars unacquainted with Mormon history to explore it within the context of their own academic field. Laurie not only presented the lecture in 1999 but that same spring taught a course on Mormonism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and her continuing work in Mormon studies now spans two decades. To be sure, courses in Mormon history or Mormon studies have multiplied in many colleges and universities as part of this expanding interest in religious studies and the history of religion. This was also the time when the Smith Institute began to collaborate more closely with BYU Studies, Religious Education at BYU, and also the newly formed Family and Church History Department. Some excellent conferences came out of that collaboration, and a number of resulting publications were jointly produced by the Smith Institute and BYU Studies. As I mentioned, there was a fear, a caution, a concern at this time about Latter-day Saint women's history going off in directions that Church leaders felt might be counterproductive, including too speculative an exploration of theology, such as what Joseph Smith had intended for women in terms of priesthood authority and priesthood power.<sup>28</sup> As associate director and then director of Smith Institute, I was able to attend many meetings where BYU entities and the Family and Church History Department counseled together and coordinated efforts. Because Richard E. Turley Jr., managing director of the new department, was at those meetings, this became a great opportunity to push forward what

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28. Historical context for the concerns is insightfully discussed in Lisa Olsen Tait, "What Is Women's Relationship to Priesthood?" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2021): 241–72.

had been Maureen's agenda on the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes. Maureen had retired by this time, but it seemed like an apt setting to discuss how these minutes might possibly be published. At that time, we decided that a broader context might help readers, a context that not only included the American women's history context of the 1840s but showed how those minutes were used over time and how Relief Society developed out of the institution that Joseph Smith had founded. That possibility was so hopeful, and it seeded the attempt to publish the minutes and other documents related to Relief Society history that eventually blossomed into *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History*.<sup>29</sup>

When I saw that that project could take off (and especially after I had been given some new assignments at Smith Institute), with great foresight, I asked Carol Madsen to collaborate with me. She was an indispensable—if not the prominent—partner in that work. As the project moved forward in those early years, we also had the assistance of Jenny Reeder, Sheree Bench, and yourself.

**Silver:** I must admit, I did a little happy dance when *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* was finally published. I was so excited to see 1842 to 1892 recognized and explored. Those were powerful years. At one point, you were asked to direct the Smith Institute. Explain the opportunities and some of the responsibilities that came with that appointment.

**Derr:** It was an honor to be invited to be director. Leonard Arrington had been director of the institute until 1986, and then Ronald K. Esplin took up the post for the next sixteen years through 2002. Both played major roles in shaping the institute. By comparison, I was there really very shortly, for about two and a half years from 2003 to 2005. I worked closely with David Magleby, who was then dean of the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences, and often with Alan Wilkins, academic vice president, because there were many questions concerning BYU's role in presenting cutting-edge scholarship in Mormon history to the university and to the public. Research that was being done on the Mountain Meadows Massacre and on women was viewed as potentially controversial and divisive. After the earlier difficulty over

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29. Derr and others, *First Fifty Years of Relief Society*.

Mark Hofmann's forgeries, I think there were concerns about how much BYU wanted to publicize new historical research and include the public in discussing it. There was the need to balance what Smith Institute scholars could present within a seminar or conference and what we could present in a public lecture. Working those things out wasn't simple or without disappointment.

But certainly the biggest development for the Smith Institute was the appearance of the Joseph Smith Papers project. Larry H. and Gail Miller's funding of the project officially began, I think, in 2001. With this additional funding, the project quickly developed far beyond Dean Jessee's original work.<sup>30</sup> He had been working for years on the papers of Joseph Smith; the question was how to move that important work forward and expand it. So one by one, additional members were added to that working group. They were funded by Larry H. Miller and were part of the Smith Institute staff but not part of its faculty. That group continued to grow over the years with Ron Esplin at its head.

At the same time, Richard Bushman came to the Institute and, in cooperation with private donors, began to sponsor a summer seminar. Richard's influence was important and very much felt. Of course, because of his ongoing work on a biography of Joseph Smith, he had an interest in the development of the Joseph Smith Papers and became an important contributor to that project, but his work with summer fellows—these younger, promising graduate students—in developing the Archive of Restoration Culture and in researching aspects of other religions related to Joseph Smith's time period became singularly important. It continued for several years and became a formative experience for young scholars such as Matt Grow, Reid Neilson, Jed Woodworth, Kathleen Flake, and others. The seminar was one of the Institute's most significant and lasting contributions to Latter-day Saint scholarship.

**Silver:** You can also see the tradition of Leonard Arrington through all this, his interest in bringing people together, helping them develop their own pursuits, yet working collaboratively. It's a fine model, and it has expanded through the years.

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30. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Volume 1, Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, and *Volume 2, Journal 1832–1842* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989; 1992).

**Derr:** Leonard and Richard both have been great mentors.

**Silver:** I came into the Smith Institute about that time, in 2001 or 2002, when the women's projects were unfolding. You were at the center of that expansion. We were able to organize research groups. Claudia Bushman ran a summer seminar for young women scholars in 2003. Then Carol Madsen and I chaired a conference on Latter-day Saint women in the twentieth century that was held in 2004, the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Eliza R. Snow. Let's talk about the exciting things that happened at that time.

**Derr:** So much of the work of the Smith Institute then centered on the Joseph Smith Papers. As I mentioned, other scholars, Ron Walker particularly, were working on the Mountain Meadows Massacre with the Family and Church History Department. When I joined the Institute as director, I didn't want women's history to be lost. I believe you were working on the Emmeline Wells diaries at that time . . .

**Silver:** Yes.

**Derr:** And the Relief Society documents book was going forward with Jenny Reeder. We wanted to figure out how women's history could be established more firmly at BYU, so we called together a group of formidable consultants, including Claudia Bushman, Laurel Ulrich, Aileen Clyde, Chieko Okazaki, some BYU faculty, you [Cherry Silver], and others, and tried to decide what we could do. We came up with the idea of an initiative. Our original team was centered in the Institute, including myself, Carol Madsen, you, Sheree Bench, Jenny Reeder, and Connie Lamb of the Harold B. Lee Library, and we called ourselves the Women's History Initiative Team, the WHITs—we thought ourselves so clever, didn't we? Our name later became MWHIT, the Mormon Women's History Initiative Team. We wanted to support things already underway, such as the Summer Seminar for Sisters sponsored by Claudia Bushman,<sup>31</sup> the 2004 Conference on Mormon Women in the Twentieth Century, and some smaller seminars.

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31. Claudia L. Bushman, ed., *Summer Fellows' Papers 2003: Latter-day Saint Women in the Twentieth Century* (Provo, Utah: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 2004).

We particularly wanted to launch a variety of events in 2004, in celebration, as you said, of the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Eliza Snow. That year we sponsored four women's history lectures at the BYU Harold B. Lee Library, kicked off by my lecture, "Remembering Eliza R. Snow," delivered on her birthday, January 21, complete with birthday cake. Each of the four lectures by me, Carol Madsen, Sherilyn Bennion, and Claudia Bushman featured complementary exhibits in the library's Special Collections. Jenny Reeder put those together beautifully. It was an exciting year. It gave us a lot of visibility. We also had plans to launch a course in the BYU History Department on Latter-day Saint women's history, and that also came to fruition and has continued over the years. It is still being taught annually under the auspices of Global Women's Studies.<sup>32</sup> Then there was continuing support for other ongoing projects such as the Relief Society documents book that became *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, the Emmeline Wells biography and diaries, and the Eliza Snow poetry and biography. There was a lot going on during those two or three years.

**Silver:** It was a very satisfying time. We were looking forward, asking, Why shouldn't many researchers and historians be involved? What topics are of current importance? What methodologies ought we to be using? That quest has continued to develop and to influence results over the years.

**Derr:** Yes, I think the conferences we organized picked up where the old Utah Women's History Association had fallen off. The 2004 conference you and Carol co-chaired, and then compiled and published the proceedings of, brought in a wide circle of women. Dave Hall working on Amy Brown Lyman, thoughts about—

**Silver:** Women missionaries.

**Derr:** Women missionaries, exactly: a subject much broader than Relief Society, a look at the global experiences of Latter-day Saint women. Focusing on that subject gave us a chance to push out and get a greater contingent of women interested in Latter-day Saint women's history.<sup>33</sup>

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32. As of 2021, GWS 332 was offered each winter semester.

33. Carol Cornwall Madsen and Cherry B. Silver, eds., *New Scholarship on Latter-day Saint Women in the Twentieth Century: Selections from the Women's History Initiative Seminars, 2003–2004* (Provo, Utah: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History, 2005).

**Silver:** Then, in 2005, the dean discontinued the Smith Institute. At that time, the Joseph Smith Papers were well underwritten. What happened to your studies on Eliza R. Snow and the Relief Society documents?

**Derr:** Initially, those studies had to be placed on the back burner. Smith Institute faculty were given the choice of whether to remain at BYU as faculty members in their various departments, teaching as well as researching, or to be transferred with the Joseph Smith Papers project or the Mountain Meadows project back to the Family and Church History Department in Salt Lake City. The department had been exploring that possibility for some time. Leaders there, including Rick Turley and Steven L. Olsen, envisioned a department with a renewed emphasis on research and a larger contingent of scholars. There was the push from BYU to substantially change or disband the Institute and the pull from the Family and Church History Department to bring people up there, so yes, that resulted in a dramatic change in 2005. I made the choice to go to Salt Lake City, and my projects essentially went with me. Clearly, however, I wasn't going to have much time to work on my personal projects, since I accepted an administrative post there. One of my great sorrows was that the Mormon Women's History Initiative was not transferrable. The Family and Church History Department did not agree to take that on, but as you well know, the initiative fell into the capable hands of you and Sheree Bench. You should comment on that.

**Silver:** Richard Bushman came to us and said, "It was a great idea. If you want it to continue, you two had better do something about it." So we simply transformed the Mormon Women's History Initiative Team from an Institution-backed organization to an independent group of scholars, mostly women, interested in Latter-day Saint women's history. That has been a fruitful decision. Now we have board members from all across the country, and we have increased interest both in individual projects and in working together. I am no longer associated with MWHIT, but I applaud all that they are doing. As for the Emmeline Wells diaries, you encouraged us to continue on campus, and we did. The BYU library's Special Collections under Brad Westwood housed us in the library for a year, and then we were happily adopted by the Woman's Research Institute where Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill

gave us office space and some financial support while we continued our research.<sup>34</sup>

**Derr:** MWHIT has grown beyond anyone's wildest expectations. It is important in promoting Latter-day Saint history and essential in promoting Latter-day Saint women's history.

**Silver:** Fortunately, we have kept our minutes, so we know something about its progress.

**Derr:** That is because of Cherry, the great keeper of minutes and willing documentarian and historian. Wonderful!

**Silver:** From 2005 on, there were interesting times at the Family and Church History Department. What happened to you personally in the department until your retirement?

**Derr:** I went there in an administrative role at the request of the department's associate managing director, Steve Olsen. I joined his team and became what was strangely titled director of Church history research and development. That included an array of everything connected with scholarship and publication: the Church History Museum, the historic sites, and publications, including the Joseph Smith Papers. These were all in my portfolio; individually each of them had a division director, a section director—historic sites especially remained under Jenny Lund's direction, and the Joseph Smith Papers under Ron Esplin's.

All of this was supervised by the director's council and the executives of the department, including the amazing Church Historian, Elder Marlin K. Jensen, and Assistant Church Historian, Richard E. Turley, Jr. These were visionary leaders, and Steve Olsen pushed hard for significant changes in the department, especially a commitment to getting Church history on the web and to the worldwide Church. We have seen the fruition of his efforts and his associates' efforts and that of their successors in recent years, not only with the new Church History Library, but also with the assignment of representatives of Church history in various areas of the world, with the two volumes of

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34. Since August 2017, the Emmeline B. Wells diary project has been supported by the Church History Department. The extensive diary with introductions and annotations is being published online by the Church Historian's Press one chronological section at a time. "The Diaries of Emmeline B. Wells," The Church Historian's Press, <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/emmeline-b-wells?lang=eng>.

*Saints* already out, with the many completed volumes of the Joseph Smith Papers, and with the remarkable Church History Library website with its digitized documents and videos.

Those years, 2005 through 2008, were the beginning of that transformation, and I was happy to be part of that. It was change and more change and redirection for everyone, a lot of circling back and moving forward that was confusing, challenging, and sometimes frustrating. It was both exciting and consuming to be part of it.

**Silver:** Through those years, you still felt a passion for Eliza R. Snow and for documents connected with women's history. Did your personal research languish or prosper? What happened?

**Derr:** After 2008, those interests came back to the front burner for me. I had been promised by department leaders that they would give me time for the projects I brought from BYU, and that time opened up for me almost magically. In the meantime, Carol Madsen had been continuing her work on the Relief Society documents with help from Jenny Reeder and others, so I was able to reconnect with that project. Karen Lynn Davidson had been collaborating with me on the Eliza poetry at the recommendation of Richard Bushman. Karen and I also had help from Jenny Reeder, and we were able to finish that volume and publish it in 2009. I do have to salute Heather Seferovich, who was working for *BYU Studies* at the time, and also Linda Hunter Adams for their help. Both did significant work on that book, making it possible to publish a well-designed book in a timely fashion.<sup>35</sup>

**Silver:** It is a handsome volume, and I commend the way your excellent introductions explain the history of the Church through Eliza's poetry. Wonderful insights.

**Derr:** Thank you. I'm glad it worked that way. As for the early Relief Society papers, large parts of the work on the Relief Society documents had been completed, including the Nauvoo minutes, records from the 1850s, and some from of the 1860s. Carol Madsen had finished a lot of work on the 1880s and 1890s, enough so that we felt we had a manuscript we could ask someone to take a look at. We gave it to Assistant Church Historian Rick Turley. He had been a longtime director of the Church Historical

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35. Derr and Davidson, *Eliza R. Snow: The Complete Poetry*.

Department and scholarly contributor to Church history and had recently been working with the Joseph Smith Papers. After he read our manuscript, he said, "This really needs some work; this really needs some work."

**Silver:** Not the most reassuring response.

**Derr:** By that time, the Church Historian's Press had been established, and we had hopes of publishing this book through that press, which Rick directed at the time. He said, "I don't think that is possible without a lot of work," but he was willing to give us department support. We were able to hire some interns, and the project really took off after Matt Grow was named director of publications for the department. Matt is brilliant, capable, and efficient and had a tremendous commitment to this project. He took a hand in it personally, drafting some introductions, looking at footnotes, and helping revise other weaknesses. The progress was stunning. With the project in such capable hands and moving forward, I was able to say late in 2010 that I would retire at the end of 2011, because my husband, Brooke, and I planned to serve a mission.

With that kind of lead time, the department was able to bring on someone who would be, in many ways, my successor. We hired Kate Holbrook, a remarkable scholar in her own right and a superb networker who significantly expanded the department's work in women's history. Kate and I held overlapping positions for six months, a significant time for passing the baton and a thoroughly enjoyable collaboration. Kate became totally immersed in the Relief Society documents project. She had not done a lot of work on the Relief Society, so this was great training for her. I remember her laughing and saying one day, "They just videotaped me making some comments, and I got the founding date of Relief Society wrong!" But not for long; Kate got a real grasp of women's history and made such a contribution. The project was well underway when Brooke and I left for our mission at the beginning of 2012. I was able to keep in close touch to review new introductions to documents and chapters and yet have this great force at the Church History Department refining the manuscript to make it so much stronger and more scholarly, in line with the standards of the Joseph Smith Papers. After we returned from our mission in 2013, I was able to assist with the final edits, and the book was published by the Church

Historian's Press in 2016 under the title *The First Fifty Years: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History*.

**Silver:** Then, after you and your husband returned from your mission, you four editors had time to present your work and explain the project to a large readership in interviews and podcasts. I was very happy to see that volume. I took it to my ward while we were celebrating the anniversary of the founding of the Relief Society in March and showed it around as a great treasure. Most of the sisters looked at it and said, "That's a very large book."

**Derr:** Yes, it's 767 pages. And I really cannot say enough about the individuals the Church History Department has employed to make such projects possible. Another great satisfaction for me before I retired was that the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes, with a transcription, were actually published as part of the online Joseph Smith Papers. Even before the print volume came out, those critically important minutes became available online for everyone to read and study, and that was a great day of celebration for me. As you said, we had been working with an old transcript of the minutes for what, thirty years?

**Silver:** Jill, before you retired, you must have had some concerns about what would happen to your work and your interests in women's history. Explain the shift within the Church History Department after your departure.

**Derr:** Yes, as I mentioned, I planned my retirement about a year in advance, and during that year, especially the first six months before Kate Holbrook came aboard, I worked with two colleagues in the Church History Department—Cathy Chamberlain and Marilyn Foster—to try to formulate a plan for continuing women's history. Cathy was a consultant to the Church History Department who had been hired several years earlier when concerns arose about how to market the Joseph Smith Papers and how to make Church history more accessible to Church members. She was brilliant at that. She had a particular interest in the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes and helped push for their publication. Marilyn Foster was the director of communications in the Church History Department.

I talked with them about my concerns for keeping women's history alive in the department once I left, given that support for projects in women's history had rested largely on my shoulders.

Both of them said that it was not possible for one person to be the sole advocate for women's history. If the study of women's history depended on one person, it was likely to die out at some point without greater institutional support. Both women recommended that we work with Church History Department leaders to make women's history an integral part of the department, and that was what happened. Marilyn Foster, being on the director's council, was able to push for women's history to be a priority beginning in 2012, the year after I retired. It was one of three or four department priorities that year. This new priority was realized through a series of Church History Library lectures, and, most importantly, it helped shape the structure of Kate Holbrook's appointment. She would not just be over a couple of women's history projects but manage women's history generally.<sup>36</sup>

That approach bore great fruit because not only did Kate come aboard to direct women's history, but Jenny Reeder and Lisa Olsen Tait were also hired as full-time employees. Britany Chapman Nash in the Church History Library remained a significant contributor. These women have expanded the visibility and accessibility of women's history. They have worked with the Relief Society Presidency, for example, on their concerns about women's history, published a significant collection of women's discourses, and begun work on a new history of the Young Women's organization.<sup>37</sup> This team has a strong presence in the department. The new commitment to women's history informed the way the *Saints* volumes developed to feature both men's and women's stories in an engaging narrative of Church history. The two women I mentioned earlier, Cathy Chamberlain and Marilyn Foster, along with this new team of women historians, have to be given credit for helping to shape a new day in women's history at the Church History Department.

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36. The new support for women's history facilitated a 2012 conference on Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency, with proceedings published in *Women and Mormonism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Kate Holbrook and Matthew Bowman (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016).

37. Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook, eds., *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2017). This volume and *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* have been made accessible online, along with *The Discourses of Eliza R. Snow* and *The Diaries of Emmeline B. Wells* at <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/publications>.

**Silver:** In concluding our conversation, I invite you to reflect more generally on the writing of Latter-day Saint women's history during your career. What have been the trends in examining the lives and contributions of women in the nineteenth century? What approaches have been fruitful in these studies?

**Derr:** Initially, when Maureen Beecher, Carol Madsen, and I worked as a team at the History Division under Leonard Arrington, we focused on the "women worthies," the most famous women and their lives, in order to begin to include a few of the women who were missing from history at that time. We looked to the women who had had a significant public presence, to women who made a difference in politics or economics. At that time, the world generally defined achievement in these fields as success. Things have changed over the years, and social history has taken on greater significance. One important shift was the turn toward exploring the personal writings of women. Another has been the new attention paid to the collective work of women, beginning to unpack their institutional minutes, or looking at women's discourse as it appears in those minutes or particularly in their *Exponent* articles or their poetry. Susanna Morrill did beautiful work by looking at the poetry of Latter-day Saint women as it appeared in the *Exponent* as their means of expressing theology.<sup>38</sup>

Our horizons have expanded over the years.<sup>39</sup> We're more interested in lesser-known women and their writings and experiences. As we have moved forward, different approaches have greatly expanded the field. Studies such as Jenny Reeder's work on Eliza Snow's gold watch reflect increased interest in material culture.<sup>40</sup> Work on quilts is also material culture, as is the study of the ways that women express themselves in their cooking. Kate Holbrook has started to look at food as a way of revealing women's lives and even their religious experiences or

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38. Susanna Morrill, *White Roses on the Floor of Heaven: Mormon Women's Popular Theology, 1880–1920* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

39. Todd Compton provides a significant historiographical overview in "New Mormon Women's History," in *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2004), 273–302.

40. Jennifer Reeder, "Eliza R. Snow and the Prophet's Gold Watch: Time Keeper as Relic," *Journal of Mormon History* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 119–41.

expressions.<sup>41</sup> Of course, we see now lots of fresh approaches and new topics. Taunalyn Rutherford's wonderful work on women in India and other innovative work on women in Europe and in Asia have shown us the experiences of Latter-day Saint women from other parts of the globe.<sup>42</sup> These projects will tell us something about what our faith means to women as it is expressed through a different culture.

Theological inquiry, once so suspect, is now being embraced more readily, especially since scholars can compare the Latter-day Saint experience with that of women in other faiths: with the experiences of Jewish women or Muslim women or evangelical women. In the world generally, all of these topics are being addressed, so all of a sudden Latter-day Saint scholars or scholars studying Latter-day Saint women have the possibility of comparing them with women in other religions. Scholars such as Catherine Brekus bring this broader perspective to looking at Latter-day Saint women.<sup>43</sup> Gender studies have become increasingly important, and closer readings of women's documents continue to provide new insights. Laurel Ulrich's recent book, *A House Full of Females*, draws from women's diaries along with men's to offer an intriguing integrated history of the lived realities of plural marriage.<sup>44</sup> I think it is exciting that minute books for the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary are being digitized, because now so many more women will be able to explore the history they reveal.

**Silver:** I was surprised when one young female scholar was told by a dissertation advisor, "You have a pretty good topic, but where are you going to find material about women, enough to be able to write a major study?" No problem now in finding sources. We

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41. Kate Holbrook, "Good to Eat: Culinary Priorities among Mormons and the Nation of Islam," *Anthology on Religion, Food, and Eating in North America*, ed. Ben Zeller and others (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

42. For example, see Taunalyn Rutherford, "Shifting Focus to Global Mormonism: The LDS Church in India," in *The Worldwide Church: Mormonism as a Global Religion*, ed. Michael A. Goodman and Mauro Properzi (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2016). 71–94.

43. Catherine A. Brekus, "Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 58–87.

44. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

have only to open our eyes and harvest what is there. This has been a fascinating discussion. Do you have any final comments?

**Derr:** My final comment would be to echo something Carol Cornwall Madsen said years ago in her memorable address to the Mormon History Association. She talked about lots of different approaches to Latter-day Saint women's history and about the women who were hidden and have now become visible. She said that uncovering these women has helped her to discover herself.<sup>45</sup> For any Latter-day Saint woman who studies the history of Latter-day Saint women, that emerging self-discovery is probably the greatest blessing. In many ways, I feel that my life has unfolded as it has because of these dear and wonderful women of the past. I will be eternally grateful.

**Silver:** Thank you so much. You have helped us see that Latter-day Saint women's history is not only a work of paying tribute but of finding joy and companionship in the present and through the past. Heartfelt thanks for your decades of work with women's history and the views you have set forth today.

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Cherry Bushman Silver is coeditor of the Emmeline B. Wells diaries project. She was a research historian at the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at Brigham Young University under Jill Mulvay Derr and worked on the executive committee of the Mormon Women's History Initiative Team.

Jill Mulvay Derr has studied the history of Latter-day Saint women for more than four decades. She worked in the History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints under the direction of two Church Historians: Leonard J. Arrington and Marlin K. Jensen. In the course of research and teaching at Brigham Young University, she became Associate Professor of Church History and later Managing Director of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History.

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45. Carol Cornwall Madsen, "'Feme Covert': Journey of a Metaphor," *Journal of Mormon History* 17 (1991): 61.