

JENNIFER MOULTON HANSEN, ed. *Letters of Catharine Cottam Romney, Plural Wife*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992. xvii; 317 pp. 24 illustrations, 3 maps, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

MARIA S. ELLSWORTH, ed. *Mormon Odyssey: The Story of Ida Hunt Udall, Plural Wife*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992. xiv; 296 pp. 9 illustrations, 4 maps, 2 appendixes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

STAN LARSON, ed. *Prisoner for Polygamy: The Memoirs and Letters of Rudger Clawson at the Utah Territorial Penitentiary, 1884-87*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993. x; 256 pp. 15 illustrations, 4 appendixes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

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While a considerable corpus of works on plural marriage already exists, the number continues to multiply. The three works under review, each detailing the life of a polygamist or plural wife, reveal the diversity of experience in plural marriage, a diversity that partly explains the continuing fascination with the subject.

In general, works about polygamy deal with its most dramatic and problematic periods—its controversial origins in Nauvoo or its demise at the end of the nineteenth century, entailing flights from U.S. marshals, life on the underground, time in prison, and secrecy. These three books concern the latter period.

To be sure, the period has been covered elsewhere, including B. Carmon Hardy's recent *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage*.¹ Some primary documents from the period have also been published, such as the oft-quoted autobiography of Annie Clark Tanner.² The edited journals, memoirs, and letters being reviewed are significant additions to the body of published primary works.

Two of the books portray the experiences of plural wives, while the third describes prison life for a polygamist. That the three books be reviewed together is fitting, not only because the subjects of these books were contemporaries, but also because their lives intersected. The two plural wives, Ida Udall and Catharine Romney,

fled together from St. Johns, Arizona, to hide from U.S. marshals, and later Rudger Clawson took a daughter of Ida's husband, David Udall, as a plural wife.

Mormon Odyssey tells the story of Ida Hunt Udall, who became the second wife of David K. Udall in 1882. Her birthday book provides an overview of her life, while her 1882–86 journal, including excerpts of her correspondence with her husband, details the early years of her marriage. The remainder of Ida's life—about a fourth of the text—is supplied by Maria Ellsworth, who is thus not only editor but also author.

Unlike Ida Hunt Udall's journal, Catharine Cottam Romney's letters, dating from 1873 through 1917, cover the entire period of her plural marriage to Miles P. Romney, although not evenly. Because most of the letters are addressed to her parents and siblings, the ten years Catharine lived in St. George after her marriage are treated only in brief sections provided by the editor, Jennifer Moulton Hansen. Additional brief sections fill in other gaps or provide historical background.

Rudger Clawson's memoirs are limited to the three years he spent in the Utah penitentiary. (His diaries from 1898 to 1904, also edited by Stan Larson, have recently been published.³) Clawson revised his prison memoirs several times. The editor mainly relies on the last version, typed in the 1930s, although he incorporates portions of earlier manuscripts in this published version. The descriptions of prison life—the noxious odors, the noise and confusion, the inedible food, the hungry bedbugs—are vivid. At least as compelling are the seventeen well-chosen, chaste, yet passionate letters from Clawson to his wife Lydia.

A question frequently asked about polygamy is, How happy were plural families? Catharine Romney's letters shed light on how one plural wife found happiness, or at least uncomplaining contentment. She endured many trials—unremitting hard work, dire poverty, and separation from her husband—but she persisted in looking for whatever was positive in her situation. After writing her parents from Mexico that water was scarce, that their garden had frozen, and that seven horses had been stolen, she concluded:

Truly there are many things to discourage the people here, as well as some to encourage. . . . People who have been struggling on here

for two years and over and living on faith as it were, have to continue to so live, seeing but a short distance ahead of them at a time but still I have no doubt but there will be a brighter day in the near future. (125)

Discouragements abounded, but she refused to be discouraged. Such optimism also pervades her accounts about her husband and sister-wives. Her only complaints were about separations from them. Having gone into hiding to avoid U.S. marshals in 1884, she wrote that her absence from loved ones was “a long *long* four months,” a mild complaint indeed (99). Such optimism characterized all her letters, not only to her monogamist parents, to whom she may have wanted to show the best side of her polygamous marriage, but also to siblings and close friends.

Ida Udall was not so consistently cheerful. When her husband’s first wife, Ella, resented Ida’s and David’s marriage, Ida lamented in her journal:

Oh! if she could only feel happy and reconciled, I should feel that my life was indeed a happy one. Why is it, that in carrying out the commandments of God, his children need be so sorely tried? (55)

Her greatest trial, however, stemmed not from plural marriage itself, but rather from the legal attempt to disrupt it. During her two-and-a-half-year exile while she hid from marshals, her journal was scattered with phrases like “depression of spirit” (133), “sadly depressed” (106), and “thus cruelly exiled, banished” (146). She even got angry, not at Ella, but at David when he canceled a long-anticipated visit, although she soon repented of her anger. Yet except for this brief, if notable, outburst, Ida simply described events if she could not write glowingly of her sister-wives, their children, or her husband. She praised Ella’s willingness to nurse her through a difficult illness, grieved when Ella’s daughter died, and worried that Ella worked too hard. To her husband, she wrote letters full of love and devotion. Happiness in plural marriage came by emphasizing whatever was good and overlooking—or at least quickly forgiving—the slights, the differences, and the difficulties.

The reader might well question, however, how happy Ida’s marriage was. Particularly in that portion written by the editor, Ida is depicted as lonely, overworked, and unfairly treated. Undoubtedly

Ida lived a difficult life, but the complaints about her problems came from her daughter Pauline, not from Ida. The statement, for example, that David Udall bought an organ for Ella but that Ida had to pay for her own is based solely on information from Pauline (195, 273n). Pauline is undoubtedly reliable about Ida's finances, but whether she was so intimate with the facts about Ella's finances is questionable, especially when Ella earned money at various endeavors to help support the family. Relying on Pauline's statements, the author (Pauline's daughter) also claims that after Ida's disabling strokes Ella was kind to Ida but never took personal care of her (222). Pauline's brother Don, however, wrote that Ella "graciously waited on Ida and gave much time and attention to her needs."⁴ Children's perspectives on plural marriage are important, but they are not necessarily those of the parents, or even of other children.

Beyond their insights about plural marriage, these books also provide a wealth of information on everyday life. Housing (from wagon boxes and tents to bungalows), food (mostly homegrown), and clothes ("good Salt Lake shoes are a treasure," Hansen, 86) are only a few of the topics addressed. Although neither editor puts her subject into a national context, the Udall and Romney families clearly were organized to produce rather than consume. Even with children working from a young age on the farm or in other family enterprises, neither family had the resources to buy many consumer goods. With their many children, these plural families continued to produce most of their own food and clothing, thus remaining outside the consumerism enveloping turn-of-the-century America.

These firsthand accounts may at times seem repetitious, but the frequent references to illnesses, work, and visits reveal much about the quality of these women's lives. Even without the methods Laurel Thatcher Ulrich used so skillfully to analyze Martha Ballard's diary,⁵ readers of these two books can discern that sickness was ever present, finances were ever meager, and work was never done.

Equally revealing about everyday life are Clawson's memoirs describing life in prison. In his introduction to the memoirs, Stan Larson fits the document into the genre of prison literature, although

unfortunately the publisher omitted the endnotes for that section. While Larson does not compare the Utah Territorial Prison to other late nineteenth-century prisons, he puts Clawson's memoirs into the context of other polygamists' prison experiences, using their journals to amplify a topic or give further examples. In addition, he includes lists of all prisoners from 1884 to 1895 incarcerated for LDS plural marriage and also of their most important firsthand accounts of prison life—a valuable contribution to those wanting to pursue the subject.

In many ways, Clawson's experiences represent those of other prisoners. All endured the monotonous routine, ate the same unpalatable food, wore the same striped clothing, were punished in the same sweatbox, and longed for home. Clawson's experience was unique, however, because he was the first polygamist to enter the Utah penitentiary. No friendly face greeted him with sympathy; instead, his fellow prisoners welcomed him with phrases like "get the rope" and "hang him" (42). His experience was also unusual in its length: most served less than a year, while he served more than three.

How representative Ida Udall and Catharine Romney are is more difficult to assess. Certainly, many other plural wives similarly pioneered new regions, and the broad picture of hard work and poverty sketched by Ida and Catharine was typical of life on the frontier. In terms of harmonious families, these two women were also in the majority *if* Kimball Young is right in judging that 53 percent of plural families were highly or reasonably successful.⁶ Indeed, of the combined eight wives of Romney and Udall, only one obtained a divorce (in a much larger study, 18 percent of plural wives divorced⁷) and that one divorce took place before Catharine married into the family. The Romney and Udall families, whatever their problems, were apparently more compatible than many others.

Ida and Catherine also differed from their husbands' other wives—and from all of Clawson's wives—in that they came from monogamous families (Ida's father entered polygamy after her marriage). Neither Ida nor Catharine had her parents' experience, for good or ill, to guide her. Indeed, Ida had an idealized view of plural marriage based on one journey she took with a Church leader and

his wives. What both Catharine and Ida did have when they married was romantic love for their husbands. Neither was like Mary Linton Morgan, Udall's third wife, whose marriage was brought about by Church leaders who asked Udall to marry and take care of her after her first husband's death. Nor did either suffer the stigma of being "a Poor sewing Girl" (Larson, 4) whose father was dead, as did Lydia Spencer, Rudger Clawson's second wife. Clawson's mother broke off his engagement to Lydia when he was single but apparently had no objection to her becoming his plural wife. Catharine and Ida chose to become plural wives. Most Mormon women, particularly in the 1880s, participated in plural marriage reluctantly.⁸ Indeed, some believed plural marriage was suitable only for those women who would otherwise not get married.⁹

To be sure, neither these plural wives nor this prisoner represents the average, yet their writings depict with compelling immediacy the trials—and joys—experienced by plural families during polygamy's slow and painful demise. Although these three books differ in form, each provides an important and intimate biographical study, and together they enlarge our understanding of Mormon plural marriage in the 1880s and beyond.

NOTES

¹ B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

² Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography*, 1st ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1973).

³ Stan Larson, ed., *A Ministry of Meetings: The Apostolic Diaries of Rudger Clawson* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993).

⁴ Don Udall, "Ida Hunt Udall," in *Arizona Pioneer Mormon: David King Udall, His Story and His Family*, ed. David King Udall and Pearl Udall Nelson (Tucson, Ariz.: Arizona Silhouettes, 1959), 266.

⁵ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁶ Kimball Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* (New York: Henry Holt, 1954), 56.

⁷ Kathryn M. Daynes, "Plural Wives and the Nineteenth-Century Mormon Marriage System: Manti, Utah, 1849-1910" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1991), 251.

⁸ Stanley S. Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," *Western Humanities Review* 10 (Summer 1956): 232, 239; see also Daynes, "Plural Wives and the Nineteenth-Century," 160-62.

⁹ Martha Cragun Cox, "Autobiography," photocopy of holograph, 1928, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 126.