Relief Society Grain Storage Program, 1876-1940

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RELIEF SOCIETY GRAIN STORAGE PROGRAM
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INTRODUCTION

During the 1930's, the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints established the welfare program to help members of the Church overcome the economic distresses of the Great Depression. Since then, they have continued to stress the importance of being ready to meet shortages that occur during famines, wars and natural disasters. To help the Saints prepare for these difficulties, the Mormon leaders have asked the Saints to set aside a year supply of food and other commodities and have stored, through the Welfare Program, additional wheat in large elevators in Salt Lake City and Kaysville, Utah.

Although the present system did not start until the Depression of the 1930's, the Church has always been aware of the need to be ready to meet disasters that might occur unexpectedly. Shortly after the organization of the Church, Joseph Smith told the Saints, "If ye are prepared, ye shall not fear."¹ The Mormon prophets since President Smith have also warned the Saints to be ready to meet these problems and have established programs to help the members prepare for them.

In 1876, Brigham Young started such a program when he asked the members of the Women's Relief Society to store grain. The sisters accepted the responsibility and throughout the rest of the nineteenth century...

¹The Doctrine and Covenants (hereinafter cited as D. & C.) 38:30.
and the early part of the twentieth century, they maintained a storage program. During this period, they had many of the same duties for saving grain that the Welfare Committee has today.

This thesis will describe and interpret the development of this Relief Society wheat storage program from its inception in 1876 to 1940 when the program was transferred to the General Church Welfare Committee. Emphasis will be placed on the sisters' attempts to store grain and the problems they encountered. The thesis will also discuss the effects of outside forces on the program and the different ways the sisters used the grain. The final chapter will deal with the relationship between the movement and the history of the Relief Society and its parent organization, the Mormon church.
CHAPTER I
MORMON GRAIN STORAGE PROGRAMS

History

When Joseph Smith organized the Mormon church in 1830, he announced the beginning of the last dispensation of time before Christ would return to usher in the Millennium and to rule the earth. He said that during this last period before the Savior came, the gospel would be spread throughout the world, the righteous would be gathered and natural disasters and "wars and rumors of wars" would cover the earth.\(^1\) Many of the Saints believed these days of destruction would come during their generation and that they needed to be prepared to weather the troubled times.

To be ready for these problems during the last days, the leaders of the Church encouraged the Mormon people to become economically independent of "Babylon" so they would not have to rely on the rest of the world for food and the other necessities of life. This need to be separated from the rest of mankind was reinforced when the Saints established temporary homes in the Great Basin while they waited for the call to return to Jackson County, Missouri. In this home, isolated from the rest of the world, the leaders asked the

\(^1\)D. & C., 45:26.
members "to be self-sustaining; to produce all that is possible from
the soil and the elements and to manufacture all articles practicable
at home."  

Although the Mormons attempted to follow this counsel, they
were not successful during their first few years in Utah. The harsh
weather in the valley and the crickets ruined their crops and they
failed to raise enough food to feed the Saints. These problems
strengthened their belief that they should be prepared for the last
days and should become independent of Babylon because they saw hard
times as a warning of the famine and disasters ahead. As a result of
these problems, the leaders of the Church encouraged the men to save
grain so the Saints would not go hungry during the similiar famines
of the last days. For example, Heber C. Kimball asked the men to "lay
up stores of grain, against the time of need, for you will see the
time when there will not be a kernel raised and when thousands and
millions will come to this people for bread."  

Unfortunately, the men of the Church usually did not follow
this counsel and they sold their grain to the stores, outside traders
or anyone else who would give them a good price. To encourage the
brethren not to sell their produce, Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young
repeated their grain saving message several times, but each time,
the Saints seemed to have various reasons for not conserving their

2Emmeline B. Wells, "Home Manufacturing and Storing Grain,"
Woman's Exponent, VI (June 15, 1877), 12.

3Heber C. Kimball, "The Devil to be Cast out of the Earth,"
(March 9, 1856), Journal of Discourses, George D. Watts, ed. (26
vols.; Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855), III, 258.
wheat. One excuse some of the men used was they sold the grain because "their wives and daughters want[ed] the proceeds . . . to buy hats and bonnets." To eliminate this problem, Heber C. Kimball suggested to the sisters it would be better "to let fine shoes, fine dresses, fine bonnets, ribbons, veils, laces and other imported finery stay in the store until they rot, than to let . . . grain go for such articles." 

Although the leaders of the Church continued to ask the men and women to hold onto their wheat, the members did not store very much during the first twenty years they were in the Salt Lake Valley. The Utah War and the Civil War convinced the leaders that the end of the world might come before the Saints were ready and they looked for new ways to encourage the members to store grain. Since the men had fallen short in their assignment, Brigham Young asked the women in 1876 to be responsible for storing the grain.

This was not an unusual calling for the LDS women because the sisters saw themselves as equal partners with the men and the most independent women in the history of the world. One way the sisters were able to express this freedom was through the Female Relief Society

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4For more examples of the speeches given on the grain question, see E. Cecil McGavin in collaboration with Albert L. Zobell, Jr., "Grain Storage among the Latter-day Saints," Improvement Era, XLIV (March, 1941), 142.


7Susa Young Gates, "Women in Politics," Susa Young Gates Papers, Church Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereinafter cited as Church Archives.
which Joseph Smith organized in 1842 as a program to care for the poor and needy in the Church. Although the group was disbanded shortly after the death of President Smith, Brigham Young reorganized the women and gave them the responsibility over economic affairs designed to mitigate the impact of the railroad on the Mormon community in Utah. The sisters were placed in charge of projects such as establishing retrenchment societies to encourage the women to use home grown goods, organizing cooperative stores and raising silkworms and manufacturing silk. The women accepted the call to store grain as a continuation of these economic policies.8

Relief Society Grain Storage

After Brigham Young decided to ask the women to save wheat, he needed to publicize the new program. Therefore, he asked Emmeline B. Wells, the editor of the Woman's Exponent which served as the official voice of the Relief Society, to write "the strongest editorial that you can" on the subject for the magazine. Later, Mrs. Wells recalled that she accepted President Young's request as a mission from God and as an answer to a blessing Eliza R. Snow, the president of the Relief Society gave her. In the blessing, Mrs. Snow told Mrs. Wells that she would "live to do a work that has never been done by any woman since the creation."9

Shortly after President Young gave Mrs. Wells this assignment, she published two editorials in the Woman's Exponent. The first one


"Sisters be in Earnest" which appeared in the October 15, 1876 issue, explained the purpose of saving wheat and asked the sisters to collect funds to buy wheat and to build storehouses where they could deposit it. In a later editorial, Mrs. Wells asked the LDS women to make immediate plans to store grain. After reminding them of the food shortage they had faced during the first years in the valley and explaining they would face the same problems if they did not store grain, she prayed that the women might catch the spirit of the program. She also requested that the local societies submit a report of their storage activities to her.

The leaders of the Relief Society indicated their support for Mrs. Wells in her attempts to encourage grain storage when they met on November 11, 1876 in the Salt Lake City Fourteenth Ward meeting house to plan the program. At the meeting, President Eliza R. Snow appointed a Central Grain Committee to coordinate the activities of the local societies and to adopt a plan of action for the entire Church. She chose Emmeline B. Wells as president, Priscilla M. Stainer as treasurer, and E. S. Barney, Elizabeth Howard, and Sarah M. Kimball as committee members.

Local Relief Societies then followed the pattern set by the General President by forming committees to promote storage and to

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10Wells, "Sisters be in Earnest," Women's Exponent, V (October 15, 1876), 89.

11Wells, "Be Wise and Hearken to Counsel," ibid., V (March 1, 1877), 149.

12Wells, "History of the Relief Society," ibid., XXXII (September, 1903), 29 and "General Meeting of the Central and Ward Committees," Woman's Exponent, V (December 1, 1876), 99.
make plans for granaries. During 1877, these committees wrote letters to the Woman's Exponent expressing their support of their program and their desire to save grain.

In these letters, the sisters explained why they sustained the new program. The majority of the women accepted the call as a revelation from God given to help the Church members meet the famine that would proceed the Millennium and to prepare them for other natural disasters that might occur suddenly. They felt that just as God had warned Joseph to prepare for a time of famine, they had been called to store wheat to feed their hungry families and the many people who would flee to Zion for safety during a period of starvation.  They also dedicated themselves to the new mission because they believed Brigham Young had the right to speak for God on earth. They considered it "a great blessing and privilege to have a prophet to lead us, that we may escape by listening to council the impending calamities that would befall the disobedient."  

Besides seeing the program as a call from God, many of the sisters agreed with Heber C. Kimball that they had made impossible demands on their husbands and fathers for the wheat. They hoped that by being "frugal and industrious" they would be a source of "comfort and strength" to the men.  They also felt that they had


14Wellsville Relief Society, "Storing Grain," Woman's Exponent, (November 1, 1879), 84.

15"Items about Storing Grain: Gunnison," Woman's Exponent, V (March 1, 1877), 152.
a responsibility to help the men save grain because "should a famine come, the women would have to suffer hunger as well as the men."16

The women were also excited about their new pursuit because they could accomplish a task that was necessary to build up the Kingdom of God and to further the work for the Lord. They did not offer excuses for their failure to support the program because they saw it as a call from the prophet to prepare the Saints for the Millennium. They succeeded where the men failed because they ignored those who tried to discourage them and explored new methods of gathering wheat.

Methods of Gathering Wheat

The ladies tried several ways to accumulate extra grain. One method the leaders suggested was that they go to the fields and glean the grain left after the harvest. Emmeline B. Wells told the sisters that they should view gleaning as part of a mission from God and not a degrading drudgery. She said that like Ruth, if they were faithful in reaping wheat, they would be blessed for their efforts.17

The members of the Relief Society and Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association in Spanish Fork responded to the call to glean in 1877 and gathered fifty bushels of wheat.18 Other societies also reported that the ladies had gone to the fields to glean a few

16"Report of the Dedication of the Kaysville Relief Society," Woman's Exponent, V (March 1, 1877), 149.

17Wells, "The Woman's Grain Movement in Utah," Woman's Exponent, VI (September 1, 1877), 52.

18"Relief Society Reports," Woman's Exponent, VI (December 1, 1877), 98.
kernels. This continued to be an important way of collecting wheat even during the twentieth century for in 1914 the sisters in Springville were still collecting unreaped grain from the fields.19

In some cases, the Relief Society women donated extra wheat from their homes. In smaller communities, like Greenville (later known as North Logan), the ladies brought one-half to two bushels to the wheat committee.20 In larger towns, members of the Relief Society visited the sisters' homes and asked them to give any extra grain they had on hand. For example, in Richfield the Relief Society block teachers checked to see if the sisters had grain to donate.21 In Spanish Fork Priscilla Merriman Evans took a team of horses and a wagon to all the homes in the first visiting teaching district to collect the wheat from the women.22

In the areas where the sisters could not glean the fields and did not have extra grain to give, they donated money or produce to the Relief Society which the committee sold to buy grain from the local farmers. In Kanosh those who had no extra wheat gave molasses, corn,


20 These accounts are recorded in the minutes. For example, in 1894 the following account was included: As on last report, 37-1/4 bushels. Rent on portion loaned, 4-1/2 bushels. Margaret Larsen, 2; Mary Ann Crockett, 1; Mary R. Smith, 1; Susannah J. Smith, 1. Total, 46-3/4 bushels. Greenville Ward Relief Society, Financial Reports, 1891-1897, 1894, Church Archives.

21 Richfield First Ward Relief Society, Minutes of the Richfield First Ward, October 5, 1882, 1874-1884, p. 207, Church Archives.

flour and peaches which the committee exchanged for wheat. 23 The sisters in Deweyville gave to the Relief Society the eggs they gathered on Sunday, the proceeds from which bought fifty bushels of wheat. 24

The women in Pooa had an unusual way of supporting the program. The brethren of the ward planted three hundred acres of "White Touse Wheat" from which they promised to give the Relief Society all the grain reaped from six acres. The men harvested the wheat and in exchange for these services, the society furnished food and supplies for the men while they were working. 25

The women of the Church not only accepted the call to accumulate wheat, they set out to collect as much as they could. Although sometimes it was difficult to raise money to buy grain, they used their imagination to discover ways to amass more grain.

**Granaries**

After the sisters gathered the wheat, they needed to find places to shelter it. Although Mrs. Wells suggested that each society build a granary, initially they did not have the money to build them. In their attempts to find places to keep the grain, some of the sisters stored it in their cellars, but the majority of the Relief Societies received permission from the bishops to keep it in ward storehouses or

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23"Relief Society Reports," *Woman's Exponent*, V (May 1, 1877), 182.

24"Grain Meeting," *Woman's Exponent*, VI (December 1, 1877), 102

in bins in the local tithing offices. In some cases, the women put the grain in bins which they borrowed and placed them in the bishop's or the Relief Society president's barn. For example, the Central Grain Committee stored its wheat in Daniel H. Wells's barn. If a member of the bishopric or the husband of one of the Relief Society members already owned a granary, the wheat was often stored there until the society could afford to build its own. The sisters believed that although they had been called to organize the program, their husbands should help, a position which Brigham Young encouraged. In some cases the societies were delighted with the support the men gave them in storing their grain and the fortunate ones agreed with the members of the Relief Society in Mantua, "Our bishop is always ready to lend a helping hand."

Though most of the brethren tried to help the sisters save grain, nearly all of the storage arrangements created tensions between the members of the ward. For example, when the women stored the produce in the tithing offices, the ward leaders distributed the grain to the needy. If the wheat was stored in individual barns, sometimes it was not separated from the farmer's supply and it was used without the Relief Society's permission. Local granaries also exploited the sisters by selling the wheat and the General Board was

26Mary F. Kelley, "Brigham Young on Famine," New West Magazine, IX (June, 1918), 63.

27"Relief Society Reports: Fayette," Woman's Exponent, V (April 15, 1877), 169.

28"Relief Society Reports," Woman's Exponent, VI (February 1, 1878), 130.
afraid the elevator owners would continue to capitalize on the program by selling grain when the famine came. Because of these difficulties, the Relief Society leaders wanted the sisters to have complete control over the program. They believed so strongly that each society needed its own granary that they encouraged those societies that did not have a safe storehouse for the wheat by the turn of the century to sell their grain so they could afford to build one.29

In order to emphasize the importance of building granaries, the Woman's Exponent published articles on the types and the cost of storehouses which the various societies were building. The first granaries were completed in 1877 in the Salt Lake City Fifteenth and Seventeenth Wards and were used as examples for the sisters in other areas to follow. In October, President Sarah M. Kimball reported that the Fifteenth Ward had completed a fireproof granary that was built of rock, and had a tin roof and a foundation of concrete. The twenty foot square granary could hold one thousand bushels of grain and cost $375. The same year the Seventeenth Ward paid $275 to construct their sixteen by eighteen foot granary that could hold 1200 bushels. Since the storehouse was lined with concrete, the sisters were assured that it would be mouseproof.30

Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, the General Board encouraged the Relief Society members to build granaries. Often when a local Relief Society built what was thought to be an especially

29Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Officers, Board and Missionaries Meeting, December 1, 1905, II, p. 110, Church Archives.

30"Home Affairs," Woman's Exponent, VI (October 1, 1877), 69.
good or inexpensive granary like the one in Box Elder or St. George Stake, the Woman's Exponent published an article about it.31 Sisters throughout the Church then followed these examples and soon nearly every ward had a little granary beside their Relief Society meeting house. Although varying in size, shape and capacity, each was maintained to protect the wheat.

Some of these activities were announced at the Relief Society Central Grain Committee first annual meeting held on November 17, 1877. At the meeting, Emmeline B. Wells reported the societies had accumulated 10,500 bushels of wheat of which 300 had been gleaned by the members of the Relief Society and the Young Ladies Society. They had also put aside 7,000 pounds of flour and had saved over $300 in cash. When the leaders of the priesthood and the Relief Society heard this report, they were delighted. Presiding Bishop Edward Hunter thought that "the storing of grain is commendable." Zina Young also complimented the sisters on their success but then told them that this was "very little compared to what is before us. . . We ought to have at least fifty thousand bushels of wheat next year."32

The sisters did keep up the program and by the second annual meeting in 1878, they had stored 24,000 bushels of wheat and 900 pounds of flour and had completed thirteen granaries.33 By responding

31"Editorial," Woman's Exponent, XVII (August 1, 1889), 36; "How to Build a Granary on Nothing," Woman's Exponent, VI (September 1, 1877), 52.

32"Grain Meeting," Woman's Exponent, VI (December 1, 1877), 102.

33Journal History, November 23, 1878, Church Archives.
to the call from Brigham Young, they had given of themselves and their own meager supplies. They saw the program as a mission from God to prepare the Saints for the famine during the last days and with the support of the priesthood, they reached out to achieve that goal. They adopted many ways to amass and protect the grain so they would be prepared like the five wise virgins of the parable. The women were sure that by "obedience to counsel," they would be blessed for their efforts.34

34Wells, "The Woman's Grain Movement and Charities and Industries in Utah," Woman's Exponent, VI (September 1, 1877), 52.
CHAPTER II
MILLENNIALISM AND GRAIN STORAGE

During these first years of the Relief Society grain storage program, the leaders of the Mormon church and the woman's organization reminded the sisters that they should protect their wheat so the Saints would be ready for the destruction of the world. So the members of the Church would have enough food during the last days, the leaders advised the Relief Society sisters not to lend the grain to individuals to aid the poor, to build churches or for any other purposes. They stressed the grain should not be loaned because many members of the Church expected the Savior to come in 1890 or 1891.

The Saints believed the Millennium would begin during the nineteenth century because of some statements Joseph Smith made during the 1830's that implied the end was near. In 1835, Smith was promised in a revelation, "If thou livest until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man." This belief in the Millennium increased when Smith wrote, "Fifty-six years shall wind up the scene." Fifty-six years after the date of this statement would set the second coming for March 14, 1891.2

With such warnings, the sisters hoarded the wheat even though there were many poor Latter-day Saints who needed it. They looked

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1D. & C., 130:15

2Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Period I, Brigham H. Roberts, ed. (6 vols.; Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1948), II, 182.
past the individual members' needs in their attempt to prepare for
the entire welfare of the Church.

The Year of Jubilee

The members of the Relief Society made an exception to this
policy during the Year of Jubilee, the fiftieth anniversary of the
founding of the Church. During this year, John Taylor announced the
plans for an Israelitish Jubilee which included canceling one half
the debts owed to the Perpetual Emigrating Company and encouraging
Mormon bankers and businessmen to annul debts of the Saints. He also
asked the Saints to give one thousand head of cattle and five thousand
sheep to the needy in the Mormon communities.³

As part of this program to share the wealth, President Taylor
asked Eliza R. Snow if the Relief Societies would loan, without in-
terest, some of their wheat to the poor to be used for seed. At the
conference, President Taylor announced that President Snow had agreed
to his request and explained the sisters would be loaning 35,000
bushels to the brethren that should be returned at harvest time. When
he asked the women at the conference if they would support the proposal,
they voted unanimously in favor of it.⁴

After obtaining the sisters' permission, Taylor sent a letter
"to the President of the Central Grain Committee and Presidents of

³Leonard J. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History
of the LDS, 1830-1900 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959),
p. 365-6.

⁴"The Year of the Jubilee, A Full Report of the Proceedings of
the Fiftieth Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-
day Saints" (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1830), p. 64.
the various Branches of the Relief Society and throughout the Stakes of Zion being in Charged of Store Wheat" explaining his plan. He also reminded the bishops that they were borrowing from a sacred trust and recommended that they give the Relief Society a receipt for the exact amount of wheat loaned so that it could be returned when circumstances permitted. He believed not only that the grain should be returned, but that they should also not ask to use the wheat again.5

The bishops made good use of the wheat and despite President Taylor's counsel, many felt the policy of loaning grain to the poor should continue after 1880. When some of them ignored Taylor's message and attempted to borrow the grain, the General Board told the local presidents to discuss the importance of storage with them and to inform them that the grain was not their property.

Although the local Relief Society leaders followed this advice and tried to maintain absolute control over the wheat, the ward leaders continued to ask the local societies to share their grain. The General Board wrote to the First Presidency complaining about the numerous abuses and asking if they would do something to help protect the project. The leaders of the Church demonstrated their support for the sisters' attempts to control the program by writing letters to the bishops explaining the purpose of the grain. They stated in their first notice to them:

... the wheat has been collected by the members of the society in the various wards at considerable trouble and they are the proper custodians thereof and responsible therefore to the

5Journal History, April 16, 1880, p. 2, Church Archives.
parties from whom it has been obtained. No bishop has any right because of authority as a presiding officer in the ward, to take possession of the grain.6

A Change in the Emphasis of Grain Storage

After the Year of Jubilee, the sisters returned to the policy of storing their wheat so they would be ready for the famines and wars that were to come. They believed the final destruction of the world was very near and they viewed the Edmunds and Edmunds-Tucker Acts as examples supporting Joseph Smith's prophecy "that the whole Nation would turn against Zion and make war upon the Saints" in the last days.7 They also felt that even though the Church members would be partly sheltered during these times, they needed to be prepared to meet the difficulties that would proceed the Savior's second coming.

By 1890, many of the LDS people were beginning to realize that the Kingdom of God would not be established through natural means in the near future. Klaus J. Hansen has argued that "When it became apparent that the enemy was willing to retreat in return for some painful concessions and the Lord was not about to destroy the adversaries of the Kingdom, hope for a miraculous delivery receded."8 This decline in millennial fervor was expressed in the Manifesto which discouraged the practice of polygamy in the Mormon church. In issuing

6"To the Bishops of the Various Wards," Woman's Exponent, XII (July 15, 1883), 28.

7Wilford Woodruff Diary, December 31, 1889, Wilford Woodruff Papers, Church Archives.

this revelation, Wilford Woodruff concluded that he had come to the point where he had to act for the temporal, rather than the spiritual salvation of the Church.\(^9\)

It should not be thought that the millennial fervor completely died after 1891. To some members of the Church, the Spanish American War was seen as one of the wars that would lead to the final destruction of the world. For example, the President of the Salt Lake Stake Relief Society said, "The sisters should wake up and realize the awful conditions of the world." She saw the war as one in the series of which Joseph Smith had prophesied and as proof that the withdrawal of the Spirit would come soon.\(^10\) However, this was not the popular Mormon view of the Spanish American War. To most of the leaders of the Church, the war was not part of the disaster predicted for the end but was a justified fight to free an oppressed people from bondage.\(^11\)

With this change in many Mormons' perception of the Millennium also came a change in many of the sisters' attitudes toward grain storage. To some degree after 1890 and especially after the turn of the century, they no longer felt the program was to prepare the Church for the final destruction of the world and they began to realize that "we may not live to see the famine." They still felt

\(^9\)Wilford Woodruff Diary, September 25, 1890, Wilford Woodruff Papers, Church Archives.

\(^10\)Journal History, March 21, 1898, Church Archives.

\(^11\)In his master's thesis, Jeff Stott examines the views of Mormon leaders on the Spanish American war. Although he found that some of them were violently opposed to the fight, most of the leaders felt the war was justified and he sees the change in millennial thought as one of the causes for the change in the Mormon view of war. For more information, see Robert Jeffrey Stott, "Mormonism and War: Selected Mormon Thought Regarding Service in American Wars" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974), pp. 45-62.
that there was a purpose for storing grain however and if they did what was asked of them, everything would be all right.12

Although the Relief Society members were no longer storing grain for the last days, they did continue the program. Members of the Relief Society did not say explicitly why they continued to amass grain, yet the evidence leads to the conclusion it was to assist the needy. Throughout the 1870's and the 1880's, one of the reasons for continuing the program was to provide for the Saints during any natural disasters such as famines, earthquake or fire that might destroy their crops and thus create a temporary food shortage. With anticipation of the imminency of the Millennium receding, storing for a time of immediate emergencies seems to become the major reason for the program. Emmeline B. Wells explained this new emphasis in the Woman's Exponent when she stressed that the grain should be stored so that "if the crickets and grasshoppers should destroy the crops next year," the Saints would be prepared to feed their families.13

Other reasons have been suggested for why the program was discontinued, but evidence is lacking for them. One such explanation is goal displacement. If the program had continued as a result of goal displacement, then the women would have continued to store grain simply because they thought it was something they ought to do. In that case, the program would have become an institution and that insti-

12"Relief Society Conference," Woman's Exponent, XXX (December, 1901), 55.

13Wells, "The Saving of Grain," Woman's Exponent, XXVII (September 15, 1898), 36.
tution, rather than a specific goal, would become the purpose for sustaining the program.14

New Uses for Relief Society Wheat

With the new policy of storing wheat for physical disasters, the Relief Society started to use their grain to help members of the Church and the world community survive immediate emergencies and natural catastrophes. Before the shift in policy, the sisters had not responded to such needs. The new approach, however, allowed the Relief Society to view its program as a means by which it could spread the gospel and give aid to those in need. The General Board also used these natural disasters as object lessons to show the types of emergencies the sisters might have to face and the importance of being prepared to meet them.

After Mrs. Wells explained the new attempts to then be prepared to meet immediate problems, the General Board adopted a program of distributing grain to needy members of the Church. Such instances occurred in 1898 and 1901 when a drought destroyed the wheat crops in Parowan and members of the Church were afraid there might be a bread shortage in the area. In 1915, the Central Wheat Committee recalled that they had given two thousand bushels of wheat to the people in Parowan to help them cope with these difficult times.15


15 "Grain Saving in the Relief Society," Relief Society Magazine, II (February, 1915), 58. Unfortunately, local records do not mention these incidents. Because of a smallpox epidemic in the town of Parowan, there were no Relief Society meetings held and therefore there are no Ward Relief Society minutes in the Church Archives. The Parowan Stake Relief Society Minutes and journals and diaries by people from Parowan do not mention this incident either.
Occasionally, the Relief Society also gave some of its grain to Gentiles. For example, the sisters gave some of it to the victims of the San Francisco earthquake. On April 18, 1906, an earthquake shook the state of California and hit the area of San Francisco especially hard. The quake destroyed many of the city's brick structures, opened large cracks in the earth and ruptured the water system. To add to this destruction, fire spread unchecked throughout the city. In all, an area of four square miles and 28,000 buildings were destroyed.¹⁶ Thousands of San Francisco residents lost their homes and 450 died during the earthquake and fire. Starving people seeking an allotment of three or four loaves of bread formed bread lines four abreast and several blocks long. Even then many were disappointed because the distribution centers ran out of food.¹⁷

As soon as the Relief Society leaders received word of a nationwide plea for aid for the earthquake victims, they met to decide how they could help. After deliberating, they sent a railroad car loaded with flour, clothing and bedding to San Francisco which was one of the first to reach the Bay area. Mayor Eugene E. Schmitz of San Francisco telegraphed his thanks for their generosity.¹⁸

In addition to this donation from the General Board, a number of stake and local Relief Societies also sent carloads of flour to


¹⁷William G. Hartley, "LDS History Manuscripts: The San Francisco Earthquake" (Unpublished article in the possession of Mr. Hartley, LDS History Division, Salt Lake City, Utah).

¹⁸Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, April 18, 1906, II, p. 9, Church Archives.
San Francisco. Shortly after the General Relief Society dispatched its shipment, a carload of flour was sent from Bingham County, Idaho and donations of flour and other commodities continued to be sent from Utah until they were no longer needed in the area. 19 Citizens of Mt. Pleasant, Fairview, Manti, Richfield, Provo, American Fork and other small towns in the state sent carloads of flour. Since the Relief Societies in these areas stored large quantities of wheat, they might have given some of their supplies to help fill these cars. 20

To members of the General Board, the San Francisco earthquake and fire was an example to the members of the Relief Society of the disasters that they might have to face. In an editorial in the Woman's Exponent, Emmeline B. Wells said, "The sisters who have been dilatory or indifferent in regard to saving grain may realize more the importance attached to the storing of grain by the women of Zion by this object lesson." 21


20 An article in the Deseret News included the amount of flour sent by Utah residents on the different railroads. On the Denver-Rio-Grande Railroad, one carload of flour was sent from each of the following towns: Mt. Pleasant, Ephraim, Fairview, Eureka, Provo, Richfield, Springville and Heber. On the San Pedro-Los Angeles-Salt Lake City, one carload was sent from Manti, American Fork, Spanish Fork, Fillmore, Tooele and three from Provo. Although the article does not say it was Relief Society wheat, there was a great deal of grain stored in these towns and the sisters might have given some to the cause. Deseret News, May 19, 1906, p. 2. One of the reasons why this could have been Relief Society grain is because Mrs. Wells states that other areas donated grain but she would not report which ones until all the stakes had reported to her. Wells, "Earthquake and Fire," Woman's Exponent, XXXIV (May, 1906), 68.

21 Wells, "Earthquake and Fire."
The Relief Society responded in a similar way to a call for help during a famine in China in 1907 that was so intense that people dug up dead bodies to satisfy their need for food.\(^{22}\) When calls were sent across the United States for flour to help the Chinese, the Mormon Church and the Relief Societies passed resolutions pledging aid. Those in attendance at the Church's Semi-annual Conference adopted a proposal made by John Winder, a counselor to President Joseph F. Smith, to send twenty tons of flour to China.\(^{23}\) The Relief Society sisters also agreed during their conference to ship one carload of flour to the Asian country.\(^{24}\)

By the time the Relief Society flour reached China, however, the famine was over and it was no longer needed. Therefore, the Chinese officials sold the flour at Shanghai and sent the money to Governor John C. Culter of Utah. He forwarded the $5,800 check to President Smith who returned it to the Relief Society.\(^{25}\)

Like the San Francisco earthquake, this incident also reinforced the Relief Society's resolution to set aside grain. They saw the problems created by famine and decided they should do everything they could to avoid a similar situation. As the motivation for the program shifted from millennialism to welfare though it seems clear that the sisters no longer saw their program as a means to help only members of

\(^{22}\)Deseret News, April 20, 1907, p. 25.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., April 8, 1907, p. 5.

\(^{24}\)"General Conference of the Relief Society," Woman’s Exponent, XXXV (May, 1907), 71.

\(^{25}\)Letter from John C. Culter to President Joseph F. Smith, July 11, 1901, Relief Society Records, Church Archives.
the Church. In reporting the activities of the Relief Society to the National Council of Women, Emmeline B. Wells described grain storages as a program "for charity outside our own locality and domain."26

Thus, throughout the nineteenth century, the sisters continued to store wheat. Until about 1891, the main reason for storing seems to have been to prepare for the disasters anticipated shortly before the second coming of the Savior. As a result, the sisters were discouraged not to loan grain to needy ward members or to bishops. Although an exception was made to this policy during the Year of Jubilee, the general program was based upon an expectation for the Millennium, not an immediate need. The decline of millennialism during the latter part of the nineteenth century led to a change in the program's purpose. The sisters' main reason for saving grain was to prepare for immediate disasters and in accordance with this new policy, they gave wheat and flour to both members of the Church and Gentiles to help them overcome immediate problems. They began to view the grain storage program as a way they could help people in need and they looked forward to being able to help in future emergencies.

CHAPTER III
INTERNAL CHANGES IN THE GRAIN STORAGE PROGRAM

During the first twenty years of the twentieth century, the Relief Societies continued to amass grain, not to prepare the Saints to meet the Millennium, but to help them meet natural disasters. With this change in emphasis, in many ways the grain storage program became a means by which the Relief Society could realize its primary goal of helping the needy. As a result, the grain movement was not stagnant and the Relief Society was constantly changing the program to serve the members of the Church and to improve storage methods.

By the turn of the century the leaders of the society had convinced the sisters of the importance of improving the program of storing wheat to help the members of the Church. Reminding the members of their priorities, the leaders told the sisters that "filling our granaries should be our first work after looking after the sick and the poor." To carry out this plan, many of the local Relief Societies, like those in the Sanpete Stakes, had their own granaries and had accumulated large quantities of wheat. In 1894 the Sanpete Stake had

1"General Relief Society Conference," Woman's Exponent, XXXII (June, 1902), 7. At the Alpine Stake Relief Society Conference, Susa Young Gates also stressed the importance of grain storage. She said that the three most important programs that the Relief Society needed to develop at that time were 1) grain storage, 2) development of the libraries and 3) support of the Woman's Exponent, "Relief Society Report," Woman's Exponent, XL (October, 1911), 24.

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8,700 bushels on hand and during each succeeding year, the wards in the area stored nearly one thousand bushels. By saving that much grain, the sisters had accumulated 12,500 bushels of wheat by the turn of the century when the stake was divided.²

By 1914 several other stakes also had large stores of wheat. A partial sampling in 1914 showed that five stakes, Alpine, Oneida, Sevier, Utah and Box Elder, had stored sixty percent of the approximately 63,500 bushels. This probably represented less than half the wheat actually stored that year though because the report did not include many of the leading grain storage stakes including North and South Sanpete.³ In 1915, a more complete report of the Relief Society showed an inventory of 157,000 bushels of wheat, $6,000 in reserve funds and $22,000 from recent sales. By this time the sisters had also spent $33,000 to build granaries and in some stakes, like Sanpete, every ward owned a granary.⁴

These figures show some of the success the Relief Society had in fulfilling its mission originally received from Brigham Young and demonstrated that the sisters were trying to sustain the program. Yet despite the apparent success, there were many problems that plagued the program and the sisters changed their policies in an attempt to solve them.

²Sanpete Stake Relief Society, Financial Reports, 1894-1900, Sanpete Stake Relief Society Minute Book, 1893-1905, Church Archives.

³Letter to Emmeline B. Wells from the Presiding Bishopric, January 13, 1915, Susa Young Gates Papers, Church Archives.

⁴"Grain Saving in the Relief Society," Relief Society Magazine, II (September, 1915), 50, 58.
Relief Society Policy on Loaning Grain

One major problem that the sisters faced was trying to decide whether they should loan the grain to farmers and bishops. Although the Relief Society had been willing to loan the grain during catastrophic disasters, the leaders stressed the grain should be used only when it was absolutely necessary and the First Presidency continued to support this "hands-off" policy. In 1896 President Wilford Woodruff told Zina Young, Eliza R. Snow's successor as president of the Relief Society, that even the president of the Church "had no right to take a handful of wheat and dispose of it; the wheat was held in sacred trust for a day of scarcity and famine."\(^5\)

Even with this type of advice from the Church's prophet, some of the brethren still tried to persuade the Relief Societies to loan grain to them or to discontinue the program. For example, some wards, like the Bear Lake Ward, wanted to sell their grain and use the money to help pay for the Logan Temple and other Church buildings.\(^6\) In these instances, the General Board told the sisters not to sell the wheat "to build meeting houses or for any other purpose."\(^7\) The Relief Society leaders adopted a similar policy when the bishop of the Salt Lake City Twenty-first Ward encouraged the ward Relief Society not to continue to store wheat. Instead of allowing groups to suspend

\(^{5}\)Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Conference of the Relief Society, April 2, 1896, II, p. 24, Church Archives.

\(^{6}\)Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, April 6, 1893, II, p. 12, Church Archives.

\(^{7}\)Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Conference of the Relief Society, October 5, 1898, II, p. 41, Church Archives.
the program, they encouraged the Ward Relief Society presidents to remind bishops of the urgency of the project.8

Although the official stand of the General Board was never to loan the wheat, occasionally it modified this policy if it felt a project was worthwhile and if the borrower offered security for the return of the wheat.9 For example, in 1908 the Board permitted the Grantsville Ward to sell their wheat so they could buy a piece of property. After Annie Wells Cannon and Sarah J. Tooele visited the Tooele Stake and recommended the loan be made because the sisters needed the land, the Relief Society leaders gave their permission to sell the wheat if the money was taken only as a loan and if when it was repaid, they bought wheat with the money.10

The Relief Societies could also loan the wheat to members of the wards to help them over personal disasters if the society was given some type of security for the advance and if the local priesthood leaders and the stake Relief Society president gave their permission. To make sure these conditions were met, the societies drew up legal agreements with the individuals borrowing the wheat which set a date for its return and an interest rate. For example, the Richfield Ward drew up a contract with O. F. Pearson of Glenwood. Pearson borrowed 665 bushels of which he agreed to repay by October 1, 1901, along with

8Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, October 5, 1898, II, p. 41, Church Archives.
9Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Conference of the Relief Society, October 3, 1903, II, p. 88, Church Archives.
10Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board, June 5, 1908, II, 127, Church Archives.
nine percent interest. In other cases the societies received a peck per bushel interest when the farmers returned the wheat after the harvest.

Although the Relief Societies appear to have taken careful steps to prevent the loss of their wheat, there were numerous abuses. Bishops used the grain in the tithing offices to distribute to the poor, Relief Society presidents loaned the wheat to their husbands and friends without security, and individuals demanded extensions on their loan. In the example described above, Mr. Pearson asked the sisters to extend the loan one year because he could not pay it back in 1901.

Storage Facilities

Besides the problems the sisters had in adopting a loan policy, they also had difficulties with their storage facilities. Often they were unsure how to deal with problems such as inferior wheat, rotting grain and vermine attacks in inadequate granaries. Since the beginning of the program, the sisters had often been unable to control rodents in the granaries. Although the leaders had encouraged them to keep the mice out of the storehouses "if possible," many times they seemed unable to do so. The Relief Societies tried to con-

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11 Agreement between O. F. Pearson and the Richfield Relief Society, Richfield Ward Relief Society Minute Book, 1900-1911, Church Archives.


13 Although many of these abuses may have taken place during the first part of the twentieth century, the General Board did not find out about them until the grain was sold during the 1910's and the 1920's. For more information see Chapter V.

14 Oneida Stake Relief Society, Oneida Stake Relief Society Minutes, November 2, 1901, 1900-1907, Church Archives.
trol the mice by lining the base of the granary with concrete or iron or by placing broken glass gathered by the Primary children in the storehouses.\textsuperscript{15} Still, many of these precautions failed and some of the wheat spoiled. For example, in North Logan the Church members lined the base of their granary with iron and filled it with three bins of wheat. When the farmers opened the granary a few years later, they found the wheat was wormy and when they took it for grinding, the miller told them the three hundred bushels of wheat were fit only for use as hog feed.\textsuperscript{16}

Some of the Relief Societies attempted to prevent this type of spoilage by rebuilding their granaries and promoting better methods of caring for the wheat. In 1902 when President Tinid Peterson in Fairview found that almost all of their wheat was rotting, she suggested the society sell it and build a new granary.\textsuperscript{17} She arranged for the sale of the wheat and the repair of the old storehouse. A year and a half later these repairs were completed and the granary was in better condition than ever before.\textsuperscript{18} The ward also improved the quality grain stored and by the end of the next month, the society had almost as much wheat as all of the wards in North Sanpete Stake combined.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15}Box Elder Stake Relief Society, Box Elder Stake Relief Society Minutes, 1879, Church Archives.

\textsuperscript{16}Nevel Crockett, Private Telephone Interview held in North Logan, Utah, March 17, 1974.

\textsuperscript{17}Fairview Ward Relief Society, Fairview Ward Relief Society Minutes, March 17, 1902, 1900-1905, Church Archives.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., December 5, 1903, p. 121.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., January 18, 1904, p. 126.
The General Board also promoted better ways of taking care of grain by publishing articles on new methods of storage in their magazines. For example, in 1890, an article in the Woman's Exponent described a new way of storing grain in a steel tank by creating a vacuum within it and then adding carbonic acid gas.20

The Board also published articles to encourage the sisters to store a better quality of grain. During the early years of the program the Relief Society leaders had asked the societies to store any grain they found. They believed that by exchanging old wheat for new periodically, the sisters could prevent shrinkage and the wheat would last for a long time. They used the Millard Stake which had stored wheat for twenty years before they exchanged it as an example of how successful this policy was.21 But as the program continued, the leaders realized it took more than good granaries and occasional rotation of the wheat to develop a successful program. One of the major problems came from the poor quality of wheat grown in Utah during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In an article in the Relief Society Magazine, Alice Merrill Horne explained, "Utah raises the most foolish crop of wheat--dozens of varieties--when without any extra trouble or cost they could unite with Arizona and Idaho and have the best wheat in the west." To promote the use of a better strain of grain, she asked the sisters to store only the "best Turkey wheat."

20"Storing Grain," Woman's Exponent, XIX (December 15, 1890), 103.
21Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, April 5, 1898, II, 36, Church Archives.
Her article also recommended several ways that they could control shrinkage. Besides storing the best quality of grain "first, last and always," she suggested the wheat should be rotated at least every other year. It should also be kept dry by harvesting it during the dryest period of the year and by keeping the bin dry. In addition, it should be stored in an elevator, or steel bin with a capacity of about one thousand bushels and it should be turned and have dry lime added occasionally so the wheat would not ferment.22

Despite these attempts to improve the storage conditions, there were some places where it was not practical to continue the program. In these cases, the First Presidency and the General Board permitted the individual wards or stakes to abandon the project. For example, by 1911 the granaries in the Salt Lake Stake which had been the pride of the Relief Society were inadequate and there were no places nearby where the sisters could buy their wheat cheaply. When Harriet B. Harker, the president of the Stake Relief Society, asked Stake President N. L. Mann if the sisters should continue to store grain, he was unsure what to tell her and wrote to the First Presidency for instructions. In reply to his letter, the Mormon leaders told him that the Relief Societies should not continue to gather wheat "as they do not have access to elevators or other safe means of storing grain." Instead, they should collect money for a wheat fund and deposit it in the Zion's Saving Bank.23

22Alice Merrill Horne, "Give Us this Day our Daily Bread," Relief Society Magazine, II (February, 1915), 61-3.

23Letter from the First Presidency to the Salt Lake Stake Presidency, August 24, 1911, Salt Lake Stake Minute Book, 1904-1910, Church Archives.
When President Mann forwarded this letter to the Relief Society leaders, he stressed the policy was for only the Salt Lake Stake and they should not spread news of the decision throughout the state since the program was still "a conspicuous part of the Relief Society in the agricultural districts."24

In spite of the contrary injunction, some agricultural areas adopted the disposal policy without the permission of the General Board. Because grain was also spoiling in the granaries in the Oneida Stakes in 1911, the stake Relief Society President encouraged the sisters to sell the wheat and place the money in banks since it would be better to have the money earning interest than having the grain rot in the storehouse.25 Later, Mrs. Wells expressed her disapproval of this policy when she told the leaders of the Oneida Stake, "Money will not feed us if the grain is not in the granary."26

Even though there were attempts to continue the program during this period, it was apparent by 1911 that it was a problem in nearly all areas of the Church. With the troubles caused by mixed qualities of wheat and outstanding loans, the Relief Society General Board and many of the members began to doubt that the program was meeting its objectives. Because they still felt they had a sacred responsibility to continue to store grain, they tried to find other ways to improve the methods of storage and in this attempt, they turned to the First

24 Letter from Stake Presidency to the Stake Relief Society President, August 26, 1911, Ibid.

25 Oneida Stake Relief Society, Oneida Stake Relief Society Minutes, December 20, 1911, 1900-1917, p. 54, Church Archives.

26 Ibid., September 6, 1916, p. 245.
Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric for help. After examining
the situation, the brethren concluded that the basic problems lay in
the storage facilities rather than the program itself. They believed:

The outlay in the erection of granaries is out of all propor-
tion to the value of the wheat stored in them and besides there
is more or less expense incurred in keeping the buildings in
good condition, as well as the attending the storage in them
through one cause or another, which apparently seems hard to
overcome.27

To deal with this problem of poor storage facilities, the
priesthood leaders encouraged the sisters to store grain in commercial
elevators. In Cache and Davis County where there were good elevators
operated by responsible businessmen, they could keep their grain near
their homes. Relief Society organizations in some stakes were encouraged
to sell their grain and to send the money to the Richfield elevator
"which was erected a number of years ago for the expressed purpose of
storing grain for the Relief Society" or to the Presiding Bishopric's
office. Arrangements were then to be made by George M. Jones, manager
of the Richfield elevator, or the bishopric to buy wheat. In general,
the brethren allowed the societies to use their own granaries until they
had to rotate the wheat, but then they encouraged them to sell both the
wheat and the granary and sent the money in to them if their storehouse
was inadequate.28

This policy of sending money to Salt Lake was not adopted by
the wards that had adequate granaries though. Rebecca C. Nibley report-
ed to the General Board that her husband, Presiding Bishop Charles S.

27Circular to the Relief Society Stake Presidents from the
General Relief Society President, November 20, 1911, Presiding Bishopric
Circular, 64, Presiding Bishopric Papers, Church Archives.

28Ibid.
Nibley encouraged the wards and stakes that had good storage facilities to keep it at home, but if they did not, they should sell the grain and send the money to his office.  

As this shift in policy was made, the General Board received numerous requests from societies asking how they should deal with their specific problems. In answer to these letters, the Board established some general guidelines for the new program and outlined a set of questions to be used in dealing with grain storage problems all which asked the sisters to seek the advice of the local priesthood leaders.

Would you advise the sale of wheat where there are no elevators but good granaries?
If the Priesthood advises it.
If the granaries are being built should the money given for wheat be used in building the granaries?
According to the advice of the priesthood.
Is it advisable to take the money donated for wheat to buy portable steel granaries?
Follow the advice of the priesthood.

Although the women had always been encouraged to work with the brethren in determining grain policies, the General Board had never told them to simply follow the advice of the local priesthood without the Relief Society leaders' consent. There are several reasons for the shift in policy. First, since so many areas were storing wheat and each one faced different circumstances, the General Board could not answer all of the letters they received or solve all of the problems that came up during their annual stake visits. Because the members of the Board felt they were not in a position to

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29 Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the Relief Society General Board Meeting, September 17, 1914, II, p. 132, Church Archives.

30 Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the Relief Society Business Meeting, April 17, 1913, IV, pp. 61-62, Church Archives.
understand the needs of all the wards, they asked the priesthood authorities to analyze their local situation and to give the sisters advise on what to do.

Another reason why the General Board might have given the counsel is because the Relief Society was starting to rely on the priesthood leaders, especially the Presiding Bishopric and the First Presidency, to help make many of the decisions concerning the storage program. The Relief Society leaders had found that the program was too large for them to handle without aid and they turned to those who presided over them for help in directing the project.

The leaders might also have given this advice to coordinate their policies with those of the entire Church. During the twentieth century in an attempt to give those members of the Church who were scattered across the United States and the world a sense of the Mormon community, the Mormon leaders put a greater emphasis on the local ward organizations.31 In accordance with this new policy, the sisters might have been asked to direct their questions to those leaders in direct authority over them rather than referring all of their problems to the Relief Society leaders.

Finally, there was a feeling throughout the United States just before World War I that although the world still had problems, they could be solved. Americans believed, for example, that the world had outgrown war and that any natural disasters could be handled by the

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local areas. Members of the General Board might have felt the same way about grain storage. That is, they believed that they no longer had to direct the program as closely as they had before because the sisters could solve their own problems by working with the local brethren.32

Besides asking the Relief Societies to work directly with the priesthood leaders, the General Board appointed a grain committee, E. B. Williams, Elizabeth Crimson, Emily S. Richards, Alice M. Horne, Ida S. Dusenberry and Carrie S. Thomas, to help the sisters adjust to the new policy. The committee investigated conditions in local areas and then answered correspondence or met with the sisters.33

All the problems were not completely solved by the new program because groups still loaned money without security and stored poor qualities of grain. With the new program though, the Presiding Bishopric played an active role in controlling these abuses by sending letters to local bishops to clear up problems and to inform them that they should not use the grain to build churches or for any other purposes.34 The Presiding Bishopric also worked closely with the General Board on all major decisions and this partnership changed future grain policies.

32 For more information on this optimism felt just before World War I, see Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1953), pp. 208-33. Goldman explains the reforms on the local and national level during the progressive era and the feeling among the people that the world could be made better through their efforts.

33 Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, September 17, 1914, V, p. 135, Church Archives.

34 Ibid., April 9, 1917, VIII, pp. 104-5.
During the first part of the twentieth century, the Relief Society made several internal changes in their grain storage program. They established a loan policy that allowed individual Relief Societies and members to borrow grain when they needed it. They also abandoned many of the small inadequate granaries and centralized their storage. At the same time, the General Board started working with the Presiding Bishopric and encouraged the sisters to work with the local priesthood leaders. With these changes, the Board hoped to make the program more successful and more valuable to the members of the Church.
CHAPTER IV
WORLD WAR I

World War I destroyed much of the optimism that had developed during the early part of the twentieth century. It gave Americans a visual example that the world had not outgrown the need to fight. Along with the loss of faith in the ability of the rest of the world to keep out of war came a fear among Americans that although they might not have to fight in the European war that it would affect American life. There was especially a fear that the war might create a food shortage in the United States and to protect themselves from such a famine, Americans started to collect grain, flour, fruit, beans and other food commodities.

The Relief Society General Board also encouraged the Mormon sisters to amass more grain so they would be ready to meet the problems the war might cause. Susa Young Gates told them that the fact that the rest of the nation was saving wheat should strengthen the Latter-day Saints' determination to be prepared. The Mormons, who had been warned of possible disasters, should reserve even more food than the rest of the nation.¹

In an article in the Relief Society Bulletin, Emmeline B. Wells explained in more depth the reasons why the women needed to

put forth an extra effort to save grain. She wrote:

In all these years we have not had much need to use the grain stored away for the purpose it was designed, but with the dark cloud hovering over the world as it now does, we can see the prophetic wisdom of President Young in calling upon these sisters to save grain against a time of need.³

Although Mrs. Wells suggested in the article that this might be the beginning of the war Joseph Smith had prophesied would cover the earth, she pointed out that the most important reason for sustaining the program was to prepare the Saints for the "threatening famine which nearly always follow the great wars."³

The encourage the sisters to support the storage program during the war, the General Board used all the old techniques that they had in the past and introduced some new methods that the societies could use to build up their grain supplies. For example, they still asked the women not to sell their wheat even at the prevailing high prices and encouraged them instead to buy wheat with any extra grain funds that they had.⁴ The leaders especially encouraged the members of the Relief Society in agricultural areas to put aside some of their grain because although there seemed to be a surplus of food, they should always be ready for any disaster that might occur suddenly.⁵

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³Ibid.
⁴Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, June 7, 1917, VII, p. 136; September 7, 1914, V, p. 31, Church Archives.
⁵Gates, p. 2.
Besides encouraging the sisters to use the old procedures to accumulate grain, the Relief Society also initiated some new storage programs. One way the Relief Society encouraged the conservation of food during the war was by supporting a wheat and potato raising contest set up by the First Presidency. According to the rules of the contest, any ward Relief Society, Young Men or Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association, Sunday School, Primary, Religion or Priesthood group could win $1,000 if they raised the most spring wheat on five acres. The Church also agreed to pay $500 for the second highest yield and $250 for the third largest crop. The General Board allowed local Relief Societies that wanted to enter the contest to use the grain they had on hand or to withdraw wheat through the Presiding Bishopric's office to use as seed. They were also allowed to loan the wheat to other organizations that wanted to enter the contest.⁶

The General Board also promoted grain storage by encouraging members of the Relief Society to store wheat and flour in their own homes if the program had been discontinued in their area. For example, the women in Salt Lake City kept one to two thousand pounds of flour in small garrets at home because they did not have other facilities where they could store wheat.⁷

In addition to adopting new programs to encourage grain storage, the Relief Society changed the program to help safeguard their wheat.

⁶Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, April 19, 1917, VIII, pp. 102-4, Church Archives.

Ever since the first years of storage when the sisters had had problems with bishops and businessmen over who should control the wheat, the General Board had been afraid that the owners of commercial elevators might speculate with their wheat while the price was high. To prevent the businessmen from having this chance to sell their wheat and make a profit off it during the war, the societies withdrew all of their wheat from the commercial elevators and kept it in reserve in the local ward granaries. The Church also resumed construction of its own elevators. For example, in Logan the Church members built a 50,000 bushel capacity elevator.

All of these extra precautions to make sure the storage program continued paid off in 1916 when there was a shortage of grain in the United States and wheat prices soared higher than they had ever been before the war. This wheat shortage was even more intense after the United States entered the war in 1917 and the government food administration had to control the price and distribution of wheat products to prevent a bread shortage.

The reason there was a shortage of wheat in the United States at this time was because the government was shipping many of its agricultural goods overseas to feed the Allies and the American soldiers. Since much of the farm land in Europe had been destroyed during the

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9*Journal History*, June 13, 1917, p. 3, Church Archives.


11Deseret News, May 1, 1918, p. 7.
war and many of the soldiers and civilians were starving, American citizens were sending all of their surplus wheat abroad to help these people. By January, 1918 all the surplus produce raised in 1917 had been shipped to Europe and the government had plans to send more after the harvest.  

**Sale of the Relief Society Grain**

In the government's attempt to gather all surplus grain to send to Europe, some of the food administrators asked the Relief Societies to sell their supplies. When the officials asked the sisters for the grain, they were not sure if they had the authority to sell their wheat and they sought advice from the General Board and the Presiding Bishopric. In answering the sisters, Presiding Bishop Nibley told them they should not sell the grain even if the food administrators tried to pressure them into the sale. He told the General Board:

We feel the food commissioner has not thoroughly understood the fact that your wheat is purely a donation and is not kept for commercial purpose. . . . As your wheat is a charity fund and held for that purpose, we feel that if the matter is explained to the Food Controller, that he will not demand that the wheat be sold.  

After Bishop Nibley explained these circumstances to the government officials, he was assured that there would be no further pressures on the Relief Society to sell their grain.

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13 Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, May 2, 1918, IX, pp. 122-3, Church Archives.
However, less than a month later, the food controller asked the Presiding Bishopric to arrange for the sale of the grain. The controller for the state of Utah and Henry Blood, the president of the North Davis Stake, discussed the grain situation with Orrin P. Miller and David A. Smith, Bishop Nibley's counselors. The food controller stressed that the grain was needed immediately; there would be plenty of wheat in the fall and then the women would be encouraged to fill their granaries again. He also explained that the sale was a "matter of loyalty of the Relief Society to the government."\(^{14}\)

Bishop Nibley was not in Salt Lake City when this visit took place, but when he returned from his vacation, he found a letter from the government officials asking the Church to sell the grain and received another visit from President Blood and Henry H. Green, Utah's representative to the subcommittee of the milling division of the United States food administration.\(^{15}\) After commending Bishop Nibley on the success of the Relief Society program, Green emphasized that the government needed the grain because although the Texan wheat would be ready in sixty days, there were shortages that would exist until then.

After these two visits, the Presiding Bishopric met to decide what they should tell the government officials, and since they were unsure how to deal with the problem, they asked David A. Smith to explain the situation to the First Presidency. President Joseph F. Smith's counselors, Anthon H. Lund and Charles W. Penrose, told

\(^{14}\)Relief Society Wheat Letters, Susa Young Gates Papers, Church Archives.

\(^{15}\)Deseret News, May 25, 1918, p. 1.
him that the Church would have to comply with the government's request and later President Smith concurred with the decision.  

Since the First Presidency felt the grain should be sold, Bishop Nibley decided to urge the Relief Societies to sell the wheat immediately. To arrange for its sale, he sent a letter on May 16, 1918, to the "Bishops of Wards where Grain is Stored" in which he asked the priesthood leaders to discuss the grain situation with the Relief Society presidents to determine the amount of wheat the sisters had on hand. This information should be forwarded to the Presiding Bishopric and when all the reports were in, the bishopric would tell the local leaders where the wheat should be shipped. In the letter, he also asked that the money the sisters received from the sale be deposited in a bank until he or the First Presidency advised the wards to buy wheat again. He then signed his and Emmeline B. Wells's names to the letter.

In his haste to comply with the request from the government officials, Bishop Nibley neglected to notify Mrs. Wells of the change in policy and although her name was on the letter, she did not learn of the new ruling until the next week. Because he had overlooked telling the Relief Society President, Bishop Nibley was afraid that the sisters might misinterpret the change. To prevent any misunderstanding,

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16Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, May 23, 1918, IX, pp. 140-1, 144-5, Church Archives.

17"Letter to Bishops of Wards where Grain is Stored" from the Presiding Bishop and General Relief Society President, Susa Young Gates Papers, Church Archives; Deseret News, May 20, 1918, p. 1.

18Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, May 23, 1918, pp. 140-3, Church Archives.
he complied with the request from President Joseph F. Smith to discuss the matter with the General Board.19 When he attended the Board's meeting on May 23, 1918, he apologized to the sisters for his quick action and explained why he had felt the wheat had to be shipped before the General Board's meeting.

President Wells graciously accepted the apology and the new policy after she heard Bishop Nibley's explanation. She explained she was not opposed to the decision to sell the wheat, but she was hurt that Bishop Nibley had not consulted with the Relief Society leaders before mailing the letter. She explained that although the Relief Society had asked the Presiding Bishopric to aid in making decisions about the program, the wheat was primarily the responsibility of the Relief Society and it should judge how the wheat should be distributed. Bishop Nibley agreed and promised that he would consult with the sisters before making any further decisions on when the sisters should start the storage program again.21

Although Bishop Nibley promised to work more closely with the General Board in making decisions, the Relief Society continued to have disagreements with the Presiding Bishopric over who controlled the wheat. For example, in June the Presiding Bishopric asked the Relief Societies that had not been paid for their grain to report to their office and also asked the sisters to buy more grain as it was available.21 When the General Board discussed this letter is their

19Ibid., pp. 144-5.

20Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, May 23, 1918, IX, pp. 140-3, Church Archives.

21Letter from the Presiding Bishopric to Bishops, June 27, 1918, Susa Young Gates Papers, Church Archives.
meeting, they decided to ask the Presiding Bishopric not to answer questions without consulting the Relief Society leaders. They also wrote the First Presidency asking them to explain the relationship that should exist between the Presiding Bishopric's office and the Relief Society in directing the storage and sale of the grain.22

This question of who should control the wheat continued to be a problem between the two organizations for even though after this incident, the Presiding Bishopric consulted the General Board before setting up a new policy, they were making the final decisions. For instance, this was especially true when the sisters attempted to start the storage program again and the Presiding Bishopric asked them not to. In August, 1918, David A. Smith informed the General Board of this new policy adopted by the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric.23 Under it, they suggested the Relief Societies not buy any wheat immediately because since the government still controlled the price of wheat, the societies would have to pay an inflated price. Rather than buy grain, the Presiding Bishopric's Office asked the societies to put the wheat money in the bank or to buy government securities. This policy would continue until the brethren told the sisters to store grain, and until then, the societies could store grain given to them as a donation but they should not buy any more. After explaining this policy to the General Board, the Presiding Bishopric wrote a letter

22Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, July 11, 1918, IX, pp. 193-4, Church Archives.

23Letter to Amy B. Lyman from David A. Smith, August 7, 1918, Ibid., September 5, 1918, IX, p. 209.
outlining the new regulations to the Relief Society presidents throughout the Church.24

Their disagreements over who should direct the storage program were not discussed outside the General Board and Presiding Bishopric meetings, and as far as the United States government and the nation knew, the sale of the wheat was a united Church effort. The women of the Church did not want to admit that they did not have absolute control over the program. When it was first organized, Brigham Young had assigned the storage program to them, but gradually as the program became difficult to control and the organization of the Church government changed, they asked the brethren to help direct the program. By 1918, it had almost reached a point where the Presiding Bishopric had complete control over the wheat. Although the sisters saw the need for help from the brethren, they seemed reluctant to admit that in exchange for advice, they had lost power over the control of the wheat. Also, during this period, the Church was trying to create a good public image. To give the image of a united church working for a common goal, differences between organizations were de-emphasized. Therefore, although the Relief Society leaders could discuss the problems among themselves, they saw no need to advertise their difficulties with the Presiding Bishopric to the rest of the world.

Despite these problems with the Presiding Bishopric, the sale of the grain went quite smoothly. Shortly after Bishop Nibley sent

24Letter to the Presidents of the Relief Society from the Presiding Bishopric, August 26, 1918, Susa Young Gates Papers, Church Archives.
his first letter, 40,000 bushels were ground by Utah flour mills and then shipped to the food administrators in Utah. 25 Later, Bishop Nibley also sent a letter to the ward leaders in Idaho asking them to ship their wheat through the food controller in that state.26 By June 24, 1918, the Relief Societies in Utah and Idaho had sold about 200,000 bushels to the United States government for $1.20 a bushel.27

Public Response to the Sale of the Wheat

After the sale of the grain was complete, the Church and the Relief Society received notices of appreciation from the general membership of the Church and individual Relief Societies, from some national and regional magazines and from the federal government.

The official Church magazine, The Improvement Era, published a glowing report of the transaction which states:

Our Relief Societies were called on just prior to harvest time of this year, to supply the government with all the wheat they had stored up for years. . . . They promptly and loyally complied with the request and the wheat has been taken over by the government and used to help meet the demands made upon the country by our allies.28

Individual Relief Societies also voiced their approval of the decision to sell the grain. For example, according to the Box Elder Stake Relief Society, the sale of the grain was "a most


26Letter to the Bishops of Idaho from the Presiding Bishopric, June 10, 1918, Susa Young Gates Papers, Church Archives.


28"Editor's Table," The Improvement Era, XXII (November, 1918), 62.
wonderful thing for the world to know . . . and it would preach the gospel more than words."  

In addition to this recognition from members of the Church, the Relief Society received some attention from national and regional magazines. The *Literary Digest* carried an article by Elder James E. Talmage, an apostle in the LDS Church, in which he described "the recent voluntary action of the Relief Society in turning over to the National Food Administration the great stores of wheat."  

Another article on the sale in the *New West Magazine* praised the foresight of Brigham Young and the sisters in seeing the need for accumulating grain.  

The government also publicly responded to the Relief Society's sale of the grain. For example, Henry H. Greene wrote a letter to the Presiding Bishopric thanking them for their cooperation on behalf of Herbert Hoover, the head of the federal food administration and the local food controllers.  

Hoover also mailed a letter to the First Presidency of the Church in which he expressed his gratitude that the Church had "freely and voluntarily contributed wheat and flour to the government for war use."  

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29 Box Elder Relief Society, Box Elder Relief Society Minutes, 1918-1919, p. 25, Church Archives.


31 Mary F. Kelley, "Brigham Young on Famine," *New West Magazine*, IX (June, 1918), 63.

32 Letter from H. H. Greene to the Presiding Bishopric, June 24, 1918, Susa Young Gates Papers, Church Archives.

33 Roberts, p. 468.
Congressman Milton H. Welling, from Utah which he read during a speech in the House. After he completed reading the letter and explaining the Relief Society program, those present were so impressed by the sisters' devotion to the government that they gave the Relief Society a generous round of applause. The Relief Society received further recognition from the government in 1919 when President Woodrow Wilson visited Emmeline B. Wells in Salt Lake City and personally thanked her for the Relief Society's aid to the war effort.

All of these reports of the sale of the Relief Society wheat give the impression that the transaction with the government went very smoothly, but this was not the case. Even after the final decision was made to sell the grain, the Relief Society and the government officials continued to have some disagreements and one of the initial problems was the Relief Society's fear that some of their wheat would be used to make alcoholic beverages. At a General Board meeting, Susa Young Gates explained that a great deal of the government's wheat was being used to make liquors and that Hoover seemed to favor this practice. After Mrs. Gates asked the Relief Society leaders to voice their disapproval of this government action, Clarrisa Williams persuaded them not to vote on the matter since the State Council of Defense had already expressed their opposition to this use of the wheat.


35Amy Brown Lyman, In Retrospect (Salt Lake City: General Board of the Relief Society, 1945), pp. 43-4.

36Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, June 6, 1918, IX p. 162, Church Archives.
Just as the Relief Society was not pleased with the government's use of the wheat, the food administrators were not satisfied with the grain they got from the Church. In a letter to the Presiding Bishop and the President of the Relief Society, a food administrator from Kansas City, thanked the sisters for selling the wheat but then explained that he felt the Church should discontinue the storage program because of some of the problems the government had in trying to use the grain. In explaining these problems, he pointed out that the government had not been able to use much of the grain because the Relief Society had sold the government several carloads of poorly mixed grades of grain. Another weakness in the program was its attempts to help during disasters were not economical. For example, when the flour was sent to San Francisco, it would have been cheaper for the societies to have sold their wheat locally and sent the money rather than to pay the freight to send flour to the area. "Added to this fact that [the grain] is held in small parcels in rather indifferent storage facilities and you have an abundance of reason for a discontinuance of the practice." After describing these weaknesses, the food controller pointed that although he was aware that he could see "strictly [the] practical view" of the program and that the Church had religious motives, he felt that he could not be expected to appreciate them. However, if the Church felt it should ignore his counsel and continue to store grain after the war, he suggested it be assembled in two or three elevators.37

37Letter to the Presiding Bishop and the President of the Relief Society from a food administrator in Kansas City, Ibid., July 11, 1918, IX, pp. 190-2.
The Relief Society leaders did decide to ignore the food controller's counsel and when they discussed the letter during their meeting, they emphasized that storage was strictly a Relief Society matter and the government had no right to try to direct it. They agreed their program was a holy mission and although they could sell the grain to help the government, they should start conserving the staff of life as soon as possible.38

None of the published sources explained these problems that accompanied the sale of the wheat in 1918 and there is a reason why the government and Relief Society did not publicize their difficulties. This reason had to do with the attempts by the state of Utah and the Mormons during the twentieth century to prove that they were loyal American citizens. During the Smoot trials, the United States government had questioned their loyalty and many Americans still believed after the trial that Utahns were not enforcing the laws against polygamy. To prove their allegiance to the United States, the members of the Church started a public relations program.

Part of this public relations program included supporting the war effort by volunteering to serve in the armed forces, pushing for contributions to the Red Cross and the War Saving Stamps and passing laws which on the surface showed great adherence to the United States policy of restricting the activities of foreigners. For example, one law prohibited unnaturalized citizens from possessing

38Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, July 11, 1918, IX, pp. 192-3, Church Archives.
firearms and hunting. \(^{39}\) Although this law gave the appearance of protecting the nation from Germans and other enemies of the state in America, it actually did nothing to change the laws on possession of firearms.

Another part of this new public relations philosophy was the Relief Society's decision to sell their grain. At first the General Board was strongly opposed to the proposal by the government that they contribute their wheat to the war cause. However, when the government questioned the loyalty of the sisters to the United States and the Presiding Bishopric and the First Presidency finally marketed the wheat, the sisters agreed to sell because they decided it would be better for the Church's image if they said the grain was sold voluntarily rather than under pressure. This interpretation was acceptable to the government officials as long as they got the wheat. With this unspoken agreement, neither group made an issue of the problems they had in selling and distributing the wheat.

World War I brought an opportunity for the Mormon sisters to use their stored grain to help the government's food programs. Although the sisters opposed the sale of the grain at first, they finally agreed to support the Presiding Bishopric's decision to sell the grain. Differences between the Presiding Bishopric and the Relief Society General Board continued following the sale of the wheat, but these were de-emphasized because of the Church's attempt to create good public relations. Problems between the United States government

\(^{39}\) Utah Session Laws, 1917, Chapter 95.
and the Relief Society were also not publicized to help further the Church's public image. Following the sale of the grain, the Relief Society storage program was temporarily discontinued and although the sisters were disappointed by this decision, they looked forward to the day when they would be allowed to store grain again.
CHAPTER V
RELIEF SOCIETY GRAIN STORAGE, 1918-1940

Immediately after the war, the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric re-examined the purposes of the Relief Society storage program. Although they felt that it was still important for the Church to conserve grain, they agreed with the government officials that the program was not worth the trouble or the expense and they decided to suspend it until they could build better elevators. They concluded that until then, the sisters should sell any wheat they had not sold to the government and should send all of the money they had from wheat sales to the Presiding Bishopric's office. There it would be deposited in a special trust fund where it would earn four percent annual interest.¹

The members of the Relief Society accepted this decision to discontinue storage as a revelation from God. According to the General Board, "The Priesthood had instituted the grain saving movement; they had closed the work. . . . As the Relief Society operates under the direction of the Priesthood, it was simply in conformity with them that the grain saving had been discontinued."²

¹ "Priesthood Quorum's Table," The Improvement Era, XXVI (April, 1923), 573.

² Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the Relief Society General Board Meeting, May 2, 1934, XX, p. 32, Church Archives.
Because the women saw the decision as a revelation from God, they expressed a desire to confirm to the General Authorities' decision. Still, many of them were disappointed that the program had been suspended and wanted a more exact reason why it had ended. When the leaders of the Church offered no further explanation other than that it was a revelation, the sisters tried to think of some of the reasons why the Priesthood had discontinued the program. For example, some of the Relief Society leaders decided the storage program had been suspended because it had served its purpose of aiding the Saints and the nation during a time of famine. At the Relief Society General Conference, President Clarrisa S. Williams, head of the Relief Society after Emmeline B. Wells, stated, "The grain saving movement has accomplished its early mission" by meeting the needs of the United States during a food shortage. They also explained that if there should be another famine, the funds would "be safe and ready to use with the direct authority of the president of the Church."

Neither of these explanations show the real reason why the ladies agreed to discontinue the program. They did not seem to realize that disasters and famines still might occur, as they had in the past, and then they came, their money would not buy very much wheat at the enormous prices that the government would sell it. In retrospect, it

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3Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the Relief Society General Conference, September 21, 1922, XIII, p. 80, Church Archives.


seems probable that the main reason the sisters discontinued the program was the request of the president of the Church and the other reasons which made it possible for them to deny that the program had been, in at least a part, unsuccessful.

**The Wheat Trust Fund**

Whatever reasons the sisters gave to rationalize the change in policy, they recognized the fact that the program was over. Their new program was to collect all the funds and mail them to the Presiding Bishopric's office. As the funds gradually flowed into this office, the bishopric issued receipts to the wards showing how much each individual ward had on deposit and promising that Relief Society four percent interest on their account.6

This money came in very slowly because even though the Relief Society encouraged the local organizations to send their money in, they also pointed out they had "no intention of creating any hardship in any district." The Board emphasized that especially when a loan had been made with proper security, the local society should wait until the contract was due before trying to collect the wheat.7 Still, even though the leaders were patient in waiting for the money to come it, they were amazed at the number of problems that the call for the funds brought to the surface that the women had hinted to them throughout the program, but which the General Board had never completely understood.

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6Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the Relief Society General Board Meeting, May 9, 1923, XIII, p. 171, Church Archives.

Some of the problems dealt with the misuse and poor management of the wheat and the funds. Although the Relief Society leaders had advised the local societies not to loan the grain to bishops or members of the ward unless they were given security, to change their wheat frequently and to deposit any money in a secure bank, these policies were not always followed. Since there was no checking up on their programs, they did not inform the General Board of the problems until they received the call for centralization. At that time, they sent letters to the Board telling why they could not send their money in quickly. To help the sisters meet these problems, the General Board gave permission to some wards to send the funds in gradually or to make other arrangements to account for their grain money. 8

One of these problems the women had was trying to collect wheat when the Relief Societies had been given no security. For example, $750 had been loaned to eight individuals in the Cassia Stake of which one had offered no security and another owed $300 that he had not paid interest on for three years. 9 One ward Relief Society President in that same stake had loaned $400 to her bishop, who was also her husband, and had received no note or security. The women in a ward in the Curlew Stake had a similar problem where a widow had borrowed some wheat money that she was unable to pay back. 10 In cases where these types of loans had been made, the Relief Society Board suggested,

8 Relief Society, General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, September 6, 1922, XIII, p. 75, Church Archives.


10 Ibid., August 23, 1922, XIII, p. 69.
"Where, through unfortunate circumstances, wheat money has been loaned without security, we shall expect that whoever is responsible, if the responsibility can be placed, to take up the matter at once of having the money refunded."

The Board adopted a similar policy whenever any amount of money or produce could be reclaimed. For example, in the Ogden Fifth Ward the bishop had borrowed $20 worth of wheat to distribute to the poor and the Board asked the sisters to have the bishop return the grain. This was not the policy adopted, however, in some cases where the wheat or other commodities had spoiled for then the Board allowed the produce to be given to the poor. When the women in Gainesville found it impossible to sell the 525 pounds of beans they had stored instead of wheat because the beans were spoiled, the General Board allowed them to distribute the produce among the needy.

The Relief Society leaders also made special allowances for societies that had lost money in bank failures because in some cases, the banks were these groups that had deposited their funds had failed during the 1920's. For example, the banks in Rigby and Raft Stakes in Idaho went bankrupt during this period and since the societies could not collect any of their money to send to Salt Lake, the General Board asked them to write it off as a loss. However, if they were ever


12Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the Relief Society General Board Meeting, May 9, 1923, XIII, p. 171, Church Archives.

able to recover even a portion of the money, the Board asked them to send it to the general fund.\textsuperscript{14}

After trying to deal with these many types of problems, the Relief Society leaders discouraged the local Relief Societies from loaning or keeping any of their wheat money. They told them the money could not be used for building projects, for financing the Relief Society magazine or for paying for any projects "without the consent of the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric."\textsuperscript{15} Occasionally, however, these groups allowed the societies to use the money to complete worthwhile projects. For example, members of the Redmond Ward in North Sevier Stake used some of their wheat money to pay for draining twenty acres of ward property and some of the stakes in Idaho used their money to help finance the Idaho Falls Hospital.\textsuperscript{16}

This policy was adopted only in specific cases though and generally the Relief Society leaders and the Presiding Bishopric asked that none of the funds be left at home to develop local projects. When the Kanosh Ward asked if they could leave their funds in the state bank of Millard because many of the women opposed forwarding the money to the general office, the Presiding Bishop refused the stake's offer and explained to the Millard stake president that his office had been appointed by the First Presidency to be the custodian of the wheat fund and he felt that all the money should be centralized as possible. He also pointed out that eight hundred wards had already

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, September 27, 1922, XIII, p. 84

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Ibid.}, June 15, 1921, XII, p. 90

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, March 28, 1922, XIII, p. 25; November 1, 1922, XIII, p. 97.
turned their money in and he wanted to see all groups conform to
this new policy.  

Despite statements like these to stake presidents, all of the
wards did not stop storing grain and did not send all of the funds
in immediately. In June, 1920, the General Relief Society Annual
Financial Report shows the sisters still had 111,000 bushels of wheat
stored.  

Although most of this grain was finally sold during 1920,
not all the societies sent the money to the general fund, so that in
1927, President Clarrisa Williams was still calling for all money to
be sent to the Presiding Bishopric's office.  

Wheat Interest

Those societies that did not send their money in were the
exception though and most of the sisters did comply with the new
policy. As their money started to come into the Salt Lake office,
the Relief Society leaders had to decide what they should do with the
four percent interest the Presiding Bishopric was paying. Although
some members felt that the interest should be added to the principal,
the General Board hoped to use the money to develop new projects to
help solve some problems that all of the women faced. One of these
major hurdles that the sisters in the Relief Society had to cross
was the high cost of maternity care and the Board wanted the interest

17Ibid., September 12, 1923, XIII, p. 208

18Lyman, "Relief Society Annual Report," Relief Society
Magazine, VIII (June, 1920), 367.

19Lyman, "Minutes of the General Conference of the Relief
Society," Ibid., XIV (June, 1927), 271-2.
to be used to allow pregnant women "to have good care at reasonable rates." 20

After receiving the permission of the stake Relief Society presidents to initiate a Church wide maternity care program, the Board made plans for maternity homes in Salt Lake City and other areas of the Church. The leaders also encouraged the local societies to each have a maternity care basket and to work closely with the stake and government agencies that were already set up to help expectant mothers. 21

Although the interest was used to finance this new project, the principal was left intact in the Presiding Bishopric's office and even though the amount deposited there varied some between 1920 and 1940, the total was usually about $400,000. 22 The money was kept there to be used when the priesthood asked the sisters to convert it into wheat again. Until then, although the sisters were disappointed that the storage program was over, they accepted the counsel and did everything they could to deposit the money at the Presiding Bishopric's office and to encourage the new program.

20 Ibid., VIII (December, 1923), 193-4.

21 Originally the Relief Society leaders wanted all the funds to come directly to them so they could use the money to direct programs. Ibid. When this program did not receive the support of the sisters in the Relief Society, the leaders agreed to let the local societies have the interest but encouraged them to support a maternity care program. "Circular Letter to Relief Society Stake Presidents from the General Board," Relief Society Magazine, IX (June, 1922), 305-6. Under this program, each ward was to use the interest to help the mothers in the ward and to work with the stake organizations and state government agencies. For more information, see the minutes of the General Conferences in the Relief Society Magazine in the June and December issues during the 1920's.

22 The amount of money held in the wheat trust fund is recorded in the yearly report of the Relief Society. For more information on how much was in the account each year, see the "Financial Reports," Relief Society Magazine, V-XXV.
A Return to Grain Storage

In spite of the liquidation of the program following World War I, it was not long before the sisters were asked to store grain again as part of a new Welfare Program. After the Great Depression hit the United States during the 1930's, many Mormons were unemployed and unable to care for their families. During this depression the leaders of the Church saw the need once again to be prepared to help their members during temporary disasters and to reach this goal; they established a welfare system in 1936. Joseph Fielding Smith of the Council of Twelve Apostles, explained the purpose of the new system when he said, "It has been cardinal teaching with the Latter-day Saints that a religion that has not the power to save people temporarily . . . cannot be depended upon to save them spiritually and to exalt them in the life to come."23 In addition to sponsoring this Church-wide program, the leaders asked the individual members to be prepared to meet emergencies by having "every head of every household. . . see to it he had enough food, and clothing and when possible, fuel also for at least a year ahead."24

As part of this renewed emphasis on being equipped to meet emergencies of the future, the First Presidency asked the General Board in May, 1939 to convert one fourth of their trust funds into


24One Hundred Seventh Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 4, 5, 6, 1957 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1937), p. 26.
wheat. Later in August, 1940, the First Presidency asked that the General Board arrange to use another $100,000 to buy wheat and explained that soon all of the funds would be used to buy grain.

To help oversee this transfer of funds, the First Presidency asked Joseph L. Wirthlin, the Presiding Bishop, Amy Brown Lyman, Relief Society President and Harold B. Lee, head of the welfare system, to form a wheat committee. These people, with the help of an advisory board, were in charge of purchasing wheat, filling the elevators and controlling all sales. In addition, the committee agreed to hire custodians through the welfare agency of the Church to take care of the elevators and the stored wheat. Each of the organizations represented on the committee would also be responsible for covering part of the cost of the program. The LDS Church would pay for storing and caring for the wheat, the Relief Society would give the money for the purchase of the grain and the General Welfare Committee would provide the storage space.

As soon as the First Presidency formed the committee and divided up the responsibilities, each organization set out to accomplish its part of the new project. The Relief Society had to do very little work to get the money to buy grain since the majority of the wheat fund was already at the Presiding Bishopric's office. Attempts to collect outstanding loans from the stakes in Idaho that had borrowed money to help meet their allotments for the Idaho Falls

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25 Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, May 31, 1939, XXII, p. 167, Church Archives.

26 Ibid., August 14, 1940, XXIII, p. 78.

27 Ibid., August 21, 1940, XXIII, pp. 85-6.
Hospital were not successful, but other than this one case, all of the money was ready to be used to purchase wheat. The Welfare Committee had the largest assignment to fulfill before the storage program could begin. To provide a place to store the wheat the sisters were buying, the committee started to build elevators in Salt Lake and Sharp, Utah and McCannon, Idaho that were equipped with machinery to care for the grain.

One of these new elevators was built on Welfare Square and when the Church dedicated it in 1940, many of the Church and Relief Society leaders attended and took part on the program. President Amy Brown Lyman gave a brief history of the Relief Society storage program and President David O. McKay offered the dedicatory prayer. In the prayer, he praised the Relief Society for their example "not only to the Church, but to the entire world in thus losing themselves for the good of others ... and denying themselves of necessities if necessary." In describing the sale of the grain to the government in 1918, he said, "We are grateful that when the time came that the government needed wheat for those who were suffering, who were hungry, the spirit of giving promoted the Church to give wheat to bless those in need." He also explained that the grain money was being put back into storage under the "inspiration ... [of the] First Presidency."

Following the dedicatory prayer, carloads of wheat were emptied into

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28Ibid., December 16, 1941, XXIII, p. 258.
29McGavin, "Grain Storage among the LDS," 185.
30Donna D. Sorensen, "Church Grain Elevator Dedication," Relief Society Magazine, XXVIII (October, 1940), 653-4.
the elevator and by September, 1943, this and all the other Church elevators were filled with nearly 300,000 bushels.31

With the filling of the new elevators, the program had come a full circle and returned to the original program of storing wheat. The Relief Societies had once again donated grain to help the Saints just as they had during Brigham Young's days and the problems of storing grain in only bins and granaries in the local areas were solved by the addition of new elevators and special caretakers to take charge of the wheat.

Throughout the 1920's and 1930's the Relief Society grain storage program was discontinued. After the initial problems during this period of centralizing all of the wheat funds, the sisters did not worry about storing grain and concentrated on a maternity care program instead. Following the Depression and as part of the new welfare system, the First Presidency allowed the sisters to use their wheat money to purchase grain once again. The new policy fulfilled the dreams of the sisters of the Church, especially Emmeline B. Wells, of being ready for famine and natural disasters. The Relief Society was again planning for the future through grain storage.

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31 Relief Society General Board, Minutes of the General Board Meeting, September 5, 1943, XXIV, p. 220, Church Archives.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

The work that has been done in the saving of grain is unusual and unique for women. Joseph in Egypt was the only one that saved and stored wheat for a great nation.

Because the Relief Society saw the grain storage program as a unique calling for women, a study of this movement is an important aspect of the history of that woman's organization. The program is also significant because it touches on several aspects of Mormon history from 1876 through 1940. For that reason, it helps provide new evidence on the role of Millennialism in nineteenth century Mormonism and to show the important role of women in economic affairs in Utah. In the twentieth century it serves as an illustration of the gradual decline of the Relief Society's and other Church auxiliaries' direct control over programs which was accompanied by the rise in the importance of the role of the Priesthood leaders. This change was accompanied by an altered role which Mormon women played in national and state affairs.

Millennial Thought

The Relief Society program adds to the data gathered by Klaus Hansen, Louis Reinwand and other researchers on the role of the

Millennium in Mormon thought. From 1830 when Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints until after Wilford Woodruff issued the Manifesto in 1890, most of the Saints expected the imminent return of Christ to usher in the thousand years of peace during their lifetime. Preceding that reign of peace, they anticipated wars and other calamities. With the issuing of the Manifesto and the changes that occurred in Utah during the 1890's, the members of the Church realized that they would probably not live to see the end of the world and with this change in attitude, they developed a new concept of wars and disasters. For example, they viewed the Spanish American War as a justified fight and not as the war which might usher in the end as they had seen the previous ones. They also no longer saw natural disasters as the emergencies Smith had prophesied would proceed the second coming.

The development of the Relief Society storage program is further evidence of this millennial view. Up until 1890 most of the sisters believed that they were setting aside grain for an immediate famine to precede Christ's coming, yet during the 1890's they realized that they might not need the wheat for the last days. With this realization that the grain might not be used during a famine just before Christ's coming, they used the staff of life to help local members of the Church in Parowan and to aid outsiders in San Francisco and China when disasters hit those areas. From 1907 to World War I, the women were also willing to loan the grain to those farmers with individual problems who were willing to pay the wheat back within a reasonable length of time.
The Relief Society pushed for a continuance of grain storage during World War I so the Saints would be able to survive the shortages created by the war. Although there was a slight resurge of millennialist fervor during the war, this was not the main reason for the refusal to sell the grain to the government during the war. The Relief Society was afraid that if they sold the grain to the government, the church members would be left without provisions to protect themselves during the grain shortage. However, when the government raised the refusal to sell as evidence of Mormon disloyal to the United States, the leaders agreed to support the Presiding Bishopric's decision to sell the grain to the Food Administration.

At that time questions were raised about the economy of the program and following the World War I, the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric concluded the program was not worth the cost. They then asked the sisters to save the money they received from the government as a means of buying wheat but to discontinue the actual storage of grain. During the 1920's and the early 1930's the sisters did not store grain and they used the interest from their trust fund to meet the everyday problems of being wives and mothers.

Grain storage was started again when the depression of the 1930's convinced the members of the Church that they still needed to be prepared for immediate disasters. During this period, the Church developed the Welfare System which provided jobs and supplies to help members of the Church and the rest of the world during times of distress. In addition to this organized church program, the members of the Church were encouraged to have a "one year supply of food, clothing and other essentials to be used in cases of personal
tragedy, natural catastrophes or wartime emergency." Included in this new welfare program was a call by the First Presidency to put the Relief Society wheat trust fund into grain.

Grain storage, now under the Presiding Bishopric, continues to be a major part of the Church Welfare System today. The Mormon people hope to be prepared to meet the needs of the future and to have supplies to help the members of the Church and the rest of the world during natural disasters and wars. Although since 1890 the emphasis for grain storage has been on immediate emergencies rather than on the second coming, the Saints still expect the Savior to return and by constantly being prepared, they hope to be ready for any disasters that might come.

The Role of Women in Mormon Economic Affairs

Beyond millennialism and the changing nature of the program, the main value in studying grain storage lies in the understanding it gives of the role of women in Mormon economic affairs and church government. "The Economic Role of Mormon Women" and The Great Basin Kingdom by Leonard J. Arrington discuss the importance of the women in supporting and maintaining the Church's economic policies. A study of the Relief Society storage program can be used to further understand the importance of the woman's role in Mormonism.

The Relief Society's attempts to direct economic affairs was unique for women in the nineteenth century. During the period from 1850 to 1920 while the majority of American women were fighting for

\[2\text{Allen and Cowan, Mormonism in the Twentieth Century, p. 95.}\]
suffrage and equal rights, the Mormon women felt that they already had many of these rights in the Church. They saw themselves as co-creators with the men and because they were given special assignments to encourage Church welfare, they considered themselves an important part of the organization. Although grain storage was just one of these assignments, it was representative of many of the others.

As was the case in all economic affairs, the women accepted the call to store grain as a mission from the Lord and they were willing to put their time and effort into helping to serve their God no matter what He asked of them. Although the sisters were not completely successful in storing grain, they tried every means they knew to try to continue and improve the program. Yet if on the surface the program seems to be a failure, in many other areas it was successful because it gave the Saints a feeling of security, added to the Church's economic prosperity and well being and provided an important independent role for women.

The Role of Women in Church Government

The grain storage program was also important because of what it reveals about the independent role that women and the Church's organization of women, the Relief Society, played in Mormon church government. Dr. Arrington explains, "One interesting aspect of the Relief Society's assignment [to store grain] is the manner in which it assisted the women to achieve an independent position in Church government."

3 This independence needs to be examined in more depth.

because although the government of the Church has usually been seen as an organization dominated by men holding the priesthood, in this case the sisters were given complete control over the wheat and the brethren were expected to assist only under the direction of the women.

During the early part of the twentieth century the sisters gradually lost some of their independence. There are several reasons why this change took place and why the priesthood started to play a more important role in the program. One was because over the years the program grew so large that the sisters seemed to be unable to deal with all the problems they faced alone. Not knowing how to improve their granaries or prevent bishops from borrowing the grain, the General Board turned to the Presiding Bishopric for help.

This may have been the initial reason for the Relief Society's first approach to the bishopric, but it does not explain the continually increasing role that the brethren played in the movement. To understand the relationship that developed between the Priesthood and Relief Society leaders, it might help to examine the differences in Church organization in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Mormon people appeared to be more diffused throughout America and the rest of the world than they had in the previous century and in many cases they were a minority in large urban centers. Since the leaders of the Church no longer used immigration to Utah as the means in which to hold the Church together, they faced a crisis on how they could give the widely scattered Mormon people a sense of community in a constantly changing complex world. One way that they developed was centralizing
the programs of the Church. During the nineteenth century the Relief Society and the other auxiliaries had been organizations almost separate from the main structure of the Church. For example, although the General Authorities presided directly over the Relief Society members, as Wilford Woodruff indicated when he explained his relationship to the grain storage program in 1896, they did not have a direct control over the Relief Society affairs. This type of relationship changed, however, with the search for a new Mormon community. The leaders formed a new bureaucracy which tended to unite all of the organizations under one general leadership. They hoped that by knitting the organizations closer together, they would be able to feel more united and they could hold the members together more effectively.4

On this basis then it is easy to explain the increasing role the Presiding Bishopric played in the grain storage program. As the Relief Society became more an auxiliary to the Priesthood than a separate organization, it had to rely more on the men to direct its programs. With this change, the First Presidency asked the Presiding Bishopric to give suggestions on how to store grain and handle wheat money and to send letters to bishops about the program. Gradually it became a joint project rather than a Relief Society program and finally the Presiding Bishopric took over to such an extent that the Relief Society was not consulted at all or simply informed of the decision after they had already been made as was the case during World War I.

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This change that took place during the early part of the twentieth century might have been part of the decision of the Church to develop a formal, more centralized bureaucracy in which the auxiliaries such as the Relief Society lost their independent standing and became part of a more closely controlled Church Government. With this change, programs such as grain storage were partially taken over by the Priesthood at first and then finally came under the complete control of the leadership of the Church.

The Role of Mormon Women in National Reform Movements and Politics

If the Relief Society and its programs gradually merged with the Church's developing bureaucracy, it is entirely possible that the change affected the role of women not only in the Church but also in the larger society. It may well be that as the Relief Society began to play a less important role in the development of the Church's programs, the Mormon women also played a less active role not only in Church activities but in national reform movements and politics. As one studies the Mormon women in the nineteenth century, he is amazed at the status and responsibility that some Mormon women had in the Church. In many cases besides acting as the defacto head of a polygamous family, the women also took part in numerous church and national affairs. This century produced women like Emmeline B. Wells who served not only as editor of the Woman's Exponent, director of the grain storage movement and President of the General Relief Society but also was president of the suffrage movement in Utah and active in the national affairs of woman's suffrage meetings. Other notable women included
Susa Young Gates who edited the *Young Ladies' Journal* and served as a member of the General Board of the Relief Society in addition to acting as corresponding secretary to the National Suffrage Movement and writing several chapters on woman's suffrage and Emily S. Richards who also served as a member of the General Board and Central Grain Committee as well as president and vice-president of the suffrage movement in Utah and as an official delegate to suffrage meetings in Washington, D. C. Along with these, women such as Alice Merrill Horne, Margaret Hughes Cannon and countless others also played an important role in state and national reform and political movements. And yet since the early part of the twentieth century, there seem to be few Mormon women who can match these records. It may well be that, like many other ladies in the United States, the climax of their participation in reform came with the adoption of the nineteenth amendment.

If, then, the role of Mormon women, both in the Church and national reform has changed what effect did the changes in church government which developed during this period have on the sisters. As the women were called to work more closely with the Priesthood and to follow their counsel, patterns developed in those relationships may have led them to become reticent about suggesting new ideas and about promoting reform at all and may have brought them to play less active roles on all levels. Certainly, the roles which women like Emmeline B. Wells, Susa Young Gates and Emily S. Richards played and those played by the Relief Society leaders today are quite different. Beyond these things, the study of the grain storage program points to some of the developments in the Mormon church and shows the need for more research on Mormon women and their role in Church government.
The study of this program ought not only increase our understanding of the history of the Church and the Relief Society but should lead to some interesting insights into the role of women in developing bureaucies.

However one looks at the Relief Society grain storage though, he must be amazed at the willingness of the sisters to accept the assignment to serve their Heavenly Father and to help the members of the Church and the world community. Since 1842 when the Relief Society was organized, the women of the Church have been willing to help the Church create a heaven on earth and the grain storage program that was started in 1876 was a continuance of this policy. With this program, despite disappointments over poor granaries and poor grain, the sisters were able to store a great deal of wheat. The Relief Society leaders like Emmeline B. Wells and the individual members can be proud of their accomplishments in fulfilling a sacred mission.
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