

“FOR THE POWER IS IN THEM”: LEONARD ARRINGTON AND THE FOUNDERS OF *EXPONENT II*

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

This essay builds on a talk I gave at Utah State University on July 12, 2017 at a conference honoring Leonard J. Arrington, the first credentialed academic to serve the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as its official Church Historian. Arrington was a polymath, a multi-tasker, and a keeper as well as a writer of history. The USU conference honored the full range of his achievements. In addition to presentations by former history department colleagues, family members, neighbors, and friends, it featured economists, specialists in Western land use and irrigation, an aerospace executive, and a Latter-day Saint who as a teenager had been Arrington’s home teacher. In the opening panel, a cataloguer, an editor, and a biographer offered different but complementary views of the massive diaries Arrington kept from 1971–1997.¹

My talk explored his relationship with a loosely organized group of women in the greater Boston area who produced a female-focused issue of *Dialogue* in 1971, launched *Exponent II* in 1974, and published

1. The program and videos of the presentations at the Leonard J. Arrington Centennial Conference can be found at <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/arrington100/2017>. The speakers on the diary panel were Matthew Godfrey, who catalogued Arrington’s diaries at USU, Greg Prince, the author of a 2016 book on Arrington’s work as a historian, and Gary Bergera, who was then completing the three-volume edition of the diaries published in 2018.

Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah in 1976.² From the beginning, he offered encouragement, practical support, and quiet confidence in our abilities. In the dedication to *Mormon Sisters*, we expressed our appreciation: “To Leonard Arrington. He takes us seriously.”³

Arrington embraced an admonition found in Doctrine and Covenants, section 58: “Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves.”⁴ He never questioned but what those words applied to women as well as men. He published his first essay on the economic contributions of Utah women in 1955, well before second-wave feminism took hold. When called and sustained as Church Historian, he almost immediately hired Maureen Ursenbach and with her help established women’s history as part of the department’s agenda.⁵

2. Internal accounts of our early history include: Claudia Lauper Bushman, “Introduction,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 5–8; Claudia L. Bushman, “Preface,” *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*, edited by Claudia L. Bushman (Cambridge, Mass.: Emmeline Press, 1976), xi–xiii; Claudia Lauper Bushman, “My Short Happy Life With *Exponent II*,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 178–92; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “The Pink *Dialogue* and Beyond,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 28–39; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Mormon Women in the History of Second-Wave Feminism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 45–63; Claudia L. Bushman, Nancy Tate Dredge, Judy Dushku, Susan Whitaker Kohler, and Carrel Hilton Sheldon, “Roundtable: *Exponent II* History,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 129–62; and Carrel Hilton Sheldon, “Launching *Exponent II*,” *Exponent II* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1999), available at <http://www.exponentii.org/history>.

3. Bushman, “Preface,” *Mormon Sisters*, v.

4. Doctrine and Covenants 58:27–28.

5. Gregory A. Prince, *Leonard Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 228–31.

When I gave my talk at USU, I was well aware of our connection to Arrington, but I was a bit fuzzy on details. That is hardly surprising. In the early seventies, no one in our group kept a diary. But he did! So when the opportunity arose to write this essay, I decided it was time to see what, if anything, he had to say about our relationship. Fortunately, his diary had just been published in a handsome three-volume edition with an excellent index.⁶ Tracking names and dates through its pages, I not only discovered missing details about our adventures, I developed a richer and more complex understanding of the larger context which brought us together.

Arrington and his co-author Davis Bitton called it the "unsponsored sector," a place where Latter-day Saints created worthy activities without formal Church control or sponsorship. Some were local innovations within general Church guidelines, others entirely independent.⁷ Arrington's own career is a case study in how this worked. He probably wouldn't have become Church Historian if he and others had not already developed a series of associations that built both scholarly and public interest in a revitalized Church history. He built on these associations as he began his new position, confident that he could harmonize the demands of scholarship and religious commitment. Arrington was not just a consummate historian but, in the words of one of his biographers, "as loyal a Latter-day Saint as ever professed the faith."⁸

6. Leonard J. Arrington, *Confessions of a Mormon Historian: The Diaries of Leonard J. Arrington, 1971–1997*, edited by Gary James Bergera, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2018).

7. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), chap. 16.

8. Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 56–63, 133; Rebecca Foster Bartholomew, "A Life of Simple Goodness; Leonard James Arrington in 1971," in *Confessions of a Mormon Historian: The Diaries of Leonard J. Arrington, 1971–1997*, edited by Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2018).

We shared Arrington's values, but our situation was quite different. Two decades or more younger than he, we were college-educated women, born in the West but now living in the East. Although most of us were "stay-at-home" mothers, we spent a lot of time sustaining the Church. In a stake known for very high standards, we had collectively volunteered hundreds of hours preparing lessons, revising scripts, designing posters, mastering quantity cooking, and researching, writing, editing, copy-reading, illustrating, and marketing a fabulously successful guidebook to Boston, a fundraising project organized by our ward Relief Society. In our lives, the relationship between the unsponsored and sponsored sectors was not very clear. Although none of us had a single minute of free time, we somehow felt an urge to do more.

Maybe that is why Leonard Arrington took us seriously.



Our group began with an informal meeting in my living room in June of 1970. At first, we simply wanted to talk about the implications of the new women's movement swirling around us. Before the summer was over, we had volunteered to produce an issue of *Dialogue*.

At the time, I don't believe any of us, with the possible exception of Claudia Bushman, knew Arrington personally. We encountered him first through the essay he submitted to our proposed issue of *Dialogue*. When Claudia read it aloud at one of our meetings, we erupted in cheers. It wasn't his erudition that impressed us. It was his story about Ellis Shipp, a polygamous pioneer woman who defied her husband in order to return to medical school. His scattershot references to things we had never heard of, like the passing of women's suffrage in Utah in 1870, made our small rebellions seem trivial.⁹

9. Leonard J. Arrington, "Blessed Damozels: Women in Mormon History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 22–31; Ulrich, "Mormon Women."

Most of us met Arrington for the first time in May 1972, when he flew to Boston to participate in one of Boston Stake's landmark events—Education Week. According to his diary, he stayed the first night at the home of Claudia and Richard Bushman, where he met Cheryl May and her husband, Dean. "What an interesting evening!" he wrote. "We talked until 11 p.m. or later." Over the next two days he reported driving to and from the conference with Grethe Peterson and, among other things, hearing a talk on Africa by Judy Dushku.¹⁰ After attending a performance of Gabriel Fauré's Requiem by the combined stake chorus and ensemble, he wrote, "I could not help weeping for joy that such a strong bastion of the Church was now in the Boston area." After visiting with "scholars, historians, educators, and church members in the Boston region," he concluded: "These 'intellectuals' are loyal, active, good spirited, intelligent, and dedicated people."¹¹

His highlighting of the word *intellectuals* is significant. A week before leaving for Boston, he had spent forty-five minutes conferring with Elder Boyd Packer, who had regaled him with stories about the shortcomings of "intellectuals" who relied on their professional training rather than "the Spirit." Packer had singled out a psychologist, a Church financial adviser, and a former stake president in Vermont. He even seemed to criticize Elder Neal Maxwell, who, when serving as Church Commissioner of Education, had proposed creating a board of expert advisers. Packer said that a housewife with only a high school education who had successfully raised a family contributed more to a Church committee he had advised than all the academic experts the group consulted. Since Arrington had himself proposed creating a board of advisers, he asked Packer for comments on the persons he had suggested. Packer declined to approve or disapprove any of them but

10. Arrington, *Confessions*, 1:138–40.

11. *Ibid.*, 1:141.

noted his concerns about one person on the list, who “was great except for one hang-up he had problems on: namely the Negro question.”¹²

That conversation was obviously still fresh in Arrington’s mind when he learned that there were three black families in the Boston Stake. It also shaped his response to a comment by Richard Bushman about the lack of “hang-ups” among students in the area. “For some reason Dick can’t explain, the worry over intellectual conflicts declined when Boyd Packer came into the region [as mission president in 1963].” He concluded, perhaps with a hint of irony, “I plan to ask Elder Packer if he was aware of what he accomplished, and how he did it.”¹³

Arrington made no comment on women’s issues during his visit to Boston, perhaps because they too appeared to have been settled. That was not the case in Utah. In August, Carol Lynn Pearson, who had already established herself as a poet, visited his office. She too had become interested in history. He encouraged her efforts. “Certainly she is not a women’s lib advocate, but she does look for, hope for, pray for greater recognition of women in our history, in our culture, in the Church,” he wrote.¹⁴ A few months later, she gave him the “original unexpurgated draft” of an article on women’s suffrage in early Utah that had been accepted but heavily edited by the *Ensign*. Arrington noted that it was “based primarily upon the *Woman’s Exponent* which was the organ of LDS women’s rights at the time” and that the *Ensign’s* excisions

12. *Ibid.*, 1: 134–38. Arrington commented that Packer “didn’t have the Ph.D. and seemed sensitive on that point.” He may or may not have been aware that in 1962, shortly after becoming a general authority Packer received a doctorate in educational administration from BYU. That was an Ed.D, not a Ph.D. See Cassidy Wadsworth, “Remembering President Boyd K. Packer,” *Daily Universe*, <https://universe.byu.edu/2015/07/03/remembering-president-boyd-k-packer1/>.

13. Arrington, *Confessions*, 1:141–42.

14. *Ibid.*, 1:243–44.

"were mostly items which would seem to encourage women to leave the home and enter professional or business careers."¹⁵

Pearson told him that she had recently testified in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment at a hearing of the Utah Legislature. She explained that before doing so, she had contacted Belle Spafford, general president of the Relief Society. Spafford told her that she believed women had a right to speak their minds on things they had studied, but that she herself believed that the ERA would encourage permissive behavior. Not long afterward, Arrington learned that the *Ensign* had dropped Pearson's article.¹⁶

Weeks later, Jay Todd, editor of Church publications, told Arrington the full story. He said that because Spafford was out of town, Gordon B. Hinckley had made the decision to drop Pearson's article. Todd was quite annoyed because her article was already in galleys and dropping it forced a delay of several weeks in that month's *Ensign*. He said that Spafford affirmed Hinckley's decision when she returned, arguing that since the Church had not yet taken an official position on the ERA, any mention of women's rights would imply approval. He added that the ERA question was now being handled by Elder Boyd Packer, who had somehow gotten hold of a letter by Pearson that "apparently made some strong statements about the Church being dominated by men, by the priesthood, and that women didn't have a fair opportunity for expression. He read that letter to the Quorum of Twelve and they were very indignant about it, and that turned the tables on Carol Lynn." Todd also said that Packer had taken to the Quorum of Twelve "the special issue of *Dialogue* on women, and other matters."¹⁷

Arrington was nevertheless undaunted when a month later, Maureen Ursenbach came into his office to tell him she had just received a

15. *Ibid.*, 1:415–17, 437.

16. *Ibid.*, 1:416–17, 436.

17. *Ibid.*, 1:471–73.

telephone call from Judy Dushku in Boston, who said that the women there had completed a series of lessons at the LDS Institute of Religion in Cambridge on women in Church history. Their discovery of a full set of the *Woman's Exponent* in Harvard's Widener Library had not only facilitated their research; it had generated a new project. Here is how Arrington described it: "[T]hey are going to hold a fair during the first week in June . . . to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the *Woman's Exponent*. They said they would like to invite Maureen to give the main address and to give it on Eliza R. Snow. They would pay her expenses back. Maureen wanted to know if she had my approval to go, and I told her yes, and told her she should definitely go. I gave her some suggestions on approaches to Eliza R. Snow she might incorporate into her paper."¹⁸ Although he referred to the proposed event as a "fair" (he may have meant "affair"), it was actually a gala dinner held at the home of Chase and Grethe Peterson.

That dinner had immediate and positive consequences for Arrington and the Church's history division. Jill Mulvay, who was then teaching in Boston, was so impressed with Ursenbach's talk that she went up to her afterward and asked how to get involved in historical research. On September 12, 1973, Arrington wrote: "Today Maureen and I interviewed Jill Mulvay who will work for us fall quarter on the biography project assisting Maureen to do a biography of Eliza R. Snow."¹⁹ Our group can therefore claim some role in creating the legendary partnership between Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Jill Mulvay Derr.

Meanwhile in Boston, we began revising the talks we had given at the LDS Institute hoping to create an anthology on nineteenth-century Mormon women. When finding a publisher proved difficult, we moved on to an even more exciting project. It was almost ready to go when Juanita Brooks spoke at our second Exponent Day dinner in June 1974.

18. *Ibid.*, 1:482.

19. *Ibid.*, 1:594. For Jill Mulvay's own account of her meeting with Ursenbach, see Prince, *Leonard Arrington*.

Exponent II, a quarterly newspaper devoted to the dual platforms of "Mormonism and feminism," appeared in July. Although it seems unbelievable now, we didn't at the time consider "feminism" a dirty word. As Arrington's own diary suggests, "women's lib" was the more common epithet for activist women. We were not agitators. Our goal was to give Latter-day Saint women a forum for expressing their own ideas. We took great pains to balance each issue with variant points of view. But we did believe in equality.

On November 27, 1974, Arrington described a meeting in which his advisers discussed concerns raised in a recent meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve. They shared with him a letter Elder Packer had sent to the First Presidency repeating his familiar warning about historians who relied on professional standards rather than "the revealed word of God." They added that some of the leaders were also concerned about "too many publications in *Dialogue*" by Church employees. In addition, the Quorum had discussed "Claudia Bushman's Women's Lib magazine, *Exponent II*." Arrington noted, "No further remarks on this." In his summary of the day's proceedings, he nevertheless pointed to an obvious solution: "Keep down our involvement with *Dialogue*, *Exponent II*, and *Sunstone*."²⁰

For Arrington, there was one high point in the discussion. When someone asked if the Church History Department should be required to clear its publications through the Correlation Committee, Bruce McConkie responded with verve: "We have to write history. We cannot avoid the responsibility. And so long as we have to do it, we have to get competent professional people. We cannot expect it to be done by an 8th grade Sunday School teacher or someone untrained."²¹

That might have been comforting for Arrington, but it had no relevance to *Exponent II*. We weren't professionals. We weren't writing

20. Arrington, *Confessions*, 1:753–56.

21. *Ibid.*, 1:755.

history. We were sharing personal essays, stories, poems, book reviews, and news sent in by Mormon women from all over the country. One of the most popular features was called “The Sisters Speak.” The June 1976 issue, for example, featured responses from Urbana, Illinois; Burley, Idaho; and Provo, Utah, to the question: “Do you feel that you’re happier when you discuss your problems with your friends or when you keep them to yourself?” On questions like that, women themselves were the experts.²²

Ironically, our first crisis was not triggered by something we wrote in our newspaper but by an amazingly positive story that appeared on April 13, 1975 in the *Boston Globe*. It highlighted the success of our church in keeping a vibrant and committed membership when other religious denominations seemed to be losing members. Unfortunately, somebody in Salt Lake City was unhappy with several references to Claudia Bushman. “A year ago, Mormon women in the Boston area established ‘Exponent II,’ a monthly publication edited by Mrs. Bushman,” wrote the reporter. “She said she and others are trying to influence, though not criticize, such church policy as discouraging women with small children to work.” Toward the end, the *Globe* raised the issue of the Church’s exclusion of African Americans from the priesthood. Again they cited Claudia: “Mrs. Bushman said her husband, the Boston stake president, has tried without success to get blacks accepted as missionaries. There are many whites within the faith, she said, who wish the ban would be lifted. She said that a change in policy would require a revelation, noting that such a change had occurred in the late 1800s over polygamy.”²³ Her comments may not have been discreet. But they were truthful. Local leaders were indeed trying hard to extend full fellowship to African American members without overtly challenging the Church’s ban on priesthood.

22. “The Sisters Speak,” *Exponent II* 2, no. 4 (June 1976): 17.

23. Kay Longcope, “The Mormon Experience,” *Boston Globe*, Apr. 13, 1975, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

The response came during a stake conference visit from Elder Robert D. Hales, who had recently been called as an assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve. Years before, he had lived in Boston and was a friend of the Bushmans. He warned Claudia against continuing to participate in *Exponent II*, which he predicted would "come to no good." She listened. But when she shared this news with us, the paper's founders decided to write letters to Hales explaining what the paper meant to us and why we felt we should persist.²⁴

I do not remember whether I wrote a letter, but I have a vivid recollection of a second gathering in which former Boston Stake president L. Tom Perry, now a member of the Quorum of Twelve, gave us further counsel. He was gracious but concerned about our paper. He didn't insist that we quit publishing, but he did caution us that if we continued we might damage our own reputations. He explained that there would soon be a whole new set of callings for women at the regional level, and he didn't want us to be overlooked because of what some considered suspect behavior. I don't think any of us found that a particularly compelling argument. We had never aspired to "high" Church position. We knew that because of her husband's position, Claudia felt she had to resign. The rest of us were determined to carry on with Nancy Dredge as the new editor.²⁵

In November, Hales told Arrington that he "was attempting to bring a little imagination courage, and spontaneity into the church magazines." He said the *Ensign* was planning a special women's issue that would feature "an article by Claudia Bushman, poetry by Carol Lynn Pearson, and other things." The March 1975 *Ensign* did include

24. Bushman, "My Short Happy Life," 191-92; "Elder Robert D. Hales," General Authorities and General Officers, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/leader/robert-d-hales?lang=eng>.

25. Bushman, "My Short Happy Life," 191-92; "Elder L. Tom Perry," General Authorities and General Officers, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/leader/l-tom-perry?lang=eng>.

a number of pieces by women, although there is nothing in the issue to mark it as a “women’s issue.” Bushman’s lively essay focused on her grandmother, who had spent her girlhood on Indian reserves in British Columbia and Quebec and was converted to the Church by reading a copy of the Book of Mormon sent to her by relatives in Salt Lake City. There was nothing by Carol Lynn Pearson in that issue, although the *Ensign* featured three of her poems in April 1976.²⁶

Claudia was soon back at work on our abandoned collection of essays, thanks, she believes, to one of Carrel Sheldon’s “great surges of vision and energy.” This is how Carrel herself recalled the decision to go forward:

Our newspaper was an instant success, but our book, *Mormon Sisters*, had been making the rounds of publishers for a year without any success. Deseret Book said they “wouldn’t touch it with a ten-foot pole.” They thought it was a very good book, but “dangerous.” We thought it was important and should be published. So I turned my *Exponent II* job of “business manager” over to Roslyn Udall and set up Emmeline Press, Ltd. so we could publish *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah* ourselves. Within a few months boxes of books completely filled my dining room, stacked from floor to ceiling.²⁷

Claudia explains that in order to finance the book, “a dozen women took a loan for \$1,000 each from a bank. Carrel arranged it from a local LDS banker-bishop.” Since we were able to advertise in *Exponent II*, sales were brisk. By the time the books arrived, the loans were paid off.²⁸ Nor had Arrington’s team abandoned us. Maureen Ursenbach’s

26. Arrington, *Confessions*, 2:119; Claudia L. Bushman, “Maggie Becomes a Mormon,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1975, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1975/03/mormon-journal/maggie-becomes-a-mormon?lang=eng>; Carol Lynn Pearson, “The Valentine,” “Prayer for an Afflicted Child,” and “Short Roots,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1976, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1976/04/poetry?lang=eng.

27. Sheldon, “Launching *Exponent II*.”

28. Claudia Bushman, email message to author, July 19, 2019.

talk on "Eliza R. Snow," Jill Mulvay Derr's essay on "Zion's Schoolmarms," and a piece on "Pioneer Midwives" by Chris Rigby Arrington (Leonard's daughter-in-law) appeared alongside our essays in the table of contents.²⁹

On November 26, 1976, I wrote in a little journal about spending the previous day in Boston with my friend Bonnie Horne.

Bonnie & I went to the Bushman's. It looks nice despite a few printer's errors. Claudia repeated her anxieties about "getting people in trouble." . . . I don't know how to handle this sort of thing. I think it is damning to look for trouble from on high. Somehow we need to have more faith, not only in ourselves, but also in heavenly Father. I won't live in a garrison. Who are these bogey men out there? They are real—as Claudia's experience with the *Exponent* showed. Yet the paper goes on. . . . Well—I must read *Sisters* and decide if it should be banned or promoted. I like the cover.³⁰

The cover featured a turn-of-the-century photograph by George Edward Anderson in which three resolute women stand on the steps of a house looking outward.

Arrington's diary entry for Christmas Eve that year provides a tranquil coda to this story: "James and Susan and I made our annual pilgrimage to Boyd Packer to deliver two of Mamma's luscious pecan pies. He received us cordially." Afterwards, they carried "the Mormon Sisters" book to several female neighbors.³¹



Through a string of seeming coincidences, our DIY projects connected with Arrington's historian's shop. He graciously submitted an essay to

29. Bushman, *Mormon Sisters*, 25–88.

30. This entry comes from a small diary I kept intermittently from 1961 to 1962 and then on and off from 1976 to 1978.

31. Arrington, *Confessions*, 2:334.

our proposed issue of *Dialogue*, encouraged our efforts at historical research, and sent documents and people our way. But none of these things would have happened if we hadn't first volunteered to edit an issue of *Dialogue*, agreed to present a series of lectures at the Institute, dared to launch a feminist newspaper, and risked our own time and money to self-publish a book.

We played a small part in a much larger history. The diary Leonard Arrington kept between 1971 and 1997 shows how through collective effort and a risky combination of scholarship and activism, Latter-day Saint women living in widely separated parts of the United States embraced their own history. It preserves small moments in the lives of Lavina Fielding Anderson, Valeen Avery, Rodello Hunter, Linda Newell, Emma Lou Thayne, and others who in different ways contributed to a feminist awakening. It also contains powerful observations from the mostly invisible women who kept both the unsponsored sector and the Church itself going during a very difficult time. As Church Historian he helped to create the field of Mormon women's history. As a diarist he laid a foundation for future histories.

LAUREL THATCHER ULRICH {ulrich@fas.harvard.edu} began her writing career in 1956 with an essay in *Seventeen* magazine describing Christmas in Sugar City, Idaho, her hometown. A graduate of the University of Utah, she moved with her husband, Gael Ulrich, to Massachusetts in 1960, and then to New Hampshire, where she completed her PhD in early American history. She is the author of several prize-winning books, including *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870*, which was published in 2017. She recently retired from Harvard University and has begun sorting through a disorganized collection of old papers that helped inspire some of the thoughts in the essay in this issue. She and Gael now live in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania near some of their children and grandchildren and are members of the Philadelphia Fourth Ward.