

Under the Sunbonnets: Mormon Women with Faces

Maureen Ursenbach Beecher

There they all are, listed in an official history of the Church, at dinner in Joseph and Emma Smith's Nauvoo mansion house: Brothers Wilson Law, Hyrum Smith, John Taylor, Orson Hyde, William Clayton, Shadrach Roundy, Willard Richards, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, George A. Smith—the list is long, and reads like a muster roll of the Nauvoo Legion until the catch phrase at the end: "and ladies."¹ And ladies. The postscripts of the official histories of the Church. We know they were there, the women. But except for prim Eliza R. Snow driving a team and wagon, or determined Mary Fielding Smith administering to her dying ox, would we recognize them? Whose are the faces under the big-brimmed sunbonnets?

Clarissa Decker Young, her mother Harriet Wheeler Young, and Ellen Sanders Kimball came into the Great Basin with Brigham Young's first company. Who were they? What role did they play in the first rude settlement while George Brown, William Carter and Shadrach Roundy were damming City Creek and flooding the ground for the seed corn and potato cuttings? Other companies arrived, and with them children. We point with pride to the first school being held that first summer, but who is the young teacher who herded her charges into the sun-hot tent for their lessons?

The Mary Jane Dilworths of our history have been left as faceless as the sunbonnet ladies our grandmothers appliqued on their quilts and embroidered on their pillowslips. Profiled, their bonnet brims hiding the features which could have identified them, the sunbonnetted figures were as easy to draw on the quilts as the "and ladies" to add in the history. The sunbonnetted pioneer women we represent in our

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¹Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-51), 5:248.

July 24 celebrations, the ones we parade on floats down Main Street, Salt Lake City, or Center Street, Provo, or State Street, Parowan, or Moab, or Snowflake, Arizona, are stereotypes, just as faceless as the quilt-top ladies. We recognize the bearded Brigham Young beside them; we know the long-haired Porter Rockwell perched behind; we may even identify military Daniel Wells riding horseback alongside. But can we name the women under the sunbonnets? It seems sadly significant that a recent Church publication, attempting to depict Susa Young Gates, used instead a photograph of Mary Alice Cannon Lambert, and no one caught the error until a descendant of that lady wrote to complain.

Turn back the brims on our women's sunbonnets. Face them into the sun. Let us see who they are, one by one, what they did, what they said, what contribution they made to us as a people, to us as individuals.

Take Mary Jane Dilworth, for example, that first schoolmarm in the Valley. Under her sunbonnet is a face just sixteen years old. Baptized in her Pennsylvania birthplace, she had moved with her parents to Nauvoo just in time to be driven onward for the long winter of 1846-47 in Winter Quarters. For some reason Mary Jane came on ahead of her parents; in the long trek across the plains she traveled in the family of William Bringhurst, arriving in the Valley before the first houses were built lining the walls of the Old Fort. Hence the tent-schoolroom. Adapting to the unusual became the usual to Mary Jane: married the next year to Francis Hammond, she left with him three years later, a baby in her arms, for a six-year mission to the Sandwich Islands where she labored alongside her proselytizing husband, teaching school to the natives who soon were calling her "Mother."² Mother she was, not just with the honorary title, but in reality, to the child she brought from Utah and to the three children she bore in the Islands. Many Hawaiian native children, four paler-skinned American children, a raft of missionaries, they all knew the face under her sunbonnet.

It is easier for us to generalize about Mormon missionary wives waiting at home than to realize that often they accompanied their husbands. The Nauvoo experience of Louisa Barnes Pratt, for example, is one we most readily accept. Reading her account of her husband Addison's mission call to Tahiti, we feel for all such wives. She wrote:

²Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons Co., Publishers, 1904), 4:326.

When it was first announced to me that his mission was to the South Pacific ocean, and for an absence of three years, a weeping spirit came upon me which lasted for three days. I then became calm, and set about preparing his wardrobe for the event. He was often in a thoughtful serious mood.³

Louisa would be left in Nauvoo with their four children, and could not have anticipated the events which would follow her husband's departure—it was 1843, and before he returned she would know the martyrdom of the Prophet; the cruel haggling of the gentiles; Winter Quarters; the "chills and fever" that plagued the driven Saints; the arduous trek to the Great Basin. She would next see her husband in Utah. But she had no inkling then of all that. The day arrived, inevitably. "The parting scene came," Louisa wrote in her reminiscence.

The two eldest daughters wept very sorely. We walked with him to the steamboat landing: he carried the youngest child in his arms. . . . He would be absent three years. . . . It was unfortunate at the last as he stept on to the steamboat the children saw him take his handkerchief from his eyes, they knew he was wiping away his tears, it was too much for them. They commenced weeping; the second daughter was inconsolable, the more we tried to soothe her, the more piteous were her complaints; she was sure her father would never return. . . .⁴

Of such material we have created our stereotype of the Mormon women, lumping all similar experiences into the same sort of bag, romanticising them into generalizations which eventually become little more than sentimentality. Robbed of her own individual character, the one becomes representative of the many, and the face under the sunbonnet becomes blurred. But read on. Read further in this woman's reminiscence. Her troubled journey to Utah, maneuvered by dint of her own determination and business acumen; her reunion there with Addison; their plans for a permanent home; and then his second mission call. The stereotype would have her again await patiently his return, the while grubbing for her family. But she recounts how, half despite herself, she confessed to Mary Ann Young, wife to prophet Brigham, that, yes, she would like to follow Addison to

³"Journal of Louisa Barnes Pratt," *Heart Throbs of the West*, ed. Kate B. Carter, 12 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1947), 8:189-400. The journal, written by Louisa Pratt herself in her fiftieth year, is based on her own diaries, no longer extant. The published version has been heavily edited, so the quoted segments here come from the original journal, in possession of S. George and Maria Smith Ellsworth, Logan, Utah, p. 108.

⁴Ibid.

Tahiti. The next conference, April 1850, shortly after her talk with Sister Young, Louisa listened to the mission appointments with both hope and fear: Thomas Tomkins was called to go to the Islands and take with him Addison Pratt's family.⁵ Louisa couldn't describe the effect the announcement had on her, but soon she and her children were on their way to Tahiti, where, rather than finding her Addison locked in the admiration of his convert friends, she got word that he was secured in prison on a nearby island. Undaunted, Louisa established her family in the village, planted her little New England dooryard and began teaching the children of the village "civilized" manners along with their English. The story—Addison's release and their eventual return—is a long and exciting one, and certainly not what we, with our generalized view of our pioneer ancestors, would expect.

We have long seen our pioneer foremothers selectively, focusing on only those aspects of their lives we immediately admired. We have made of them unwilling models of the virtues we ourselves would wish to possess, erasing, when we came across them, any traits we chose not to see. We have distorted the women into the molds after which we would wish our own character to be patterned. We have robbed them of their reality, made of them the blue-eyed, clear-complexioned, sweet smiling heroines of our plays, our musicals, and our parade floats. But look closer. Under the sunbonnets there are also the wrinkled faces, the pockmarked ones, the sad and the happy ones, freckled cheeks, defiant eyes, the stained teeth, the kind looks and the scowls. Let us look full face on these women, and discover, one by one, what gave to their lives the richness which flows from their veins into ours, which gives us our heritage.

Diversity is the thing. In what they did, as much as in how they looked, these women were distinctive. They chose—or found themselves locked into—lifestyles as different from each other's as they may seem from ours. We are already accustomed to the image of the frugal mother of early pioneer times, her brood around her, standing in the doorway of the log cabin to greet their father-husband coming home from the field or the mission, the meeting, or the hunt. Of a later generation, but of that familiar devoted spirit, is Abigail Rees Madsen. Her daughter Amy, number seven in this family that reached thirteen children, records how it was for them. Four of the little kids slept widthwise in the second bed in their parents' room. Rousing one

⁵"Journal of Louisa Barnes Pratt," ed. Carter, p. 251.

night, Amy heard her father and the oldest son doing something to the big bed. "Mama," she whispered. "Mama's in the other room. Go to sleep," returned the man's voice. Amy was too young to know about birthings, but felt the mixed sense of excitement and anxiety that filled the house the next morning when nurse Annie Tingey announced over the oatmeal that there was a new brother, and the children weren't to go near the front room whence Mama's bed had been moved.

Abbie Madsen's life was full of her thirteen children, children to be given life, to be taught, to be made happy in a world that provided little materially. Evenings around the kitchen table,

Mama would wash a pan of apples and then she'd quarter and core them for us to nibble on while we worked. She was our trusted encyclopedia of knowledge and sayer and explainer of long words—until her day-weariness would catch up with her. We would steal sly glances at her nodding head and drooping eyes as we asked questions. As her train of thought died down she'd give irrational answers that raised a great deal of childish laughter. She'd rouse herself to find out what was going on and then laugh with us and scold us onward.⁶

Such a sense of total responsibility for so many children left Abbie Madsen little room for her own thoughts. But, as her daughter recorded, there was one portion of her life which was her own:

I learned that Mama was a poet through the lock on the bathroom door. It was locked such a long time one summer afternoon. We wondered if another child was locked inside and had gone to sleep, so we counted the family. All of us were outside the bathroom. Everyone was accounted for but Mama. I timidly knocked . . . "Mama?" Silence. Grace said, "Go use Jensen's privy. Mama must be writing a poem." She was right. When Mama came out she carried a pencil and paper and she had a far-away thoughtful look in her eyes.⁷

Other women also bore thirteen children. Susa Young Gates, for example, daughter of Brigham Young, mother of singer Emma Lucy Gates Bowen, composer Cecil Gates, and Leah D. Widtsoe. But her life style has little in common with Abbie Madsen's. An early marriage, ending in divorce, left her with two children; a second marriage gave her the rest, but death took most of them in their childhood. Susa and Jacob Gates raised only five to maturity. Susa worked diverse interests into her life style. She attended Brigham Young Academy under

⁶Amelia Madsen Beecher, "Reminiscence," photocopy of holograph, in the author's possession, p. 10.

⁷Ibid., pp. 24-25.

tutelage of Professor Maeser; she served there as instructor in music; she learned and taught "phonography"—shorthand; she traveled to the Sandwich Islands for educational reasons and returned there after her marriage to Gates, as his companion missionary (two of her sons died there); returning, she founded and edited for eleven years the *Young Woman's Journal* which eventually evolved into the *Improvement Era*. In the two years, 1892-93, she was appointed to the Board of Trustees of Brigham Young Academy, published a book, recorded the official minutes of each of the forty-one dedicatory sessions of the Salt Lake Temple, and gave birth to two babies. The next year she organized the domestic science department at BYU, founded the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, published another book, and had another baby. She was thirty-eight years old.⁸ Susa Young Gates evolved a life style far removed from that of Abigail Rees Madsen.

Abbie Madsen and Susa Gates are not the extremes on a continuum; they are two stars in a random pattern of the whole firmament of women of the Mormon past. Each shines with her own brilliance, giving off her own particular quality of light, but both have a place in the configuration that is our historic past. It will take long study to discover all we need to know about these and the other many women of our past, individually and collectively. The study is not wholly new, but the bulk of the work is ahead of us. The real job, however, goes beyond merely the history of the women. The task facing our historians is to incorporate into their writing of the history of the Church the impact of women on that history. For the women were not in a vacuum, and their lives touched and were touched by the world at large as well as the church and community at home. To see their contribution honestly and fairly is a challenging task of reconstruction and revision. Let me here make one step along the way, touching some of the areas in which women were involved, and seeing who some of them were and how they affected and were affected by the events and circumstances of the Mormon environment.

Women, we know, were involved in education in early Utah. Girls were included with boys in the early schools—where there were schools. But the lives of individual women reveal wide diversity in the educational opportunities in pioneer Utah, diversity not always contingent on year or locale. Here's Rosilpha Stratton Gardner, born

⁸Carolyn W. D. Peters, "A Portrait of Susa Young Gates," MS in the personal file of Leonard J. Arrington, p. 10. The essay will appear shortly in a book edited by Claudia L. Bushman and Judith R. Dushku to be published by Peregrine Smith, Salt Lake City and Santa Barbara.

in Cedar City in 1854, and raised in Virgin City. A descendant writes that

Her schooling was very limited. They had only one slate, speller and arithmetic, which was used by all the family. They would get soft rocks from the mountain and use for slate pencils. The first book she ever had was made by the teacher and was a shingle with ABCs on one side, and figures on the other. This had to be carefully preserved to be handed down to the next member of the family. To them writing paper was unknown.⁹

Even at that, Rosilpha was not as deprived as some. Matilda Peterson, in the northern part of the territory, had less opportunity; as a working girl in Ogden, away from her Huntsville home, she made her educational discovery:

After I had been there a few weeks, I received a letter from my brother Waldemer, asking me to write home. I will never forget that first letter I tried to write. My brother . . . knew I had never had a pencil in my hand but I was game. I got a book with letters in and a lead pencil and paper, and started to write. It didn't look so bad while I was writing, but when I got finished I couldn't read one word. I rolled it in a little ball and started to cry and was going to put it in the stove. I changed my mind, instead I . . . smoothed it out, and sent it. I thought he would never ask me to write again. Just as quick as my brother could answer, a letter came back. He said he could read every word. . . . He begged me to write again. I wrote again and kept on writing until it looked pretty fair.¹⁰

These accounts contrast with the story as we prefer to tell it, of a people hard pressed for life's staples, sacrificing to build well-equipped schools and hire the best teachers. But that aspect, too, is true. Lucinda Lee, growing up in the San Bernardino colony the Church had established in Southern California, found educational opportunities at home and at school: "My father," she writes, "determined that his children should not be ignorant as well as poor. At the close of his day's work he patiently taught us, while yet too young to attend the common schools."¹¹ And when Lucinda attended formal school, her mother sacrificed her help at home—Lucinda was the oldest daughter, the one who would normally be expected to carry the bulk of the work load—

⁹"Rosilpha Stratton Gardner," *Pioneer Women of Arizona*, ed. Roberta Flake Clayton (n.p., n.d.), pp. 157-58.

¹⁰Matilda Peterson, "Reminiscence," microfilm of typescript, p. 4, Church Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹¹"Autobiography of Mrs. L[ucinda] L[ee] Dalton," photocopy of typescript, p. 2, Church Archives.

and "kept the older ones in school so resolutely, that I only remember losing half a day in several years." By age twelve, Lucinda was being trained as a teacher, and from then on, she writes, "I was a pupil no more." Not that her studies diminished: as a teacher she wrote, "I found myself under the necessity of applying myself to my books or acknowledging myself vanquished by some industrious boy or girl."¹² But Lucinda found stumbling blocks placed in her way: when she applied to a gentleman teacher for permission to learn algebra he replied that "it would be wasted time for me to ever study it, because I already had more learning than was necessary for a good housekeeper, wife, and mother which was a woman's only proper place on earth." To his credit, the gentleman later commended Lucinda for her accomplishments as scholar and teacher.

Annie Clark, growing up in Farmington, had even further chances at education:

It was arranged that my brother, Charles, and I should go to the Brigham Young Academy to study the subject of religion. Other subjects were studied, too, but shining through them all was "the glorious light of the Gospel," which subject was taught by Brother Maeser. I had but one regret, that being a girl, I could not go on a mission, as girls now do [she was writing in 1939], to preach these wonderful truths he had impressed upon us.¹³

And further still, as the years passed, were the educational opportunities afforded Alice Louise Reynolds. Karl G. Maeser had retired from Brigham Young Academy and its new president, Benjamin Cluff, suggested to Alice Louise—when, at the age of nineteen, she was teaching school in Nephi—that she go east to the University of Michigan and prepare herself to teach in a department of literature which she would establish at the Provo university.¹⁴ This was 1892, and Brother Maeser's feeling that women should not teach at the higher levels anything but the domestic arts was being superceded by policies more cognizant of women's abilities.

It must be realized that the educational picture for women in the Church, the whole scene of advancement opportunities for them, changed as the world picture changed. More significantly, in Zion women's opportunities changed as the needs of the growing economy changed. In the first two decades, up to the mid-1860s, the most basic

¹²Ibid., p. 4.

¹³*A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography by Annie Clark Tanner* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1973), pp. 46-47.

¹⁴Amy Brown Lyman, *A Lighter of Lamps* (Provo, Utah: Alice Louise Reynolds Club, 1947), pp. 20-22.

necessity governed everyone. There was little time for involvement in the inklings of "the movement" which were seeping into Zion from Seneca Falls and the eastern women's organizations. For Mormon women, as for Mormon men, there was a kingdom being built, and so long as everything got done, no one cared who did it. No one was concerned about who held the plough, who directed the irrigation water, who carried the adobes, who took charge of the children. Men and women were in this thing together, and in the particularly Mormon blend of pragmatism and tradition, sex roles merged and everything got done. A look through conference talks of those first decades shows Church leaders, Brigham Young especially, repeating one basic message to the sisters: obey your husbands and work in harmony with them (and their other wives) for the building of the kingdom.

But in the mid-1860s circumstances changed. A new theme emerged in the official statements, soon to be reflected in the occupations of the women. Brigham Young realized that, now the ship of Zion was firmly launched, she needed all hands on deck for the voyage into a safe and more sophisticated economic harbor. Modern technology, necessary to the burgeoning economy, required specialized skills, and, realized Brigham Young, women could learn these skills as well as men. Women would still have tasks suited to their "finer natures," but the variety permitted would widen their sphere far beyond their homes and fields. One of the first of those opportunities came with the telegraph in 1866. Telegraphers skilled in the Morse code were needed for the new lines which were then spanning Utah. Many students of the code, called on "missions" to learn the trade, were women—girls, more accurately.

Three of those were childhood friends from Nephi. Just fifteen years old when their calls came, they learned the code together during the summer of 1867, and were immediately placed in charge of offices in Nephi, Mona, and Fountain Green, all Central Utah towns. Before they were parted, with girlish romanticism, they chose coquettish code names for each other, names that were to stay with them long years later: Mary Ellen Love, pleasant but rather plain, became "Estelle"; Elizabeth Parks was "Belle"; and English-born Elizabeth Claridge, "Lizette." Over the wires, during off hours, flew notes from one to another of the three, closing the distances that their assignments had put between them. The girls matured. Mary Ellen (Estelle) married and moved north to Dry Creek, present-day Lehi, at the same time that gold was being mined up nearby Little Cottonwood Canyon. There her

skill at telegraphy was again useful to the growing economy, and an office of the Deseret Telegraph was established in her home. Several months passed, and then the wires carried her call for help: the impending birth of her first child would take her from her post. Elizabeth Claridge (Lizette) traveled the several days from Nephi to fill in during the confinement. The birthing was worse than expected, and even with Lizette there, the office finally closed down to spare the mother the torment of having to listen to the incessant clicking of the key. There were, after all, considerations which transcended hard-nosed business.¹⁵

The baby was safely delivered, and Estelle soon returned to her transmitter, transcribing in elusive dots and dashes over the noises of the baby on her lap. Lizette went on to the telegraph office in St. George, where she took up again an interrupted courtship with a young man, a discontented farmer-turned-railroader. At that time her telegrapher's wages made her richer than he, but after their marriage the tables turned—he was Alfred McCune, later a multimillionaire who eventually built for his wife the splendid McCune mansion which still stands on upper Main Street in Salt Lake City.

The opportunities for women kept widening. By 1869 President Young was taunting the "big, fat, lubberly fellows" whom he found clerking in stores, handing out calicoes and measuring ribbons. "I would rather see the ladies do it," he said, and added that some women were already just as good accountants as men, and that men might better go to raising sheep, wheat, or cattle.¹⁶ He boasted that the University of Deseret was offering classes in business skills to females as well as to males, preparing the girls to be "book keepers, accountants, clerks, cashiers, tellers, payers, telegraphic operators, reporters, and fill other branches of employment suited to their sex."¹⁷ Within a few years of this time women were establishing and running their own stores and cooperatives, and when President Young offered the Salt Lake ladies some male assistance in setting up their Women's Commission Store, an enterprise which grew to some proportions, the ladies politely ignored his generosity. A most terse letter in the Church Archives reveals Eliza R. Snow's impatience with one of President

¹⁵ *Communication of Early Utah* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1936), pp. 11, 12; Susa Amelia Young Gates, *Memorial to Elizabeth Claridge McCune: Missionary, Philanthropist, Architect* (Salt Lake City: Privately published, 1924), pp. 24-25 and *passim*.

¹⁶ Brigham Young, 6 April 1869, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-86), 12:374-75.

¹⁷ Brigham Young, General Epistle, January-February 1868, p. 25, Brigham Young Circular Letters, Church Archives.

Young's underlings in his dealings with the women's store. The man had the temerity to dispute the percentage agreed upon between Sister Snow and President Young as commission on goods from his woolen mills. Apologizing to the President (her husband) for disturbing him with the matter while he was sick abed, Eliza clarified the situation in formal business terms, and then concluded that "Although we are novices in the mercantile business, we are not green enough for that kind of management."¹⁸ And, wifelike, signed the letter, "With love, Eliza R. Snow."

The decade of the 1870s saw the beginning of professional opportunity for women in Utah. Suffrage had introduced them into the public concerns, and when in 1872 Georgie Snow was admitted to the bar as the first qualified Utah woman lawyer she was welcomed by her male colleagues.¹⁹ Her training had consisted of "reading law" in her father's law office for three years, and her bar examination was a fifteen-minute impromptu interrogation conducted by an ad hoc committee while Judge McKean and the court waited to pronounce her admission. The whole examination would have been foregone, in fact, were it not for the court's fear that if she were admitted unexamined, a precedent would be set for the young men who followed to expect that same privilege.

Women in professional medicine followed the women lawyers during that same decade. Midwives, called and set apart by Church leaders had long been the chief medical practitioners, but finally President Young brought into consideration his awareness of the midwives' inadequacies, his distrust of the gentile male doctors practicing then, and his sense of propriety which demanded that women be attended by women doctors, with the result that he called for women to study medicine in eastern universities and then return to Zion to practice and instruct there. The experiences of Romania B. Pratt Penrose, the first Utah woman to earn her MD, and Ellis Shipp, who followed her, have a blend of the comic and the pathetic. Home after her first year in a New York medical college, Romania Pratt found herself with no money to return.²⁰ Brigham Young looks to Eliza R. Snow: raise some money for her, he suggests. And the Relief Society comes through, enabling Romania to leave again her five

¹⁸Eliza R. Snow to Brigham Young, 10 February 1877, holograph, Brigham Young Papers, Church Archives.

¹⁹"Ladies Admitted to the Utah Bar," *Deseret News Weekly*, 25 September 1872. Phoebe W. Couzins, a practicing lawyer from St. Louis, was admitted at the same time.

²⁰Christine Croft Waters, "Dr. Romania B. Pratt Penrose," MS in the personal file of Maureen U. Beecher, p. 7; *Young Woman's Journal* 2 (September 1891):534.

children and complete her work in general practice as well as a specialization in eye and ear. Ellis Shipp, with whom Romania shared for a short time her room at Philadelphia Woman's Medical College, had the same sort of difficulty returning for her second year.²¹ Imagine either of these ladies (Ellis especially, since she returned to school pregnant), facing their dissection lab. One student described how it must have seemed to ladies of Victorian sensibilities:

The sight of eight stark, staring bodies, every age and color, stretched upon as many tables, was not reassuring to say the least. A stifled scream might have been heard, and there were some pale faces, and clinging to each other for support, [and] highly perfumed handkerchiefs held assiduously to the noses of the more sensitive.²²

Returning to Salt Lake City, both doctors not only established practices, but conducted classes in nursing and obstetrics for their sisters. One such, Sarah Indaetta Young Vance, reports her experiences in taking a course in midwifery. She and her husband were moving from cold Colorado back to their warmer holdings in Arizona, and stopped briefly to attend conference in Salt Lake City. Sarah was torn "to stay and fulfill that dearest of my childhood ambitions when I desired above all else to be a doctor like my father when I grew up." She enrolled in a class under Dr. Shipp. Her husband took the older boys back to Arizona, but left with Sarah her two younger sons, ages six and four, and a baby.

I rented a room [Sarah writes] across the hall from the doctor under whom I studied. You can just imagine what a time I had with those three lively country boys in the city. I would lock them into the room while I attended my classes. No sooner was I gone than out through the window would go Leslie and Bert leaving the baby alone. . . . Of course they got themselves into all kinds of little troubles.²³

She tells of Leslie's wangling a newsboy's job, of Bert's picking up chewing gum off the street, of their being beat up by the big boys, but none of it seemed serious enough to interfere with their mother's studies. "They never did anything bad," she concludes. "They were just mischievous boys." Six months and a diploma later, Sarah returned to

²¹Ellis Shipp Musser, ed., *The Early Autobiography and Diary of Ellis Reynolds Shipp, MD* (Salt Lake City: Privately published, 1962), p. 239 and *passim*.

²²Waters, "Romania Pratt Penrose," p. 6; cites "Cactus" in *Young Woman's Journal* 2 (October 1890):44.

²³Sarah E[Indaetta] Y[oung] Vance, "The Story of My Life," Photocopy of typescript, pp. 27-29, Church Archives; also Clayton, *Pioneer Women of Arizona*, pp. 640-45.

Arizona, set apart and blessed by Apostle Abraham Cannon to fulfill her callings as midwife and mother to her own twelve children.

Whether we call it child neglect, or view it as accommodation, this experience of Sarah Vance does suggest what may have been true in other cases: that husbands and family were often required to be supportive of mothers in their desire to work for the common good, as wives were of husbands in their calls to fill assignments for the Church and community. The evidence of cooperation continued into this century, when Jane Manning Skolfield entered medical training in Denver, where she and her family were living. Her latest child was still tiny, so her twelve-year-old daughter missed a year of school in order to see to things at home, and as long as the baby was still nursing, took it on streetcar or bicycle to the college so "Dr. Jane" could give it its noontime meal.²⁴ The studies which will measure in the historical context the effects on the society of these choices and the sacrifices they demanded have not been made, but reading the biographies of some of the women themselves suggests that the return far surpassed the cost.

When woman's rights debates raged during the last century, Eliza R. Snow, speaking for the women and the Church, proclaimed loudly that nowhere in the world had women more rights than here in Zion.²⁵ She may have been right. The demands of kingdom building, the needs of an isolated people, the social and family circumstances, polygamy among them, were conducive to encouraging the Mormon women of the last century in expanding their abilities and extending their influence. Progress, personal and collective, hinged on their taking hold of the opportunities which their circumstances placed before them. And from their leaders they had encouragement.

For it was in 1879 that Eliza Snow, then general president of the Relief Society, told a meeting of women in Sevier County to take off their sunbonnets.²⁶ Her reference is specific more than metaphoric: she wanted the women to leave off the rough garb of the pioneer life in favor of the finer appearance which their skill could produce. The minute-taker in the ward Relief Society quotes Sister Snow as saying that "she had a great objection to sun bonnets," and that "she would be glad when she visited us again to see the sun bonnet changed to home made hats." Prosaic though the injunction be, there is a metaphor there for us: women could not progress without change, and changing

²⁴Jane Manning Thomas, "The Biography of Dr. Jane Wilkie Manning Skolfield, May 19, 1866-February 11, 1935," typewritten, pp. 3-4, Utah Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁵"Great Indignation Meeting," *Deseret News Weekly*, 19 January 1870.

²⁶Glenwood Ward, Sevier Stake, Ward Relief Society Minutes 1873-1888, 26 May 1879, Church Archives.

sunbonnets for hats, homemade though they be, represented progress. Home industry was a challenge for those women, but it was not their only challenge. There would be for them other things to accomplish, and the later emancipation from silk raising, grain storage, and homemade hats would mean emancipation into whatever other challenges the new society would offer. The new generation, woman by woman, family by family, would have to face those challenges.

There they are, then, some of the women of Mormonism's past. Diverse, disparate, often having in common no more than their connection, weak or strong, with the restored gospel. There's Emma Batchelor Lee running the ferry across the Colorado, giving birth to her sixth child with no one but her own young son to help.²⁷ Or Ellen Woodward Fuller, "Aunt Ellen" to both the Pine, Arizona, Mormons and the nearby Indians, at eighty-one years still running her general store and mail order house.²⁸ And Mary Morgan Rees, distressed over her husband's call to take another wife, walking from Brigham City to Salt Lake to confer with the President on the matter, and in such a rush that she declines that offer of a ride in a neighbor's wagon with a curt, "No, thanks. I'm in a hurry!"²⁹ And Martha Cragun Cox, having missed the regular examination because of the death of her baby, pleading for certification as a schoolteacher in Nevada because the poverty-stricken Saints on the Muddy need her services.³⁰ Our archives are bulging with their stories, their observations, their lives. We can learn to know them. We can look at them, and discover who we are.

²⁷Juanita Brooks, *Emma Lee* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1975), pp. 70-71.

²⁸"Ellen Celeste Woodward Fuller," in Clayton, *Pioneer Women of Arizona*, pp. 156-57.

²⁹Amelia Madsen Beecher, "Reminiscence," p. 3.

³⁰Martha Cragun Cox, "Reminiscence," holograph, pp. 144-46, Church Archives.