the persistence of POLYGAMY

from JOSEPH SMITH'S martyrdom to the first MANIFESTO, 1844-1890
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To our children:

Laura Alice Bringhurst-Issacs
Robert Cannon Foster
Shannon Elizabeth Foster-Spafford
Senia Suzanne Foster

And to our mutual friend, mentor, and fellow historian:

Mario S. De Pillis
gone through the painful ordeals of frequent moves and persecutions. RLDS members found it possible to hate what they viewed as sin and love the sinner. Solomon Gamer's case, for example, was like the return of the prodigal son. William Smith may have been a difficult uncle to his outspoken antipolygamist nephew, Joseph Smith III, but he was still family. Those who kept their polygamy a secret, like Richard Mann, were hard to police, and women involved in polygamous relationships might have been seen more as victims than perpetrators. People like Obadiah Riggs, Justus Morse, and Joseph Coolidge were men of talent and charm, who could be easily forgiven after living outside of polygamy for many years.

Even though twenty former polygamists is not a large number, knowing their story helps flesh out more fully early RLDS attitudes toward polygamy. The possibility exists that at least another twenty or so RLDS former polygamists are currently unidentified. This fact adds to the significance of this category. The number and prominence of the children of plural marriages is another significant contribution made by former polygamists to the denomination's early success. This fact is especially true when former polygamists helped bring in extended family, as in the case of Justus Morse. Altogether the presence of a surprisingly large number of people with direct experience with plural marriage brings another dimension to understanding the complex RLDS relationship and response to Mormon polygamy.

Polygamy and Women's Rights:
Nineteenth-Century Mormon Female Activism

by Andrea G. Radke-Moss

The contradiction between Mormon women's polygamous experiences in the nineteenth century and their vibrant political activism on behalf of women's rights has been much explored by historians. Many scholars continue to try to tease out the complexities of that relationship but, to nineteenth-century contemporaries of Mormon women, as well as to scholar-observers today, the relationship between polygamy and political feminism sometimes seems highly incongruous.

The Utah legislature awarded women the right to vote in February of 1870—an event that, in the words of historian Carol Cornwall Madsen "baffled the nation. Nothing seemed more anomalous than enfranchised Mormon women, popularly imaged as the 'dupes' and 'slaves' of tyrannical leaders." Unfortunately, because of the continued atten-
tion to historic and contemporary polygamy, some outside observers of Mormon faith and culture fail to even recognize the extent to which Mormon women enjoyed access to political and social rights, and activism not even shared by their eastern peers. Non-Mormon historian Lawrence Foster acknowledged that "indirectly and almost in spite of itself, Mormon polygamy in the late nineteenth century contributed to a greater degree of autonomy and political activism among the women of the church."

Mormon women leaders of the mid-1800s, found little or nothing incompatible in their concurrent conditions of polygamy and political activism. In fact, the need to defend themselves against antipolygamy legislation and anti-Mormon persecution often cemented Mormon women's desire, motives, and organizational strategies on behalf of the cause of women's social and legal justice.

Mormon women's activism had its earliest roots some ten years before the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints publicly announced polygamy in 1852. Indeed, the formal organization of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo in 1842 hinted at later women's rights and even suffrage activism in the Utah period. The origins of the Relief Society are well documented but worth retelling here.

In 1842, Sarah Melissa Granger Kimball desired to combine some Nauvoo women's efforts on behalf of making shirts for the male workers on the Nauvoo Temple. Building upon the growing popularity and experiences of ladies' benevolent societies in the American Northeast, Kimball and her assistant, a "Miss Cooke," met on March 4, 1842, to draft a set of rules and to "ask Eliza R. Snow to write a constitution and bylaws for the fledgling organization."

By choosing to write bylaws and a formal constitution, the Relief Society followed a common pattern of the day for many women's organizations, in which they "functioned as miniature democratic laboratories, teaching their members self-government." In fact, these benevolent soc-

3. Ibid., 26.

6. Ibid., 27.
7. Ibid., 46.
8. Ibid., 47.
women to actually receive the priesthood. But, most scholars and church leaders have offered a very conservative interpretation of the "turning of the key," arguing, as Joseph Fielding Smith declared in 1958, that "[w]hile the sisters have not been given the priesthood, it has not been conferred upon them ... that does not mean the Lord has not given unto them authority. Authority and priesthood are two different things." Still, a distinctive empowerment was decidedly bestowed upon women with the organization of the Relief Society. Historian Jill Mulvay Derr has argued that debates over the priesthood ordination of women should not detract from the larger significance of women being organized in the first place, since "the turning of the key, the creation of the society itself, opened to women their place and responsibility in the organization of the Church." Whether Latter-day Saint women were "ordained" or "set apart," whether the key was turned to them or in their behalf, whether they were organized "in the order of the priesthood," "after the pattern of the priesthood," or "under the priesthood," seems to have been less important to them than the fact that they were organized by a prophet of God, "according to the order of God." Like other women's societies of the 1840s, the importance of the founding of the Relief Society was that it also offered organizational experiences, group cohesiveness, and a directed effort toward future public action, as when Relief Society sisters "drafted a petition seeking protection for the community of Nauvoo and delivered it to the governor [of Illinois]."

While the Nauvoo women did not yet openly practice polygamy, nor did they participate in any concerted suffrage activism, still, the seeds had been firmly planted in the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo for later group political organization. In fact, some of the original members at the March 17 meeting included women who later stood for women's suffrage in Utah, including Elizabeth Ann Whitney, Leonora Taylor, Bashaheba W. Smith, Sarah M. Kimball, and Eliza R. Snow. Sarah Granger Kimball even later recognized that with the founding of the Relief Society in Nauvoo, "the sure foundations of the suffrage cause were deeply and permanently laid." The early success of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo was temporarily short lived when Brigham Young disbanded the organization in 1844, following Joseph Smith's death, due to Young's fears that some of the society leaders, especially Emma Smith, were working to undermine the church leaders' attempts to practice polygamy. With little irony, the Relief Society under Emma Smith's presidency took on a distinctly antipolygamy tone, but within twenty years, the society became the most pro-polygamy organization on earth. Still, the lasting benefits of women's political organization were left to grow; and, in spite of their hiatus from Relief Society activities, Mormon women attempted to preserve the strong organizational bonds formed during the Nauvoo period, even during the difficult exodus and Winter Quarters experiences in Iowa and eastern Nebraska.

The polygamous marriages that had begun in Nauvoo continued to be performed among the Mormon emigrants at Winter Quarters. Although women had not formal Relief Society ties to hold them together, they still maintained their Nauvoo connections and made many new ones, in the midst of their shared hardship. The Winter Quarters experience represents the first period in which Mormon women, as a group, were left to rely upon themselves for spiritual and physical sustenance during the period of difficulty. As Presendia Lathrop Young remembered, "There were not many brethren left [in Winter Quarters] and the sisters had to assist in many ways, both temporal and spiritual."

12. Ibid., 50.
Because of the absence of male leaders who either went on missions, continued to Utah with the vanguard company, or who proceeded toward Santa Fe with the Mormon Battalion, Mormon women depended upon each other to exercise their spiritual gifts of "speaking in tongues, of blessing each other, and of uttering prophecy." As a result, "[d]uring these sessions, a bonding occurred that left these Saints, the women especially, intensely involved with each other and eloquent in expressing their feelings for each other and their commitments to the faith." These feminine organizational roots laid an important foundation for later group cohesiveness which led to political efforts by LDS women during the Utah period.

The two decades following the formal announcement of polygamy by church leaders in 1852, represent the most intense period of Mormon women entering new polygamous marriages. But, at the same time, Mormon women did not yet enjoy the benefits of political franchise. One of the ironies of the intersections of LDS women's polygamous experience and their right to vote is that as the rate of new polygamous marriages declined after 1870, Mormon women's political activism actually increased. Historian Kathryn M. Daynes has demonstrated in her thorough statistical study of polygamy in Manti, Utah, that the overall rate of new polygamous marriages gradually declined after the decade of the 1860s. This decline "was significant but was not uniform over time," due to various spikes or "sporadic increases in new plural marriages." Stanley Ivins has attributed these periodic increases in new plural marriages to "revivalist activity within the church or with some menace from without," i.e.: the pressures of antipolygamy legislation.

While Daynes concedes that polygamy certainly did increase during times of revivalist preaching, as during the Reformation of 1856–57, and the intense reactionary period of the 1880s, she mainly attributes the rise in new plural marriages to the expanded numbers of convert young women arriving from Europe. To Daynes, the "rate of immigration thus appears to be a crucial component in determining variations in the numbers of new plural marriages." Still, even as immigrant groups continued to arrive in Utah from Great Britain and Scandinavia in the 1870s and 1880s, the overall plural marriage rate continued to decline up to the 1890 Manifesto and beyond. For later suffrage activism, the decline of polygamy had little effect on how both members and outsiders perceived the intersections between polygamy and suffrage, since most of the church's main female leadership, in both the Relief Society and women's rights, were plural wives themselves, and continued to be some of the staunchest defenders of "The Principle."

Even though women did not yet enjoy the right to vote in Utah Territory between 1852 and 1870, women's political and ecclesiastical activism continued in fits and starts during this time of increasing new plural marriages. By 1866, the church leaders had overcome some of their reservations about the early Relief Society, and once again encouraged the organization's reactivation throughout the territory. Relief Society leaders found renewed ways to express their efforts at sisterhood, charitable works, and by contributing to the economic self-sufficiency of Utah. These included the creation of Indian Relief Societies to provide food, clothing, and bedding to neighboring tribes. Members also quilted, sewed, collected relief items for struggling Saints, participated in home manufacturing, and pursued cooperative economic ventures through the Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution and individual ward Relief Societies. Through such activities, women gained valuable qualities of independence, business savvy, fundraising, accounting skills, and cooperative participation—all of which later benefitted their successful efforts at women's political organization.

In many ways, polygamy facilitated women's economic contributions to the home and community, as Daynes has argued. First, while polygamy did not create many families of extreme wealth, or even "middle-class women of leisure," it "simply mitigated the worst poverty and shared the..."
burden of struggling for a living in a semi-arid land.” But many plural wives tried to raise themselves out of subsistence level to success in their own right, especially as they were able to establish themselves in businesses and professions.... [and] to enter the paid labor market.

According to Daynes, the institution of “plural marriage was more likely to make this a necessity as well as a possibility,” since wives could share domestic and childrearing responsibilities, while women and children often acted as economic contributors to the home, and even helped toward “enlarging the family’s assets.”

Perhaps, most important as tools necessary for their later political organization and suffrage activism, Mormon women got their first taste of ecclesiastical voting—or congregational voting to sustain newly called church and Relief Society officers—during this time, as well as opportunities for speaking in public. Even the great Mormon suffrage leader of the 1880s and 1890s, Emily S. Richards, began her speaking career amidst these early Relief Society beginnings when women learned to teach other women the gospel. Richards remembered: “The first time Aunt Eliza asked me to speak in a meeting. I could not.... She said, ‘Never mind, but when you are asked to speak again, try and have something to say; and I did.’”

With this early initiation into public oratory, Emily Richards later addressed the National Woman Suffrage Association in Washington DC in 1899, receiving praise from “a surprised journalist,” who described her as “trembling slightly under the gaze of the multitude, yet reserved, self-possessed, dignified, and as pure and sweet as an angel.”

Certainly, the 1860s was a growing time for Mormon women, especially under the leadership of Eliza R. Snow, who not only counseled the sisters on their duties as wives and mothers, but also promoted self-improvement programs and instructed the sisters to prepare themselves for a broader field of activity.

The opportunities for a “broader field of activity” would come soon to Mormon women, as they would be called upon to defend themselves against growing anti-Mormon fervor and attempts at antipolygamy legislation. By 1868 and 1869, the Deseret News reported the first whisperings of the merits of universal suffrage, as well as other women’s issues in Utah. In this climate, as scholar Lola Van Wagenen has suggested, “the Relief Society came to provide a sanctioned setting for a growing discussion of women’s rights and responsibilities.”

In 1870, Mormon women experienced a major victory for the advancement of women’s rights, when Utah’s territorial legislature voted for women’s suffrage. Historians have attributed this victory to varied origins, including outside political interests and the influence of moral reformers, who hoped that Mormon women would use the vote to throw off polygamy. Other historians, in an attempt to downplay the suffrage victory as a triumph for women’s rights, have tried to write off Utah’s woman suffrage bill, as merely male Mormon leaders hoping to use their influence on the female vote in order to maintain the church’s control of territorial politics, male patriarchal order, and, perhaps, most importantly, the continuation of polygamy.

Historian Beverly Beeton has challenged this latter argument by showing how “during the ... territorial years ... if there were already more than four Mormon voters for every non-Mormon voter, it obviously was not necessary to double the Mormon electorate by giving women the right to vote.” Instead, Beeton saw the 1870 victory as “more externally than internally influenced,” especially as Reconstructionist politicians in the East advocated for a Utah suffrage victory even earlier than the watershed 1870 year: “for at least three years prior to the legislation vesting the women of Utah with the political franchise, this idea had been discussed in the East.”

Eastern reformers and politicians maneuvered the Utah victory, in the hopes that Mormon women might use suffrage to throw off polygamy and patriarchy in favor of monogamy and traditional families.

22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 136.
25. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 6.
When assessing the ultimate reason for Utah’s suffrage victory, Beeton has argued that “this concern of people outside the territory for women’s right to vote in Utah was the most influential force in bringing about the enfranchisement of Utah women.” But antipolygamists failed in their goal, leaving outsiders to wonder whether Utah’s women were, indeed, being controlled by the Mormon hierarchy. Still, Utah’s Mormon leaders were not influenced unwillingly, and many certainly supported women’s suffrage for political reasons of their own.

Mormon leaders did have a vested interest in granting women the right to vote, but, Beeton argued, not for the egalitarian reasons that some have supposed. Instead, they hoped that a suffrage victory would improve the image of Utah women to national suffrage activists and sympathizers in Washington DC, who would then turn their support for the Mormons toward defeating antipolygamy legislation.

What the male Mormon leaders really sought, was “lobbying power and congressional support in the move to achieve statehood.” This view was supported by Mormon leader and woman suffrage supporter George Q. Cannon, who celebrated that “the extension of suffrage to our women was a most excellent measure. It brought to our aid the friends of woman suffrage.”

While historians like Beeton have downplayed Mormon men’s “egalitarian impulses,” in granting the vote to women, other scholars have treated the question of women’s suffrage with much more complexity. For instance, historian Thomas Alexander has given credit to far-sighted and progressive male Mormon leaders for their sincere belief in women’s “equality,” and has demonstrated that their support for women’s suffrage “seems to have been unanimous.”

Apostles George Q. Cannon and Franklin D. Richards expressed strong vocal support in favor of the feminine franchise. According to Alexander, the male Mormon leaders were building from a precedent of female political participation that included a tradition of women voting in ecclesiastical elections in the State of Deseret, and women’s early participation in the cooperative ventures of the church. Further, many Utah territorial legislators sincerely believed that the defense of polygamy was an appropriate social reform for women as “social representatives,” since feminine moral authority could effectively combat prostitution and other forms of sexual enslavement. Indeed, “church leaders saw this reform [polygamy] as a way of freeing women from slavery to the lusts of men and making them honored wives and mothers with homes of their own and social position.”

Lola Van Wagenen has taken the most feminist view of the 1870 suffrage bill, arguing that while Mormon men were considering granting the vote, it was really the effects of women’s political experience in Utah that pushed the vote on the suffrage bill to its successful passage. While conceding Beeton’s argument that “suffrage was not granted women in 1870 because of an overwhelming egalitarian impulse on the part of the Brethren,” Van Wagenen has claimed that “although Mormon women did not openly seek suffrage, I believe they were activists in their own behalf, and their actions contributed to their enfranchisement.”

Van Wagenen has even suggested a direct correlation between the women’s call for the vote at the January protest meeting and the male leaders’ change of attitudes in support of the February 12 passage of the suffrage bill. She has also cited Mormon women’s experiences in “visible and aggressive political activism,” especially ecclesiastical voting, writing and submitting petitions, and even “the doctrines of the restored gospel, including polygamy, [which, they believed] signaled a new era for women.” Indeed, many LDS women saw the restored church and the keys turned to women through the Relief Society as intricately linked to the subsequent legal, social, and political freedoms for all women in the nineteenth century.

Regardless of women’s political intentions toward gaining the vote, historian Carol Cornwall Madsen has suggested that “the decision to enfranchise Utah women was already in the making before the women’s

31. Ibid., 120.
32. Ibid., 130.
33. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 107.
37. Van Wagenen, “In Their Own Behalf,” in Madsen, Battle for the Ballot, 68.
38. Ibid., 61.
rally, [and] church leaders did not need a public rally of women to assure them of their loyalty or political capabilities."

What really cemented women's request for the vote was the pending antipolygamy Cullom Bill of December 1869, which was designed to enforce the earlier 1862 Morrill Act. Mormon women's collective efforts in 1870 had much more to do with defending the church and its institutions—especially polygamy—from outsiders' attacks, than in demanding broad political rights.

Regarding Van Wagenen's claim "that the resolution to demand the vote of the governor was a radical notion," Carol Cornwall Madsen, instead, has argued that "demanding the vote of the governor, sparked as it was by the intensity of their outrage at the Cullom Bill, simply reflected an idea that was already well established and not as radical a resolution as it might seem."

In other words, Mormon women wanted to save polygamy and the church more than they wanted the right to vote. Equal suffrage was an important means to an end. If it represented political activity "in their own behalf," their interests could not be defined as their own political independence but, rather, as the preservation of the religion and its principles to which they were deeply committed, in union with their husbands, fathers, and sons.

For these women, "the vote was desirable more as a tool than as a right, which they would use as an expression of loyalty and unity." Madsen has argued that "seeking the vote was not the focus of this group of women. Theirs was a protest against the infringement of the First Amendment's protection of religion." Already in January 1870, the women of the Salt Lake City Fifteenth Ward Relief Society met to express opposition to the bill. Under the guidance of president Sarah M. Kimball, the attendees at the meeting were able to officially vocalize some of their intentions toward achieving a political voice in the matters of Utah's institutions. The women's influence was certainly present, but

More to the end of defending the church against antipolygamy legislation than in enacting a major victory for women's rights.

Whatever complex reason or reasons lay behind the passage of the 1870 Utah suffrage bill, it was clear that the polygamy issue was always central to Utah's suffrage battle, and would remain so throughout the period in which Utah women enjoyed the right to vote after 1870, lost it in 1887, and then regained it with statehood in 1896.

Because the proposal to enfranchise Utah women was tied to the desire of many people to eliminate polygamy, the fortunes of the female franchise in Utah would rise and fall for the next twenty years with the battle over plural marriage. Additionally, women's right to vote would be argued on the local and national scene each time the question of statehood for Utah was considered.

In no way was the struggle between suffrage and polygamy more apparent than in the national suffrage organizations' maneuvering over the Utah vote. The 1870 Utah suffrage bill came on the heels of a national schism between two major arms of suffrage organization, the American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell, and the National Woman Suffrage Association, led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Not only did the AWSA allow for male membership and leadership in the organization, it also took a more conservative and gradualist approach to women's suffrage, recognizing small victories in territorial and state constitutions. The NWSA insisted on female-only membership and firmly held out for a constitutional victory on the national level, while still embracing the smaller victories in Wyoming and Utah. Further, while the AWSA chose to limit its association with women and groups of questionable moral practices like divorce and free love, the NWSA accepted all women with intentions toward equal rights for women, regardless of social, marital, and sexual behavior.

These ideological differences between the two organizations led to the AWSA's outright rejection of polygamy, while the NWSA could endure some shaky connections with Utah's women, as long as they supported suffrage. Utah's voting women and suffrage activists found themselves unwittingly caught in the middle of this national rift, which "would become even more controversial in the coming decade as the

40. Ibid., 141.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., 122.
43. Ibid., 123.
44. Beeton, "Woman Suffrage," in Madsen, Battle for the Ballot, 120.
social purity agenda expanded to include an antipolygamy crusade that also became enmeshed with the suffrage movement. In other words, more conservative leaders within the national suffrage cause sought to fight against equal suffrage in Utah for what they considered the greater cause of punishing male and female polygamists, and ending plural marriage altogether.

In contrast to the AWSA's social purity agenda that showed its willingness to sacrifice support for equal suffrage in the name of morality, the NWSA stood firmly against the disenfranchisement of any women, regardless of the reason. But Utah women still presented to the NWSA leaders what Joan Iversen has called a "perplexing political anomaly: polygamous suffragists." It also presented them with an ideological dilemma—wanting to support any suffrage victory without appearing to condone plural marriage.

Still, eager to build on western suffrage victories and to add momentum to the national woman's rights movement, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton made their first visit to Salt Lake City in July 1871. Reluctant to associate with Mormon polygamists, Anthony and Stanton first reached out to the female members of the New Movement, or Godbeites, who had left the main body of the Mormon church to embrace a more palatable and less-authoritative version of restored Mormonism. Because of their disassociation with the mainstream church, many outsiders perceived the Godbeites as antipolygamist, and as having a "reform agenda that Easterners hoped might overthrow polygamy."

Ironically, the Godbeites had not completely rejected plural marriage; in fact, suffragists Annie Thompson, Mary Hampton, and feminist Charlotte Ives Cobb (later Godbe, then Kirby) were all three wives of William Godbe, the movement's founder. Still, the Godbeites had also joined themselves economically and politically with "gentiles," or non-Mormons in Utah, which added to their political legitimacy among eastern observers of Utah religion and politics who hated church authority. It also gave them the appearance of having discarded polygamy—even though this was not true—and allowed for an uneasy association with the National Woman Suffrage Association.

Stanton's and Anthony's visit gave them the opportunity to meet with both New Movement women as well as some of the mainstream Mormon women leaders, establishing important first connections that set the stage for the next few decades of Mormons' participation in national suffrage activism. During the visit to Salt Lake, Stanton spoke before an audience of Mormon women in an attempt to persuade them to overthrow polygamy. In the end, she came away somewhat impressed with Mormon women's defense of plural marriage on the grounds of the "sacredness of motherhood" with strictures against sexual intercourse during pregnancy and lactation. In fact, Stanton felt that all marriages of Biblical tradition—both polygamous and monogamous versions—were bound up in oppressive male domination, and that "Mormons were no more deluded than any woman who accepted the biblical concept of woman's inferiority and patriarchal marriage."

Even after this visit by the NWSA leaders, Mormon affiliation with the national suffrage organizations proceeded only slowly and cautiously during the 1870s, with no formal suffrage organization made by Mormon women until increasing antipolygamist actions demanded a response. In fact, Mormon women's reluctance to embrace the national suffrage movement should have been no surprise, since Mormon women could hardly embrace Stanton's anti-Christianty and her view of them as "deluded." Nor would they reach out to the National Woman Suffrage Association for eight more years—that is, until leaders of the National protested in Washington against escalating attacks on Utah woman suffrage, and the Mormons were faced at home with the newly organized Anti-Polygamy Society.

Susan B. Anthony was far less willing than Stanton to see any positives of plural marriage, and it was Anthony's reluctance to include Mormon suffragists that led to the NWSA's snubbing or exclusion of Utah's...
polygamist suffragists until later in the 1870s. Her initial coldness toward Utah suffragists was quite ironic, especially because “it was Anthony who was to become personally closer to the Mormon women over the next thirty years.”

In the meantime, during the 1870s, Mormon women struggled as outsider attacks increased in number and vitriol. A few highly public personalities and publications only added to the negative attention directed toward Mormon marriages. In 1872, ex-polygamist and New Movement member Fanny Stenhouse published her first book, Expose of Polygamy in Utah: A Lady’s Life Among the Mormons, which was followed in 1874 by “Tell it All”: Woman’s Life in Polygamy. These publications vaulted Stenhouse to national fame, and her subsequent stint on the lecture circuit only added to the antipolygamy climate of the 1870s, and her “true” accounts of life in plural marriage portrayed Mormon women as “pityful dupes or ignorant fanatics.”

Cornelia Paddock, a non-Mormon who had moved to Utah in 1870 with the completion of the transcontinental railroad, added her voice to the antipolygamy, antistatehood efforts then in full swing. Stenhouse’s and Paddock’s highly publicized attacks invited a high level of outsider scrutiny directed toward Mormon women. This negative attention characterized the next two decades, during which both Utah’s unsuccessful attempts at statehood and the cause of women’s suffrage in the territory suffered almost irreparable damage.

During this time, Anthony and other national suffragists courted the association of Charlotte Ives Cobb and other New Movement suffragists in Utah. This tenuous link allowed the NWSA continued public support of a territorial suffrage cause, while still maintaining a lengthy distance from plural marriage, even though Cobb’s own marital status remained highly ambiguous. To outside observers, part of what cemented the connection between polygamy and the franchise in Utah was that Utah’s elite female suffrage leaders, with few exceptions, were plural wives or daughters of high-ranking polygamous members of the First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and political officials in the territorial legislature. These included Phoebe Woodruff, Bathsheba W. Smith, Zina D. H. Young, Susa Young Gates, and, later, Emmeline B. Wells.

In fact, it was just such tight connections to the highest leadership of the church that caused the anti-polygamy movement and the national suffrage leaders to blame Utah’s Mormon women of being puppets of the male hierarchy. While Utah was certainly not unique for having its suffrage advocates come from the leading circles of wealth, privilege, and education, some argued that just such a top-down suffrage effort reinforced the idea that Mormon women were trying to keep other women oppressed within a system of male domination. This fact alone remained an immensely frustrating thorn in the side of the national suffrage movement—that Mormon women refused to use the vote to overturn polygamy.

While the public discourse was certainly driven by these elite women, through Relief Society speeches, writings, and the Woman’s Exponent, the numbers of women across the territory who supported suffrage causes demonstrate a widespread populist and feminist effort by Mormon women of all stations. The first “Great Indignation Meeting” of January 13, 1870, to protest the Cullom Bill, brought three thousand women to the old tabernacle, although Carol Cornwall Madsen describes the meeting as having “attracted five to six thousand women,” with even thousands more “in outlying communities” holding their own rallies.

These meetings were followed in February and March by “at least fifty-six such indignation meetings” across the territory, in which “countless LDS women had had the opportunity of publicly defending the principle and their right to practice their religion.” The Relief Society leadership also brought the vast numbers of young women into their influence, through the newly organized renunciation efforts of the Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Association (1869). Relief Society leaders began the practice of “carrying messages to outlying wards, later reported, and they also visited YWMIAs’ groups.”

52. Ibid., 154.
55. Madsen, An Advocate for Women, 123.
57. Ibid., 115.
Through the actual physical carrying of important Salt Lake messages, Relief Society leaders influenced the rank-and-file women of the church toward their larger suffrage efforts, but also, brought those women's energy back to Salt Lake City. By 1880, there were twenty stakes organized in Utah and one in Arizona, each with four to thirty-six formal Relief Societies within each stake.58

Relief Societies throughout the church, were, in fact, small laboratories where both suffrage activism and polygamous teaching coexisted, and even flourished comfortably. Relief Societies also served as necessary underground networks where plural wives found safety and housing during the 1880s period of antipolygamy prosecutions.

In the early 1870s, Mormon women were not yet formally organized, except in their attempts to defend themselves from outsider attacks. To that end, the Woman's Exponent was established in 1872, as the most important vehicle for Mormon women's literary and political expression, with Lucinda (Lu) Dalton as its first editor. While initially touching on suffrage and other women's rights issues, the Exponent's editors and contributors focused primarily on defending polygamy and the LDS church.

Even before Emmeline Wells took over the editorship of the Exponent in 1877, those two purposes—defending polygamy and advocating women's rights—were intrinsically linked in all of her writings, and remained so throughout her editorship. In fact, the Exponent often moved beyond merely defending polygamy to the point of holding it up as a superior system to monogamy for the advancement of women. The various justifications for polygamy—especially used by Wells in the Exponent—helped Mormon women to maintain both their belief in patriarchy and their growing support for women's rights—a tricky ideological balance that seemed contradictory to outsiders.

Wells gave much attention in the Exponent to defending polygamy, especially during what Carol Cornwall Madsen has called the period of "antipolygamy agitation," and the founding of the Anti-Polygamy Society in 1878.59 In fact, historian Beverly Beeton has argued that Wells's motive in advocating woman suffrage was not as much from an ideological base as a means to improve the image of Mormon women and promote the goals of the church. To that end, Wells was "first a polygamous wife and mother, then an advocate of woman suffrage."60

Still, even as Wells grew more vocal in her editorials about supporting woman's suffrage, the Woman's Exponent became increasingly popular so that subscriptions reached women all over Utah, Idaho, and Arizona. The suffrage message got out to the broad Relief Society membership, and as long as Wells continued to defend both polygamy and suffrage, she did so safely, without alienating her key audience.

Wells's various justifications for polygamy covered all moral and social areas, ranging from a belief in strict obedience to God's law as revealed through his prophets, to the rearing of children in faithful homes, the linking of families through eternal sealing powers, and finally, for the women who lived in plurality, the fostering of qualities like "patience, generosity, tolerance, and sororal affection," among others.61 A common argument suggested that polygamy was a preferred marital arrangement for women who might otherwise remain single and childless. Indeed, polygamy had the "potential to eradicate the detested double moral standard and give more women a chance at marriage and motherhood with honorable men....In other words, [Wells] maintained, it promoted Christian virtues and the qualities of selfless womanhood."62

Some took this argument a little too far by suggesting that without plural marriage, many Mormon women might otherwise have entered into prostitution. Against that point, Wells drew a very strong line, instead arguing, as Wells's biographer Carol Cornwall Madsen has described, that the "goodness, purity, integrity and principle that characterized women who accepted plural marriage and endured to the end were never the qualities of a potential prostitute."63

Still, for Mormon women, the argument about marital possibilities for all women came in handy when Mormons sought to challenge the hypocrisy of antipolygamy crusaders, especially by drawing attention to the prevalence of prostitution and marital infidelity among high-ranking

58. Ibid., 123.
61. Madsen, An Advocate for Women, 49.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 53.
as they suppose. We are perfectly capable of thinking for ourselves."

And an enfranchised woman, then, "feels her political independence and that she is virtually part and parcel of the great body politic, not through her father or husband, but in her own vested right." 71

Ironically, considering the efforts of the nineteenth-century women's movement's calls for women to be recognized as individuals in their own rights, Mormon suffrage leaders made the bold assertion that it was polygamy—not monogamy—that more successfully achieved this outcome.

Wells was not the only one touting the advantages of polygamy; the argument for greater individual autonomy within plural marriage was born up by the reminiscences of a few high-profile plural wives, as well. 72

In 1884, polygamist, suffragist, and Relief Society leader Mary Isabella Horne admitted in her memoirs that "plural marriage destroys the oneness of course...[and that] no one can ever feel the full weight of the curse till she enters into polygamy." 73 But even though she considered polygamy "a great trial of feeling," she "could see some advantages, now she feels better; she is freer and can do herself individually things she never could have attempted before, and work out her individual character as separate from her husband." 74

And Annie Clark Tanner also concluded, after thirty years as a plural wife, that the "companionship between husband and wife in polygamy could not be so close as in monogamy." 75 Still, she echoed Horne's sentiments that "there was more independence on both sides in polygamy."

64. Blanche Beechwood, "Our Daughters," Woman's Exponent 2 (February 1, 1874): 131, quoted in Madsen, An Advocate for Women, 52.
66. Madsen has argued that as much as Wells touted the superiority of polygamy, happiness in her own plural marriage to apostle Daniel H. Wells eluded her. "The sublime marriage that Emmeline continually described in her writings was certainly beyond the boundaries of her own marital experience and an illusion for many women of the time. Hidden beneath the nom de plume she chose for these heartfelt renderings and within the recesses of her diary was a woman longing for an elusive love," Madsen, An Advocate for Women, 101.
68. Annie Clark Tanner, A Mormon Mother, 1st ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1973), 272.
From a personal point of view, most would have agreed with Tanner's more negative portrayal of polygamy: "It is needless to observe that monogamous marriages are by far the more successful. They give security and confidence, and these are the requirements for happiness." But from a Mormon suffragist point of view, plurality allowed women to develop more self-sovereignty than they might have otherwise in a traditional, monogamous marriage.

Placed side-by-side, this argument sounded remarkably similar to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's later and more famous "Solitude of Self" speech of 1892: "In discussing the rights of woman, we are to consider, first, what belongs to her as an individual, in a world of her own, the arbiter of her own destiny, an imaginary Robinson Crusoe, with her woman, Friday, on a solitary island." While Stanton and Anthony held that all marriages were a form of ownership over women, still, they could almost admit to the benefits of polygamy for creating what Wells called a more independent wife.

In spite of such seemingly convincing arguments in favor of plural marriage, the outside world, and especially the National Suffrage Movement, remained vehemently unconvinced. The founding of the Anti-Polygamy Society in 1878 increasingly focused negative attention on Utah polygamy, causing many Mormon women leaders to rally once again. Even Anthony finally felt the need to defend Mormon women—albeit reluctantly, because of the Anti-Polygamy Society's continued calls to end woman's suffrage in Utah toward the result of abolishing polygamy altogether. The Anti-Polygamy Society's efforts certainly had an effect on Utah's 1879 bid for statehood, which failed. And when the Anti-Polygamy Society expanded its public efforts in 1880 with nationwide publication of the Anti-Polygamy Standard, moral indignation intensified against Utah Territory, resulting in a call to end woman suffrage. In 1879, the Supreme Court ruled in the case Reynolds v. the U.S. that certain restrictions on the free practice of religion, especially polygamy, were constitutional, thus setting the stage for the most stringent antipolygamy, anti-Mormon federal laws in the 1880s.

All of these factors contributed to the early 1880s to create a climate intensely hostile to Mormon polygamy, the church, its leaders and Mormon women themselves. Within this atmosphere, the turning point for Mormon women's entrance onto the national suffrage scene occurred in 1879, when Emmeline B. Wells and Zina Young Card were invited to visit the NWSA to speak for Utah women, thus cementing Mormon women's first formal connection to the NWSA. Mormon women even appealed to Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes, but to little avail. The 1880s would be the most difficult decade for Mormon women's legal and political rights on the national level.

Emboldened by the 1879 Reynolds case, national antipolygamy forces tightened their efforts to legislate away plural marriage. Indeed, anti-Mormon persecution reached a fever pitch in the 1880s, with the enactment of two devastating pieces of legislation—the Edmunds Act of 1882, and the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887. At the same time, the National Woman Suffrage Association suffered some blows as well, specifically the refusal of the Republican Party to take up woman suffrage on its platform, and the unsuccessful attempt to secure passage of a "Woman Suffrage Amendment" in 1877.

Mormon women continued their representation in the NWSA throughout this time, in spite of cold reactions from national suffragists, and outright persecution by Congress. Again, leaders like Stanton and Anthony had to walk a fine line between outright rejection of and revulsion toward polygamy, and unconditional support of Mormon women's rights to marital choice and religious self-determination. Mormon suffragists like Zina D. H. Young and Ellen Ferguson, who travelled east in 1881 and 1882, often met cold receptions, with their defenses of polygamy rejected outright. Emmeline B. Wells later made lengthy, exhausting, and mostly fruitless trips to Washington to reverse the tide of antipolygamy opinion.

When the Edmunds Act passed in 1882, it disenfranchised over twelve thousand male and female polygamists. However, Mormons still managed to elect their favorite candidate, John Caine, by a "margin of
19,000 votes." Concurrantly, liberals, non-Mormons and anti-suffragists in Utah increased their demand for a law that would disenfranchise all Mormons and take political power away from the LDS church.

The Edmunds Act offered an unintentional benefit for Mormon suffragists, in that "it began untangling woman suffrage from polygamy." Since not all Utah women were disenfranchised from the Edmunds Act, thus, for national suffragists, "defending women's right to the ballot in Utah would no longer mean defending polygamy suffragists." Instead, "any further attempt to tamper with woman suffrage in Utah could be defended as an attack against the principle." But that relief lasted only so long among antipolygamists in Utah, who were also split about the effects on the franchise for women.

While many lamented the loss of suffrage for Mormon women as removing any political power they might have had, still others celebrated the 1882 law as an appropriate punishment for Mormon women, who they thought "voted only as Church leaders dictated." With the goal of ending Mormon political domination, many national suffrage leaders, like Frances Willard, Kate Field, Lucy Stone, and Angie Newman actually came out in support of disenfranchising Mormon women. But the NWSA and Susan B. Anthony remained loosely loyal to the cause of restoring woman suffrage in Utah, even if it meant an uncomfortable relationship with their Mormon women counterparts.

At the same time anti-Mormons and antipolygamists wouldn't stop at just disenfranchising polygamists; they wanted to go to the point of ending Mormon political power altogether. In 1887, Congress passed and President Grover Cleveland signed the Edmunds-Tucker Act, which decapitated the LDS church financially, confiscated property, criminalized polygamous practice, and ended suffrage for all Utah women.

Antipolygamists maintained a self-sacrificing moral high ground, arguing that they were happy to give up their own voting rights as long as polygamy was eradicated. But this move was so devastating to the cause of woman suffrage that national leaders stepped forward in defiant response to the act. The NWSA became even more determined to fight for a national women's suffrage amendment, so that the Utah defeat would not be such a liability to the long-term goal of the vote for women. When Utah applied for statehood in 1887, for the sixth time in almost forty years, all Utah women, and not just Mormons, were excluded from any vote on the proposed state constitution.

In spite of venomous anti-Mormon feeling in Washington DC and in the nation, Susan B. Anthony did not abandon Mormon women entirely. Leading up to the fortieth anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, NWSA leaders planned a meeting in Washington DC to organize an International Council of Women, made up of women's organizations from all around the world, to meet and "collectivize women's associations in each nation" toward the goal of achieving greater rights for women, achieving peace, and promoting social reforms against prostitution and the sex trade.

A major turning point came when Emily S. Richards was unexpectedly chosen to represent Mormon women at the ICW meetings and, later, to serve as Utah's representative to the NWSA meetings in 1889. Her leadership was no accident; in fact, no one was better poised to see Mormon women through a radical transition from polygamous suffragists toward a more self-conscious public representation as mainstream nonpolygamists. Richards and her husband, Franklin S. Richards were monogamists.

Young, articulate, and attractive, Emily Richards also appealed to newer generations of Mormon youth, who were turning away from polygamous belief and the church's past attempts at isolation, in favor of assimilation into the larger American culture. In spite of a cold reception by the audience, Richards won over the delegates with her speech, and gentle, unassuming personality. Her leadership and tenacity through the 1890s paved the way for a stronger and more beneficial relationship between Utah and national suffrage leaders.

At the 1891 meeting of the National Council of Women, which Emmeline Wells attended after a five-year absence from Washington, Mormon women were finally admitted, by virtue of the 1890 Manifesto.

79. Ibid., 112.
81. Ibid., 237.
82. Ibid., 240 and 242-43.
83. Ibid., 243.
which ended new polygamous marriages, and by virtue of their existing organizational structure found in both the Relief Society and the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association.

This meeting would be a prelude to greater associations with the NCW and ICW leading up to Utah's statehood convention in 1895. The events of the 1880s, while devastating to the church and plural marriage, proved invaluable to Utah's suffrage leaders, for it allowed national suffragists in the NWSA to align themselves more closely to Mormon women, in defense of their desires to regain the suffrage they had lost. By nurturing this relationship, Utah's Mormon women were poised to face the upcoming challenges of the 1890s that would result in a successful showing at the Chicago World's Fair and, ultimately, in a state constitution that came with full suffrage rights for women.

At no time did the competing images of the oppressed polygamous wife and the liberated suffragist collide more soundly than at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. The LDS church having moved into a new era with the 1890 Manifesto rejecting plural marriage, at least publicly, Mormon women sought to benefit from and build upon a new collective public persona that celebrated progress for Utah's women, their renewed patriotic spirit, increased political activity, and vibrant suffrage activism. By virtue of their membership in the National Council of Women, high-ranking Mormon women in the Relief Society and the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association were invited to participate in the World's Congress of Representative Women, held in May 1893, as part of the various congresses and parliaments intended to "kick off" the fair. The congress brought together hundreds of women from all over the world to lecture and discuss on issues significant to the women's movement, as well as progressivism, education, religion, arts and humanities, and child welfare, among others.

That Mormon women would be included in an internationally significant conference on women was, in itself, a major step toward overcoming past prejudices about Utah's polygamous past. Mormon men enjoyed no such similar publicity, and in fact, even struggled for recognition and admission to the World's Parliament of Religions, from which they were excluded. It is noteworthy that while Mormon elder B. H. Roberts's petitions were repeatedly rejected by parliament leaders, Emily Richards was actually invited to speak at the women's auxiliary of the parliament, a distinction likely afforded her because of her status as a high-profile, monogamist wife.

Still, Emmeline B. Wells confessed to some jealousy about the attention Mormon men usually received in these public events. Regarding her own privilege of being chosen to preside over the congress proceedings for one day, Wells declared, "If one of our brethren had such a distinguished honor conferred upon them, it would have been heralded the country over and thought a great achievement."

Her suspicion seemed unwarranted, for, indeed, Mormon women received much more attention, at least positive attention, than did their male counterparts at the world congresses. Besides Wells, the Relief Society was represented by Zina D. H. Young, Martha Hughes Cannon, Sarah Melissa Granger Kimball, Jane S. Richards, and Mary Isabella Horne. From reports on the Relief Society's charitable work and grain-saving efforts, to accounts of the first women to Utah in 1847 and 1848 and the Primary organization for children, the Relief Society leadership came away from their congress having successfully painted a picture of progressive, liberated, and refined Utah women.

The Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association (YLMA) sent its president, Elmina Taylor, with the express endorsement of the first presidency of the church, including official authorization to preach.

84. Ibid., 267.
teach, and expound the scriptures and doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” And Emily S. Richards received a similar authorization from the first presidency.

At both the Relief Society meeting on Friday morning and the YL-MIA meeting on Friday night, speakers consciously avoided controversy and instead focused on how Mormon women led the way in education, journalism, voluntary charitable work, and the arts. Talks like “Literature and Art” by May Talmage; “Legal and Political Status of Utah Women” by Emily S. Richards; “Motherhood” by Martha S. Tingley; and “Education of Women” by Julia Farnsworth, were universally appealing topics for women activists of the day. These talks showed a population of Mormon women who subscribed to Victorian expectations of proper womanhood, while also celebrating the progressive leaps in feminine legal and educational rights being achieved in Utah.

In spite of Mormon women’s attempts to deemphasize and even consciously ignore the topic of polygamy while at the congress and subsequent fair activities, still the shadow of plural marriage was ever present, always threatening to color observers’ impressions of their Mormon guests. Leading up to the fair and, in context of increased public attention on Mormons, some LDS women even continued to express a kind of ambivalence about the discontinuation of plural marriage since 1890. These statements might make or break the renewed public relations campaign with some Mormons’ nostalgic longing for the era of plurality.

Susa Young Gates, as editor of the Young Woman’s Journal, was defensive of plural marriage, just as much after the manifesto as before, while also carefully conceding Mormons’ willingness to obey the law, as it had been imposed. Gates often looked back on polygamy with regret, blaming its end on the unwillingness of members—especially women—to practice it fully and wholeheartedly.

In an 1893 article, Gates claimed that “we, the women of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, have a grievous sin to answer for in that we have too many of us treated this sacred and holy principle with neglect, sneers, mocking abuse and even cursing and railing.” To Gates, the end of polygamy was due to God’s punishment for a collective lack of faith, and she even leveled the accusation that some women “openly rejoiced when the manifesto was issued, and who held many a joyous jubilee with their daughters over the prospect.” But, that didn’t make the doctrine any less true, even after 1890. As dogmatic as Gates seemed in her belief, she certainly wasn’t alone among high-profile Mormon women, who had been raised in the principle and continued to long for it.

In an interview held in March 1893 by the Chicago Daily News with Brigham Young’s so-called “favorite” wife, Harriet Amelia Folsom Young, she was pointedly asked “Do you still believe in polygamy?” Folsom admitted, “Certainly I do. If polygamy was once right it is still right. There is no reason why a polygamous marriage may not be as happy as the ordinary marriage, if it is entered understandingly.” In fairness, women like Harriet Folsom could hardly be expected to publicly reject polygamy outright, only three years after the church’s official renunciation of the practice, especially after they had spent years in their own successful plural marriages. Still, outsiders often wanted to know whether the church would return to the practice. The interviewer followed up by asking, “What will be the future of the Mormon church on the question?” But Folsom was carefully circumspect:

The same as the past, so far as believe [sic] in the doctrine of polygamy is concerned. As to its practice that has been declared unlawful by the government, and the Mormon people have promised to abstain from polygamy. They will keep their promise, but they can believe in the doctrine of polygamy without practicing it. It would not be right under the “Manifesto” to practice polygamy.

She ended with a hopeful projection for the future of the Mormon church, even without its distinctive marital practice: “The ill feeling that has heretofore existed toward the Mormon church is fast dying out and

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89. Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph F. Smith, Salt Lake City, Utah, “To Whom it May Concern,” May 9, 1893, Elmina S. Taylor Collection, LDS Church History Library.

90. World’s Congress of Representative Women, Department Congress of the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association, Friday, May 19, 1893, Elmina S. Taylor Collection.


92. Ibid., 277.

93. Harriet Amelia Folsom Young, interview in the Chicago Daily News, March 8, 1893, p. 3, transcript, MSS B 95, box 14, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.

94. Ibid.
the people of Utah have learned to treat the Mormons as any other religious body.95 Certainly her wishes for the end of persecution and the beginnings of acceptance for Mormons fit nicely within the goals of Utah’s Board of Lady Managers for the world’s fair.

In light of the postmanifesto ambivalence about polygamy, as expressed above by the likes of Brigham Young’s own daughter and widow, it’s no wonder that the Mormon female leadership felt the importance of crafting a “public relations miracle” in Chicago. Specifically, “through a concerted de-emphasis on the peculiarity of polygamy and religious isolation, Mormon women sought to shed their lingering stereotype of ‘oppressed’ plural wives while also showing themselves as progressive women who would soon lead the way in a major state women’s suffrage victory.”96 If they succeeded in Chicago, then they could then turn their attention to “expect and demand suffrage as a facet of statehood when it came three years later.”97 Mormon women sought to convince the world that they were modern and progressive, and that they had completely excised the practice of plural marriage. If they failed, the next application for statehood would certainly fail.

Julia Farnsworth’s closing address at the YLMIA meeting captured what all Mormon women desired from their presence at the fair: “Our star of hope is bright for the future elevation of mind and body. We trust its illumination may add light to the other states and Territories of our Union, until the Congress of her people may see the absolute necessity of admitting Utah as a State.” To that end, Farnsworth declared, they would “work and pray, placing our standard high as the everlasting hills and as solid as the rock of ages.”98

While the presence of Mormon women at the world’s congress certainly didn’t achieve an overwhelming change in the perception of Mormon women on a national or international level, the Congress still managed to influence a few high-profile opinions. Besides getting positive reports from famed observer of Mormonism, Elizabeth Lisle Saxon, LDS women also met and socialized with such women as “May Wright Sewall, Anna Howard Shaw, Rachel Foster Avery, Isabella Beecher Hooker, and other authors, activists, reporters, and national club presidents.”99

Perhaps most significant to the LDS women’s goal of overcoming the taint of polygamy was an article in Chicago’s famous Inter Ocean newspaper on June 18, 1893. Reporter Augusta Prescott led out with a headline that pronounced: “MORMON WOMEN Who Will Take Part in the Fair Congresses ARE NOT POLYGAMISTS,” and used as examples the monogamists Emily Richards and Electa Bullock.100

When Prescott pressed May Wright Sewall about the most unique offering of the world’s congress, Sewall announced, “I have you heard that we are to have Mormon women to take part in all our congresses this summer? A surprised Prescott then asked, “Do you allow polygamists to address your meetings? And do you countenance polygamy in any of its forms, even though its representatives be pretty women and even club women and women suffragists?”

Sewall’s answer is quite revealing as to the extent of the Mormon representatives’ ability to refashion their image at the fair. “Why no … We do not countenance polygamy.” In fact, Sewall believed, perhaps naively, that “none of the women who came to Chicago from Utah were of that belief.”101

While some of the younger women from Utah had monogamist marriages, there were a few high profile female representatives like Zina D. H. Young, Elmina Taylor, and even Emmeline B. Wells, herself, who maintained some level of belief or practice of plurality. But the public relations miracle of undoing the taint of polygamy had happened, at least on the surface.

Mormon women went home to Utah, after the summer of 1893, feeling very satisfied with their successful performance at the fair. Susa Young Gates crowed that “never before has the name Mormon met with a general respectful courtesy. . . . Everywhere, in cars, in hotels, in any and all of the buildings and resorts in the Fair if one dropped a word about

95. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
100. Chicago Inter Ocean, June 18, 1893, in Charles E. Johnson Collection, P001, box 11, newspaper clippings, Utah State University Archives, quoted in Radke-Moss, “Mormon Women,” 107.
101. Ibid., 107-8.
polygamists." Not wanting to appear favorable to polygamy and thus alienate their NCW colleagues, nor wanting to issue a formal statement against a high-ranking priesthood leader, Emmeline B. Wells finally proposed a compromise statement that did not specifically indict Roberts, but still called for "all congressmen to be law abiding."

Whether or not Mormon women saw the end of plural marriage as the death knell to any further political progress for women into the twentieth century, still they knew that they had had their heyday and looked back longingly on their time in plurality. Not free to express that loss in public, it often took private form. YLMIA president Elmina Taylor was still receiving letters from young women as late as 1902 about the good old days of polygamy. One sister missionary wrote to Taylor, "I ... shall never forget the beautiful testimony you gave me in regard to the holy principle of polygamy and the way your family has lived it. I am proud of our noble men and women who have made success of living that law and I know that it is of God." Even the younger generations seemed aware of the painful transition between premanifesto belief and practice, and postmanifesto denial. Another Mormon woman wrote:

You know Sister Taylor, since the manifesto was issued, there are some of our people, especially our young people, who talk against that principle. They seem to think that it is not a principle of our religion since we are not allowed to practice it. I always feel sorrowful to hear one of our people say a word against it, for I know it is of God and I only wish it could be practiced for it is a principle that purifies the hearts of those who live it right.

The president of the Colorado Mission confessed that "I would much rather defend the principle of Polygamy than the manifesto." Polygamy was definitely still on the minds of outsiders as well. "Almost the first question we girls meet in our work is on polygamy. It is really [sic] amusing [sic] to see what ideas the world have of us and that principle. The majority think that is all there is to Mormonism." And yet, as much as a young sister missionary did not want Mormonism to be

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102. Susa Young Gates, Young Woman's Journal.
104. Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, Women of Covenant, 149.
106. Ibid.
defined entirely by plural marriage, she still found ways of convincing her listeners of its value. "They invariably have to admit after having the principle of plural marriage explained, that it is far ahead of the conditions existing in the world today."  

Considering the sentiments of some young Mormons regarding polygamy, even twelve years after the manifesto, it's no wonder that the LDS women leaders who had spent so many years defending plural marriage found it difficult to give up their zeal on the matter. Following Utah's statehood, Mormon women never really regained the exuberance for impassioned political activism and feminist reform that they had enjoyed in the 1870s and 1880s. Historians might look back on these decades as magically transformative but, also, religiously and culturally devastating.

Indeed, the vibrant LDS female leadership of the nineteenth century united its forceful energy around two contradictory forces—revolutionary political change for women on the one hand, and strident attempts to defend a patriarchal marriage system and religion on the other. But, after the manifesto of 1890 and, then, the granting of statehood in 1896, Mormon women no longer had to face the paradox of reconciling both plural marriage and women's voting rights.

In many ways, Mormon women reverted to very traditional and conservative political participation marked by the status quo gender relations of the mid-twentieth century and beyond, or, as Lola Van Wagenen has described, "like most American women, Utah's women responded to hard times by looking inward to the security offered by church, family and home."  

Ironically, without the intensity of defending polygamous belief and practice, and arguing for suffrage, something vital was lost in Mormon women's political zeal, as well.

While settling into the routine of equal suffrage and the business-as-usual party divisions of American society, Mormon women no longer pursued reform politics with the same concentrated efforts as they had when plural marriage had been under attack. This partly explains why "Mormon women became increasingly invisible in the new state's political life." It seemed like polygamy and equal suffrage had worked

hand-in-hand for so many years to refine and sculpt Mormon women into nationally known journalists, orators, and activists. Without that struggle, Mormon women rather wandered into obscurity and retirement, without the focus needed to persist in other work.

Just like national suffragists, who after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, "found themselves with a right to vote but bereft of a unifying cause," the same might be said of Mormon women after achieving suffrage and statehood. A handful of Mormon women, including Emily Richards, herself, continued to engage in progressive reform through the peace movement and promotion of maternal and child health, and welfare programs.

Ultimately, the legacy of those long years, when Mormon women coalesced their energy and spirit around the suffrage cause, is not diminished by the fact that they failed to preserve polygamy. But that legacy shines on even more brightly today for those who would have it no other way.

109. Ibid.
111. Ibid., 152.
113. Ibid., 169–70 and 214–17.