

# Introduction to the Journal of Emma Lorena Barrows Brown

*The everyday activities of one woman bring to life the roles of a Relief Society leader, the interactions of a small farming community, and the tedium of a frontier settler's chores.*

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Since the 1970s, many historians have shifted the focus of their studies to include subjects that were not deemed worthy of note a generation before. Where once historians considered a political history of rulers sufficient as a record of a nation, they now attempt to investigate human activity more broadly, dwelling on common cultural and social structures as much as on elite politics. The new historians seek to discover "history from below,"<sup>1</sup> through close examination of material related to previously overlooked or underprivileged segments of society. Every aspect of human activity now falls under the historians' lens that seeks to illuminate the local and the marginalized.<sup>2</sup>

Mormon historians have also begun to uncover nontraditional voices, focusing on individual memoirs and experiences to add depth to the well-established patterns of "official history."<sup>3</sup> The study of Mormon women's history has blossomed in the past twenty years partly as an outgrowth of this movement; a growing number of scholars are eager to study and publish women's writings—letters, autobiographies, and journals. Such personal records allow an immediate glance into the daily routines, thoughts, and social worlds of those who write them and help scholars reconstruct the female side of the Mormon experience.<sup>4</sup> This article provides a segment taken from the five-year journal of Emma Lorena Barrows Brown, a woman living in the farming community of Charleston, Utah, in the 1870s.



Emma Lorena Barrows was the second child of Ethan Barrows and Lorena Covey. Born in Nauvoo, Illinois, on October 1, 1843, she and her family crossed the plains in 1850 with the Evans Company. In 1858 she married into polygamy as the second wife of George Washington Brown, who was one of the original party to cross the plains with Brigham Young. Emma Lorena's only child, Ethan Leonard Brown, was born ten months after she married. When George's first wife, Amy Elizabeth Hancock, died in childbirth in 1862, Emma Lorena raised Amy's three surviving boys: George Washington Brown (who died in 1874 after being kicked by a horse), Isaac Nathaniel, and Brigham John. Adding one more generation to this complex household, George's mother, Avis Hill Brown McBride,<sup>5</sup> came to live with them in her later years; she died in 1884. Emma Lorena and George moved from Salt Lake City to Kamas, Utah; Simpson Springs, Nevada; then back to Utah—first to Springville, Wallsburg, and Heber before they finally settled in Charleston in 1866. Both are buried in the Charleston cemetery.

A careful reading of the personal journal of this relatively unknown woman exposes a whole community. In her 115-page journal, Emma Lorena records the types of enterprises that regularly filled her days for the four and a half years from January 1878 through June 1882. The segment published here spans the period from January 1, 1878, through September 30, 1879, and describes an ambitious listing of activities such as washing, entertaining, sewing, dressing the dead, making cheese, voting, teaching Sunday School, dancing, attending concerts, participating in poetry readings, gathering wheat for the Relief Society, presiding over conferences, speaking to groups of women, gardening, preserving fruit, whitewashing, and quilting. Through her daily accounts, Emma Lorena comments on the weather, church meetings, social events, household concerns, employment, and political involvement. The life she records sheds light on local and Mormon history. Conditions in Heber Valley in the late nineteenth century come to life under her daily observation, and seasonal patterns shape her activities. She profiles the roles of a stake Relief Society president and social interactions within the Mormon community. Even the tedious chores of a frontier settler are vividly recounted in Emma Lorena's narrative.



Her daily entries concisely state the major events of the day, dwelling in greatest detail on interactions with other people. She tells about the frequent visits to and from friends and neighbors. Like many other women of her day, Emma Lorena actively corresponded by mail with her female friends.<sup>6</sup> None of the letters she wrote are known to have survived, but in her journal she notes the time she spends writing to Maria McRea, Eliza R. Snow, and various family members.<sup>7</sup> The receipt of a letter would often also warrant a comment in the day's tally of events.

Emma Lorena names Louisa Bagley, Betsy Murdock, Lizzie Hanks, Lavina Sweat, and Amy Wing as young ladies from neighboring families whom she employed in her home.<sup>8</sup> One of these young women, Lizzie Hanks, would later become her daughter-in-law, perhaps partly through the friendship that grew while she spent time with the Browns. Emma Lorena also writes of frequent visits with her stepson Isaac and his wife, Eliza Rocksina Murdock, or Sina.

Even the things Emma Lorena chooses to leave out can reveal something of her nature and the purpose she intended for her journal. For example, she never reveals her opinions or feelings about an event. Even when strong emotions must have been present, as when her grandchild dies, Emma Lorena does not comment past the bare fact and her action taken in response to it. On Monday, December 8, 1878, she writes only that she "heard that Isaac baby was dead;" on Tuesday she "went to Isaac and Staid all day;" on Wednesday she "burried Isaac baby went to the furnel."

When such tragedies and other unusual events arose, Emma Lorena may have "pondered them in her heart" (Matt. 2:19) but not in her journal. The bare facts she does record can give rise to imaginative speculation at times, however. On September 28, 1878, she writes, "George went to Heber with a laady." What was the reason for this trip? Could it have been a courtship that failed to come to a polygamous conclusion? Or was George simply helping someone in need? Why does she leave out the name of this lady and of certain other people who enter her journal's pages?<sup>9</sup> The glaring absence of introspection makes reading between the lines essential to a fuller understanding of her life.<sup>10</sup> However, dramatization and speculation can obscure the straightforward simplicity of her narrative.



Emma Lorena's journal entries range from two words ("at home") to a dozen lines. She uses her journal for short factual annotations, not for literary treatises. Carol Cornwall Madsen has identified several reasons for which nineteenth-century Mormon women wrote diaries, including a desire to express themselves in a lasting form, a drive to record spiritual growth and introspection, or a need to assert themselves as individuals. Women also wrote to record individual responses to historic events.<sup>11</sup> In Emma Lorena's journal, the longest journal entries almost invariably detail activities connected with her "public capacity" in the Relief Society. Perhaps she envisioned her journal as an official, instead of a personal, history, or perhaps the two realms had merged since much of her time was taken up with Relief Society business.

Evidently Emma Lorena wrote more detail in her letters than in her journal. When a problem arose with local Church leaders who wanted to appropriate wheat belonging to the Relief Society, she "wrote a letter to Sister E R Snow" about the matter (January 6, 1880) but on February 6, confided in her journal only the following: "Went to a Society meeting at Sister Taylor Bp Murdock over trying to get the Society Wheat brought Bro Giles from Heber [a member of the Stake presidency and doubtless a figure of considerable authority] to talk to the Sisters." By this time, Emma Lorena would have received a reply from Eliza Snow which describes the dispute and illuminates Emma Lorena's original journal entry. The letter admonishes Emma Lorena to "let things go as they may, we will not quarrel with the Priesthood, altho' it is in 'earthen vessels.'" <sup>12</sup> The letter also contained practical advice passed on from President John Taylor regarding the proper manner of selling the wheat (the profits must be returned to the sisters for investment in more wheat). Armed with this letter, Emma Lorena must have carried the day at the "Society meeting": her phrase "*trying* to get the Society Wheat" (italics added) is telling in this connection.

Evidence from letters written to Emma Lorena from her mother and her sister indicate an openness not present in her journal, as when her forthright mother says, "Emma what has become of you that you do not write and let us know what you are a goin to do Emma I think that you hav forgotten that you hav got a mother . . .



you may forgit us all but you will never be forgotten by eny of us.”<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Emma Lorena, like her mother, found the format of a letter more conducive to personal disclosure than a journal.

As years passed, Emma Lorena would have found fewer and fewer free moments for reflection and letter writing. In 1874 the leader of the Charleston Relief Society moved away, and Emma Lorena, who had been acting as counselor and secretary, was appointed president. Forty-two women were enrolled in the Charleston Relief Society in 1874; an average of twenty-one attended the meetings, which were held every two weeks in a private home. The meetings consisted of charitable efforts such as sewing clothing and quilts for the poor and of spiritual enlightenment through testimonies and through Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants lectures and readings.<sup>14</sup> Emma Lorena continued to lead the Charleston Relief Society until September 1879, at which time Eliza R. Snow and Emmeline B. Wells organized the Wasatch Stake Relief Society and called her as its president.<sup>15</sup>

In many ways, Emma Lorena Brown was a suitable choice. Her experience leading the ward Relief Society taught her much about the workings of the Relief Society and prepared her well for the greater responsibilities of serving in the stake organization. Since at least 1875, she had corresponded on Relief Society business with Eliza Snow, who sent letters to her with such affectionate address as “my very dear sister” and “My Dearly Beloved Sister.”<sup>16</sup>

Minutes of the meetings President Brown held note that she exhorted the sisters to attend their meetings regularly and promptly. She encouraged them to faithfully fulfill their duties and to know that they would be blessed for so doing, and she asked ward presidents to express the problems of the various societies freely. She comes across with humor and spunk: on November 5, 1886, the secretary reported that President Brown “spoke strongly” on the Word of Wisdom. Demonstrating a staunch belief in the importance of Relief Society, she taught on September 29, 1892, that whenever company arrived at her house on Relief Society day, she would invite them to go along with her rather than stay home and visit.<sup>17</sup> A note of disappointment is sounded in her journal on January 17, 1878, when because of her husband’s ill health she



wistfully wrote, “it was Society Meeting but I didnt go to Meeting.” Despite Emma Lorena’s Relief Society responsibilities, she was also committed to her family. She shows her concern for their well-being with the simple words “All well” that she often wrote upon her return from an extended trip.

Emma Lorena Barrows Brown’s journal covers an exciting time in church organization. In the 1870s, several wards were organized in Heber Valley. The congregations, divided geographically and called by the names of the towns of Charleston, Wallsburch, Center Creek, Heber, Midway, and later Buysville, made up the “Wasatch Stake of Zion” covering Heber Valley. Emma Lorena was actively involved in the leadership of the stake Relief Society, the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association, and Primary organization; her husband, George Washington Brown, served from 1877 until 1901 as one of the stake high councilors.<sup>18</sup> The couple’s constant involvement in church administration meant a great deal of travel to various local and general meetings, as seen in the large numbers of people mentioned in Emma Lorena’s journal, in her continual visits to the wards of Wasatch Stake, and in the trips she makes to Salt Lake City to attend conferences.

When in Salt Lake City, Emma Lorena would often visit her extended family. Among Emma Lorena’s relatives in Salt Lake City during the time of this journal were her father, Ethan Barrows; his second wife, Lucy Hardy (Emma Lorena’s mother had died in 1869); and their son, Charles Henry—Emma Lorena’s half-brother. Emma Lorena’s siblings also lived in Salt Lake City: Leonard Ethan Barrows, whom Emma Lorena records as coming to Charleston for extended visits; Brigham Young Barrows (“Brig”); Benjamin Joseph Barrows; Permelia Eveline Barrows; and Elmira Barrows (“Milly” or “Mira”).

Emma Lorena tells briefly of events and activities in which she participated that were part of the grand sweep of history in her day. From 1870 to 1887, a seventeen-year window of women’s suffrage was opened in Utah; the Edmunds-Tucker Act nullified this progressive legislation, but Emma Lorena capitalized on the opportunity while it was available. For three consecutive years, 1878–80, she records going to vote on the first Monday in August.<sup>19</sup>



The Edmunds-Tucker Act was partly aimed at crippling the practice of polygamy in Utah; in this practice as well, Emma Lorena was a woman of her day. She had married polygamously in 1858 at the age of fourteen, and she based her official support of polygamy on her personal experience. As one of her Relief Society responsibilities, she presided over a "Mass Meeting" of the ladies of Charleston on January 6, 1879, when she "stated that as the Gentile ladies of Salt Lake City had got up a petition to abolish polygamy, we, as sisters believing in plural marriage, wish to oppose them."<sup>20</sup> In rallying to display their support for polygamy, Mormon women showed the Eastern press that they had the capacity to speak for themselves in the causes they espoused.<sup>21</sup>

In connection with her leadership role in the Relief Society, Emma Lorena led meetings and spoke in public. A rare event among mainstream Protestant denominations, public speaking by a woman had led one nervous Baptist in 1819 to declare "that woman appears to me lost to modesty and prudence, who has boldness enough to teach or exhort where men are present."<sup>22</sup> Perhaps her own modesty and a case of nerves caused Emma Lorena to record that she was ill all night following her first appearance as the Wasatch Stake Relief Society president: "Presied [presided] over the first Relief Society Conferance in Wasatch Stake had a very good Conferance came home and was sick all night" (December 5, 1879). Given Emma Lorena's experience in conducting meetings, however, this illness may have been caused by something other than nerves.

Emma Lorena finally succumbed to the effects of a long-standing heart ailment and an internal cancer on December 8, 1897. Despite the little her journal reveals of her personality, Emma Lorena's constant efforts in doing good works for her family, community, and church show her to have been a committed and stalwart soul. The esteem with which her descendants remember her pays tribute to her life, as does the comment of her daughter-in-law, Sarah Elizabeth Hanks Brown: "If there was ever an angel on earth, she was one."<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, the study of nineteenth-century Mormon women's journals brings the readers closer to an understanding of how the writer of the journal saw her life as it happened. The unstudied quality of such records gives them an



immediacy unavailable in reminiscences gathered later in life. Of such records Wallace Stegner wrote:

There is another physical law that teases me, too: the Doppler Effect. The sound of anything coming at you—a train, say, or the future—has a higher pitch than the sound of the same thing going away. If you have perfect pitch and a head for mathematics you can compute the speed of the object by the interval between its arriving and departing sounds. I have neither perfect pitch nor a head for mathematics, and anyway who wants to compute the speed of history? Like all falling bodies, it constantly accelerates. But I would like to hear your life as *you* heard it, coming at you, instead of hearing it as I do, a sober sound of expectations reduced, desires blunted, hopes deferred or abandoned, chances lost, defeats accepted, griefs borne. I don't find your life uninteresting. . . . I would like to hear it as it sounded while it was passing.<sup>24</sup>

The immediacy of this particular journal must come under careful scrutiny. The journal appears to have been copied from another written source, and in certain places, clear signs of editing occur. On September 25, 1878, for example, Emma Lorena first writes, "Sent Ethan some vittels." Apparently some time later, she crosses out the last word in favor of "Provision." On October 10, 1878, she writes "&" over her original "and." In neither case does the change affect the meaning, which seems to indicate a concern for the finer points of style.

In a curious sequence inserted after Monday, September 9, the entries of August 12 through September 9 are repeated with some variations. The significance of these variations lies in their indication that Emma Lorena was not simply copying out each entry. In some cases, she gives more detail in one entry than in the former for that date; in most, the wording differs at least slightly. Why would such duplication have occurred in her journal? In another puzzling sequence during June 1879, she seems to have gotten three days ahead of herself for six entries, before crossing out the errors and correcting the dates. These and other mysteries inevitably arise when we examine the written record of another era. From the basic problems of deciphering handwriting to the particulars of the motive and feeling behind an ambiguous expression, the reality underlying a written record slips through the grasp of readers



distant in time and custom. Nevertheless, while accepting its inherent limitations, we can learn a great deal from such a record.

Emma Lorena Brown writes with a regular hand, frequently jamming in an extra word or letter above the line at the end of an entry, a practice that suggests a frugal desire to avoid wasting a line. I have inserted her superscriptions back into the text without comment, except where an extended statement was added later. Lowercase *m*, *n*, *e*, and *s* are not always distinguishable from their capitals; where capitalization is unclear, I have tried to follow her general use of capitalization, working from cases where it is distinct. Final *R*s and *E*s tend to disappear; *O*s and *A*s are easily confused. Again I have endeavored to establish the most likely use given the context. Her spelling, although irregular by modern standards, does conform to the vocalization patterns she would have used. Twice she changes her format for marking the dates (on January 28, 1878, and on Monday, June 24, 1878), and the transcription duly reflects these changes. To conserve space in the printed version, the entries for each week are grouped into one paragraph, and the dates are boldfaced to distinguish one entry from another.

I have worked from a photocopy of the journal, which is in the possession of Reta DeeAnne Clark Whetten and Fern Brown Holt Robinson. The original journal is held by Jean Duke Howe. I am grateful to the descendants of Emma Lorena Barrows Brown and especially DeeAnne Whetten, for bringing the journal to my attention, allowing me the pleasure of working with it, and patiently supplying background information. Pauline Musig at the LDS Church Archives spent several hours helping me find obscure records, for which I thank her. Susanne Roberts helped formulate questions and consider a variety of answers, besides giving helpful criticism. I am especially grateful to Maureen Ursenbach Beecher for her incredible supply of knowledge, enthusiasm, and resources and for her willingness to share them. Many thanks are due my husband, my father, and my mother for constant support and encouragement. A portion of the expenses of the project were carried by the Richter Summer Fellowship, granted by the Calhoun College Master's Office, Yale University.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 4.

<sup>2</sup>Burke, *New Perspectives*, 1-23. Burke's first chapter, "Overture: The New History, Its Past and Its Future," outlines very concisely the differences between this "new history" and previously practiced methods of studying history.

<sup>3</sup>This new emphasis on nontraditional sources is well explained and documented in D. Michael Quinn, ed., *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), vii-xi.

<sup>4</sup>As examples of each of these types of writings, see S. George Ellsworth, *Dear Ellen: Two Mormon Women and Their Letters* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1974); Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography by Annie Clark Tanner* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1976); and Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr, *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982). Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), is an excellent example of how these sources can be put to use.

<sup>5</sup>She is the "Grandmother" to whom Emma occasionally referred.

<sup>6</sup>For a detailed study of female correspondence, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29.

<sup>7</sup>Maria McRea was a friend who at the time of the journal entries lived in Arizona; Eliza R. Snow was an important leader of the female community in the LDS Church.

<sup>8</sup>Emma Lorena's lack of daughters may have necessitated the exploitation of willing neighborhood girls for assistance in the household chores. For a similar practice in late eighteenth-century New England, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1788-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 80-82.

<sup>9</sup>For example, on April 10, 1878, "a Dainish man" ate dinner at her house; on May 24, 1879, "a Man & his wife" stayed the night.

<sup>10</sup>Judy Nolte Lensink explores this idea in "Expanding the Boundaries of Criticism: The Diary as Female Autobiography," *Women's Studies* 14 (1987): 39-53. Lensink has reference to writings by women who tended toward far greater loquacity than Emma Lorena Brown, however, so her assertion that the topics on which women remained silent were taboo items may not hold much relevance in Emma Lorena's case.

<sup>11</sup>Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Women's Traces: The Words They Left Behind," in *Women and the Power Within: To See Life Steadily and See It Whole*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson and Marie Cornwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 193-212.

<sup>12</sup>Eliza R. Snow to Emma Lorena Barrows Brown, January 19, 1880, in possession of Jean Duke Howe.

<sup>13</sup>Lorena Covey Barrows to Emma Lorena Barrows Brown, n.d., photocopy in possession of the author, courtesy of DeeAnne Clark Whetten and Fern Brown Holt.



<sup>14</sup>Charleston Ward Relief Society History Book, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

<sup>15</sup>Carlie C. Tidwell, "Brief Sketch of Wasatch Stake Relief Society from Its Organization June 7, 1869 to June 7, 1915," LDS Church Archives.

<sup>16</sup>Eliza R. Snow to Emma Brown, February 17, 1883, photocopy in possession of the author, courtesy of DeeAnne Clark Whetten and Jean Duke Howe; Eliza R. Snow to Emma Brown, March 2, 1887, in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, comp. Kate B. Carter, 20 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958-77), 17:384.

<sup>17</sup>Relief Society Minutes Book of Wasatch Stake Relief Society, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>18</sup>John M. Calderwood, "History of the Wallsburgh [sic] Ward, Wasatch Stake," LDS Church Archives; Wasatch Stake Historical Notes, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>19</sup>Brown's journal covers a five-year period, but the journal is incomplete in 1881 and breaks off before August of 1882, so these three citations are the only times she mentions voting.

<sup>20</sup>From the report of the meeting published in the *Woman's Exponent* 7 (February 1, 1879): 189.

<sup>21</sup>Much of the background information in this section can be found in Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 110-49.

<sup>22</sup>George Keely, quoted in Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 158.

<sup>23</sup>Biographical information drawn from the following family genealogical data in possession of DeeAnne Clark Whetten: Lucile Brown White (granddaughter of Emma L. and George W. Brown), "History of Emma Lorena Barrows Brown," typescript, 1978; Lucile Brown White, "History of George Washington Brown" typescript, 1978; Ethan Leonard Brown, "Life History of Ethan Leonard Brown," as told to Reta Brown Clark, typescript, n.d.; and obituary in *Woman's Exponent* 26 (January 1-15, 1898): 237.

<sup>24</sup>Wallace Stegner, *Angle of Repose* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), 24-25, emphasis in original.