



7-1-2020

A Harmony of Voices

Rebekah Ryan Clark

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>

 Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Clark, Rebekah Ryan (2020) "A Harmony of Voices," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 59 : Iss. 3 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol59/iss3/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



Suffrage leaders Emily Richards, Sarah M. Kimball, and Phoebe Beatie, 1875. Susa Young Gates Collection. © 2014 Utah State Historical Society. All Rights Reserved.

A Harmony of Voices

Negotiating Latter-day Saint Unity on Women's Suffrage

Rebekah Ryan Clark

On a snowy April morning in 1895, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gathered within the walls of the Salt Lake Temple and unanimously declared themselves committed to women's suffrage.¹ That same day, a large group of Relief Society women gathered nearby in the Salt Lake Assembly Hall and unanimously stood in favor of including women's suffrage in Utah's newly designed state constitution.² In that defining moment, such unified support for the most pressing women's rights issue of the day by both the governing body and the official women's organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was noteworthy. Anomalous circumstances years earlier had stimulated broad support for women's suffrage among both leaders and lay members of the notoriously patriarchal Church of Jesus Christ. Widespread cooperation between men and women—and the endorsement of the territory's predominant church—made the suffrage experience of Utah women unique within the national suffrage movement. While this support inevitably varied among individuals in both intensity and motivation, the

1. George Q. Cannon, April 4, 1895, *The Journal of George Q. Cannon*, Church Historian's Press, <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/george-q-cannon/1890s/1895/04-1895?lang=eng>. The meeting included the following members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: Franklin D. Richards, Brigham Young Jr., Francis M. Lyman, John Henry Smith, George Teasdale, Heber J. Grant, John W. Taylor, Marriner W. Merrill, Abraham H. Cannon, and Quorum President Lorenzo Snow. The remaining two members, Moses Thatcher and Anthon H. Lund, were not present.

2. E. B. Wells, "Relief Society Conference," *Woman's Exponent* 23, no. 19 (May 1, 1895): 262, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/18190/rec/537>.

blending of those distinct voices during Utah's fifty years of suffrage activism reveals an instructive alliance among Latter-day Saints.

In nineteenth-century Utah, a community saturated with religiosity, activism on behalf of women became imbued with a powerful spiritual dimension. Latter-day Saint doctrines of individual agency, female divinity, and eternal progression fostered theological support for the principle of women's equal rights. Practical experiences of pioneering new settlements, raising families alone while husbands served missions, and practicing plural marriage engendered women's independence and interdependence. Wider spheres opened for Utah women than were traditionally available within the "Cult of Domesticity" of the Victorian era, though they did not completely escape its influence.³ Early Latter-day Saint women developed a deep commitment to women's collective action, a profound understanding of their own authority, and a steadfast devotion to the Church of Jesus Christ. These convictions coalesced into active participation in the suffrage movement in the late nineteenth century. Latter-day Saint women were genuinely dedicated to expanding women's rights and strengthening women's collective influence for good, and they also understood that suffrage advocacy positioned them to defend the Church during a period of intense national attacks. Utah's progressive suffrage laws and politically active women counteracted negative stereotypes and secured useful allies in Washington, D.C., allies who helped advocate on behalf of Utah when political and suffrage rights were being threatened by antipolygamy legislation. Recognizing that shared religious objectives transcended gender divisions, Latter-day Saint women and men cultivated a suffrage partnership founded on a rich history of united dedication to building the Kingdom of God on earth.

At a time when most American religious denominations were divided within themselves on the issue of suffrage, members of the Church of Jesus Christ displayed uniquely widespread support for women's voting rights from the early days of the women's movement. In analyzing this unity, it is critical to recognize that while Latter-day Saint women constituted the vast majority of women in Utah, their suffrage experience did not represent all Utah women. A small but vocal coalition of dissident Saints, along with those who were not members of the Church,

3. See Kathleen Marquis, "Diamond Cut Diamond: Mormon Women and the Cult of Domesticity in the Nineteenth Century," *University of Michigan Papers in Women's Studies* 2, no. 2 (2008): 114, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mfs/acp0359.0002.002/122?xc=1&g=mfs&node=acp0359.0002.002:7>.

sought to end polygamy and politically weaken the Church by opposing women's suffrage in Utah.⁴ In effect, this division further mobilized Latter-day Saints. Unity on the issue of suffrage became a matter of religious survival. Over time, some women of other faiths joined the Latter-day Saints in advocating for Utah women's voting rights, creating another level of partnership that bridged religious divisions.⁵

The Latter-day Saint suffrage experience also did not encompass the involvement of many women of color, who were marginalized within suffrage dialogues and activism throughout the nation because of discriminatory federal laws and local practices. Most Native Americans and Asian immigrants were federally barred from citizenship and voting rights for several more decades and had to wage their own struggles for voting equality.⁶ While Utah's small but significant African American population demonstrated active political involvement by the 1890s, Black women's participation in the suffrage movement remained largely separate from the efforts of Utah's official suffrage associations.⁷ This paper focuses on the suffrage activism of Latter-day Saint women and men while recognizing the important and ongoing efforts of other Utah residents to obtain political rights.

Suffrage activism was marked by a striking degree of collaboration among Latter-day Saints, particularly during the nineteenth century. Progress would not have been possible without the active engagement and efforts of outspoken, broad-minded, and steadfastly faithful women and men working together on behalf of women. Although divisions arose, most Latter-day Saint women and men worked in concert to defend the rights of their community while carefully navigating

4. Even devoted supporters of suffrage in principle, such as Jennie Froiseth, Cornelia Paddock, and Annie Godbe, who had all served in national suffrage leadership roles, vocally opposed women's suffrage in Utah because they felt it sustained the practice of polygamy.

5. Notable non-Latter-day Saint women who became members of the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah despite their antipolygamy sentiment included Lillie Pardee, Margaret Blaine Salisbury, Emma McVicker, Corinne Allen, and Isabelle Cameron Brown.

6. Federal legislation such as the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 extended voting rights and protections. In 1957, the Utah State Legislature repealed restrictions that had prevented many Native Americans from voting, one of the last states in the nation to do so.

7. "Rally of Colored Women," *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 23, 1895, 3; "Echoes of the Election," *Broad Ax* (Salt Lake City), November 12, 1898, 1; "Western Colored Women," *Deseret Evening News*, June 15, 1904, 2; "Colored Women Form Organization," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 3, 1904, 8.

tensions raised by individual expression and diverging voices. In general, Latter-day Saint suffragists sought to be assertive without being adversarial, progressive without being divisive, confident without being confrontational, and unified without being identical. By working within, rather than against, the existing hierarchical structure of their community, they more effectively accomplished their goals of defending their religious beliefs, regaining suffrage rights with statehood, and supporting the national movement to extend those rights to women throughout the nation. As Susa Young Gates, an ardent suffragist and prominent Latter-day Saint leader in the early twentieth century, summarized, “Harmony of voices makes music. Harmony of human efforts and of actions, brings peace. It is the comparative unity of action in the group which brings civilization and progress into all life.”⁸ By merging progressive activism with their advocacy for religious beliefs, Latter-day Saint suffragists blended different voices, fostered unity, and achieved a high level of harmony and progress toward women’s political equality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Foundations of Enfranchisement

By the time Utah was preparing for statehood, the vast majority of Latter-day Saint men and women had long been vocal advocates of women’s political rights. The idea of women’s suffrage in Utah was first suggested by the *New York Times* in the late 1860s as a low-risk method to test suffrage and possibly eradicate polygamy.⁹ In response, the Church-sponsored *Deseret Evening News* immediately embraced the idea of enfranchising women and expressed confidence that Latter-day Saint women would in fact uphold Church policies, affirming, “The people of Utah are not afraid of the consequences of giving the women of the Territory the right to vote.”¹⁰ The paper later declared itself an “earnest advocate for Women’s Rights” and asserted, “The plan of giving our ladies the right of suffrage is, in our opinion, a most excellent one.”¹¹

8. Susa Young Gates, “Women of All Times,” 2, Odd Chapters and Fragments, History of Women files, Susa Young Gates Papers, circa 1870–1933, Church History Catalog, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter CHC), <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=86f5a269-40d8-4c13-b195-29085895ee88&crate=0&index=22>.

9. “Minor Topics,” *New York Times*, December 17, 1867, 4.

10. “The Female Suffrage Question,” *Deseret Evening News*, January 9, 1868, 2.

11. George Q. Cannon, “A New Plan” and “Female Suffrage in Utah,” *Deseret News*, March 24, 1869, 78, <https://contentdm-lib-byu-edu.erl.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews2/id/42088/rec/12>.

Such an endorsement had its roots in the deep cooperation and mutual trust that had been fostered among the Saints since the earliest days of the Church. Joseph Smith taught the women that “all must act in concert or nothing can be done.”¹² Mary Fielding Smith observed the spiritual unity felt among members in the Kirtland temple in 1837, recalling that “the Brethren as well as the Sisters were all melted down and we wept and praised God together.”¹³ When the Prophet Joseph Smith “turn[ed] the key to” the women as he organized the Relief Society “according to the ancient Priesthood,” he promised that “knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time—this is the beginning of better days” for women.¹⁴ Many Latter-day Saints later attributed the start of the women’s movement to the formation of the Relief Society, claiming, “The sure foundations of the suffrage cause were deeply and permanently laid on the 17th of March 1842.”¹⁵ President George Albert Smith provided an even more expansive view of the “better days” promised by Joseph Smith, testifying in 1945 that “when the Prophet Joseph Smith turned the key for the emancipation of womankind, it was turned for all the world, and from generation to generation the number of women who can enjoy the blessings of religious liberty and civil liberty has been increasing.”¹⁶

In many ways, women in the early Church enjoyed a community where their voices were valued, their spiritual authority was acknowledged, and their contributions were respected. As the Saints moved west, the demands of pioneer life facilitated a more public role for women in Latter-day Saint communities. Historian Lola Van Wagenen has observed, “In these efforts, they learned to move forward carefully

12. “1.2 Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book,” March 31, 1842, in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women’s History*, ed. Jill Mulvay Derr and others (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2016), 43, <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/the-first-fifty-years-of-relief-society/part-1/1-2/1-2-3?lang=eng>.

13. Mary Fielding Smith to Mercy Fielding Thompson, July 8, 1837, Mary Fielding Smith Collection, circa 1832–1848, CHC, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=40452f44-8728-49ad-815c-6b55bo90fff&crate=0&index=13>.

14. “1.2 Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book,” April 28, 1842, in Derr and others, *First Fifty Years*, 59, <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/the-first-fifty-years-of-relief-society/part-1/1-2/1-2-7?lang=eng>.

15. Sarah M. Kimball, “Reply to ‘A Man’s Advice about Woman Suffrage,’” *Woman’s Exponent* 20, no. 11 (December 1, 1891): 81, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/16570/rec/467>.

16. George Albert Smith, “Address to the Members of the Relief Society,” *Relief Society Magazine* 32, no. 12 (December 1945): 717, <https://archive.org/stream/reliefsocietymag32reli#page/717/mode/2up>.

enough to avoid problems, but forcefully enough to break new ground.”¹⁷ Church leaders sanctioned women’s public role by emphasizing unity and shared goals. Although women were still circumscribed by Victorian notions of separate spheres, Brigham Young and Eliza R. Snow encouraged Utah women to attend medical school and enter trades and professions, “urging the Sisters forward to be more useful and to take a wider sphere of action.”¹⁸ While reorganizing the Relief Society in Utah in 1868, President Eliza R. Snow defined union as “the soul of successful concentrated action” and counseled, “United effort will accomplish incalculably more than can be accomplished by the most effective individual energies.”¹⁹ Utah’s early endorsement of equal suffrage went beyond political expediency and indicated a trust in the joint partnership of men and women to improve society. In an editorial by George Q. Cannon, the *Deseret News* urged, “With woman to aid in the great cause of reform, what wonderful changes can be effected! Without her aid how slow the progress! Give her responsibility, and she will prove that she is capable of great things; but deprive her of opportunities, make a doll of her, leave her nothing to occupy her mind, . . . and her influence is lost.”²⁰

In January 1870, as Latter-day Saint women publicly demonstrated this influence by engaging in collective political action on behalf of the Church, they continued to emphasize cooperation and unity. At a women’s mass meeting protesting federal antipolygamy legislation, speakers declared that women were “one heart, hand and brain, with the brotherhood of Utah,” that they were “co-workers in the great mission of universal reform,” and that “in the Kingdom of God, woman has no interests separate from those of man.”²¹ In what was perhaps the easiest

17. 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 (Winter 1991): 34, https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V24No4_33.pdf.

18. “Minutes of a Ladies Mass Meeting,” January 6, 1870, Fifteenth Ward Relief Society minutes and records, 1868–1968, vol. 1, 1868–1873, 156, CHC, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=bod3ab4a-9810-46cd-99fc-53c482bffib4&crate=0&index=155>.

19. Eliza R. Snow, “Female Relief Society,” *Deseret Evening News*, April 18, 1868, 2, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=Aul-kAQHnToC&dat=18680418&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>.

20. George Q. Cannon, “Woman and Her Mission,” *Deseret News*, May 26, 1869, 6, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=Aul-kAQHnToC&dat=18690526&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>.

21. Hannah T. King, Harriett Cook Young, and Eliza R. Snow, in “Minutes of ‘Great Indignation Meeting,’” January 13, 1870, *The First Fifty Years*, <https://www.churchhistorypress.org/the-first-fifty-years-of-relief-society/part-3/3-13?lang=eng>, italics in original.

legislative victory of the suffrage movement, just a few weeks later Utah women became the first female citizens in the nation to vote under an equal suffrage law.²² The suffrage bill was unanimously passed by the territorial legislature, composed entirely of Latter-day Saint men, and was signed into law on February 12, 1870. Two days later, twenty-five women voted in a Salt Lake City municipal election. A new era of political partnership had begun.

Women in the Church had mostly positive but some mixed reactions to this newly won right, demonstrating the inherent diversity of opinion within women's experiences even in a relatively homogenous group like nineteenth-century Relief Society women. On February 19, a week after Utah's historic suffrage legislation was signed into law, a large group of Latter-day Saint women's leaders met in the Fifteenth Ward Relief Society Hall. Sarah M. Kimball boldly declared that she could now "openly declare herself a womans rights woman," clarifying that "the interests of man and woman cannot be seperated [*sic*]." The meeting minutes record that many of the women similarly "manifested their approval" of women's rights. Wilmirth East announced, "I have never felt that woman had her privileges. I always wanted a voice in the Politics of the Nation, as well as to rear a family." Presendia Kimball alluded to the collective benefit that women's suffrage could provide: "I am glad to see our daughters elevated with man and the time [will] come when our votes will assist our leaders." Acknowledging the need for restraint, Phoebe Woodruff said she was "pleased with the Reform and . . . had looked for this day for years," but she warned that they should "not run headlong and abuse the privilege." Even Margaret T. Smoot cautiously admitted, "I have never had any desire for more rights than I have. I have always considered these things beneath the sphere of woman. But as things progress I feel it is right that we should vote."²³ For the bolder advocates of women's rights, like Kimball, their already progressive beliefs uniquely aligned with their spiritual commitment to defend the Church, providing expanded opportunities for public activism. For initially reluctant women, like Smoot, the sanction they received from male and

22. Wyoming had granted women equal suffrage two months before, making it the first state or territory to grant equal suffrage to female citizens without property or other restrictions. Since Utah held both municipal and general elections in 1870 before Wyoming held its first election, Utah women are considered the first to vote.

23. "Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the Ladies' Co-operative Retrenchment Society," February 19, 1870, Fifteenth Ward Relief Society minutes and records, 1868–1968, vol. 1, 1868–1873, 153–56, CHC, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=bod3ab4a-9810-46cd-99fc-53c482bff1b4&crate=0&index=168>.

female leaders in the Church likely persuaded them of the acceptability and even necessity of extending their “sphere.” Despite variation in their reactions and motivations, these faithful women resolutely and unitedly used their new political voices not only to defend their own rights and beliefs but also to actively support the expansion of equal suffrage throughout the nation.

As Latter-day Saint women entered and engaged in the political arena, their experiences reflected a blend of caution, cooperation, faith, and outspoken advocacy. Eliza R. Snow, the Relief Society General President, supported women’s suffrage but cautiously tried to distance Latter-day Saint women’s activism from “strong-minded” women engaged in a “war of sexes.”²⁴ Indicating her insular approach, she emphasized, “In the Church and Kingdom of God the interests of men and women are the same; man has no interests separate from that of women, however it may be in the outside world, our interests are all united.”²⁵ Emmeline B. Wells, Utah’s most prominent suffragist, sought to create bridges rather than distance between Latter-day Saint women and other national suffragists, vocally advocating for progressive reforms such as equal pay, equal job opportunities, and a national women’s suffrage amendment.²⁶

Although more progressive than Snow on women’s rights issues, Wells and many other Latter-day Saint suffragists remained devoutly faithful and never suggested a full upheaval of the patriarchal social order. Wells empowered women to act as partners with men but warned against the militancy and confrontation that occur “when women seek to essay the role of revolutionists instead of reformers, when they set up one sex as of necessity antagonistic to the other, when they claim for women not liberty but license to set at defiance wholesome social regulations and nature’s laws.”²⁷ Sarah M. Kimball, an independent and fearlessly progressive leader, likewise demonstrated deep respect for the

24. Eliza R. Snow, “Latter Day Saint Ladies of Utah,” *Deseret News*, July 26, 1871, 287–88.

25. Eliza R. Snow, “Minutes of the Organization Meeting of the Young Ladies Retrenchment Association of Cedar Ford,” *Woman’s Exponent* 4, no. 1 (June 1, 1875): 2.

26. Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Emmeline B. Wells: An Intimate History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2017), 156; Carol Cornwall Madsen, *An Advocate for Women: The Public Life of Emmeline B. Wells, 1870–1920* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2006), 68–69.

27. Emmeline B. Wells, “Woman’s Rights and Wrongs,” *Woman’s Exponent* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 1872): 5, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/937/rec/3>.

direction and authority of male priesthood leaders as she confidently led the Fifteenth Ward Relief Society and the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah.²⁸ She later revealed that “as time rolled on we were very careful,” demonstrating her awareness of the bounds of propriety.²⁹ Kimball exemplified boldness, while teaching that “it was necessary the sisters be united in their efforts, but yet the women cannot accomplish much unless they have the hand of encouragement reached out to them by the brethren.”³⁰

Utah quickly gained nationwide attention for its progressive extension of women’s rights, although suffrage remained intertwined with the controversial practice of polygamy for several more decades. The resulting complexities deepened divisions with “Gentile” women and disaffected Latter-day Saints, many of whom ultimately led the anti-polygamy campaign to revoke women’s suffrage in Utah despite supporting women’s suffrage in general.³¹ These tensions in turn solidified unity among Latter-day Saints on the suffrage issue. Using primarily the structural organization of local Relief Societies, suffragists mobilized the majority of Utah women to combat negative perceptions, lobby against escalating antipolygamy legislation, and gather petitions advocating the protection of their suffrage rights. Despite their efforts, the federal Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 disenfranchised *all* Utah women as part of its crushing assault on the political and economic power of the Church of Jesus Christ.³² In response, Utah suffragists obtained permission from the National Woman Suffrage Association to form their

28. Janelle M. Higbee, “President Mrs. Kimball: A Rhetoric of Words and Works” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1998), 38, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/4788/>.

29. “Conference N.A.W.S.A.,” *Woman’s Exponent* 24, no. 9 (October 1, 1895): 61, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/32740/rec/546>.

30. A. S. Rogers, “Letter to the Editor,” *Woman’s Exponent* 6, no. 4 (July 15, 1877): 29, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/1559/rec/126>.

31. For example, Jennie Froiseth served as a vice president for Utah on the national board of the National Woman Suffrage Association but opposed women’s suffrage in Utah, arguing, “Suffrage, as it exists in Utah, is an entirely different matter from what the suffragists in the East are working for.” Jennie Froiseth, “Polygamy and Woman Suffrage,” *Anti-Polygamy Standard* 1 (June 1880): 20.

32. Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887, 48 U.S.C. ch. 10 § 1461 (1887). In addition to repealing suffrage for all Utah women regardless of their religious or marital status, this federal legislation threatened the survival of the Church by imposing devastating punishments, including confiscating Church property, disincorporating the Church, and increasing imprisonment of polygamists.



Portrait of (*seated*) John T. Caine, Margaret Caine, Joseph F. Smith, Emily S. Richards, Franklin Richards, (*standing*) George F. Gibbs, L. John Nuttal, and Charles W. Penrose when in Washington lobbying for Utah statehood, 1888. Courtesy Church History Library.

own branch. Rather than act unilaterally, prominent Relief Society and suffrage leaders such as Emmeline B. Wells, Zina D. H. Young, Emily S. Richards, Bathsheba W. Smith, Sarah M. Kimball, and Jane Richards took the lead in securing ecclesiastical support before finalizing official national affiliation. They proactively proposed a plan to form a territorial suffrage organization to President Wilford Woodruff and other Church leaders, who unanimously approved.

At a large meeting of the newly formed Woman Suffrage Association of Utah at the Assembly Hall in Salt Lake City on April 11, 1889, influential male and female leaders framed this new phase of women's public activism in terms of equality and partnership. Martha P. Hughes (later Cannon), a prominent doctor and Utah suffragist who became the nation's first female state senator just a few years later, gave a "well written address" in which she boldly declared, "All men and women are created free and

equal.”³³ Bishop Orson F. Whitney spoke at length, referencing the doctrinal basis for his belief in equality as he explained, “Woman is the other half of man; he is not complete without her. They are brother and sister, offspring of the same heavenly Parentage, and should go hand in hand in every righteous effort, in every worthy cause. . . . The advancement of one means the advancement of the other.”³⁴ George Q. Cannon, First Counselor in the First Presidency, also voiced his practical support of equal voting rights, citing the “good work performed by able women” on behalf of Utah. He noted, “I have never seen any effects in connection with woman suffrage to deplore.”³⁵ Charles W. Penrose advocated for women’s right not only to vote but also to hold public office.³⁶ The speeches exhibited a high level of trust in women’s judgment, a commitment to women’s causes, and support for women in leadership as well as apprehensions about maintaining harmony. Echoing Eliza R. Snow’s earlier warnings against adversarial activism, Penrose cautioned against “berating ‘the monster man’” and encouraged cooperation, saying, “Man and woman should be together in all things.”³⁷ Emily S. Richards also sought to allay concerns by assuring the audience that women’s suffrage did not “depart from woman’s true sphere in life, nor make her usurp man’s prerogatives,” concluding that “woman’s rights are human rights.”³⁸

33. Martha P. Hughes, “Woman Suffrage Meeting,” *Woman’s Exponent* 17, no. 24 (May 15, 1889): 190, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/36820/rec/410>.

34. Orson F. Whitney, “Woman Suffrage Meeting,” *Woman’s Exponent* 17, no. 23 (May 1, 1889): 182, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/37014/rec/409>. Whitney had grown up particularly close to Emmeline B. Wells and her daughter Emmie and had even taken over writing some of Emmeline’s *Woman’s Exponent* editorials while she was lobbying in Washington, D.C. Madsen, *Emmeline B. Wells*, 221.

35. George Q. Cannon, “Woman Suffrage Meeting,” *Woman’s Exponent* 17, no. 24 (May 15, 1889): 191. George Q. Cannon had previously written to President John Taylor praising the lobbying influence of Emmeline B. Wells and Zina Young Williams during their trip to Washington, D.C., in 1879. George Q. Cannon to John Taylor, February 7, 1879, George Q. Cannon, Letterbook, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, cited in Madsen, *Emmeline B. Wells*, 188.

36. At the request of Emmeline B. Wells, Charles W. Penrose had introduced a bill to the Utah Territorial Legislature in 1880 that would have given Utah women the right to hold public office even sooner. The bill passed the legislature but was vetoed by the federally appointed governor. See Madsen, *Advocate for Women*, 186–87.

37. C. W. Penrose, “Woman Suffrage Meeting,” *Woman’s Exponent* 17, no. 24 (May 15, 1889): 190–91.

38. Emily S. Richards, “Woman Suffrage Meeting,” *Woman’s Exponent* 17, no. 23 (May 1, 1889): 184.

As local and county suffrage organizations multiplied throughout the territory in 1889, leaders continued to assuage public fears about women stepping into the political sphere. At the meeting forming the Juab County Woman Suffrage Association, newly elected president Elizabeth Ann Schofield directly addressed these reservations, saying, “Every lady should feel it her duty to make an effort to obtain the Franchise. Many do not understand the true meaning of Woman Suffrage. Some think woman is trying to usurp man’s rights. Not so! She only desires to stand side by side with him, and share those privileges he values as inestimable.”³⁹ Upon being elected president of the newly formed Beaver County Woman Suffrage Association, Julia P. M. Farnsworth similarly declared, “I am a friend of humanity, which comprises men and women; they are inseparable.” Farnsworth dutifully reiterated the widely held belief that “woman’s true sphere is the home,” but she qualified this assertion by echoing teachings from Brigham Young and other early leaders that a woman should not be barred from also engaging in public enterprises if “she can do justice to other professions.”⁴⁰

Latter-day Saint suffrage leaders also dispelled reservations about women’s activism by emphasizing top Church leaders’ support for the cause. For example, just five days after being sustained as General President of the Relief Society, Zina D. H. Young helped establish a local suffrage association in the Farmington Ward. Young specifically assured the Farmington Relief Society that the First Presidency approved of suffrage for women, and then the new association president Elizabeth Coombs reminded the gathering, “As an advocate of Woman Suffrage, Brother Joseph F. Smith said . . . that he had no right which he would not like to have his wives and daughters enjoy.”⁴¹ Apostle Francis Marion Lyman also spoke at that meeting and forcefully declared his own support of women’s equality while expressing dismay at the large percentage of men and women who were “suspicious of womans rights.”⁴²

39. Elizabeth Ann Schofield, in “W. S. A. in Juab County,” *Woman’s Exponent* 18, no. 1 (June 1, 1889): 6, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/37049/rec/411>.

40. Julia P. M. Farnsworth, in “Woman Suffrage Association,” *Woman’s Exponent* 17, no. 19 (March 1, 1889): 150, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/24934/rec/405>.

41. Woman’s Suffrage Association (Farmington, Utah) minutes, 1892–1895, April 13, 1892, 8, 10, CHC, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=f13dac3d-647f-4c7f-b034-0059a48f73f3&crate=o&index=7>.

42. Woman’s Suffrage Association minutes, 11.

Elder Lyman asserted that President Brigham Young “was an advocate of the franchise of woman,” and that President Wilford Woodruff and the “brethren generally” advised the sisters to advocate for the cause, concluding, “I desire to say here that it is according to the mind and will of the Lord, as manifested by the First Presidency, that the women take hold of this woman Suffrage movement as they do in the Relief Society, every Latter-Day-Saint woman should join and use her influence for good.”⁴³ These assurances of approval from the Church hierarchy were effective in establishing popular support for suffrage among Latter-day Saints like Clara Stayner, who served as the first vice president of the Woman Suffrage Association of Farmington. Stayner later said that she had been “greatly opposed” to women’s suffrage at first but became converted to the idea because “this move has been sanctioned by the authorities of the Church.”⁴⁴

As more Latter-day Saint women joined in the cause of suffrage activism during the years leading up to statehood, they fostered more unity than ever before with women outside their faith but also experienced greater divisions within their own suffrage ranks.⁴⁵ The 1890s were a complicated transition period as the Church sought to establish commonality with mainstream Americans in preparation for statehood.⁴⁶ This acculturation included efforts such as renouncing the controversial practice of polygamy, joining the National Council of Women, and aligning with major national political parties rather than Utah’s unique religiously divided political system.⁴⁷ Resulting partisan politics, power struggles, and personal ambitions led to fractures in the unity of the

43. Woman’s Suffrage Association minutes, 11–12.

44. Woman’s Suffrage Association minutes, 17.

45. See Carol Cornwall Madsen, “Decade of Detente: The Mormon-Gentile Female Relationship in Nineteenth-Century Utah,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (Fall 1995), 298–319; Carol Cornwall Madsen, “Schism in the Sisterhood: Mormon Women and Partisan Politics, 1890–1900,” in *Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870–1896* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 245–72.

46. See Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 4–5; Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012), 163; and Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), xv.

47. Wilford Woodruff, “Official Declaration 1,” October 6, 1890, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/od/1?lang=eng>; Rebekah Ryan Clark, “‘A More Universal Sisterhood’: Latter-day Saints in the National Council of Women, 1888–1987,” *Journal of Mormon History* 47 (forthcoming, January 2021); “Utah Politics and Parties,” *Deseret Evening News*, March 31, 1891, 4.

suffrage associations, causing what Emmeline B. Wells described as “considerable feeling and some pettiness.”⁴⁸ Mary Isabella Horne observed, “Politics have divided us more than anything else that ever happened.”⁴⁹ Reflecting their differences in party loyalty, Dr. Ellen Ferguson led an unsuccessful attempt to oust Wells from the presidency of Utah’s suffrage association in 1894. Wells and Emily S. Richards, the president and vice president, respectively, of the territorial association, were rising leaders in opposing political parties but overcame these tensions as they urged suffragists to maintain “the best of feeling . . . between the women of both parties” and to avoid “intense partisanship to hinder their working together for the public good.”⁵⁰ Differences in strategic approach also threatened the unity of Utah’s suffragists. Just prior to the 1895 Constitutional Convention, a handful of militant suffragists tried to convince local members of the more moderate Woman Suffrage Association of Utah to defect and form a separate suffrage “League.”⁵¹

Wells mitigated these challenges and maintained suffragists’ loyalty in part by asserting her confidence in the relationships they had built with the leading men supporting the suffrage cause, writing, “I rather trust men than distrust them by far.”⁵² Women in Utah’s local, county, and territorial suffrage associations recognized that garnering the unified support of men as well as women was critical to laying the groundwork for regaining the franchise. The *Women’s Exponent* encouraged such cooperation, asserting, “When pure-minded women move earnestly and in unity upon some of these momentous questions at issue, and when noble, lion-hearted men are willing to join harmoniously

48. Emmeline B. Wells, Diary, June 9, 1891, 14:187, Digital Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter BYU Digital Collections), <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/p15999coll20/id/39958/rec/6>. See also Madsen, *Advocate for Women*, 271. “As the national political parties began to take a firm hold in Utah, the divisiveness that Emmeline and others feared began to encroach on the unity of the suffrage association.”

49. “Ladies’ Semi-Monthly Meeting,” *Woman’s Exponent* 23, nos. 15–16 (February 1 and 15, 1895): 238, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/18052/rec/534>.

50. Cassie Newman, “S.L. Co. W.S.A.,” *Woman’s Exponent* 24, no. 19 (March 1, 1896): 122, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/32923/rec/554>; “Woman’s Work and Duty,” *Woman’s Exponent* 25, no. 9–10 (November 1 and 15, 1896): 69, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/18471/rec/567>.

51. See Madsen, *Advocate for Women*, 271–73.

52. Emmeline B. Wells to Mary A. White, January 14, 1895, 3, Papers of the Beaver County Woman Suffrage Association, BYU Digital Collections, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/p15999coll24/id/33532>.

in these great and high endeavors for the bettering of the condition of those who are powerless to lift themselves, . . . then there will be something permanent accomplished.”⁵³ While serving as the president of the territory-wide Woman Suffrage Association of Utah in 1890, Sarah M. Kimball boldly stated, “Education and agitation are our best weapons of warfare.” Rather than direct this hostile imagery at men, however, she solicited their direct cooperation: “Believing that the best results follow the deliberations of men and women, we favor the admission of men as members of the [territorial suffrage] association.”⁵⁴ As statehood became imminent and suffrage activism accelerated, Latter-day Saint suffragists sought to strengthen their cohesion with male supporters.

Statehood, Suffrage, and the Constitutional Crisis

In 1895, Utah Territory was finally on the brink of achieving its long-sought statehood. The official end of Church-sanctioned plural marriage had paved the way for Congress to pass the 1894 Enabling Act, inviting Utah to apply a seventh time for entrance into the Union. Utah’s Constitutional Convention opened at the new Salt Lake City and County Building on March 4 and continued until May 7. Prior to the convention, the women of the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah had assiduously secured pledges of suffrage support from the majority of delegates and both major political parties.⁵⁵ This broad cooperation was reinforced by experience; Utah women had previously voted with positive results for seventeen years before their rights were stripped by federal antipolygamy legislation in 1887. Since that time, Utah suffragists had mobilized, lobbied, and kept the suffrage issue alive in Utah. Despite the appearance of unanimity, the issue still emerged as the Constitutional Convention’s most hotly debated topic. Several critical meetings held in conjunction with the convention revealed tensions and complexities underlying Utah’s widespread support for women’s suffrage. They also illustrated the active role that Latter-day Saint women played in securing the inclusion of suffrage rights in Utah’s new state constitution.

During this contentious and uncertain period, Latter-day Saint women remained the most consistent and vocal force behind restoring

53. “Fortieth Anniversary of the Woman Suffrage Movement,” *Woman’s Exponent* 16, no. 18 (February 15, 1888): 140.

54. Sarah M. Kimball, “Greeting,” *Woman’s Exponent* 18, no. 18 (February 15, 1890): 139.

55. “Woman Suffrage Column: Utah W.S.A.,” *Woman’s Exponent* 23, no. 15–16 (February 1 and 15, 1895): 233.

women's suffrage rights in Utah. By the time of the Constitutional Convention, the women had organized suffrage associations in at least twenty-one Utah counties and were engaged at all levels of the debate. Since the delegates to the convention were meeting in the main chambers of the City and County Building on March 18, the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah held its own territorial convention just down the hall in the Probate Courtroom. That afternoon, several suffragists hand delivered a petition to the Constitutional Convention on behalf of "the great majority of the women of Utah."⁵⁶ The petition was signed by official representatives of the Relief Society and the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association as well as the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah, giving it religious sanction and claiming authority on behalf of the more than 35,000 Utah women in those organizations. This petition reminded delegates of their pledges and gratefully declared that the women were "keenly alive to the importance and far reaching consequences of your labor in our behalf." It echoed the themes of equality, unity, and partnership that Utah suffragists had long fostered, asking the delegates to "open the doors that will usher [women] into free and full emancipation." It also assured that the women sought "no rival sovereignty, no sphere peculiar and apart, no conflicting regime or antagonistic legislation, no hostile policy or divided counsels," but rather "higher and truer harmony, more genuine and enlightened fellowship, more real co-operation, more vital and perpetual union."⁵⁷ The *Woman's Exponent* similarly reminded its readers of their collective goals: "It is to help *good* men do *better* work that women wish for the franchise."⁵⁸

When debates erupted at the Constitutional Convention, the proposed suffrage provision became unexpectedly controversial. On March 28, delegate Brigham H. Roberts launched an eloquent attack that temporarily threatened passage.⁵⁹ Roberts, one of the few Latter-day Saint leaders who vocally opposed the enfranchisement of women, strategically appealed to a wider base by not only attacking women's suffrage on its merits but also stoking fears that it might jeopardize

56. "Convention and Woman Suffrage," *Woman's Exponent* 23, no. 17 (April 1, 1895): 241; Utah State Archives and Records Service, Statehood Constitutional Convention (1895) Records, Series 3212, March 18, 1895.

57. "Convention and Woman Suffrage," 241–42.

58. "Woman Suffrage," *Woman's Exponent* 23, no. 17 (April 1, 1895): 244.

59. "Roberts Ends the Debate," *Salt Lake Herald—Republican*, April 3, 1895; Utah State Archives and Records Service, Statehood Constitutional Convention (1895) Records, Series 3212, March 28, 1895.

statehood. Several delegates joined Roberts in arguing that the suffrage question should be submitted as a separate vote after statehood was secure, but a large majority of delegates continued to support women's right to vote. Andrew Smith Anderson immediately declared his support for including women's suffrage, asserting that "the principles of justice demand it. It embraces the principles of human rights and liberties and that great fundamental principle that there shall be no taxation without representation."⁶⁰

Orson F. Whitney and Franklin S. Richards, both prominent members of the Convention and the Church, boldly led the defense of women's suffrage based on principle over political expediency. They gave such eloquent arguments that the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah printed and distributed pamphlets containing their speeches. They attested to women's intellectual, organizational, and civic capacity and directly addressed rising fears about the potential impact on statehood. Reminding the other delegates that there were "some things higher and dearer than Statehood," Whitney argued, "I would rather stand by my honor, by my principles, than to have Statehood."⁶¹ Franklin S. Richards similarly proclaimed, "I say that if the price of Statehood is the disfranchisement of one-half of the people, . . . it is not worth the price demanded."⁶² Whitney also declared that a woman was not "made merely for a wife, a mother, a cook, and a housekeeper. These callings, however honorable, . . . are not the sum of her capabilities." He further emphasized the spiritual basis for extending women's rights by using arguments that would have resonated with the largely Latter-day Saint audience: "This great social upheaval, this woman's movement . . . means something more than that certain women are ambitious to vote and hold office. I regard it as one of the great levers by which the Almighty is lifting up this fallen world, lifting it nearer to the throne of its Creator."⁶³

In response to these debates, the Apostles who met in the Salt Lake Temple on April 4 "unanimously condemned" the stand taken by Roberts, with "some going so far as to say that an enemy could not have betrayed us more or as much."⁶⁴ It is telling that these leaders interpreted Roberts's

60. Utah State Archives and Records Service, March 28, 1895.

61. Utah State Archives and Records Service, March 28, 1895.

62. Utah State Archives and Records Service, March 28, 1895.

63. Utah State Archives and Records Service, March 28, 1895.

64. Cannon, *Journal*, April 4, 1895.

arguments as a personal betrayal. Their disapproval stemmed in part from defensive concerns that the “heated speeches” would stoke latent animosity among the “Gentiles” and in part from their long-established history of ideological and practical support of women’s suffrage. First Counselor George Q. Cannon, who joined the meeting later that morning along with the rest of the First Presidency, recorded that “further conversation brought several brethren to their feet, in which they expressed themselves very strongly in favor of woman suffrage, particularly Brother Jos. [Joseph] F. Smith.”⁶⁵ Cannon disrupted this unity by raising his own concerns about the possible impact of the suffrage provision on Utah’s statehood. Cannon himself had publicly supported women’s suffrage for years and had personally contributed funds to the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1878, but at this juncture, his support was challenged by the pressing need to secure statehood. Having just returned from Washington, D.C., where he served as Utah’s territorial delegate to Congress, he pragmatically persuaded the other leaders to not officially endorse the provision.⁶⁶ While support for women’s suffrage itself was unanimous among this leading body of Apostles, they stepped back and allowed the process to play out.

Women in the territory were, as their suffrage petition asserted, “by no means indifferent spectators of the drama.”⁶⁷ That same afternoon, local Relief Society presidencies and members from throughout Utah Territory gathered at the Assembly Hall on Temple Square for the afternoon session of the general Relief Society conference. Emmeline B. Wells, then serving as the General Secretary of the Relief Society as well as the president of the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah, spoke to the conference about the equal suffrage provision pending in the Constitutional Convention. Emily S. Richards then urged the congregation to “uphold the question and be united and stand firm.” Richards made a motion for all women who favored equal suffrage in the Utah constitution to stand. Bathsheba W. Smith, who had been the first Relief Society

65. Cannon, *Journal*, April 4, 1895. Joseph F. Smith often spoke powerfully about women’s rights, urging that women “not stand in the way of those of their sisters who would be, and of right ought to be *free*,” and that “God never did design that a woman should receive less for the product of her labor . . . than a man should receive for the same labor.” Joseph F. Smith, in “Relief Society Conference,” *Woman’s Exponent* 24, no. 6 (August 15, 1895): 45.

66. Cannon, *Journal*, April 4, 1895; Madsen, *Emmeline B. Wells*, 171 n. 38.

67. “Convention and Woman Suffrage,” 242; Utah State Archives and Records Service, March 18, 1895.



Franklin S. and Emily S. Richards and their children, circa 1873. Courtesy Church History Library.

woman to make a motion publicly supporting suffrage twenty-five years earlier, seconded the motion, “and every woman in that large congregation was on her feet immediately.”⁶⁸

This Relief Society meeting stood in stark contrast with the one held at Salt Lake City’s Grand Opera House the next afternoon, where a large group of women instead advocated for submitting suffrage separately after statehood. Many of these women, such as Jennie Froiseth and Cornelia Paddock, had led the antipolygamy crusade and helped secure the revocation of suffrage in Utah in the 1880s. Froiseth, Paddock, Brigham H. Roberts, and Charlotte Ives Godbe Kirby were among the main speakers at the meeting.⁶⁹ Kirby, the first to officially represent Utah at a national suffrage convention, was ironically one of the only Latter-day Saint women to support separate submission.⁷⁰ Kirby’s marriage to Latter-day Saint dissident William Godbe and her confrontations

68. “Relief Society Conference,” *Woman’s Exponent* 23, no. 19 (May 1, 1895): 262.

69. “Vox Populi,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 6, 1895, 5.

70. Charlotte Ives Kirby, “A Woman’s Answer,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 4, 1895, 7.

with Emmeline B. Wells made her connection to other Latter-day Saint suffragists tenuous, another example of fractures within Utah's suffrage factions. In the coming weeks, women on both sides of the suffrage question circulated petitions throughout the territory.⁷¹

The spring of 1895 was arguably the most divided era in Utah's history of support for women's suffrage. The ability to successfully overcome these divisions demonstrates the strength of the bridges that Latter-day Saint suffragists had been building for twenty-five years since first obtaining the vote in 1870. During the Constitutional Convention debates, one delegate credited the Relief Society as the main force that had "worked up sentiment" for the inclusion of suffrage rights.⁷² The organization indeed served as a vehicle for suffrage activism, infusing their advocacy with spirituality and providing the structural organization to mobilize and disseminate suffrage information. Comprising the clear majority of Utah women, they also made up the majority of the membership in the territorial and county suffrage associations, with local Relief Society presidents often serving simultaneously as local suffrage association presidents. The tireless efforts of these women, and of the men who supported them, made the ultimate reconciliation of these tensions possible. The suffrage provision was approved by an overwhelming majority at the Constitutional Convention on April 5, and the final vote on April 18 successfully secured the inclusion of women's right to vote and hold office in Utah's new state constitution.

Beyond State Suffrage

After this victory, many Latter-day Saint suffragists remained personally committed to securing a federal suffrage amendment during the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁷³ They often imbued their public activities with spiritual significance and evangelized equality, blurring religious and political lines by urging, "We who have accepted the new gospel of Equal Rights, must labor with untiring zeal for the redemption of the masses."⁷⁴ This conjunction of sacred and civic commitments

71. Utah State Archives and Records Service, April 18, 1895. These petitions resulted in 24,801 signatures for inclusion and 15,366 for separate submission.

72. Utah State Archives and Records Service, April 5, 1895.

73. See Katherine Kitterman and Rebekah Ryan Clark, *Thinking Women: A Timeline of Suffrage in Utah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019).

74. Alvira Lucy Cox, "Equal Suffrage," *Woman's Exponent* 22, no. 7 (October 15, 1893): 50.

fortified suffrage advocacy and facilitated Latter-day Saint partnerships on behalf of suffrage.

The week after the close of the Constitutional Convention, Susan B. Anthony and Reverend Anna Howard Shaw arrived in Salt Lake City for a regional National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) convention hosted by the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah. They were greeted with much enthusiasm by a large procession of Utah suffragists, and a crowd of more than six thousand attended their speeches that night in the Tabernacle. Despite the recent resurgence of discord among Utah women over the issue of separate submission of the suffrage question, this Rocky Mountain Suffrage Convention included an interdenominational group of suffragists who united in the larger goal of advancing women's rights throughout the nation. Shaw praised the men of the Utah Territorial Legislature: "The work of the world demands the highest and best interests of men and women working side by side together."⁷⁵ Mary Isabella Horne, a prominent leader among Latter-day Saint women, similarly voiced her commitment to this universal cause, saying, "I would be glad if we could induce all the men and women to believe in equal suffrage for both sexes. God created us equal. . . . The time is coming when women will stand side by side with man, that they may work together."⁷⁶ As Latter-day Saint women continued their suffrage advocacy on a more national platform, they sought to do so "side by side" with the men who had supported them throughout their advocacy in Utah.

Leading suffragists in Utah were not on the margins of their religious society. They often served as prominent leaders within the women's organizations of the Church of Jesus Christ and simultaneously engaged in petitioning, fundraising, lobbying, attending conventions, and serving in leadership positions in national suffrage organizations such as NAWSA, the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, the National Woman's Party, and the National and International Councils of Women. The Church funded several women's trips to national women's rights conferences, and male leaders of the Church repeatedly lent support and encouragement for women's public advocacy. Emily S. Richards, who served as president of the Utah State Council

75. "Conference N.A.W.S.A.," *Woman's Exponent* 24, nos. 7–8 (September 1 and 15, 1895): 55.

76. M. Isabella Horne, "Conference N.A.W.S.A.," *Woman's Exponent* 24, nos. 11–12 (November 1 and 15, 1895): 77.

of Women, appealed to shared spiritual goals when she requested that the First Presidency of the Church donate books for a NAWSA suffrage fundraiser, observing that it would be “a good opportunity to do some missionary work.”⁷⁷ As Emmeline B. Wells was preparing to go to a National Council of Women conference, Church leaders including President Lorenzo Snow, President Joseph F. Smith, and Elder Heber J. Grant set her apart as if she were going on a mission. They gave her a priesthood blessing that she might have “influence with the women among whom she may associate in this Convention, . . . that they may become our friends and not our enemies, and that the rights and privileges which belong to the women of Thy people . . . may be recognized and acknowledged by the women of the nation and by all the people of the nation.”⁷⁸ This blessing demonstrated not only Wells’s desire to have her public activities consecrated by priesthood authority but also the willingness of the Church to endorse her efforts for the benefit they provided to both the Church and the women of the nation.

Tensions emerged as Latter-day Saints tried to assimilate into early twentieth-century America, and suffragists continued to seek harmony among those of their faith when faced with conflicting or even dissonant voices. One of the most challenging examples occurred in 1899, when Emmeline B. Wells and other Utah delegates risked their membership in the National Council of Women by defending Brigham H. Roberts, once their most vocal suffrage opponent. Sacrificing a “golden opportunity” to demonstrate unity with other American women, they instead defeated a Council resolution denouncing Roberts as a polygamist.⁷⁹ When they were forced to choose, their loyalty to the Church of Jesus Christ outweighed their allegiance to other causes. Even after a resurgence of such antipolygamy opposition among women’s organizations,

77. Emily S. Richards to Lorenzo Snow, November 17, 1900, 3, Letters, Ric-Ruc, First Presidency (Lorenzo Snow) general correspondence, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=eed494a2-0878-4481-aefb-50c57b6f6a45&crate=0&index=2>. Richards respectfully notes that she did “not presume to make any selection” of the books but instead left that to the “wisdom” and “dictates of the spirit” which God had given the First Presidency.

78. “Blessing Pronounced upon the Head of Emmeline B. Wells,” November 9, 1900, Emmeline B. Wells Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

79. Wells, Diary, February 11, 1899, 24:78, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/p15999coll20/id/43730>; Carol Cornwall Madsen, “The Power of Combination: Emmeline B. Wells and the National and International Councils of Women,” *BYU Studies* 33, no. 4 (1993): 654–55.

the First Presidency continued to support women's suffrage activities while cautiously urging the women to maintain their distinctive identity. They reminded Relief Society leaders that their religious identity was "paramount in importance" compared to other associations and advised them to lead rather than follow the examples of other women's organizations, writing, "You are the head and not the tail."⁸⁰

Diverging approaches to women's activism also arose among Latter-day Saint suffragists as they continued to advocate for a federal suffrage amendment in the twentieth century.⁸¹ Most Utah suffragists supported NAWSA but also initially embraced the rival Congressional Union's more radical demands. Emily S. Richards, now the leader of Utah's largest suffrage organization, ultimately denounced the methods of Alice Paul's National Woman's Party (NWP). Annie Wells Cannon, however, served as Utah's representative on the NWP advisory board while also faithfully and congenially serving on the Relief Society General Board with Richards.⁸² Latter-day Saint religious connections ran deeper than political or strategic differences, and suffragists managed to make space for different voices and maintain support for the suffrage cause. When the federal suffrage amendment was finally won, fifty years after Utah women had first begun to vote, Latter-day Saint men and women celebrated and took pride in the role they had played in this historic reform movement. At the October general conference in 1920, just after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, President Heber J. Grant stood at the pulpit and "expressed his pleasure that the women of America had been granted the franchise."⁸³

As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich so famously said, "Well-behaved women seldom make history."⁸⁴ Latter-day Saint suffragists undoubtedly made history. Although their controversial marital relationships and women's

80. Relief Society Minutes, October 3, 1913, and March 17, 1914, quoted in Madsen, "Power of Combination," 668.

81. "Suffragettes are Ready for Convention," *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 19, 1915, 12; "Women of Utah Pledge Support," *Salt Lake Herald—Republican*, August 21, 1915, 12.

82. *The Suffragist* 7, no. 51 (January 11, 1919): 2. Alice Louise Reynolds, another prominent Latter-day Saint, also contributed funds to the National Woman's Party in 1918. *Suffragist*, 11.

83. "Plea for Broader and Deeper Charity," *Washington County News*, October 14, 1920, 2. While the Nineteenth Amendment removed gender restrictions, many marginalized groups in America had to continue the struggle for equal voting rights for several more decades because of restrictive citizenship and voter registration laws.

84. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007). Ulrich's observation has taken on many different meanings, but its

rights activism were considered radical from the outside, within their own community they were considered “well-behaved women.” In fact, it was arguably *because* they faithfully worked within their social, religious, and cultural structures that they were so effective in building the bridges with Latter-day Saint men that expanded their political influence. They helped men understand that the advancement of God’s kingdom depends on the equality of men and women. These suffragists emerge as models of apparent contradictions: decisive, outspoken, and progressive while remaining respectful, faithful, and conservative. Neither adversarial nor passive, they were confident and assertive examples of women’s empowerment and religious commitment. As the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah reminded the Constitutional Convention in 1895, “The key and clue to all true progress is the large harmony that the Infinite Spirit is breathing into the rising grandeur of human development.”⁸⁵ That harmony was the secret to their success.

Rebekah Ryan Clark is a historian for Better Days 2020 and co-author of the book *Thinking Women: A Timeline of Suffrage in Utah*. She holds a law degree from the J. Reuben Clark Law School at Brigham Young University and a history and literature degree from Harvard University, where her honors thesis was on Latter-day Saint women’s suffrage activism. She has worked in the women’s history division at the Church History Department and as an online instructor for BYU–Idaho. Rebekah currently serves on the board of the Mormon Women’s History Initiative Team and lives in Highland, Utah, with her husband, Andrew, and their five young children.

original intent seems to assert that women working within their community’s accepted norms contribute to history in meaningful but often unrecognized ways.

85. “Convention and Woman Suffrage,” 241; Utah State Archives and Records Service, March 18, 1895.