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A Treasure Trove of Research Resources about Historical Latter-day Saint Women

Connie Lamb

Even considering the fine books and articles on the history of Latter-day Saint women that have been written in the last fifty years, there are still innumerable questions about early Utah women to be explored. For example, how did the votes of women in territorial Utah from 1870 on affect local and territorial elections? Who were the first female politicians in Utah, and what did they accomplish? In what ways were Latter-day Saint women involved in the national suffrage movement in the United States? How did Kanab, Utah, come to have an entire slate of female city officials, and what did they achieve during their service? In addition, there are questions specifically related to the Relief Society: What did the sisters achieve in their work of saving wheat, raising silkworms and spinning silk, and training midwives? Furthermore, beyond a purely academic or historical interest, individuals yearn to know more about the lives and experiences of their own foremothers, actual and spiritual.

There are many resources that can provide insights into these and other questions about historical Latter-day Saint women. Some materials are focused on Mormon studies, but others are much broader. All the resources described in this article are open access, which means they can be searched for free anytime from anywhere. Some resources provide just references, while others include the full text of various documents. This article will be a journey through the world of libraries, archives, and publications of all types.

HISTORY

As soon as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was established, texts about the Church and its members began to appear, written from both inside and outside the fold, and many have been preserved in the ensuing 190 years. A tool used by librarians prior to the World Wide Web was the published bibliography—a compiled list of materials on a specific topic. This was the only way researchers knew where books and archives were housed.

In 1960, William V. Nash wrote a thesis titled “Library Resources for the Study of Mormons and Mormonism.”¹ He searched out libraries with large collections about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, then he traveled to the institutions or talked to the directors on the telephone to identify specific holdings. He found these repositories mainly where Latter-day Saints had historically settled—New York, Missouri, Illinois, Utah, Arizona, California, and more. Research libraries that collect Americana were on his list, including public libraries, university libraries, and historical societies. Major repositories include the Library of Congress, the New York City Public Library, Harvard, Yale, Brigham Young University, the Utah Historical Society, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Library, the Huntington Library, and the University of California, Berkeley. At that time, seventy years ago, patrons had to visit the libraries in person to use the collections, especially manuscripts and archival material. How things have changed!

Today, much of this material has been digitized so it is available online, and there are online catalogs, finding aids, and other guides that show what is located where. Many items have been digitized but certainly not all, so for some things the researcher must still travel to a physical location to use them. However, technology has had a tremendous impact on Mormon studies by making research materials more easily available.

RESEARCH TOOLS

Doing research requires posing an actual question that provides a reasonable topic, then determining the terminology to use. One way to think about a research strategy is by using these three steps: I am researching [topic] because I want to find out [issue or question] in order

1. William V. Nash, “Library Resources for the Study of Mormons and Mormonism” (MLS thesis, University of Illinois, 1960).

to [application or purpose]. For example, I am researching women's suffrage because I want to find out about Utah's activities in that realm in order to learn if any of my female ancestors were involved. Alternatively, a simpler way may just be asking "what" and "why" questions followed by "where" (to look). Answering either set of three prompts helps narrow the topic and decide keywords. Thinking of which concepts you want to bring together and what terms to use for searching are basic elements of research. Most online resources can be searched by keyword, but each resource varies as to what fields are searchable—it might be just the title or the title and the abstract or maybe the full text, so it is important to think about the terms an author may use. Always consider synonyms. Examples for "woman suffrage" might be "female voting rights" or "woman's enfranchisement." Note that in the nineteenth century, it was common to use the singular "woman" rather than "women," which is the current practice. After searching a few places, the researcher may need to narrow or broaden the search depending on the number of hits and how much information is needed.

The rest of this article will identify and describe research tools valuable to both amateur and professional researchers of Mormon studies. These resources include books, newspapers, websites, and archives. Most of them can be accessed through the BYU library catalog at <http://lib.byu.edu>. The researcher types the name of the resource in the search box, and a list of "hits" will appear. When the results appear, note the call number or click on the link for online items. Be sure to scroll down to find all options, including print and electronic, as there may be more than one record for an item. Several of these resources have "Mormon" in the title, which is the long-established term used among scholars and which libraries use for cataloging.

Books

Books are excellent sources to examine in the early stages of a research project because they can provide background information about a subject and show a researcher what questions have already been answered by earlier studies. Also, books usually have bibliographies that may direct the researcher to sources she or he was not previously familiar with.

For information about historic Latter-day Saint women, several books have been digitized, including Edward W. Tullidge's *Women of Mormondom* (1877),² the *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia* (about 1900),

2. Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (1877; repr., Salt Lake City: n.p., 1975).

and the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992). Books that are not digitized but are useful include *Pioneer Women of Faith and Fortitude*—the seven series published by the Daughters of Utah Pioneers that cover both individuals and topics—and county histories for many states, including Utah. In recent years, a plethora of books and articles have been written about Latter-day Saint women, including individual biographies, historical studies, collections of stories, and narratives about a variety of subjects related to women. Three histories of the Relief Society contain information on how that organization was involved in suffrage, as part of the greater story of Relief Society: *A Centenary of Relief Society, 1842–1942*, published by the General Board of Relief Society; *History of Relief Society, 1842–1966*, also published by the General Board; and *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society*, published by Deseret Book in 1992 for the Relief Society’s sesquicentennial anniversary.³

Books can be located through searching a library’s main catalog by title or author; however, it is not necessary to have a specific identifier because many books can be found in the catalog by using subject terms or keywords. For women’s suffrage and women’s history in Utah, several important libraries to search include the BYU Harold B. Lee Library (<https://lib.byu.edu>), the University of Utah J. Willard Marriott Library (<https://lib.utah.edu>), and the LDS Church History Library (<https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/section/library?lang=eng>). Other universities and colleges in Utah also have books about the Church of Jesus Christ, family and local histories, and other such material. The libraries mentioned by Nash now have online catalogs that can be searched for Mormon studies material, including books and some archival items. If a specific book (or article) is unavailable in a local library, it can be ordered through the Interlibrary Loan (ILL) system. Persons affiliated with an institution of higher education can request a copy of a book through their library ILL department, usually at no cost. Material can also be requested through public libraries, but there may be a charge for the service. Books are sent from one library to another through the regular mail, and articles via email.

Newspapers

Newspapers are a wonderful source of local and national history. The Utah Digital Newspapers project, hosted at the University of Utah

3. Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenback Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

library, is a freely available database that is being added to regularly and includes over 150 papers, both statewide and local, published as early as 1850. It can be accessed through the University of Utah library website at <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/search> or through the BYU library catalog. One of the papers it includes is the *Woman's Exponent*, the twice-monthly newspaper published 1872–1914 in Salt Lake City by and for Latter-day Saint women. It is an extremely valuable research source. All of the newspapers included in the Utah Digital Newspapers database are easy to search. For example, entering a woman's name will result in a list of all the individual pages of the paper on which that name appears; when one opens the page, the name is highlighted to be easily located.

A second specialized database is the 19th Century Mormon Article Newspaper Index (<https://lib.byu.edu/collections/19th-century-mormon-article-newspaper-index/>), created at BYU, which includes 5,800 newspaper articles dealing with Latter-day Saints or with the territory or state of Utah between 1831 and 1900 and can be searched for free through BYU. Additionally, the Daughters of Utah Pioneers website (http://isdup.org/dyn_page.php?pageID=5) provides links to newspapers and other resources for researching historic Latter-day Saint women. Other newspaper databases can be found by searching the internet, some free and others subscription based.

Databases and Websites

Like the databases described above, several other open-access databases and websites are particularly useful for doing research about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, suffrage, the history of Utah and Utah women, and other related topics. An important resource is “Studies in Mormon History” (<https://smh.lib.byu.edu/>), a database that can be accessed and searched through the BYU library catalog free of charge. This database includes bibliographic citations to articles, books, theses, and PhD dissertations dealing with the history of the Church, ranging from the time of its inception in 1830 to the present. Since it is intended as a guide to responsible historical scholarship, it does not, for the most part, include highly pejorative works, though it does include controversial works that still have historical substance or interest. The print version of the database is one volume divided into two sections: the first an alphabetical listing of the last names of authors, and the second an alphabetical listing by subject. In the online database, these two lists are merged, so a search can be made by author's name or by subject. Searching for “suffrage” in this database, for example, results in 120 hits.

In addition to “Studies in Mormon History,” there is another online bibliography titled “A Mormon Bibliography, 1830–1930” (<https://lib.byu.edu/collections/mormon-bibliography/about/>). As the title indicates, this resource covers the first one hundred years of the Church of Jesus Christ and includes items about women’s suffrage and voting. This site is an electronic version of the printed volume *A Mormon Bibliography, 1830–1930*.⁴ This resource overlaps some with “Studies in Mormon History,” but it includes more ephemeral items. It provides citation information for the material with only a few hyperlinks to actual items. The database contains over 14,500 bibliographic records for entries found in the printed bibliography. These records itemize print publications of many varieties, all of which relate in some way to the restored Church during its first century.

The “Mormons and Their Neighbors” database is an index to over 100,000 biographical sketches published in 236 individual books.⁵ This is only an index, however, so the original sources must be consulted to discover what information is given about the person. A sampling of the sources indexed includes volumes by the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, *Marriages in the Nauvoo Region, 1839–1845* (a searchable database hosted by [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)), various county and town histories, and Davis Bitton’s *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies*. These sketches’ subjects include persons living between 1820 and 1981 in northern Mexico, New Mexico, Arizona, Southern California, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, and southwestern Canada. A database specific to Mormon women is the “Mormon Women’s Studies Resource” (<https://mormonwomen.lib.byu.edu/>) that is a portal to information and research about women in Mormon culture and in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It contains lists and links to organizations, institutions, databases, websites and other resources. It also contains a bibliography that is updated periodically. This resource can be accessed through the internet.

Another portal to all things Mormon is the “Mormon Studies Resources” website (<https://lib.byu.edu/collections/mormon-studies-resources/>). This guide can be used to search for material about Latter-day Saint theology, history, culture, and people. It is organized mainly by subject categories such as art, music, doctrine, nationality, and women,

4. Chad J. Flake and Larry W. Draper, *A Mormon Bibliography, 1830–1930: Books, Pamphlets, Periodicals, and Broad­sides Relating to the First Century of Mormonism*, 2 vols., 2d ed, rev. ed. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004).

5. This database can be accessed at <https://lib.byu.edu/collections/mormons-and-their-neighbors/>.

but it also includes categories for genres like diaries, manuscripts, dissertations, photographs, and so forth. The links connect to databases, websites, and individual works that can be text-searched for relevant material.

The database “Theses on Mormonism” includes references to more than 650 theses written at Brigham Young University from 1932 to 2005. This database is not indexed by subject; a researcher would need to browse the titles for items relevant to a particular research project. Another resource for this type of material is Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD), which can be accessed from the home page of the BYU library website. It covers all subjects from the 1950s to the present. Searching the term “Mormon” results in over 3,000 hits, and “women’s suffrage” provides about 390 hits. BYU also maintains an institutional repository called ScholarsArchive that houses faculty publications, student works, journals, and data sets on all subjects. Searching “Mormon” in this database provides 6,770 hits, and “women’s suffrage” gives 166 hits.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sponsors two websites that include considerable material on women. One is the Church Historian’s Press website (<http://www.churchhistorianspress.org>), which includes the books *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women’s History* and *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women* in addition to some of the diaries of Emmeline B. Wells. The other is the Joseph Smith Papers website (<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>), which contains relevant material under the heading “Joseph Smith and the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo.” The Relief Society minute books for 1842 are available online along with other Relief Society–related documents.

One additional resource is the Digital Public Library of America, which is not sponsored by the Church or BYU but includes many items related to the Church and women. The Digital Public Library of America brings together the riches of America’s libraries, archives, and museums and makes them freely available to the world; it can be accessed by entering its name in Google or any other robust search engine. This website includes almost 37 million items and gives researchers access to photographs, books, maps, news footage, oral histories, personal letters, museum objects, artwork, government documents, and more, in the original format. Searching is straightforward. A search of “suffrage Utah” results in 100 hits, including a *New York Tribune* announcement of the February 12, 1870, passage of the bill that granted suffrage to the women of Utah, and a booklet of Orson F. Whitney’s 1895 speeches in support of women’s suffrage before the Utah Constitutional Convention.

Archives and Manuscripts

Large research libraries hold extensive collections of manuscripts (unpublished documents such as diaries, journals, letters, scrapbooks, biographies, autobiographies, and other rare original documents). These materials are stored in the special collections section of a library and are listed in the main library catalog. Some collections have been digitized, but most are available only at the particular library that holds them. Often a finding aid is digitized so researchers can see what is in the collection before traveling to the library. At BYU, a researcher does not need an appointment but can use special collections anytime it is open. Photographs are stored in a cold vault, and it takes twenty-four hours after the request is submitted to view them, but most material can be pulled very quickly. Other libraries have their own guidelines for usage, so it is essential to check ahead of time whether an appointment is required. The BYU library has collected many women's life stories and other materials that document the lives, roles, and accomplishments of women in Utah, Mormonism, and the West.

The Guide to Women's Manuscript Collections (<https://guides.lib.byu.edu/womensmanuscripts>) facilitates access to over six hundred women's manuscript collections, all of which are housed in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections section on the first level of the BYU library. The collections range from small to extensive and include such items as biographies, autobiographies, diaries, letters, papers, and more. The Guide provides a short biographical sketch of each woman and an abstract that gives a description and content summary of her collection. It can be browsed by name or searched by name or topic. New entries are added on a regular basis. Searching "suffrage" and "vote" results in twenty hits, including entries on the Beaver County Woman Suffrage Association. Most of this material is not digitized, so it must be viewed in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections reading room.

LDS Women's Publications

BYU has digitized three of the early Latter-day Saint women's periodicals: *Woman's Exponent* (1872–1914) (also digitized in the Utah Digital Newspapers collection, described above), *Young Woman's Journal* (1889–1929), and the *Relief Society Magazine* (1914–1970), each of which can be searched for free with the full text available. As noted above, during the 1800s, the singular form "woman" was commonly employed, so using that term in searching will produce more results for material published

in that era than “women” will. An example is the *Woman’s Exponent*, which has considerable content about suffrage (597 hits) and Utah’s involvement in women’s right to vote. There are also 240 references to politics. From 1879 to 1896, the masthead of the *Woman’s Exponent* read “The Rights of the Women of Zion and the Rights of the Women of all Nations,” showing its support for voting and other rights for women. The *Relief Society Magazine* is a great source for the history, activities, and interests of Relief Society members during the early to mid-twentieth century. It also includes information about individuals and Relief Societies around the world. It describes the life, culture, and faith of LDS women during the time of its publication. The BYU library has created an index to the *Relief Society Magazine* that includes the major standard categories of material: lessons, articles, fiction, poetry, plays, editorials, recipes, notes from the field (ward and stake Relief Society information), happenings (about individuals), images, and advertisements. Searching the word “suffrage” results in 45 hits. The index includes links to the full text of the magazine; it can also be browsed by year.

CONCLUSION

Now more than ever before, it is possible for any individual with an interest in the history of women in the Church or of a particular woman to find research material regarding whatever she or he seeks to learn. Anyone who sits down at a computer with this article in hand can locate a treasure trove of material. You may be surprised at the gems you find. However, there is so much that hasn’t yet been written—stories of the lives of ancestors, the work of particular Relief Societies or other groups of historic Latter-day Saint women, and the achievements of women in so many fields. This gap creates real opportunities for future contributions to our understanding of our sisters from previous generations. We have only to begin.

Connie Lamb is a senior librarian at the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, with specialties in anthropology, Middle East studies, African studies, and women’s studies. She is also the adjunct curator for women’s manuscript collections in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at the BYU Library. She has master’s degrees in library science, Middle East studies, and cultural anthropology, and an MPhil in anthropology. Connie is co-editor of two book-length bibliographies, has published several book reviews and articles on a variety of topics, and has developed four databases for library research. Connie is active in both library and subject-oriented professional organizations and has given presentations and papers at numerous association meetings.