



Margaret Gay Judd Clawson (1831-1912). Margaret Clawson's "Rambling Reminiscence," written in 1906, details her journey across the plains in 1849, when she was a teenager, and her subsequent life in Utah. Courtesy Utah State Historical Society.



## **“Tryed and Purified as Gold”: Mormon Women’s “Lives”**

*A journal entry is a piece saved from the fabric of a woman’s day. Ragged, incomplete, misshapen—only its color and pattern are left to show how it fits with its mates.*

Maureen Ursenbach Beecher

“And now that I have written this long, disconnected rambling remembrances of the past,” wrote Mormon pioneer Margaret Judd Clawson in the late nineteenth century, “I Scarsly know what to do with it For who Can be interested in the little things of [the] Common, everyday life of another?”<sup>1</sup>

I, for one, and my colleagues are interested. Since the nascence some thirty years ago of the study of women’s history, we have valued every such text for the richness of its details, its “little things.” From just such “rambling remembrances” as those of Margaret Clawson, we have been able to extract the details which, analyzed and synthesized, allow us to construct and illustrate a history of the Mormon past, female.

As I have worked in archives collections abstracting an overall picture, however, I have realized that my joy was not in the generalizations I could draw, but in each life I was reading. Something in the handwritten, sometimes penciled, often naive, misspelled, uncluttered account each woman gave of herself drew me in and held me fast. I would find the single detail or particular description I needed for my historical analysis, then, guilt nudging at my elbow to move to other sources, I would read on, and on, and on. Each writer, whom I viewed first as informant, became by stages an individual, a woman, an acquaintance, my friend, my sister. The historical data became a by-product of what is now to me a much more satisfying search: the life writings of Mormon women, a literature of its own. Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert, in their anthology *A Believing People*,



introduced me to Mary Goble Pay's description of her family's arrival in Utah with the handcart companies:

We arrived in Salt Lake City nine o'clock at night the 11th of December 1856. Three out of four that were living were frozen. My mother was dead in the wagon.

Bishop Hardy had us taken to a home in his ward and the brethren and the sisters brought us plenty of food. We had to be careful and not eat too much as it might kill us we were so hungry.

Early next morning Bro. Brigham Young and a doctor came. The doctor's name was Williams. When Bro. Young came in he shook hands with us all. When he saw our condition—our feet frozen and our mother dead—tears rolled down his cheeks.<sup>2</sup>

The passage defies analysis by any of the criteria by which I was taught to recognize good writing. Simple sentences, or run-on, or fragmentary. Interjections. Dangling modifiers. Little words—only two with more than two syllables in the whole passage. But a Hopkins sonnet or a John Donne sermon has not the power to move me as has this honest piece so simply written. The literary canon must expand to allow it a place.

For our Mormon manuscript collections are rich with the life writings of ordinary women from our recent past. Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library, among other local repositories, has such gems packed away in fiberdex boxes, often untouched from year to year. Not the written-for-publication works of famous women, these are either the daily jottings of mothers, wives, daughters, or the women's mature attempts to set their lives in order, to explain themselves, not to the world, as Newman attempted in his *Apologia pro vita sua*, but to their children and their children's children in the Puritan tradition of testimony bearing and lasting testament. In loose sheets or bound notebooks, they are as imperfect as the lives they represent, as incomplete as a peek through the keyhole, as unfinished as mortality.

For all their simplicity and honesty, the life narratives of women are deceptive representations. We see only traces. That is surely part of their appeal—the intimation of life's hidden intricacies, which connect the bits we see. In a voice imitative of that of the female life writer, Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood wrote:

It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always leave something out, there





Mary Goble Pay (1843–1913). Her ingenious life sketch, begun in 1896 and finished in 1909, speaks poignantly of her experiences as a British immigrant, pioneer, mother, midwife, and community builder. Courtesy Deseret Book.

are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which could mean this or that, too many shapes which can never be fully described, too many flavors, in the air or on the tongue, half-colors, too many.<sup>3</sup>

For how, in discourse that is at best only conditionally referential and subject to infinite play of meaning, can one recreate a life? a year? a day? a single moment? Try as we would to hold a mirror up to life, we are faced with the physical fact that the reflection is at best a reverse image in two dimensions. “In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible,”

wrote Philippe LeJeune, “this in no way prevents it from existing.”<sup>4</sup> To the general impossibility of writing a life, add the specific difficulty, occasioned by her gender, of composing a woman’s life: a woman whose literary models were those created mainly by men, about men’s lives, in a society that values what men value. Despite the fact that the first extant autobiography in English was written by a woman, the genre is essentially male: Augustine, Goethe, Rousseau, Bunyan, Franklin—the canon is theirs. Even that noble first autobiography, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, written in about 1450, lay undiscovered until the mid-twentieth century.

Two centuries after Kempe, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, penned “A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and Life” as an appendage to her much longer biography of her husband. Anticipating the criticism of her peers in seventeenth-century



England, she asked rhetorically, "Why hath this lady writ her own life?" The question is real enough—in publishing her own autobiography, Lady Cavendish was exploring territory inhabited largely, though not exclusively, by men. "I hope my readers will not think me vain for writing my life," she began, adding that of herself "none care to know whose daughter she was or whose wife she is, or how she was bred, or what fortunes she had, or how she lived, or what humour or disposition she was of." She hoped her text would create and preserve her identity, "lest after-ages should mistake, in not knowing I was daughter to one Master Lucas of St. Johns, near Colchester, in Essex, second wife to the Lord Marquis of Newcastle; for my Lord having had two wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should die and my Lord marry again."<sup>5</sup>

Margaret was right. Historically she had no individuality separate from that of her father and her husband; the existence of other daughters and other wives might obliterate from memory her very being. "Ultimately," writes critic Sidonie Smith, "the issue is one of identity versus anonymity. Cavendish is writing for her very life."<sup>6</sup>

Mormon women autobiographers likewise struggled to justify their efforts at life writing. "Who Can be interested?" apologized Margaret Clawson. "It has been a pasttime, and pleasure to me recalling the little incidents, And occurrences of the long ago, And this is my only excuse for these lengthy reminiscences."<sup>7</sup> It should not surprise us, then, that in Davis Bitton's *Guide to Mormon Diaries* the ratio of women's to men's life writings in Utah repositories is about one in ten, a discrepancy, I suggest, created as much by our failure to value and preserve women's life writings as by their failure to write.<sup>8</sup>

As we broaden the literary canon to include these texts, we establish a corpus of the life writings of ordinary women. How do we then approach them critically? What principles can guide our reading? How do they reach us, these private pieces?

First there is the question of genre. For diaries—or journals—differ from autobiographies—or memoirs or reminiscences—and both differ from letters or recorded conversations. Let me use a homely metaphor to make some distinctions. Mary White was one of the West Texas quiltmakers interviewed by Patricia Cooper and



Norma Bradley Buferd for their 1978 book, *The Quilters*. For Mary, quilting was a way to see the world:

You can't always change things. Sometimes you don't have no control over the way things go. Hail ruins the crops, or fire burns you out. And then you're given so much to work with in a life and you have to do the best you can with what you've got. That's what piecing is. The materials is passed on to you or is all you can afford to buy. . . that's what's given to you. Your fate. But the way you put them together is your business. You can put them in any order you like.<sup>9</sup>

The image works as well to explain not only the living of a life, but also the writing of one. Each recorded moment, each diary entry, is a piece saved from the fabric of a woman's day. Ragged, incomplete, misshapen—only its color and its pattern left to show how it fits with its mates. Like fabric scraps, a diary is a jumble of unconnected pieces tossed together into a box and pushed under the bed.

My own mother had such heaps of fabric pieces. Whenever she sewed, we children had the task of picking up the scraps. The criterion for which pieces were saved and which were discarded was their size: half a quilt square was large enough to keep, since two pieces could be sewn together to make one four-by-four-inch block. Just recently, because it was worn beyond mending, I discarded an old block quilt made from mother's sewing scraps. It was like losing my childhood, for I recognized blocks from my brother's striped pajamas, a pink print dress of my own, and an apron my mother had worn.

Sometimes, after I had moved from home, my sister would find a particularly fine fabric, or plan a special dress, too good not to tell about. She would cut a sample, tidy its edges, attach to it some of the trimmings and a sketch of the style, and send it to me. That's a letter, shaped according to the writer's relationship to the intended recipient. These letters, too, often became part of a collection loosely stuffed into a hatbox on the closet shelf.

Sometimes the fabric pieces just stayed where they were; sometimes, however, in a season of relative quiet, a woman would pull them out and make the small pieces into larger blocks, bits of life history—stars or log cabins or nine-square blocks—intending to put them together, some day. She would see patterns emerging, possibilities she had not imagined. Her initial sorting might lead to a new focus, a wider view. The backward look might well lead



to a new dream of a possible future, the reshaping of the past to a restructuring of the future.<sup>10</sup>

Years later, having survived the more demanding necessities of her life, a woman might eventually pull out her box of swatches or blocks and arrange them into a full quilt top. "You can put them in any order you like," Mary White had said. Wedding Ring, Log Cabin, Windmill, Flying Geese, or Crazy Quilt—she would now create a thing of beauty in which every piece connected artistically and permanently to its neighbor and every block had its partner. Emergent patterns became permanent, each piece part of the whole. Each piece that the collector still liked, that is, or would acknowledge as hers. That is an autobiography. Its intricacy or simplicity tells more about the woman at the time of its quilting than of the blocks at the time of their origin. It uses the stuff of the past merely as the raw material out of which the present is recreated.

Take Annie Clark Tanner, for example—you know her as *A Mormon Mother* from her fine autobiography published by her son Obert in 1969.<sup>11</sup> From first to last, we have not the child Annie growing up, the girl Annie attending Brigham Young Academy, the young woman Annie marrying into polygamy, or the mother Annie rearing her children alone in Farmington. Instead each part is cut to shape and placed in the whole to reveal to the mature, reflecting Annie—and to the reader—the meaning of the contradictions in her life. In composing the autobiography, Annie drew on her collection of her diaries and letters, which, her son later told me, were destroyed. How sad. In the spaces between the diary and the autobiography, what might we learn of growth, of struggle, of developing self-awareness?

Then we might have of Annie what we have of Rhoda Dykes Burgess, whose diary, as typed by her granddaughter, recently came to hand. Begin anywhere—it hardly matters. Try January 15, 1882. Pine Valley, Utah.

It is snowing very hard to day there has been no meeting nor Sunday school most of the men are away at work I am not well to day Eliza has been writing the young folks are having a sleigh ride oh how I miss my Dear Mother when I am sick.<sup>12</sup>

Then begin to trace the pieces. "Today's" snow will last for months, even though this is Pine Valley, not thirty miles from St. George—





Rhoda Ann Dykes Burgess (1845–1918). Rhoda Burgess kept a daily account of her pioneering experiences in southern Utah's Pine Valley and Grass Valley. She bore eleven children there and reared all but two to adulthood. Courtesy Lois Shepherd Beck.

Utah's usual hot spot. The Burgesses have come down from their farm in Grass Valley, further up the mountains, where the winter is even harder, to live until summer. It helps to have neighbors, especially in winter. In spring, Rhoda and George will again move their household the twelve miles north.

It is Sunday as Rhoda writes. Even so, the men are away at work. The men are usually away at work. "I am not well today" is a rare complaint for Rhoda, and a foreshadowing: in three weeks, she will bear her tenth child and sixth daughter. On the eve of the birthing, Rhoda will write:

I have been cleaning washed and Ironed a littel the Children are home from school Geo is back from Grassvalley supper is over and the littel ones are in bed the snow is quite deep and the weather very cold I am so lonely to night and selfish enough to wish my Dear old Mother here with me.<sup>13</sup>

But in January, Rhoda's sister Eliza is here with her, writing. Follow her story. Eliza had married George's brother Hiram in 1858, six years before Rhoda and George married. A second and third wife entered Hiram's family, and Eliza found a better place with Rhoda, to whom she seems almost a sister wife. Had she not sprained her ankle four days before this writing, she might have been more helpful. What was Eliza writing—a diary of her own? a letter? to whom? saying what?



"The young folks are having a sleigh ride." Splendid, for the Mormon community had little else but its own entertainment. Who of the children are there? George Edward (Eddie) is sixteen. Perhaps he is along for the fun now, but his father will need him to ride over to Grass Valley in the evening to tend the animals there. Rhoda will worry that he will freeze in the cold, of course. Perhaps he has lagged behind in order to court Emily Jeffery, who will come ever so surely into Rhoda's diary as Eddie brings her into the family three years from now.

Mary Alice (Allie) at thirteen well deserves the sleigh ride. The weekly washing falls to her, and the cleaning when Rhoda is confined. Allie churns, cooks, and helps out at the neighbors'. Before Primary each week, a Mrs. Jones is teaching her to sew by hand, and when Rhoda's sewing machine arrives, Allie will surely learn that too. It seems much for so young a girl, but her older sister Lillie, who would have been their mother's main help, had died three months before Allie was born.

The next oldest daughter to Allie is Ella Mae (Ellie), nine, not quite the help her sister is. She brings in the wood and often must tend Willard, seven; Horace, four; and Lucy, three, while Allie is away or working. In two weeks, Ellie and Howard, eleven, will be feverish and covered with rashes—measles, which will last through Rhoda's confinement. Did Rhoda fear the effect of measles on an unborn child? Did she know the fetus within her was already beyond that danger? Or did she worry alone in silence? Did the little ones catch the measles, or would she have that to worry about that later? Rhoda doesn't say. About the time they would have broken out, Rhoda would be facing her own confinement.

Anticipating the birthing without "my dear old mother" is particularly trying; Dorcas Keeling Dykes (Grandma to the children, Ma to Rhoda) had been sick through most of December. The diary reads:

Dec 12 the Children came from Grandmas this morning said she was sick so I hurried down found her in bed she said she was a littel better she had had a chill . . .

Dec 13 I have been sick all day . . . so I did not go down till evening found her much better she said she wanted her supper so we got it she ate hearty seemed to enjoy it



Dec 14 Ma is not so well to day has that old pain in her side

Dec 15 Ma is no better and yet she does not seem very sick her appetite is quite good and her mouth is all broke out with cold sores . . .

Dec 16 Ma sent word to me not to come down to day as she felt much better I am so glad . . .

Dec 17 I hurried down to Mas this morning found she had spit blood all night . . . I hope it is nothing serious I have seen her spit blood before this Brother Lloyd has just administered to her I do wish George was here—evening—Lord help us to say *Thy will be done* our Dear old Mother has passed away to a better world than this.

“The snow is falling on her grave today,” Rhoda writes as she draws one day nearer her own passage through “the valley of the shadow of death” that was birthing.

So, patch after patch, the quilt pieces jumble into Rhoda's box—gingham for Allie; calico for Ellie; corduroy for Eddie, to keep him warm; leather for George, perhaps; and ecru lace from Ma's shawl. Life. Raw life. Day by tedious day. “I have been piecing a flannel quilt and tearing carpet rags all day.” The fabric of a woman's life.

But not always so heavy with responsibility. Take Lizzie Conrad, nearly nineteen, and waiting for her true love to return, writing to her diary as though to a friend, and signaling with a squiggle each day a letter arrives from her Hyrum:

Little Journal I haven't written any in you for a long time I have neglected you and my mind is getting rusty. Sacred little book you will keep my secrets wont you.

The persona is innocence itself, springtime pregnant with promise but threatened by approaching summer:

21st of March [1894] This is my birthday. I am 19 years old. I ought to be a woman now. Oh what a responcebility. The oldest one of the family ought to be able to take the place of ma. [Lizzie's mother will give birth next month.] Hyrum is coming home, am I happy or sorry? I am glad he is coming home, but sorry I have not been a better girl and proven my self more worthy of him. . . . I was such a child when he went away and a very thoughtless girl and Hyrum the boy that he was, sent away to preache the Gospel, he will come home with a great deal of experience and a strong testamony of the truth. I wonder if I will ever be worthy of him.





Mary Elizabeth "Lizzie"  
Conrad Muhlstein  
(1875–1938). Shown  
here with her hus-  
band Hyrum, ca.  
1910, Lizzie is seen  
in her diary not as  
the decorous wife  
and mother, but as  
the fervent and  
impassioned teen-  
ager who waited for  
Hyrum's return from  
his mission. Courtesy  
Joyce Muhlstein.

Hyrum does return, and the diary, like the velveteen rabbit, is forgotten a while. A year passes.

Well my little book it has been a long time since I've told you how I felt. I'd feel pretty well if I'd done right all the time but I have not. I thought at one time I had more trouble than any one, but the old saying is, that time is the great healer of all wounds, and he has partly healed mine. After having taken a fancy to the German lad [and here we may remember that the manuscript is catalogued in our BYU archive under the name Lizzie Conrad *Mublestein*] his folks took it into their heads that it must not be so. They there fore decided to seperate us by the Atlantic Ocean, and thought that I would soon marry and their son would be saved but that scheme didnt work. Hyrum and I felt the same as of old towards each other. His folks still treat me cool. He left for Scofield on the 15 of May to raise some money to pay of[f] his mission debt and of corse I am left alone again.<sup>14</sup>

The course of true love, et cetera, et cetera. But *true* true love it seldom is. For personal texts are the fictions we create in order to make our lives acceptable to ourselves. By omissions, by evasions, or by outright untruths, we reshape events to our liking. "I don't remember why I was lying here," observed a young friend on



reading her own teenage diary, "but I know this is a lie."<sup>15</sup> Our memories are flawed—distorted—as people discover when they share their version of an event with that of a sibling or a spouse. But within every text is imbedded a deeper truth, a transcendent reality trying to emerge. Take this reflective account of a Canadian woman looking back to her central Utah childhood.

Maydell Cazier Palmer was a queenly personage in my young world. She and her stake president husband came occasionally to our ward and shared Sunday dinner with us, my father then being bishop. I stretched to understand the sermons of the dignified man, his slight palsy seeming to add emphasis to his words, but I cowered in absolute awe of the woman, his wife, who seemed to tower by his side in regal silence. She was not silent, I discovered as I matured, but she never occupied our pulpit that I recall. Educated, articulate, outspoken, she had earned, by her conscientious examination of her life and her surroundings, a reputation for asking probing questions. In her autobiography, written in her later years, one sees her attempt to anticipate the end from the beginning. There we must doubt, objectively, the story by which she explains to herself the stance of questioning at which she arrived.

Born in 1889, she lived what she remembers as a happy childhood with her parents and her two sisters in Nephi, Utah. After 1903, however, her father seemed nowhere present. Actually he had gone to Canada, taking with him his second wife, duly sealed in Salt Lake before the 1890 manifesto. His brother Orson, who had also emigrated, occasionally returned to Utah. Maydell remembered:

On one of these visits he came to see my mother, and I innocently asked him why my father did not come home to visit us. A peculiar expression was exchanged between the two and a meaningless answer given. A few days later I put this question to my mother and received the answer she had hidden from me for these years. "Your father is living in Canada with a woman whom he has introduced as his wife."<sup>16</sup>

The threads of this story are so tenuous, the spaces so open, I am reminded of a piece of Battenberg lace—just enough fabric to connect the threads but not enough to fill in the holes. How could so bright and analytical a young woman, living in a Mormon town



where marshals had so recently threatened the security of nearly half the families in the community and at a time when hearings in Washington were accusing Mormons of clinging to their polygamous marriages, have achieved her midteens without suspecting the cause of her father's absence or sensing the sorrow in her mother's silence?

Maydell continues:

I thought for a second she must be joking but when I saw her face full of anguish I realized she spoke the truth. Suddenly my fairyland disappeared. I found that the idol of my girlhood had clay feet. I sobbed in grief.<sup>17</sup>

Telescoping her fears, her suspicions, her mother's shame into one brief moment, Maydell has encapsulated for herself and divulged to us what she later saw as a turning point in her faith: "The thinking of all my life about revelation has been tempered by this traumatic experience."<sup>18</sup> That the event occurred just as Maydell related it is unlikely; that the resulting attitude toward prophetic dicta remained is undeniable.

Before he allowed the Church historian to look at his diary, my grandfather carefully razored out small sections. More frequently we totally omit details which belie the persona we are trying to present. Spaces. Silences. Perhaps the most interesting part of the autobiographical record is what is left out and why. In my grandfather's case, notes were deleted after inclusion. Perhaps they reflected ill on another person; perhaps they spoke a truth which, in the days of post-Manifesto polygamy, could be damaging to the Church; perhaps they simply contradicted the self he wished to portray. That another of my ancestors noted the birth of one of his children in the margin, as an afterthought, need not suggest that the birth meant little to him; it could as easily reflect his sense of what a man's journal ought to concern itself with.

Women, too, have been known to suppress parts of their records or destroy the entire record. More often what happens in a woman's world seems to her simply too mundane, too routine, too insignificant to warrant mention. The "dailiness" of a woman's life, Laurel Ulrich calls it; the ongoing "woman's work" that creates the





Maydell Cazier Palmer (1889–1984). Born in central Utah, Maydell Palmer wrote her autobiography shortly before her death, outlining her life in Lethbridge, Canada, and extensive travels with her scientist husband. Photo, ca. 1975, courtesy Delbert Palmer.

core around which the household members build their lives; the “little things” Margaret Clawson deemed of no interest.

Emma Lorena Barrows Brown, called in the 1880s as president of the Wasatch Stake Relief Society, kept a lean diary of her activities. The few events and activities she considered worthy of mention are framed by the omission of the ones she did not deign to note. “At home,” she would write, summarizing for herself the demanding tasks of keeping house in rural Charleston, Utah. In contrast, Relief Society activities are spelled out in her 1878 entries:

Sun 28 [July 1878] went to R Society Meeting Meeting comenced at 9 Oclock Sister E R Snow & Zina Young spoke and gave ous some good instruction went to Sunday School then went to Bro Murdock to Dinner went to afternoon Meeting come home and got Supper then went to the Y[oung] L[adies'] Meeting Sis Snow Zina Young spoke had a good meeting

Mon 29 went to Wallsburgh to Meeting Eat Dinner to Br Camp had a good meeting come home

Tues 30 went to Heber to meeting had a good meeting Eat Dinner to Br Shelton then come home

Wed 31 at home Sister Snow and Zina come had a good visit George comenced to mow

August 1st. Th George went to Battle Creek to take Sister Snow and Zina and Lucy and Chas Seen them get on the cars to go to the City wash.<sup>19</sup>



14 90

Sat<sup>14</sup> at home  
 Sun<sup>15</sup> Dick Geo came home  
 Mon<sup>16</sup> Geo & Brig went to Ranch  
 Tues<sup>17</sup> work  
 Wed<sup>18</sup> in the afternoon went to  
 the Ranch. Jennett Rhoads went  
 went down with Nipper Fuller  
 and Bre Blackie  
 Th<sup>19</sup> went on the hills back  
 of our place Lizza came over  
 Fri<sup>20</sup> started home on a load  
 of hay  
 Sat<sup>21</sup> at home  
 Sun<sup>22</sup> at home Geo went after  
 the cows  
 Mon<sup>23</sup> at home  
 Tues<sup>24</sup> at home  
 Wed<sup>25</sup> at home  
 Th<sup>26</sup> at home  
 Fri<sup>27</sup> at home  
 Sat<sup>28</sup> at home  
 Sun<sup>29</sup> went to meeting  
 Mon<sup>30</sup> work

Emma Lorena Barrows Brown diary, p. 90. The entries on this page, spanning August 19–30, 1880, are brief and repetitious. Whether they reflect the quality of Emma's life at that time is unknown. The page is shown at actual size. Courtesy Jean Duke Howe.



The last terse word marks the catch-up of the household tasks which Sister Brown had set aside during the visits of her august guests; Monday's washing had had to wait until the sisters' departure on Thursday. There follows another weekend of church activities, conference in Heber, and guests to dinner. Finally on Monday the daily activities recommence in necessary, but uneventful, similarity, reflected in the diary by a series of short entries: "at home and washed"; "at home all day"; "quilted a quilet raining"; "at home ironed"; "at home."

Whether the task of diary keeping became too onerous, the weather too unremittingly hot, or Emma Lorena simply unable to find significance in her activities, in August 1880 the life of the thirty-seven-year-old wife, mother, sister, and president is reflected in an even more sparse series:

Thu 19 went on the hills back of our place Lizza came over

Fri 20 started home on a load of hay

Sat 21 at home

Sun 22 at home Geo went after the Cows

Mon 23 at home

Tus 24 at home

Wed 25 at home

Thu 26 at home

Fri 27 at home

Sat 28 at home

Sun 29 went to Meeting

Mon 30 wash

The columnar appearance of August's entries, the apparent sameness of her days may well have discouraged Emma Lorena. After three similarly brief September entries, she inscribed the date and day along the margin and left six weeks' worth of empty spaces from "Fri 3 at home" to October 22. Then she noted, after a space of a word's length, "& Ethan came home." A similar hiatus commenced again November 11 and continued to December 14, when even the dates no longer appear. Empty pages represent January and February 1881, designating presumably the diarist's intent to summarize those months later. Then the passage of March through



November is simply noted by month. September is the exception: "On the 23 of this month William Leonard Brown was Born." Whether pregnancy had been more than usually difficult, the summer more than usually hot, the work more than usually dreary, or the baby more than normally difficult, only Emma Lorena can know. For us it is left to ponder the silences, the spaces, and their meaning in the framework of the whole diary. Reading on, we feel relief when in November "Geo went to Provo to meet Sister Horn and Howard" and the Relief Society work resumes for President Brown. It is easier to deal with the positive values than the negative spaces.

Margaret Judd Clawson, with whom we began this essay, wrote in full and delightful detail of her young womanhood, of crossing the plains, of performing in the Salt Lake Theater, of young motherhood, of the social life which whirled around her family. But of the backstage romance and her marriage as second wife to Hiram Clawson, she writes only: "In 1852 I was sealed to Hiram B. Clawson by President Brigham Young and I have no cause to regret ever having taken that step For he has been a Kind, Considerate husband and a most indulgent Father to all of his Children." Four years later, when Margaret was four months pregnant with their son Rudger, Hiram married a third time. Her pain and that of Hiram's first wife, Ellen Spencer Clawson, are reflected in that woman's letter to her friend Ellen McGary in San Bernardino telling of the new marriage: "I think perhaps Margaret feels worse than I do for she was the last, and I suppose thought he would never get another, the same as I did."<sup>20</sup> In an autobiography written presumably for her children, Margaret would not share the anguish, the ache, the sorrow engendered by her marriage in polygamy. Nor perhaps could she acknowledge the seemingly illicit delight of being courted and won by a man already someone else's husband. In any case, in her reminiscence, as in so many Mormon women's accounts, her soon-to-be husband is a shadow, a phantom, seldom named or seen.

In her letter, however, Margaret's sister-wife Ellen is freer—she knows, or thinks she knows, that her words will be kept private by one who will understand. After that third marriage, Ellen confides to her friend:



I feel as though it would do me good to write, for my heart is rather heavy. I never thought I could care again if Hiram got a dozen wives, but it seems as though my affections return with double force, now that I feel as if I had lost him but I expect he thinks as much of me as ever, only in a different way you know a new wife is a new thing, and I know it is impossible for him to feel any different towards her just at present, still it make[s] my heart ache to think I have not the same love, but I console myself with thinking it will subside into affection, the same as it is with me, for you know the honey-moon cannot always last at least if you dont know it now you will some-time perhaps.

Words tumble pell-mell from Ellen's pen, her grief revealed to her friend. Such intimate disclosure is rare in an autobiography and in most diaries. In deigning to read such a letter, we who seek to understand the burdens of the past count ourselves among the writer's confidants and assume with reverence an obligation of compassion and love. We, too, become sisters and friends.

Quilts, embroideries, tapestries, fabrics of women's lives—these personal narratives. Loosely woven or still on the loom, bobbins dangling, colors yet to be interwoven; or tightly bound and neatly finished, ends tucked in, seams hidden. Unique as the mind that conceived them, the hands that made them. They warm us, please our eye, delight our sensibilities, evoke our love. Let us not participate longer in the silencing of the voices of our sisters of past and present. Let us find their texts, read them, share them, and learn from them. In them we find ourselves.

Maureen Ursenbach Beecher is Professor of English and associate at the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at Brigham Young University. This article is from the Alice Louise Reynolds Lecture, March 17, 1994, Harold B. Lee Libraries.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Margaret Gay Judd Clawson, "Rambling Reminiscence of Margaret Gay Judd Clawson," holograph, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives). Courtesy of Jean Greenwood and Kathlene Fife Jackson, who transcribed the text. See also *Relief Society Magazine* 6 (1919): 257-62, 317-27, 391-400, 474-79; and excerpts in Gordon Irving, ed., "Teenage Pioneer: The Adventures of Margaret Judd Clawson," *New Era* 4 (May 1974): 44-50. BYU's



Religious Studies Center is publishing the entire Clawson manuscript as prepared by Kathlene Fife Jackson in a volume edited by Claudine Foudray Gallacher.

<sup>2</sup>Mary Goble Pay, "Death Strikes the Handcart Company," in *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints*, eds. Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 107.

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 134.

<sup>4</sup>Philippe LeJeune, *On Autobiography*, quoted in Helen M. Buss, *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>5</sup>Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, "A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and Life," *The Lives of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, and of His Wife, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. Mark Antony Lover [Lower] (London: John Russell, 1892), 309-10, quoted in Domna C. Stanton, *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 14.

<sup>6</sup>Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 100.

<sup>7</sup>Clawson, "Rambling Reminiscence."

<sup>8</sup>Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977).

<sup>9</sup>Patricia Cooper and Norma Bradley Buford, *The Quilters: Women and Domestic Art* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), 20.

<sup>10</sup>I appreciate the extension made to the quilt metaphor by William A. Wilson: "Once we have selected the final design, pattern takes over and guides our choices." Bert Wilson to Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, March 19, 1984, in possession of the author.

<sup>11</sup>Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography by Annie Clark Tanner* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1969).

<sup>12</sup>"The Journal of Rhoda Ann Dykes Burgess," typescript in possession of the author, courtesy of Lois Shepherd Beck and Jill Mulvay Derr.

<sup>13</sup>"The Journal of Rhoda Ann Dykes Burgess," February 6, 1882.

<sup>14</sup>Mary Elizabeth Conrad Muhlestein, Diary, 1891-1900, holograph, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Muhlestein's diary, as edited by Amy Cutt Lopez, will shortly be published by BYU Religious Studies Center.

<sup>15</sup>Amanda McPeck, conversation with the author, March 15, 1994.

<sup>16</sup>Maydell Cazier Palmer, *Autobiography of Maydell Cazier Palmer* (Lethbridge, Alberta: privately published, 1980), 61.

<sup>17</sup>Palmer, *Autobiography*, 16.

<sup>18</sup>Palmer, *Autobiography*, 16.

<sup>19</sup>Emma Lorena Barrows Brown journal, holograph in possession of Jean Duke Howe. See pages 53-54, below.

<sup>20</sup>Ellen Spencer Clawson to Ellen Pratt McGary, November 4, 1856, in S. George Ellsworth, *Dear Ellen: Two Mormon Women and Their Letters* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1974), 33.