Sixth Annual

Alice Louise Reynolds Lecture

Presented by

Maureen Ursenbach Beecher
Professor of English
Research Historian
Joseph Smith Institute for Church History
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March 17, 1994

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Maureen Ursenbach Beecher is a distinguished scholar of Mormon women's history and literature. During the past twenty years she has played a major role in raising studies of Mormon women to academic maturity. Her publications and teaching, her eagerness to establish and maintain scholarly networks, and her largesse in nurturing new scholars have been critical to the coming of age of Mormon studies.

The daughter of Charles and Lucile Harvey Ursenbach, Maureen was born and reared in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. She graduated from Brigham Young University in 1958 with a B.S. degree in English and mathematics. Following missionary service in Switzerland, she lectured in English at McGill University, received a Master of Arts in English from the University of Utah in 1966, and then resumed teaching at McGill. She returned to the University of Utah to work on her Ph.D. and to serve as managing editor of the *Western Humanities Review* from 1969 to 1972. She has observed that *There is contingent upon membership in the kingdom of God a responsibility to shape one's own life according to one's own abilities.*

Professor Beecher's Ph.D. in comparative literature was awarded in 1973, the year after she began working as editor and senior research associate in the newly established History

Division of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Her dissertation examined the picaresque in European literatures, but her new work under Church Historian Leonard J. Arrington immersed her in Mormon history. Her own interest in women writers, combined with Dr. Arrington's commitment to include women in the writing of Church history, made the study of LDS women an immediate priority for Maureen and led her inevitably to Eliza R. Snow, the most prominent Mormon woman of the nineteenth century.

Dr. Beecher's work on the life and times of Eliza R. Snow has resulted not only in numerous scholarly articles, a book of essays, *Eliza and Her Sisters* (1991), and the forthcoming edition of Snow's diaries and autobiography, but has been central to the widening interest in and understanding of Latter-day Saint women and the Mormon experience. And her studies have had a profound impact on Maureen herself. *Mormonism is a life-changing, life-directing commitment. How we view ourselves, how we express ourselves, the work we do, the way we play—all is altered by our commitment (or lack thereof) to our religion.*

Valuing all Latter-day Saint women just as highly as the illustrious Eliza R. Snow, Professor Beecher has studied ordinary lives, looking, for example, "Under the Sunbonnets [for]—Mormon Women with Faces" and analyzing "Women's Work on the Mormon Frontier." As the contemporary American women's movement raised questions about women's

experiences, past and present, Professor Beecher spoke and wrote to both academic and nonacademic audiences. She thoughtfully placed her own experiences—as scholar, working woman, daughter, sister, wife, mother, Relief Society president—within the context of the experiences of Mormon women of the past. *Some of us must open gates for our sisters along the way, gates which they cannot budge alone.*

Committed to making more widely available women's accounts of their lives, she is instigator and general editor of the University of Utah's forthcoming series of volumes of Mormon women's personal writings. The project is reflective of her entrepreneurial bent and her warm willingness to engage and unite new and established scholars in path-breaking work.

Maureen Ursenbach Beecher was founder and president of the Association for Mormon Letters (1976—77). She has been council member (1974—77) and president (1984—85) of the Mormon History Association, has served on the editorial board of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (1985—92), and serves now on advisory boards of The Charles Redd Center for Western Studies (1988–) and *BYU Studies* (1990–) and on the board of directors of the Canadian Mormon Studies Association (1989–). Her affiliation with Brigham Young University began in 1981 when the History Division of the Church Historical Department was transferred to BYU and became the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church

History. Her joint appointment as research professor at the institute and professor of English has given her the opportunity to teach and advise students and to further her scholarship through grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, BYU Women's Research Institute, David M. Kennedy Center, Religious Studies Center, and Charles Redd Center for Western Studies.

In addition to *Eliza and Her Sisters* (which won the 1992 Ella Larsen Turner Award for Excellence in Biography), Professor Beecher coedited with Lavina Fielding Anderson *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Cultural and Historical Perspective* (1987) and coauthored with Jill Mulvay Derr and Janath Russell Cannon *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (1992, winner of the 1993 Frankie and John K. Orton Award in LDS Literature).

Maureen is the mother of Daniel Harvey Madsen Beecher and Anne Bronwen Beecher. She has nurtured with her gracious enthusiasm a much broader family. *The holy blending of the magnificent and the mundane that is a woman's blessing [has] poured over me, and I [have] felt the strength of sharing, the continuity of sisterhood.*

Jill Mulvay Derr

The Alice Louise Reynolds Lecture

"Tryed and Purified as Gold": Mormon Women's "Lives"

Maureen Ursenbach Beecher

Brigham Young University, 17 March 1994

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

Margaret Clawson's "Rambling Reminiscences" is one of the many oases where I have slaked my thirst as I wandered the deserts of historical documents for the past twenty-some years in search of an understanding of the Mormon past, women's past. In all that time, my search has been that of a historian, attempting to understand the events, know the characters, describe the climate, map the physical and political geography, see the picture entire—forest, not trees.

Often as I worked away in the LDS Church Archives or BYU's Special Collections, mouth dry and head muddled, I would stumble onto a woman's pencilled reminiscence or handwritten diary. I would find the single detail or particular description I needed, then, guilt nudging at my elbow to move

to other sources, I would read on, and on, and on. The writer whom I viewed first as informant became by stages an individual, a woman, an acquaintance, my friend, my sister. The historical data became by-product of what is now to me a much more satisfying search: the life writings of Mormon women, a literature of its own.

There is no fitting these often ingenuous texts into the canon I had been taught to appreciate through years of formal study of literature. How could one trained on Milton, Goethe, Hawthorne, or Joyce find beauty in such prose as this, from Mary Goble Pay, as she describes her family's arrival in Utah with the handcart companies:

> We arrived in Salt Lake City nine o'clock at night the 11th of December 1856. Three out of four that were living were frozen. My mother was dead in the wagon.
>
> Bishop Hardy had us taken to a home in his ward and the brethren and the sister brought us plenty of food. We had to be careful and not eat too much as it might kill us we were so hungry.
>
> Early next morning Bro. Brigham Young and a doctor came. The doctor's name was Williams. When Bro. Young came in he shook hands with us all. When he saw our condition—our feet frozen and our mother dead—tears rolled down his cheeks.[2]

The passage defies analysis by any of the criteria by which I was taught to recognize fine writing. Simple sentences, or run-on, or fragmentary. Interjections. Dangling modifiers. Mainly monosyllables—only two words with more than two

in the whole passage. But a Hopkins sonnet or a John Donne sermon has not the power to move me as has this honest life, simply written. The literary canon must expand to allow it place.

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

For all their apparent simplicity, the life narratives of women are deceptive representations. We see only traces, and those "through a glass darkly." That is surely part of their appeal, the intimation of the hidden intricacies of real life which connect the bits we see. Wrote Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, in a voice imitative of the female life writer's:

> It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which could mean this or that, too many shapes which can never be fully described, too many flavors, in the air or on the tongue, half-colors, too many.[3]

For how, in discourse which is at best only conditionally referential and subject to infinite play of meaning, can one re-create a life? a year? a day? a single moment? Hold as we would a mirror up to life, we are faced with the physical fact that the reflection is at best a reverse image in two dimensions. "In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible," wrote Philippe LeJeune, "this in no way prevents it from existing."[4] Add to the general impossibility of writing a life the specific difficulty engendered by her sex of composing a woman's life: a woman having as literary models those created mainly by men, about men's lives, in a society which values what men value. Despite the fact that the first extant autobiography in English was written by a woman, the genre is essentially male: Augustine, Goethe, Rousseau, Bunyan, Franklin—the canon is theirs. Even that noble first, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ca. 1450, lay undiscovered until the midtwentieth century.

Two centuries after Kempe, Margaret Cavendish, duchess of Newcastle, penned "A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and Life."[5] In so doing, she asked rhetorically, anticipating the criticism of her peers in seventeenth-century England, "Why

hath this lady writ her own life?" The question is real enough—in appending to her much longer biography of her husband's life her own autobiography Lady Cavendish was exploring territory inhabited largely, though not exclusively, by men.[6] "I hope my readers will not think me vain for writing my life," she began, adding apologetically her tongue-in-cheek expectation that of herself "none care to know whose daughter she was or whose wife she is, or how she was bred, or what fortunes she had, or how she lived, or what humour or disposition she was of." Her hope for her text was that it create and preserve her identity, "lest after-ages should mistake in not knowing I was daughter to one Master Lucas of St. Johns, near Colchester, in Essex, second wife to the Lord Marquis of Newcastle; for my Lord having had two wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should die and my Lord marry again."

Margaret was right. Historically she had no identity separate from that of her father and her husband; the existence of other daughters and other wives might obliterate from memory her very existence. "Ultimately," writes critic Sidonie Smith, "the issue is one of identity versus anonymity. Cavendish is writing for her very life."[7]

Mormon women autobiographers likewise struggled to justify their efforts at life writing. "Who Can be interested?" apologized Margaret Clawson. "It has been a pasttime and

pleasure to me recalling the little incidents, And occurrences of the long ago, And this is my only excuse for these lengthy reminiscences."[8] It should not surprise us, then, that in Davis Bitton's *Guide to Mormon Diaries* the ratio of women's to men's life writings in Utah repositories is about one in ten.[9] But isn't that about the ratio of cream to skim in a can of whole milk?

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

First there is the question of genre. For diaries, or journals, differ from autobiographies, or memoirs, or reminiscences, and both differ from letters or recorded conversations. Let me use a homely metaphor to make some distinctions. Mary White was one of the West Texas quiltmakers interviewed by Patricia Cooper and Norma Bradley Buferd for their 1978 book, *The Quilters*. For Mary, quilting was a way to see the world:

> You can't always change things [Mary mused]. Sometimes you don't have no control over the way things go. Hail ruins the crops, or fire burns you out. And then you're given so much to work with in a life and you have to do the best you can with what you've got. That's what piecing is. The materials is passed on to you or is all you can afford to buy . . . that's what's given to you. Your fate. But the way

> you put them together is your business. You can put them in any order you like. [10]

The image works as well to explain the writing of a life as its living. Each recorded moment, each diary entry, is a piece saved from the fabric of a woman's day. Ragged, incomplete, misshapen—only its color and its pattern left to show how it fits with its mates. A diary or a journal is a jumble of unconnected pieces, tossed together into a box and pushed under the bed.

My own mother had such heaps of fabric pieces. Whenever she sewed, we children had the task of picking up the scraps. The criterion for which bit was saved and what discarded was its size: half a quilt square was enough, since two pieces could be sewn together to make one four-by-four block. Just recently, because it was so very dirty, beyond cleaning, I discarded an old block quilt made from mother's sewing scraps. It was like losing my childhood, for I recognized in it my brother's striped pajamas, a pink print dress of my own, and an apron my mother had worn. Threads of the past, reminders of the clothes we wore, the children we were. Entries in a diary long forgotten.

Sometimes for her sewing my sister would find a particularly fine fabric, or plan a special dress, too good not to tell about. She would cut me a sample, tidy its edges, attach to it some of the trimmings and a sketch of the style, and send it

to me, away at college. That's a letter, shaped according to the writer's relationship to the intended recipient. These, too, often became part of a collection loosely stuffed into a hatbox on the closet shelf.

In the scurry of a woman's life, sometimes the pieces just stayed where they were; sometimes, however, the goodwife would pull them out and make the small pieces into larger blocks, bits of life history—stars, or log cabins, or nine-square blocks—intending to put them together, some day. And then, having survived the necessities of the hard life, a woman might eventually pull out her box of swatches or blocks, and arrange them into a full quilt top. "You can put them in any order you like," Mary White had said. Wedding Ring, Log Cabin, Windmill, Flying Geese, or Crazy Quilt, she would create a thing of beauty in which every piece connected artistically and permanently to its neighbor and every block had its partner. Patterns emerged, and each piece became part of the whole.[11] Each piece that the collector still liked, that is, or would acknowledge as hers. That is an autobiography. Its intricacy or simplicity tells more about the woman at the time of its quilting than of the blocks at the time of their origin. It uses the stuff of the past as the raw material out of which the present is re-created.

Take Annie Clark Tanner, for example—you know her as *A Mormon Mother* from the fine autobiography her son Obert published in 1969.[12] From first to last we have not the child

Annie growing up, the girl Annie attending Brigham Young Academy, the young woman Annie marrying into polygamy, or the mother Annie rearing her children alone in Farmington. Instead each part is cut to shape and placed in the whole to reveal to the mature, reflecting Annie—and to the reader—the meaning of the contradictions in her life. Would that we had her original diaries and letters, the pieces as they fell from the cutting table! In the spaces between the diary and the autobiography, what might we learn of growth, of struggle, of developing self-awareness?

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

> It is snowing very hard today there has been no meeting nor Sunday School most of the men are away at work I am not well today Eliza has been writing the young folks are having a sleigh ride oh how I miss my Dear Mother when I am sick. . . . Aunt Amanda . . . came and spent the evening with us. [13]

Then begin to trace the pieces. "It is snowing very hard today." Today's snow will last for months, even though this is not thirty miles from St. George, Utah's usual hot spot. The Burgesses have come to Pine Valley from their farm in Grass Valley, even further up the mountains to live until summer. It helps to have neighbors, especially in winter.

In spring Rhoda and George will move their household the twelve miles north.

It is Sunday as Rhoda writes. Even so "the men are away at work." The men are usually away at work, trying to make Utah's Dixie blossom as prolifically as did her Wasatch Front settlements. "I am not well today" is a rare complaint for Rhoda, and a foreshadowing: in three weeks she will bear her tenth child and sixth daughter. On the eve of the birthing, Rhoda will write:

> I have been cleaning washed and Ironed a littel the Children are home from school Geo is back from Grassvalley supper is over and the littel ones are in bed the snow is quite deep and the weather very cold I am so lonely tonight and selfish enough to wish my Dear old Mother here with me.[14]

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

"The young folks are having a sleigh ride." Splendid, for the Mormon community had little else but its own entertainment. Who of the children are there? George Edward, Eddie, is

sixteen. Perhaps he is along for the fun now, but in the evening his father will need him to ride over to Grass Valley to tend the animals there. Rhoda will worry that he will freeze in the cold on the way. Perhaps now he has lagged behind in order to court Emily Jeffery, who will come ever so surely into Rhoda's diary as Eddie brings her into the family three years from now.

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

The next oldest daughter to Allie is Ella Mae, Ellie, nine, not quite the help her sister is. She brings in the wood and often must tend Willard, seven, Horace, six, and Lucy, three, while Allie is away or working. In two weeks Ellie and Howard, eleven, will be feverish and covered with rashes—measles, which will last through Rhoda's confinement. Did Rhoda fear the effect of measles on an unborn child? Did she know the baby within her was already beyond that particular danger? Or did she worry alone in silence? Did the little ones

catch the measles, or would we have that to worry about again? Rhoda doesn't say. About the time they would have broken out, Rhoda would be facing her own confinement.

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

> Dec 12 the Children came from Grandmas this morning said she was sick so I hurried down found her in bed she said she was a littel better she had had a chill
> Dec 13 I have been sick all day . . . so I did not go down until evening found her much better she said she wanted her supper so we got it she ate hearty seemed to enjoy it
> Dec 14 Ma is not so well to day has that old pain in her side
> Dec 15 Ma is no better and yet she does not seem very sick her appetite is quite good and her mouth is all broke out with cold sores
> Dec 16 Ma sent word to me not to come down to day as she felt much better I am so glad. . . .
> Dec 17 I hurried down to Mas this morning found she had spit blood all night. . . . I hope it is nothing serious I have seen her spit blood before this Brother Lloyd administered to her I do wish George was here —evening—Lord help us to say *Thy will be done* our Dear old Mother has passed away to a better world than this

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

So, patch after patch, the quilt pieces jumble into Rhoda's box—gingham for Allie, calico for Ellie, corduroy for Eddie,

to keep him warm; leather for George, perhaps, and ecru lace from Ma's shawl. Life. Raw life. Day by tedious day. "I have been piecing a flannel quilt and tearing carpet rags all day." The fabric of a woman's life.

But not always so heavy with responsibility. Look now over the shoulder of Lizzie Conrad, nearly nineteen, waiting for her true love to return, writing to her diary as though to a friend, and signalling with a squiggle each day a letter arrives from her Hyrum.

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

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

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

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

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

The course of true love, etc. etc. But true true love it seldom is. For personal texts are the fictions we create in order to make our lives acceptable to ourselves. By omissions or by outright untruths, we reshape events to our liking. "I don't remember why I was lying here," observed one of my students on reading her own teenage diary, "but I know this is a lie." [16] Our memories are flawed, as you have no doubt discovered when you have shared your account of an event with that of a sibling or a spouse who was also there. But within every text is imbedded a deeper truth, a transcendent reality trying to emerge. Take this reflective account of a Canadian woman looking back to her Central Utah childhood.

Maydell Cazier Palmer was a queenly personage in my young world. She and her stake president husband came occasionally to our ward and shared Sunday dinner with us,

my father being then bishop. I stretched to understand the sermons of the dignified man, his slight palsy seeming to add emphasis to his words, but I cowered in absolute awe of the woman, his wife, who seemed to tower by his side in regal silence. She was not silent, I discovered as I matured, but she never occupied the pulpit. Educated, articulate, outspoken, she had earned by her conscientious examination of her life and her surroundings a reputation for asking the right questions at the wrong times of the wrong people. "While Brother Joseph Fielding Smith was in our home," she recorded, "I attempted to discuss . . . women and the priesthood." Her question was a salient one: "By what authority do women officiate in the temple?" Her logic led him into a corner; consistent with her steps he would have to have admitted that "all temple work done for women by women is to no avail." The Apostle dismissed the argument. "I was told by one of our visitors that the brethren have a good laugh about this when they talk about it," she concluded sadly. But added, "Women in the church have not yet come into their own."[17] Those of us who know Helen Canland Stark and other members of the Alice Louise Reynolds group will sense the sister spirit here.

But the part of Maydell's autobiography which most intrigues me, as I deal with questions of objective and subjective truth, is earlier, as she remembers her girlhood in

Nephi. Born in 1889, she lived what she remembers as a happy childhood with her parents and her two sisters. After 1803, however, her father seemed nowhere present. Actually he had gone to Canada, taking with him his second wife. His brother Orson, who had also emigrated, occasionally returned to Utah. Maydell remembers:

> On one of these visits he came to see my mother, and I innocently asked him why my father did not come home to visit us. A peculiar expression was exchanged between the two and a meaningless answer given. A few days later I put this question to my mother and received the answer she had hidden from me for these years. "Your father is living in Canada with a woman whom he has introduced as his wife." [18]

The threads of this story are so tenuous, the spaces so open, it reminds me of a piece of Battenberg lace: just enough fabric to connect the threads, but not enough to fill in the holes. How could so bright and analytical a young woman, living in a Mormon town where marshals had so recently threatened the security of nearly half the families in the community, and where hearings in Washington, D.C., were currently accusing Mormons of clinging to their polygamous marriages, have achieved her midteens without suspecting the cause of her father's absence or sensing the sorrow in her mother's silence?

Maydell continues:

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

Her mother then presented Doctrine and Covenants Section 132 for the young woman's reading. Here again, one must ask: Had she never been taught the prophetic basis of the Principle, for which so many of her co-religionists had given so much? Never read the sacred scriptures, or discussed them with teachers?

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

Return to the Battenberg lace, or the cutwork embroidery of an earlier day. Before he allowed the Church Historian to look at his diary, my grandfather carefully razor bladed out small sections. More frequently we totally omit details which belie the persona we are trying to present. Spaces. Silences. Perhaps the most interesting part of the autobiographical record—what is left out, and why.

Margaret Judd Clawson, with whom we began today, wrote in full and delightful detail of her young womanhood, of crossing the plains, of performing in the Salt Lake Theatre, of young motherhood, of the social life which whirled around her family. But of the backstage romance and her resulting marriage as second wife to Hiram Clawson, she writes only: "In 1852 I was sealed to Hiram B. Clawson by President Brigham Young And I have no cause to regret ever having taken that step for he has been a Kind Considerate husband And a most indulgent Father to all of his Children." Four years later, when Margaret was four months pregnant with Rudger, Hiram married a third time. Her pain and that of Hiram's first wife, Ellen Spencer Clawson, are reflected in that woman's letter to her friend Ellen McGary in San Bernardino telling of the new marriage: "I think perhaps Margaret feels worse than I do for she was the last, and I suppose thought he would never get another, the same as I did. . . ."[19] In an autobiography written presumably for her children, Margaret would not share the anguish, the ache, the sorrow engendered by polygamy. Nor perhaps could she acknowledge the seemingly illicit delight of being courted and won by a man already someone else's husband. In any case, in her reminiscence, as in so many Mormon women's accounts, her husband is a shadow, a phantom, seldom named or seen.

In the letter, however, Ellen Clawson is freer—she knows, or thinks she knows, that her words are kept in confidence by one who will understand. After the third marriage, she confides to her friend:

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

Words flow from Ellen's pen, tumbling over each other as though the sluices of her heart have opened to her friend. Such intimate disclosure is rare in a diary, and even rarer in most autobiographies. In daring to read such a letter, we who seek to understand the burdens of the past count ourselves among the writer's confidants and assume with reverence an obligation of compassion and love. We, too, become sisters and friends.

Quilts, embroideries, tapestries, fabrics of women's lives, these personal narratives. Loosely woven, or still on the loom, bobbins dangling, colors yet to be interwoven; or tightly bound and neatly finished, ends tucked in, seams hidden.

Unique as the mind that conceived them, the hands that made them. They warm us, please our eye, delight our sensibilities, evoke our love. Let us not participate in the silencing of the voices of our sisters of past and present. Let us find their texts, read them, share them, and learn from them. For they are us, and ours, forever.

NOTES

1. Margaret Gay Judd Clawson, "Rambling Reminiscence of Margaret Gay Judd Clawson," holograph, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah. Courtesy of Jean Greenwood and Kathlene Fife Jackson, who transcribed the text. See also *Relief Society Magazine* 6 (1919): 257–62, 317–27, 391–400, 474–79. Also excerpts in Gordon Irving, ed., "Teenage Pioneer: The Adventures of Margaret Judd Clawson," *New Era* 4 (May 1974): 44–50. This year, BYU's Religious Studies Center is publishing the piece entire as prepared by Kathlene Fife Jackson in a volume edited by Claudine Foudray Gallacher.
2. As quoted in Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, eds., *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 145.
3. Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 134.
4. Philippe LeJeune, *On Autobiography*, as quoted undocumented in Helen M. Buss, *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 3.
5. Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, "A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life," *The Lives of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, and of his Wife, Margaret Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. Mark Antony Lover [Lower] (London: John Russell, 1892), 309–10. As quoted in Domna C. Stanton, *The Female Autograph* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 14.
6. Ibid.
7. Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 100.
8. Clawson.
9. Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries & Autobiographies* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1977).

10. Patricia Cooper and Norma Bradley Buferd, *The Quilters: Women and Domestic Art* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), 20.
11. I appreciate the extension made to the quilt metaphor by William A. Wilson: "Once we have selected the final design, pattern takes over and guides our choices." Certainly the process applies to the writing of an autobiography, and probably at some level to the living of the life. (Bert Wilson to Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, 19 March 1985, in author's files.)
12. Obert C. Tanner, ed., *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography by Annie Clark Tanner* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund and the University of Utah Library, 1969).
13. "The Journal of Rhoda Ann Dykes Burgess," typescript in author's possession.
14. Ibid., 6 February 1882.
15. Mary Elizabeth Conrad Muhlestein, Diary, 1891–1900, holograph, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
16. Conversation with Amanda McPeck, 15 March 1994.
17. "Autobiography of Maydell Cazier Palmer" (Lethbridge, Alberta: Privately published, 1980), 61.
18. Ibid., 16.
19. Ellen Spencer Clawson to Ellen Pratt McGary, 4 Novenber 1856, as published in S. George Ellsworth, *Dear Ellen: Two Mormon Women and Their Letters* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund and the University of Utah Library, 1974), 33.



Oil Painting of Alice Louise Reynolds

by Dean Faucett

ALICE LOUISE REYNOLDS

You may look over the annals of this church and check over the names of the women who have majored in blessing mankind. I think you will find no one who has contributed more unselfishly than Alice Louise Reynolds. To my mind, that was her dominant trait—unselfishness.

—Elder George Albert Smith
Funeral of Alice Louise Reynolds
Utah Stake Tabernacle, Provo
December 9, 1938

Unselfish service has a lasting effect on what it touches. The unselfish touch of Alice Louise Reynolds can still be felt at Brigham Young University. The Harold B. Lee Library can trace its beginnings to a committee on which Miss Reynolds served, first as a member and later as chair. She devoted many years to building the dream of a large and comprehensive university library at BYU. Today the Harold B. Lee Library, with almost 3,000,000 volumes, stands as a monument to her dedication and vision.

Alice Louise was born to George Reynolds and Mary Ann (Tuddenhaum) Reynolds on April 1, 1873. She was only 6 when her father was imprisoned for plural marriage and only 12 when her mother died at the birth of the family's eleventh child.

Soon after her mother's death, Alice and a younger sister were sent to Brigham Young Academy in Provo to study under Karl G. Maeser. Alice also attended the new Salt Lake City Academy and Brigham Young College in Logan. In 1889 she returned to Brigham Young Academy and graduated with a Normal Diploma in May 1890.

The new principal of the Academy, Benjamin Cluff, Jr., visited with Miss Reynolds shortly after graduation and convinced her to attend the University of Michigan to prepare herself for a teaching opportunity at Brigham Young Academy. Alice Louise Reynolds was among the first Mormon women to go East for university study. After studying in Michigan for two years, she returned to the Academy, where she received a Bachelor of Pedagogy degree in 1895. In 1897 she was awarded a Bachelor of Didactics degree by the Church Board of Education, and in 1910 she received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the new Brigham Young University. Miss Reynolds was the first woman to teach a college-level course at BYA and taught all of the literature classes until 1903. She was also the first woman to become a full professor at BYU and was an active member of the Utah and National Education associations. Her thirst for knowledge led her to continue her education throughout her life. She did graduate work at

the University of Chicago, Cornell, Berkeley, and Columbia. She also studied in London and Paris.

Alice Louise Reynolds was politically active and served on the National Democratic Committee and as a delegate to the national convention of the Democratic Party. She also served as a delegate to several women's organizations, including the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the National American Women Suffrage Conventions, and the League of Women Voters at the Pan American Convention.

In 1906 a faculty library committee was formed to help establish an adequate library for Brigham Young University. Miss Reynolds was a member of the committee from its inception and served as its chair for 19 years. She is especially remembered for her determination to build the library's book collection. She headed a fund-raising drive to purchase a major private library held by a Provo judge, J. W. N. Whitecotton. Her active leadership made it possible to obtain the 1,200-volume collection when the school lacked the funds to purchase the books. Later, she organized several campaigns to obtain books and acquire funds that helped the library's holdings increase to 100,000 volumes at the time of her death in 1938.

Church callings were an important part of her life. She served for

20 years as a member of the Utah Stake Board of the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association. In 1923 she was called to the General Board of the Relief Society. She became the editor of the *Relief Society Magazine*, serving in this position for 7 years concurrently with her teaching responsibilities at BYU. She was also instrumental in adding literary lessons to the Relief Society curriculum.

Throughout her life Miss Reynolds had many friends and admirers. She was so well respected that former pupils formed a club in her honor. The Alice Louise Reynolds Club eventually consisted of 16 official chapters throughout the United States.

Alice Louise Reynolds died of cancer on December 5, 1938. In her memory, and in conjunction with the dedication of the Harold B. Lee Library addition in 1977, the Alice Louise Reynolds Room was named as a memorial and permanent tribute to this remarkable teacher and friend of the library.

The Alice Louise Reynolds Lecture Series has been established in her honor to feature prominent guest speakers in literature, bibliography, and public service. It is through the generosity of members of the Alice Louise Reynolds clubs and other Friends of the Library that the endowment for this annual lectureship has been made possible.



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