

Brigham Young and the beginning
of the Retrenchment Association
In this issue: YWMIA Centennial,
Sisterhood, and the Church

May 1969
The Era
Improvement

On the Cover:

The time: Sunday evening, November 28, 1869.

The Scene: The parlor of the Lion House.

The event: The organization by President Brigham Young of his daughters into a retrenchment association, later to become the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association.

In the beautiful painting on the cover, Artist Dale Kilbourn has captured the scene as President Young admonished his daughters to "retrench in your dress, in your tables, in your speech.... Retrench in everything that is bad and worthless, and improve in everything that is good and beautiful."

To capture the facial features of ten of President Young's daughters (who fondly called themselves "The Big Ten"), the artist referred to the photograph pictured below, which is now in the collection of the Utah State Historical Society. Pictured are: back row, Zina Young Card, Eva Young Davis, Nett Young Easton, Maime Young Croxall, and Maria Young Dougall; back row, Marinda Young Conrad, Carlie Young Cannon, Ella Young Empey (first president of the Retrenchment Association), Emily Young Clawson, and Fannie Young Thatcher.

The painting will be presented to the YWMIA during June Conference, June 26-29, when the centennial year will officially begin. In honor of the centennial, this issue of the Era features articles about the YWMIA as well as stories, articles, and poetry about women and the Church.



The "Big Ten"—daughters of Brigham Young

The Improvement Era

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The Pioneer Woman

By Dr. Kenneth and Audrey Ann Godfrey

• Uprooted from their homes with hardly time for a proper good-bye, and leaving behind much that was dear to them, the pioneer women did what they could to make their rugged wagons home to their wandering families.

Most of their conveniences had been left in New York, Ohio, Missouri, or Illinois. Thus, they were faced with putting to full use all the talents and skills at their command to make life bearable. They must have thought of the women

of ancient Israel who followed Moses, and those who went with Lehi into the wilderness. This would give them strength and renew their hope that with the help of God, they too would find their "promised land," a home to call their own.

"With almost their entire culinary material limited to the milk of their cows, some store of meal or flour, and a very few condiments," as one writer wrote, they learned to fashion a meal that was both appetizing

Before leaving camp each morning,
Mary mixed her bread and placed it in the wagon to rise.

and healthful. They found if they hung the leftover milk and cream on the side of the wagon, it would turn to butter as the wagon jogged along. They acquired the skill of working with yeast. When camp was made and a fire laid in an iron stove or an oven dug in the side of the hill, the well-kneaded loaf was ready for baking. Often they would find an oven ready for their use, left by those who had gone before.

Mary M. Voght Garn crossed the plains with seven children. She made regular yeast and thickened it with cornmeal into a heavy dough. She would shape the dough into small squares and place these in a shaded corner of the wagon, knowing that the sun would kill her carefully guarded yeast plants. When new yeast was needed, a new start would be made from the last

square. Before leaving camp each morning, Mary mixed her bread and placed it in the wagon to rise. As she traveled, the yeast would do its work, and evening would find the family taking its meal with freshly baked bread.

But food was not always plentiful. Hosea Stout recorded in his diary on June 20, 1846, just two short months away from Nauvoo, that "hunger began to grind hard upon us." Stout wrote: ". . . my wife went to preparing our dinner which might properly be called our 'ultimatum.' It consisted of a small portion of seed beans and a little bacon boiled and made into soup. We had flour enough to set it out and in fact we this last time . . . seemed [to have] a more luxurious and sumptuous table than usual which made to a stranger an appearance of plenty."

That night two men took their meal with the Stouts, never dreaming it was the last of the family's provisions. Later the family was reduced to eating boiled corn.

As the wagons came into buffalo country, families busily engaged themselves in making jerk from the freshly killed meat. They cut the meat into long strips that they dipped in a boiling solution of brine. It was then hung on a heavy cord over a smudge fire for the night. The next morning the strings of meat were looped under the wagon bows to be dried in the sun.

As the days grew into weeks, the women of the wagon trains knew a companionship with each other that was very close, brought on by the common hardships they suffered. They nursed each other through cholera, mountain fever, and childbirth. Eliza R. Snow re-

corded that the first night out from Nauvoo, nine children were born.

As time went on, women gave birth to babies under every circumstance imaginable. Sister Snow wrote: ". . . some in tents, others in wagons, in rainstorms, and in snowstorms. I heard of one birth which occurred under the rude shelter of a hut, the sides of which were formed by blankets fastened to poles stuck in the ground, with a bark roof through which the rain was dripping. Kind sisters stood holding dishes to catch the water as it fell, thus protecting the newcomer and its mother from a showerbath."

In many cases the women organized, just as the men did, in order to accomplish the goals they had set for themselves. In one organization resolutions were drawn up, such as those noted by Louisa Barnes Pratt in her diary: "Resolved: that when the brethren call on us to attend prayers, get engaged in conversation and forget what they called us for, that the sisters retire to some convenient place, pray by themselves and go about their business." Then Louisa adds, "If the men wish to hold control over women, let them be on the alert. We believe in equal rights."

Often, after children were tucked into bed, the women would gather in small groups and enjoy the coolness and quiet of the evening. Louisa wrote that "the Platte River country was beautiful." The women could be seen strolling along the river banks in the moonlight or enjoying a refreshing bath in its waters. "Our hearts, at the same time, glowed with wonder and admiration at the beauty and sublimity of the scenery, alone in a great wilderness."

Though the days were often dull, there were other times when the excitement was almost more than these prairie women needed, as

Brother and Sister Godfrey are members of the Tempe Sixth Ward, Tempe (Arizona) Stake, where Brother Godfrey is district coordinator of Arizona and New Mexico seminaries and institutes, and where Sister Godfrey is mother, teacher, and part-time writer.

Whether they made soap from ashes or paint from skim milk, ingenuity was their key

Rachel Lee found out near the end of her journey. As she walked beside her wagon, delighting in the wind that cooled her a little as she trudged along, an unexpected gust whipped her skirts into the wagon wheel. Historical writer Juanita Brooks wrote that before Rachel knew it, her skirts were being "wrapped around and around the hub. She screamed for help as she tried to extricate them, but in an instant they were drawn so tight that she could only grasp two spokes in her hands, her feet between two others, and make a complete revolution with the wheel."

The wagon was finally stopped, and Rachel found herself almost right side up but still tightly bound to the wheel. Everyone gathered around, trying to decide how to get her loose. There was no question of cutting her clothing, as that would mean one less item for wear that she needed badly.

It was decided they would unhook her skirt and unbutton the petticoat, and by carefully slitting the placket, she could be pulled free. Her shoes were unlaced. Then as one woman held a blanket to protect her from curious eyes, she was plucked from skirt, petticoats, and shoes "as clean as though they were skinning the legs of a chicken." Later the clothing was easily removed from the wheel, and in the privacy of her wagon Rachel shook them free of wrinkles and put them on again. As she took up her walk again, she kept a wary distance from the wheels.

After being spread out in various

places during the day's travel, the families especially enjoyed their evenings together. By then all the out-workers—scouts, ferrymen or bridgemen, roadmakers, herdsmen or haymakers—were finished and could come to the camp to rest. As the smoke of the campfires was silhouetted against the pink clouds of sunset, the bells of the cattle heralded the arrival of the tired laborers. Many of the women would go out to meet them. Later, with the children in their laps or seated about them, they would talk over the events of the day.

"But every day closed as every day began, with an invocation of the Divine favour; without which, indeed, no Mormon seemed to dare to lay him down to rest. With the first shining of the stars, laughter and loud talking hushed, the neighbor went his way, you heard the last hymn sung, and then the thousand-voiced murmur of prayer was heard, like babbling water falling down the hills," wrote Thomas L. Kane.

With their destination reached, the women found there were still mountains to be climbed in the form of establishing households in the wilds of the Great Basin. M. Isabella Horne, who arrived in the valley on October 6, 1847, told of the difficulties she and other women faced.

"Mr. Horne succeeded in building two small log rooms that season for our family, which consisted of my husband, myself, four children, and Brother and Sister Robert Holmes, whom we brought with us, and when we moved into the house there were neither doors, windows, nor floors."

She tells how they made their furniture, as they had brought with them only one chair. Holes were made in the logs of the house; in these were inserted poles that stretched horizontally and were

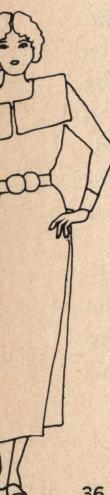
held up at the other end by posts set in the floor. Rope or rawhide was stretched across the poles to form a bed. The cupboards were made by again inserting two smaller poles in the log wall and laying a packing box on top of them. Calico curtains were hung across the front to keep out the dirt. Stools were made for seats, and boxes were used for tables until lumber to build them could be found.

In March 1848 a severe storm which lasted ten days, saturated their sod roof, and the rain came inside. Brother Horne tacked wagon covers to the roof and the foot of the bed to let the water run off so they could sleep. Oilcloth was stretched over the table. As they cooked or did housework, they wore wraps and carried umbrellas. After the rain had stopped, it still continued to rain inside for quite some time.

Then came the snakes and mice. The snakes were soon frightened away or killed. But the mice were more evasive. They turned up in trunks, beds, and even coat sleeves. A trap was invented that consisted of a whittled, round piece of wood laid over a pail with water in it. The middle of the stick was flat, and grease was put on the edges. When the mouse ran out to get the grease, the wood turned, tipping the mouse into the water. After Sister Haight supplied her neighbors with kittens, the supply of mice was greatly diminished.

Since their cattle had been worked down, their meat was very poor, so tough it had to be boiled all day. There were no vegetables except for a few sego lilies and parsnips that the children dug. Isabella says that the segoes were quite good when freshly cooked, but became thick and ropy as they cooled.

Sister Leonora Taylor owned the only sieve in the valley. She had



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brought a piece of bolting cloth with her that she attached to a frame made for her by one of the men. It was borrowed when any of the sisters wanted to make white biscuits.

The women helped each other in additional ways. Isabella heard of a neighbor who had put some red lead and lamp black into skim milk and painted her home. She borrowed the remaining "paint," and using a rag, covered her doors and frames.

Setting a precedent for their modern counterparts, the pioneer women used their ingenuity to fashion the tools they needed. Cotton yarn became fish nets. Floured and larded rags were twisted into crude candles to light the homes. Ashes became soap. Squash and pumpkin thickened cornstalk molasses.

The first year was a busy time, with few amusements. But the pioneers felt free and happy, because they had no fear of mobs. They planted gardens that grew well and flowers that brightened their rustic surroundings. The first fruit trees took root. And by the second year, work had slowed enough to allow time for socials, dancing parties, and other activities.

It had been a long, hard journey from Nauvoo, but now the rewards outweighed the labors. Homes were firmly established and gardens had been harvested, with the produce put away for winter consumption. There were free hours for visiting beloved friends. The pioneer women once more settled into comfortable routines of keeping a home and making life beautiful and happy for those around them. The journey had helped them grow in service, in faith, in love, in strength. These attributes would continue to assist these female adventurers in helping to build the kingdom of God on earth.

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