

bers. Shipps vastly overestimates the spread of this usage, which implies a theological ecumenism foreign to most members of the Church. Shipps is of course fully aware of the need within Mormonism to be separate from other forms of Christianity—a theme central to her 1985 path-breaking work, *Mormonism: The Story of A New Religious Tradition*. The difficulty is that it is unclear how the current emphasis on Christ within the LDS church will affect the relationship between Mormons and other Christians. Shipps is certainly correct that the expanding church is now in a transition phase. She may yet prove

prescient that “unless the matter of LDS identity is somehow solved in the new multinational situation, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has little hope of maintaining itself apart from other forms of Christianity” (p. 272).

Many would ask: why would a non-Mormon historian spend her whole career studying the Mormons? This book is filled with such penetrating and unending curiosity that the only answer can be “She just finds them fascinating.” May Shipps stay as a permanent resident in the land of Mormon history and keep writing about it for a long time to come.

A Variety of Women's Voices

Life Writings of Frontier Women Series, Utah State University Press Series Editor, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher

Volume One: *Winter Quarters: The 1846-1848 Life Writings of Mary Haskin Parker Richards*, edited by Maurine Carr Ward (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), 336 pp.

Volume Two: *Mormon Midwife: The 1846-1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions* edited by Donna Toland Smart (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 457 pp.

Volume Three: *The History of Louisa Barnes Pratt: Mormon Missionary Widow and Pioneer*, edited by S. George Ellsworth (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998), 420 pp.

Volume Four: *Out of the Black Patch: The Autobiography of Effie Marquess Carmack, Folk Musician, Artist, and Writer*, edited by Noel A. Carmack and Karen Lynn Davidson (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1999), 398 pp.

Volume Five: *The Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, edited by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000), 316 pp.

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THIS LAUDABLE AND AMBITIOUS SERIES presents a variety of life writing by Mormon women, ranging from diaries and letters to memoirs and more formal autobiography. Series editor Maureen Ursenbach Beecher begins each volume by advocating the importance of women's writing for our fullest understanding of western history and culture. These life stories are particularly woman-centered, for the Mormon women's husbands were often absent on missionary journeys, which compelled their wives to be uncommonly strong and independent. Beecher also wants readers to feel an intimate link with these women of long ago, which is perhaps why the series uses first names, a practice that would have seemed im-

pertinent to Victorian women but seems consistent with this collection's goals: "The reader of this and the other texts in the series is invited to sit back, relax, and let the words flow. Consider the reading a conversation with a neighbor, an introduction to a new friend" (vol. 3, p. x). Each volume has its own "personality" that emerges from the voice of the original writer in collaboration with the perspective of the editor who shapes the introductory essay and documentation.

The series begins with Mary Richard's diary, kept during her sojourn at Winter Quarters, 1846-1848. While diaries are surely considered the nonliterary "stepchild" of autobiography, as Beecher terms them, she sees in their immediacy a good story: "Never quite complete, always concealing something, they are as gripping as a mystery story, as engaging as a play unfolding on an intimate stage" (p. xii). If one can tolerate Mary's idiosyncratic spelling and punctuation, one enters not only her daily routine of prodigious amounts of needlework in her in-laws' home, but the challenges facing this newlywed whose husband is away on a mission:

we traveled along through wood a prairie and about 2 o'clock arrived at the pony creek Indian Village where we stayed all night at a Bro [James] McLellens I think. with whom I had a confab about keeping council & following the Church. he thought 'twas best for every one to live where he could get the most to Eat and keep his family the most comfortable and I contended that it was better to sacrifice and suffer with the Saints for then we possessed a hope that e'er long we should enjoy the blessing with them. . . there was many other thing that we spoke about but I cannot write them (p. 111).

Mary's letters show great affection for her absent husband Samuel: "I am very glad to hear that you are going to send me your likeness though would much rather see the Boy that wears the curl" (p. 73). But when Samuel returned and decided in 1855 to enter plural marriage, Mary's spirit and health deteriorated. This period of her short life was not covered in her diaries, although editor Maurine Carr Ward addresses the complexities of this relationship in her introductory essay: "Mary's letters depict Samuel as insensitive and inconsiderate. . . His letters talk of feeling lonely away from the warmth of his home and wives and of his love and concern for them. . . He may have been so involved with his own affairs that he saw only what he wanted to see at home" (p. 40). Thus we are left with virtual silence regarding Mary's greatest personal challenge, in contrast to the daunting detail of her earlier diary, a frustrating characteristic of authentic life writing. The volume contains almost seventy pages of biographical information about Mormon families and is richly illustrated, as are all the books in this series.

Volume Two presents the diaries kept from 1846 to 1888 by famous Mormon midwife Patty Bartlett Sessions, who died shortly before turning 98. The decision by editor Donna Toland Smart to indicate in the text where Patty corrected her own diary lends a wonderful sense of dynamism; we see a woman re-reading and clarifying as she creates a book of her self. As Smart observes, "Patty told her tale while she was living it, shifting attention from one scenario to another with little or no elaboration. She was too busy to explain fully what she already knew, writing, as it were, only reminders for herself" (p. 24). The editor's footnotes (which save the reader from having constantly to flip back to endnotes in a

dizzying dance) provide information the sparse text cannot provide. Smart spent seven years editing these diaries, which are wonderfully depicted in the volume's photographs. Patty Sessions suffered the deaths of five of her young children, was sealed to Joseph Smith, endured stormy polygamous marriages with her two husbands (both of whom chose Patty's home for solace in their dying days), founded a school, and as a widow "laid up considerable"—\$16,000 (p. 26). The diary's reticence (her first husband is called Mr. Sessions) is discarded when Rosilla becomes his first plural wife:

Saturday 3 Mr. Sessions took all the Saliratus I had gave it to Rosilla told her to lock it up from me and keep it ^he also abused me very much^ for she had told him many things that were untrue and when he found out the truth he took ^the most of it^ back again and gave it to me Sunday 4 I feel bad I am in trouble (pp. 62-63).

It is an unfortunate loss to history that Patty's earlier diaries dating from 1812 are missing, for they covered the beginning of her marriage, her conversion, and important years in the birth of the Latter-day Saints. One is made all the more curious by Patty's observation as she starts her diary of her sixty-first year: "I have been reading my journal and feel to thank the Lord that I have passed through what I have" (p. 226).

Volume Three in the series contains the marvelous memoir drawn from the diaries of a remarkable woman, Louisa Barnes Pratt (1802-1872). The spirited Louisa traveled to Winter Quarters without assistance from her husband, experienced the pioneer days of Zion, joined her husband on a missionary trip to Tahiti, and ultimately chose to

rejoin the community of saints in Utah rather than stay with her husband in California. As one daughter observed of this choice, "Mother has better courage to live in a hard place. She has had a deeper experience, and does not dread hardness so much" (p. xvii). While memoirs, especially those written for one's children as were Louisa's, can be filled with bland platitudes, this one has a distinct and genuine voice throughout. En route from Nauvoo, Louisa notes, "I found great pleasure in riding horseback. By that means I could render some assistance in driving the stock" (p. 81). She abhorred buffalo hunts, sympathizing with the panicked animals. She negotiated with church elders in order to venture to Tahiti, only to suffer enormously from sea sickness, which she describes: "it is continually dying, and yet you live! It is not to be told but only to be felt" (p. 123). In Tahiti she virtually adopted a little girl whose "color was not objectionable"; in a moment of candor, she writes, "Never does my mind revert to the scenes enacted on that 'isolated world' but I remember the patter of those little feet, and can see the golden child in the water. I have digressed. I will return to my journal" (pp. 164, 165). The Pratts did adopt a half-Tahitian boy, and during her California years, Louisa fretted about his "nature" and the influence of her nurture. Even in old age and increasing isolation, Louisa writes, "So I communed with myself, and resolved to set my heart lightly on every thing. . ." (p. 284). The overlap of genres—journal and memoir—provides a richly layered text that combines the journal's immediacy with the memoir's wisdom, although editor S. George Ellsworth's introduction is vague about the types of "abridgements and alternations" Louisa made during the twenty years she spent cre-

ating this text bequeathed to her children—and, thanks to this series—to us.

Volume Four is *Out of Black Patch*, the lively autobiography of folk musician, artist and writer Effie Marquess Carmack (1885-1973), written in a wonderful chatty tone. She begins, "I thought that maybe some of my children, or grandchildren, might just appreciate a story of my life. Not that there has been anything very extraordinary or wonderful in it, but one thing sure, it is different from that of any other" (p. 31). A large portion of the book recounts her childhood home of rural Kentucky so vividly that we can smell its heat and tobacco. Editor Karen Lynn Davidson suggests that this emphasis on happy childhood days might compensate for the marital disappointments Effie later faced. One simple line by Effie about her husband's role during her convalescence from illness speaks volumes to most women: "Edgar told the Doctor that he could do the washing easy, but after just one attempt, he hired a negro woman to come and do it, and she did a good job of it" (p. 267). The text is uneven, with some events like courtship glossed over and others—particularly her bringing son Cecil back from death—poignantly recounted. While Davidson embraces the silences and mysteries in this autobiography (which may in fact be a collaboration with Effie's daughter, who typed from the original which no longer exists), she provides wonderful answers in her footnotes about folk ways, medicines, and history. (This is the best-documented book of the series.) In later life, Effie became a renowned painter and won a prize at the New York World's Fair. She built a gallery teaching studio in her mid-fifties and completed its hand-laid fireplace after a beloved Kentucky model. In her mid-sixties, Effie

took her collection of folk songs, her guitar and costumes to Knott's Berry Farm to audition, which led to a new career as a performer. While Effie was clearly not a "frontier" woman, whether building a loving family, a studio, or a folk music repertoire, she had a sense of humor that enlivens her anecdotes throughout.

Volume Five is actually a second edition of the 1995 book based on the personal writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow that was to have begun this series. Eliza is the most prominent Mormon woman in the series, which means she often overshadowed herself as an individual in favor of herself as a model. As editor Maureen Ursenbach Beecher notes, "One would hope to glimpse both the external 'Eliza' and the intimate 'I' in her diaries, in her verses, and in her autobiographical reflection ... The 'I,' the inner woman, remains in relative obscurity, hidden intentionally under the coverings of a propriety which protected Eliza from the curious, the antagonistic, even from her friends, and in large part, from us" (p. xviii). Eliza is particularly hidden in her "Sketch of My Life," which was written as a defense of Mormonism with the public in mind. Her trail diaries, in contrast, are more animated:

Ate our bread up for supper & have not wood, expecting to find it lat night but thro' the kindness of Moth. Chase we are supplied with the addition of b. chips & we have a good breakfast. . .the Ind. that annoy'd us last night, pass us & strike their tents & travel with us til near night when they fall in our rear & we encamp near them. . . (p. 187)

Beecher, who is the editor of the entire series, is knowledgeable about the strengths and deficiencies of each

type of life writing and shows this in her discussion of Eliza's journal describing the devouring crickets that ate the Saints' crops in Zion in contrast to the later story that included providential seagulls. Beecher's choice to begin the book with the more formal "Sketch," followed by the earlier diaries, is curious. This volume does not contain the helpful bibliography that the other books in the series do.

A good place for general readers to enter this garden of life writing would be with the memoirs by Louisa Barnes Pratt and Effie Marquess Carmack. The diaries require more patient reading, which will be rewarded by the incremental knowledge of independent women with an "itch to record." In general, the lesser-known the woman, the more candid is her life writing. Photographs of the fragile original diaries in these books remind us how ephemeral life writings are and how wise the families and LDS archivists were to preserve them.

Scholars of women's history and life writing will find the series weak on secondary materials. The intention of the editors, stated in each introduction, was not to overly interpret their subjects' writing, leaving the words to speak for themselves. According to series editor Beecher: "While some background material is provided in the endnotes to each chapter, there has been no attempt to summarize the entire history of the times in which the author wrote. There is purpose in such paucity of textual explanation: we present this series

with the intent that, in this reading, the focus be upon the writer herself and her intimate circle" (vol. 5, p. x). However, books emanating from an academic press should provide enough scholarly content to place individual women's lives into context. These books have admirable documentation of Mormon scholarship, but (with the exception of the fourth volume) do not demonstrate knowledge of the wider field of life writing and Western women's history that would illuminate the context in which these Mormon women lived and wrote. The bibliographies and notes do not provide these trail markers to a huge body of literature.

At the same time that they eschew intrusive interpretation, the introductory essays in this series summarize the entirety of each woman's life story and highlight the dramatic points the reader is about to encounter. For this reader, this foretelling takes the very life out of life writing. The major mileposts in each woman's life could have been placed within the notes to her text rather than in front of it. This would have allowed her in essence to "speak" first. If we truly have confidence in pioneer women's voices, as the labor that went into this impressive series would indicate, perhaps instead of standing in front of Eliza, Effie, and their sisters to tell us why we will find them interesting, the editors could have stood back, gently guided us within their notes if the text's language was obscure, and let these women speak to us for themselves.