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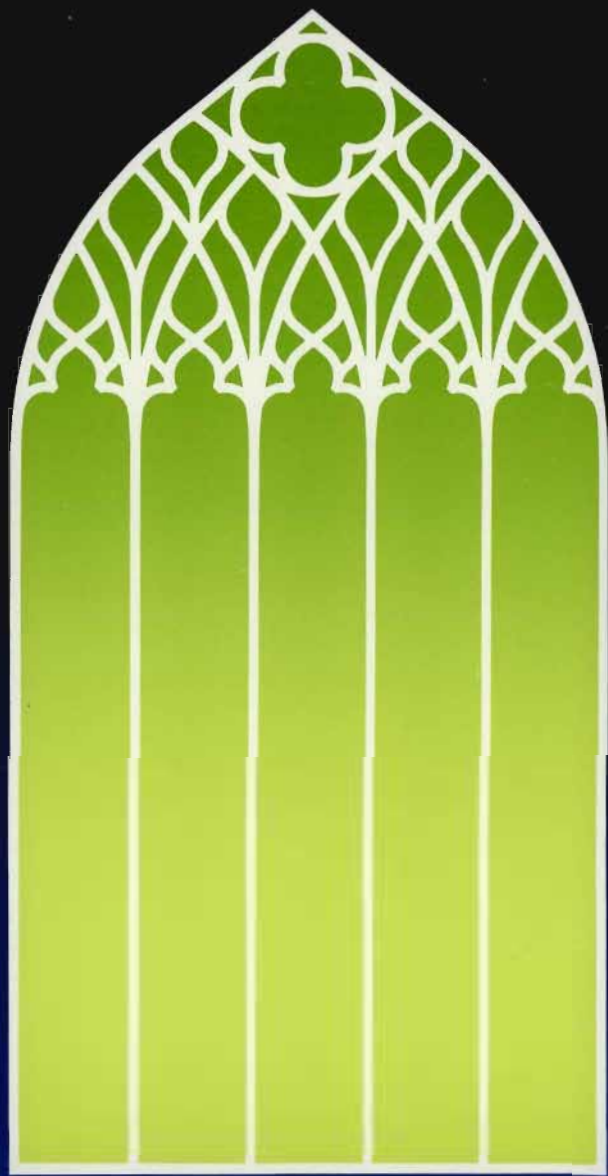
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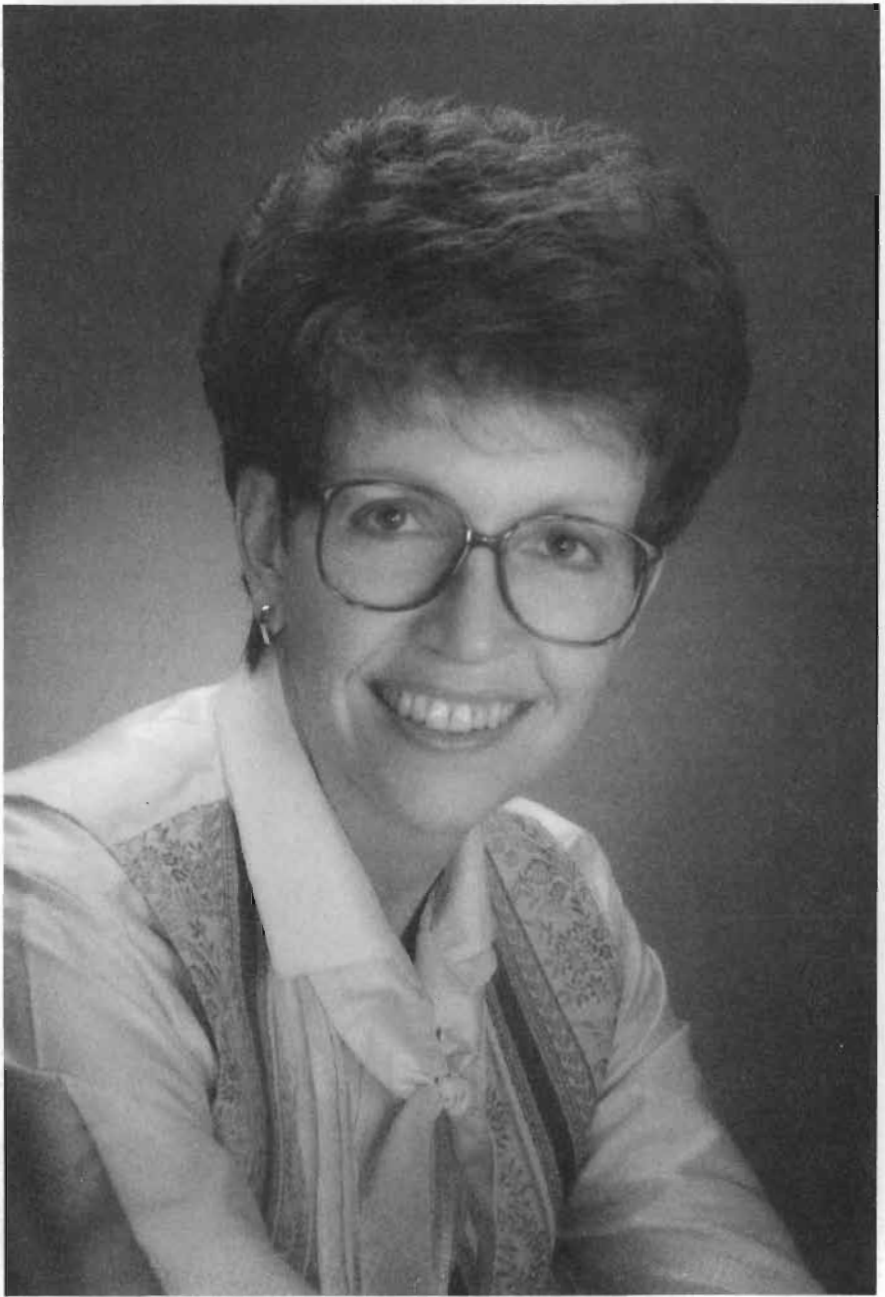
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Glenda Riley

SESQUICENTENNIAL REFLECTIONS:
A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF MORMON
AND GENTILE WOMEN ON THE
WESTWARD TRAIL

Glenda Riley

THE MID-1840S PROVED TO BE heart-wrenching and life-altering for women who turned their faces toward the American West. During the 1840s, as well as the succeeding decade, thousands of women undertook westward migration, some with certainty, others with misgiving. Whether hopeful or hesitant, illiterate or educated, single or married, native-born or from Canada or a European nation, women experienced many comparable—as well as some vastly diverse—circumstances on the westward trek.

The similarities and differences between early Mormon and Gentile trail women will be explored here, including how Mormon women on the trail coped with their additional burdens. The essay

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maintains that these two groups of women experienced the westward migration in strikingly dissimilar ways.

SIMILARITIES ON THE TRAIL

Mormon and Gentile women's trail diaries and other accounts, which constitute an important genre of historical documents, reveal many similarities.¹ For instance virtually all women, except the most hardened, yearned for a better life ahead. A variety of media had done its job well. From rumors to newspaper accounts, from touring lecturers to guidebooks, from letters "back home" to railroad company and other "boomer" literature came the image of the American West as a promised land.

Myriad illustrations exist. As early as 1837, for example, the Dubuque *Iowa News* declared, "It is seldom that a person who has resided for some years here, can ever content himself to return and live in the east." Less than two decades later the *Eddyville Free Press*, also in Iowa, promised rewards that exceeded even the most hopeful fantasies of potential migrants. People had only to bring "strong minds and willing hands to work" to be "abundantly blessed and rewarded."²

Not surprisingly then, women often traveled on hope and dreams. In 1846, Eliza Roxcy Snow, a plural wife of both Joseph Smith and his successor Brigham Young, who emigrated to the Salt Lake Valley, lauded in verse the opportunities the West offered:

Let us go—let us go to a country whose soil
Can be made to produce wine, milk, honey & oil—
Where beneath our own vines we may sit & enjoy
The rich fruit of our labors with none to annoy.³

¹Mormon women's diaries as a genre are discussed in Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "Tried and Purified as Gold': Mormon Women's 'Lives'," Alice Louise Reynolds Lecture presented at Brigham Young University, 17 March 1994. See also Judy Nolte Lensink, "Expanding the Boundaries of Criticism: The Diary as Female Autobiography," *Women's Studies* 14 (1987): 39-54.

²*Iowa News* (Dubuque), 5 August 1837, and *Eddyville (Iowa) Free Press*, 16 April 1855.

³Quoted in "Elizabeth Roxcy Snow," in *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900*, edited by Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey,

In 1853, Hannah Tapfield King, another Mormon woman similarly looked forward to entering "that renowned place, 'The Valley'" of the Great Salt Lake.⁴

In addition Latter-day Saint wives often shared their husbands' visions. According to Mary Ann Hafen, a young handcart pioneer in 1860, her mother survived the trip by concentrating on her husband's assurances that Zion lay ahead, "that the Lord would take care of us, and that better times were coming."⁵

Gentile women also perceived the West as a paradise of sorts. In 1849, Catherine Haun, an Iowa woman married for just four months, undertook a demanding journey across the Great Plains in pursuit of improved health in California. Other women hoped to leave behind worn-out land, high taxes, the system of black slavery, or various kinds of prejudice in favor of richer soil and a more open society. And like Hafen's mother, some sustained themselves by listening to their spouses' promises. In 1860, Lavinia Porter of Hannibal, Missouri, turned her back on her family and followed her husband toward what he described as the "land of golden promise."⁶

Women of color also looked to the West as a haven from discrimination and the opportunity for a fresh start. Shortly after the Civil War, African American Jenny Proctor recalled how she, her husband, and their son climbed aboard their covered wagon with their "little mules hitched to it" and left Alabama for what they hoped would be a better life in Texas.⁷

and Jill Mulvay Derr, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982), 160. See also Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "The Eliza Enigma: The Life and Legend of Eliza R. Snow," in *Essays on the American West*, edited by Thomas G. Alexander (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 29-46.

⁴Hannah Tapfield King, "My Journal," in *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1890*, edited by Kenneth L. Holmes, 11 vols. (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1986), 6:198.

⁵Mary Ann Hafen, *Recollections of a Handcart Pioneer of 1860: A Woman's Life on the Mormon Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 23-24.

⁶Catherine Margaret Haun, "A Woman's Trip Across the Plains," 25 April to 4 November 1849, Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.; and Lavinia Honeyman Porter, *By Ox Team to California: A Narrative of Crossing the Plains in 1860* (Oakland, Calif.: Oakland Enquirer Publishing Co., 1910), 6.

Trail work constituted yet another similarity between Mormon and Gentile women. With a few exceptions of all-male parties, women routinely participated in westward migrations and made a crucial contribution to a party's well-being and even survival. Among Mormons, women even took part in the 1846-47 march of the famed Mormon Battalion. One of these young women was on a honeymoon journey. Other women crossed the Plains without the assistance of husbands and sons who served in the battalion or who had undertaken religious missions.⁸ On the trail women provided such essential services as cooking regular, substantial meals whenever possible. Although men occasionally took over culinary tasks, it was not the norm. Gentile Francis Sawyer noted in 1852 that "the men do all the cooking in bad weather," but that she cooked otherwise.⁹

Even though food may sound commonplace, it played a critical role. Food sustained migrants as they crossed the trail, not only by giving them physical nourishment, but frequently by supplying emotional sustenance as well. After a chilling dousing during a river crossing, for example, Mormon Patience Loader's mother gave her daughters tiny pieces of carefully hoarded bread and molasses. According to Patience, "This was a great treat to us. . . . It seemed to give us new strength to travle [sic] on."¹⁰

Through other dismaying times, food also provided tender memories of former homes and maintained "proper ways" despite wagon and tent living. The ritual of taking tea seemed nearly universal. In 1853, a Mormon migrant from England wrote: "Set the

⁷Interview, Jenny Proctor, in George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave*, 17 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), 7:209.

⁸Carl V. Larson and Shirley N. Mayne, eds., *Women of the Mormon Battalion* (Providence, Vt.: Watkins Printing, 1995); Norma B. Ricketts, *Melissa's Journey with the Mormon Battalion: The Western Odyssey of Melissa Burton Coray, 1846-1848* (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing Co., 1994); "Drusilla Dorris Hendricks: 'Mother's Little Christian,'" in Leonard J. Arrington and Susan Arrington Madsen, *Sunbonnet Sisters: True Stories of Mormon Women and Frontier Life* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984); and no author, Mr. and Mrs. James Casto, no date, WPA Manuscripts Collection, Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department, Cheyenne.

⁹"Francis Sawyer," in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*, 5:88-89. Also helpful is N. Jill Howard and Glenda Riley, "'Thus You See I Have Not Much Rest': Food on the Oregon Trail," *Idaho Yesterdays* 37 (Fall 1993): 27-25.

¹⁰"Patience Loader," in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women's Voices*, 225.

wagon & tent—washed & had tea,” and again, “I went to tea.” Other women, both Mormon and Gentile, also found comfort in drinking tea. American-born Gentile Celina Hines frequently referred to “taking” tea while on the trail, a ceremony that helped her and other family members maintain a sense of continuity with their past. Similarly, Sarah J. Cummins and a friend used boiling water from a hot spring to prepare tea, which they sipped as they reminisced about former friends and happy occasions.¹¹

Women also provided child care and medical treatment, and acted as apothecaries. All three services, often in combination, were much in demand on the trail. In Winter Quarters, midwife Patty Sessions not only delivered babies but regularly doctored the sick, including many children. Among non-Mormon travelers, illness was also rampant, especially attacking children. In 1853, Clarissa Taylor began her journey with a feverish baby, while Amelia Knight’s two children came down with mumps. In that same year, Charlotte Pengra treated her daughter for a swollen ear, fever, and dysentery.¹²

A different type of women’s trail work fell into the psychological and spiritual realms. More specifically, women served as transitional forces on the westward journey. The trip provided a time for people to adjust from the known to the new, to learn fresh skills, and to develop ways of managing unexpected circumstances.¹³

In addition, many trail women bolstered other migrants

¹¹King, “My Journal,” in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*, 6:200-01; Celinda A. Hines, “Diary of Celinda E. Hines,” in *Transactions of the Forty-Sixth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association* (1918): 100; and Sarah J. Cummins, *Autobiography and Reminiscences of Sarah J. Cummins*, 1845, Oregon Historical Society, Portland.

¹²“Patty Bartlett Sessions,” in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women’s Voices*, 184-97; Elizabeth Willis, “Voice in the Wilderness: The Diaries of Patty Sessions,” *Journal of American Folklore* 101 (January-March, 1988): 37-47; Clarissa E. Taylor, “Clarissa E. Taylor, July 6, 1853, Letter from Fort Laramie in ‘Oregon Bound,’” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* (1922): 136; Amelia Stewart Knight, “Diary of Mrs. Amelia Stewart Knight,” (1853) in *Transactions of the Fifty-Sixth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association* (1928): 40; and Charlotte Stearns Pengra, *Diary of Mrs. Byron J. Pengra*, 1853, Lane County Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

¹³“The Frontier in Process: Iowa’s Trail Women as a Paradigm,” *The Annals of Iowa* 46, no. 3 (Winter 1982): 167-97; reprinted in Marvin Bergman, ed., *Iowa History Reader* (Ames, Iowa: State Historical Society with Iowa State University Press, 1996), 37-60.

through hard times by force of resilient personalities. Even several female Saints who had nothing to eat but "bone soup" were able to sing for their brethren and "enjoy" themselves for a few hours one evening in 1856. When they rose to breakfast on broth and one biscuit among them, they ate "with thankful hearts."¹⁴ Other women could glory in a sunrise, laugh at a mishap, and appreciate the beauties of the landscape. For instance, along the Platte River, Gentile Tamsen Donner wrote, "the prairie between the Blue and Platte rivers is beautiful beyond description. . . . Everything is new and pleasing." Teenager Elizabeth Keegan, who found the overland journey to Sacramento in 1852 "tedious in the extreme," waxed lyrical about "rolling praries [sic] . . . covered with verdure."¹⁵

Generally trail women drew upon the tenets of women's culture to direct them in this time of upheaval. Women's customary roles and domestic ideologies gave them guidelines to follow in chaotic circumstances. As wives and mothers, trail women especially played a crucial role by providing moral guidance in a situation that often involved drinking, swearing, loose sexual practices, a state of near undress on the part of some natives, and omitted Sabbath observances. As Mormon Hannah Tapfield King complained, "I have no Sunday feelings while traveling on Sunday."¹⁶

Women especially worried about "civilizing" their children despite crude trail conditions. On an 1846 journey, one young Mormon woman recalled that her mother tried to further her social education by allowing her to attend dances but forbidding her to swim. Similarly in 1852 Gentile Mary Ellen Todd insisted that her daughters remain ladylike by avoiding running, jumping, and climbing, while the following year Amelia Knight spent a good deal of time "washing and scrubbing" each of her offspring.¹⁷

¹⁴"Patience Loader," in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women's Voices*, 237-38. See also Levi Edgar Young, "Pioneer-Day Musicians," in Beatrice B. Malouf, *Daughters of Utah Pioneers*, Lesson for March (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1993), 282-84.

¹⁵Tamsen Donner, "Journal," in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*, 1:71; and Elizabeth Keegan, "Letters," *ibid.*, 3:23-24.

¹⁶King, "My Journal," in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*, 6:208.

¹⁷Rachel Emma Woolley Simmons, "Journal of Rachel Emma Woolley Simmons," in *Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, Heart Throbs of the West*, 12 vols. (Salt Lake

source
food

tedium

Another part of nineteenth-century women's culture involved the formation of reciprocal relationships with other women. Encouraged by the women's guidebooks of the day to practice cooperation, trail women often joined with their counterparts to get a job done, whether it be laundry, cooking, or child care. West of the Des Moines River, Eliza R. Snow and two other women went to "the Creek about a half mile distant to wash, while Sis. Y. & Catherine stayed to attend to the cooking department."¹⁸

Childbirth provided yet another opportunity for women to help one another. When women were "confined" or "in a poor fix to travel," midwives or other women usually delivered babies and even cared for mother and child afterwards. During an 1848 trek led by Brigham Young, Mary Wickersham Wooley bore a robust baby with the help of her twelve-year-old daughter Rachel and a midwife. In another case, when non-Mormon Arvazona Cooper's breastmilk stopped flowing, a female traveler even served as a wet nurse so the infant could survive to see the West.¹⁹

Of course, women's efforts to cope with the hazards of the Overland Trail d demanded great physical energy, stamina, and fortitude. Traversing the trail to California was a twenty-four-hour, every-day-of-the-week undertaking often fraught with danger. Consequently Mormon and Gentile trail women also experienced corresponding tragedies and disappointments. Such notations as that by a Mormon woman on her way to Salt Lake City in 1853, "baby died" and "Sister How's baby died," were common. Moreover, members of the Willie and Martin handcart companies fell victim to intense cold and lack of provisions. During an 1856 crossing, both parents of the Holiton family died from overexposure, leaving behind four or five children. An eleven-year-old girl's father and mother died of hunger and she later had to have her frostbitten feet

City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1950), 11:159-63; Adrietta Adamson Hixon, *On to Oregon: A True Story of a Young Girl's Journey in the West* (Weiser, Ida.: Signal Printers, 1947), 2; and Knight, "Diary," 39.

¹⁸"Elizabeth Roxcy Snow," in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women's Voices*, 162.

¹⁹"Rachel Emma Woolley Simmons: Twelve-Year-Old Teamster Who Crossed the Plains," in Arrington and Madsen, *Sunbonnet Sisters*, 43; and Arvazona Cooper, "Our Journey," 1863, Oregon Historical Society, Portland.

amputated above the ankle. Mary Goble Pay's description of her family's arrival in Salt Lake City, also in 1856, is even more upsetting: "Three out of four that were living were frozen. My mother was dead in the wagon."²⁰

trials on trail
 Gentile women also confronted threats of varying natures. In 1852, Iowan Lucy Cooke crossed the plains to California with her husband, a new baby, and her in-laws. Along the way, she confronted outbreaks of cholera, her mother-in-law's unceasing lamentations, her husband's depression, and her baby's illness. Like Cooke, Eliza Ann McAuley Egbert journeyed to California in 1852. She recorded accidents, death, "impudent" Indians, and loss of stock.²¹

For many women, however, the worst menace was that posed by Indians, widely reported as "hostile" and "ferocious." Still, even though many women expressed fear of Indians, reports of attacks were relatively rare. Mormon handcart women, for example, reported a cow killed by Indians or an offer of marriage and ponies, but few recorded any serious trouble.²²

Frequently, women gradually rejected the stories they had heard about Indians before leaving home and began to trade with them. Trail women bartered needles, thread, calico and flannel shirts, children's rag dolls, flour, and bread in return for potatoes, corn, pumpkins, melons, strawberries, blackberries, meat, fresh fish, dried salmon, baskets, moccasins, and tanned hides. On one occasion, Gentile Lucia Williams, traveling to Oregon in 1851, traded two pancakes for a salmon and on another, gave a native woman an apron, a needle, and some thread for enough salmon to

²⁰King, "My Journal," in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*, 6:194-95; "Patience Loader," in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women's Voices*, 233-34; and Mary Goble Pay, quoted in Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, eds., *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 145.

²¹Lucy Rutledge Cooke, *Covered Wagon Days: Crossing the Plains in 1852* (Modesto, Calif.: Privately published, 1923); and Eliza Ann McAuley Egbert, *Diary, 1852*, California Historical Society, San Francisco.

²²Rebecca Bartholomew, *Audacious Women: Early British Mormon Immigrants* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 184-85.

provide several meals. Williams remarked that she had “never tasted any fowl or fish half so delicious.”²³

Moreover, trail women also began to visit with Indian women. A young Gentile woman who migrated to Salem, Oregon, in 1851 recalled that “if there were Indians we would go visiting their lodges and go around among them.” Some years later, Gentile Arvazona Cooper commented that when a Cherokee woman invited her for a visit, she found that Indian woman “well fixed with household affairs and very kind and sociable.”²⁴

Interchanges between female travelers and native women often led to warm feelings. Gentile Lucia Williams noted that her daughter and an Indian woman started to “jabber” and “laugh” so that “they got into quite a spree.” Such friendly episodes not only eased female migrants’ minds regarding Indians, but often led to an exchange of important information. Especially during the 1840s and 1850s, before trails become overcrowded and mistrust between groups ran high, trail women showed native women how to use needles and bake yeast bread, while native women demonstrated how to prepare and preserve foods, find and use roots, brew herbal medicines, and create a baby-jumper suspended between two bed-posts.²⁵

Clearly, crossing the overland trail acted as a great leveler, bringing women of many social classes and national backgrounds into contact over such basic concerns as nutrition, health, and physical safety. Yet differences existed as well. This pattern proved especially true for Mormon women, whose religious beliefs and practices often set them apart from other westbound women.

²³Lucia Williams, “Diary,” in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*, 3:142-43. See also Sarah J. Cummins, *Autobiography and Reminiscences*; Catherine A. Washburn, “Journal, 1853, From Iowa to Oregon Territory,” Huntington Library, San Marino, California; and Glenda Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 165-72.

²⁴Mrs. H. T. Clarke, “A Young Woman’s Sights on the Emigrant’s Trail,” 1878, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California; and Cooper, “Our Journey Across the Plains.”

²⁵Lucia Williams, “Diary,” in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*, 3:132; and Cooper, “Our Journey Across the Plains.”

DIFFERENCES ON THE TRAIL

The dissimilarities between Mormons and Gentiles proved crucial, especially to LDS women. For one thing emotional trauma regularly characterized their departures. For another the growing avoidance of Mormons and Gentiles along the trail isolated the Saints from the main body of westward migrants. This separation marginalized Mormon women and put them outside an easy reach of information, companionship, and assistance from other parties, trains, and even settlements along the way. Moreover, poverty was rife among the Saints. Although the 1847 Donner Party tragedy topped the list of overland trail disasters, Mormon women of this era routinely confronted hardship and hunger.

For Mormon women, special problems occurred before they even set foot on the trail. Although both Mormon and Gentile women wrestled with grief over leaving their homes, relatives, friends, and neighbors behind, many Mormon women bore the additional shock of split families caused by members who opposed conversion, migration, or both. Patience Loader was only one of many who left a split family behind. Patience's sister Eliza was so bitter about Patience's conversion to Mormonism that she refused even to bid her sister goodbye.²⁶

In addition, unlike non-Mormons, violence and riots often propelled Saints westward, whether they desired to move or not. Although Church leaders had prophesied the exodus and believed they must eventually lead their people to the West, the average Saint knew little of the forecast or plans for its implementation.²⁷

Women especially became convinced of the move's necessity when their children and other family members suffered from bigotry against which they were powerless to protect them. As a case in point, Sarah Studeviant Leavitt, who lived near Kirtland, Ohio, during the early 1840s, remembered that her children would come "from school with their nose bleeding and crying, saying that they had been pounded most unmercifully." Although Sarah visited her children's teacher and extracted a promise to stop such abuse,

²⁶Arrington and Madsen, *Sunbonnet Sisters*, 21-22, 33-34, 54-55.

²⁷Reed C. Durham, Jr., "Westward Migration, Planning and Prophecy," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 4:1563-64.

community censure against the family continued. The Leavitts relocated in Nauvoo, only to discover that they again had to leave a thriving farm, this time with just the things they could hastily load into a wagon.²⁸

Other women of the early 1840s had, spurring them on, memories of mobs who drove women and children from their homes and set fire to the houses behind them, imprisonments, hangings, tar-rings-and-featherings, and outright battles. One young woman left Nauvoo, Illinois, with her mother and siblings after a mob killed her father.²⁹

It was at Nauvoo of course that such traumatic pressures eventually reached a peak and made it imperative that Church leaders activate their migration plan. It was there that Joseph Smith began to practice in secret the revelation commanding plural marriage—meaning that one husband wed several wives—instructing his closest associates in this revival of Old Testament patriarchs. In 1843, for example, Smith was sealed to sisters Eliza and Emily Partridge. Smith also publicly preached about what would eventually be called celestial marriage, but he kept the details of his vision to himself. One woman remembered that, when asked, Smith simply replied, “If I were to tell you, the best friends I have, apparently, would shed my blood.”³⁰

The need to avoid open discussion of plural marriage led to rumors and resistance. Like others Sarah Leavitt first heard about plural marriage when a friend “whispered” in her ear “that the

²⁸“Sarah Studevant Leavitt,” in Ogden Kraut, comp., *Autobiographies of Mormon Pioneer Women, Vol. 1: Sarah Studevant Leavitt, Mary Brown Pulsipher, Mary Adeline Beman Noble, Martha Pane Jones Thomas, Eliza Dana Gibbs* (Salt Lake City: Pioneer Press, 1994), 1:15-38.

²⁹“Martha P. Jones Thomas,” 81, 84, and “Eliza Dana Gibbs,” in Kraut, *Autobiographies of Mormon Pioneer Women*, 1:111; “Emily Partridge Smith Young,” in Ogden Kraut, *Autobiographies of Mormon Pioneer Women, Vol 2: Nancy Alexander Tracy, Eliza Partridge Smith Lyman, Emily Partridge Smith Young, Mary A. Phelps Rich* (Salt Lake City: Pioneer Press, 1994), 2:80; Nancy N. Alexander Tracy, Narrative, 1880, Bancroft Library; and Mrs. Martha Brown, letter to Mr. H. H. Bancroft, 7 August 1880, Bancroft Library.

³⁰Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Jeni Broberg Holzapfel, *Women of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 86-103; “Eliza Partridge Smith Lyman,” in Kraut, *Autobiographies*, 2:57; and “Martha P. Jones Thomas,” in *ibid.*, 1:93.

authorities were getting more wives than one," a practice that dated back to at least 1841 and perhaps to the 1830s. Although Sarah at first resisted the idea, she demonstrated the strength of spirit and independence of thought characteristic of many Mormon women by consulting God rather than simply accepting or rejecting the word of the Church hierarchy. Sarah embraced plural marriage when God revealed the truth in a "heavenly vision." Similarly, after "considerable deliberation," including devout meditation, Mary Phelps embraced the principle of plural marriage and became the third wife of Charles C. Rich in January 1845.³¹

Jane Snyder Richards also fought plural marriage but eventually accepted her husband's need to take a second wife for religious reasons. Although the second wife died on the trek to Utah, Jane had discovered that plural marriage "was not such a trial as she had feared, when she was tested." She added that plural marriage proved the least of her troubles in a long lifetime.³²

In subsequent years, many other Mormon women adopted plural marriage because they believed it was the will of God, necessary to their salvation and spiritual growth.³³ Still, plural marriage failed to convince all Mormon women. Sarah Hall Scott wrote in 1844 that "the people of the state will not suffer such things any longer. . . Any one needs a throat like an open sepulchre to *swallow down* all that is taught here."³⁴

As Joseph Smith foresaw, plural marriage also drew enormous enmity from some insiders as well as many outsiders. In 1844, an anti-Mormon mob murdered Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum in the jail at Carthage, the county seat. After this calamity, thou-

³¹Holzappel and Holzappel, *Women of Nauvoo*, 97; "Sarah Studevant Leavitt," in Kraut, *Autobiographies*, 1:31-32; "Mary A. Phelps Rich," in *ibid.*, 2:119. See also M. Guy Bishop, "Eternal Marriage in Early Mormon Marital Beliefs," *The Historian* 53 (Autumn 1990): 77-88; George D. Smith, "Mormon Plural Marriage," *Free Inquiry* 12 (Summer 1992): 32-37, 60; and Daniel W. Bachman and Ronald K. Esplin, "Plural Marriage," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1091-95.

³²Mrs. F. D. (Jane) Richards, *Reminiscences*, 1880, Bancroft Library.

³³See, for example, Phebe W. Woodruff, *Autobiographic [sic] Sketch*, 1880; Mrs. Mary J. Tanner, letter to Mrs. H. H. Bancroft, 29 October 1880; and Mrs. F. D. (Jane) Richards, *Reminiscences*, 1880, all at Bancroft Library.

³⁴Quoted in Holzappel and Holzappel, *Women of Nauvoo*, 103.

sands of Mormons mobilized to their leaders' growing certainty that the Saints would have to abandon Nauvoo and move west once again.³⁵ They trekked to the desert of the Great Salt Lake in Utah, which lay outside the boundaries of the United States.

Under the leadership of Brigham Young, who migrated with his wives from Nauvoo in 1846, Mormons established Salt Lake City in 1847 and the state of Deseret in 1849.³⁶ Although they hoped to live in peace, free from persecution and regulation by laws stipulating that marriages be monogamous, in 1850 the U.S. Congress recognized Deseret as the Territory of Utah, which brought Mormons back within the jurisdiction of the United States.

As Latter-day Saints flocked toward their new promised land, they traveled as outcasts from their homeland. Although they left a prosperous community and their temples behind, they had to develop a "don't-look-back" mentality. As Joseph Smith suggested as early as 1840, their Zion and all it promised lay ahead.³⁷ They fastened their thoughts and hopes on the future and, wary from their recent traumatic experiences, held themselves apart as much as possible.

Yet distress followed the Mormons along the trail. In particular plural marriage, now openly practiced, continued to bedevil untold numbers of Mormon women. The 1840s letters of Mary Haskin Parker Richards disclose one woman's emotional conflicts while in Winter Quarters, where the issue was frequently discussed. Richards herself begged her husband to wait before taking another wife, declaring that "there is no such a thing as happiness known here where a man has more than one [wife]." Near Fort Laramie, Hannah Tapfield King similarly noted that she could not reconcile herself to "this new doctrine coming in such a form." And in 1852, when Iowan Sarah A. Cooke converted to Mormonism, she refused to accept plural marriage for herself or any other member of her family.³⁸

³⁵Plans to leave Nauvoo are mentioned in "Mary A. Phelps Rich," in Kraut, *Autobiographies*, 2:117.

³⁶Described in Mrs. Clara Decker Young, "A Woman's Experiences with the Pioneer Band," 1884, Bancroft Library.

³⁷Durham, "Westward Migration: Planning and Prophecy," 4:1563.

³⁸Maurine Carr Ward, ed., *Winters Quarters: The 1846-1848 Life Writings of*

In addition, the Saints quickly learned that most non-Mormon travelers had absorbed widespread prejudices against them. A storm of anti-Mormon cartoons, caricatures, newspaper articles, novels, sermons, speeches, and tracts had convinced numerous Gentiles that, as the *New York Times* reported, most Latter-day Saints were “intense and zealous religionists” who shared a “delusion.”³⁹

Several Gentile women traveling westward included Mormons among their fears, for “the tales told of the Mormons. . . were worse than those of the Indians.” Another said she had heard “so many vile things of these Mormons that I expected to see them with cloven feet.”⁴⁰ Given such mistrust, members of the two groups often hurled accusations back and forth on the trail. During the 1850s, some Saints claimed that non-Mormon emigrants played “foul tricks,” for which they blamed Mormons. In another instance Helena Rosbery, who converted in Sweden and traveled to Utah with a handcart company in 1859, also laid the suffering of the Latter-day Saints on Gentiles: “The gentiles have made laws that come in conflict with the laws of God and when that is so we will obey the laws of the Lord and let that of man go.”⁴¹ For their part, Gentiles indicted Mormons, saying they were “vile,” immoral, and a source of constant trouble along the trail. Others agreed that the Latter-day Saints either perpetrated heinous deeds or incited Native Americans to do so.⁴²

Mary Haskin Parker Richards (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), 30-31; King, “My Journal,” in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*, 6:213; and Mrs. Sarah A. Cooke, “Theatrical and Social Affairs in Utah,” 1884, Bancroft Library.

³⁹*New York Times*, 26 May 1859. For discussions of anti-Mormon images see Karen Lynn, “Sensational Virtue: Nineteenth-Century Mormon Fiction and American Popular Taste,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14 (Fall 1981): 101-11; and Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Graphic Images, 1834-1914: Cartoons, Caricatures, and Illustrations* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983). A typical attack was Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse, *A Lady's Life Among the Mormons: A Record of Personal Experience as One of the Wives of a Mormon Elder* (New York: J. C. Derby, 1855).

⁴⁰Pauline Wonderly, *Reminiscences of a Pioneer* (Placerville, Calif.: El Dorado Country Historical Society, 1965), 7; and Helen Carpenter, *Diary*, 1856, California State Library, Sacramento.

⁴¹Tracy, “Narrative”; and Helena Erickson Rosbery, “History of Helena Rosbery,” 1883, Huntington Library.

Impressions
@Mormons

Despite such sentiments, some Gentiles appeared favorable toward Mormons. One woman noted that Mormon merchants at Council Bluffs charged reasonable prices and acted fairly in their dealings with travelers. Another, Margaret Hecox, who migrated to California in 1846, deplored the "abject poverty" suffered by the Saints and judged them not quite "as black as they were painted."⁴³

Still, the two groups generally kept their distance as much as possible, particularly as the numbers of westward parties grew, competition for scarce resources along the trail increased, and Gentile travelers became even more vitriolic in their criticisms of Mormons. The Saints sensibly avoided contact with Gentiles when possible, intensifying the isolation they already imposed on themselves as an exiled religious community.

Clearly, the Saints' practice of plural marriage provided a major reason for Gentile mistrust. During the 1840s and 1850s, many Americans feared plural marriage as a threat to long-held and widely cherished conceptions of monogamous marriage. Actually, about three-quarters of Latter-day Saints were monogamous. Those who practiced plural marriage were in the minority. Moreover, Church leaders hedged the practice around, for the most part, with careful regulations. But after the Latter-day Saints publicly announced plural marriage in 1852, few non-Mormons could be convinced of these facts.⁴⁴

Meanwhile an expanding number of Mormon women defended the idea of plural marriage. Eliza R. Snow maintained that she was learning to "love" the "principle and design of Plural Marriage." Snow deeply resented it when the inhabitants of Des Moines "mani-

⁴²Elisha Brooks, *A Pioneer Mother of California* (San Francisco: Harr Wagner Pub., 1922), 29; Ruth Peterson, "Across the Plains in '57," compiled by Nancy Campbell Lowell, 1931, California State Library; Emily McCowen Horton, *My Scrap-book* (Seattle: n.p. 1927), 27; and Carpenter, *Diary*.

⁴³Wonderly, *Reminiscences of a Pioneer*, 7; and Margaret M. Hecox, *California Caravan: The 1846 Overland Travel Memoir of Margaret M. Hecox* (San Jose, Calif.: Harlan-Young Press, 1966), 21-24.

⁴⁴Bartholomew, *Audacious Women*, 188; Bachman and Esplin, "Plural Marriage," 1094-95; and David J. Whittaker, "The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt and the Public Announcement of Plural Marriage," *Western Historical Quarterly* 18 (July 1987): 293-314.

festes as much curiosity as though viewing a menagerie of wild beasts." She concluded that "their levity and apparent heartlessness" demonstrated their "profound ignorance."⁴⁵

Another 1840s migrant accepted plural marriage as a "sacred revelation." She explained that her religious beliefs led her to consent to her husband's second marriage and that the extended family lived in peace and happiness. Like Snow, she expressed hostility against those who held Mormon women "up to scorn" and caused them no end of troubles. Yet another traveler of the 1840s agreed. As one of two wives, she declared that she enjoyed a "poor but happy" life. And, unlike non-Mormon groups, she lived in a community free of "vice and prostitution."⁴⁶

Not unexpectedly, most Americans saw Mormon practices negatively. In 1850, John W. Gunnison, an army officer stationed in Salt Lake City, wrote his wife that "some things happen in this polygamy loving community which would astonish the people in the States." He added that it was easy to see "the influence of polygamy in degrading the female sex."⁴⁷

As Gunnison suggested, plural marriage could be perceived as

⁴⁵Eliza Roxcy Snow, "Sketch of My Life," 1885, Bancroft Library.

⁴⁶Jane Snyder Richards, "Reminiscences," 1880, and Margaret S. Smoot, "Experience of a Mormon Wife," 1880, both at the Bancroft Library.

⁴⁷John Gunnison, Letter to "My Dear Martha," 1 March 1850, Huntington Library. For a fuller discussion of the reaction to Mormon polygamy see Carol Weisbrod and Pamela Sheingorn, "Reynolds v. United States: Nineteenth-Century Forms of Marriage and the Status of Women," *Connecticut Law Review* 10 (Summer 1978): 828-58; Charles A. Cannon, "The Awesome Power of Sex: The Polemical Campaign Against Mormon Polygamy," in Thomas L. Altherr, ed., *Procreation or Pleasure?: Sexual Attitudes in American History* (Malabar, Fla.: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1983) 99-113. An attack on polygamy's effect on women is Jennie Anderson Froiseth, ed., *The Women of Mormonism; or, The Story of Polygamy as Told by the Victims Themselves* (Detroit: n.pub., 1882). More recent scholarly accounts of Mormon women's views of polygamy are Julie Dunfey, "Living the Principle" of Plural Marriage: Mormon Women, Utopia, and Female Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *Feminist Studies* 10 (Fall 1984): 523-36; Joan Iversen, "Feminist Implications of Mormon Polygyny," *Feminist Studies* 10 (Fall 1984): 505-21; Kahlile Mehr, "Women's Response to Plural Marriage," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Fall 1985): 84-97; and Jessie L. Embry and Martha Sonntag Bradley, "Mothers and Daughters in Polygamy," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Fall 1985): 99-107.

a special peril to women. This factor may help explain why Gentile trail women reacted with such venom to the idea and to those who practiced it. In 1853, Gentile migrant Harriet Sherrill Ward judged the Saints "a miserable lot of extortioners upon whom the wrath of God will yet be poured out." Later, while crossing the plains in 1860, Mary Fish derided handcart women as "sadly in want of husbands to level themselves to brutes & after all their trouble to obtain one 4th or perhaps one 20th part of a man."⁴⁸

As if the Latter-day Saints traveling westward did not already have enough negative aspects to their image, many Americans, troubled by a rising divorce rate, further condemned the Mormon kingdom as little more than a divorce mill. In 1847, Mormon leaders began granting divorces or cancellations of sealings. Because Church officials lacked the legal power to terminate civil marriages, they limited themselves to divorcing polygamous couples whose marriages fell within the jurisdiction of the Church. They intended that Saints leave conflicted relationships in favor of ones that would foster their Christian qualities. Brigham Young reportedly granted over 1,600 divorces during his presidency of the Church between 1847 and 1877. Although Young theoretically opposed divorce because it contradicted the Mormon belief in eternal marriage, he was willing to terminate contentious and other troubled marriages.⁴⁹

On one day, Brigham Young freed George D. Grant of three wives and a few weeks later, relieved him of a fourth. Apparently, Young personally lacked sympathy for men such as Grant. He stated in 1858: "It is not right for men to divorce their wives the way they do." He had slightly more compassion for women. Although he often counseled a distraught wife to stay with her husband as long "as she could bear with him," he instructed her to seek a divorce if

⁴⁸Ward G. DeWitt and Florence S. DeWitt, *Prairie Schooner Lady: The Journal of Harriet Sherrill Ward, 1853* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1959), 126; and Mary C. Fish, "Across the Plains in 1860," Bancroft Library.

⁴⁹Eugene E. Campbell and Bruce L. Campbell, "Divorce among Mormon Polygamists: Extent and Explanations," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46 (1978): 4-23; and Kristen L. Goodman, "Divorce," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:393-93. See also Kimball Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1954).

life became "too burdensome." In 1861, Young instructed husbands to release discontented wives.⁵⁰

As news of Mormon divorces reached the Gentile world, public outrage against Mormons flared, at home and on the trail. The situation worsened in 1852 when the first Utah territorial legislature adopted a statute permitting probate courts to grant divorces. The 1852 Utah Territory statute was objectionable because in addition to listing the usual grounds of impotence, adultery, willful desertion for one year, habitual drunkenness, conviction for a felony, and abusive treatment, it included an omnibus clause: judges could grant divorces "when it shall be made to appear to the satisfaction and conviction of the court that the parties cannot live in peace and union together and that their welfare requires a separation." Moreover, contrary to the customary one-year residency requirement, a Utah court need only be satisfied that a petitioner was "a resident of the Territory, or wishes to become one."⁵¹

As a result of the 1852 legislation, civil divorces were so easy to obtain in Utah Territory that a couple could receive a divorce on the same day they applied for it. On February 12, 1856, John and Sarah Wardall petitioned for divorce and requested equal division of their children and property. The judge agreed: John received custody of the two oldest boys and Sarah got custody of their daughter and youngest boy.⁵²

Rumors regarding such "easy" divorces further separated Mormons from Gentile along the trail during the 1850s. Given the expanding animosity toward the Latter-day Saints, it is not surprising that Gentile trail women disparaged Mormon women. Although Mormon women were often of similar ethnic background, race, and social class, as well as sharing a widespread belief in God, Gentile women treated them as a minority group within trail society. One Gentile women, not content with disagreeing with religious practices, dismissed Mormon women as "very plain looking, many of

⁵⁰Quoted in Lawrence Foster, "Polygamy and the Frontier: Mormon Women in Early Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50 (Summer 1982): 285.

⁵¹*Laws of the Territory of Utah* (Salt Lake City: n.pub., 1852), 82-84.

⁵²Probate Court Records Book, 12 February 1856, Washington County, Utah, Huntington Library.

them absolutely ugly.” Another added that Mormon women were “not always inclined to be friendly”—perhaps understandably.⁵³

Numerous Gentile women also reveled in cases of Mormon failure and disappointment. Although relatively few Mormons regretted their commitment to Mormonism and left Salt Lake City, Gentile women discoursed at length regarding parties of Saints heading back to the “States,” and assumed that these people had their fill of Mormonism and now fled Zion. In 1857, Helen Carpenter described a contingent of returning Mormons as wearing “rags and tatters.” In her view, they constituted “the very worst lot” she had seen, but were only a few of many who “would be glad to leave Salt Lake if they could only get away.”⁵⁴

In 1860, Mary Fish concurred. She met two Mormon women “fleeing” Salt Lake because of their antipathy toward their plural marriages. According to Fish, one woman returned to her parents with “four little responsibilities,” while her companion had “consoled herself for the loss of a small portion of a man by taking a whole one as she has married a trader.”⁵⁵

In addition, more often than not Mormon indigence inspired disgust rather than sympathy among Gentile women. One remarked in 1852 that the Saints were not only “poor,” but that their ranks included numerous “foreigners.” In a sense, she was correct; poverty was endemic among the Mormons and growing numbers of migrants to Salt Lake did originate in Canada and Europe, including uneducated people from the lower classes.⁵⁶

⁵³Ellen Tompkins Adams, “Diary of Ellen Tompkins Adams, Wife of John Smalley Adams, M.D.,” 1863, Bancroft Library; and Haun, “A Woman’s Trip.”

⁵⁴Carpenter, *Diary*. For other similar remarks see Ada Millington, *Journal kept while Crossing the Plains, 1862*, Bancroft Library; Horton, “My Scrap-book,” 27; and Agnes Stewart Warner, *Diary, 1853*, Huntington Library. For a discussion of several disillusioned women who left Salt Lake, see Bartholomew, *Audacious Women*, 188-96.

⁵⁵Fish, “Across the Plains.”

⁵⁶Mary Stuart Bailey, *Journal, Ohio to California, 1852*, Huntington Library. For persecution of Canadian immigrants see Martha Wilcox, “Autobiography of Martha Anna Wilcox Westwood Foy,” 1983, copy in my possession. For British immigrants, see Bartholomew, *Audacious Women*. For foreign-born women in general, see Arrington and Madsen, *Sunbonnet Sisters*.

In fact, poverty, which in turn led to a high death rate, was perhaps the worst single feature of the Mormon diaspora. In part because of mob violence, Mormon parties often departed without adequate preparation. Martha Pane Jones Thomas recalled that in 1846 her family of two adults and eight children “started for the Mountains without purse or scrip, wagon or team.” As a result, people were famished. More than one pregnant woman bore a child under the worst of situations, afraid that she and her infant would starve to death. One woman summed up the misery: “hard times and much sickness and suffering prevailed, especially at Winter Quarters.”⁵⁷

Handcart companies, though few in number, probably experienced the worst privation, however; and the suffering of the Willie and Martin companies in the early winter of 1856 has become a symbol for unswerving devotion under unbelievable hardship. Although supply wagons attended these intrepid pioneers, provisions frequently ran short or were insufficient. As a result, handcart pioneer Patience Loader repeatedly noted “deplorable” conditions, death, and physical inability to pull handcarts any longer. She also underwent emotionally scarring events: “When we was in the middle of the river I saw a poor brother carrying his child on his back. He fell down in the water. I never knew if he was drowned or not. I felt sorry that we could not help him but we had all we could do to save our ourselves from drowning.” In several places in her journal, Loader characterized the trip as a “hard” or “terrible” journey, which finally ended with her family’s arrival in Salt Lake in November 1856.⁵⁸

SURVIVING THE MORMON TREK

The discussion of the special tribulations of Mormon women is not intended to diminish the courage, inventiveness, and determination of Gentile trail women who likewise confronted and surmounted the hardships of the westward journey. It is meant, how-

⁵⁷“Martha Pane Jones Thomas,” in Kraut, *Autobiographies*, 1:73; and Tracy, “Narrative.” See also Carol Lynn Pearson, “‘Nine Children Were Born’: A Historical Problem from the Sugar Creek Episode,” *BYU Studies* 21 (Fall 1981): 441-44.

⁵⁸“Patience Loader,” in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women’s Voices*, 225, 229, 232.

ever, to raise a question: if Mormon trail women faced such additional burdens as trauma, isolation, and poverty, where did they find the added resources to endure?

In part, many Mormon trail women were able to persist because their entire family or community headed toward Salt Lake. Rather than being splintered as a result of their faith, these fortunate women migrated with relatives, friends, and neighbors who believed as they did. From Nauvoo, for example, people routinely left in parties who traveled together and gave each other support.⁵⁹

Mormon trail companies also found themselves bound in a sacred undertaking. For courage and endurance, Mormon women drew on their loyalty to the Church and its basic unit, the family. Women derived further strength from their religious beliefs, their conviction that a promised land lay ahead, and their faith in the second coming of Christ.⁶⁰

At the same time, Mormon travelers in general bred a sense of unity. As virtual outcasts, Mormon travelers developed a group identity. They generated vigor from the conviction that they participated in a special mission. In her poem "The Camp of Israel: A Song for the Pioneers," Eliza R. Snow especially demonstrated this spirit:

We better live in tents and smoke
 Than wear the cursed gentile yoke—
 We better from our country fly
 Than by mobocracy to die.

Chorus
 Tho' we fly from vile aggression
 We'll maintain our pure profession—
 Seek a peaceable possession
*Far from Gentiles and oppression.*⁶¹

⁵⁹See, for example, Carol Cornwall Madsen, *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993).

⁶⁰Kraut, *Autobiographies*, 2:i; and Reed H. Bradford, "Family," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:486-88.

⁶¹Quoted in "Snow," in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women's Voices*, 152-53. See also Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Peace Initiative: Using the Mormons to Rethink Ethnicity in American Life," *Journal of Mormon History* 21 (Fall 1995): 1-30.

At the same time, as they faced various ordeals, Mormon women constructed an active sisterhood. From the beginning, Church doctrine encouraged women to develop their individual abilities, to exercise their personal wills, and to join together in a variety of endeavors. Church teachings also provided a strong work ethic. Thus, although Victorian precepts advised them against arduous labor, Mormon women realized its necessity and chose to work together, building strength in the face of adversity. Of the handcart companies, for example, one historian has written, "Of particular note is the superb performance of the women."⁶²

Mormon women joined together in other ways as well. An outstanding example was the Relief Society, which enacted Church teachings that "Charity Never Faileth." According to Mormon pioneer Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy, the purpose of the first Relief Society, organized in Nauvoo in March 1842, was to assist "the poor and for every noble purpose that came within woman's sphere of action." Women's relief activities also gave women a measure of responsibility and authority, even within the formal Church structure.⁶³

In dealing with the vagaries of plural marriage, many Mormon women also gained autonomy and vigor. In their dairies and journals, Mormon women often portrayed husbands as shadowy figures, sometimes not even giving their full names or other identify-

⁶²Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Women of Nauvoo*, 170-71; and Howard A Christy, "Handcart Companies," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:573.

⁶³Tracy, Narrative; and Janath Russell Cannon and Jill Mulvay Derr, "Relief Society," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1199-1200. For bonding activities of early Mormon women see Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "Women's Work on the Mormon Frontier," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 49 (Summer 1981): 276-90; Anne Firor Scott, "Mormon Women, Other Women: Paradoxes and Challenges," *Journal of Mormon History* 13 (1986-87): 2-19; and Karen W. Peterson, "Cottage Industries of LDS Women during the Early Period of the Church, 1836-1890," (M.S. thesis, Utah State University, 1988). Also useful are Marilyn Warenski, *Patriarchs and Politics: The Plight of the Mormon Woman* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980); and Donald G. Godfrey, "Zina Young Williams Card: 'No Ordinary Frontier Woman,'" Paper presented at the Mormon History Association annual meeting, Park City, Utah, 1994, photocopy in my possession, a revised version of which appeared under the title of "Zina Presendia Young Williams Card: Brigham's Daughter, Cardston's First Lady," *Journal of Mormon History* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 107-27.

ing features. Such spouses failed to appear as forces in daily family life and decision-making. Frequently, however, Mormon women found such a husband's absences freeing. According to Mary Isabella Horne, plural marriage offered her an opportunity "to work out her individual character as separate from her husband."⁶⁴

Women also argued that plural marriage created a work partnership of several women, including plural wives and their daughters. According to one daughter of a plural marriage, "Everyone worked united together and so were able to accomplish much."⁶⁵ Certainly, such organization of chores went far beyond the customary cooperative style practiced by most nineteenth-century women and must have proved a boon on the trail.

Mormon migrants also obtained aid from the Church, which provided strong leaders as well as financial help and supplies. Following the tradition established by Joseph Smith, who sold land and found other ways to help fund migrations of Latter-day Saints to Nauvoo, Church leaders in Utah instituted the Perpetual Emigration Fund. This program allowed Utah settlers to donate money and supplies to aid other Mormons coming to Salt Lake. Emigrants later repaid their debts by working on Church projects or donating produce or cash. By 1870, the Perpetual Emigration Fund had assisted over 13,000 Saints from Scandinavia and Europe, and over 38,000 from Britain.⁶⁶

In addition, through the auspices of the Church, women, acting as informal groups and later as ward Relief Society units, collected

⁶⁴Beecher, "'Tryed and Purified as Gold,'" 22; and Mrs. Joseph (Mary Isabella) Horne, "Migration and Settlement of the Latter Day Saints," 1884, Bancroft Library. For an analysis of the effect of husbands' frequent absences see Carol Cornwall Madsen, "'Feme Covert': Journey of a Metaphor," *Journal of Mormon History* 17 (1991): 43-61. Also helpful is Martha Nibley Beck, "Roles of Women," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1574-75.

⁶⁵Mary Elizabeth Cox Lee, "An Inspired Principle and a Remarkable Lady," 1949, Huntington Library. Also useful are Embry and Bradley, "Mothers and Daughters in Polygamy"; and Kathryn M. Daynes, "Plural Wives and the Nineteenth-Century Mormon Marriage System: Manti, Utah, 1849-1910" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, Bloomington, 1991).

⁶⁶Smith's generosity is described in Tracy, Narrative. For the emigration fund, see Arrington and Madsen, *Sunbonnet Sisters*, 70-71.

food, made clothing, and provided other supplies to assist needy migrants. On numerous occasions, men filled wagons with goods and headed toward the travelers, although sometimes the mounds of supplies proved more than the men and wagons could transport. Women cheerfully opened their homes to immigrants after they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, providing medical care and provisions when needed.⁶⁷

Mormon travelers also received assistance from outsiders. Because not every Gentile spurned every Mormon, women noted instances of help from Gentile travelers. During an 1853 migration, for example, Mormon Hannah King recorded that in crossing a treacherous stream “the Californians came to our assistance, & we got the Horses landed without a buckle being broken!”⁶⁸

As a result of these factors, Mormon women did not face trail adversities without help. They could, and did, utilize every additional resource available to them, sometimes even turning liabilities into assets.

CONCLUSION

What, then, carried more weight, similarities or differences? Which had the most impact along the overland trails during the 1840s and 1850s? This brief survey indicates that in the case of Mormon and Gentile women, similarities proved incapable of overcoming differences. Women’s trail journals increasingly noted that Mormon and Gentile trains simply passed by, or avoided overtaking, each other.⁶⁹ Further, Mormon women confronted factors ranging from mob brutality to plural marriage that never touched their Gentile counterparts.

Consequently, although Mormon and Gentile women often

⁶⁷“Patience Loader,” 240, and “Lucy Meserve Smith,” 268, in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, *Women’s Voices*.

⁶⁸King, “My Journal,” in Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women*, 6:204.

⁶⁹Maria J. Norton, *Diary of a Trip Across the Plains in ‘59*, Bancroft Library; Mary Jane Guill, *Overland Diary, 1860*, California State Library; and Adams, *Diary*. Another scholar suggests that rapprochement did not occur until the 1890s. See Carol Cornwall Madsen, “Decade of Détente: The Mormon-Gentile Female Relationship in Nineteenth-Century Utah,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 63 (Fall 1995): 298-319.

shared such personal characteristics as ethnicity, race, class, and an abiding belief in God, they found few meeting grounds. Instead, they typically experienced the westward trail in parallel yet disparate ways.