BUILDING
The Material World of Mormon Settlement
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I will here state that since my first trial in receiving the principle of celestial marriage I have never doubted its being the work of God and know that it is the most "glorious dispensation of the fullness of times" destined to usher in the millennium, when peace shall reign on the earth.

—Mary Ann Price Hyde, 1880

Consumption for many Sanpete men meant owning a fine house, but during the Zion-making years they could also have satisfied the drive for accumulation by having more than one wife (Figure 5.1). Data from the 1870 census indicates that almost a third (30 percent) of all Sanpete households were polygamous, and if we add to this number their monogamous relatives and friends, the number of people directly and indirectly involved in the institution rises dramatically. In much the same way as the South before the Civil War was a “slave society,” even though only a small percentage of Southerners actually owned slaves, Utah and the larger Mormon-settled area of the West must be considered a “polygamous society” in the second half of the nineteenth century, since living in Zion during this period required many to participate in the practice and the community to accept it.1

In Nauvoo, many Latter-day Saints greeted news of Joseph Smith’s 1843 revelation introducing the principle of celestial marriage with outrage and revulsion. A schism opened that cost Smith his life and nearly brought down his church. Yet less than a decade later, when in 1852 Brigham Young openly proclaimed polygamy a pillar of LDS Church doctrine, no such outcry occurred. The dissenters had left (many eventually gravitated toward the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which was established in 1860 and opposed polygamy), and the “Brigham” Saints (those who went west), whether they joined in or not, nevertheless acquiesced and went along with the “principle,” as it was known. By the time of Young’s announcement, plural marriage had been absorbed into the routines of Mormon life. One consequence of this acceptance was the need to invent architecture for it, for no precedent existed for housing multiple-wife families.2 The choices made figure significantly in the social topography of the Mormon Zion, though rarely have historians fully appreciated the subtle genius behind this distinctive vernacular building tradition.
Unorthodox Orthodoxy

Ask almost anyone in Utah today about polygamous housing and they will quickly point to Brigham Young’s Lion house, a large dormitory-like residence that stands next to the Beehive House in downtown Salt Lake City. And they would not be wrong (Figure 5.2). Built between 1854 and 1856, the Lion House (Young was known among the Saints as the “Lion of the Lord”) served as home to many of the president’s wives: the main-floor apartments were reserved for wives with children, the upper-floor rooms (behind the dormers) for the childless wives, and the basement level contained the kitchen, dining hall, pantries, and servants’ quarters. In all, at the peak of its existence as a multifamily dwelling, the Lion House housed a fraction of Young’s fifty-six wives; the rest lived elsewhere in the city in separate houses or in other towns like Provo and St. George.³

The trouble with singling out the Lion House as a model of polygamous architecture is that doing so promotes an older “plural marriage was the exception not the rule” approach to the history of Mormonism’s “peculiar institution.” Thinking of polygamous architecture in terms of a few exceptional houses supports the idea that only a few of the most prominent church leaders participated. If we accept the society as a polygamous one, and we should, then dwellings like the Lion House, for all their prurient charm, are historically deceptive. Even the most cursory survey of Mormon housing practices shows that the vast majority of plural families opted for the exact opposite,
choosing instead inconspicuous, normative houses and then adapting them to multifamily needs.

The Andrew Petersen house in Manti is a typical example (Figure 5.3). From the outside it is impossible to tell the house is a polygamous dwelling since it looks very much like all the others in town (and in the valley and the state for that matter). Yet once a visitor is inside, he or she sees that the plan betrays its true identity (Figure 5.4). Nicknamed “Holy Ander” because of his pious ways, Andrew took two wives, Anna and Petrea, and lived with them in this rather plain adobe house during the 1860s and 1870s. In designing their house, the Petersens opted for a central passage, but placed two staircases in the space where normally there would have been but one. In this way, each wife got her own separate apartment consisting of a downstairs parlor and an upstairs bedroom. The long shed placed at the rear apparently acted as a common kitchen. Presumably, as was the custom, Holy Ander moved between the two spaces as circumstances and inclinations allowed.

Why such an orthodox architecture for a clearly unorthodox (and at the time extremely sensational) practice? A number of factors may account for this. For one, there was, as pointed out earlier, the issue of polygamy’s prevalence. With so many families involved, one hardly needed to highlight it in the landscape with a distinctive house design. In Manti, for instance, with almost a third of the families during the 1870s living in plurality and their residences and properties scattered throughout the town (Figure 5.5), no matter where residents went they would have been exposed to and aware of the new state of matrimonial affairs. Another reason relates to polygamy’s relatively short fifty-year lifespan: insufficient time elapsed for the Saints to develop a consistent answer to the question of how to house multiple wives and their families. Experimentation was the rule, with everyone trying something different according to individual needs, which were many and remarkably varied. Some families got along and lived together, others bickered and lived apart, some did both, and as we shall see in the case of Jens Weibye, sometimes the situation changed almost daily. Given such a moving target, it is hard to imagine anyone coming up with a consistent approach in architecture.

On a deeper level, one wonders whether the Saints unconsciously chose a nonconfrontational architecture as a way of hiding their martial nonconformity. Traditional house forms would serve as “masks of orthodoxy” so to speak, thereby downplaying polygamy’s impact on the society and giving less ammunition to Gentile critics who decried it as immoral and oppressive to women. Certainly it would be tempting to throw up a disguise, making the practice invisible except to insiders who would know who the polygamists in their town were and where they lived. The Lion House and a few other large polygamous compounds seem to discredit this explanation, since they
Figure 5.3. Andrew Petersen family house, 300 South 400 East, Manti, circa 1870. Photograph from 1978.

Figure 5.4. First- and second-floor plans of the Petersen house in Manti. Note the two staircases and partitioned second-floor bedrooms.
Figure 5.5. Lots owned by polygamist families in Manti, circa 1880 (with diagonal hatching). Not all the lots contained a house, but the physical presence of the practice was nonetheless considerable.

aggressively asserted polygamy's presence in the landscape—and they were noticed and commented upon by many visitors to the Mormon capital. Perhaps in the end it was simply the degree of normality that the Saints attached to polygamy that determined how the houses were built. Generally speaking, church leaders defended plural marriage from two positions. First, it was a righteous institution sanctioned by God, and second, it was carried out in accordance with both civil and ecclesiastical law. The charge of immorality was absurd, the argument went, because polygamy was nothing more than American-style marriage carried forth as usual but with more wives for each husband. Adultery and sexual dalliance were illegal, and the rituals of courtship and marriage were strictly observed. Given this rather nonchalant business-as-usual attitude, it is no wonder that the architecture of polygamy would follow suit, with the Saints on the whole adopting traditional housing solutions for what they perceived (and presented) as a logical extension of normative (and biblically sanctioned) practice.

Certainly this was the case in the Sanpete Valley, where given the limited range of options within the traditional housing repertoire, two general
patterns emerged. On one hand, husband and wives could live together in a single house, a solution Mormons and Gentiles alike named "cohabitation," or simply "cohob" for short. On the other, each wife could have her own house, thus preserving the basic one-on-one housing arrangement found in monogamous marriages. It was not an either/or proposition, of course, and most polygamous families tried one or the other or both at different times depending on the circumstances. The architecture invented for polygamy in the Sanpete Valley resembles that found in other parts of the western Zion and illustrates the rather ingenious nuances of what can only be read as a peculiar chapter in American housing history.10

**Cohabitation**

In the Sanpete Valley no houses on the scale of the Lion House were constructed. No single man accumulated such a large number of wives. Nor were any dwellings conspicuously polygamous. The two largest cohab houses were those belonging to Canute Peterson of Ephraim (see Figure 4.32), who married three times, and Frederick W. Cox of Manti, who had five wives (Figure 5.6). Both men employed the Georgian house form, though Cox's shows best the degree to which a traditional plan could be modified for multifamily use.

Frederick Walter Cox Sr. was born in 1812 in Plymouth, Oswego County, New York, in the heartland of the Burned Over District. He converted to Mormonism in 1834 and a year later married Emeline Whiting, the daughter of a fellow Latter-day Saint. The couple made their way to Far West, Missouri, where the church was gathering, but soon were "driven from there" and forced back to the Nauvoo vicinity, where they made their home "in the [Isaac] Morley Settlement near Lima, Illinois."11 Here in 1846 Frederick Walter took two more wives, Cordelia Morley (daughter of Isaac) and Jemima Losee. In entering polygamy it was later said of Cox, "No man could have

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**Figure 5.6.** West and north elevations of the Frederick Walter Cox Sr. family house, 94 North 100 West, Manti, 1854-61.
tried more than he to live up to the high standard of men it takes to live up to that kind of life."  

In 1852, the Coxes followed the Saints who had earlier been expelled from Nauvoo west to Utah. After a short stay in Salt Lake City, they landed in Manti where they were reunited with members of their extended Illinois family who had migrated as a group to Salt Lake City and then on to Sanpete Valley in 1849. Cox noted that they were welcomed to town by “Granpa Morley, Uncle Edwin Whiting [his first wife’s father], Uncle Joseph Allen, Uncle Orville [S.] Cox, and Sylvester Hewlett in whose house we lived the rest of the winter.” After renting Hewlett’s house for a year, Cox built a small rock house in the southwest corner of Manti’s Little Stone Fort consisting of two sixteen-foot rooms. Here the family, now counting four wives—Lydia Losee (sister of Jemima) was added as wife number four in 1855—and nineteen children lived for nine years. A Cox family history offers a description of the fort house:

Aunt Emeline’s room was [lighted] by one small window, one door, and an open fireplace, and had room for two beds with the foot boards coming close together. There was scarcely room for her family to gather around the fire opposite the beds. The next room being the corner one had a door facing the east; a window faced the north. The partition walls were straight west from the door and south from the window. Aunt Jemima had two beds in here and Aunt Lydia one. They had no fireplace but used a step-stove for cooking and heating. Aunt Jemima had a family but Aunt Lydia had not been married long. They did all their work, lived, and ate in this one room. Mama [Cordelia] had [her own] small bedroom a little more than half way up the side of the fort. In it there was space enough for one bed and a small one on the floor. There was a corner fireplace with room for mother’s “half” chair where she sat to knit and we gathered around her and the fire.”

By the mid-1850s Frederick Walter’s family (which now included his oldest son and his wife) totaled twenty-five and there was clearly need for a bigger and more permanent house. Work started on the “big house,” as it was called, in early 1854, with family members cutting and hauling rock from the stone quarry and carrying timber from mountain canyons. Cox hired a team of local masons and carpenters, and the house took seven years to complete. The house was planned with twelve rooms (Figures 5.7 and 5.8) on three floors (including the large basement) plus an open garret in the attic for a children’s dormitory. The west rooms on the second floor were left open, becoming a long room for school, religious services, and dancing. The minutes of the Manti Ward mention “a private Social Picnic Party was held in the F. W. Cox House Ball Room; Saturday PM 19th [of] January 1861. Most of [the] Church Authorities here being pres[ent].”
Census records indicate that all four Cox wives lived together in the Big House, which according to Cordelia’s daughter Theressa was “quartered like a pie and each of the four wives received a section.” In all probability, the house was constructed to face east toward the interior of the fort since that is the orientation of its formal center-passage entrance. Each of the four ground-level apartments was accessible from the passage, providing an equality of access that polygamous wives seem to have desired—a door of one’s own to the outside was a fundamental right. Two more outside doors are found on the west main-floor rooms; this elevation became the front of the house after the fort was demolished and the regular city plat reinstated.

When Cox took young Emma Petersen for a fifth wife in 1869 (she was eighteen and he fifty-seven), he had a separate house built for her next door (Figure 5.9). Justifications for the new house run from overcrowding in the old one to jealousy toward the young newcomer on the part of the older wives. Whatever the case, Emma’s house is quite curious (Figure 5.10). It originally had a two-room chambered hall plan (one room above the other) and a fireplace on the front west wall, with the chimney disguised by inclusion in a

Figure 5.7. F. W. Cox Sr. house, basement and first-floor plans. Cooking and dining took place in the basement, with work and storage spaces divided among four wives, who each had an apartment on the first floor.

Figure 5.8. F. W. Cox Sr. house, garret-level and second-floor plans. The second-floor arrangement is more ambiguous. Spaces were allotted for the four wives, but Emeline and Jemima shared the “Long Room,” which was often used for dining, entertaining, and dancing. Children were relegated to cubicles in the unfinished garret.
Figure 5.9. View of the F.W. Cox Sr. family compound, showing the Big House to the north of a small one constructed for fifth wife, Emma Petersen Cox.

Figure 5.10. Elevations and floor plans for Emma Petersen Cox House, 90 North 100 West, Manti, 1869. The stepped parapet on the gable adds a dash of architectural fashion to this small stone house.
parapet wall similar to those found in Nauvoo. To my knowledge, this is the only stepped-gable Federal house standing in the Mormon region, though at one time they were undoubtedly more numerous.20

Another example of the design complexities faced when attempting to accommodate multiple wives is found in the houses that Orson Hyde built in Spring City. Born in Oxford, New Haven County, Connecticut, in 1805, Hyde embraced the Mormon faith in 1831, after his foster family had moved to Kirtland, Ohio. Part of the original core group of LDS converts, Orson was a gifted speaker and intensely spiritual. He served proselytizing missions on the East Coast and in England, visited Zion's Camp in Missouri as an emissary of Joseph Smith, and even made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In 1835 he was chosen, along with his friend Brigham Young, to serve on the newly formed Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, making him one of the highest-ranking members in the church hierarchy.21

Orson had married Marinda Johnson in 1834. She continued to live in Kirtland while he was off on missions and other church-related journeys. Shortly after his return they moved to Missouri in 1838, just before the persecutions and subsequent removal of the Saints to Nauvoo. Here in 1843 Orson married twice more: first Martha Browett and then Mary Ann Price. Both women hailed from England and lived discreetly as servants in the Hyde house, since polygamy at the time was still a clandestine activity. After Smith's martyrdom and the exodus of the main body of the church, Hyde helped direct the westward migration from Kanesville (later Council Bluffs), Iowa, where he and Martha divorced in 1850. Orson, with Marinda and Mary Ann, departed for Salt Lake City two years later. In tow was a servant and divorcée, Charlotte Quindlin, whom Hyde married in 1852 after arriving in Salt Lake. A year later the entire family was living in a fine new house that stood just north of Temple Square.22

Throughout the 1850s Apostle Hyde kept busy setting up and administering Mormon colonies first in Wyoming and then in California, though he still had time to court and wed Ann Eliza Vickers in 1857. Ann Eliza's addition was countered by the subtraction of Charlotte, who in 1859 asked for and received a divorce. Then Young placed Hyde in charge of the Sanpete Valley colony, and in the spring of 1860 the indefatigable Apostle moved south, choosing Spring City as his new hometown. Mary Ann Price Hyde later reminisced: "In 1859, we moved to Salt Lake City where he [Hyde] made a comfortable home, but was soon after called on a mission. On his return he took another wife [Ann Eliza], and was appointed to preside in Sanpete Co. This was a new country and sparsely settled and Mrs. Hyde [Marinda] preferred remaining in the City with her children. So it was agreed upon that I should go to Sanpete."23

Marinda stayed in Salt Lake City along with Ann Vickers, who recently
Figure 5.11. The south elevation of Apostle Orson Hyde's first house in Spring City. It stood on the corner of 100 West and 200 South and consisted of a two-story log front section and a one-story rear kitchen wing built of stone. The large adobe house in the rear of the photograph is unidentified. Photograph courtesy of Myrtle Hyde.

had given birth to her first child. Mary Ann later wrote that "my husband took three young wives after settling in Sanpete Co. and for several years we lived together until the offspring became so numerous we were compelled to have separate homes." The three young wives were Julia Reinert (age twenty-one), married in 1863; Elizabeth Gallier (twenty-four), 1864; and Sophia Lyon (eighteen), 1865. Hyde contracted to have a large house built several blocks west of Main Street (Figure 5.11). The house was standing by April 1863, when it was described by a member of President Young's traveling entourage: we "halted before the residence of Elder Orson Hyde, who, with his usual blandness of manner and a countenance which betokened a good heart, received his distinguished guests and welcomed them to the hospitality of his home. His house is of hewn logs, one and a half stories, with a stone kitchen." The Hyde house slowly filled up. At first there were only Mary Ann and Orson. Then, by 1862, Ann Eliza had arrived with her infant child, and in 1863 Julia came. In 1864 Elizabeth and her family arrived, then Sophia in 1865. By 1866, five wives and eleven children were crammed into the house's five rooms, and it was probably at this juncture that Julia decided to have a house of her own. The 1870 census shows her living away from the main family with her two children, probably renting a small two-room adobe house located on the east side of town (Figures 5.12 and 5.13). The house was certainly modest, but then Hyde never was a wealthy man and depended heavily for his livelihood on donations from the Sanpete brethren. In 1876, for instance, when Hyde was seventy-two years old and "43 years in the Church," Jens Weibye of Manti visited Spring City and noted that Hyde "has 25 persons in his family, his hired help cost him $350 a year, $100 a year for Shoes to his family, and $100 Schoole Bill. [He] told us what he want[ed] and need[ed] for his family."
In 1870 Marinda left the family, receiving a divorce that year. Shortly after this Orson finally began construction on a house commensurate with his standing in the Sanpete community. Built in the years between about 1872 and 1876, it stood prominently on the town’s main thoroughfare across from the meetinghouse. Its I-house profile added to its stature, as did its finely pointed rock walls and dignified Greek trim (Figure 5.14). The open plan is consistent with valley practice, though still surprising since a house of this size, built for the valley’s leading citizen, might be expected to have a central stair passage. The Hydes, however, chose the open hall-parlor arrangement on the first floor, whereas on the second they reconsidered, adding a
Figure 5.14. The Orson Hyde family house, 209 South Main, Spring City, 1872-76 (photograph 2005). A long one-story kitchen and service shed extends along the back of this two-story stone I-house.

Figure 5.15. First- and second-floor plan of the Hyde family house. The open plan on the ground level is unusual for a family of the Hydes' stature. A passage was awkwardly inserted into the upper floor, with a wall bisecting one of the front windows.
hallway to separate the two upstairs bedrooms and provide their occupants more privacy. An unfinished basement and attic gave the family added storage space, and a rear shed-roof extension provided an extra bedroom as well as a kitchen. It is unclear where everyone slept, though records do indicate that Mary Ann, Ann Eliza, Elizabeth, and Sophia all lived in the house after its completion in 1876, and before Orson died in 1877 (Figure 5.15). 29

Another common Sanpete Valley house enlisted for polygamous purposes was the three-part type favored by Scandinavian immigrants (Figures 5.16 and 5.17). The house’s tripartite plan was ideally suited to a family of two wives: each wife and her family would have a side room and then presumably share the middle room for cooking and eating. Norwegian polygamist Jens Jensen figured this out when he was faced with providing spaces for his two wives, Katrina Sophia Sorensen and Anna Maria Nielsen, both also from Norway. The Jensens lived in Spring City, where plat records show the family living together in this one-story adobe house. The house is quite early for Spring City, probably dating to the early 1860s. It is unusual with so few windows, perhaps as a precaution against marauding Utes. In 1880, after Jens’s death in 1877, Katrina and Anna Marie are shown living here with their eight children. 30

Figure 5.16. The three-part Scandinavian type house of the Jens Jensen family, 200 South 200 South, Spring City, circa 1860. Census records indicate that Jensen lived here with his two wives, Katrina and Anna Marie, Photograph from 1978.

Figure 5.17. Ground plan of the Jensen family house. Presumably each of Jensen’s two wives had one of the outer rooms for her own, while the middle one was shared.
Separate Houses

Building houses for each wife was another alternative for polygamous families and one perhaps requiring a less dramatic change in behavior, preserving as it did a semblance of single-family routine. The decision for more houses often was, as in the case of both the Coxes and the Hydes, the result of outgrowing the original cohab space. Reuben Allred, for example, arrived in Spring City with two wives, Lucy and Jane, and later wrote, "We lived as one family for many years—until our children multiplied to such numbers that we separated for convenience." Separate houses also proved more convenient after the federal "raids" against cohab polygamists began in the 1880s. Allred recalled in 1889 that "as soon as it was convenient I prepared a home for my first wife in Spring City to make a show of keeping the law, my second wife and family [remaining] in Chester on the farm." Much depended on a family's wealth. John Crawford of Manti was one husband who could afford two houses. He was a successful farmer and rancher who also owned an interest in both a sawmill and a limekiln. Born in Wickston, Scotland, in 1829, Crawford joined the Mormon Church at the age of fourteen and immigrated to Utah in 1849. After living for a while in Salt Lake Valley, he moved to Centerville, north of the capital, and then in 1853 Brigham Young called him to Manti to help strengthen that vulnerable settlement. It was a turbulent time, what with an Indian war and all sorts of fort building going on, but John still managed to court and wed twice, first to Cecelia Sharp in 1853 and then Elizabeth Snow in 1856.

Crawford owned two lots in block 87 of the Manti City survey (Figure 5.18). A large stone house was built on the east lot, where John lived with Cecelia (household 107 in the 1860 census) and four children. Elizabeth and her two children lived on the west lot (household 108). The size of the east house proclaimed it the family's headquarters, and this is undoubtedly where John lived most of the time. In architectural style too it was noteworthy, being a two-story I-house with a hall-parlor plan and a fashionable Gothic Revival cross-gable on the front (Figures 5.19 and 5.20). An unusual feature of the house is the large chimneystack that sits at the back of the two-story front section, serving both the front living room and the rear kitchen. Most chimneys are found along the ridgelines, either at the ends or middle. The chimney's location here follows an older British tradition and may reveal something of John's Scottish heritage. Elizabeth's house is less imposing; it is a one-story hall-parlor plan dwelling with a five-bay facade and constructed of uncoursed rock. It does have elegant pedimented window heads, but the obvious disparities between the two houses may or may not have caused problems between the wives (Figures 5.21 and 5.22).
As a rule, when wives had separate houses, they were spread out through town—the husband apparently not being able to buy adjacent lots as he added more wives and families. Arrangements were more often than not ad hoc affairs, with houses located here and there throughout the town and territory. The families of James Guymon are indicative of this pattern. Guymon was born in 1816 in Jackson County, Tennessee. At an early age his family moved to Illinois, where James's mother and father joined the Mormon Church in 1835. James soon followed suit. After his first wife, Sarah Davis, died in childbirth in 1838, he married Mary Ann Couch and after the expulsion moved west,
first settling in Kanesville (Council Bluffs), Iowa, where in 1847 he married a second wife, Rhoda Leach. The whole family—James, Mary Ann, Rhoda, and all their children—moved on to Utah, settling in Salt Lake Valley before picking up and moving to Springville, in Utah County. In 1857 James was called to work in the Iron Mission being established in Parowan, in (appropriately enough) Iron County.

In Parowan, James married again, going this time for young Mary Boden (she was eighteen years his junior). For the next seven years, until 1864, the Guymons lived together in Parowan. When his mission was completed, James decided to move to Fountain Green in the Sanpete Valley. Mary Ann remained behind in Parowan and died there in 1868. James, now with two wives, Mary and Rhoda, bought several available lots in Fountain Green (Figure 5.23). One was on Main Street, while the other was to the west on 100 North Street. James lived in this latter house with Mary and third wife (fifth overall) Martha,
whom he married in 1866. In 1870, Mary had five children and Martha had none. We do not know how they divided the space, but the house has two front-facing wings and presumably each wife had her own wing. For a time, James ran a small store in the house as well. Rhoda’s house, over on Main Street, probably started as a one-room log house. The Guymons were not rich, and when they added to the house, probably in the late 1860s, a single-story brick hall-type house was all they could afford. Here Rhoda lived with her nine children.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{Figure 5.23.} The location and design of the James Guymon family houses in Fountain Green, circa 1875. Another of his wives lived to the south, in the town of Parowan, Utah.
Fluidity

The variety of individual solutions is remarkable in these house histories. How much money the family had and what the relationship was between husband and wives and between the wives at any given time determined what kind of housing they had. This is one of the reasons writing about the architecture is so difficult— one day one arrangement and the next day something completely different. To get a sense of how complicated and fluid the housing situation could be, it is useful to look at one Manti family that left behind a rather full account of its trials and travails in plurality. We have met Danish immigrant Jens Christian Andersen Weibye before: no history of the Sanpete Valley could possibly be written without consulting the voluminous daybooks he kept throughout his life. His comments regarding the dynamics of multifamily living are both poignant and enlightening. Preserving the original spelling makes them all the more engaging (remember that Weibye’s first language was Danish).

Born in Hjørring Amt (County), in the vicinity of Aalborg, Denmark, in 1824, Jen Christian Andersen Weibye converted to the LDS Church in 1854, though he remained in his native land for almost a decade before heeding the call and gathering to Zion. He continued working as a tailor, preached the gospel, and courted Sisilie Marie Pedersen of Hjørring, whom he married in 1860. Two years later, the couple made the journey to Utah, arriving in Salt Lake City, where they lived in the “8th Ward’s campground” for a year. The next December he and Sisilie moved to Sanpete, where in early 1864 he bought an “adobie house with two rooms in, and a city lot of Harrison Perry Fugate in Manti for 35 bushels of Wheat (wheat $2.00 a bushel) and our three year old heifer, reconed to 15 bushel of wheat ... that is the same as $100.00 in all.” He also traded “the family’s tent, worth $50, for 10 acres of land in the middle field of Hans Ottesen,” while admitting that the house he bought from Fugate was “in a rather poor condition (only two pane of glass).”

Looking to better their lot, the Weibyes sold the Manti house in 1865 and moved to Richfield, a newly opened town about sixty miles south and west of Manti. Here Jens contracted for a small adobe house to be built, though the investment would be in vain. Brigham Young ordered the Richfield settlement to “break up” on account of the Indian troubles there. Weibye dutifully moved his family back to Manti in April 1867, where he now had to rent his old house, with payment in wheat futures— what he hoped to raise the coming year. Ever optimistic, he wrote, “We moved our things, and feel now at home in our old place.”

Well, maybe not completely at home. While visiting friends in the town of Mount Pleasant on June 7 (he was there because it had “frosted” in Manti
and he could not work), Jens impulsively bought a city lot on the south side of town and started building a house. He spent the first days of June in Mount Pleasant, “breaking” up a load of rocks, and “commenced to lay foundation to my new house here in town,” which was finished by June 18. On June 21 he returned to Manti and declared that he was “glad to see [his family] all well.”37 The month of July was spent back in Manti, fixing up the house there: “I put some mud on our house, and a board on the bottom of the roof [presumably to hold the dirt in place].”38 Then it was back to Mount Pleasant, where now he started to make adobes. It seems that in one day of continuous hard work he could make eight hundred! The next day he took time out to write “a letter to my wife” but still “mad 354 adobes,” which was his daily average for the month. Through the late summer he worked as a laborer harvesting crops and only returned to Manti at the end of September, where Bishop Andrew Moffit asked him to be tithing clerk in that city.39

Moffit’s offer proved a turning point in Weibye’s life. In November 1867 he notes that “Bishop Moffit bought Sister Lewis’s House of Isaac Vorhees to me for 150 Bu[she]ls of wheat, he [Vorhees] is to have 50 bushels of wheat down, and 100 bu after harvest 1868,” and “I moved with my family to Blok No. 77 lot 7 and 8 in a Stonehouse where there is a Cellar also.”40 Through the year he continued to farm and work at the Manti Tithing Office and make preparations for constructing a new house. This meant that he had to “break down” the extant house during early October 1868, perhaps because it was poorly built or otherwise ill suited to their needs. First he took down the south room of the two-room house and used the rocks for what was the cellar of the new house, measuring “6½ feet high, 9 feet long, 7½ feet broad inside. The wall is 1½ to 2 feet thick.”41 He and Sisilie went to a dance in the council house, then he worked covering the cellar with “floor beams,” which “takes about five days.” The couple lived in the north room, which he upgraded by buying a used door to cover the fireplace so that he could heat it with a stove rented from Brother Jens Christensen “for $1 a month.”42

In January 1869 he mentions in his daybook that he had brought the woman who would be his second wife home to meet Sisilie. He mentions nothing of Sisilie’s reaction to Maren Kirstine Gregersen, but she must have acquiesced because Jens and Maren did marry and he then began the process of housing his new wife. Apparently he planned to settle each woman in her own house: “I helped [Maren] to move into Albert Smith’s north room where I am to pay two dollars a month in rent and is to have it a few months til I get [a house] build for her.”43 Then the three—Jens, Sisilie, and Maren—traveled to Salt Lake City, where Maren was sealed to him in the Endowment House as his “second wife.”44 What happened next is unclear. The old stone house he had bought from
Isaac Vorhees was still partly dismantled, but he wrote on May 7, 1869, “to day my second wife Maren Kirstine moved from Albert Smiths and home to me, because I have room for her now. I did not have any room for her before.”

This entry is a month before he began work on a completely new house, mention of which first appeared only on June 9: “Peter Larsen commenced to day to build my [new] house with Rocks, it is to be 26 ½ feet long and 24 feet wide (broad). I tended him, and my first wife [Sisilie], she tended the Tithing Office.” Presumably, some refurbishing of the old house had taken place, to make it possible for Maren to move in, though he never stated what it was. Perhaps they were simply all wedged into the north room, warmed by Brother Christensen’s stove.

Through the summer, Larsen and Weibye continued to make progress on the new house, while Jens tended the garden, worked in the tithing office, and watered his wheat. In an entry from late June, Weibye was irked by the behavior of Larsen, who disappeared for “11 dais,” an absence that caused delays. On July 4, Jens attended the town’s Independence Day celebration that concluded with a dance in the council house—he didn’t say if he took one wife or both. The masonry work on the house was reported finished on July 30. Larsen charged him “$14 0 dollars in U.S. Currency, and $14 0.95 pay on his Emigration [debt].”

Weibye positioned the new house on the west part of the lot. It adhered to the standard one-story hall-parlor plan but had a rear shed extension as well as a small, unfinished attic and a cellar, both reached by stairs in the rear section. What is interesting about the design, which Weibye sketched out in his daybook (Figure 5.24), is the way he modified the conventional hall-parlor plan to accommodate his two wives. Bedroom number one lay in its right place to the side of the living room, though it was reduced in size considerably by sharing the space with a closet and the staircases (one leading up and the other down). In the rear shed, in addition to the kitchen, a small bedroom was tucked into the north end. In this way, the Weibyes expanded the social module for their plural needs: Jen and his first wife, Sisilie, occupied the front bedroom while Maren was relegated to the rear room beside the kitchen.

During August, Jens worked harvesting his wheat, digging potatoes, and helping the carpenter Mads Madsen put the rafters and shingles on the house. Jacob Christensen made the window sash, with thirty-six panes, and at this time they “layed the loft [ceiling] in [Sisilie] Maries Bedroom.” Ole Munster was another man Weibye hired to do “carpentering,” as well as Christen [Bertsen], who laid up the chimney and did other finishing masonry work. Weibye shingled the house himself and also noted that he whitewashed “our two new bed room,” and plastered our “clothing room [closet that opens
into the kitchen]." On September 26 the work was done to the point that "my two wifes moved their beds in to our new bedrooms in our new house, and fixed them up nice."51 All seemed to be well: on October 30 Jens stated that "last night I and wifes was to the Officeers danse in the Council house here in Manti."52

The house was livable but still not completely finished. In April 1870 Weibye's journal contained this entry: "we cleane and whitewashed ur old house, and moved some into our new house. [Sisilie] Marie moved our bed into our bedroom No. 1."53 Then on April 25, "Jacob Christensen layed some loft for us over our seating-rooms [living room] in the new house."54 From June 28 through June 30, he had the floor laid in his new house: first carpenters Jacob Christensen and Peter Lund "plain" the lumber, and then they laid the floor, first in the main house and then the "kitchen," assisted by Weibye.55 Finally, on August 5, Christensen came back to complete the finish work in the "seatingroom," and Weibye put down "78 brick for a hart [hearth] in our kitchen."56 He also made a "cobert [cupboard] to stand in our Kitchen." It
was not enough apparently to placate Maren Kirstine, who at the end of the month moves “her bed into the old house.”

Undeterred, Weibye continued to record work on the house: he had Ole Monster make a “kitchen table and sink in our kitchen and I helped him, he made a Cloth box for [Sisilie] Maries bedroom,” which cost about “8 bushels for furniture work.” Plastering on the house interior continued through October, and on October 21 “my wife [Sisilie] Marie layed down carpet in her bed room for the first time; and today she layed down carpet in the southeast room for [her daughters] Else and Magrete.” This was Maren’s old bedroom (2). November the construction was finally over: A. Wilson “points” the stonework, and they purchased a “Parlor Stove (price $17.65).” Weibye then left on a two-year proselytizing mission to Denmark, leaving his wives to fend for themselves for two years and twelve “dais.”

On his return, Sisilie Marie came to meet him in Salt Lake City. They arrived back in Manti on October 11, 1873. On December 4, he and Sisilie Marie walked over to the council house to hear Brigham Young speak, but it is curious that through this whole period he never mentioned Maren. She remained in the picture, however. Early in 1874, Jens hired Christian Kjar and P. P. Dyreng to tear down the “old house,” the one where Maren was living. And then among his expenses for 1875 he listed an “Adobie House with Rock Cellar under, Cellar 9½ by 12 feet; house 13½ by 23½ feet, price about 190.00.” This long rectangular house was located in the south part of town. More information about it and its occupant is found in the daybook entry for June 28, 1875, where Jens said that he went to the “south house in the evening to stay with second wife Stine [Maren Kristine].” During the night he came down with the stomach flu and was hauled back to the new house so that he could be “home with my wife Marie.”

Throughout 1875 the dual household arrangement persisted. Weibye continued working on the new house, digging “a new root cellar of rocks, behind the house, 12 x 10½ feet, six foot high ceilings, also a new granary which also included a washroom.” And then he “got a Little nice stove for our Bedroom (price 7.25, Stovepipe and elbo 90 ct, freight 35 cts. Total $8.50).” He also spoke of putting carpet down and installing the new stove in Marie’s bedroom, which he (significantly, since it indicates where he was sleeping) calls “our Bedroom.” Maren was apparently still annoyed with the arrangement and living in the south house. On the whole, the year ended on a down note: “Some body broke 4 window lights on the east end of my House, the reason I do not know; but some men or boy must be made angry at me for some thing.”

The next year proved eventful. Things started out routinely enough: Jens built a “correll” on Maren’s south lot, and added more improvements to the north one, including “a new Chicken House, a Pig-pen, and moved my correll
from the north side of my City lot and south on the southwest Quarter of my lot. Then on October 3 the daybook entry announced that "I moved my 2nd wife Maren Kirstine to my House, where my first wife Marie she lives, it is with united feelings that we are going to live in One house now as we was before I went on Mission in 1871." Matrimonial bliss returned to the Weibye household! Maren's south house was then rented—"Bro Rasmus Henningsen with family moved into my south house, and is to pay 2.00 per month in Rent for the winter months"—and then sold in late March 1877 to Henry Wintch, who bought it for $275, to be paid as follows: in 1877, 120 Perch Rocks, $80.00; 3,000 feet lumber, $75.00; Cash, $25.00; Wheat, $25.00; and Labor, $5.00; and in 1878, Cash, $25.00; Wheat, $25.00.70

With his cohab life working, Weibye contemplated a newer, larger house to match his growing family. This new house would also be constructed of stone and would sit east of the existing house, on the northeast corner of the lot. Mathias Christian Andreasen Hansen and George Braithwaite were hired as masons; work commenced on July 23, 1877.71 By November the "wall plates" were set and the masons finished with their portion of the project; "there is 278 perch [of stone] in it, it is 40 1/2 feet long 21 1/2 feet wide and 16 3/4 feet from the foundation to the roof."72 And, not to spare any details, Weibye further noted that there were "13,000 shingles—45 days labor to put the roof on." A "Skougaard from Ephraim" was hired to do the roofing.73

When completed, the Jens C. A. Weibye house was one of the finest houses in Manti (Figure 5.25). It is yet another I-house, this time graced with elaborate details in the Gothic Revival fashion. The upstairs wall dormers have steeply pitched roofs, finials, and scroll-cut bargeboards. The center one is larger and contains a door leading to a two-story porch with a fancy lattice-like balustrade. On this central dormer, which is larger than the side window dormers (emphasizing the symmetry of the composition), there is woodwork simulating a fancy scissor truss with pronounced finial. Other features include pedimented window heads on the downstairs openings and a white picket fence.

On the inside, the plan predictably follows the one-room-deep arrangement found on local I-houses, but the house does have a central passage (Figure 5.26). In the naming and function of the rooms, it is best to rely on Weibye's own description of the house: "[We] put up upstairs petition [partition] in the south end of the house [part of the central passage is the south room divided into two], got Loft [ceiling] layed, and mantelpiece in the lower Bedrum, and got that bedroom and a little room west of it Plaster(ed), got loft laed over the Hall [passage] and after over the Parlor [main living room]."74 To set this bedroom off as special, Weibye had "wall-paper [placed] in our New House bedroom."75 One indication that he named the passage the "hall" is
found in an entry that describes finishing the “up Stair-railing in my Hall, in my new House.”

If there was any question about a consumer mentality prevailing among the Saints, it is dispelled by men like Weibye, who, when they could, went all out to provide material comforts for their family. For example, he wrote about hanging paintings and other pictures in “our Bedroom [the downstairs one which he shared with Sisilie Marie], and the “Room is now considered ready, with Carpet, Curtains, and Pictures, as well as a Grate; the first room finished in our new house.” Then in November, “Wm Luke jun whitewashed my dining-room [in the rear wing], and Charles Tennant got ready with plastering my Kitchen and Cellar.” In his daybook Jens also talked about having the stair built up to the North [first floor] Porch.

The work went on and on. In July 1879, Jens, along with Brother Peter R. Petersen, “tuck the Roof of my old House and the following days he continued to tear it down the most of it, I am going to rebuild it, and raise it higher.” Jens started the rebuilding project at the end of August, with M. Axelsen “doing mason work for me, on my little Rock house.” The idea was to get more room on the second floor, so the two put “joices” in over the sitting room and kitchen, and then Morton Axelsen put “up the last Rocks in the West end of my little Rock house [which] is now rebuilt.” The house was now a full twenty-four feet wide and twenty-five feet long. And finally, in October, the workers finished “with the carpenterwork in my [big house] Dining-room and got the Cellar-Stairs made by Hans Jac. Hansen. Jens Carlsen done the Carpenterwork in my Dining-room.” It seems that
Figure 5.26. First- and second-floor plans of Weibye's 1877-79 house.
domestic tranquillity prevailed, for that month “I and my two wives attended Bro N. L. Christensen Birth Day Dance in Ephraim house where the Temple Laborers live a good many of them one Block from the Manti Temple.”

By November 22, 1879, a Saturday, Weibye wrote that the big house was ready for occupancy, saying, “We moved from our adobie house and up in our New [one], and in our Rebuilt House, and have it very comfortable now, more then we used too have it at anytime.” Things were so good that apparently Jens decided it was time to marry again, taking a third wife, Thora Henriette Twede, who was sealed to him in the Salt Lake Endowment House on April 9, 1880. Even this late, the Weibyes are still purchasing locally produced furniture. In May, one entry reads: “We got a new bedstead made by Christopher Crame Painted by Lewes Hansen, and a Spring Mattress... the mattress was 8.00, bedstead 15.00, painting 3.00, for a total of 26.00.” And the big house was filling up: on August 11, 1880, Jens wrote, “My wife Thora moved in to her room in the South of my New Large House upstairs.” At this time, too, Thora took a job “clerking in Manti Relief Society co-op Store, for $3.00 pr. Week.” The 1880 Census lists Weibye in the big house, along with Maria [sic], Stine, and Thora. No mention is made of anyone living in the rebuilt house next door.

The Weibyes’ peaceful existence did not last long. By the end of January 1881, the household imploded. Jens wrote: “My wife [Sisilie] Marie told me that she would go down to our Daughter Magrethe Kjar[s], and stay there, because she would not live in my family any long[er] when my wife Maren Kirstine is in my House; I then made preparation to move my wife Stine over into Ole Monsters little Rock House.” Perhaps anticipating trouble, Jens had purchased the Munsters’ house the previous year. Now it was ready, and the day after Sisilie Marie’s declaration, he “moved Stine over in Ole Monsters little Rock House. She has now been in my House with me and my first wife Marie since October 3rd 1876. 4 years 3 months 26 days.” For some reason, Stine found the Munster house unsuitable, and on February 9, “Bro J. Chr Kjar and Chr Skougaard helped me to move my wife Maren Kirstine from Ole Monsters house to An Christopffersens House, which I have rentet for some months at 4.00 per Month to be paid in Tithing, she has been in Ole Monsters House in 11 nights and days. We could not agree with Ole Monster, so I moved my wife, and will Deed his House and lot over to him again which I did.” Finally, writing in May 1881, Jens said that he “moved my wife Maren Kirstine into Peter Poulseens House that I have bought for $260.00.” In February 1882, Maren Kirstine died at age fifty-four. The family was never reunited.

Some minor details remained unfinished on the big house. In early 1882 it got “carpet and window curtains in the parlor,” and Jens hung pictures in
"our parlor and North Room upstairs and changed some in our Bedroom and dining room." Two years later, however, in the fall of 1884, he wrote that the carpenters were still working on the "cornish." Seven years of construction and he admitted the house has "6 windows there is not cased." Everything on the house itself was done by October 1885 and in August that year the final touch, the picket fence, was added. Jens Weibye, a model of frontier refinement and gentility, found the strength to also complete his marrying, taking Isabella Walker as his fourth wife (third living) at the end of the summer.98

By this time, the U.S. government began cracking down on polygamous families, and particularly those in cohab situations. Probably this pressure prompted Weibye to commence yet one more building project, a house for Thora. In March 1887 he wrote: "I marked the Size of the House that I am going to [build] for my wife Thora, it will be 15 feet wide and 24 feet long," and was to "be built on that City Lot that I bought of Jens Petersen January 4th 1887 for $100.00."99 And then, he said, "I moved my wife Thorsas Furnite etc. into that new House that I have built for her; the Lot has cost me $100.00 and the House about $325.00. I have borrowed some means to build the House."100 There was no indication that Isabella ever lived in the big house, and a map Jens drew in June 1887 had the three wives living in separate dwellings. Though he did not say, Isabella likely lived in the small house Jens had purchased in 1881 for Maren (Figure 5.27). But whatever the living pattern,

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Figure 5.27. The location of the Weibye family houses in Manti, 1881.
and however fluid the housing arrangements were, it is clear that the Weibyes were still a family, at least in the “plural” sense of the word. On June 8 Jens confided that “to night I had my 3 wives Marie, Thora and Isabella in my House, and we had Supper together that was a joy for me; we are all well.” At last.

A Building of Their Own

The lesson of the houses is that polygamy was a tricky business, and it kept the men and women who entered it on their toes, responding to both the vagaries of life and the fickleness of love. The houses also offer some insight into gender relations in the City of Zion that otherwise might go unnoticed. Questions concerning the impact polygamy had on women and their standing in Mormon society go hand in hand with any discussion of the built environment, since the production of the material and social worlds is so closely intertwined. Many have wondered whether this new approach to marriage altered traditional gender roles in any way, perhaps even giving LDS women a stronger voice in the community. Or were the women reduced under patriarchal authority to a state of servitude akin to the concubines of old? Answering such questions lies beyond the scope of this study, but the landscape does offer food for thought, even if not a full-course meal.

How far did polygamy go in changing existing gender practices? Some historians have argued, correctly it seems, that plural marriage did promote increased social awareness and action among LDS women as they sought to defend the institution and themselves from attacks by antipolygamy Gentiles. Suffrage was another area where it made a difference; the Mormons needed all the votes they could get to maintain political control of the Utah Territory and thereby preserve polygamy, a situation that led to women in Utah receiving the vote in 1870 (in state and local elections). And it is possible, other historians say, that plural wives, because they often lived alone while their husband was with his other wives or on a church proselytizing mission, enjoyed a degree of freedom and autonomy unknown to their monogamous sisters.

The landscape offers a rather different (and less positive) assessment. In terms of women and everyday existence, life in the principle seems to have been radical in name only. The way plural marriage worked was much like the housing that sheltered it—older established traditions were tweaked and preserved rather than upended and discarded. Nineteenth-century American society was patriarchal: men ruled both the nation and the family. It was the same with Mormons. The introduction of polygamy did little to change the fundamentally unequal relationship between the sexes. Men could have more wives, but it did not work the other way around. Men owned most of
the property, maintaining their time-honored position as spiritual and legal heads of the household (if anything, plurality even enhanced this arrangement since husbands could potentially head many households rather than just one). And finally, polygamy gave the male ego a biblical boost by establishing a direct lineage between the patriarchs of old, such Old Testament figures as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and those of the new City of Zion dispensation.105

This does not mean that Mormon society was any more oppressive or chauvinistic than the United States in general, but it was not less so either. It is important to point out, as the Weibye example shows, that wives were not excluded from the conversation. They were perfectly capable of demanding their own living spaces, of helping to design their own houses, and if need be, simply locking the door to keep out an unwanted husband. But at the same time, the spaces they inhabited were not theirs per se, and they were legally obliged to share them when and if the husband arrived.

Another thing to remember about polygamy is that generalization is dangerous. This appears especially so in housing, where it is difficult even to pin down occupancy patterns (which varied so greatly through time). And as soon as we say that some polygamous families tried “equal comforts,” with each wife receiving identical space, then we encounter just as many or more displays of favoritism, with one wife receiving a better house or more attention. No, the best history of polygamous architecture would be one that treated every family individually, and this kind of effort will take time. Data need to be collected on plural families, their houses must be identified and documented, and then living patterns described—where the wives lived, for how long, how often the husband visited, and so forth—before venturing further. How would we, for instance, ever know whether women in polygamous households had more or less autonomy than their monogamous sisters? The answer most likely will be that some did, some did not. Not much of a response, but it is the best we can do at present.106

The topic nevertheless remains beguiling. For some wives, like Augusta Dorius Stevens of Ephraim, plurality meant living the good life. In the 1850s, at age sixteen, she had married Henry Stevens, a much older man. She wrote: “I thought the principle to be right and became his second wife.... There was little, if any, courtship in my marriage.” But Henry “was a good man to me and his first wife also and she proved to a good, kind mother to me and my children also that came later.” Augusta reported that Stevens’s first wife was a “remarkable and good woman and I loved her dearly. She treated my children as if they were her own. In our lonely cabin dug out of the side of a hill where we were each provided with our room we had lived in love and unity.”107 Counter this experience with that of (a nameless) Mrs. Peter Madsen of Ephraim. Her husband’s journal from 1857 noted: “We [the brethren] had
lots of preaching and [counsel]. . . . Some of this was about plural marriage, I was obedient but not wise, I married a girl, but she did it more of fright than of love, for that reason it could not last long only about 9 months then she was divorced.” And there was hardship, even in the best of circumstances. Manti polygamist Redick Allred was called away on a mission in 1852, just three years after the town's founding. Everyone was still living in the fort and life was precarious at best. After his call, Allred wrote: “I began to make preparation for my journey and to situate my Family as comfortable as possible; but being a man of small capital, I could not provide the many necessaries, which nature required to sustain a family in the absence of a husband and father.”

How did the wives feel about being left alone? We do not know, since they rarely talked about such things. Rare, in fact, are expressions of emotion, although they do surface on occasion. One particularly poignant journal entry comes from Emma Jane Tucker of Manti. Emma had but a single husband, but she may have spoken for many of her sister wives, both monogamous and polygamous, when she wrote her family just before Christmas in 1872. In the letter she acknowledged that her husband George was “poor” and worked hard to stay afloat financially. A long-distance hailer freighter, George was often gone, which prompted her to say, “George has gone to Pioch[e, Nevada] with a load of barley, expects to be gone almost a month. . . . It is so lonesome here without any of you. I'd like to be there for some plum pudding and all the good things to eat.” And again, in a letter dating from March 1875: “I'm looking for George to come from the city, but I'm always looking for him so that is no news.”

Zion was a man's world. In reading over fifty years of ward minutes for each town in the valley, I encountered no female voice. They were there, but in public at least, perfectly silent. We can hear their voices in journals and diaries, but mostly they speak of their daily routines. Again drawing on Augusta Dorius Stevens, we hear the words of a polygamous wife describing her life: “Milk the cows, making butter and cheese, spinning and weaving to make cloth for the clothing of the whole family became a part of my duties besides my general house work. I did a great deal of sewing and prepared the cloth and made the clothing for the men as well as for the children and myself. . . . I used to cook our meals over the fire in the fire place and we thought we made some good substantial meals too.” When her husband was disabled by asthma, she supported him through sewing and weaving in her home, and other kinds of work, including midwifery, bringing more than “twelve hundred babies into the world in my practice of obstetrics.”

Except in extreme cases, running a polygamous home (or homes) was much the same as doing it with a single wife—it required constant negotiation
between the sexes to work out problems, needs, and desires. It was just life but with the added complications of more wives. And if women were not in full control of their domestic spaces, they could nevertheless find points within the landscape in which to gather, to keep up with the latest news, solicit information and advice, and offer congratulations and condolences. Scholars call this kind of intercourse "networking," and it is a fundamental human activity, common to men and women alike. For Sanpete men, it may have occurred while they were walking to the fields, or at the feed store, ward meetinghouse, social hall (or the saloon, for there was a least one bar in every town but Chester). For women, networking happened over back fences, at the streams doing laundry, at the market, in sewing circles, or in Manti at least, at the council house, which had a large fireplace in its south end (Figure 5.28). On cold days, one resident recalled that women and young girls would find chairs or benches and "in short time there would be a circle of mothers and women, some little distance back [from the fire]." Sitting, and talking.

Mormon women also had a specific building of their own, the Relief Society Hall (Figure 5.29). The Relief Society was an LDS female service organization dedicated to helping the poor. At the time of its inauguration in 1842 at Nauvoo, it was typical of women's service groups around the country. After the move west, however, it lay largely dormant until revived in 1868 by

Figure 5.28. "Women at Rag Carpet Bee," Mount Pleasant, late 1880s. George Edward Anderson Photographs, MSS P-1. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University.
President Brigham Young, part of his effort to shore up Mormon resolve and promote economic self-sufficiency in anticipation of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869. Young worried that ready access to cheap Gentile goods would destroy Zion’s economy and bring down the Kingdom—one of the first “buy local” movements.15

The Manti Ward history provides some background on the Relief Society in the Sanpete Valley: the “relief society [had been] organized in Manti in February 1856 . . . and remained “active through 1861,” but “soon after this the society was broken up through lack of patronage and other reasons and Manti had no Relief Society after that until May 11, 1868, when a new organization was effected.”16 At that time the ever vigilant (and seemingly omnipresent) Jens Weibye noted that he and “Brother Hans Jensen” attended a meeting of “13 sisters here in Manti for the purpose to Reorganize the Relief Society again.” Rebecca Wareham was elected president.17 This date marked the rebirth of the Relief Society. The best documentation of Relief Society activities exists for the one in Spring City, where Apostle Orson Hyde’s first wife, Mary Ann, served as president.

At one of the first Spring City meetings, Mary Ann Hyde laid out to the gathered sisters the purpose of their calling: “The object of the Relief Societies were to assist the poor, to instruct in every good principle, and to do good at all times.”18 At first the sisters gleaned donations from the community and then parcelled them out to the needy. They were, however, admonished not to overdo it. Speaking in 1870, President Hyde urged the women “to go on and
do the Best they can [in raising contributions],” but at the same time warned them “she did not wish them to give when they could not afford as this is a relief society and not meant to distress people.”

In addition to donations, the Relief Society sisters’ income mostly came from selling home-manufactured goods. In Ephraim, receipt records from March 1869 to December 1881 reveal that the Sisters produced “70 quilts valued from $3 to $9 each,” six hundred yards of homemade cloth, jeans, and “lindsey,” “many yards” of carpet, 6,691 pounds of cheese, and 9,100 dozen “and 10” eggs,” which, coupled with “monthly donations have realized $13,220.73.” There was also a special attempt at silk production, which required growing mulberry trees for the silkworms. The Manti Relief Society in 1878 listed in its receivables “1 City lot for to plant Mulberry Trees on.” The donor of the lot was (who else but) Jens Weibye, his gift valued at seventy-five dollars. In Ephraim, the sisters’ property in 1881 included a “hall, 7 acre silk farm, machinery, Co-op shares, sheep, wheat, etc.”

Some of the relief societies invested in local businesses, in sheep and cattle, in the cooperative stores, and even availed themselves of usury, lending wheat by the bushel for a return of a “bushel and a peck.” The mainstay of their operation, however, continued to be donations. Eggs and wheat were particularly valuable. But they would turn down nothing, as an 1871 account book for the Manti Relief Society testifies: donations that year included a “dress, peticot, boots, shirt, quilt, dress, socks, night cap, calico quilt, many quilts, 31 yard carpet, salt, flour, sugar, beans, butter, soap, coffee, apples, soap.”

Disbursements were directed toward the “Sick and Poor,” but also to such projects as, in Manti, the meetinghouse and tabernacle funds. Laborers could trade, for instance, their work for credit at the cooperative, but they could also collect their in-kind wages from the Relief Society, as an entry from the society’s minutes lists: “Christian [Berntsen] got 3 quilts (valued at $17), Rasmus Petersen 3 quilts (on $15), Christian Halvorsen 1 quilt ($5), labor of Christian Nielsen and Carl [Berntsen] ($5 each); George Braithwaite got $3.42 worth of cheese for his labor, and Richard Hall ‘6 yard heans [jeans],’” valued at $6. After 1877, the greatest number of products went toward temple construction, gained mostly in the form of in-kind payment to workers. For example, in 1879, the Ephraim Relief Society donated to the Manti Temple “Quilts ($8.45); Socks ($6.50); Gloves ($6.00); Cheese ($19.68); Cash ($13.00); Labor ($10.00). Total $93.63.” One 1881 donation worth mentioning also came from Ephraim: “Before the wards were divided there was given to the [Ephraim] Tabernacle by the Relief Society one silver sacramental service—value $114.00” and also “windo-glass for the building,” at the price of $70.06.
The first meetings of the Manti Relief Society were held in the council house (see Figure 7.8). On March 10, 1869, the Desert News reported that “almost every sister in this place [Manti] belongs to the Female Relief Society, and the institution is doing much good. Its members clothe and feed the poor and hungry, visit the sick, and mind their own business generally. I’ve heard some people say that ‘women can’t assemble together without gossiping and meddling with everybody’s business,’ but that’s not so. I have visited one of their meetings about two weeks ago, they were all busy. Some were cutting and tearing rags for carpets, and some were making pantaloons; others again were cutting out blocks or squares for quilts and coverlids, and sewing and quilting, and all for the poor, of whom, thank the Lord, there are but very few in this place.”

By the end of the 1870s the Manti sisters commenced building a hall of their own, combining it with a store in the manner of the Fifteenth Ward Relief Society building in Salt Lake City, which had a first-floor store and a second-story meeting hall. The Manti building (Figure 5.30) was finished in 1882—a reference to it in Jens Weibye’s daybook says he attended their meeting “in their New Hall.” Its dual purpose was indicated by the fact that Weibye also wrote: “The Manti Female Store commenced; Alvira Cox and Maria Larsen Clerks, Capital Stock Value $200.” The Manti hall/store was unusual in that it didn’t follow a standard hall plan, with its narrow end facing the street. Rather it was what amounted to a central-passage I-house adapted to new needs. The store was found on the first floor. Instead of ample storefront windows it had two bays projecting onto the sidewalk for displaying merchandise.

It is possible to get an idea of what the interior of the Manti hall may have looked like through the following description of the building’s costs: the September 1, 1880, record of disbursements for the Ladies Hall includes “19½ yards linsey ($11.70) for carpenter John Wilson, $7.90 cash for stonemason Thomas Hoggan,” and then lists “C. Cramer made Benches ($2.40); lumber for Benches and posts ($30.00); nails and screws ($6.09); 22 Benches made ($26.00); making a Stand ($4.00); 2 benches made ($3.20); planing Lumber ($8.25); lumber of F. W. Cox ($6.00).” At the end of the year, more disbursements were made to the “Ladies Hall,” including “1 stove ($11.50); stove piping ($2.10); Freight of Stove ($8.50); as well as “Painting and Soap [?] ($1.00); 19½ Yard Carpet ($11.70).”

So what went on in the Relief Society halls? We know they sold merchandise, held meetings, made plans for soliciting donations and supporting those in need, both individual Saints and building projects. But what did the women talk about, given the opportunity to be alone, without (for the most part) any brethren standing around? Fortunately, we have the minutes of the Spring
City meetings, and these documents reveal a range of topics that should not be of any great surprise, given the nature of the halls as networking spaces. One issue that came up was gender equity, getting equal pay for equal work. “Sister Hyde said that she wanted to hear the Sisters speak their feelings... as she had... understood that some of the Sisters felt bad that there was such a low estimate placed upon our labor.” It seems they were donating time at the cooperative store and received a lower wage equivalent than did the men. Times don’t change that much perhaps.

They also talked about fashion, or the avoidance of it. Mary Ann Hyde toed the church line by saying she “was pleased to know that in the [capital] City [of Salt Lake] they [the sisters] were adopting resolutions to discard the fashions of the Gentile world.” A speech by Sister Robinson, however, was closer to the mark in terms of what the shopper-friendly Saints wanted; Robinson rose and reported on a trip to Salt Lake City, saying that she “felt well,” and “had visited the sisters [in the city] and found all doing well she had visited the commission store in the city and saw a great many beautiful articles there. She wished to do right she saw her one failing [vanity] more than anyone else does.”

And then there was polygamy. Where could a sister go to vent about her husband bringing home a new young wife? At an August 1, 1870, meeting, something of an open forum on plural marriage took place. After introducing the subject of polygamy, Mary Ann Hyde asked the sisters to “express themselves” on “the principle.” The minutes report that “Sis Mary Olsen said if anyone had been tried in Polygamy she had; but she was glad to say...”
that she now felt better and felt to Sustain her husband in every thing pertaining thereunto." Sister Elizabeth (Betsy) Allred said that "she was glad she had the privledge of obeying the gospel and was glad of her experience in plurality. Not that it was always sunshine all the time, but the knowledge she obtained, and it was a commandment from God and it was her desire to serve [H]im." Hyde herself had thoughts on the subject, and spoke of the "trials which we had to pass through[,] she had been thirty years in plurality and she had her trials in that as well as other things and she had found it well to try to have a buoyent heart."  

On a more mundane, practical level, there was home economy. What better place to learn a few tricks to try around the house? At a November 1870 meeting, "Sister Brough gave in her report as to the condition of the Ward and thought it would conduce greatly to the health and comfort of the people if the Sisters would keep their houses clean." In Ephraim in 1869 the talk focused on disease and "advising ventilation in our houses plenty of fresh air, and cleanliness, as the sure groundwork of health." And, in the same year, also in Ephraim, "Sister Ellen Madsen gave some good instruction in regard to making the littl we have to eat look as pretty and neat upon the Table as possible."  

Women were also the protectors of community morals, and Mary Ann Hyde referred to the "comencement of the [saloon] and she was sorry that there was any one so low as to establish a whiskey shop on the hay bottoms to sell liqute to our boys while they were at work," and that "some old men would patronize them who did sell liqute." And of course there was faith. Sister Hyde in 1874 said to the sisters: "We ought to be thankful for the many and mercifull blessings the almighty poured out upon us. She urged the sisters to be up and alive in their dutys nd to do all they could for the Society and the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God."  

In addition to halls and stores, the sisters also built granaries to house their in-kind donations such as wheat before it was distributed to the poor. The Relief Society granary in Ephraim, dating to the early 1870s, is a good example (Figure 5.31). Shortly after the Ephraim Relief Society was organized, the sisters purchased seven acres of land and planted mulberry trees, one thousand of them in all, to launch the silk industry in that city. The climate, however, thwarted their efforts—it was too cold for the worms. The land was traded for property on Main Street, on the lot to the south of the newly finished cooperative store that stood just to the north (see Figure 6.20). The Ephraim Relief Society granary contained a number of large grain bins. The minutes explain how the system worked: "The wheat stored was changed by selling it when prices were high and using the money to replace the wheat when prices were low, thus changing the old for fresh new and adding a few
more bushels. The Ephraim sisters also purchased the upper floor of the cooperative for use as their meeting hall.

The buildings the Female Relief Societies constructed in the Sanpete Valley and throughout the Mormon region gave women a symbolic presence in the community that was undeniably. These were women’s spaces. Unlike their houses, the halls and granaries were public places that the sisters actually owned and over which they had control. There is every indication, too, that whenever possible male assistance in getting them constructed was kept at a minimum in order for the sisters to maintain as much autonomy as possible—they did not want to put themselves in debt to the brethren, nor be patronized in any way. Property ownership and buildings were male worlds, however, which meant the sisters had to venture into unfamiliar spheres. Building lots had to be acquired, builders hired, and work supervised, tasks that necessitated dealing with men on their terms. There was a limit to female power, however, and it probably lay somewhere near the ward bishop’s front door, as this remark by President Mary Ann Hyde of Spring City reveals: Hyde said that “she wished the consent and blessings of the bishop on every thing she done in connection with the Society.”

In the Sanpete towns, the work on Relief Society buildings appears to have gone quite smoothly. Halls and granaries went up around the valley, the poor were fed, money for the temple was raised, and the networking went on. The best description of the building process is again found in the minutes from Spring City that center on a small stone hall the sisters there built in the 1870s (Figure 5.32). The building was sometimes called a granary, but its plan seems to contradict this tradition. On the first floor was an open meeting and
work room, while the upstairs possibly served as additional meeting space or as an office. The stonework suggests two construction phases, a relatively rough one taking the walls up to the first-story level, and then a more ably executed second phase for the upper attic room. An interesting feature is the location of the front door in the rear rather than the front, but otherwise, it is a fairly standard example of the hall-type building in the valley.\textsuperscript{146}

After their official organization in 1868, the Spring City sisters met regularly in the sisters' houses (one was the William and Ellen Major house discussed in chapter 3), but the goal from the beginning was to build a hall—to have their own space. A lot just east of the church tithing yard was purchased, probably in late 1868 or early 1869 (the year the first federal land survey began). From the tenor of the discussions it is possible to sense the urgency the women felt about the project. In the summer of 1870, Sister Hyde said, "She would like to have the poor looked after, She did not wish to have the object of the Society to be so far forgot as to neglect the poor, she wished the Sisters to contribute. . . . She felt the Sisters were improving in union but they felt need of a House of their own to meet in."\textsuperscript{147} Another Relief Society member,
Nancy Acord, “enquired what the Sisters were willing to do toward getting lime to build the house. She had heard there was some lime to sell at the Coal Bed [Wales] and wished to get some as quick as possible.” The women also bought “rock for foundation stone [$50]” and contracted for labor “due on House [$200].” Perhaps in an effort to raise money for the building, the east half of the lot was sold to the local school trustees for a rock school (see Figure 6.17). The work proceeded but in fits and starts. August 31, 1871: Hyde “urged the sisters to use all their influence in forward the erection of the house it would be a great benefit.” July 14, 1872: “There had been some mistake about the lumber the Society had got [for] their house but those that had used it seemed willing to make it good.” July 21, 1874: President Hyde “asked the sisters their opinion in regard to the house, the Bishop [Frederick Olsen] had preposed to build the house and have the lower part for a public school room. She wished the sisters to be free and speak their minds on the subject.” They apparently did and declined. Sisterly pride? Perhaps. But there were misgivings, too, when they realized that they would, in the words of Elizabeth Brough, have to “put off building the house for awhile as we did not have means enough and could not get the required assistance.”

Bishop Olsen soon offered another partnership, now saying the hall could be part of a library, to which Sister Ann Larsen quipped, “It was a very good idea to get a library but she thought we needed a house first to read in.” The bishop was persistent, visiting a Relief Society meeting in January 1876 at which he “encouraged the Sisters in their progress he intended to help them to build their house as soon as he got through with the present public business he had to tend to.” In the end, the building was finished. It was combined with neither school nor library, and what help the sisters received from the bishop and other men in the community the minutes never say, but persistence bordering on stubbornness was a necessary evil if the society was to have a house of its own.

Oddly Familiar

How did the institution of plural marriage affect women’s status within LDS society? The verdict is still out, but looking at the buildings, which is all that we can do here, the phrase that comes to mind is “oddly familiar.” What we see is a landscape of difference (there are all these polygamous houses) with decidedly normative qualities (the houses and meeting halls look the same as most American houses and meeting halls). Thus, while recognizing that
the fluidity of polygamous relationships makes it hard to generalize, it is also hard not to, given the unmistakable conservatism of the practice. Presented with the possibilities of change, the Mormons chose not to, or at least, not very much. Houses or halls, they fit rather easily into a landscape that was becoming increasingly familiar, however odd.