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The “New Woman” and the *Woman’s Exponent*

An Editorial Perspective

Carol Cornwall Madsen

“The Woman’s Exponent . . . will furnish good material for future historians who will, it is ardently hoped, remember the women of Zion when compiling the history of this Western land. There has been no great work during these years commenced by women that has not been considered and helped by this little paper.”¹

Economically, politically, socially, and theologically, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were known for being insular and cohesive at a time when the United States was stretching its boundaries and developing unifying communication and transportation networks across the continent. The concept of Manifest Destiny was imbibed by the young republic, and rugged individualism became a symbol of the adventurous entrepreneurs who saw a bounteous future in the great American West, especially with the addition of Mexican territory in 1848 and the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. The Church was clearly out of sync with the path the nation followed, instead wrapping itself in the encircling “wagons” of distance and cohesion that promised security and sanctuary against the barbs and threats and abuse by those who drove them to the western frontier of the United States and then followed them there. But when polygamy was introduced in 1852 as another “peculiar Mormon practice,” the limits of religious, social, and political tolerance were reached. Polygamy was an affront to Victorian sensibilities, irrespective of its religious foundation, and every effort was exerted to stamp

1. “The Fortieth Volume,” *Woman’s Exponent* 40, no. 1 (July 1, 1911): 4.

it out. Several congressional antipolygamy acts, a U.S. Supreme Court decision declaring polygamy unconstitutional, and nearly thirty years of effort were required, however, to force the Church to capitulate.² In 1890, Church President Wilford Woodruff issued a “Manifesto” suspending the practice of plural marriage, and with it went a primary obstacle to statehood, which seven attempts and nearly half a century had failed to achieve. When statehood was granted in 1896, Utah in many respects joined the mainstream of American life.

LDS Women Gain an Advocate

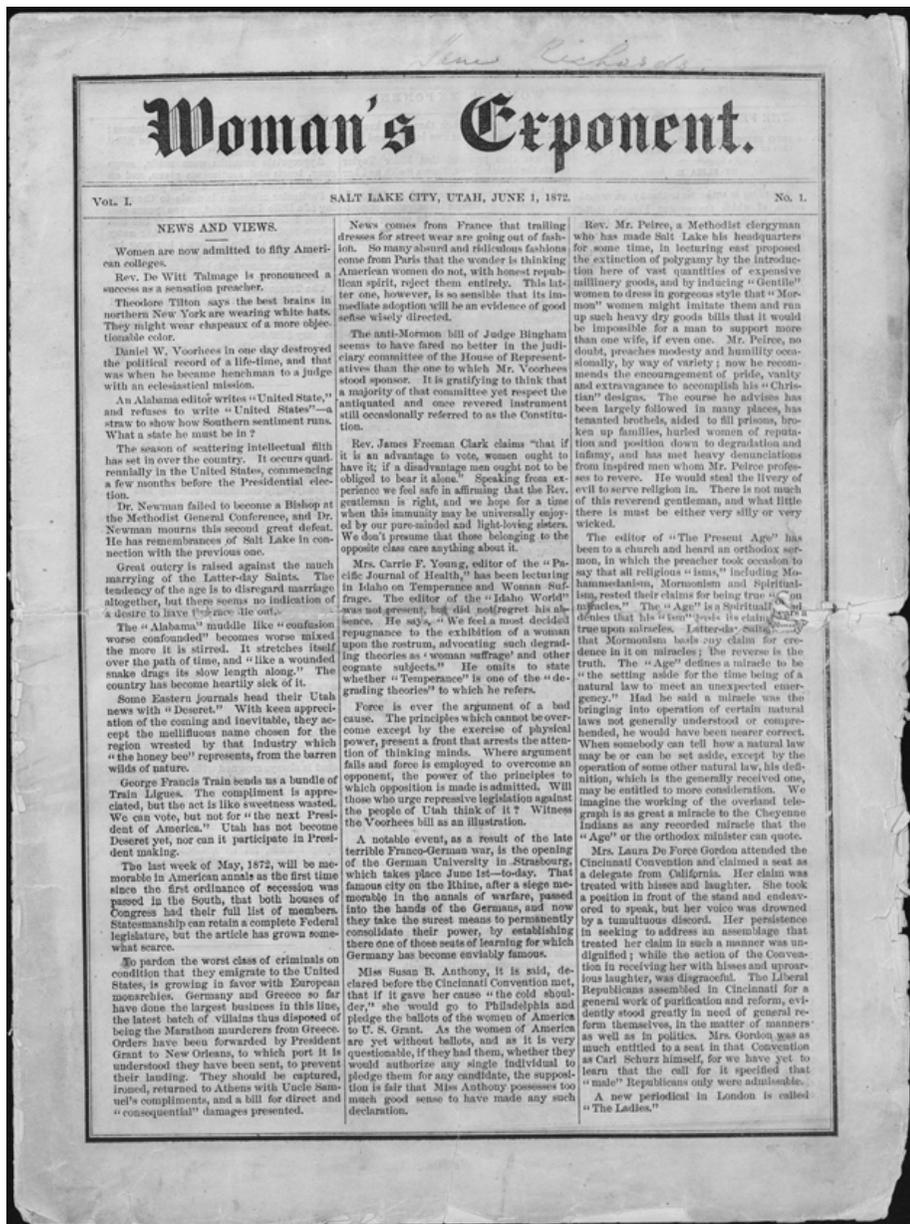
Against this well-known background of Utah history, the *Woman’s Exponent* emerged in 1872 to speak for Mormon women, who were often the target of antipolygamy diatribes. Several factors contributed to the birth of this semimonthly journal for LDS women. Prior to the June publication of the *Woman’s Exponent’s* first issue, the newly founded *Salt Lake Herald* (whose editor, Edward L. Sloan, had originated the idea of a woman’s paper) announced that “the women of Utah are today unquestionably more the subject of comment than those of any other portion of the country, or indeed of the world. As they have long exercised the right to think and act for themselves, so they claim the right to speak for themselves through the potent medium of the types.”³

A second salient reason was Sloan’s confidence that the women of Utah could write and defend themselves against the clamor of disparagement that surrounded them on all sides. In January 1870, at the same time Sloan was laying plans for the *Woman’s Exponent*, LDS women met in the old tabernacle in Salt Lake City to protest the particularly punitive antipolygamy Cullom Bill then being debated in Congress. Women conducted the meeting, and fourteen members of the large, exclusively female assemblage spoke on behalf of plural marriage. The rally brought them many accolades for their “logic and rhetoric,” not only from local papers but also from New York papers.⁴ The Utah legislature, comprised

2. The LDS Church publicly declared its acceptance of plural marriage as doctrine in 1852. The Morrill Act of 1862 declared bigamy a legal offense, and the Edmunds Law of 1882 and the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 followed with increasingly harsh enforcement measures.

3. “Woman’s Exponent,” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, April 9, 1872.

4. The *Deseret News* published quotations from the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald*, February 16, 1870, and March 8, 1870. The Cullom Bill, against which they rallied, was ultimately defeated. See “Female Suffrage in Utah,” *Deseret News*,

The first issue of the *Woman's Exponent*, June 1, 1872. Courtesy Church History Library.

of male members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was so convincingly swayed by the words and manners of these women that a month later it decided, with little opposition, to grant them the right to vote. Though women's enfranchisement would add strength to the political dominance of Latter-day Saints in the territory, it also ignited in many of the lawmakers a latent sense of the injustice of denying women the vote.

Utah's enfranchisement of women was certainly one of the factors that convinced Edward Sloan that the women of the Church were capable of maintaining a paper of their own. Though the paper would be managed and written by women, Sloan was putting the paper in the tradition of Church publications from its founding, such as the *Times and Seasons*, *Millennial Star*, and numerous religious pamphlets designed to tell the Mormon story. The *Woman's Exponent* would be the means of telling the LDS women's story.

Sloan would also be numbered among those men across the country who selected women to become editors of the newspapers or magazines they founded. Two of the most popular early nineteenth-century publications were the *Ladies Magazine* and *Godey's Lady's Book*, both of which were founded by Louis A. Godey and edited by Sarah Josepha Hale. In 1870, when Sloan, a longtime journalist, and his partner, William C. Dunbar, founded and edited the *Salt Lake Herald*, Sloan was interested in running a woman's column in the newspaper. Dunbar rejected the idea, which led Sloan to found a separate paper for women—the *Woman's Exponent*.

As an editor, Sloan was aware of the growing popularity of women's magazines and newspapers. Following the Civil War, many of them were political in nature, seeing the denial of women's vote as parallel to the suppression of voting rights of the newly emancipated slave population.⁵ Sloan, however, eschewed the idea of entering the national debate on woman's rights, just as Godey disdained the discussion of slavery in his magazines. As Sarah Hale had declared in 1841, the popular *Godey's Lady's Book* would not deal with politics or theology because, she announced, "other subjects are more important for our sex and more

February 16, 1870, 18; "The Ladies' Mass Meetings—Their Significance," *Deseret News*, March 8, 1870, 49.

5. The National Woman Suffrage Association lobbied extensively to include women in the Fifteenth Amendment that enfranchised former slaves after their emancipation but without success and thereafter turned its attention to creating a new amendment giving women the vote.

proper for our sphere." Her publication was a strong element in both defining and promoting the then-current home-centered definition of womanhood and "woman's sphere," attracting thousands of devoted followers of its fashion plates and feminine approach. It rejected any signs of changing traditional social practices other than extending more educational opportunities for women and encouraging women to utilize them.⁶ But Sloan did believe that his new paper would be a timely move, allowing LDS women to counteract in their own words some of the derogatory descriptions of LDS women appearing in other publications.

The woman's rights movement slowly encroached on the preeminence of the traditional image of womanhood, leading to a number of publications by women fostering a wider public arena for women. At its founding in 1872, the *Woman's Exponent* almost inadvertently joined a large coterie of woman's rights journals and papers. In the first issue, Louisa Greene, its first editor (1872–1877), outlined its editorial dimensions, which were slightly broader than Sarah Hale's mission statements. It was to be a journal of LDS women's thoughts, a forum for their opinions, and a record of their work. She absolved the paper from any need to "advocate woman suffrage" (since Utah women had been voting for two years), "to contend against" wrongs perpetrated by the male half of the community, or to "champion any special claims. . . . We have no rivalry with any, no war to wage, no contest to provoke."⁷ Yet, in that same editorial, Greene promised to speak freely on every topic of current interest to both the women of Utah and women the world over. In order to fulfill the latter promise, however, Greene soon found it necessary to advocate the cause of woman suffrage, contend against the discrimination of women in education and employment and especially the denigration of LDS women, and "defend" vigorously the Church's practice of plural marriage. These were all issues of interest to her readers and writers and comprised a third of the journal's editorial content during its forty-two-year history. The early demise of Sloan, the paper's founder, just two years after the *Exponent's* establishment, left the editors as the final arbiters of the journal's content, and they enthusiastically engaged their paper in the national conversation on woman's rights that marked the later years of the nineteenth century.

6. Nancy Woloch, "Sarah Hale and the *Ladies Magazine*," in *Women and the American Experience*, 3d ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2000), 114.

7. "Our Position," *Woman's Exponent* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 1872): 4.



Louisa Lula Greene Richards, first editor of the *Woman's Exponent*. Courtesy Church History Library.

After the *Herald's* announcement of the woman's newspaper, the *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, a non-LDS newspaper, stated, "What kind of a woman character it will possess we know not, but, seeing that the Church organs make a considerable display of it, we think it may be like Utah female suffrage—another polygamic institution."⁸ Surprisingly, upon receiving a copy of the first issue of the *Exponent*, the *Tribune* conceded that "aside from its polygamic leanings we regard it as the greatest stride the Mormons have yet made in literature, being well edited and quite newsy, and we think it will take well amongst the Mormon ladies

as it is much more modern in style and contains less of priestly cant than most other Mormon publications."⁹ This was an unexpected endorsement of the paper, one particularly aimed at non-Mormon readers.

Editing the *Woman's Exponent*

When the paper was formally launched in June 1872, both its name and editor were in place. Louisa Greene, a young single woman from Smithfield, Utah, would lead the *Woman's Exponent* into becoming a strong advocate for the growing woman's rights movement.¹⁰ Elsewhere, other new publications by women were promoting the "emancipation" of women, focusing on broadened legal and political rights, with varying degrees of success. The *Revolution*, organ of the National Woman

8. *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, April 11, 1872.

9. *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, June 10, 1872.

10. See Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Louisa Lula Greene Richards: 'Remember the Women of Zion,'" in *Sister Saints*, ed. Vicky Burgess-Olson (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 432–53; and Carol Cornwall Madsen, "'Remember the Women of Zion': A Study of the Editorial Content of the *Woman's Exponent*, a Mormon Woman's Journal" (master's thesis, University of Utah, 1977), 50–85.

Suffrage Association and edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, lasted only two years, from 1868 to 1870, but it laid the groundwork for the long struggle ahead. Most enduring was the Boston *Woman's Journal*, a publication of the American Woman Suffrage Association (1870–1919) and a rival to the National Association. *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* (1870–1876) of New York and the *New Northwest* (1871–1887) of Portland were both prominent in their time. These periodicals followed the lead set by the *Lily* (1849–1856), a temperance paper that shifted to woman's rights, and the *Una* (1853–1877), which began as and remained solely a woman's rights paper.¹¹ In addition to these popular papers, the *Woman's Exponent* occasionally published news from the *Chicago Balance*, the *Homestead* of Oakland, the *Golden Dawn* of San Francisco, the *New Century* (published by the Women's United States Centennial Committee in Philadelphia), the *Boston Watchman*, and especially *Woman's Words*.¹² Indeed, the editors of the *Woman's Exponent* were joining a large sorority of editors of woman's rights papers that reached across the country.

While the *Exponent* enjoyed the Church leaders' advocacy and financial help in meeting printing costs, the paper was produced independently, sustained primarily by its subscriptions.¹³ It was never an official organ of the Relief Society, though it became a resource for information on the activities of the various units of the Relief Society, as well as those of the Young Ladies' MIA and Primary Association throughout the territory. It did not try to replicate either a newspaper or a ladies' magazine but developed a unique style appropriate to its own purposes. Issued semimonthly, it had no organized staff or paid employees except for female typesetters and the printers. Its circulation was relatively small (never reaching the goal of 3,000), but its content reflected the opinions of a variety of contributors besides its editors. Its lofty goal was clearly announced in its prospectus:

The women of Utah to-day occupy a position which attracts the attention of intelligent thinking men and women everywhere. . . . They have been grossly misrepresented through the press, by active enemies who

11. A brief history of the *Lily* is Edward A. Hinck, "The Lily, 1849–1856: From Temperance to Woman's Rights," in *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840–1910*, ed. Martha M. Solomon (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 30–47; Mari Boor Tonn surveys the *Una* in "The Una, 1853–1855: The Premier of the Woman's Rights Press," in Solomon, *Voice of Their Own*, 48–70.

12. Madsen, "Remember the Women of Zion," 26.

13. Madsen, "Remember the Women of Zion," 35–37.

permit no opportunity to pass of maligning and slandering them; and with but limited opportunity of appealing to the intelligence and candor of their fellow countrymen and countrywomen in reply.

Who are so well able to speak for the women of Utah as the women of Utah themselves? "It is better to represent ourselves than to be misrepresented by others."

For these reasons, and that women may help each other by the diffusion of knowledge and information possessed by many and suitable to all, the publication of *Woman's Exponent*, a journal owned by, controlled by and edited by Utah ladies, has been commenced.¹⁴

Obtaining sufficient copy for each issue was an unwelcome task. Many of the paper's readers were unresponsive to the issues raised by the paper, either reluctant to see their names in print or indifferent to the crusade for woman's rights that seemed peripheral to their own lives. As a result, besides handling the financial accounts, the editing, the layout, and the mailing of each issue, the editors also carried the burden of writing much of the content themselves. At the outset of the new periodical, Louisa Greene noted that though circulation had rapidly increased in the first few months, literary contributions were not as forthcoming as expected. "There are numbers of ladies throughout the Territory who could write," she noted, "and yet do not, and could clothe in pointed, touching words, ideas that would be of great value to their sisters everywhere."¹⁵ When Emmeline Wells became editor, she complained of the daunting task of acquiring sufficient copy and confided to her diary, "I never supposed when I commenced working on the paper that I would have to do everything for myself. I feel sometimes my burden is too heavy."¹⁶ However, as the *Exponent* was ineluctably drawn into the debate on suffrage, polygamy, and statehood, more copy joined the editors' editorials, and the paper became an influential tool in disseminating information from the active woman's rights movement in the East as well as news of other advancements in women's status elsewhere in the world.

In addition to the editors' own contributions and the pieces submitted by a small band of loyal contributors, the *Exponent* also included

14. "Woman's Exponent, a Utah Ladies' Journal," *Woman's Exponent* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 1872): 8.

15. "Our Journal," *Woman's Exponent* 1, no. 10 (October 15, 1872): 76.

16. Emmeline B. Wells, *Diary*, vol. 4, January 18, 1878, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

reprints from other journals, letters from readers, reports from women-led Latter-day Saint auxiliaries, and the minutes from the bimonthly meetings of the independent Retrenchment Association.¹⁷

For two dollars per annum, the subscriber could expect twenty-four bimonthly issues. This schedule persisted for seventeen years; then, after 1889, publication became erratic, varying from nine to twenty-two issues per year for one dollar. In those hundreds of pages produced during the paper's long run, much of LDS history is written and preserved, including an editorial focus on Church policies and events, a growing association with the organizations and individual women supporting woman suffrage, and other concerns pertinent to women. It also became a repository of individual women's biographies and autobiographies, as editor Wells sought to fulfill Brigham Young's commission to "write brief sketches of the lives of the leading women of Zion, and publish them" and to "tell the sisters to take the *Exponent* and keep it, for it will contain the record of their work and a portion of church history."¹⁸ Indeed, it is a great repository of LDS women's history. Wells's efforts to meet Young's request resulted in two hundred multicolumn life sketches of LDS women and eight hundred lengthy obituaries.¹⁹ In addition, short stories (mainly by editor Wells), poetry, and commentary on Church events and conferences as well as local events and individuals appeared alongside reprints of articles from other women's papers.²⁰

Only 3 percent of the editorials dealt with household affairs. Readers' letters, tributes to friends and leaders, and minute details of the proceedings of national meetings attended by LDS women also filled the pages of the *Exponent*. Group biographies of women in various fields of employment such as journalism, medicine, literature, politics, education, philanthropy, and even farming were included, their stories usually

17. The Senior and Junior Retrenchment Societies were briefly existing organizations designed to encourage the Saints to live more frugally, especially in food, dress, and home decor, and to patronize LDS-owned commercial businesses. They merged into what was informally called the Retrenchment Society, which existed outside any line of ecclesiastical authority or supervision. See Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Retrenchment Association," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow and others, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1223–25.

18. Brigham Young, quoted in "The Jubilee Celebration: The Need of Press Representation," *Woman's Exponent* 20, no. 17 (March 15, 1892): 132.

19. This compilation is in possession of author.

20. Madsen, "Remember the Women of Zion."

written by the editors.²¹ The *Woman's Exponent* recognized women in the wide variety of lives they lived.

The Relief Society and Woman's Rights

In 1889, another unplanned connection between the Relief Society and the woman's rights movement, promoted by Emmeline Wells and the *Woman's Exponent*, gave LDS women an opportunity to recognize the value of the rights they had already obtained mainly through the Relief Society, organized in March 1842 in Nauvoo, Illinois. The ostensible beginning of the national woman's rights movement was the convention held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. In preparation for that meeting, Elizabeth Cady Stanton had written a Declaration of Sentiments, which enumerated the grievances arising from the suppression of woman's representation, not only in the realm of politics but also in all aspects of civil life, particularly education, religion, employment, and the law. Emmeline Wells, in an editorial written forty-seven years after the organization of the Relief Society, connected that 1842 event with the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention held six years later. "The organization of the Relief Society," she opined, "opened perhaps one of the most important eras in the history of woman. It presented the great woman-question to the Latter-day Saints, previous to the woman's rights organizations, which have created such extensive agitation . . . since. . . . It has given to woman . . . opportunities for expressing her own thoughts, views and opinions; all of which has had a tendency to make her intelligent in regard to matters which before were considered incompatible with 'woman's sphere,' and unintelligible to her 'weaker mind.'"²²

This ebullient assessment of the benefits of the LDS women's Relief Society bolstered the self-image of many Latter-day Saint women and measurably counteracted the effects of the mordant barbs of their anti-Mormon detractors. Ardent encouragement from Eliza R. Snow and other Relief Society leaders also helped to bolster the confidence of their Relief Society sisters. Periodic reports from ward Relief Societies, published in the *Woman's Exponent*, bear out the reality of Wells's extensive beneficial claims of the progressive nature of the Relief Society.

21. See, for example, *Woman's Exponent* 17, nos. 1–24 (June 1888–May 1889); *Women's Exponent* 22, no. 4 (September 1, 1893): 28; *Women's Exponent* 40, no. 9 (May 1, 1912): 69; and *Women's Exponent* 41, no. 14 (February 1, 1914): 100–102.

22. Emmeline B. Wells, "Women's Organizations," *Woman's Exponent* 8, no. 16 (January 15, 1880): 122.

The woman's movement was an all-encompassing and even radical movement, supporting not only the right to vote but also women's right to ownership of their own property upon marriage, educational opportunities on all levels, a wide swath of employment, and independent leadership in their own Church auxiliary organizations.²³ Utah was well advanced in granting many of these rights to women, and Wells was not averse to crediting the Relief Society for obtaining those newly confirmed rights.

Utah Women Join the Woman's Movement

Despite their progressive stance, LDS women activists didn't formally enter the national conversation on equal rights so much as they were inadvertently drawn into it. An issue oft debated by antipolygamists was the question of how it was possible for women to live in a society that provided numerous civil rights to them even as that society kept them under the yoke of an outlawed marriage system. The *Woman's Exponent*, however, was a great defender of the unrecognized values and opportunities that women in plural marriage possessed, making it a handmaid in the movement for equality. The *Exponent's* response to the constant derogation of the practice and of the women who practiced it focused on women's right to choose their own form of marriage, including plural marriage. Being among the few enfranchised women in the nation, LDS women also recognized that woman suffrage was a means of empowering women in the public sphere. Rather than voting to overturn the practice of plural marriage, however, LDS women voted to maintain a woman's right to choose to become a plural wife. Joining in the most encompassing and intense issues relating to women through its editorials, the *Exponent* was indeed forced to renege on its original

23. Louisa Greene firmly declared the progressive nature of Utah, writing that "President [Brigham] Young proves himself to be the most genuine, impartial and practical 'Woman's Rights man' upon the American Continent, as he has ever done; his counsels, instructions and advice to women being always directed toward their progress and advancement in usefulness and the possession of valuable knowledge." Louise L. Greene, "Work for Women," *Woman's Exponent* 1, no. 22 (April 15, 1873): 172. At the admittance of two women to the Utah Bar, Utah being one of the first territories to allow such, she declared that "women [in Utah] enjoy more of what is contended for as woman's rights than they do in any State in the Federal Union; and that they appreciate their position and are seeking to qualify themselves for spheres of usefulness to which their sisters in other parts of the country can only yet look in prospective." Louise L. Greene, "Woman Lawyers," *Woman's Exponent* 1, no. 9 (October 1, 1872): 68.

intention to avoid controversial matters. In doing so, the paper clearly showed its advocacy for women and a new image of the nineteenth-century woman. Nearly half (44.53 percent) of the editorials over the forty-two-year span of the *Woman's Exponent* dealt with woman suffrage, plural marriage, or woman's rights. Neither editor shied away from wrestling with the vitiation and degradation that characterized the arguments mounted by detractors of Mormonism generally, and polygamy specifically, as well as of woman suffrage. In fact, addressing these issues on the *Exponent's* editorial page gave the *Exponent* currency, substance, and legitimacy as a resource for women to understand and participate in the events swirling around them. And it clearly made LDS women and the *Woman's Exponent* major components in the national discussion of woman's rights.

The *Exponent* published in its first issue an article signed "E" (certainly an effective pseudonym, with all the Elizases, Emmelines, and Elizabeths as possible contenders for authorship). The article argued for equal pay, equal educational opportunity, and greater options for employment.²⁴ This article opened the way for the paper to publish other grievances, both general and personal. It showed an awareness of at least one woman eager to share her thoughts publicly on the concerns voiced in the national movement for woman's rights. The paper's clearly expressed avoidance of any need to "contend" or "champion" or "defend" was nullified in its first issue, and the *Exponent* became a major player in the long contention between Mormon and federal officials, particularly over plural marriage. The endorsement by Church leaders indicated consent to the women's quest for equality and helped to build name recognition and awareness of the paper and its stance during these early years.²⁵ With Church support and a medium to express their views, LDS women were ready to join the growing movement for woman's rights.

Plural Marriage as a Woman's Right

The urgency to defend plural marriage against the many antipolygamy bills appearing in Congress made addressing the issue one of the first departures from the editors' early promise to refrain from contending with critics and defamers. The Church's original religious and constitutional defense of the practice did not match the kind of argument that

24. "Woman's Rights and Wrongs," *Woman's Exponent* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 1872): 5.

25. "The Woman's Paper," *Woman's Exponent* 18, no. 1 (June 1, 1889): 4; George A. Smith, "Sustaining the *Exponent*," *Woman's Exponent* 3, no. 2 (June 15, 1874): 11.

polygamy's denigrators employed, one focused on the social policies, psychological factors, and familial aspects of the practice. Latter-day Saints were thus obliged to meet the critics on their terms. Emmeline Wells, for example, promoted the idea that plural marriage could prove an antidote to many of the immoral practices of the world, a strong plank in the platform of woman suffrage. Plural marriage, she asserted, was consistent with "laws of life and health" for both present and future generations, while the "other [was] contrary to morality and chastity." Idealistically, she claimed that plural marriage had at its foundation the strength and building up of family life; it was the worldly way that destroyed the family. Additionally, she believed that polygamy could be the means of eliminating prostitution, since all women would have the opportunity for marriage with good and righteous men.²⁶ Far from being a bondage and enslavement of women, the *Exponent* argued, plural marriage gave women "more time for thought, for mental culture, more freedom of action, a broader field of labor, inculcates liberality and generosity, develops more fully the spiritual elements of life, fosters purity of thought and gives wider scope to benevolence."²⁷ In other words, polygamy "does not narrow, but widens woman's field for usefulness."²⁸ This idea was bedrock to the editors of the *Exponent* and to other public defenders of the practice, and to their credit, their unrelenting stance neither impeded the development of personal friendships with their gentile suffrage cohorts nor denied them membership in some of the national women's organizations of that time, particularly the National Woman Suffrage Association and the National and International Councils of Women.²⁹ In all three groups, LDS women had much opportunity to speak, persuade, and defend not only their lifestyle but also the woman's movement in general. Polygamy was a woman's issue, they maintained, and very much an element of woman's rights.

26. "The Position of Utah," *Woman's Exponent* 10, no. 15 (January 1, 1882): 116.

27. "Women Talkers and Women Writers," *Woman's Exponent* 5, no. 6 (August 15, 1876): 44.

28. E. B. Wells, "Patriarchal Marriage," *Woman's Exponent* 6, no. 6 (August 15, 1877): 44.

29. A local antipolygamy society comprised of non-LDS and disaffected LDS women had the support of several "purity" organizations as well as several denominational women's auxiliaries. The American Woman Suffrage Association, rival to the National Association, did not permit the admission of LDS women, nor did the Daughters of the American Revolution, leading to the organization of the Daughters of the Revolution, which did accept LDS women.

While her defense of the practice was basically constitutional in principle, editor Emmeline Wells capitalized on the personal ramifications of the practice. As an exemplar, she personified the plural wife who developed self-reliance, resilience, and personal independence. These qualities flowed into Wells's ideas of the "New Woman," a concept then being created through the arguments and political rhetoric of the suffragists and other woman's rights activists.

Of course, the federal government didn't quite agree with Emmeline's assessment of the good that polygamy might offer, so Wells tried a logical approach and an appeal for the rights of citizens: "Would it not be well for the nation to pause, ere any irrevocable step is taken, that would strike at the peace and happiness and individual liberty of the people of Utah, and examine well and closely into the conditions of the Territory? Would it not be wiser to hear both sides of this case, before decisive steps are taken to punish? We have always understood every person in the Republic was entitled to a fair hearing, before any verdict could be given."³⁰ Her citizen's appeal was also unconvincing to the authorities, though she saw precedents being set for possible future consequences resulting from federal intervention in religion. "The sectarian priests who have been loudest in denouncing the 'Mormons' from the pulpit and to the government may tremble for fear of the retribution which is sure to follow upon their devoted heads, now that the government has commenced legislating against one form of religion."³¹ Twice a plural wife, Wells believed it should be a legitimate choice for all women.

Defending their marriage style brought numerous LDS women into the public sphere. The *Woman's Exponent* gave those women a platform on which those who were fortified enough by their indignation toward the actions of the government could rise up and express their dismay. Wells was not intimidated by her opponents and felt the support of her Church leaders. It was a frenzied time, however. From 1882 to 1890, when government action was full-blown against polygamy, the 101 *Exponent* editorials on the practice were primarily directed toward defending the constitutional right to practice it (despite a negative Supreme Court ruling in 1879). They denounced the various legislative acts prohibiting it, enumerating the dire results of their enforcement. National suffrage meetings unified Utah and national suffragists in expressing their

30. "Hostile Measures," *Woman's Exponent* 10, no. 18 (February 15, 1882): 140.

31. "Sensational Stories about the Mormons," *Woman's Exponent* 10, no. 21 (April 1, 1882): 164.

opposition to both the Edmunds Anti-Polygamy Act of 1882—which, among its provisions, disenfranchised all men and women involved in plural marriage—and the 1887 Edmunds-Tucker Act, which removed the right to vote from all Utah women, not just polygamous wives. Before the Edmunds-Tucker Act passed in 1887, the *Exponent* made one of its last comments on the subject: “Those who live longest will see in the *finale* of the present controversy and persecution now raging, ostensibly in consequence of the practise of a principle that was taught and practised by holy men of old, that it will yet appear that officeseeking, political place and power and Mammon were the real motives that caused the raid against the ‘Mormons.’”³²

The finale came with the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887, which attacked the financial holdings of the Church, and in 1890, President Wilford Woodruff issued a “Manifesto,” agreeing to suspend the performance of any additional plural marriages. Emmeline Wells wrote her final editorial on the practice:

This is indeed an interesting period in the history of this people, and those who have been looking for a great change to transpire that Zion might be liberated from bondage, ought to take into consideration, how often it has been repeated to the Saints, that the Lord's ways are not man's ways, and that great things never come about as even *wise* men anticipate. . . . Again and again in ancient and modern revelation has the Lord said He would have a tried people even “as gold seven times purified,” therefore the Saints should not murmur as did ancient Israel lest they lose sight of “the prize of the high calling.”³³

These words were hopeful but had little effect on the alteration of LDS life after plural marriages were outlawed. However, though LDS women lost the battle over polygamy, they were determined to regain the statutory right to the vote permanently. With statehood on the horizon, the *Woman's Exponent* announced the organization of LDS women into a distinct suffrage organization to be known as the Utah Territorial Woman Suffrage Association.³⁴ Through the polygamy crusade, women recognized the necessity of the vote in the determination of public policy. The *Woman's Exponent* would be a strong force in support of woman

32. “Thoughts on the Times,” *Woman's Exponent* 14, no. 7 (September 1, 1885): 52, italics in original.

33. “Fear Not for Zion,” *Woman's Exponent* 20, no. 10 (November 15, 1891): 76, italics in original.

34. “Woman Suffrage Meeting,” *Woman's Exponent* 17, no. 16 (January 15, 1889): 121.

suffrage, now a pressing campaign that was making headway in the West.³⁵ Those women who had publicly defended their right to choose their own marital pattern had gained the experience to speak and write about the need for, and the right of, women to vote.

Woman Suffrage

From the day they first received their right to the ballot in 1870, LDS women were forced into defensive mode. Each new antipolygamy bill proposed by Congress became more punitive in its methods of enforcement and began rescinding women's right to vote. The *Woman's Exponent* became an essential tool in the debate, explaining the value to the community of the ballot in women's hands. As Wells explained, "Women have not asked for suffrage because of place or power, or to crowd men out of the ranks of the wage-earners or professions, but that they may be acknowledged as being an equal in the work and business of the great world in which all must live and take part. . . . This great work can never be done well by one half of the human family; it is the opinion of all who think deeply that men and women must do the work together and unitedly."³⁶

Not all LDS women were as eager as suffragists to fight for the vote; most of those who were against it were non-LDS or disaffected LDS women and were concerned about the additional political power that enfranchised women would provide to the Church. Wells was dismayed at the apathy she detected among many LDS women and particularly urged foreign-born sisters to seek citizenship and citizens to acknowledge the precious right and privileges of the ballot. If women could acknowledge the power that the vote would give them, the *Exponent* declared, "and come forward in their united strength and help maintain the rights; which will secure to them and those they love, and their children, the homes and the liberty of which in times past they have been so unjustly deprived," they would be a force with which to reckon.³⁷ Utah suffragists, however, having now lost their right to vote after seventeen years of disenfranchisement, had to fight to reclaim it. To do so required an organized plan, originated and implemented by the women themselves,

35. Fifteen states granted women the right to vote before the 1920 passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. All but two were in the West or Midwest.

36. "Responsibility of Women Voters," *Woman's Exponent* 26, nos. 8–9 (September 15 and October 1, 1897): 196.

37. "Woman Suffrage in Utah," *Woman's Exponent* 10, no. 6 (August 15, 1881): 44.

which they were capable of doing. Their efforts at lobbying Utah's constitutional convention delegates in 1895 by their persuasive arguments were successful, and woman suffrage became part of Utah's organic law when statehood was declared in 1896.³⁸

It had not been an easy crusade, however. When the Edmunds-Tucker Act passed in 1887, it disenfranchised not only the men and women who were involved in plural marriage, but all women in the territory. The illogic of removing the right to vote from non-LDS Utah women drew national suffragists to the defense of woman suffrage in the territory, and LDS women worked with them as a team to reinstate woman suffrage in Utah. The personal and organizational relationship that developed proved to be a crucial connection in the years that followed.

The *Woman's Exponent* remained one of the most consistent and dependable journalistic advocates of this civil right for women. It was always more than an inanimate record. It was a major voice, a viable advocate, illuminating the issues and participating in the debate. Six years after the demise of the paper in 1914, Emmeline Wells, now ninety-two, celebrated with Utah the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 extending the vote to all women in the country. As Zina D. H. Young noted at the first general Relief Society conference in 1889, the *Exponent* had always stood ready "to advocate the woman's side" of all "vexed" questions, and editor Wells had later noted that the goal of the paper was not just to report but to discuss all issues that impacted women's lives, especially suffrage, education, marriage, and other points of debate included in the woman question.³⁹ Indeed, by the strength of their own convictions, the editors had made their "little paper" an indispensable woman's advocate during a volatile time in LDS women's history.

After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, the movement's promise that suffrage would energize the power and unity of women, so evident during the long suffrage campaign, failed to materialize. Women did not exhibit the strength of their political power by voting as a bloc—or by voting at all. The editorial response to this dilemma was inherent in the questions the *Exponent* asked of its readers in a similar scenario after Utah women were initially given the vote:

38. Jean Bickmore White explains in detail the uneven trail to including woman suffrage in the 1895 Utah State Constitution in "Prelude to Statehood: Coming Together in the 1890s," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (Fall 1994): 300–15.

39. "First General Conference of the Relief Society," *Woman's Exponent* 17, no. 22 (April 15, 1889): 172; Emmeline B. Wells, "Editorial Thoughts," *Woman's Exponent* 18, no. 12 (November 15, 1889): 92.

“Women of Utah! do you reflect upon these things? Do you appreciate the blessings of the ballot? If you do, why do you not manifest it by your works?”⁴⁰ But women expressed their individuality by voting for their own choice of candidates, and the power of female unity did not appear at the ballot box.

The New Woman

Of even more value and significance was the *Woman's Exponent's* part in defining the “New Woman” emerging from the nineteenth century. “This is woman’s era,” Emmeline Wells was fond of saying, and the *Woman's Exponent* helped to describe the slow metamorphosis from “woman on a pedestal” to a “real woman,” Wells’s preferred term. One of her favorite contemporary writers, Sarah Grand, was among those who introduced the term, which was popularized in the novels of Henry James, the plays of Henrik Ibsen, and the works of other writers. According to historian Ruth Bordin, “The term New Woman always referred to women who exercised control over their own lives be it personal, social, or economic.”⁴¹ Independence was a key virtue. With greater educational and employment opportunities now available to women, the New Woman was largely independent of men as providers and protectors.

The New Woman found a strong voice in the *Woman's Exponent*. Editor Wells was pleased with the proliferation of women’s clubs and organizations designed around women’s interests. She herself organized two writing clubs, conceived to encourage women to write about their views on any subject, and she published many of their papers. She lauded the women who had broken the chains banning them from pursuing careers in medicine, law, education, business, journalism, and even politics and public affairs, noting that Utah was ahead of the rest of the nation in offering such opportunities to women. The *Exponent* happily joined the growing number of women’s papers, which Wells felt were essential features of the progressive elements of the nineteenth century. By addressing thousands of readers across the country, they

40. “Woman Suffrage in Utah,” *Woman's Exponent* 10, no. 6 (August 15, 1881): 44.

41. Ruth Bordin, *Alice Freeman Palmer: The Evolution of a New Woman* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 2. The ideals of the New Woman were expressed not only in literature but also in art, music, dress, education, and employment. It was a White, middle-class concept that generated many new views of womanhood. This redefinition of womanhood and the ever-widening sphere of female participation in social and political life have been viewed as the first U.S. feminist wave and were highly influential in the feminist movement of the twentieth century.

could forward the work of “reformation” as well as record it. The *Exponent* was strongly committed to engaging in that march of progress.

In asserting their own voices in public pursuits traditionally dominated by men, women were expressing the full impact of their “emancipation” from tradition-bound gender expectations and creating this new image of womanhood. Their newly heard voices affirmed the validity of their own experiences as well as their right to offer commentary on social practices and political policies.

As editor of the *Exponent* during the height of this transition in women’s status, Emmeline Wells built on the arguments raised by her editorial predecessor on woman’s equality. Even before becoming editor, Wells had used the pseudonym Blanche Beechwood for several articles on woman’s status in marriage. She was bold in her assessments. In the past, Wells affirmed, “women [have been] what men have made them.” Men had defined the parameters of women’s character, their nature, their abilities, their sphere of action, and their mission in life, she asserted. If men were so much more “superior to women,” she added, “let them show themselves so.” “Real women” desire someone worthy of the “reverence” men seem to expect. Sadly, she concluded, “man, with all his boasted knowledge, and practical skill in reading character, is still in comparative ignorance of how women feel, or what they are.”⁴² Too often, the editorial mused, men treat their wives “as toys, to be picked up and cast aside at will; very well for pastime playthings, or for housekeepers; but to consider them real, genuine, rational beings, is a novel idea.” Many men consider women as “vain, frivolous, fickle and deceitful, incapable of performing any important part in life creditably.”⁴³ In many marriages, Wells commented a few years later, the wife gave “all—that she may sit by his hearth, bear his children, preside at his table, and merge her life into his, to the extinguishing and crushing out of all desires, ambitions, tastes, or capabilities for anything save what he deems proper, or right.”⁴⁴ She was particularly concerned about the financial arrangements in marriages, even more so when she was later unexpectedly left to provide her own living.⁴⁵ She often

42. Emmeline B. Wells [Blanche Beechwood, pseud.], “Real Women,” *Woman’s Exponent* 2, no. 15 (January 1, 1874): 118. Wells used a pseudonym for a series of articles about equality in marriage.

43. Wells [Blanche Beechwood, pseud.], “Real Women,” 118.

44. “Woman’s Progression,” *Woman’s Exponent* 6, no. 18 (February 15, 1878): 140.

45. When Daniel Wells married Emmeline as his sixth plural wife, he was involved in several successful financial ventures. However, because of a number of unforeseen

editorialized on the subject and felt that financial dependence deprived a woman of personal independence. She disdained those marriages in which the husband retained to himself all knowledge of the family's financial affairs, leaving the family vulnerable to such unexpected changes in fortune as Wells would experience for herself. Not only that, she affirmed, but there could be no real partnership in marriage if one of the partners was uninformed about the financial basis of the family.⁴⁶ The New Woman, independent, educated, and financially astute, could use those attributes to enhance family life. "Whatever efforts woman can make, whatever she may do that is not detrimental to home life," Wells believed, "that she should be permitted to do without ridicule and without censure."⁴⁷ In other words, she wrote, why could marriage not be a partnership, with "each [partner] according to the other all the freedom of thought, feeling, and expression they would grant to one who was not bound to them by indissoluble ties?"⁴⁸ This was the ideal, she felt, of a woman not losing but finding outlets for her capabilities, not only in a community setting but at home in the family.

Though the *Exponent* spoke primarily to adult women, Wells occasionally addressed articles to her younger readers, hoping to "raise their consciences" and thus broaden or modify their expectations. She appealed to them to mature intellectually as they matured physically. In an 1874 article written under a pseudonym, she chided them for their slavish imitation of faddish fashions and worldly ways: "Where there is an unconstrained, natural young lady, whose whole soul is not wrapt up in fashion, dress and style; who has independence of character enough to think for herself; who is not feverishly impatient with a desire to

circumstances, the businesses failed, and the financial status of the Wells family dramatically dropped. The other wives had sons on whom they could depend. Emmeline had only daughters. As a result, the *Woman's Exponent* became her primary means of support soon after she became editor.

46. Emmeline B. Wells [Emile, pseud.], "A Defense," *Woman's Exponent* 4, no. 24 (May 15, 1876): 190. Wells used a different pseudonym as author of this article on the financial arrangements of a family, probably because of the sensitive subject matter. Because she lived apart from the rest of Daniel's wives and seldom saw her husband, she found it necessary to go to the "big house" where he lived and personally appeal to him whenever money was needed for her personal or household needs or those of her daughters. She never knew whether she was exceeding her share of the family finances or not.

47. E. B. Wells, "Woman's Relation to Home," *Woman's Exponent* 8, no. 7 (September 1, 1879): 52.

48. "Woman's Progression," 140.

know who her future husband will be and whether his wealth will be immense [*sic*]; who is contented with her lot and cheerful, joyous and happy, . . . people wonder why she is not like the rest.”⁴⁹

To her older readers she had much to say about “strong-minded” women, a pejorative term when used by opponents of change but valued by women who were movers and partakers of the ideals of the New Woman.⁵⁰ Editor Wells knew that many of her LDS contemporaries were suspicious of the new term and used it derogatorily. But Wells declared that she had a “strong-minded” mother, who raised her brood of ten children largely on her own and discovered the inadequacies of a woman without a provider. Wells was emboldened by strong-minded women of all ages. Such women, she discovered, were sure of their own convictions while cultivating self-reliance, intellectuality, personal integrity, self-respect, and competence. The “true woman” of the Victorian ethos—demure, passive, and compliant—was giving way to the New Woman of the post-Victorian period in American society.

This transition of the meaning of womanhood as articulated by the *Exponent’s* editorials was bolstered by a host of changes in what was considered “woman’s sphere.” In Utah, the pioneering effort upset traditional divisions of labor in cultivating home life and in building communities, redefining the dimensions of “spheres.” Women were among the first faculty and the first student bodies in Utah’s growing chain of higher-education institutions. Elizabeth Kane visited Utah with her husband, Colonel Thomas L. Kane, in 1873, and she observed after traveling through the territory that Utahns were “thousands of years behind us in some of their customs [like polygamy]; in others, you would think these people the most forward children of the age. They close no career on a woman in Utah by which she can earn a living.”⁵¹ In Utah, financial independence was a major step toward personal independence.

Finally, Wells shared her thoughts about women who felt their usefulness had ended when the nest had emptied: “It is the opinion of many who are wise and learned that woman’s mission upon the earth

49. Emmeline B. Wells [Blanche Beechwood, pseud.], “Our Fashionable Young Ladies,” *Woman’s Exponent* 3, no. 8 (September 15, 1874): 58.

50. To many more traditional-minded men and women, this was a pejorative term, but to most writers for the *Woman’s Exponent*, it was an admirable description. These were the women who dared to defy society and step out of their prescribed domestic roles to expand their life experience.

51. Elizabeth Wood Kane, *Twelve Mormon Homes: Visited in Succession on a Journey through Utah to Arizona* (Philadelphia: self-pub., 1874), 4–5.

is maternity, with its . . . accompanying cares and anxieties, and needful exigencies; that these fill the measure of her creation, and when it is done, she should . . . retire from the sphere of active life and gracefully welcome old age. That motherhood brings into a woman's life a richness, zest and tone that nothing else ever can, I gladly grant you, but that her usefulness ends there, or that she has no other individual interests to serve I cannot so readily concede."⁵² Still presiding as general Relief Society president at age ninety-two, she demonstrated another option for older women.

Thus, the *Woman's Exponent's* answer to those who stood guard at the borders of distinct spheres of life for women and men was to announce in its editorials that this was indeed woman's era and barriers to the progress of women were slowly falling. "Let them [women]," Wells proclaimed, "have the same opportunities [as men] for an education, observation and experience in public and private for a succession of years, and then see if she is not equally endowed with man and prepared to bear her part on all general questions socially, politically, industrially and educationally as well as spiritually."⁵³ This was the goal of the woman's movement, and it laid the foundation for producing the New Woman.

The *Woman's Exponent* was a strong advocate of this new image of womanhood, far removed from the delicate, dependent qualities of the former "woman on a pedestal." Gradually fading as a popular image of women, the woman on a pedestal gave way to new social forces that unlocked women's latent capabilities and created a place for them more useful than a pedestal in the "great work of the world [which] can never be done well by one half of the human family."⁵⁴

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52. Emmeline B. Wells [Blanche Beechwood, pseud.], "Life Lessons," *Woman's Exponent* 4, no. 9 (October 1, 1875): 70.

53. Emmeline B. Wells [Blanche Beechwood, pseud.], "Action or Indifference," *Woman's Exponent* 5, no. 7 (September 1, 1876): 54.

54. "Responsibility of Women Voters," 196.