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# “The Finest of Any in the World”

## *Silk Production and the Politicization of Women in Utah*

WHEN THE OGDEN RELIEF SOCIETY PRESIDENT JANE S. Richards saw silkworms for the first time she declared that she would rather wear cotton than handle worms to make silk.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the process of raising silkworm eggs, cultivating mulberry trees, and extracting silk fibers from cocoons was often unsavory and time consuming. Nevertheless, Sister Richards, as well as Relief Society sisters throughout Utah, sacrificed their time, energy, homes, and squeamishness to the demanding work of silk production. Silk production, or sericulture, was one of several home industries that the Mormon prophet Brigham Young promoted in an attempt to make the Utah territory more self-sufficient. He saw Utah as a perfectly good location to make and export silk and women as perfectly capable of doing the job. Those involved in sericulture hoped that it would become “one of the home industries that ere long will be ranked among the best.”<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, because of a lack of machinery and steady markets, the Utah silk industry died out by 1905, but not before it became a highly gendered industry which contributed to Utah women’s own causes and identity. The silk industry required a level of enterprise that provided leadership and organizational opportunities for early Mormon women in Utah. These kinds of economic activities intersected with Utah women’s political activities in ways that show that creating a highly gendered home industry like sericulture helped nineteenth-century Mormon women develop identities as autonomous and capable members of society. Silk became a symbol of the pride Utah women felt as they asserted their independence in the economic and political sphere.

1 Chris Rigby Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics: Mormon Women and the Silk Industry in Early Utah.” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (October 1978): 390.

2 R. Simpson, “Sericulture,” *Woman’s Exponent*, 5, no. 14 (December 15, 1876): 109

Early Mormon women were a remarkable group of people, and many historians have studied their contributions to Utah society, including their economic contributions. Historians such as Chris Rigby Arrington, Eileen V. Wallis, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher have looked at the economic experience women gained as they participated in home and territorial industries. Though Beecher argues that women's work in frontier Utah produced little change in gender roles, other historians conclude that Mormon women had unique opportunities and experiences as they participated in the local economy.<sup>3</sup> While Arrington wrote specifically about women in the silk industry in Utah, her overview did not include a discussion of how the silk industry affected different aspects of Mormon women's lives, including their political lives. This paper will look more specifically at the entrepreneurial opportunities that the silk industry afforded women and how those opportunities affected Utah women's political development.

Mormon women actively found ways to become more economically and politically independent as they gained and displayed economic prowess with the silk industry. Historians have also written about early Mormon women's politicization. While discussing the history of women's suffrage in Utah, many historians focus on the external forces that drove the enfranchisement of Utah women, such as American progressives who wanted to end polygamy and male Mormon leaders who wanted to maintain the Mormon theocracy in Utah.<sup>4</sup> However, historians Lola Van Wagenen and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich have written about Utah women as actors rather than passive pawns in the nationwide discussion of women's rights.<sup>5</sup> Van Wagenen also acknowledges that Utah women's economic

3 Arrington, "The Finest of Fabrics"; Eileen V. Wallis, "The Women's Cooperative Movement in Utah, 1869–1915," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (October 2003): 315–331, America: History & Life, EBSCOhost;

Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "Women's Work on the Mormon Frontier," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (June 1981): 276–290, America: History & Life, EBSCOhost.

4 Sarah Barringer Gordon, "'The Liberty of Self-Degradation': Polygamy, Woman Suffrage, and Consent in Nineteenth-Century," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 3 (December 1996): 815–847. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.; Thomas G. Alexander, "An Experiment in Progressive Legislation: The Granting of Woman Suffrage in Utah in 1870," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (January 1970): 20–30. America: History & Life, EBSCOhost.

5 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017); Lola Van Wagenen, "In Their Own Behalf: The Politicization of Mormon Women and the 1870 Franchise," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24, no. 4 (1991): 31–43. America: History & Life, EBSCOhost.

experiences likely influenced their political activism.<sup>6</sup> This paper will use the silk industry in Utah to look more closely at this idea of intersection between Utah women's economic and political activities and to what extent these activities influenced each other.

Early Mormon theology gave equal attention to the spiritual and the temporal needs of humans, a principle that was put into action in the silk industry. Part of the early Mormons' beliefs as they settled the Utah territory emphasized economic self-sufficiency and resourcefulness. Brigham Young told the saints, "[The Lord] has surrounded us with . . . everything with which to build up, beautify, and glorify the Zion of the last days."<sup>7</sup> Young wanted the saints to produce their own goods and avoid becoming dependent on imports. To help with this goal Young asked missionaries and immigrants coming to Utah to bring any seeds or equipment that could be used to establish home industries.<sup>8</sup> Silk production was one of the home industries that Young promoted, and European immigrants with experience in sericulture started bringing silkworm eggs and mulberry seeds in the 1850s.<sup>9</sup> Brigham Young himself planted several acres of mulberry trees on the church farm from seeds imported from France.<sup>10</sup> By 1865, Young was attempting to establish sericulture on a church-wide basis.<sup>11</sup> Around this time the Church's women's organization, the Relief Society, was being reorganized after it had been disbanded in Nauvoo. Brigham Young had begun reorganizing the local Relief Societies in the early 1850s, and by 1867 they were fully revived. Young wanted the Relief Society to help the saints resist outside influence and support home manufacturing.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Relief Society became the main organization to take part in sericulture. This Relief Society responsibility was reemphasized in 1875 when Young assigned his wife Zina D. H. Young to travel the territory and teach Relief Society sisters about sericulture.<sup>13</sup> Throughout

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6 Van Wagenen, "In Their Own Behalf," 35.

7 Leonard Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-Day Saints 1830–1900* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), 5, 26.

8 Milton R. Hunter, *Beneath Ben Lomond's Peak: A History of Weber County 1824–1900* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Deseret News Press, 1944), 284.

9 Arrington, "Finest of Fabrics," 379.

10 Hunter, *Beneath Ben Lomond's Peak*, 331.

11 Arrington, "Finest of Fabrics," 379.

12 Jill Mulvay Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Kate Holbrook, and Matthew J. Grow, eds., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History*, (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2016), 211; Jill C. Mulvay, "The Liberal Shall be Blessed: Sarah M. Kimball," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (June 1976): 212, America: History & Life, EBSCOhost.; Ulrich, "House Full of Females," 372.

13 Arrington, "Finest of Fabrics," 387.

the late 19th century, Mormon women in the different settlements in the territory became heavily involved in planting mulberry trees, raising silkworms, reeling thread, and weaving fabric in order to do their part in building up Zion.

At first blush, silk production looked like a typical line of work for women. European countries mainly used women and children for the work of silk production, and Brigham Young saw the work as light enough to be well-suited to women, children, and the elderly.<sup>14</sup> Women were already used to spinning, weaving, sewing, and gardening, as evidenced by one Ogden woman's autobiography in which she proudly recalled her ability to provide for her family by growing produce and making homespun clothes.<sup>15</sup> These types of tasks were an important part of sericulture and could be done at home, which meant silk production would fit in well with women's domestic work.

Sericulture differed from other items women were producing in that silk was a luxury good. Making silk was complicated, and most settlers did not have experience with its production. Because of this, women had to put in time and energy to learn how to successfully produce something they had never tried before. Silkworm eggs had to be kept at fifty-five degrees Fahrenheit and could not begin hatching until the mulberry trees started leafing. Once the silkworms hatched from their eggs, they had to be fed large quantities of chopped up mulberry leaves. The silkworms then wrapped themselves in a cocoon. During the lifetime of the silkworms, they had to be kept in a dry place between sixty-five and sixty-seven degrees Fahrenheit. The cocoons were then baked or steamed before the silkworms could become moths and break out. The cocoons were dried for two months and then washed. To make the actual silk, the threads from the cocoon were put into a reeling machine which twisted the filaments into silk thread. The thread could then be woven into silk cloth.<sup>16</sup>

As women took on the work of silk production, they had to learn the intricacies of keeping mulberry leaves dry and silkworms protected from extreme temperatures and lighting. They had to clear out rooms in their homes to make room for the thousands of eggs and cocoons

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<sup>14</sup> Deseret Silk Association, "Treatise on silk raising by the Deseret Silk Association of Utah Territory, 1877" (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Silk Association, 1877) Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.; Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 227.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy Alexander Tracy, "Nancy Alexander Tracy autobiography," (1885), Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 380–381; D. Graves, "Silk Meeting," *Ogden Junction*, 1 May 1880.

they were raising. They also had to learn how to successfully spin silk which required being able to tell when to add new cocoon filaments to the reeling machines to keep the silk thread uniform. To keep everything organized, Relief Societies had to operate almost as businesses as they strove to build up the silk industry in Utah. Relief Societies partnered with the Deseret Silk Association which was organized in 1875. Under this arrangement, stake Relief Society presidents became county chairs and ward Relief Society presidents became local directors of the association.<sup>17</sup> To be successful at silk production, there had to be an organized system to disseminate information and distribute equipment. The leaders of the association, which later became the Utah Silk Commission, worked to gather information about the silk industry throughout Utah as well as find ways to acquire machinery. They also put together instructional materials and set up opportunities for both the women and young women to learn silk production skills like reeling.<sup>18</sup> Education about sericulture was important to these silk organizations, and the biennial reports for the Utah Silk Commission show that a large portion of their budget was used for instruction.<sup>19</sup> The responsibilities of running a silk industry gave women experience in organizing and keeping track of many people and resources. It also gave them experience in distributing information and promotional material—all important skills for business and leadership.

The silk industry also required women to be enterprising as their participation in the economy increased beyond home production. Often, Relief Society presidents would write to Salt Lake to ask for mulberry seeds and then distribute them among women in the ward.<sup>20</sup> Relief Societies would also buy property for the purpose of sericulture. The *Woman's Exponent* reported that the Relief Society in Rockville, Kane County, were able to raise money from subscriptions to build a house to hatch the silkworm eggs.<sup>21</sup> Nancy Alexander Tracy, who was in the Relief Society presidency in her ward in Ogden, recalled that the Relief Society bought land and planted more than two hundred mulberry trees. Even though her

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>18</sup> "Notice to Those Interested in Sericulture," *Woman's Exponent*, 31, no. 21 (1903), 85.; "Sericulture," *Woman's Exponent*, 18, no. 2 (1889), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Arrington, "Finest of Fabrics," 387, 391; Between 1903 and 1904 the Utah Silk Commission spent \$1,623.90 out of their \$3,000 budget for instruction purposes. (Utah Silk Commission, "Biennial Report of the Utah Silk Commission of the State of Utah," (Salt Lake City: *Deseret News*, 1900) Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah).

<sup>20</sup> Clark S. Monson, "Mulberry Trees: The Basis and Remnant of the Utah Silk Industry." *Economic Botany* 50, no. 1 (1996): 134. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4255812>.

<sup>21</sup> "Sericulture," *Woman's Exponent*, 7, no. 1 (June 1, 1878): 6

Relief Society's efforts to produce silk were not a success, Tracy recounts that the Relief Society still took part in the silk industry by buying shares in the manufacture of silk in Salt Lake City.<sup>22</sup> Because of sericulture, women gained experience in procuring and distributing resources and funds. Reports from the Deseret Silk Association and the Utah Silk Commission, as well as the *Woman's Exponent* show that these women also had to keep track and make an account of their expenses.<sup>23</sup> Women were heavily involved in economic practices that helped businesses run.

These women were successful in their roles as leaders of the silk industry. Zina D. H. Young and later Ann Donyon took charge of the silkworm cocoonery on Brigham Young's farm and managed to have more success hatching eggs than the men who had previously tried to run the cocoonery. Most of the officers in the Deseret Silk Association and the Utah Silk Commission were women, with Zina D. H. Young elected as its first president.<sup>24</sup> Belonging to and running these silk organizations helped raise women's position in society. One of the first talks given by a woman in a general conference of the Church appears to have been an address by Zina Young about sericulture.<sup>25</sup> The Utah Silk Commission Biennial Report for 1899–1900 reports that “The Secretary . . . was also invited to speak on silk culture at the Inter-National Council of Women in London under the department of Industrial Arts.” The same report asked that the secretary receive a salary of \$1,200 a year.<sup>26</sup> The female leaders of the silk industry and their knowledge and expertise were respected enough to be allowed to preach in previously male-dominated meetings. They were able to take advantage of opportunities to travel the world and represent Utah's inter-

22 Nancy Alexander Tracy, “Nancy Alexander Tracy autobiography,” (1885), Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 54.

23 Annie C. Larsen, Catherine F. Martin, Mary Swindle, Louisiana Heppler, Mary Marsh, “Sericulture,” *Woman's Exponent*, 10, no. 3 (July 1, 1881): 21.; Utah Silk Commission. “Biennial Report of the Utah Silk Commission of the State of Utah.” (Salt Lake City: *Deseret News*, 1900). Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

24 Arrington, “Finest of Fabrics,” 383, 387; This is not to say that men did not take any part in the silk industry. Brigham Young gave several men responsibilities relating to sericulture. George Q. Cannon and Louis Bertrand were tasked with getting mulberry seeds from Europe. George D. Watt was sent on a mission to promote sericulture. William Jennings and Paul Schettler were elected officers in the Utah Silk Association. However, since silk production was mainly considered women's work, women were the main members and leaders of the silk industry. (Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 227.)

25 Arrington, “Finest of Fabrics,” 383.

26 They do not name “the secretary” specifically but likely they are referring to the secretary of the Commission who was Margaret A. Caine. Utah Silk Commission. “Biennial Report of the Utah Silk Commission,” 7.

ests and industries. These women were also considered valuable enough to possibly be in salaried positions. Women's economic and leadership experiences in the silk industry let them be a part of something outside of the traditional domestic sphere. As Mormon women strove to make the territory more economically self-sufficient, they themselves became more economically self-sufficient. They were capable of producing goods and providing for the needs of Utah's inhabitants. One woman wrote in the *Exponent*, "I do like the idea of the sisters forming the 'back bone' of the Kingdom of God. It seems to show me exactly where we (sisters) stand, what our calling is and how great our responsibilities are."<sup>27</sup> As they fulfilled their callings and responsibilities and contributed to Utah's economy, sisters felt strength and a sense of purpose.

At the time that women were running the silk industry in Utah, they were also becoming increasingly politicized. Some of the first efforts to get women the vote in Utah came from reformers outside of Utah who believed that women's suffrage in Utah would help end polygamy if women were able to vote against their oppressors and immoral marriage institution. However, both Mormon men and women who were part of polygamous relationships also supported women's suffrage. Male Mormon leadership hoped that Mormon women's votes would help stop capitalist and non-Mormon encroachment in Utah. Some even thought that enfranchisement of women in Utah could be a way to show the progressive nature of a polygamous society.<sup>28</sup> Many Mormon women staunchly defended polygamy while simultaneously defending the seemingly opposite ideal of political equality between men and women. In fact, Mormon women's protests of anti-polygamy legislation seems to have been a driving force in the early politicization of Utah women. In January 1870, three thousand women organized and participated in an "indignation meeting" where they defended the practice of polygamy. Mormon women showed that they were capable of organizing themselves and participating in politics without threatening the practice of polygamy like reformers had hoped. By February 1870, the Utah territory gave women the vote.<sup>29</sup>

Utah women were pleased with the decision to give women the vote. The wives of prominent Mormon leaders such as Eliza R. Snow drafted a resolution that expressed gratitude to the Utah territorial governor for signing the bill, and Sarah M. Kimball organized government classes and

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27 Inez, "The back bone of the Kingdom of God," *Woman's Exponent* 5, no. 10 (October 15, 1876): 75

28 Sarah Barringer Gordon, "'The Liberty of Self-Degradation,'" 825–6.

29 Van Wagenen, "In Their Own Behalf," 36.; Beverley Beeton, "Woman Suffrage in Territorial Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (March 1978): 111.

mock legislative assemblies so that women could learn how American politics worked. Suffrage also allowed women to become more involved in public affairs. Several were admitted to the bar, coroner's jury, and school boards.<sup>30</sup> The response women had to enfranchisement shows that Mormon women were ready to assert their independence and become involved in multiple domains that were not traditionally considered feminine. Their involvement with sericulture at this time is also evidence of this. However, because women were not using their new-found political power to end polygamy, American reformers lobbied to revoke women's suffrage in Utah. A provision in the anti-polygamy Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 disfranchised all women in the Utah territory.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, female suffrage was important enough to Utahns that they were able to win it back in 1895 when they drafted the new state constitution.<sup>32</sup>

While polygamy is certainly one of the most famous catalysts for women's enfranchisement and politicization in Utah, the intersection between Utah women's economic and political activities show that women's participation in industries like sericulture influenced their political ideals and continued to influence their ideals well after being given the vote. One of these intersections comes in the form of the Relief Society. The Relief Society was not only a spiritual organization in the nineteenth century, but an economic and political one as well. Relief Societies organized the work of silk production and other home industries as well as the suffrage movement in Utah. In the halls that Relief Society sisters raised funds to build, sisters worked on their silk projects and held political meetings. It was a space where they could further both their economic and political interests. Relief Society leaders such as Zina D. H. Young and Emmeline B. Wells were both advocates of the silk industry and women's suffrage. The economic independence and leadership experiences these women gained while working in the silk industry supported the ideals of political equality that Relief Societies throughout Utah were endorsing.<sup>33</sup>

The connection between silk and politics is also evident in Utah's participation in the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Sericulture had become a point of pride for Utah women and they were able to display their hard work at the fair. Utah women made special projects specifically for the fair

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30 Thomas G. Alexander, "An Experiment in Progressive Legislation," 27.; Jill C. Mulvay, "The Liberal Shall be Blessed," 217.

31 Alexander, "An Experiment in Progressive Legislation," 29.

32 Ibid., 30.

33 Carolyn Butler-Palmer, "Building Autonomy: A History of the Fifteenth Ward Hall of the Mormon Women's Relief Society," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 20, no. 1 (2013): 69-94.

such as handmade dresses and a silk map of the United States. They also set up a live exhibit where Utah women demonstrated how to reel and weave silk.<sup>34</sup> The silk products that Utah women made and sent to be exhibited were well received. *The Salt Lake Tribune* praised the women's exhibit: "It is simply grand, and too much praise cannot be awarded the noble and energetic women whose incessant labors have brought about such a glorious result. The exhibit is . . . creditable to Utah."<sup>35</sup> Even those outside of Utah appreciated the exhibit. One newspaper reported that "the silk exhibit from Utah is the finest of any in the world."<sup>36</sup> Some of the silk products were displayed in the Utah building, and Utah silk was also exhibited in the Woman's building.<sup>37</sup> Women's rights activists had worked hard to get an exhibit space for women equal to the space given to men at the Chicago World's Fair. When they got permission to build a Woman's building, the Board of Lady Managers, which was made up of representatives from each state and territory, made sure the building was full of women's accomplishments.<sup>38</sup> The inclusion of Utah women's silk work showed that women all around the country recognized and admired Utah women's enterprise and ability to produce silk for the Utah territory.

Silk was not the only way women were representing Utah at the Chicago World's Fair. Mormon women also participated in the World's Congress of Representative Women which was organized by the women's branch of the World Congress Auxiliary.<sup>39</sup> Many of Utah's Relief Society leaders were members of national women's organizations, such as the National Council of Women, and were welcomed to the Women's Congress in Chicago. The Relief Society and the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association were each given their own session where leaders such as Zina D. H. Young, Jane S. Richards, and Emmeline B. Wells gave speeches.<sup>40</sup> One sister, Emily S. Richards, spoke about the legal and political advantages women had in Utah, where they were still able to own property and sue even though the vote was taken away from

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34 "Utah Women at the Fair," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 June 1893.

35 "Utah at the World's Fair," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 June 1893.

36 Augusta Prescott, "Mormon Women Who are Not Polygamists," *Logansport Chronicle* (Indiana), 24 June 1893.

37 Arrington, "Finest of Fabrics," 393; "Utah Women at the Fair."

38 Nancy F. Cott ed., *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 353–4.

39 *Ibid.*, 355.

40 Reid Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism: The Latter-day Saints and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93–6

them.<sup>41</sup> The World's Congress of Representative Women gave Mormon women the chance to work with other women and women's organizations all over the world to promote political, economic, and social equality.<sup>42</sup> Mormon women felt the significance of their participation in the congress. The *Woman's Exponent* reported, "It was an unprecedented opportunity and there never was before in the history of the world such a gathering of women. . . . It presages advancement for all women in the future."<sup>43</sup> Susan B. Anthony also believed this congress would advance women's rights. Mormon women's involvement with the congress shows that they were considered an integral part of this cause.<sup>44</sup>

The Chicago World's Fair gave Utah women the opportunity to display their economic independence and skill with the silk industry, as well as their support of women's rights and advancements. At times these displays coincided at the fair as evidenced by the report of one sister who wrote to *The Young Woman's Journal* saying, "Sister Zina Young Card . . . wore a homemade silk dress [at the World's Congress of Representative Women], the audience were informed and many favorable comments were passed upon this added proof of Utah womens' [sic] skill."<sup>45</sup> Utah women's participation in the Chicago World's Fair was a success. Emmeline B. Wells was later asked to speak about sericulture to the National Council of Women because of the success of their silk exhibit.<sup>46</sup> Their exhibition of handmade silk products showed their capability in participating in the territorial economy which underscored their commitment to women's rights.

One other significant intersection between the silk industry and Utah women's political activity was the gift Utah women gave to Susan B. Anthony for her eightieth birthday in 1900. Of all the gifts that the Utah women could have given Anthony to commemorate her birthday and her indefatigable work for women's suffrage, they chose to give her a black silk gown made from handmade Utah silk.<sup>47</sup> This gift suggests that

41 May Wright Sewell ed., *The World's Congress of Representative Women: A Historical Resume for Popular Circulation of the World's Congress of Representative Women, Convened in Chicago on May 15, And Adjourned on May 22, 1893, Under the Auspices of the Woman's Branch of the World's Congress Auxiliary* (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Company, 1894), 2: 913-4.

42 Ibid., 76-79, 92.

43 "Editorial Notes," *Woman's Exponent* 21, no. 24 (June 15, 1893): 181

44 W. R. Maxfield, "The World's Fair for the 'Stay-at-Homes,'" *Zion's Herald* (Boston), 24 May 1893.

45 "Miscellaneous," *The Young Woman's Journal* 4, no. 9 (June 1893): 427-429.

46 Arrington, "The Finest of Fabrics," 393.

47 Ibid., 392.

Utah women connected their work in the silk industry with the work of obtaining political equality. Silk production was an industry almost entirely run by women. It proved that Utah women were more than capable at organizing, leading, and contributing to society. The gift of silk to Susan B. Anthony represented Utah women's pride in their efforts and contributions towards gender equality. Anthony recognized the significance of the gift and told the Utah women that she was exceedingly pleased with the gift because it was "made by women, too, who stand on a plane of perfect equality of political rights and privileges with the men of their state."<sup>48</sup>

The Utah silk industry started out as a project to make the Utah territory more self-sufficient. It was meant to keep Utah from importing too many Eastern goods and possibly bring in revenue to the territory. Once Brigham Young gave the responsibility of producing silk to the sisters of the church, the women in Relief Societies throughout the territory threw themselves into the demanding work of raising silkworms and making silk. Besides learning how to make silk, women gained economic experience and took advantage of leadership opportunities. These contributed to the development and sustaining of their political ideals. Sericulture helped to elevate women's roles in the Utah territory. The Chicago World's Fair and Susan B. Anthony's dress became ways to display to the world Utah women's skill, independence, and elevation in society. The silk industry, which lasted only approximately fifty years, is easily overlooked or lumped with the other home industries that Utah settlers experimented with. However, sericulture is an important part of Utah women's history. It became much more than a textile industry, but rather a symbol of the economic and political autonomy Utah women gained in the late nineteenth century.

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<sup>48</sup> Kate B. Carter, comp., "Silk Industry in Utah," in *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1939–1951), 11: 90.

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