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Belva Lockwood

The “Nerviest Woman in the United States,” Who Became the Latter-day Saints’ Irrepressible Advocate and Friend

Melinda Evans

In August 1889, a number of newspapers ran an article that began with this sentence: “Belva Lockwood has long been considered the nerviest woman in the United States.”¹ At the time, Belva Lockwood had been a household name in the U.S. for many years. By 1889, she had also established herself as an outspoken advocate who unabashedly defended the legal rights of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A well-known Washington, D.C., lawyer and activist for various causes (such as women’s suffrage, gender and racial equality, Native American rights, temperance, and international peace) and the first woman ever admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court bar, Belva described herself as having a mind of “extreme practicality.”² Belva’s biographer describes her as a woman who “exuded ego,” who “reveled in public notice, and offered herself as a model of female accomplishment and independence.”³ And Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg describes Belva as “principal among way pavers,” a person whose life and work reveals that “resilience, wit, and good humor . . . can turn put-downs and slights into opportunities.”⁴

Certainly, members of the Church in nineteenth-century Utah could benefit from a friend who knew how to turn disparagement into political opportunity and who was familiar with the political workings of Washington, D.C. Between the close of the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century, Utah became a political football as national

1. “The W. C. T. U. in Paris,” *Olean Weekly Democrat*, August 8, 1889; *Wichita Eagle*, August 25, 1889, 12.



Belva Lockwood. Courtesy Library of Congress.

attention was drawn to the remote Utah Territory and the political ramifications of polygamy. George Q. Cannon, Utah's territorial delegate to Congress, said in 1879, "Mormonism has become famous, because of the practicing, by a portion of the people, of this doctrine [of plural marriage], until the whole earth resounds with the talk of 'the Polygamy of the Mormons,' as though the Mormons were half the people of the United States."⁵ Congress debated whether Utah's unusual, tight weave of religion, politics, and

economics was threatening to the nation, and every presidential election demanded that candidates at least decry the practice of polygamy if not the Latter-day Saint faith altogether.

Women's suffrage was a subject of national attention during the same years that Congress aimed to obliterate the Latter-day Saint faith. The two contentious national debates—women's suffrage and polygamy—became entwined when Utah women received the right to vote in 1870. National women's suffrage groups were then faced with the conflict of whether or not to endorse the voting rights of Utah women even though some of those women were in polygamous marriages. Certainly, not all Utah women were Latter-day Saints, and not all Latter-day Saint women were involved in polygamy. However, "the Mormon Question" was so publicly controversial that any alignment of the suffrage organizations with Latter-day Saint women could damage the progress of the national women's suffrage movement. To complicate things, congressional attacks on Utah women's suffrage were sometimes part of larger attempts to disfranchise all polygamists or all Latter-day Saints, making

5. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 20:275–76 (July 20, 1879).

it difficult for women's suffrage activists to oppose the legislation without appearing to defend the Latter-day Saints' practice of polygamy.

Amid this debate, Belva Lockwood unabashedly supported Utah women's right to vote and vigorously condemned legislative attacks on Latter-day Saints' constitutional rights.

“The Nerviest Woman in the United States”

So who was Belva Ann Bennett McNall Lockwood, “the nerviest woman in the United States”? She was a rural school teacher at age fifteen, then a farmer's wife at eighteen, a mother at nineteen, and a widow at twenty-two.⁶ She then earned a degree from Genesee College, where she was baptized a Methodist, attended law lectures by a local attorney, became devoted to missionary work and the temperance movement, and graduated with honors in 1857.⁷ From her mid-twenties until her mid-thirties, Belva taught school as a single mother in western New York, ruffling feathers when she insisted on including calisthenics, nature walks, ice skating, and public speaking in girls' curricula, becoming friends with fellow teacher Susan B. Anthony in the process.⁸

When the Civil War ended, Belva moved to Washington, D.C., where she started a school but already had ambitions beyond teaching, as shown by her unsuccessful application to be a U.S. consular officer (in preparation for which she studied German, memorized the Consular Manual, and spent a summer studying international law in the basement library of the United States Supreme Court).⁹ Belva soon met and married Ezekiel Lockwood, and with him she had a second daughter, her adored “little blossom,” whom she cared for while studying legal treatises such as Blackstone's commentaries.¹⁰ In October 1869, just days before Belva turned thirty-nine, she and Ezekiel attended a law lecture at Columbian Law School, and Belva—then the mother of two daughters, one a teenager and the other a nine-month-old baby—became determined to become a lawyer.¹¹

6. Julia Hull Winner and Belva Lockwood, “Belva A. Lockwood—That Extraordinary Woman,” *New York History* 39, no. 4 (October 1958): 325–26.

7. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 7, 9.

8. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 11–13.

9. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 17–18.

10. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 23–26; Jill Norgren, *Belva Lockwood: Equal Rights Pioneer* (Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2009), 44.

11. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 40–41.

Unfortunately, studying law was not an easy thing for a woman to do in 1869. Columbian Law School rejected her request for admission, saying that she would distract the male students—a rejection that Belva eagerly publicized by talking with the local press.¹² Eventually, National University allowed Belva and a few other women to study there, but after Belva completed the two-year course, National University refused to award her a diploma.¹³ Without a diploma, she was denied admission to the D.C. bar in 1872, even after she passed an oral examination by local practitioners as well as an additional three-day oral exam rigged up after anonymous bar members opposed admitting her.¹⁴ Refusing to give up, Belva unsuccessfully attempted to take law classes at Georgetown College (which rejected her because of her sex), but she did take a few law courses at Howard University.¹⁵ The following year, Belva finally received her diploma from National University after writing twice to the newly elected President Ulysses S. Grant (the ultimate head of the school), and she was finally able to join the D.C. bar and develop her law practice.¹⁶

Then two things happened that propelled Belva's national fame. First, between 1874 and 1879, Belva fought to become the first woman admitted to the bar of the United States Supreme Court. In 1874, after being denied admission to the bar of the U.S. Court of Claims because she was a woman, Belva wrote a petition and legal brief that Congressman Benjamin Butler worked into a bill, with language providing that no woman otherwise qualified could be barred from practicing before any U.S. court on account of sex.¹⁷ That bill failed, and in 1876, the Supreme Court ruled that it would not admit her to its bar unless such legislation were passed requiring the court to admit women.¹⁸ Accordingly, Belva (while still running a busy legal practice) returned to lobbying Congress

12. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 41–42.

13. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 43.

14. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 44.

15. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 49.

16. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 50–51. In Belva's typical fashion, she preferred to bury the hatchet rather than carry a grudge, and when the speaker fell ill for the 1874 commencement at Columbian Law School (the first school to reject her as a student), Belva took the opportunity to fill in and was reported as one of the "lights of the law" to "grace the occasion." See "Local Items," *The Capital*, June 7, 1874, 1.

17. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 72.

18. Supreme Court of the United States, "Minutes," November 6, 1876, quoted in Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 73.

in 1877 and 1878, during which time she also faced significant personal heartbreak when her husband and father died weeks apart.¹⁹

As Belva lobbied Congress, one senator emerged as her nemesis opposing the bill: Senator George F. Edmunds of Vermont. Belva reportedly said, “I know I shall ‘pass’ if I can win his support,” consistent with the newspaper report that “not a solitary measure passes the Senate that is not licked into shape by the insinuating tongue and all-prevailing mind of vigilant Senator Edmunds.”²⁰ Senator Edmunds led the debate against the bill in the Senate, but he also made things personal by speaking out against Belva herself in the press, construing his opposition as a vote “against Mrs. Lockwood” and saying that he would oppose the bill not because Belva was a woman but because “I think her a very poor lawyer!”²¹ Despite Senator Edmunds’s opposition, the bill passed and was signed into law on February 15, 1879.²² On the first day that the Supreme Court reconvened, Belva appeared to again be recommended for admission. The press covered the event as front-page news, waiting with Belva for hours as the court read legal opinions (“the almost endless grind of decisions”) and then accepted ten male applicants to the bar before finally indicating to Belva to stand.²³ As she stood before the court, there was “a bating of breath and craning of necks” until Belva was presented by her sponsoring attorney, took the oath, kissed the Bible, and became the first woman to sign her name as a member of the bar of the Supreme Court of the United States.²⁴ Immediate cheers erupted, prompting the marshal of the court to call for order.²⁵

The second event that solidified Belva’s fame came in 1884, when she became the presidential nominee of the Equal Rights Party in the 1884 election. Her candidacy was instantly front-page news; in Belva’s words, “The secret was out and next morning I was famous.”²⁶ The *Evening*

19. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 75.

20. “Edmunds in the Senate,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, April 23, 1880, 2.

21. “Edmunds in the Senate,” 2.

22. 20 U.S. Stat. 292 (1897).

23. “Mrs. Lockwood’s Victory,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 1879, 1.

24. “Mrs. Lockwood’s Victory,” 1.

25. “Mrs. Lockwood’s Victory,” 1. Within the year, Belva returned to the Supreme Court to sponsor the admission of Samuel Lowry of Alabama, the first Southern Black man (and only the fourth Black man ever) to be admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court. See Winner and Lockwood, “Belva A. Lockwood—That Extraordinary Woman,” 334; “The Equality of To-Da,” *Decatur Daily Republican*, February 6, 1880, 1.

26. Belva A. Lockwood, “How I Ran for the Presidency,” *National Magazine* 17, no. 6 (March 1903): 732.

Star in Washington, D.C., reprinted her letter accepting the nomination, which discussed some of her views on the return of land and payment of debts to Native Americans, the reformation of the federal pension office, expansion of international trade, women's suffrage, and the appointment of women as district attorneys, judges, and marshals.²⁷ Her image quickly appeared on the covers and in the pages of mass-circulation magazines such as *Puck*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated*.²⁸ Belva traveled across the country giving stump speeches and interviews, the first woman to pursue a full-fledged presidential campaign, and while she (like the male presidential candidates) experienced some degree of mockery, she was for the most part treated with respect in person and in the press and was able to promote the platform of her party.²⁹ Although she lacked a war chest comparable to those that financed the main candidates for the Republicans and Democrats, she was able to finance her campaign by charging admission to her public lectures.³⁰ Belva's candidacy threw a light on the fact that even though women could not vote, they did have diverse political opinions and a desire to participate in government. As Belva herself put it, "I cannot vote, but I can be voted for."³¹

Belva's Early Support of Utah Women at the NWSA

When Utah women were the first in the United States to use their elective franchise on February 14, 1870, many Easterners—including activist groups to which Belva Lockwood belonged—expected Utah women to use their newly gained voting rights to extinguish The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or at least the practice of plural marriage. For instance, just one month earlier, in January 1870, the NWSA had resolved that securing the vote for Utah women was the most reliable

27. "A Women's Candidate for President," *Evening Star*, September 4, 1884, 1. From the start of her candidacy, Belva emphasized that she aimed to represent all Americans and that she had been nominated not by a women's suffrage association but by the Equal Rights Party, which represented men as well as women. See "For Belva and Reform," *Evening Star*, September 17, 1884, 1.

28. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 134.

29. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 135–40.

30. "Mrs. Lockwood's Campaign Closed," *Evening Star*, Nov. 5, 1884, 4. When the campaign ended, Belva boasted to reporters that she had made enough money to pay her expenses and still had \$125 left over. She also continued to make money by giving lectures about her campaign experience. See "The World in Brief," *Daily Nevada State Journal*, October 16, 1885, 1. "Belva Lockwood was not elected President, but she has made \$2,000 lecturing on her failure."

31. "For Belva and Reform," 1.

means of ending polygamy.³² Similarly, the Universal Peace Union stated that if woman were made equal to man, “then much of the evils that are now practiced—such as free love, Mormonism, war, intemperance, and prostitution, will be in a great measure done away with, through her mighty influence.”³³ When instead Utah women did not use their franchise to immediately end plural marriage, Congress responded with various bills to “promote the purity of elections” in Utah by disfranchising Utah women and to bar the subsequent granting of women’s suffrage in any U.S. territory.³⁴

Because Belva was involved with both the NWSA and the Universal Peace Union, two groups that had promoted women’s franchise as a means of extinguishing polygamy and the Church, it was somewhat surprising when Belva signaled support for Utah women at the NWSA convention in January 1876. On the second day of the conference, Belva remarked in her annual report that “in the territories of Wyoming and Utah, woman suffrage still continues after five years’ experiment, and we have not learned that households have been broken up or that babies have ceased to be rocked.”³⁵ At the evening session later that day, Belva immediately took the floor to draw attention to events reported by the local press in that day’s papers—specifically, reports that a delegation from Utah consisting of army and federal officers had met that morning with President Ulysses S. Grant to discuss problems with prosecuting polygamy. The reports stated that President Grant had expressed support for recommendations “that the Mormon women be not allowed to vote” and that women’s suffrage in the Utah territory “be set aside.”³⁶ After reading to the convention from the newspaper, Belva stressed the need to protect women’s suffrage in Utah. She proposed a formal resolution by the NWSA to denounce congressional assaults on the “vested” right of Utah women to vote and to form a special three-woman committee tasked with lobbying Congress and protecting the fledgling suffrage rights of Utah

32. Beverly Beeton, *Women Vote in the West: The Woman Suffrage Movement, 1869–1896* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986), 27.

33. Universal Peace Union, *Bond of Peace* (July 1870).

34. Kathryn L. MacKay, comp., “Chronology of Woman Suffrage in Utah,” in *Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870–1896*, ed. Carol Cornwall Madsen (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 313; Beeton, *Women Vote*, 50.

35. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 3, 1876–1885 (Rochester: self-pub., 1886), 6, accessed May 21, 2020, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28556/28556-h/28556-h.htm>.

36. “A Delegation from Utah,” *Evening Star*, January 28, 1876, 1.

women.³⁷ The resolution was carried, and the NWSA appointed Belva to serve with Sara Spencer and Ellen Sargent on the special committee with a mandate to protect Utah women's suffrage.³⁸ Belva and the other committee members lived up to this responsibility over the next several years, testifying before Congress and meeting with the president while working cooperatively with Utah's congressional representative, George Q. Cannon, and Utah women's leaders.³⁹

It was Sara Spencer from Belva's special committee who proposed, with Belva's support, that the NWSA invite certain Utah women—Emmeline B. Wells and Zina Young Williams—to openly participate in the 1879 NWSA convention even if those women were in polygamous marriages.⁴⁰ In January 1879, the NWSA executive committee decided in a meeting at Belva's home that they would give the two Utah representatives key assignments on NWSA committees—Emmeline Wells on the resolutions committee with Belva and Zina Williams on the finance committee with Ellen Sargent.⁴¹ The committee assignments were approved at the convention the next day, where Emmeline and Zina were honored guests seated on the platform with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Stanton.⁴²

Increasing Hostility and Passage of the Edmunds Act

The NWSA's support of Latter-day Saint women in 1879 was timely because antipolygamy political forces were mobilizing among the "gentile" Utahns, who argued that women's suffrage needed to end because it was sustaining the practice of polygamy. Public opinion was growing increasingly strident against Latter-day Saints, creating tensions in national suffrage movements over whether Latter-day Saint women should still be welcome as delegates. In September 1880, Emmeline lost

37. "The Suffrage Movement," *National Republican*, January 29, 1876, 1.

38. "The Suffrage Movement," 1.

39. "From Washington," *Women's Words: An Original Review of What the Sex Is Doing* 2 (February 1878): 170; "Latest News," *Chester Daily Times*, January 21, 1879, 1; "American," *Deseret News [weekly]*, January 22, 1879, 810; Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 117; Emmeline B. Wells Diary, January 10–12, 1879, 5:26, Digital Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

40. Norgren, *Woman Who Would Be President*, 117; Carol Cornwall Madsen, *An Advocate for Women: The Public Life of Emmeline B. Wells, 1870–1920* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 157.

41. "National Woman Suffrage Association," *Evening Star*, January 9, 1879, 4.

42. Madsen, *Advocate for Women*, 163.

the guidance of Sara Spencer (the member of Belva's special NWSA committee who had helped Emmeline prepare her presentation to President Hayes) when Sara left the NWSA to form her own women's suffrage group.⁴³ At the same time, the territorial supreme court in Utah was asked to decide the constitutionality of granting the vote to Utah women in 1870. Emmeline Wells sent a telegram requesting help from Belva. There was little Belva could do in Washington to influence the pending decision of a territorial court, but Belva still sent Emmeline a telegram of friendly encouragement: "Stand by your guns. Allow no encroachment upon your liberties. No mandamus here."⁴⁴ When Emmeline contacted Belva, her goal may have been to confirm that Latter-day Saint women still had a friend in the NWSA.

The unpopularity of the Utah cause grew over the next two years as public opinion of Utah women concentrated more and more on outrageous folklore and cartoonish depictions of Latter-day Saint women as stupid, impoverished, subjugated, or immoral. At the 1882 NWSA convention, Susan B. Anthony told the Utah delegates that while she felt "no schism on the suffrage question," she disagreed with them about polygamy. And rather than let them speak at the convention, Anthony wanted them to help her hear an "Anti-Mormon account" from Utah women, and she asserted that the suffrage movement must "guard the cause by shunning even the appearance of evil" in light of the "present feverish state of society."⁴⁵

The feverish state of public opinion put pressure on politicians as well as on the suffrage movement. President Rutherford B. Hayes asked Congress to remove the rights of citizenship from Utahns, and the result was the Edmunds bill, anti-Mormon legislation put forward by Belva's recent nemesis, Senator George F. Edmunds, that would deny polygamist men the right to vote, hold office, or serve as jurors.⁴⁶ Alarmed by

43. Lola Van Wagenen, "Sister-Wives and Suffragists" (PhD diss., New York University, 1996), 314; published as Lola Van Wagenen, *Sister Wives and Suffragists: Polygamy and the Politics of Woman Suffrage, 1870-1896* (Provo, Utah: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History and BYU Studies, 2003).

44. "History of the Mormon Church," *Americana*, vol. 10 (National Americana Society, 1915), 227 n 37½. See "The Mormon Question," *Deseret Evening News*, March 29, 1884, 3.

45. Romania B. Pratt, "Woman's Suffrage Convention," *Women's Exponent* 10, no. 19 (March 1, 1882): 146.

46. Edwin Brown Firmage and Richard Collin Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 227; United States Utah Commission, *Report of the*

the Edmunds bill, George Q. Cannon approached Belva and Susan B. Anthony for help. In a letter to Church President John Taylor, Cannon reported, “Miss Anthony, who is here, and Mrs. Lockwood are ready to render all the aid in their power to fight this proposition.”⁴⁷ Petitions were assembled and delivered to Congress from Latter-day Saint men, women, and young women, all asking for a congressional delegation to visit Utah and investigate the actual circumstances there before passing the Edmunds bill.⁴⁸ Congress, however, was determined to satiate the president’s and the public’s fervor, and in 1882, Congress passed the Edmunds Act.

Belva’s Opposition to Anti-Mormon Legislation: 1883

Belva Lockwood was one of the few legal figures to openly challenge the constitutionality of the Edmunds Act and of other legislation aimed at destroying The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When the NWSA held its convention in January 1883, Latter-day Saint women from Utah did not attend, but even in their absence Belva chose to speak boldly in their defense, delivering a speech that aggressively denounced the Edmunds Act and defended the religious rights of the absent Latter-day Saints. Belva also ensured that a resolution was passed by the NWSA at its January 1883 convention to firmly oppose congressional bills intended to “deprive the women of Utah of the ballot.”⁴⁹

When it was Belva’s turn to speak at the platform, Belva focused on Utah and started with arguments that would not be controversial to the NWSA, saying for instance that suffrage reform concerned fundamental rights such as “the right to say who shall rule over us, and how we shall be taxed; the right to put down the whisky traffic with the ballot; the right to a voice in the control of our public schools.”⁵⁰ She then went on to counter arguments that giving women the vote meant that “colored women, ignorant women, and women in brothels will vote,”

Utah Commission to the Secretary of the Interior (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), 25–27.

47. George Q. Cannon, Utah Delegate, to John Taylor, President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, January 14, 1882. John Taylor Presidential Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

48. Beeton, *Women Vote*, 68.

49. “Mr. Cassidy and the Women,” *Ogden Daily Herald*, January 8, 1883, 2.

50. Belva A. Lockwood, “The Disfranchisement of the Women of Utah,” *Ogden Daily Herald*, June 9, 1883, 1; also in *Women’s Exponent* 12, no. 2 (June 15, 1883): 12.

arguing that “colored men, ignorant men, foreign men, and men who hang around whisky saloons and brothels” could already vote.⁵¹

However, the next section of her speech proceeded to denounce governmental offenses far beyond the narrow scope of refusing to let women vote. Belva condemned the Edmunds Act for using controversial religious beliefs as a pretext for disenfranchising both men and women, a political tactic she disdained as “trickery and chicanery to compass an end.”⁵² Under the Edmunds Act as implemented, even nonpolygamist women and men were deprived of their right to vote, because a five-man commission established by the Edmunds Act chose to implement an oath test at polling houses. The Edmunds Act had vacated Utah’s election offices and replaced them with five commissioners handpicked by President Chester Arthur.⁵³ Delegates from Utah had pressed for Belva Lockwood to be one of the five commissioners,⁵⁴ and Belva filed a written application, but this request went unheeded, and President Arthur filled the commission with five of his male lawyer friends.⁵⁵ The Edmunds Act commission decided, without authority, to impose an oath test prohibiting Utahns (including women) from voting if they had ever participated in polygamy or agreed with polygamy. In her speech before the 1883 NWSA convention, Belva ardently opposed the practices of the Edmunds Act commission: “The law was signed and promulgated, and the commissioners duly appointed and set to work to ferret out every unfortunate man or woman who had ever espoused that principle of the Mormon faith and to place upon each the ban of disfranchisement and disqualification for office.”⁵⁶ Specifically, she was outraged that by implementing the oath test, the Edmunds Act commissioners “did more than confine themselves to the strict letter of the law, which was in itself severe,” and instead chose to enforce their own idea of “what they believed the law ought to be.”⁵⁷ Indeed, the enforcement of the Edmunds Act was unnecessarily expansive, reaching far beyond the intended impact of the law. According to the Congressional Record of debates on

51. Lockwood, “Disfranchisement,” 1.

52. Lockwood, “Disfranchisement,” 1.

53. “The Utah Commission Nominated” and “The Utah Commission,” *Weekly Nevada State Journal*, June 24, 1882, 1.

54. Beeton, *Women Vote*, 68.

55. “After Fat Places,” *Weekly Nevada State Journal*, June 17, 1882, 1.

56. Lockwood, “Disfranchisement,” 1.

57. Lockwood, “Disfranchisement,” 1.

the Edmunds bill, there were an estimated 2,500 polygamists in Utah.⁵⁸ However, during the first year alone of the Utah Commission's appointment, more than 12,000 Saints were denied the right to vote.⁵⁹

Belva also criticized the Edmunds Act commission's practices because they "made the law retroactive, contrary to the spirit and the letter of the Constitution," in that the oath test disfranchised persons who had entered polygamous marriages only prior to the passage of the Edmunds Act.⁶⁰ Belva further railed against the Edmunds Act's vilification of first wives, who had done nothing illegal, and those who verified by written affidavit their repudiation of a prior polygamous marriage.⁶¹

In broad strokes, Belva's 1883 speech to the NWSA argued that the Edmunds Act was founded on a "spirit in tyranny and oppression," which always stood ready to "inflict some further torture."⁶² Her speech also made personal attacks against Senator Edmunds, her old foe, as a vengeful misogynist:

Did ever a politician—I cannot say statesman—get up so flimsy a pretext for so unjust an act? Punish innocent women for the crimes of men! Does any one of this intelligent audience believe that that was the honorable gentleman's motive? . . . In its effort to punish men, who alone had committed the offense, for the crime of bigamy and polygamy, [the Edmunds Act] wreaked its vengeance on the women. . . . [It] disfranchises the first wife of a Mormon, who of all other persons should have been considered guiltless of offence.⁶³

At other times, Belva ridiculed Edmunds by implying he was unfamiliar with basic legal precedent (echoing his prior criticisms of her proposed legislation on grounds that she was "a very poor lawyer"), arguing that he apparently threw the landmark legal treatise "'Starkie, on Evidence,' and the laws for the Pension Office quite in the shade." She further accused him of burying "Blackstonian ideas" while also proposing to "override the Old Common Law and statute law respected from time immemorial."⁶⁴

58. Congressional Record 13:1211 (1882), cited in Firmage and Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts*, 163.

59. Firmage and Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts*, 231.

60. Lockwood, "Disfranchisement," 1.

61. Lockwood, "Disfranchisement," 1.

62. Lockwood, "Disfranchisement," 1.

63. Lockwood, "Disfranchisement," 1.

64. Lockwood, "Disfranchisement," 1.

Belva struck her strongest personal blow against Senator Edmunds when she said in her 1883 NWSA speech that the Edmunds Act was not actually concerned with prohibiting plural marriage at all. Instead, it was a politically motivated campaign strategy designed to make sure that Utah, when admitted as a state, would send Republican senators to Washington, knowing that with the women of the state voting, the senators would almost certainly be Democratic:

But do any of my hearers suppose that the gist of this affair is to do away with bigamy and polygamy, and that this is a virtuous uprising of the United States Congress? The Territory of Utah was organized in 1850, with all these peculiarities of a portion of her citizens known to the Government, and not only tolerated, but winked at, and allowed to attain gigantic proportions. This present strife is a party one, and raised for political effect, and political ends. The real question at issue is, whether Utah as a State will be Democratic or Republican, and the honorable Senator [Edmunds] from Vermont is anxious to cut off Democratic votes enough to secure to this State, when ushered in, two Republican Senators for his party. He proposes to do this by cutting off the votes of the women, and at the same time indulging a narrow prejudice against the so-called Woman's Rights movement.⁶⁵

When news of the speech made it to Utah, Belva received extensive praise and gratitude from the Latter-day Saints. George Q. Cannon, who heard Belva repeat her 1883 NWSA speech in congressional hearings, wrote to Church President John Taylor that Belva “displayed considerable courage” before members of Congress, and that her courage distinguished her from other suffragists “afraid to say anything favorable” for fear of impairing their fragile cause.⁶⁶ The entirety of Belva’s speech was printed in Utah newspapers.⁶⁷ In Ogden, Utah, Belva’s 1883 NWSA speech was also read at a large conference of area Relief Societies where special guests included local judges, the mayor, and an Apostle.⁶⁸ After the speech was read by Emily S. Richards with additional praise and thanks for Belva, Apostle Franklin D. Richards praised Belva for her “sound and strictly constitutional, eminently patriotic” arguments and proposed a unanimously carried vote of “thanks and appreciation to

65. Lockwood, “Disfranchisement,” 1.

66. Cannon to Taylor, January 30, 1883, John Taylor Presidential Papers, Church History Library.

67. Lockwood, “Disfranchisement,” 1.

68. “Quarterly Conference,” *Woman's Exponent* 12, no. 2 (June 15, 1883): 12–14.

Mrs. Lockwood for her able argument in behalf of the women of Utah.”⁶⁹ Next to speak was Franklin S. Richards, general counsel for the Church, who shared his personal knowledge of Belva’s character and accomplishments in Washington and praised her for her “benevolence and heroism” as well as her “courage in speaking on so unpopular a subject before the Convention and Members of the Senate as ‘our question.’”⁷⁰

A few months after Belva’s speech at the 1883 NWSA convention, George Q. Cannon met with Belva and a group of Utah women who had traveled to Washington to oppose new Edmunds legislation that would disfranchise all Utah women.⁷¹ According to Belva, she recommended that a delegation of Latter-day Saint women accompany her while she addressed the Committee on Territories, but this plan changed when Belva took the group to confer with Susan B. Anthony, who said, “Don’t send women, but send us money.”⁷²

There was thereafter a transfer of money from the Latter-day Saints to Belva, though the facts are not fully known, and it is unclear whether the Church ever retained Belva as its counsel or paid her for any specific legal services (an accusation sometimes made to discredit the sincerity of Belva’s defense of or respect for the Latter-day Saints).⁷³ The journal of the secretary to the President notes that on February 9, 1884, Emmeline Wells and others met with President John Taylor to discuss whether five hundred dollars might be raised “to aid in maintaining the cause of Woman’s Suffrage.”⁷⁴ About a week later, there are notes of several bishops delivering twenty-five- or fifteen-dollar donations “to be used by the sisters to aid in maintaining the Woman’s rights in Washington.”⁷⁵ By the end of the month, four hundred dollars had been sent to Congressman John T. Caine “for Mrs. Belva Lockwood to aid her to work for Utah’s interest,” as recorded in the journal of Apostle Franklin D. Richards.⁷⁶ When asked in an interview, Belva strongly denied being employed by the Church: “I will say right here that I have never been employed by the Mormons. . . . I am not a paid attorney for these

69. “Quarterly Conference,” 14.

70. “Quarterly Conference,” 14.

71. “The Mormon Question,” *Deseret Evening News*, March 29, 1884, 3.

72. “Mormon Question,” 3.

73. Joan Smyth Iversen, *The Antipolygamy Controversy in U.S. Women’s Movements, 1880–1925: A Debate on the American Home* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 166.

74. Franklin D. Richards, Journal, February 9, 1884, Church History Library.

75. Richards, Journal, February 18, 1884.

76. Richards, Journal, February 27, 1884.

people.”⁷⁷ Rather, she said that she was personally compelled to oppose legislation which could lead to disfranchisement in other territories beyond Utah: “I appeared before the committee . . . only for the purpose of opposing the disfranchisement of the women of Utah, but the bill was so sweeping that it makes no mention of the women, but proposes to wipe out the whole territorial legislature of Utah and disfranchise men and women, bigamists and monogamists, Mormons and Gentiles, taking away 75,000 votes of persons who have never been convicted of any crime.”⁷⁸

Outside of Utah, Belva and the NWSA were criticized for acting “not unfriendly to polygamy,” based on Belva’s unambiguous defense of the Latter-day Saints in her 1883 NWSA speech.⁷⁹ Some contended that Utah women voted as instructed, not with their own minds, and criticized the NWSA for supporting this kind of puppet franchise for women.⁸⁰ Despite the ongoing controversy surrounding her advocacy for the rights of Utahns, Belva was undeterred and continued to advocate for the rights of the Latter-day Saints.

Belva’s Opposition to Anti-Mormon Legislation: 1884

Even though Belva and the NWSA were criticized for her pro-Utah speech at the 1883 convention, Belva again used the NWSA speaking platform to defend Utah at the 1884 convention, this time in defiance of Susan B. Anthony’s instructions to talk about specifically women’s suffrage in Utah and Wyoming.

As Belva recollected in one interview, she had in 1884 prepared to speak on women in trades and professions, but the day before the convention, Susan B. Anthony reportedly asked Belva to change her subject and urged her to instead speak about the disfranchisement of Utah and Wyoming women. This is Belva’s account, related with her usual self-confidence: “The day before the Convention met, Miss Anthony saw me and said that my subject entrenched upon the subjects of some of the other ladies, and that as I could more readily change than any of them, she desired me to take up the subject of disfranchisement of the women of Utah and Wyoming, remarking, ‘If you do not treat that subject, no one else will, as they have neither the

77. “Mormon Question,” 3.

78. “Mormon Question,” 3.

79. Beeton, *Women Vote*, 70.

80. Beeton, *Women Vote*, 70.

knowledge nor the courage.”⁸¹ All in all, however, Belva’s 1884 speech to the NWSA did not follow Susan B. Anthony’s instructions, and she touched little on the subject of disfranchisement of Utah and Wyoming women. Instead, her speech condemned harms to Latter-day Saints’ due-process rights, causing instant commotion among those who felt that the role of the NWSA was not to publicly defend the controversial religious practices of the Latter-day Saints.

In her disruptive speech, Belva made legal arguments against various proposed amendments to the Edmunds Act (which included clauses to disfranchise all women in the Utah Territory or to dissolve the Church) and warned that the proposed legislation would further trample on Utahns’ rights, comparing the workings of the Edmunds Act to the days of the Inquisition and witch hunts.⁸²

Belva again complained that the commissioners under the Edmunds Act disfranchised any person who was at the time or who ever had been involved in a plural marriage. According to Belva, some of the women who were denied the right to vote had been widowed more than twenty years.⁸³ Because the act operated as an *ex post facto* law, there was nothing these widows could do to change the fact that decades earlier they had once been married to a man who had more than one wife.

One of Belva’s most significant complaints was that the anti-Mormon legislation clashed with the Constitution by permitting illegal searches and seizures, in that federal marshals were given authority to enforce the Edmunds Act by hunting down polygamists, usually arriving at night and rarely using the front door. Commonly remembered as “the Raids,” these illegal searches and arrests became so widespread and disruptive that by 1886, nearly every Utah settlement had been raided by federal marshals.⁸⁴ Belva also complained that Utah courts often compelled women to testify against their husbands and that the proposed legislative amendments would condone this violation of established common law: “The Edmund’s amendment . . . invades the domestic relations of the people of the Territory—disrupts families, overturns the old English Common Law and all of the statute law, State or National, hitherto known to the people of this Union, in its provisions to compel

81. Belva A. Lockwood, “Mrs. Lockwood’s Speeches,” *Woman’s Exponent* 12, no. 21 (April 1, 1884): 164.

82. “The Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills,” *Deseret News*, March 26, 1884, 11.

83. “Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills,” 11.

84. Firmage and Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts*, 169.

a wife to testify against her husband.”⁸⁵ Belva also criticized the practical effect of the Edmunds Act because by imprisoning men with multiple wives, it “wreaked its vengeance on defenceless [sic] wives and mothers; took from them their sustenance and in effect bastardized their children.”⁸⁶ Under the Edmunds Act, “cohabitation” was enough to qualify for indictment, and evidence of an actual marriage was not required. Valid evidence of “cohabitation” included taking provisions to the woman, being seen watering horses at her well, or even inviting her children to their father’s birthday party.⁸⁷ Any contact that implied support for a woman and her children could merit a criminal trial, if not a conviction. In order to reduce the threat of prosecution, a man would have to abandon completely his support of and his relationship with his wife and children.

Belva then defended the Latter-day Saints generally as a “much abused and over governed people”; the bulk of her 1884 speech delves into fundamental issues of religious freedom.⁸⁸ Belva emphasized the patriotic loyalty of the Saints and their peaceful objections to the usurpation of their rights. She defended the elected territorial legislature’s sovereignty and the people’s own right to decide “how they shall marry” and “what God they shall worship, and how they shall worship Him.”⁸⁹ Belva also pointed out that the District of Columbia, like Utah, had a territorial statute outlawing polygamy, but that law was not oppressively enforced despite the “scores of men” cohabiting with two or three women even “without the sanction of that canon of the church here [in Utah]—a marriage.”⁹⁰ Directly criticizing the motives behind anti-Mormon legislation, she blatantly denounced the bills as products of “a morbid public sentiment without foundation in morality, justice or humanity, intended to oppress a peaceful, quiet, frugal people.”⁹¹ Furthermore, she aggressively asserted that “the General Government has no more right to attack the Mormon faith or to legislate with reference to it than it has to attack the Methodists or Catholics.”⁹²

85. “Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills,” 11.

86. “Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills,” 11.

87. Firmage and Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts*, 189.

88. “Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills,” 11.

89. “Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills,” 11.

90. “Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills,” 11.

91. “Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills,” 11.

92. “Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills,” 11.

Belva then went on to compare major religions of the world, indicating that even the greatest religions have grown out of initial persecution. According to Belva's statements in a later interview, this was the portion of her speech that "specially caused the commotion."⁹³ After comparing the growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with that of the early days of the Methodists, the Baptists, the Quakers, and even the Muslims, she recounted the continual persecutions against the Saints, such as the mob violence that forced them to move from New York to Ohio, to Missouri, and then to Illinois, where Joseph Smith—whom Belva referred to as a "Prophet"—was murdered. Finally, they fled to the Rocky Mountains where they could live unmolested and build a holy temple to God. "Like our Pilgrim Fathers of old," she said, the Latter-day Saints endured hardship and privation "for the purpose of enjoying religious liberty."⁹⁴ In closing, she hoped that Congress would "turn its attention to its legitimate business and let Utah alone."⁹⁵ Certainly, this was not the kind of speech typically heard at the NWSA convention, and Belva had strayed far from her assignment to discuss women's franchise in Utah and Wyoming.

When Belva closed her NWSA speech, Susan B. Anthony jumped to the platform and adamantly stated that legislation restricting religious practices was no concern for the NWSA, which would protest only legislation designed to disfranchise women exclusively, without affecting men.⁹⁶ This was met with loud applause from the audience members, who apparently saw Belva's defense of the Mormon religion as inappropriate.⁹⁷ Belva abruptly retorted with catty sarcasm that she regrettably lacked "sufficient discrimination to see the difference between injustice to men and injustice to women."⁹⁸

Belva never again spoke from the NWSA platform about "the Mormon Question." She did, however, deliver her 1884 NWSA speech in Congress, where she continued to argue against the Edmunds Act and its amendments.⁹⁹

93. Lockwood, "Mrs. Lockwood's Speeches," 164.

94. "Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills," 11.

95. "Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills," 11.

96. Van Wagenen, *Sister-Wives*, 381.

97. See Iversen, *Antipolygamy Controversy*, 166–68.

98. "Washington Convention: N.W.S.A.," *Woman's Exponent* 12, no. 20 (March 15, 1884): 156.

99. "Cullom, Hoar and Cassidy Bills," 11.

Belva's Superstar Visit to the Utah Territory: 1885

In July 1885, Belva spent ten days in Utah after her presidential campaign, speaking in three different cities and staying in the homes of prominent local leaders, including suffragists, congressmen, and Apostles. All her hosts were faithful Latter-day Saints, and by staying in their homes, she received a firsthand view of family life among the Saints.

Utah women's rights activists and political leaders unabashedly treated Belva as a superstar. Emily Richards, a prominent Utah suffragist who had met Belva in Washington, hosted "an informal reception, hurriedly arranged," in her home for the honored guest on the afternoon of her arrival.¹⁰⁰ A lengthy poem of welcome and praise was read by Lula Greene Richards (founding editor of *Woman's Exponent*), and then to heighten the spirit of adoration, Hannah T. King added an "impromptu" poem, "On meeting Mrs. Belva A. Lockwood":

Hail lady! friend of human kind,
We greet you, heart and soul and mind!
We lay bright tributes at your feet—
Your advent here we warmly greet.

Lady, accept our hand and heart,
Your name to us doth love impart;
Friend of the oppress'd—we deem you one—
Then welcome to our mountain home.¹⁰¹

Belva responded to the poems by politely stating that she had "simply done her duty in speaking in defense of the women of Utah."¹⁰² Four more "brief speeches of welcome" were made before the reception relaxed into mingling.¹⁰³

The praise showered on Belva at this reception (dramatic even by Victorian standards) was echoed in *Woman's Exponent* articles. In its initial announcement of Belva's visit, the paper had given an accurate account of her accomplishments and manner without tumbling into excessive adoration: "Mrs. Lockwood is brave, frank and generous, and deserves all the praise bestowed on her. . . . She is exceedingly sharp and clear-sighted, and abounds with interesting facts and pithy paragraphs. Her logic is plain and conclusive, and she cares very little

100. "Mrs. Lockwood's Visit," *Woman's Exponent* 14, no. 4 (July 15, 1885): 29.

101. "Mrs. Lockwood's Visit," 29.

102. "Mrs. Lockwood's Visit," 29.

103. "Mrs. Lockwood's Visit," 29.

about popular ideas or opinions, but is quite original and independent in expressing her views. . . . She has been a firm and consistent advocate for the rights of the women of Utah, and is fairly well acquainted with our question.”¹⁰⁴ In contrast, the article following Belva’s speaking engagements in Salt Lake City lavishly extended superlatives, claiming that her speech on “Social and Political Life in Washington” was without exception “the finest lecture we have ever heard given by a woman.”¹⁰⁵

Other newspaper accounts discuss in more detail the content of Belva’s lecture on Washington life, verifying that the speech was light-hearted and uncontroversial, festooned with humor and satire. For instance, she pointed out the sudden religious fervor that sprouted up in congregations where U.S. presidents rented pews.¹⁰⁶ Even better, she reported that President Cleveland had discharged President Arthur’s French cook, “and Washington society was all agog to know who would cook the President’s dinner, but it was thought by a great many that he would cook his own goose.”¹⁰⁷ With this same style of humor, she surprisingly suggested that postal efficiency would be increased if half the post offices were given to women, for then news would travel rapidly.¹⁰⁸ Despite such jabs at women, one review commented that the lecture contained many references to women’s rights and that Belva made many of her best points in reference to the political subjugation of women.¹⁰⁹

Belva’s other lecture, “Women of To-Day,” was described as a more pointed plea for women’s rights. In it, Belva recounted stories of women who had emerged as leaders in history and urged the woman of today to actively “put forth her hand and grapple the forbidden fruit of the poet and it was hers.”¹¹⁰ She further insisted that girls must be educated and trained for useful professions just as boys were. This speech, more controversial than humorous jabs at Washington society, attracted smaller audiences even with reduced ticket prices, and the audience members were mostly women.¹¹¹ The *Woman’s Exponent* article in fact chided its readers openly, criticizing especially the absence of young women

104. “Mrs. Lockwood Is Coming,” *Woman’s Exponent* 14, no. 3 (July 1, 1885): 21.

105. “Mrs. Lockwood’s Visit,” 29.

106. “Mrs. Lockwood’s Lecture,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, July 7, 1885, 8.

107. “Belva Lockwood,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 7, 1885, 4.

108. “Belva Lockwood,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 7, 1885, 4.

109. “Mrs. Lockwood’s Lecture,” *Salt Lake Herald*, July 7, 1885, 8.

110. “Belva Lockwood’s Lecture,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 11, 1885, 4.

111. “Belva Lockwood’s Lecture,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 11, 1885, 4.

in Belva's audiences: "Mrs. Lockwood is famous enough to have drawn a much larger audience, and certainly the young ladies should have come out to see and hear her. It is not only a mistake on their part, but they have missed hearing a very distinguished woman speak. Should Mrs. Lockwood ever visit Salt Lake again, we hope she may have the house well filled with young people. They are the ones who ought certainly to have heard her."¹¹²

Belva's Appeal to President Cleveland: 1885

After leaving Utah, Belva took a day off from speaking engagements to relax at a Lake Tahoe resort. There she saw reports in San Francisco and Chicago papers that military troops had been ordered to Salt Lake City to quash brewing religious violence. Having been so recently in Salt Lake City, Belva knew that no such hostility existed, nor were the Saints inclined to spark a confrontation, despite Eastern stereotypes. Federal troops had already invaded the territory once before in 1857, when President Buchanan found that vigorous anti-Mormon actions created widespread political popularity.¹¹³ To prevent a repetition of the military invasion, Belva quickly wrote to President Grover Cleveland.

In her large, rushed handwriting, Belva adamantly attested to President Cleveland that no outbreak was imminent, and she assured the president that an outbreak was "not even dreamed of by this peaceable, quiet, and rural people."¹¹⁴ Emphasizing her recent personal experience, she stressed that she was personally acquainted with the heads of the Church, that she had talked with hundreds of Latter-day Saints while in Utah, and that she had stayed in their homes. Belva testified that they were "sober, honest, industrious citizens" and further hinted that drastic military measures might bring tension rather than peace: "If they have at any time manifested any dislike to the Government under which they have been born and educated, it has been only when they have felt that the hands of the Government has [*sic*] been laid heavily upon them, and in a spirit of persecution rather than that of prosecution."¹¹⁵

112. "Mrs. Lockwood's Visit," 29.

113. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Knopf, 1979), 164–70.

114. Belva A. Lockwood to Pres. Grover Cleveland, July 23, 1885, 2, Department of the Interior, Territorial Papers of Utah, partial rough draft in John T. Caine Papers, Utah Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

115. Lockwood to Cleveland, July 23, 1885, 3.

Evidently, the notion that the Mormons were somehow rebelling grew out of a minor occurrence on the Fourth of July 1885, when some of the Saints, mourning the loss of their civil liberties under anti-Mormon legislation, flew the United States flag at half-mast. To put things in perspective, Belva reminded the president first that the choice to fly the flag at half-mast was a choice made by individuals and did not represent the Church or all Latter-day Saints. Second, she asserted that it was no more than a traditional sign of mourning, not a scheme of action.¹¹⁶

More elaborately, Belva took the opportunity to remind the president of the many reasons the Latter-day Saints had to mourn the loss of their civil rights, as the President of the Church was under police surveillance, and many of the Apostles were under indictment or imprisoned.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Belva drew the president's attention to a blatant *San Francisco Chronicle* statement that the Edmunds Act existed for the suppression of the Church, and a judge hearing a criminal Edmunds Act case had recently stated from the bench that the purpose of the prosecution was not to increase morality but to "blot out the Mormon Religion." Belva emphatically argued with sharp, underlined words that "the suppression of a religion is opposed not only to the spirit but to the express wording of the Constitution."¹¹⁸

Belva emphasized that she was writing without the knowledge of or approval from any church but was prompted by her own feelings, saying, "[I] write from my own personal knowledge of their feelings and condition; and with a firm impression not only that manifest injustice has been done them in many instances, but that a deep rooted prejudice is being fomented against them that bodes no good either to the Government or to them."¹¹⁹ Fortunately, President Cleveland was persuaded, whether by Belva or by others, and there was not a second military invasion of Utah Territory.

When Belva mailed the letter, she forwarded the rough draft to Congressman John T. Caine, who had hosted her during part of her stay in Utah, and closed the letter with friendly regards to Caine, his family, and "all inquiring friends," documenting the friendships Belva had formed with male and female leaders in Utah.¹²⁰

116. Lockwood to Cleveland, July 23, 1885, 4.

117. Lockwood to Cleveland, July 23, 1885, 6.

118. Lockwood to Cleveland, July 23, 1885, 6–7.

119. Lockwood to Cleveland, July 23, 1885, 8.

120. Belva A. Lockwood to John T. Caine, July 23, 1885, John T. Caine Papers.

Belva's Advice to and Thanks from Utah: 1886

In February 1886, Belva again wrote to her friend John T. Caine, saying, "I am perpetually haunted by this Mormon question, and like Banquo's ghost it will not down."¹²¹ She urged Congressman Caine to push once more for Utah statehood, which could secure women's suffrage by creating an opportunity to write it into the state constitution. Belva emphatically assured Caine that the day was prime to make a bold move and urged him, "Demand for the people of Utah their rights as citizens of the Republic and do not allow yourself, or the people of that Territory to be cowed or browbeaten."¹²²

Belva could see that if Utah did not soon become a state, Congress would further erode the civil rights of Utahns and attack the Church. Public opinion increasingly supported revoking civil rights as punishment for polygamy. Even the NWSA approved a resolution at its 1886 convention supporting disfranchisement as a penalty for the crime of polygamy.¹²³ If Utah wanted to achieve statehood, Belva warned Congressman Caine, the Church would have to abandon the practice of plural marriage: "The polygamy part must be relinquished, and it is better that that portion should be conceded before your people, men and women, are disfranchised, and the Church despoiled."¹²⁴ Curiously, Belva ended her letter to John T. Caine with the words, "Burn this," a reminder of the intense unpopularity of her assistance to the abused Mormons.¹²⁵

Weeks later, a "Mass Meeting" of Latter-day Saint women in Salt Lake City singled out Belva and a handful of U.S. senators for public thanks because they, "in the face of almost overwhelming prejudice," had "defended the constitutional rights of the people of Utah."¹²⁶ The

121. Belva A. Lockwood to John T. Caine, February 14, 1886, John T. Caine Papers.

122. Lockwood to Caine, February 14, 1886.

123. Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-ninth Congress, First Session (Government Printing Office, 1886), 17:3260; "Report of Executive Sessions of the National Convention," *Woman's Tribune* 3, no. 6 (Apr 1886): 2.

124. Lockwood to Caine, February 14, 1886.

125. Lockwood to Caine, February 14, 1886.

126. "Mormon" Women's Protest: *An Appeal for Freedom, Justice And Equal Rights; the Ladies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Protest against the Tyranny and Indecency of Federal Officials in Utah, and against Their Own Disfranchisement without Cause; Full Account of Proceedings at the Great Mass Meeting, Held in the Theatre; Salt Lake City Utah; Saturday, March 6, 1886* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Co., 1886), 19. See also Jill Mulvay Derr and others, eds., *The First Fifty Years Of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016), 524.

huge gathering, complete with orchestra and Tabernacle Choir, was a “protest against the indignities and insults heaped upon the wives and daughters of ‘Mormons’ in the District Courts, and also against the proposed disfranchisement of those of their sex who are innocent of breaking any law.”¹²⁷ Belva was also specifically praised in a speech by Dr. Romania Pratt, who said, “All honor be given by the Latter-day Saints . . . to Mrs. Belva A. Lockwood, who has had the moral courage to speak the truth as she found it when with us, and in a most able manner has raised her voice to stay the flood of prejudice which is surging over our people.”¹²⁸

Belva Attempts to Enforce the Edmunds Act in Washington: 1887

In the summer of 1887, Belva began an interesting cooperation with Church leaders to try to turn public opinion against the Edmunds Act by instigating prosecutions under the act in Washington, D.C., against citizens who were not Latter-day Saints. Belva’s goal was to arouse in Washington the same indignation felt in Utah when the unfair law was applied, and also to point out that the polygamist Mormons prosecuted for cohabitation actually lived a higher morality than men in other territories who abandoned their families to live with another woman.

To implement the plan, Belva sought out potential cases and then petitioned the district attorney to pursue the prosecution. Belva worked directly with New York lawyer John W. Young, a counsel to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. In August 1887, the plan looked promising. John Young wrote to the First Presidency, saying, “I think she will be able to make things rather interesting for some people there, as she is fearless and capable.”¹²⁹

The plan proved to be more difficult than anticipated. On September 6, 1887, Belva wrote to John Young saying that the work was moving ahead but that she had not yet found as many cases as she had hoped. Belva was ruthless about finding cases, recommending prosecutions in which she knew the wife did not wish to testify against the husband and asking for compulsory process under the Edmunds Act to compel the

127. “Mormon” *Women’s Protest*, iii.

128. “Mormon” *Women’s Protest*, 29.

129. John W. Young to Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph Fielding Smith, August 20, 1887, John W. Young Papers, Church History Library.

wife to testify.¹³⁰ She also scouted potential defendants by asking female physicians and prison matrons to disclose information they might be privy to about questionable family arrangements.¹³¹ On September 9, 1887, Belva wrote to Young again, promising that when the application of the law eventually struck the most sensitive places, they would hear an uproar.¹³²

The uproar never happened. The cases Belva found did not involve prominent figures and failed to excite local interest. After a brief series of letters between Belva and John Young in August and September 1887, there was no further sign of efforts to gain public support by applying the Edmunds Act in other territories.

Belva's Speech on the Mormon Question: 1888

After trying to see the Edmunds Act enforced in Washington, Belva assisted the Latter-day Saints in 1888 with a highly favorable lecture titled "The Mormon Question" aimed at correcting public misconceptions and bolstering Utah's bid for statehood. Belva asserted that no more than two percent of Mormons ever practiced polygamy, and she implied (incorrectly) that "vigorous execution of the Edmunds law" had entirely suppressed polygamy.¹³³ She also spoke directly against ridiculous stereotypes, clarifying that Mormons were chaste, industrious, intelligent, and progressive, providing education for all children and employment for all workers. Reciting many of the arguments she raised before the NWSA, Belva criticized the disfranchisement of Utah women and the unfair application of the Edmunds Act, including Congress's unconstitutional intent to apply the act against only Latter-day Saints. She additionally criticized the government for confiscating Church property, forcing the Saints to pay rent for the privilege of worshiping in the buildings they had themselves constructed.¹³⁴ Finally, Belva contended that Utah's proposed state constitution would forbid entry into polygamous marriages.

130. Belva A. Lockwood to John W. Young, September 6, 1887, John W. Young Papers.

131. Belva A. Lockwood to John W. Young, September 26, 1887. John W. Young Papers.

132. Belva A. Lockwood to John W. Young, September 9, 1887. John W. Young Papers.

133. "Belva A. Lockwood Has a Good Word for the 'Mormons,'" *Deseret Evening News*, February 21, 1888, 2.

134. "Lockwood Has a Good Word for the 'Mormons,'" 2.

Overall, the speech gave the impression that complaints about those “polygamous Mormons” were out of date and that there was no reason to deny Utah statehood—or *almost* no reason. True to her fundamental interest in women’s rights, Belva ended by arguing that the only reason to deny Utah admission into the Union as a state was that it had not explicitly granted women the franchise in the proposed constitution.¹³⁵

In February 1888, she delivered the “Mormon Question” speech in Washington, and the speech was also reproduced in approximately fifty leading newspapers.¹³⁶ Franklin S. Richards shared a copy of Belva’s speech with Wilford Woodruff and George Q. Cannon, noting that the speech apparently ran without any negative editorial commentary, even from newspapers usually bitter toward the Mormons.¹³⁷ There were, however, a few newspapers that ran a short, two-sentence criticism of Lockwood’s speech: “Belva Lockwood expects to make a small fortune from her lectures in defense of Mormonism. She certainly has the field to herself.”¹³⁸ Apparently, those news editors had not learned that the unpopularity of a cause could not deter Belva Lockwood’s enthusiasm, nor was she afraid of following a course that was uniquely her own.

Conclusion

In an 1888 letter to Wilford Woodruff, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Franklin S. Richards wrote that Belva Lockwood repeated the “Mormon Question” speech whenever an opportunity arose. Her visit to Utah had significantly reinforced and energized her willingness to speak out in favor of the abused pioneers because she had seen for herself that they led honorable lives.

Brother Richards also conveyed to Elder Woodruff Belva’s story of a chance meeting she had had in the Catskill Mountains in New York with an old couple who had once been neighbors of Joseph Smith. She heard their report that Joseph was of excellent character, known for his “honesty, industry, sobriety, [and] truthfulness.” Their testimony

135. “Lockwood Has a Good Word for the ‘Mormons,’” 2.

136. Franklin S. Richards to Wilford Woodruff and George Q. Cannon, February 28, 1888, Franklin S. Richards Correspondence, Utah State Historical Society.

137. Richards to Woodruff and Cannon, February 28, 1888.

138. *Atchison Daily Globe*, February 4, 1888, 5; *Cherryvale Globe and Torch*, February 10, 1888, 1; *Brenham Weekly Banner*, February 16, 1888, 1.

of his moral goodness “strengthened and emboldened” Belva in her determination to help the faithful Latter-day Saints retain their right to the blessings of fair government, and she often repeated the story of their favorable report.¹³⁹

Ultimately, Belva’s recommendation that Mormons relinquish polygamy to earn Utah statehood became the course the territory followed. In 1890, the Church issued a public manifesto that officially instructed against any new plural marriages. Congress debated for years about the sincerity of the manifesto, and in 1896, Utah finally became a state. Further according with Belva’s wisdom, the new state’s constitution specifically gave women the right to vote, hold office, and enjoy all political and civil rights enjoyed by male citizens.

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139. Richards to Woodruff and Cannon, February 28, 1888.