

Sustained by Faith and Community

In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo. Edited by Carol Cornwall Madsen (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1994).

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CAROL CORNWALL MADSEN'S *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* brings together accounts of life in Nauvoo, Illinois, by about two dozen LDS women, some well known, some relatively obscure. Professor Madsen's introduction details the "kinship" networks these women formed through mutual help and support, discusses their avid participation in the Relief Society and temple ordinances, and argues that their deep faith and sense of community helped them cope with sickness, shortages of food and shelter, and persecution during the troubled years of the early 1840s. Primary selections are arranged by genre—diaries, letters, and reminiscences—with brief introductory notes discussing each form. Before each individual selection Professor Madsen provides a brief biography of the writer and highlights important aspects of theme and style.

The volume attests directly that it provides a "testament to the compelling power of faith" (29), and selections (and the introductory essay) uniformly give a picture of heroic, devout, caring women, a true sisterhood of Saints. We see women suffering, but

they remain exemplary. Though the voices are varied and individual, the picture is uniformly uplifting. Professor Madsen does note generally in her introduction that "these women were selective in what they recorded, and the reader [and the historian] must always recognize the historical limitations of personal discourse" (x), but the internal commentary sidesteps "touchy" issues (we read, for instance, diary entries by Eliza Snow from the days when she was first married to Joseph Smith, but Professor Madsen does not discuss Emma Smith's opposition to polygamy). This is ultimately a valedictory volume, not an analytical one, and some readers might wish that the overall image were a bit more rounded.

That said, it is also a delightful volume. The selections vary considerably in tone, length, and content, testifying to the various ways that the writers coped with adversity, and, as Professor Madsen emphasizes, to the writers' persistent conviction of the truth of LDS teachings. Some passages are full of pathos, like Sarah Decker's reminiscences about sitting up with her father's corpse after the Battle of Nauvoo; some are angry, like Elizabeth Heward's comments on the irony of LDS men being asked to volunteer for the U.S. Army immediately after they had been driven from their homes. Others are elegant in their directness and restraint, like Drusilla