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# "Real, Live Mormon Women": Understanding the Role of Early Twentieth-Century LDS Lady Missionaries

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“REAL, LIVE MORMON WOMEN”:  
UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY  
LDS LADY MISSIONARIES

by

Kelly Lelegren

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

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2009

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## ABSTRACT

“Real, Live Mormon Women”:  
Understanding The Role of Early Twentieth-Century  
LDS Lady Missionaries

by

Kelly Lelegren, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2009

Major Professor: Dr. Jennifer Ritterhouse  
Department: History

Missionary work has long been an important aspect of Christianity. At least as early as the 1870's, Protestant women began journeys to foreign lands to work as missionaries and teach people about Christianity, both the spiritual dimension and the lifestyle. These were primarily independent women who sought to enlarge the women's sphere from the confined, domestic life to which they were accustomed and because of its decline by the 1930's, historians have often labeled these missions as a “feminist movement.”

Meanwhile, in 1898, their counterparts from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also began filling missions, but with a different purpose. These women, known as “Lady Missionaries,” did not seek out the new role, but were assigned by Church leaders to share the Mormon message and to show that Mormon women were

something other than the stereotypical downtrodden, polygamous wives often portrayed by the media.

The greatest evolution of the Lady Missionary program occurred during its first three decades as the LDS Church defined the role of the Lady Missionary and established guidelines for all to follow. Three women of this period are Inez Knight, Stella Sudweeks, and LaRetta Gibbons. Knight, the first Lady Missionary, labored in England from 1898-1900, where she stood on corners as an example of a “real, live Mormon woman” and faced religious persecution from non-Mormons. Sudweeks filled her mission in the mid-West from 1910-1912, where she had been motivated by anti-Mormon sentiments, but faced less difficulties than Inez while sharing her message and also had more training and established expectations than those previously. Finally, Gibbons worked from 1933-1935, mostly in Colorado, where she spent comparatively more time among new converts teaching them their role within the Church and encouraging them to share their religion with neighbors. Their accounts and experiences show that women have long had a steady and significant role in the LDS Church’s missionary program, which has long gone unnoticed and offers a new perspective on Mormon women.

(105 pages)

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

On June 2, 2005, I stepped off a plane in the Dominican Republic, the country that would serve as my home for the next year and a half, while my home in Arizona remained nearly a world away. As a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I had two possessions with me at all times, as I spent my days among the people in some of the oldest towns of the New World. First, clipped to my blouse was my little, black nametag, allowing everyone to know who I was and what church I represented. Second, tucked safely inside my scriptures sat my ministerial certificate, authorizing me to represent the LDS Church and preach its doctrines. Apart from serving in leadership capacities and performing Church ordinances, such as baptisms and healings, the female missionaries' duties matched those of the young men in the mission. We knocked on doors, handed out Books of Mormon, taught potential converts, visited Church members, and participated in Church meetings. Our numbers as "Sister Missionaries" remained consistent, never falling below nine and never rising above fifteen, among the approximately 500 missionaries that covered the southeastern portion of the country. Statistics show that three years before I began, the number of female LDS missionaries stood at 11,095, representing eighteen percent of the total LDS missionary force. While the ratio seems small, it too has continued steadily, with women making up ten to twenty percent of total LDS missionaries since 1915.<sup>1</sup> Following my time as a missionary, I returned to school, married, and continued as a lay-member of the Church,

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<sup>1</sup> Tally S. Payne, "'Our Wise and Prudent Women': Twentieth-Century Trends in Female Missionary Service," in *New Scholarship on Latter-day Saint Women in the Twentieth Century: Articles Selected from the Women's History Initiative Seminars, 2003-2004*, ed. Carol Cornwall Madsen and Cherry B. Silver (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2005), 127.

just as I watched many of my counterparts do. Though the mission was a short-term experience, it allowed me to take on a role that has been performed throughout the centuries and across various Christian denominations.

My inspiration to become a missionary was my great-great grandmother, Martha Smith Merkley, who served as a missionary in the Southern States Mission from 1910-1912. I know very little of her experience besides what is found in the mission reports submitted to *Liahona the Elders' Journal*, a former missionary publication, and what her photographs tell me. Still, whenever I felt weighed down by my responsibilities, I would think, "If Martha could survive a mission ninety-five years ago, then surely I can too." After I returned home, I began to question more fully what it would have meant for her and other young LDS women to serve missions at that time. When and why did the LDS Church first appoint women as missionaries? What were their purpose and duties? How different is the missionary program now from a century ago? This thesis is the result of seeking answers to these questions. It will put these early "Lady Missionaries" into the context of American history, as has been done with their Protestant counterparts, and will explore the establishment and purpose of sending these women to the mission field, covering the years 1898-1935.

In fact, Christian missionary work is as old as the Bible itself. The book of Mark in the New Testament explains that after the resurrection of Jesus, he appeared to his remaining eleven apostles and exhorted them to spread Christianity throughout the land. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature... And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with

signs following.”<sup>2</sup> Once Christianity reached the Romans, the young religion spread with them as they conquered the lands of Western Europe. Centuries later, conversion to Christianity meant conversion to Europeanism, or more specifically, conversion to the ways of the growing British, French, Portuguese, and Spanish empires. Anyone without allegiance to the Christian god, whether Irish, Moslem, African, or Asian, was labeled a “heathen,” and as such, could not be saved a spot in heaven. This distinction was often used as a political advantage by monarchs who found power and justification in conquering non-Christian peoples. Meanwhile, European missionaries traveled throughout the world, “taming the savage,” and teaching him grace, salvation, and the path to becoming “civilized.”

By the early nineteenth-century, a number of American Protestant sects formed “missionary societies,” in which members donated, and gathered donations, to support the missionaries and missionary work abroad. From the beginning, American Protestant women found these societies to be a worthwhile cause in which they could participate. Before long, not only were women accompanying their husbands on foreign missions, but unmarried women began heading out to places such as China, India, Africa, and North American Indian reservations to set up schools and “civilize” the homes and cultures of the native people.

Meanwhile, in 1830, a new Christian sect appeared in upstate New York, founded by a young man named Joseph Smith. Officially named the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but quickly nicknamed the “Mormon” Church because of new scripture called the *Book of Mormon*, it too sent out missionaries from the beginning, preaching its

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 16:15,20 KJV (King James Version).

own version of the Christian message. Though it did not take long before these missionaries also taught the native “savages” of North America, they remained focused on sharing their announcement of a current prophet and continuing revelation with fellow Christians.

Though LDS women supported the men in their role as missionaries by looking after the home and occasionally accompanying their husbands, unmarried women did not fill missions of their own until the end of the nineteenth century, and for a different purpose than their Protestant counterparts. Whereas Protestant female missionaries went out to “Christianize the heathen,” and more specifically the women and children, LDS female missionaries worked to educate their fellow Christians about Mormonism. Mormons themselves were often viewed as non-Christians and heathens because of LDS belief in living prophets, administering angels, and by the 1850s, the practice of polygamy. Thus, LDS female missionaries had to explain their doctrine and practices to other Christians to argue they were not the heathens they were portrayed to be.

Though Mormon creed has hardly changed, and few specific practices have changed since the Church’s founding in 1830, the level of tolerance from non-Mormons has changed dramatically. The first eighty years of the Church’s history, and particularly the Polygamy Era of the second half of the nineteenth century, brought heavy opposition and persecution. In *Viper on the Hearth*, Terryl Givens argues two reasons Mormonism became a target for hostility and negative imagery. First, Givens contends that the Mormons’ tendency to keep to themselves brought trouble on them. “Their principle of ‘gathering,’ their self-identification with the House of Israel, and their relegation of all others to the status of ‘gentiles’ did not help.” He then quotes historian Joel Kotkin, who

writes, “what distinguished the Mormons and offended their ‘gentile’ neighbors was a kind of clannishness, what one mid-nineteenth-century writer described as their Jew-like ‘separation from their great brotherhood of mankind.’”<sup>3</sup> Mormons were a curiosity, and it would not be until the early twentieth century, when Mormonism became more conventional by ending polygamy and encouraging new converts to stay in their homelands that the greatest period of opposition would finally close.

The second reason that Givens argues anti-Mormonism flourished in the nineteenth century was that targeting Mormons was an ideal distraction from other controversial debates, including abolitionism, temperance, workers’ rights, and woman suffrage. As Democrat Robert Tyler wrote to President James Buchanan in 1857, “Should you, with your accustomed grip, seize this [Mormon] question with a strong fearless and resolute hand, the country I am sure will rally to you with an earnest enthusiasm and the pipings of Abolitionism will hardly be heard amidst the thunders of the storm we shall raise.”<sup>4</sup> As a result of these arguments, anti-Mormons went to work, centering their attack on Mormonism’s greatest distinction: polygamy. Anti-Mormons used magazines and newspapers to create an image of Mormons as overbearing, lustful husbands ruling over their harems of oppressed, enslaved wives. When the Church formally ended polygamy in 1890, leaders would quickly look for new ways to dispel the old images. Thus, LDS female missionaries were needed to break down the negative stereotype and prove to other Christians they were civilized. Their missions served this purpose more than to “civilize” those from different cultures, as their Protestant

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<sup>3</sup> Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 53.

<sup>4</sup> Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 38.

counterparts were doing. In other words, LDS female missionaries had to “Mormonize the Christian,” by showing the western world who the Mormons were and teaching new converts how to assimilate into the peculiarities of Mormonism.

While a significant body of literature exists on unmarried, Protestant female missionaries, particularly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, very little has been written on unmarried, proselytizing LDS female missionaries, even within the LDS Church’s own history. Interestingly enough, the Protestant female missionary movement rose and fell along with other turn-of-the-century feminist movements, even though not all Protestant female missionaries considered themselves feminist. Still, with greater public roles available to women today, relatively few Protestant women currently serve as missionaries. The LDS female missionary movement, on the other hand, has steadily climbed throughout the years, remaining in proportion to the number of male missionaries. Therefore, after providing background information on Protestant and LDS female missionaries, this thesis will focus on the role of the LDS women with a two-fold purpose. First, it will open up conversation on an under-discussed topic in both American and Mormon history. Second, it will argue that the female LDS missionaries were originally sent out with their own gendered purpose, paralleling the Protestant women, though male and female LDS missionaries alike claimed the duty of “preaching the gospel.” Protestant men evangelized while the women primarily taught in schools, nursed the sick, and shared Christianity with other women, devoting the rest of their lives to the mission. LDS women also spent much of their time among women and children, but specifically to teach them the gospel and help them to better understand the role of Mormon women, all during the short year and a half to two years they spent in the

mission field.

### “Christianize the Heathen”

Although their arguments vary, scholars have tended to view the Protestant female missionary movement as a feminist movement—a chance to redefine womanhood and the rights of women as individuals—for both missionaries and converts. Missions offered women an opportunity for independence and leadership, two things few would find in the comforts of home. In *American Protestant Women in World Mission*, R. Pierce Beaver makes the argument that the women’s missionary movement “began as the first feminist movement in North America and stimulated the rise of various other streams in the nineteenth-century struggle for women’s rights and freedoms.”<sup>5</sup> Beaver gives a history of the rise and fall of the movement, concluding that, today it “is no longer a great creative force within society at large.” He suggests that the movement rose because women needed a cause for which they could fight, and perhaps fell because of a stronger feeling of liberation among American women years later. “Many Northern women had been actively involved in the abolition movement. Then the women of both North and South were given a passionate cause for devotion in the Civil War. The War was the most effective school for women in initiative and public affairs in the course of the nineteenth century.” Among their roles during the War, women managed farms, aided soldiers, and nursed the wounded and disabled.<sup>6</sup> With the war over, women needed a new outlet to exert that same drive, independence, and leadership. However, it took

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<sup>5</sup> R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Beaver, *American Protestant Women*, 88.



great effort by the women to break down barriers within the strict patriarchal society, for as Beaver notes, “the church has always been the bastion of male arrogance and power, and the men were most reluctant to share control and ministry with the women.”<sup>7</sup> Still, some progress was made. At the 1893 Columbian Exposition at Chicago, the Parliament of Religions held a conference entitled, “Woman’s Congress of Missions.” This conference “gave recognition to the importance and power of Christian women in the world mission and in intercultural contacts.”<sup>8</sup> Although the men were not entirely supportive, women were gaining more public exposure.

While women were making progress as independent members of society, most of it occurred within their own sphere, in that they focused on teaching other women and filling the domestic roles of teacher, nurse, and companion. In *All That Fits a Woman: Training Southern Baptist Women for Charity and Mission, 1907-1926*, T. Laine Scales explains that Southern Baptist women saw missionary work as an opportunity to “enlarge their domestic sphere to include themselves as homemakers for all of society.”<sup>9</sup> Scales later argues that the women came to define evangelism in terms of separate spheres. While the men preached religion, the women “provided social services to individuals.”<sup>10</sup> Certainly the “social services” provided carried religious undertones, but took much of their focus away from proselytizing. Of course, this may have had much to do with men wanting to maintain control over their strict patriarchal society. Scales noted that in the early twentieth century there was a fear “that women will preach and serve as leaders of

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<sup>7</sup> Beaver, *American Protestant Women*, 104

<sup>8</sup> Beaver, *American Protestant Women*, 112.

<sup>9</sup> T. Laine Scales, *All That Fits a Woman: Training Southern Baptist Women for Charity and Mission, 1907-1926* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Scales, *All That Fits a Woman*, 114.

men.”<sup>11</sup> This fear led the men to keep a tight rein on female missionaries, leaving preaching to the men and homemaking to the women, even within the mission field.

Tying into the arguments of Beaver and Scales, Dana L. Robert in *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers* also argues that Protestant missionary women found liberation in their work for a time, but were more involved, as Scales suggests, in the “social services.” Robert also agrees on what kept women in their sphere, noting that “they [women] have often found themselves struggling against gender limitations-imposed either by the mission societies that send them, the indigenous churches that they serve, or both.”<sup>12</sup> Based on these gender limitations, Robert tells of Susan Beamish, who, after spending four years at a missionary training school, found herself in Argentina questioning her role as a missionary. “She was putting first and second graders through their English classes-was this a part of missionary orientation? If she were married would her assignment be any different? If her hostess were typical, it would just mean trading teaching for housekeeping, with extra pastoral responsibilities thrown in.”<sup>13</sup> Although this is only one example, the body of literature suggests that Beamish was not the only Protestant female missionary to question her role and responsibilities as a missionary. Still, though female missionary roles were not clearly defined, nor considered equal to the roles of men, Robert still suggests these women participated in a broader feminist movement when she writes, “While more young women than ever before sought to be foreign missionaries in the early 1920s, a fundamental shift in American society toward gender equality made separate women’s causes start to seem

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<sup>11</sup> Scales, *All That Fits a Woman*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Dana L. Robert *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), xi.

<sup>13</sup> Robert, *Gospel Bearers*, 64.

old-fashioned.”<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to the idea of a large-scale feminist movement, Jane Hunter argues in *The Gospel of Gentility* that Protestant women missionaries were simply paralleling the work of the men, in the three categories of medical services, management of extensive school systems, and evangelical, rural country work. Furthermore, Hunter, who looks at women missionaries within China takes a more conservative view than the other literature. She argues that the female missionary organizations were not “self-consciously feminist,” but focused on femininity, as she suggests, “women’s nurture and refinement carried miraculous potential to conquer and redeem the world.”<sup>15</sup> However, Hunter still recognizes limitations placed on female missionaries, noting, “A major source of inequities in the field lay within the structure of the home church. The Presbyterian denominations, as late as 1927, denied women lay privileges at home...The Methodist conferences barred those who were not ordained and automatically barred women who were ineligible for ordination.”<sup>16</sup> The Methodists would not have had to deliberately deny women certain privileges if the women were not vying for them. Thus, though Hunter focuses on the personal, feminine traits of the women who served in China, her narrative still carries feminist movement undertones.

Another argument in the conversation on Protestant female missionaries is that these women were sent out for political reasons, but given little explanation of their role. In *A Contest of Faiths*, Susan Yohn argues that “American democracy rested on Protestant foundations,” and without extending Protestantism across the land, American

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<sup>14</sup> Robert, *Gospel Bearers*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), xiii, xv, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 84.

democracy could not expand.<sup>17</sup> Yohn also points out that in 1876, Protestant women began pressing leaders to determine “at once” their role, and that as missionaries they often knew better “what they were fighting against than what they sought to build.”<sup>18</sup> Still, agreeing with the other literature, Yohn maintains that society expected the women to hold onto their femininity, using the language of “domesticity” and “social motherhood” as important organizing tools, and yet women were able to gain a larger role in their churches through their missionary efforts.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the conversation on Protestant female missionaries seems to conclude that the movement was a struggle between femininity and feminism. Men feared the power women would wield with greater independence, and saw that they never strayed far from their sphere of teaching, nursing, and serving. However, many of the women devoted lifetimes to their missions, rejecting marriage, homemaking, and domesticity in their own lives. Missions gave Protestant women more exposure to public roles, and opportunities for independence at the height of women’s fight for equality. Though there would be later feminist movements, as Dana Robert pointed out, separate women’s causes became “old-fashioned.”

#### “Mormonize the Christian”

While an abundance of literature exists on Protestant female missionaries, it makes no mention of LDS female missionaries, even though Mormons are technically categorized as Protestant as well. Currently, only three known published works on LDS

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<sup>17</sup> Susan M. Yohn, *A Contest of Faiths: Missionary Women and Pluralism in the American Southwest* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Yohn, *A Contest of Faiths*, 25, 46.

<sup>19</sup> Yohn, *A Contest of Faiths*, 242, 29.

female missionaries have been circulated, including a journal article, a conference paper, and a book chapter. Even though the last thirty years have produced a number of books on nineteenth-century LDS women, the women of the faith seem to disappear along with polygamy around the turn-of-the-century. An explanation for this loss of focus seems as simple as the reason the Church first sent out female missionaries. Even in the twenty-first century, Mormons still have defensive tendencies concerning their early, polygamous years in Utah. Just as the female missionaries at the turn of the century needed to show non-Mormons they were not “poor, downtrodden slaves,” LDS Church historians have also worked hard to reassure Mormons that polygamous women were tough, brave, and noble. Once polygamy ended and the Church became more adapted to mainstream America, the necessity to highlight ordinary LDS women (as opposed to organizational leaders) diminished. As far as female missionaries are concerned, LDS Church history books pause only long enough to mention the first two women sent out, but rarely give heed to the role or impact of the still-thriving “lady missionary” movement. Again, with the end of polygamy, historians quickly move on to discuss the Church’s larger role in the Great Depression and the World Wars.

In the article, “‘Not Invited, But Welcome’: The History and Impact of Church Policy on Sister Missionaries,” Tania Rands Lyon and Mary Ann Shumway McFarland discuss the Church’s policy on the LDS missionary program and how consistently low numbers of female missionaries as compared to the men “yields insights into how the church manages and portrays gender roles.”<sup>20</sup> Lyon and McFarland make a valid argument that the LDS Church has managed to keep the numbers of female missionaries

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<sup>20</sup> Tania Rands Lyon and Mary Ann Shumway McFarland, “‘Not Invited, But Welcome’: The History and Impact of Church Policy on Sister Missionaries” *Dialogue* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 73.

low and steady throughout the years with a constant encouragement that women should be focused on their roles as wives and mothers. However, because they look at the entire history of female missionaries, from 1898 to the present, the argument is too broad to thoroughly understand the movement's early years. They note, "Small adjustments have been made over the years-codifying minimum age, length of service, dress standards-but the core message has been reinforced: women are not explicitly invited to the party, but they are welcome if they choose to crash it." It is true that only small adjustments have been made, but the majority of the organizational adjustments occurred within the first three decades of the twentieth century, when the purpose and function of the female missionaries evolved into what they are today.

Another look at LDS female missionaries is in Tally Payne's "Our Wise and Prudent Women': Twentieth Century Trends in Female Missionary Service." In this paper presented at Brigham Young University's Women's History Initiative Seminar, Payne examines the quantitative side of female missionary work and "places the data and trends in female missionary service within the context of both Latter-day Saint religious history and a century of American history." She gives a historical summary of the female LDS missionary program, pointing out the influence women would bring in the mission field. She quotes Susa Young Gates, daughter of Brigham Young, who asserted women were sent as missionaries because "it was felt that much prejudice could be allayed, that many false charges against the women of the Church could thus be refuted..."<sup>21</sup> Payne gives several statistical charts showing the growth of Church membership, and male and female missionaries. She also accounts for fluxes in numbers

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<sup>21</sup> Payne, "Our Wise and Prudent Women," 125-126.

based on the Great Depression, various wars, and other political conflicts the country faced. This history also suggests that besides minor adjustments and changes in number during wartime, the female missionary program was fairly well established by the 1930's.

A third example of work on LDS female missionaries is “Sister Missionaries and Authority” in *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* by Maxine Hanks. As suggested by the title, Hanks explores the authority or lack of authority given to female missionaries as opposed to their male counterparts, known as Elders. She states, “The calling of a full-time missionary is a paradoxical role for Mormon women. It grants women some ecclesiastical authority without priesthood authority...Sister missionaries have less church authority within the same church calling as their male counterparts.”<sup>22</sup> Though Hanks points out differences between the male and female missionaries from a feminist perspective, she does not give any history arguing that female missionaries as a whole sought greater authority. On the other hand, she does show that these gaps did narrow, again, over the first several decades.

According to the small body of scholarship on early twentieth-century LDS women, the Church's female missionaries as a whole were not looking to redefine their womanhood. Having their own organization within the Church, these women had specific religious duties, including some leadership opportunities, that, along with maintaining large and complicated family systems and serving in the community, kept them busy enough to avoid the growing notion of feminism. LDS female missionaries did not view their missions as a life-transforming liberation, but a small space of time they devoted to

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<sup>22</sup> Hanks, Maxine. *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), accessed at <http://www.signaturebookslibrary.org/women/chapter14.htm>; Internet; accessed 26 Sep 2007.

servicing their religion before returning to a life that typically included marriage, family, and church and community participation. Furthermore, with or without formal training, these women seemed to understand both what they were fighting against and what they were fighting for: against the negative image associated with Mormonism, and for converts to a new (or “restored,” as they claimed) version of Christianity. LDS female missionaries did not gather to demand the title of “missionary” and greater equality, or question their role as women. Instead, they accepted the assignment from their male leaders to fill missions, and participated where and how they were needed. Therefore, the LDS female missionary program cannot be considered a feminist movement. Instead, it was a necessary arm of the overall LDS missionary program for improving the image and understanding of Mormonism and its women. This thesis, then, will show that the role of LDS female missionaries, from this point referred to as “Lady Missionaries,” developed over the first three decades of the twentieth century, as the LDS Church struggled to publicly depict Mormon womanhood and gain acceptance, especially from the rest of the Christian world.

This thesis will also show through the personal experiences of three Lady Missionaries how the Protestant and LDS female missionary movements were more different organizationally, but held more similarities at the individual level. Organizationally, the Protestant movement was considered feminist and feared by the men. It was a movement the women pushed to happen, and as Beaver points out, “The church [had] always been the bastion of male arrogance and power, and the men were most reluctant to share control and ministry with the women.”<sup>23</sup> The LDS Church, on the

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<sup>23</sup> Beaver, *American Protestant Women*, 104.



other hand, formally organized its women in 1842, under the title of the Relief Society, and actively encouraged the women to teach one another and even pursue education.

Furthermore, it was not the LDS women who first petitioned Church leaders to fill missionaries, but the leaders who issued the appointments to the first Lady Missionaries.

On the individual level, many of the women, whether Protestant or LDS, seemed to share similar desires and feelings. Beaver writes also of Mary Webb, saying that “Every Christian women’s organization now in the country owes a debt of grateful remembrance to [her] vision, initiative, and courage...but Miss Webb herself has vanished into the obscurity which she probably would have desired, since she sought not her own fame but rather the glory of God.”<sup>24</sup> This could likely be said of the majority of the female missionaries who gave their time to selfless service and spiritual connections. The experience of Mary Webb also sheds light on why LDS Lady Missionaries remain obscure—they worked to quietly spread their message, and avoided the limelight and popularity that would have made them celebrities.

In fact, part of the evidence that Lady Missionaries did not seek fame rests in the transition from a more prominent public role to spending more teaching within the private sphere. The three body chapters in this thesis will explore the missions of three LDS women, showing the evolution of their roles. It will show how the LDS Church began by sending out educated, refined women who could stand on street corners and display themselves as models of the Mormon woman. As missionary numbers increased and Mormon toleration began to grow, the LDS Church sent out less prominent women who spent more time gathering in the homes of Mormons and non-Mormons to teach in

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<sup>24</sup> Beaver, *American Protestant Women*, 15.

relaxed, private settings, again suggesting theirs was not a feminist movement, but a permanent role within the larger missionary movement.

The first chapter will look at the diary of Inez Knight, the first Lady Missionary, sent by the LDS Church to England in 1898. As large numbers of converts continued emigrating to Utah, there were considerably fewer Mormon women in the rest of the world. According to Richard M. Romney, 83,000 new converts boarded ships at Liverpool between 1837-1894, headed for the Utah Territory. Orson Scott Card adds that because of the massive numbers leaving, only 300 Church members remained in Ireland at the turn of the century.<sup>25</sup> This further suggests the necessity of having a “real, live Mormon woman” to show to non-Mormons in the British Isles. The public image of Mormon women cast them as poor, downtrodden slaves of polygamy, and Inez was sent to serve as an ambassador of Mormon women to refute such negative notions.

The second chapter will examine the life history of Stella Sudweeks, who labored in the U.S. Central States Mission from 1910-1912. Sudweeks, situated in the middle of this evolution, sought the experience of missionary life because of personal opposition she faced on account of the Church’s history of polygamy. She also served in this capacity at a time when stricter organization was being added to the missionary program. Thus, her purpose was less to represent Mormon women and more to define the role of Lady Missionary, with its structure and policies. In this role she still faced some of the same criticisms as Inez, but began to rely more on the help of recent converts to build relationships with non-Mormons.

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<sup>25</sup> Richard M. Romney, “Riding the Tide,” *Ensign* (July 1993), 29; Orson Scott Card, “The Saints in Ireland,” *Ensign* (February 1978), 45. For further explanation, see Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., “Immigration and Emigration,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 673.

The last chapter will focus on the diary of LaRetta Gibbons, who labored in the U.S. Western States Mission from 1933-1935. By this time, LDS membership was rising, and new converts, no longer gathering to Utah, needed the help of missionaries to teach them the intricacies of Mormonism, including how to run the different organizations within the Church. LaRetta, while still preaching to non-Mormons, spent much of her time among Church members, helping them to understand their new role. Since LaRetta's mission, Lady Missionaries, today called Sisters, have had generally the same role, to seek out new converts and teach them how to look and act like Mormons, as opposed to standing on street corners and defending their religion and their sex.

CHAPTER 2  
A LADY KNIGHT

*There may be little in a name  
But very much behind it,  
Agnes, Inez each the same  
And purity defines it.  
Knight a champion lover true  
A gallant bold defender  
A wearer of the "white and blue",  
With heart both brave and tender.  
Jennie Brimhall<sup>26</sup>*

Though LDS women had certainly shared their beliefs with others and accompanied husbands on missions from the Church's inception in 1830, they had never in sixty-eight years been sent to fill missions of their own, as many of their Protestant counterparts had done. Women had been needed at home to rear families, and with the brutality toward, and even deaths of, some of the male missionaries, Church leaders certainly felt concern for the safety of the fairer sex. However, in 1898, Church leader George Q. Cannon gave an address in which he shared the experience of a Brother George D. Pyper and his wife, who on their journey to the eastern states, had witnessed a common theme among the non-Mormons they encountered. According to Pyper, a non-Mormon said, "Well, we have seen the Mormon Elders, but we have not seen the Mormon women; we would like to see some Mormon women, and see what kind of people they are." One woman in particular shared this sentiment, but upon meeting

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<sup>26</sup> Inez Knight Allen, Diary, 1898-1899, Digital Collections Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 3.

Pyper's wife, found that she was "an intelligent woman, and a woman that did not look as though she was a poor, downtrodden slave that she [therefore] entered the Church. No doubt, it was due to the fact that she had found that the women were as intelligent, as presentable and as ladylike in their sphere as the gentlemen were in their sphere. This is encouraging, and it no doubt will enlarge our field of operations to a very great extent."<sup>27</sup> Cannon then explained that although the women did not have the authority to "administer the ordinances," meaning baptize or perform other sacred acts such as healing, the idea of sending them to join the men in the mission field would allow the women to bear testimony, teach, distribute tracts, and "do a great many things that would assist in the propagation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Undoubtedly, the "great many things" included changing the world's opinion of how Mormons looked and acted, and better explaining their beliefs. The "poor, downtrodden slave" described by Cannon was perhaps the most likely image non-Mormons envisioned of the sect's women, considering the Mormons' notorious practice of polygamy, which had officially ended only eight years earlier, in 1890. Anti-Mormon literature abounded, both in image and word. In the article, "Double Jeopardy: Visual Images of Mormon Women to 1914," Davis Bitton and Gary L. Bunker suggest that Mormon women were portrayed negatively at least as early as the Utah War, 1857-1858, with a surge in the 1890s during the fight for statehood, and consequently, woman suffrage. On January 31, 1885, the *Argonaut* reprinted the following clipping from *Carl Pretzel's Weekly*:

A Mormon editor of Salt Lake City has the following in a recent issue of his paper: The unknown woman who was killed at this place about three months ago

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<sup>27</sup> President George Q. Cannon, *Conference Report* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Company, April 1898), 8.

by the cars proved to be one of the wives of the editor of this paper! A new count appears to have revealed the fact!<sup>28</sup>

Behind this article's attempt at humor was an assumption about the pitiful and neglected state of polygamous wives, who were not even recognized by their own husbands. Eight years later a "little volume of sketches" was published by Grace Talbot called "Much Married Saints and Some Sinners." According to an article on Talbot's work in the *New York Times*, "It is evident that the author believes the Mormons are wicked. In all the tales the object is to show the hard lot of the Mormon woman and the evil of polygamy...Mormon women...are helpless in a loathsome slavery, the prey of jealousy, of a haunting sense of degradation."<sup>29</sup> No doubt many people, such as the ones referenced by Cannon, were familiar with this imagery and language, and many blamed the Mormon Elders (male missionaries) for mistreating their women and enticing young girls to join their cult.

Thus the LDS missionary program needed some white knights, brave souls to rescue the dismal image of the Mormon Elders and the Church for which they stood. According to historian Maxine Hanks, the first Lady Missionaries were a response to Church leader and European Mission President, Joseph McMurrin, who said in 1898, "Our sisters [missionary wives or other uncertified women] gained attention in England where the elders could scarcely gain a hearing."<sup>30</sup> This chapter will explore that attention the Lady Missionaries received at the time, through the journal of the first certified Lady

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<sup>28</sup> Davis Bitton and Gary L. Bunker, "Double Jeopardy: Visual Images of Mormon Women to 1914," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 187.

<sup>29</sup> "Latter-Day Saints," *New York Times (1857-Current file)*: Feb 21, 1903; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2005), BR12, <http://proquest.umi.com> (accessed 2 January 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Maxine Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), <http://www.signaturebookslibrary.org/women/chapter14.htm> (accessed Sep 26, 2007).

Missionary, Inez Knight. Inez began her mission in England with friend and future sister-in-law, Jennie Brimhall. While both ladies served in the same capacity, only Inez's journal, which covers the first of two years she spent as a missionary, is available for research and analysis. Furthermore, Inez served over two years, while Jennie went home within one year due to health concerns. As a trailblazer, Inez struggled to understand her role in representing the women of Mormondom. Her journal--covering the first of her two years--shows how, although she sought converts and taught among Mormons and non-Mormons, her missionary appointment had more to do with bringing attention to the positive attributes of Mormonism and a positive image of Mormon women than with sharing equal status with the Elders as authorized ministers of the gospel.

Both Inez and Jennie came from prominent Utah families, making them well-qualified to show off their sex in the best of lights. The daughter of Jesse Knight, a wealthy mining man, Amanda Inez Knight already had an impressive resume at the young age of twenty-two. According to Orson Whitney's 1904 *History of Utah*, Inez attended Brigham Young Academy's Normal Training School in Provo, from 1892-1896, where her studies included pedagogy, philosophy, and training. Within the Church organization, she worked in the Sunday schools and the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association. Whitney also noted, "In the fall of 1896, at her father's request, she spent two months at St. George, making a record of Temple work done there by her grandmother...In February, 1897, she visited California with her parents, traveling for two months through various parts of that State...The following winter she spent in Salt Lake City, studying music, and doing genealogical work at the historian's office."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Whitney, *History of Utah*, (Salt Lake City: G.Q. Cannon, 1904), 610-611.

Not only did Inez Knight come from a family that could support her financially, but she was also educated and had experience working and traveling. Furthermore, she had two missionary brothers who could serve as guardians, awaiting her arrival in Liverpool.

Lucy Jane Brimhall, known as Jennie, was the daughter of George H. Brimhall, a professor at the Brigham Young Academy in Provo. Whitney recounted that Brimhall finished “the eighth grade in the [Provo] Central School, over which her father [then] presided. Subsequently she was graduated, after a four years course, from the Brigham Young Academy, as a member of the class of 1895.” She then went to Bluff City where she worked as the assistant principal in the primary department of the district school. Between the fall of 1896 and spring of 1898, Jennie spent most of her time teaching at the Brigham Young Academy. However, she did have to quit at Christmas time in 1896, due to “failing health,” and did not resume until the following school year, after having accompanied the Knight family on their vacation to California. In the spring of 1898, Inez and Jennie planned an excursion to Europe, to visit Inez’s brothers, Ray and Will, the latter being Jennie’s fiancé, and to see the sights. However, Jennie’s bishop, J.B. Keeler, wrote to LDS Church President Wilford Woodruff inquiring as to whether Jennie and Inez’s forthcoming trip to Europe could be turned into an appointment to labor as missionaries. According to Whitney, “the result was a letter from the First Presidency to Elder Edward Partridge, president of Utah Stake, authorizing him to set apart Miss Brimhall and Miss Knight for a mission to Great Britain.”<sup>32</sup> This missionary appointment would have come as a surprise to Inez and Jennie, who had not planned for a mission and would have had little idea of what to expect as certified Lady Missionaries

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<sup>32</sup> Whitney, *History of Utah*, 614.



since they had no precedent to follow. Nonetheless, they accepted the appointment from their Church leaders and prepared to journey to England with a unique purpose.

Though Inez and Jennie were both authorized to serve in this capacity, Jennie's mission ended after only eight short months due to health concerns. Whitney explained,

Her relatives and friends in Utah...feared a return of her former trouble (pneumonia) if she remained in Great Britain during the winter...Deeply interested in her work, and believing herself sufficiently acclimated to do so with safety, she greatly desired to remain longer in the mission field. She yielded, however, to the wishes of her father, and the advice of the Church authorities, and came home.<sup>33</sup>

While Mormon women were perhaps not “poor, downtrodden slaves,” Jennie showed that they still knew their place within their society, that is, that the women were expected to heed the advice of the patriarchal authority, even if it went against their own wishes.

Meanwhile, Inez served a lengthy twenty-five months, equal to the term of her male counterparts, working with several different companions, meeting many people (both friendly and hostile), studying, teaching, and recording her mission experiences. With very few gaps in the chronology, she wrote regularly of both the events and her feelings. Thus, although Inez was not alone on her journey, it is through the detailed journal of her long stay that she was able to share a fuller and richer idea of what it meant to be the first “lady missionary.” Furthermore, her journal shows Inez's struggles to understand her own image as a woman, a missionary, and a Mormon.

At the time Inez and Jennie were issued their calls, they received no specific training or preparation, other than a priesthood blessing by her stake president. On April 2, 1898, Inez wrote, “A few relatives and friends gathered in to spend the evening. I was set apart by Pres. Partridge to fill a mission to Great Britain. It being unusual to Bro.

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<sup>33</sup> Whitney, *History of Utah*, 615.

Partridge to do that kind of work, we did not have the blessing he gave me written down for which I am sorry.”<sup>34</sup> Maxine Hanks explains that “‘setting apart,’ according to the priesthood handbook, is a ‘laying on of hands by those who are in authority’ to confer a church calling or position. It is a priesthood ordinance similar to ordination...After conferral a blessing is pronounced.”<sup>35</sup> Though being “set apart” was standard procedure for any LDS missionary leaving home, Inez pointed out that it was “unusual to Bro. Partridge to do that kind of work.” Typically, men traveled to Salt Lake City, where they were set apart by a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, top Church leaders, rather than local stake leaders. Although Whitney explained that the Lady Missionaries were “doing all things required of male missionaries along the same lines; visiting, tracting, preaching, and exerting themselves to the utmost to spread a knowledge of the truth respecting their religion and their people,” the fact that only the men were allowed to exercise priesthood power created a gap between the Elders and Lady missionaries.<sup>36</sup> This distinction emphasized that while Inez and Jennie did their part in preaching the gospel, the purpose of these ladies was to create friendly relations and change the image of Mormon women rather than deal with the more serious issues of administering the ordinances of the gospel that rested upon the men’s shoulders.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Inez Knight Allen, *Diary, 1898-1899*, Digital Collections Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Hanks, *Women and Authority*.

<sup>36</sup> Whitney, *History of Utah*, 614.

<sup>37</sup> According to Hanks, Church policy differences between male and female missionaries have seen many changes over the years, while ultimately, priesthood power and responsibility has remained with the men. One difference she notes is the change of language in the mission call: “For example, sisters were once called to be ‘a helpmeet to the elders’ and later to ‘render assistance to the Priesthood in the proclamation of the Holy Ghost.’ Currently the crucial difference in language is this: men are called to ‘represent the Lord as a minister of the restored gospel,’ and women are called to ‘represent the Lord in proclaiming the restored gospel.’” She also notes that the original “missionary certificate for sisters differed from the elders’ certificate in one important way: it granted sisters the authority to preach the gospel but not to administer gospel ordinances.” Hanks, *Women and Authority*.

The day after being set apart, Inez and Jennie embarked on their journey, along with seven others. Even before their arrival in Liverpool, Inez offered evidence that she had been reared to be a devout Mormon. One of the central doctrines in LDS theology was the importance of family and a patriarchal order, and as Inez set out, she placed her family before the extravagances of the world she was traveling.<sup>38</sup> On April 2, Inez wrote, “All along Jennie & I were congratulated on being missionaries but I did not sense it as being much more than a pleasure trip except when I was reminded that I might be separated from my dear parents so long.”<sup>39</sup> Twenty days later when the ship pulled into the harbor, she again emphasized how importantly family and parent figures, or perhaps male authority, mattered in her life.

My dear brother Will, Pres. Wells, Bro. McMurrin and Bros. Rose and Eldridge, met us at the boat. It was peculiarly tantalizing as we neared the shore to see the one face we had hoped and longed to see, to see it on the bank & yet to move so slowly toward it. So long it seemed before we could speak to him. After speaking to Will dear Bro. Wells was the first to welcome me to England, from the first he seemed a father to us.<sup>40</sup>

Here Inez had arrived to a new country, a new world, not to mention the hub of the British Empire, and the one thing she had her eyes on was her brother. She could have

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<sup>38</sup> LDS Church leaders often spoke of the importance of family. One example came from Brigham Young’s *Journal of Discourses*, “You latter-day Saints are gathered expressly that husbands may be taught how to live with their wives, and wives with their husbands; parents with their children, and children with their parents; that all my become of one heart and one mind. The Saints are so in many respects already. They are on the increase, and I expect to see the day that they will be subject in all things to the priesthood of God, and never raise an argument against anything they may be instructed to do by the priesthood.” Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: Latter Day Saint Depot 1854-1886), 11: 289-290.

<sup>39</sup> Allen, Diary, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Allen, Diary, 12.

mentioned the sights, the sounds, a freedom in being far from home, but instead she needed the closeness of family.

Throughout her mission, Inez continued to exhibit a need for male protection and guidance, as well as a strong sense of anxiety over her responsibilities. The next night, she stepped out for her first set of street meetings, where the missionaries would stand on the corner and preach. “On a busy corner we formed a circle sang a hymn, one offered prayer then we sang again. A large crowd stopped to listen. The special meetings to be held next day were announced and I recalled a sickly feeling when Bro. McMurrin announced that ‘real live Mormon women’ would speak next day.”<sup>41</sup> She gave no explanation for her sickly feeling, but there were two very possible explanations. First of all, she was put on display as the new featured attraction, which could easily excite the nerves.

The second reason, which likely tied to the first, was that Inez wrote often of a lack of confidence in her ability to speak publicly. That next evening she commented, “In the evening I spoke mid fears & tremblings but did surprise my self.” Naturally, her first experience speaking as a missionary would be nerve-wracking, but this type of entry continued. On May 9, two weeks after her arrival, she wrote, “Attended and spoke in street meeting. Regular cottage meeting we took part in. Still it seemed to me I was worse frightened every time I was called upon to talk. Oh those fearful trembling feelings I shall never forget, if I ever am free from them.” Four months later, Inez showed religious courage in the face of her fear. “Monday Sept 12...[Dave] talked some time before any one stopped, after he had a good crowd he called me & with the help of the

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<sup>41</sup> Allen, Diary, 17.

Lord I spoke 20 min at the close one stranger said ‘God bless your good mission.’” With no additional commentary, it is interesting she at least noted it was only “with the help of the Lord” she was able to speak. However, she soon lost any zeal the stranger’s encouragement might have given her. One year into her mission, she wrote, “April 2...Bro Pauley, Sister Chipman [her companion that replaced Jennie], Bro Squires & Bro Hindley spoke. I am always happy when I don’t have to speak.” Eleven days later she followed with, “My thoughts were on what shall I say if they call me to speak next Sunday? But never can I think of any thing to say.” Finally, on April 19 came the last mention in this journal of public speaking. She wrote, “Went tracting in the morning[.] I had no conversations & they were third tracts. I find it hard to keep the spirit with me to solicit conversations.”<sup>42</sup> It is hard to believe a woman so hesitant to stand out would later serve as Dean of Women at the Brigham Young Academy, sit on the General Board of the Relief Society, participate actively in the Red Cross, attend the National Democratic Convention in 1928 as a Utah delegate, and be “elected to the National Women’s Democratic Committee that same year,” among other accomplishments.<sup>43</sup>

Because she showed no apprehension in teaching classes at church (ie. “April 30, 1899...I gave the gospel lesson.”<sup>44</sup>), it remains possible that Inez’s greatest challenge was the idea of being a “real live Mormon woman.” Her motivation in filling a mission was to answer a call given by one of her priesthood leaders. Though she certainly had read letters at home from her two brothers, she could not possibly have known what lay before her. Visiting other members of her faith, or “saints” as she referred to them, attending

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<sup>42</sup> Allen, Diary, 18, 22, 73, 158, 163, 179.

<sup>43</sup> Diane Mangum. “The First Sister Missionaries,” *Ensign*, July 1980, 62.

<sup>44</sup> Allen, Diary, 179.

church and teaching classes, and sightseeing were all things this Mormon girl knew how to do. However, she had no prior training or experience representing the entire Mormon female population, and undoubtedly felt intimidated by the magnitude of her assignment.

On the other hand, although Inez did not volunteer for the job of missionary, she still took pride in her role of preaching the gospel, and quickly opened her eyes to the effect her mission would have on her as a woman and a Latter-day Saint. After the welcoming party received Inez and the other missionaries in Liverpool, they went to the mission house where they met one of the counselors to the mission president, Joseph McMurrin.

[April 22, 1898] All the missionaries met in this [the president's bedroom] for instructions. Each speaker welcomed the lady missionaries. Bro Mc Murrin said in his remarks he wanted each of us to understand that we had been called here by the Lord, then for the first time I began to sense the responsibility resting upon me. He also said the lady missionaries would be petted and almost spoiled he was afraid.<sup>45</sup>

McMurrin's comment on spoiling the Lady Missionaries was most likely said as a concerned leader, now with two young ladies under his supervision, but could prove to be profoundly prophetic.

Though McMurrin himself made the request for Lady Missionaries, he also knew what two girls from the relatively isolated town of Provo, Utah, would be exposed to in the heart of one of the world's leading empires. Inez did not write whether McMurrin identified *who* would be petting and spoiling the Lady Missionaries, leaving the question as to which of the two purposely omitted the subject, McMurrin or Inez. Though the Elders may have enjoyed the company of female members of their faith, Inez's diary did not offer proof they were petting and spoiling her. Also highly doubtful was the idea that

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<sup>45</sup> Allen, Diary, 14.

the Englishmen would be the culprits, considering that Inez and Jennie almost always had male escorts who saw to their protection.

McMurrin also could easily have been referring to Church members eager to acquaint themselves with the two young girls from Utah. Even if this was the case, two further culprits likely to pet and spoil the Lady Missionaries were Inez Knight and Jennie Brimhall themselves. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “to pet” meant “to indulge.”<sup>46</sup> Coming from a society that prided itself on industry, thrift, and self-efficiency, these Lady Missionaries found themselves heaped into a world of European fashion, food, and higher-class luxuries. On the very same day Pres. McMurrin shared his vision, Inez wrote, “We visited a good art gallery & museum there [Liverpool]. Invested in our first English shoes, which cost \$5.00 and had soles about 1/2 in thick. The first night after our arrival there we went to the regular meeting, and I was called from the back of the room up to speak. I showed my new shoes off to a good advantage as I walked on that bare floor.” Little did she know she was bringing the mission president’s fears to life by indulging herself in the ways of England. However, by doing so, Inez made a statement about her image as a Mormon woman. With shopping trips here and there, Inez never turned her mission into one of fashion, and yet she conformed to a European image, blending her own culture with that of the “outside world.” This, in turn, begs the question, did Inez abandon her image of a “real, live Mormon woman” to look more European? In fact, since the Church had no dress standard other than to advise modesty, Inez’s decision to buy shoes, or any other British clothing, hints at the very point of her message, that a Mormon woman did not, nor did she have to, look different

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<sup>46</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, “pet, v.” OED Online, <http://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed January 14, 2009).

from any other woman, American or European. If non-Mormons were expecting a browbeaten, subjugated woman in rags, Inez was there to show them confidence and class.

Meanwhile, though she indulged in some of the novelties of England, Inez remained serious when focused on the work of a missionary and what her faith meant to her. On the evening of April 23, 1898, after Pres. McMurrin announced the upcoming “real live Mormon women,” Inez observed, “Most of the elders wear tall silk hats and good black clothes and as they stood like brave soldiers on the street that night and different young men in all humility and yet with intelligence told the people Gospel truths I was never prouder to know I was numbered with the L.D.S. Saints.”<sup>47</sup> Here the Elders “stood like brave solders,” ready to fight to defend their beliefs. Nine months later, with some experience under her belt, she wrote, “Tuesday Jan 31...I like my work very much & I feel as if I don’t care how long I am required to labor as an ambassador for Christ, but I do not always feel the same.” Certainly during hostile confrontations and with the return home of her brother, Will, and dear friend, Jennie, Inez faced moments of grief, and yet she held something special in the title, “ambassador for Christ.” Inez defined her own understanding of what it meant to be a missionary, and though “soldier” and “ambassador” were the two strongest imagery examples in her diary, she seemed to have the idea of bravery and delivering the message with her constantly.

The next day she wrote, “On our way home Bro. John told me some things that made me realize more fully what it means to be a Latter Day Saint in Old Eng. I never half appreciated the Gospel & my dear home & loved parents as I now do.” Inez was

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<sup>47</sup> Allen, Diary, 17,129.



likely referring to the opposition Mormons were facing in England at the turn of the century. According to Alexander Baugh, “Between 1840 and 1913, an estimated 52,000 English Saints left the isles of the Atlantic. This may indicate why in 1892, Church membership in Great Britain was only 2,604.” Baugh then explained,

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, British Saints and their religion came under considerable opposition. It is possible that the Mormon faith was the target of more religious persecution and intolerance than any other denomination in the country during this time. This seems strange when considering that the Church was then a minor religion with membership never exceeding 7,200...Opposition came from the press, political circles, the clergy, and anti-Mormon rallies and plays.<sup>48</sup>

With diminished numbers and an “anti-Mormon crusade,” British Latter-day Saints had to be valiant in their beliefs. Inez, having been born twenty years after President Buchanan sent federal troops to occupy the Utah Territory to guard against the Mormons and having grown up in a tight-knit community among members of her faith, had not personally understood the sacrifices some made to wear the title of “Mormon.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Alexander L. Baugh, “The Church in Twentieth-Century Great Britain: A Historical Overview,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History*, ed. Donald Q. Cannon, (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2007), 237-8.

<sup>49</sup> James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard explain of the Utah War, “In March 1857, President Buchanan appointed Alfred Cumming of Georgia governor of Utah, to replace Brigham Young. At the same time, in the mistaken belief that the Mormons were in rebellion against the government, Buchanan sent along a large military force to ensure the new governor’s acceptance and authority....On September 15 Brigham Young issued a proclamation that declared martial law in the Territory of Utah and forbade the entry of armed forces....They [Mormons] expected the ‘big fight’ would take place in another year, and they were to be ready to lay to waste everything that would burn if hostilities actually occurred.” James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 305, 310, 444. Though Inez was alive during the actions resulting from the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887, which dissolved the corporation of the Church, neither her journal nor any biographies of her suggest she was directly affected by it.

However, because of her role as missionary, Inez learned plenty about religious opposition throughout her day-to-day obligations. For two years, she fell into a routine of duties, mixed with both success and rejection. As the first Lady Missionary, she had neither a handbook nor guidelines detailing a daily schedule, and yet she had plenty of work to keep her busy. As recorded by Inez, duties most often included cottage meetings, street meetings, visiting members (particularly women), studying, attending church and other meetings, and tracting. For example, on April 26, 1898, she wrote, “Tuesday went on Bro. Bradhalls invitation to Manchester, where we visited saints friends and attended street meetings. Spoke in cottage meeting.”<sup>50</sup>

A street meeting, never done by the ladies alone, consisted of standing on a corner to preach short messages, announce upcoming meetings, and invite passersby to listen to their complete message at a future time. On April 29, 1898, Inez described one street meeting thusly, “Many missionaries there, and crowd divided to hold street meetings at night. I went with Will and Bro. Bailey. It was raining but we sang & prayed and Bro Bailey began by repeating Matt. VII 24 to 27 verses. A few stopped to listen mindless of the rain. He afterwards called on me to speak. The crowd listened attentively but I did not detain them long.”<sup>51</sup> In so few words, Inez revealed an interesting strategy employed by the missionaries. First, it appears Inez and Jennie divided along with the rest of the missionary crowd, proving there were no rules binding them together as missionary companions, as there would be later on.<sup>52</sup> Separating allowed more opportunities to view

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<sup>50</sup> Allen, Diary, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Allen, Diary, 20.

<sup>52</sup> The strictness of later rules can be seen in the 2006 *Missionary Handbook*, which notes, “Preaching the gospel two by two is the pattern established by the Lord...Never be alone. It is extremely important that you stay with your companion at all times. Staying together means staying within sight and hearing of each other. Never be alone with, flirt with, or associate in any other inappropriate way with

the “real, live Mormon women,” and even listen to a sampling of what a Mormon woman might have to say. Second, Bro. Bailey recited the end of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount as found in the Holy Bible. With a history of accusations against the LDS Church for being “non-Christian,” the Elders undoubtedly quoted the New Testament to show their knowledge of “Christian” scripture and to find common ground with curious Catholics and Protestants familiar with the passage. Thus, in a few minutes on a rainy night the missionaries could defend their faith against two frequent, pressing allegations: that their women were oppressed and demoralized, and that they worshipped someone or something that was not Jesus.

Another of Inez’s missionary roles involved visiting, teaching, and encouraging other women, including Church members, those involved in the conversion process, and even the ones met in going door-to-door. On September 13, 1898, Inez wrote, “Miss Fletcher called. At nine o'clock we went with her to be baptized[.] Will performed the ordinance.”<sup>53</sup> Though LDS women did not have the spiritual authority to perform the ordinance, Inez and Jennie showed their support for Will as he fulfilled one of his duties, and also faith that *he* had the priesthood authority to baptize another. However, Inez made no entries about accompanying any men to be baptized, showing this may have been more in support of Miss Fletcher, who undoubtedly appreciated having other women of her new faith encourage her in this potentially life-changing event.

Besides making house calls, one way the Lady Missionaries helped strengthen the female Church membership was through their participation in the Relief Society. Though

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anyone of the opposite sex. The only exceptions are for communications between sister missionaries and their mission leaders, mission-related telephone calls, and letters of support and encouragement to converts. *Missionary Handbook* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 29-31.

<sup>53</sup> Allen, *Diary*, 73.

officially organized as a Church auxiliary by LDS Church founder Joseph Smith, the Relief Society began in 1842 as a sewing society to aid men working on the Nauvoo, Illinois temple, and grew to focus more broadly on charity and service. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* explains, “The nineteenth-century format for local Relief Society meetings-based on charity work, sewing, testimony bearing, and scripture study-made way in the twentieth century for a more varied and extensive educational program.”<sup>54</sup> On March 15, 1899, Inez recorded, “Went tracting in the morning & to relief Society in the afternoon. Read some sermons to the sisters, & had nice lunch there.”<sup>55</sup> Back in the United States, the women involved in the Relief Society presidency made trips to outlying Mormon communities in Utah, Idaho, California, Arizona, New Mexico, and elsewhere, both seeing to the needs of the women and ensuring the organization was being run as set forth in Salt Lake City. Because England was so much farther away, the British women would have needed to rely on the two Utah girls to see that England was conforming to the ways of Salt Lake City.<sup>56</sup> In this case, even the Church members needed to see what “real, live Mormon women” looked like so they could mirror that image and have a unified, international Relief Society in thought, purpose, and representation.

In order to be good role models and effective evangelists, all the missionaries had to attend regular meetings and study the scriptures daily. This way, as the Relief

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<sup>54</sup> Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* Vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 1203.

<sup>55</sup> Allen, Diary, 149.

<sup>56</sup> According to Allen and Leonard, “To strengthen Zion in the wards and branches, the Church continually reassessed its auxiliary programs. In 1889 annual conferences were begun in Salt Lake City for Relief Society...workers. This considerably reduced the load of general officers in these auxiliaries who earlier had tried to visit the stakes and wards regularly to give instructions. Representatives from the stakes could now carry the instructions back from the conferences.” Allen and Leonard, 427.

Societies were to be united across the world, so the missionaries needed to present a united front. Two examples of training and study occurred in November and January. “Monday Nov 21 we attended Priesthood meeting...Many good instructions were given among them the missionaries were counselled not to use too frequently the name of the Lord also not to try to make long sermons just to take up time.” On studying, Inez wrote, “Tuesday Jan 3. Had breakfast & prayers then read from Book of Mormon the teachings of King Benjamin, studied until dinner then visited with Bro. Simons. Studied in evening.”<sup>57</sup> Both of these responsibilities were crucial to the role of the missionary to help them stay on task and be prepared for the challenges that came their way. Furthermore, it gave the missionaries a Church-established image to live up to, ensuring all the brave “soldiers” shared the same, unified message.

Setting out with wisdom from their leaders and knowledge from the scriptures, missionaries spent much of their daytime “tracting.” Tracting was one of the most common strategies for making new contacts. The missionaries had several different religious tracts, each explaining the beliefs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which they passed out door-to-door, hoping to find interested patrons on their return visit. Inez often split up from her companion, each taking a different street, to knock doors and hand out tracts. In the second half of January 1899, she made several references to this, beginning January 23. “Monday. Went tracting with second tracts. Had success...Tuesday. Went tracting & put out 160 tracts. Had good success on Neveller Rd. Invitation to call...Monday Jan 30.” Inez said little about how she measured success, but considered one “invitation to call” out of 160 tracts a “good

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<sup>57</sup> Allen, Diary, 101, 115.

success.” The next day she gave a little more explanation on just how successful tracting proved. “Tuesday Jan 31. Went tracting and for the first time in my life I was not refused one tract or spoken unkindly to. But when I go with second tracts they will then know I am a Mormon & I do not expect all kind treatment.”<sup>58</sup> However, the fact that she defined success as one invitation to call or not being treated unkindly shows resilience on her part in that she continued stepping out day after day with those tracts even though few seemed interested in receiving her message. Her endurance suggests she understood the importance of her image in the mission, in which case she would understand that if she converted only one person, or was invited into only one home, every door that opened would have seen what a real, live Mormon woman looked like. This alone had the potential to produce greater tolerance among those who had only heard of the poor, downtrodden women.

In an article to the *Salt Lake Herald* following her mission, Inez wrote of one of her most disheartening tracting experiences.

My first day at tracting made a lasting impression on my mind, both on account of novelty and discomfort. The first three ladies visited greeted me kindly and accepted the tract offered, but just before the fourth lady opened the door the third came out and returned the tract, saying: “I don’t want such trash. I know who you are, and, my good girl, if you knew the Mormons as I do, you could not be induced to do such work.” At this point the fourth lady opened the door and was soon informed by her neighbor that I was a Mormon, whereupon she joined in severe abuse of our people. I told them that I had lived among the Latter-day Saints in Utah all my life, and ought to know something

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<sup>58</sup> Allen, Diary, 126, 129.

about them. I was then asked if I knew Mary -----, and after answering in the negative the lady before me said: “Then you are a liar, for you either did not come from there, or else you know her, for she went out there with Mormons six years ago and has not been heard of since. She followed me to each gate through the row to introduce me.

Altogether I was not very sorry when my tracts were disposed of.<sup>59</sup>

Though she somehow disposed of all her tracts, Inez discovered the awfulness of the anti-Mormon image that had preceded her. Based on personal experience with a neighbor who emigrated to Utah, this British woman imagined a tight-knit, cult-like community, where everyone knew each other. It also showed she had very little understanding of the size of the Church membership in Utah, proving the necessity of Lady Missionaries to educate the people on Mormonism. She arrived in England to show the people the face of a Mormon woman, and yet some people refused to believe their own eyes.

Each time Inez wrote of personal opposition, it was always the women with whom she had a problem. Some she was able to convince, and others she was not.

“[January 25, 1899] Wednesday Morning went tracting had good success but one Catholic lady gave me to understand that she was a respectable married woman & did not want any Mormon tract. I talked some time with her & she finally became quite friendly towards me. She believed we were not allowed to tract in America & that was why Elders came to Eng for women. Only one more with prejudiced ideas about our people.

In this case, Inez was able to win over this woman’s sympathy, but not until the woman made her understanding of Mormonism clear: “she was a *respectable married woman* and did not want any Mormon tract.” Her beliefs stand as evidence that she was only familiar with the stereotypical image of Mormons gathering young girls from England to

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<sup>59</sup> Inez Knight, “The Utah Girl as a Mormon Missionary,” *Salt Lake Herald*, 8 July 1900.

become polygamous wives in Utah. Since she was both respectable and married, there was no reason to waste time listening to a Mormon missionary.

Though Inez was able to reason with the Catholic woman, three months later she was left a bit dumbfounded. “Monday April 17 [1899]...I met after the meeting Bro. Fullers Aunt, who inquired if I had been led out to Utah when a ‘young lady.’ I wonder what she thinks I am now?”<sup>60</sup> Again, this suggests that non-Mormons were led to believe that the Mormons rounded up teenage girls in England to add to polygamous harems in Utah. This woman could have believed that, even at the young age of twenty-three, Inez had already been married several years. These three instances offer proof that the image of the Mormons had been profoundly tainted by negative stereotypes, and in some cases even a “real live Mormon woman” could not undo the damage of rumors and gossip.

In fact, Inez learned for herself what it meant to be persecuted for her religion because of intolerance and misunderstanding. In January 1899, Inez and her second missionary companion, Sister Chipman, witnessed at least two anti-Mormon meetings taking place, but it was not until January 19 that the group actually confronted the young Lady Missionaries. They arrived at the conference house in Bristol for a meeting, but encountered a mob standing in front of the building. In her article to the *Salt Lake Herald*, she recounted, “Shouts were heard, such as ‘Mormons!’ ‘Mormons!’ ‘Marmalades!’ etc. Some said ‘There go two of their wives!’ ...stones and sticks were hurled at the door and the windows until all the glass in front of the house was broken and missiles continued to come through the windows. The mob was composed principally of women and children, but there were many big boys among them and some

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<sup>60</sup> Allen, Diary, 127, 169.



men.” In this case, it did not matter whether Inez looked Mormon, American, or European. Likely because members of the crowd had seen Inez and her companion teaching, these two Lady Missionaries were associated with polygamy and therefore targets for ridicule.

Though President Lyman sent the girls home with Inez’s brother, Ray, they could not escape the mob that followed close behind, “calling us all kinds of names and throwing small stones and trash at us.” Inez continued,

Some big boys would run behind and push us, and others hit us with their caps...The buzz of the continually increasing mob attracted people out of shops and homes some distance ahead of us...Arriving at our destination [the police station], we were ushered into a dark back room by several policemen, who quickly closed and bolted the front door and windows. After waiting there about an hour the police officer in charge took us out a back passage and saw us safely home. We were uninjured, though our clothes were badly soiled.<sup>61</sup>

In her journal entry she added, “We [Sister Chipman and I] both cried but could not help it to think of being so treated in a civilized nation.”<sup>62</sup> When Pres. McMurrin said he feared the ladies would be spoiled, one must wonder if he imagined all the meanings that would come of his comment. The Lady Missionaries would be spoiled to the novelties of England and because they were novelties themselves to Church members. On the other hand, they would also be “spoiled” in a negative sense. Inez could no longer return home innocent and naïve to the harsh realities of the world. She had left her safe, isolated Mormon bubble with her eyes half closed, but now awoke to the cruelties of “civilized” people. In the beginning, Inez had bought into the fashions and frills of the British, taking on their image, but now she faced the reality that image was not everything. Some

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<sup>61</sup> Knight, *Salt Lake Herald*.

<sup>62</sup> Allen, *Diary*, 125.

people did not care what she looked like, but felt justified in opposing her for what they assumed she believed.

Another outcome of this incident was that it showed again the importance of male guidance and protection. President Lyman sent the ladies home, and Inez's brother, Ray, escorted them. Though chivalry would require gentlemen to aid the ladies in such an ordeal, the ever-constant presence of the Elders revealed a type of relationship different from those experienced by future missionaries. Besides being allowed to go out for ice cream alone and dance together (September 8, 1898; January 6, 1899), the most profound difference was the relationship between Jennie and Inez's brother, Will. These two were engaged before Inez and Jennie were even sent to England, and almost every entry mentioning Jennie's name included Will's beside it (ie. May 15, 1898 "Jennie felt too tired to climb so she and Will went home leaving Ray, Bro. Bailey & I").<sup>63</sup> In later years, rules strictly forbade Elders and Sisters (as Lady Missionaries would come to be called) from being alone together, and even fraternizing in groups would be frowned upon.

Most likely, there were no rules in place for Inez and Jennie simply because the Church leadership did not know the effect Lady Missionaries would have on the mission. Thus they had to learn the hard way how to behave properly with so many watchful eyes upon them. "Sunday Jan 8...we had a testimony fast meeting, in which some dissatisfaction was expressed concerning some gossip about us as missionaries, because some strangers had seen us come in late. It was suggested that we should not lodge where the Elders did. Not a very pleasant feeling prevailed." This is the only time Inez

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<sup>63</sup> Allen, Diary, 37.

mentioned any whispers of inappropriateness or impropriety concerning the closeness of the Elders and the Lady Missionaries. However, it is interesting the counsel went unheeded when a moral, upright reputation was so critical for the image of the missionaries. At this time, the mission leaders must have chosen protection of the ladies over idle gossip as no new rules were imposed. Furthermore, even with the uneasiness, the living arrangements lasted another two months before Inez wrote, “Thursday March 29. The boys moved their lodgings.”<sup>64</sup> Though such closeness was likely felt necessary for the ladies’ protection and supervision, the Church would eventually find other ways to look after the Lady Missionaries, such as lodging them near female Church members, in order to focus on maintaining an upstanding reputation of its missionaries.

Though today missionaries are not allowed to be out of sight of their companions, during Inez’s time, missionaries, even the ladies, were given greater liberty. This may have been in part because they were under the constant guardianship of the Elders, and because there was no precedent for the ladies requiring stricter companionship rules. Not only did Inez and Jennie work separately, but after Jennie’s return home Inez had to live alone, as did her new companion, until they were brought together almost three weeks later. On November 21, 1898, Inez wrote, “We attended Priesthood meeting at which I was the only girl. I felt more conspicuous by the elders beginning their remarks by ‘My brethren and sister.’”<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, in a letter to the *Young Woman’s Journal*, she wrote, “On arriving in London I found my new companion, Sister Chipman, cheerfully striving to do her part in connection with two of the elders to spread the glorious Gospel. Truly she is one of the pioneers in the lady missionary work, for she left her home and dear

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<sup>64</sup> Allen, Diary, 117, 156.

<sup>65</sup> Allen, Diary, 101.

ones and came to England and labored here several months as a missionary without a lady companion.”<sup>66</sup> Not only did this solidarity show a less rigidly structured missionary program, but it also hinted at Inez’s perspective of missionary work. Inez and Jennie planned a sightseeing trip to Europe, which was transformed into a mission, while Liza Chipman, also from Utah, planned to go to England for the sole purpose of filling a mission. Thus, before Inez even returned home from her two-year mission, women had already begun preparing to follow in her footsteps. And with more Lady Missionaries, it would not be long before Church leaders would need to organize the women abroad as they had done at home in establishing the Relief Society. Whereas Inez and Jennie seemed to have few rules and little structure as they performed their duties, the next set of Lady Missionaries would arrive to their missions knowing more specifically what was expected of them.

Upon receiving her new companion, Inez seemed to change, as though her purpose as a missionary was a reflection of her companions. For seven months, her companion was “Jennie,” never “Miss” or “Sister Brimhall.” Though they certainly spent time speaking on street corners, passing out tracts, and fulfilling other missionary obligations, Inez also wrote often of shopping and sightseeing excursions, including a one-month trip to France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and Holland.<sup>67</sup> However, once Jennie left, Inez’s new companion was “Sister Chipman,” never once “Liza.” Furthermore, though there were still a couple holiday parties and an occasional shopping trip, the number of entries dealing with studying, tracting, teaching, and visiting multiplied during her time with Sister Chipman. However, this new focus did not mean a

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<sup>66</sup> Knight, Inez, “A Letter From London,” *Young Woman’s Journal* (4 April 1899): 186-7.

<sup>67</sup> Knight, *Salt Lake Herald*.

friendship did not form between the two. Inez did not mention any distance between herself and her companion, and even wrote on April 17, 1899, “Monday night I had it hinted to me that I might be released soon and Sister Chipman felt disappointed because she did not care to go home so soon [but] neither did she want to stay without me.”<sup>68</sup> Not surprisingly, there was a greater familiarity between Inez and Jennie, soon to be sisters-in-law, but the fact that her new companion brought a stronger sense of seriousness to her language suggests a transition in how Inez viewed her appointment as a missionary. Notwithstanding prior relationships, missionaries are expected to call one another by their title, as Inez did with later companions even though friendships appear to have formed. Whether subconsciously or not, Inez seemed to become more formally representative as the language of her diary changed over the course of time. By the end of her writing she depicted more of the duties of a missionary than the frivolities of being a young girl in a foreign country, or a young girl who planned a sightseeing trip that was redirected by her Church leaders.

In the end, Inez did not leave in April 1899, but went on to serve for over another year, and with two more companions, Miss Jean Clara Holbrook, and Miss Alice Sargent.<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately, although Inez’s final thought on April 30, 1899 said, “May this be connected with another one to follow,” a second volume of her diary remains to be discovered.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, the richness of this one volume revealed many insights on both the LDS Church and the women sent out to represent it at the turn of the century. Throughout the journal, Inez shared her understanding and insights as the first Lady

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<sup>68</sup> Allen, *Diary*, 170.

<sup>69</sup> Whitney, *History of Utah*, 613.

<sup>70</sup> Allen, *Diary*, 180.

Missionary, showing the significance of her role at the turn-of-the-century. Though it is impossible to measure the impact she alone had on England, she still sought to prove to herself and to others what it meant to be a “real, live Mormon woman.” Furthermore, she showed her understanding of the purpose and role of the Lady Missionary, her interactions and relationships with others, her acceptance of Mormon patriarchal authority, and the opposition she faced as a Mormon at that time. With no prior missionary training, and little structure in her mission, Inez shared her message of Mormonism by her image and her words. Inez Knight arrived home June 11, 1900, married Robert Eugene Allen on June 11, 1902, and continued to serve both her religion and her community thereafter, including helping to found Yesharah in 1928, a club for returned Lady Missionaries at Brigham Young Academy.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> According to Kylie Nielson Turley, “Under the direction of Barbara Maughn Roskelly, a teacher at BYU’s Elementary Training School, the returned sister missionaries invited female alumnae missionaries to meet at the Provo home of Amanda Inez Knight Allen, locally famous as the first single missionary...In 1932, the women changed their society’s name to ‘Yesharah,’ a Hebrew adjective...meaning ‘straight, right, upright, just, righteous, good or pleasing.” Kylie Nielson Turley, “Yesharah: Society for LDS Sister Missionaries,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 169-170.

### CHAPTER 3

#### FULFILLING THE DREAM

I believe the missionary movement among the women will be of untold value, causing the young women to realize the position which they hold in this the living Church of Jesus Christ, in the dispensation of the fullness of times. Missionary experiences will make our women of tomorrow better fitted for the duties that devolve upon them, by becoming spiritual aids to their husbands and giving an incentive to their children to understand the glorious gospel and live in sympathy with the great work of the future toward the preparation of this continent for the coming of our Lord and Master.

*Edna Crowther, Lady Missionary, 1915*<sup>72</sup>

In 1900, Inez Knight returned home from England, having spent two years representing all the women of Mormondom. Twelve years later the number of lady missionaries had increased, and the image of “real, live Mormon women” was now spreading across the United States, from California to New York. According to historian Tally S. Payne, not only did the number of female missionaries rise from 17 in 1900 to 44 in 1910, but “a greater proportion (34 out of 44) of the sister missionaries in 1910 were called to missions within the continental United States.”<sup>73</sup> Though time and numbers had changed, many anti-Mormon sentiments remained the same. As Inez went out to refute the image of “poor, downtrodden” women in the LDS Church due to polygamy, so too did the ladies a decade later, following a surge in anti-Mormon propaganda and attacks against the Church. However, by this time the missionary program had become better

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<sup>72</sup> “Messages from the Missions,” *Improvement Era* 18, no. 12 (October 1915), 1111.

<sup>73</sup> Tally S. Payne, “‘Our Wise and Prudent Women’: Twentieth-Century Trends in Female Missionary Service,” in *New Scholarship on Latter-day Saint Women in the Twentieth Century: Articles Selected from the Women's History Initiative Seminars, 2003-2004*, ed. Carol Cornwall Madsen and Cherry B. Silver, (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2005), 128.

structured, and the women called to serve missions now had an image of their own to fulfill, that of a “lady missionary.” Serving from 1912-1913, Stella Sudweeks was a young woman who faced the task of defining what it meant to be a “Lady Missionary” and the role Lady Missionaries played within the greater missionary setting. Unlike Inez’s diary, Stella’s account was written many years later, as part of a life history she gave to her descendants. Her story is affected by hindsight, including her knowledge that she would later marry a young missionary she met in Salt Lake City as they headed to separate missions. Though clouded by the passing of time, Stella’s memories still offer many insights into the image and role of a lady missionary, especially showing the evolution of the purpose and structure of the missionary program.

Stella Permelia Sudweeks was born on May 27, 1890 in Junction, Piute Co., Utah. When she was a child, her family moved near the Brigham Young Academy in Provo, Utah, in order for two of her brothers to attend school. Meanwhile, Stella and her sister attended the B.Y.A. training school until Stella was fifteen. In 1905, her family moved to Idaho, “to the Twin Falls country when it was first opening up. We were pioneers,” she wrote.<sup>74</sup> Explaining her motivation to serve a mission, Stella recalled, “There was a strong feeling against the L.D.S. [Latter-day Saints] and many slights and discriminations against the Mormon children. It made us learn to be strong and stand up for our religion.” She then wrote of a young schoolmate who often teased her and asked, “Stella, how many wives does your father have?” In response, she wrote, “I went home crying but then I began to realize and pretend it didn’t bother me and I’d say, ‘Oh six or seven,’ after that he didn’t bother me so much. Right there I began to desire and plan to be a

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<sup>74</sup> Stella Wood, Letter to Sisters, Kimberly Idaho, January 16, 1978, Stella Wood Autobiography, L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 1.



Missionary some day.”<sup>75</sup> A similar incident happened several years later at school, when she entered a Declamation Contest but lost to a Methodist girl. Stella’s teacher explained that, “the feeling of prejudice toward L.D.S. was felt by many still...[and] it was only prejudice that gave the decision to Margaret Newbry.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, Stella realized early on that because of anti-Mormon sentiments in her own community, she wanted to become a missionary to change people’s understanding of Mormonism and gain converts along the way. Her desire marked a significant paradigm shift within the twelve years after Inez’s mission. Inez could not have rationally dreamed of being a Lady Missionary because there was no precedent and therefore no reason to consider such a possibility. However, once Inez paved the way, any young girl, such as Stella, could at least imagine making a difference as a Lady Missionary.

Many of the anti-Mormon feelings Stella experienced were likely due to the publicity of the Reed Smoot hearings of 1904 that affected Mormons everywhere, as well as a long history of Mormon/anti-Mormon conflicts in Idaho. In 1896, controversy had developed regarding the seating of Mormon polygamist B.H. Roberts as a Utah Congressman. Following debate over his unorthodox marriage practice, the U.S. House of Representatives voted not to seat him as it “was of the opinion that no man with more than one wife could serve in its chambers.”<sup>77</sup> Six years later, opponents of Mormonism rose again, this time to fight the seating of non-polygamous LDS Apostle and Senator-elect, Reed Smoot. Allegations against him stated that he was “one of a self-perpetuating body of fifteen men who, constituting the ruling authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ

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<sup>75</sup> Wood, Letter to Sisters, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Stella Wood, Letter to Family, Second Installment of the Autobiography, 1973, Stella Wood Autobiography, L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 8-9.

<sup>77</sup> *Church History in the Fulness of Times* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2000), 467.

of Latter-day Saints, or ‘Mormon’ Church, claim, and by their followers are accorded the right to claim, supreme authority, divinely sanctioned, to shape the belief and control the conduct of those under them in all matters whatsoever, civil and religious, temporal and spiritual.”

After a lengthy investigation and an interrogation of prominent Mormons, “the Republican Party defeated the proposal that Reed Smoot be removed from his seat. The victory was won in part because Republican leaders, including President Theodore Roosevelt, concluded that if Smoot remained in the Senate he would be a significant influence in keeping Utah a Republican state.” Though Smoot and the Church won a victory with the federal government, the hearings incited a new wave of anti-polygamy attacks against the Church. After one term in office, Smoot’s fellow Senator from Utah, non-Mormon Thomas Kearns, upset about losing reelection due to Mormon influence, bought the *Salt Lake Tribune* and led the way in publishing anti-Mormon articles. These were followed by attacks in national magazines, including *Pearson’s*, *Everybody’s*, *McClure’s*, and *Cosmopolitan*.<sup>78</sup> These Utah and national assaults also riled up the anti-Mormon feelings brewing in Idaho where Stella was living.

Anti-Mormonism in Idaho may have begun as early as the 1860’s, as Mormonism had begun to spread out geographically. Before this greater expansion, several communities were created in the area of Idaho adjacent to Utah as a “refuge for all who desire to leave the Mormon church, and have not the means to emigrate further.” Subsequently, as Merle W. Wells explained, the migration of Mormons to Idaho “encouraged opposition from gentile stockraisers and miners, so that there too the Saints

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<sup>78</sup> *Church History*, 468-469.

found themselves in the unenviable position of a persecuted local minority.”<sup>79</sup> Between 1884-1896, all Mormons, even non-polygamous, were denied voting rights and the ability to hold office, and were shunned among the “Gentiles”. In reaction to the Roberts and Smoot cases, anti-Mormons continued their attacks in the early twentieth century. Wells noted, “But with traditional nineteenth-century Victorian codes of conduct and marriage receding into the past, and with the Mormon church firmly on record against plural marriage on earth,...agitation against the Saints [in Idaho] proved ruinous to politicians who tried to invoke that once-potent issue [polygamy].”<sup>80</sup> Though the government could no longer attack Mormons or their Church, anti-Mormon cartoons, literature and sentiments continued several years longer, until around the time the United States became distracted by World War I. According to Gary Bunker and Davis Bitton, the eventual seating of Senator Smoot in 1908 “did not create universal tolerance, but it did remove Mormonism from the foreground of public attention.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, Stella was the marker between Inez’s era of more exposure to non-Mormons who had little idea of what a Mormon looked like, and following generations, which focused more inside the Church, in helping the members to understand their role. Stella grew up witnessing the opposition, and went out, as Inez did, to change people’s perceptions of Mormons. However, she also began to work more with the members, as Church membership was rising in the country.

With a clear desire to fill a mission, Stella headed for the mission field with differences in background and training that set her apart from Inez. This first lady

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<sup>79</sup> Merle W. Wells, *Anti-Mormonism in Idaho, 1872-92* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), xii.

<sup>80</sup> Wells, *Anti-Mormonism in Idaho*, 181.

<sup>81</sup> Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Graphic Image, 1834-1914* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), 71-72.

missionary came from a prominent Mormon family in a heavily Mormon-populated town, completed a college education, and spent time traveling to southern Utah and California. Stella, on the other hand, came from a pioneering family who helped settle southern Idaho, completed (or nearly completed) her high school studies, and as a teenager only traveled to neighboring towns. On the other hand, when Inez left, she did not have the example of earlier lady missionaries to look to, significant interaction with anti-Mormons, nor organized training. Stella did have experience facing religious opposition and took classes in preparation for her mission not available to Inez in 1898.

As far as missionary training programs were concerned, H. Alan Reid wrote, “As early as 1894, Church education saw the need for training missionaries.” Naturally, this did not include the young ladies until after Inez had set the precedent. He continued, “Brigham Young Academy at that time was offering a class in missionary preparation...In 1902 this class was closed to all except those prospective missionaries who could produce recommends from their bishops and calls from the General Authorities...This period of time also found Ricks Academy with a missionary preparation class much the same as BYA.”<sup>82</sup> Concerning the ladies, a writer, “G.A.A.,” wrote in the March 1900 *Young Woman’s Journal*, “Lately she [referring to LDS women] has been called to go as a missionary to the nations of the earth. One of my girl friends is now taking the special missionary course given at the L.D.S. College [in Salt Lake City]. She has been told that she will be called to preach the Gospel, and is preparing herself, so that when the call comes she will be able to fill the position with honor to herself and

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<sup>82</sup> H. Alan Reid, “History-LDS Missionary Training Programs” Paper written for class at Brigham Young University, S. George Ellsworth Papers, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, 11.

friends.”<sup>83</sup> Potential missionaries also took classes at Brigham Young College in Logan, Utah, and in smaller communities away from the big colleges.

One of the small towns offering missionary preparation was Oakley, Idaho, located fifty-five miles away from Stella’s home in Kimberly. Stella wrote that in 1910, the letters she exchanged with her boyfriend, Ves, “ kept getting fewer until I was called to go to Oakley to take a Missionary Course. My interest then was centered on other things and I guess his were too.”<sup>84</sup> Stella noted that she was “called” to attend this class, indicating she did not take the initiative herself, but rather was invited to do so by Church leaders. Furthermore, based on the experience of the friend of “G.A.A.,” Stella would have understood this call could lead to a future missionary call and wanted to prepare to achieve this long-awaited goal. Though she did not give a description of the class, she did write, “Besides taking the Missionary course I took other High School subjects and made up my year of High School in the few months, I believe 4, that I was there. I enjoyed it.”<sup>85</sup>

The fact that potential missionaries, especially the women, now had classes available to them showed progress in the LDS Church’s attempts to define the role of the missionary, but the program was still not as fully developed as it would later become. Stella and her contemporaries attended high school classes that offered some level of missionary training, though Stella did not specify the course material. While Inez was called, set apart, and put on a ship for England, Stella got on a train for Kansas better equipped mentally for what would be expected of her in her role. Stella’s experience in

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<sup>83</sup> G.A.A., “Something About Women,” *Young Woman’s Journal* (3 March 1900), 124.

<sup>84</sup> Wood, Letter to Sisters, 9.

<sup>85</sup> Wood, Letter to Sisters, 9.

the early stages of the training process shows the evolution of the missionary image. Though every person who took the missionary course may not have filled a mission, they would have received clarification on Church doctrine and understanding of the role of a missionary, which had not previously been available. This would have helped the Church membership understand the missionary program and, perhaps, be more inclined to support it.

Sometime between her missionary course that began in 1910, and her departure in the summer of 1912, Stella received her special letter from the Church headquarters. She wrote, “When I got my call to go on a Mission it was to the Central States. I was thrilled.” At that point, a transformation came over Stella. She was no longer a young student, going to dances and flirting with boys. Prior to her call, she wrote of several young men trying to court her and of an “answered prayer” when she got asked to a special school dance. However, now she wrote, “I got new clothes and father got me a watch and the days soon went by...Father and I left Kimberly June 3, 1912 and went to Salt Lake, the next morning we went to the Presidents Office to register.” She added, “...they did not have any Missionary classes but in the meeting some instructions were given and we were told how to care for our health and keep our bodys clean and clothing clean and well cared for.” Her final bit of preparation happened the next morning, “...father took me to the [Salt Lake City] temple, he did not go through but met me there when I got out in the afternoon. There I was, among strangers, a little country girl, going through the temple and not knowing what it was all about.”<sup>86</sup> In the temple, she participated in a spiritual ceremony, known as the “endowment,” where she received

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

“special washings and anointings, symbolic signs, instructions, and sacred covenants [which] gave the Saints new insight into their relationship with God, their eternal destinies, and their earthly responsibilities.”<sup>87</sup> Based on this description by LDS Church historians James Allen and Glen Leonard, this “new insight” would transform the mindset of these young, impressionable missionaries and launch them into their new role as religious and spiritual emissaries.

Following this temple trip, Stella and Vilate Bennion, another lady missionary, along with several Elders boarded a train heading east, giving them time to ponder the responsibility before them. Stella wrote, “When we reached Kansas City, where those going to the Central States, were to get off, my thoughts were mixed, what to expect from my mission, would I be able to do the work well, would I make friends?”<sup>88</sup> This insight from Stella suggests that she, along with most missionaries, understood that a mission was very much a matter of “work,” and building relationships with Church members and potential converts. However, her thoughts do not show whether she understood the unique influence she would have as a lady missionary. Though both Elders and Lady Missionaries delivered the same message, their mode of presentation differed, as was natural, given societal expectations separating masculinity and femininity.

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<sup>87</sup> James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 184. By this time, all missionaries had to “receive” the Endowment before beginning their mission. This requirement began at least as early as 1836 in Kirtland, Ohio, when the Twelve Apostles were preparing to leave. Gregory Prince wrote, “One week later Cowdery [Counselor to Joseph Smith] gave a charge to the twelve, telling them that they would now be required ‘to preach the gospel to every nation,’ but that, like the ancient apostles, ‘you are not to go to other nations, till you receive your endowment. Tarry at Kirtland until you are endowed with power from on high.’” Gregory A. Prince, *Power From on High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 125. Inez’s Endowment was not mentioned as she had previously received hers during her stay in St. George.

<sup>88</sup> Wood, Letter to Sisters, 12.

One role that belonged more to the Elders at this time was public speaking. Whereas Inez was called upon to speak on street corners on a number of occasions, Stella's generation of lady missionaries had little experience. Stella wrote of her first night after arriving when she, along with six Elders and three other Lady Missionaries, stepped out on Kansas City's busy streets to hold a street meeting. She recalled, "When the Elders began to preach I got a little closer and closer; Elder Brown gave a wonderful talk and I was so proud I wanted to get right out there beside the Elders so everyone would know I was one of them." Stella was not called on to speak, nor did she volunteer. She simply wanted to stand beside the Elders she admired, similar to Inez's first experience of watching the Elders present themselves as "brave soldiers."<sup>89</sup> Stella did not write of another street meeting experience, but she did say, "One of the Country Elders (Elder Riggs) told us to get up in our room and preach to each other just like we were preaching to a large audience. We lady missionaries do not get too much practice at public speaking, and he said that would be good practice."<sup>90</sup> This "lack of practice" shows that while street meetings were a regular duty of the Elders, a proper Lady Missionary did not spend time preaching on corners, but instead fulfilled her role by visiting and teaching in more private and, perhaps, ladylike environments. Still, the "Country Elder" may have encouraged the practice, knowing it would improve them for speaking in church, and any other unforeseen moments when a message would need to be shared.

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<sup>89</sup> Inez Knight Allen, Allen, Inez Knight vol. 1, 1898-1899, Digital Collections Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 17.

<sup>90</sup> Wood, Letter to Family, 1.



In fact, just as society dictated that women's place was in the private sphere of home, and men's was in the public sphere outside, Stella likely never spoke in a street meeting, but spent her time in cottage meetings, where Mormons and non-Mormons gathered in a home to hear the missionaries preach. According to *Liahona the Elders' Journal*, a weekly periodical published by and for the U.S. missions, Elder Rosel H. Hale reported in February 1913, that "a systematic canvass of that city [Kansas City] was begun in July, 1911, and since then the elders and lady missionaries have thoroughly canvassed the city. The lady missionaries are holding cottage meetings every night and the elders are holding cottage meetings and street meetings when the weather will permit."<sup>91</sup> This account supports the idea that the Lady Missionaries were strictly preaching in people's homes, but does not necessarily mean they had less public exposure than their male counterparts. While cottage meetings were often held in the homes of Church members, the attendance would be primarily non-Mormon. Furthermore, a two year "canvassing of the city" likely meant that both Elders and Lady Missionaries had knocked many doors and passed out many tracts looking for potential converts. "Separate spheres" definitely existed during Inez's mission, but the demand for seeing a "real, live Mormon woman" was so high that she needed to be "over"-exposed to reach as many people as possible. By Stella's time, with Church membership rising, there was a relatively greater awareness of who Mormons were, and thus less need for Lady Missionaries to stand before large groups of non-Mormons in open venues. This is evidenced not only by the fact that Church leaders now discouraged emigrating to Utah,

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<sup>91</sup> "News From the Mission," *Liahona the Elders' Journal* 10, no. 25 (February 18, 1913), 556.

but also that total Church membership had nearly doubled from 268,331 in 1900 to 419,683 in 1912.<sup>92</sup>

The fact that cottage meetings allowed the Lady Missionaries to remain more within the domestic sphere represented who these women were. Though missions gave women more independence, they did not take away from the feminine role of portraying the “gentler sex.” Stella’s description of three other Lady Missionaries she lived with in Kansas City showed how these women came from traditional female roles as nurturers and teachers. Sister Cora Hawley from Seattle, “was a very friendly likeable girl, about 3 years older than myself and who had a very lovely voice. She sang beautifully; she had studied voice and it was a wonderful asset to us in our Missionary work.” The second, Sister Jeannette Thompson of Salt Lake, “was old enough to be my mother and we all looked to her for wisdom. She was very small and had never married, she belonged to the Tabernacle choir and when they went back to New York to sing Sr. Thompson stayed in the Central States for her Mission.” The last, Sister Vilate Bennion of Vernal, “had not married either, as her mother was not well and Vilate had devoted her life to caring for her; she was 29 years old and so I was the baby of the group, and I think each tried to look after me a little, I’m sure they did.”<sup>93</sup> Though Stella “was the baby of the group” at the age of 22, she came motivated and desirous to be a good missionary. However, the most poignant fact that came from Stella’s description of the other ladies was how important singing was to “our Missionary work.”

Indeed, as with other Christian denominations, music was a central part of LDS Church meetings, and even missionary work. By 1899, Elders might have been found

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<sup>92</sup> Payne, “Our Wise and Prudent Women,” 129.

<sup>93</sup> Wood, Letter to Sisters, 13.

carrying a copy of *Missionary song book for use of elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the missionary field, being a choice selection of the most popular songs in the Southern states mission*.<sup>94</sup> In fact, music was emphasized among members of the Church at least as early as July 1830, three months after the Church's organization, when Joseph Smith claimed to receive a revelation from God in behalf of his wife, Emma, in which he recorded, "And it shall be given thee, also, to make a selection of sacred hymns, as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church. For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads."<sup>95</sup> The fact that Joseph's wife, a woman, was chosen to compile songs for the Church implies that music, as opposed to Church leadership, was woman's domain. Though the Elders likely would have sung the songs, the duty fell upon the women to make the music feminine and "lovely." By so doing, the Lady Missionaries would represent both parts of their title, missionaries and ladies.

Emphasizing the pressure on the Lady Missionaries to perform well musically, Stella shared an instance of insecurity twice in her autobiography, showing the impact fulfilling her role had on her faith. While working in St. Joseph, Missouri, Stella had a companion, Sister Bone, who could not sing, "except in a monotone." Stella wrote, "I could sing enough to follow the alto with some one or maybe follow the soprano but not carry either by myself let alone keep on the tune with some one singing monotone." The two missionaries decided their only solution was to read the words of the hymns in their

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<sup>94</sup> *Missionary song book for use of elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the missionary field, being a choice selection of the most popular songs in the Southern states mission*, Americana Collection. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

<sup>95</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 25:11-12.

meetings instead of disgrace themselves with their attempts at singing. However, one day they called upon an elderly couple, both crippled with arthritis. Stella continued, “Their faces lighted up when we went in and told them who we were. Neither of us had been there before, Sister Critchfield and Mecham use to go along time ago [sic] and they sang songs to them. The lady smiled and said ‘Oh, I’m so glad you have come, now you can sing ‘O, My Father,’ to us.’” The fact this couple so quickly associated Lady Missionaries with music and singing further suggests this was an essential aspect of their role and image.

Debating how best to handle the situation, Stella finally concluded, “I had the urge we must try, this was the Lord’s work...and we started to sing...I was amazed at the beauty, it was not our voices but some heavenly voices that were coming from our throats...We sang all the verses and to my knowledge did not miss a note.” With tears in their eyes, the couple said, “It was the most beautiful song we have ever heard,” and Stella added, “We were very grateful and humble that the Lord had come to our aid that day.”<sup>96</sup> Though Stella stressed her experience years later as faith-promoting, perhaps even a miracle, the fact that she was put in this situation emphasizes what was expected of her as a Lady Missionary.

Because Stella wrote this account of her mission in retrospect, the anecdote above was one of few specific examples she shared on her role as a missionary. Instead, she tended to focus on people with whom she remained acquainted after the mission, including a girl she taught, Elders who proposed after returning home, and the one Elder whose proposal she accepted. What she did explain of her duties she summed up in two

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<sup>96</sup> Wood, Letter to Sisters, 13-14.

sentences, "...we worked hard and tracted a lot and held cottage meetings. I taught a class of young women in Sunday School of about 4-6 girls teenagers."<sup>97</sup> Though short and succinct, this description pretty accurately described the role of the Lady Missionary. They passed out tracts door-to-door, led small group meetings in the homes of Church members, and sometimes taught other women when their help was needed. In contrast to the Elders, they were not holding street meetings, performing the ordinance of baptism, nor leading Church congregations (as was sometimes required of the Elders when new congregations were formed). Though the roles of Elders and Lady Missionaries differed, Stella did not suggest her work was less significant than that of the Elders when she concluded, "we worked hard."

Though not as clearly stated as with Inez, these Lady Missionaries still represented the women of Mormondom, as their duties included the more feminine side of missionary work. An example of this appeared in the December 1912 *Liahona the Elders' Journal*, in which Sister Lila Mitchell [a Lady Missionary in the Central States Mission] reported, "...although the people are not inclined to hear the gospel they are always pleased to have the lady missionaries visit them, as they always bring a beautiful influence with them."<sup>98</sup> This comment demonstrates how Lady Missionaries were still accomplishing the goal of the first women sent abroad. Not only were they showing that Mormon women were not "poor, downtrodden slaves," but they brought a "beautiful influence" into the homes of non-Mormons with no inclination to join the Church. They could establish an image of Mormon femininity to gain tolerance, and acceptance from

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<sup>97</sup> Wood, Letter to Sisters, 14.

<sup>98</sup> "News From the Mission," *Liahona the Elders' Journal* 10, no. 25 (December 10, 1912), 396.

some, without convincing non-Mormons to convert, and still be accomplishing part of their task as missionaries.

Though Stella certainly shared many similarities with Inez, the greatest difference between these two ladies was the opposition each faced. While Inez was yelled at and chased by a mob, Stella wrote of little opposition and only one entirely bad day in her life history. Everywhere she and her companion went, they were turned away, or felt uncomfortable around those who would let them in. Stella wrote, "...it really seemed as though Satan himself was right in head of us all day; the influence was awful, and every place we went to[,] it seemed like he entered first and turned their heart against us." She concluded by saying, "I never had such an experience and do not care to again. I cannot tell what it was but it seemed that Satan had all of his powers turned on us that day."<sup>99</sup> In this singular experience, she blamed her inability to teach in people's homes on Satan, instead of indifferent non-Mormons, or anti-Mormons who attempted to stop her work altogether. On the other hand, since she also did not mention converting every person she met, Stella must have encountered rejection throughout her mission, and most likely, opposition to a certain degree. Still, because this life history contained her most significant memories, the lack of opposition on her mission, as compared to the opposition she faced in grade school, suggests there was a greater degree of open-mindedness in the Midwest at this time than elsewhere previously.

Furthermore, while she did not write of opposition, she did share one experience of tolerance that impacted her. She explained her landlady's husband was an Evangelist, who one day brought home a young preacher. "She told her husband 'These are the

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<sup>99</sup> Wood, Letter to Family, 1-2.

missionaries who receive no pay for their work, and even pay their own expenses.’ He was very courteous to us and said, ‘Well, there wouldn’t be many Preachers if we didn’t get any pay.’” Stella concluded, “Anyway, he heard enough to make him think we likely would not have been so free to express ourselves had we realized to whom we were preaching.”<sup>100</sup> Though the husband might not have appreciated the message of the Lady Missionaries, not only was he “very courteous,” but he did not overreact to meeting the Mormons or having them live on his property. Stella’s conclusion suggests that the landlady’s husband respected the Lady Missionaries as women, but did not esteem them as preachers. As an Evangelist, the man was unlikely to want Mormon competition and yet chose not to argue with the women. He might have tolerated the visit out of consideration for his wife, but possibly he felt that a confrontation with two women was not worth his time. Perhaps the situation would have been different had the missionaries been Elders, and yet Stella seemed to relate this account in her life history as an experience of tolerance, an opportunity in which the two men could have persecuted the Lady Missionaries, as certainly happened to Inez, and yet chose not to, for one reason or another.

Another experience, in which opposition turned towards acceptance, appeared in an August 1812 copy of *Liahona the Elders’ Journal*. Stella sent in an account that began, “We are enjoying the work very much and each day we see where prejudice is being broken down.” She then told of a woman who “was very prejudiced and would not listen to our message. She ridiculed our ideas of an inspired prophet. She also told us of the many times she had accepted literature from the elders and afterwards thrown it

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<sup>100</sup> Wood, Letter to Family, 1.

away.” Stella described how they spoke with her a long time and shared Bible references to explain their beliefs, leaving more literature with her. Following their encounter, the woman attended several missionary meetings, and when she was returning home to Arkansas, she hugged Stella and with tears in her eyes said, “I love you just as I love my own daughter.”<sup>101</sup> Since the woman left the area Stella was working in, there is no record of whether or not she converted to Mormonism. However, this experience again shows how focused these Lady Missionaries were at establishing a more positive image of Mormons, since as Stella noted, “...each day we see where prejudice is being broken down.” This woman’s change in attitude also reinforces the notion that Lady Missionaries were needed because they could relate better to non-Mormon women, seeing as how the woman always tore up the literature from the Elders, but was willing to listen to the ladies’ explanations and form a mother-daughter bond with them.

One of the final experiences Stella wrote of from her mission happened in December 1913, when she was finishing her mission, and demonstrated how the Lady Missionaries had been better organized since the time of Inez. One day, Elder Roy Wood of the Southern States Mission, and Stella’s future husband, stopped in her mission while returning from Salt Lake City where he had been for an appendectomy. Stella asked her local mission leader if they could have Elder Wood over for dinner, and Pres. Anderson agreed as long as he was welcome to join as well. Following the dinner, Stella wrote, “I was released from my mission at that time as I had been there 18 months and that is as long as they kept L.Ms.”<sup>102</sup> This time specification was greatly different from Inez’s experience. Not only did Inez serve for two years, but in her day nobody knew how long

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<sup>101</sup> “News From the Mission,” *Liahona the Elders’ Journal* 10, no. 15 (October 1, 1912), 237.

<sup>102</sup> Wood, Letter to Sisters, 15.



a Lady Missionary should be required to serve. The first several Lady Missionaries served for different amounts of time, but now all Lady Missionaries served for eighteen months, illness or other special circumstances excepted. Thus, with a stricter organization of the missionary program and a better understanding of what was expected of them, missionaries could present a more standardized image.

One aspect of the missionary program that had not changed since Inez's mission was the leniency of companionships. Just as Inez and her companions often worked alone with the Elders, Lady Missionaries were occasionally still seen without a companion during Stella's time. *Liahona the Elders' Journal* reported on one of Stella's contemporaries who attended a Church conference in McDonald, Florida. "There were twenty-one elders present besides President Callis and Sister Martha Smith. All seemed greatly revived and strengthened by the testimonies born and the advice given."<sup>103</sup> Years later, all missionaries would be required to have their companion in sight at all times, showing again how the missionary program was progressing by Stella's service, but was still in a time of transitioning and structuring.

While companionships may not have fully developed in defining the missionary image, one change that had everything to do with the missionary image was the new rules set forth, including ones pertaining to the relationship between Elders and Lady Missionaries. With Inez, some Church members looked down upon the fact that all the missionaries lived in the same building, but no rules were made pertaining to living arrangements. Furthermore, Inez spent a good deal of time paired off with one Elder as they knocked doors in search of potential converts. By Stella's time, there were strict

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<sup>103</sup> "News From the Mission," *Liahona the Elders' Journal* 10, no. 5 (July 23, 1912), 75.

rules in place against even the appearance of paired-off relationships. As a farewell treat for Stella for having been released as a missionary, the other missionaries took her to a play. Since Elder Wood was still in town, they sat next to each other, and “he held my hand.” Stella then explained, “I was released to go home and he wasn’t in his Mission so I guess we were not breaking rules. Breaking rules as Missionaries we were very careful of, as we realized it was easy to do and we must not give any excuse for criticism of our actions.” Perhaps because Stella felt a need to justify her hand-holding, she showed she understood the weight of the matter, as she continued, “Were very careful when we went out for meetings or appointments not to go in even numbers as 2 girls and 2 Elders but two Elders and 3 girls or Vice Versa, just so we did not pair off. They were all fine Elders and fine girls and at home it would be natural to pair off but prohibited among missionaries.”<sup>104</sup> Whether or not Stella and Elder Wood should have held hands, the fact that for eighteen months she was careful not to go out in even numbers shows she took her role seriously. The missionaries now went out for a specific amount of time, with a specific responsibility to preach the gospel, and not only did they need to keep themselves focused on their duty, but both Mormons and non-Mormons needed to see that the missionaries were representing religion and not romance among themselves.

Clearly, Stella shared many experiences and concerns with Inez, but she would have even more in common with later Lady Missionaries. Thus, Stella’s mission shows that the LDS Church took steps to organize the missionary program, and the Lady Missionaries, especially in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Stella began her mission at the tail end of Mormonism’s greatest persecution, meaning she went out

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<sup>104</sup> *Liahona the Elders’ Journal* 10 no. 5, 75.

understanding the effect polygamy had on Mormonism's image, as did Inez. Stella presumably faced less opposition than Inez and her work had clearer structure. Yet, the organization and rules were not as well defined as they would become. Furthermore, though Stella never participated in street meetings, she still had plenty of public exposure in cottage meetings and tracting, whereas ladies who served later may have had more exposure to the private realm within the Church among the members.

Following her evening out on the town in Kansas City, Stella headed home to Kimberly, Idaho, where she was welcomed as a returned Lady Missionary. Unlike Inez, she never received a college education or held civic offices. She married Elder Wood shortly after he returned to his home in Teton Basin, Idaho. They raised their children as members of the LDS Church, and then many years later, served another mission together in England. Stella always stayed true to her faith, and though her mission never gave her prominence in the Church, for a time, she gave the Church prominence by representing what it stood for, including Mormon women and Lady Missionaries.

CHAPTER 4  
SETTING THE EXAMPLE

*We're working for our Mission  
With faith and courage strong.  
We hope and pray undaunted,  
For more our Church to throng.  
Our ranks are filled with Elders,  
And ladies, too, belong.  
We follow our dear President  
And push the work along.*

*Victory, Western States, this Mission that we love so well.  
Victory, Western States, Our Message we must tell.  
Victory, Western States, Victory, Our message we must tell.*

*We're called from town and city  
To teach and preach God's word.  
We never will cease trying  
'Till all its truths have heard.  
If all men should revile us,  
Still we'd stand fast for right,  
God's Spirit never fails us  
If we will seek its light.*

*The world now stands in waiting  
To hear of God's great plan,  
For He prepared this nation  
Here to reveal to man,  
Again the same great message  
That all the prophets taught,  
And so the Gospel story  
To all the world is brought.*

*And when our work is ended  
We'll not forget your days.  
You made us all so happy  
In many, many ways.  
Oh! Western States, we'll praise you,  
Let ne'er your courage fail,  
We never can repay you,  
But long your name we'll hail.*

*LaRetta Gibbons<sup>105</sup>*

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<sup>105</sup> E. LaRetta Gibbons, Western States Mission Song, E. LaRetta Gibbons Missionary Diary, (1933-1934), Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan.

In just thirty-five years from the time Inez Knight and Jennie Brimhall opened the door to Lady Missionaries, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its missionary program had come a long way. According to James B. Allen and Glen Leonard, “Between 1918 and 1930 Church membership grew from less than 500,000 to more than 630,000, the number of organized stakes increased from 79 to 104, new temples were constructed, and significant changes continued to affect the priesthood, the auxiliaries, the educational program, the missionary program, and public relations.”<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, the Church was finally gaining positive publicity and a stronger sense of acceptance from the outside community. In 1920, LDS Church President Heber J. Grant traveled to Kansas City, Missouri for a speaking engagement. “He arrived thinking that he would be called upon to defend his faith before critics. Instead, he heard nothing but praise and admiration for the Church.”<sup>107</sup>

Along with growth in numbers and tolerance came other changes as well. Whereas Inez Knight was sent to show the world what Mormon women looked like, there were now technological advancements and the financial security within the church to spread its message using different and broader methods. For example, the Church had begun buying back property considered historically significant since its inception in 1830, placing markers and monuments around the country, and celebrating the sacrifices of the early members. The Church also set up exhibits in many of the World’s Fairs, some of which included performances by the famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir. In 1913, a silent film, entitled *One Hundred Years of Mormonism*, “countered the

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<sup>106</sup> James B. Allen and Glen Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 496.

<sup>107</sup> Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 496.

impressions commonly gained by moviegoers of a depraved people under a despotic church government.” Sixteen years later, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir began “weekly network broadcasts” of its performances through the CBS radio station.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the Church publication, *Liahona the Elders’ Journal*, originally published by and for missionaries working in the U.S. missions, was now reaching missionaries, church members, and especially those wanting to know more about the Church throughout the entire country, Mexico, Canada, and Hawaii. Through these mediums, the LDS Church worked hard to improve its image and clearly explain the doctrine and practices of its members.

However, while the Church was advancing on several fronts, the United States was suffering from the effects of the Great Depression, following the stock market crash of 1929. The difficult times also affected the LDS Church’s members, and the missionary program as well, as “many families needed their sons to work at home and could not afford to send them on missions.” Because of a reduced number of missionaries at this time, missionary work required a greater involvement of its local members. According to *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, “Hundreds of people were converted as a result of the missionary efforts that were organized in the stakes of Zion,” referring to the efforts of the members. Furthermore, “One ward reported that there was a 50 percent increase in overall activity among its members as a result of local missionary work.”<sup>109</sup> With so many converts and a rise in activity, the branches needed the guidance of the missionaries, most of whom had spent their lives in the Church. Entire

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<sup>108</sup> Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 511.

<sup>109</sup> *Church History in the Fulness of Times* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2000), 515-6.

congregations comprised mostly of new Mormons had no experience and little understanding of how the LDS Church operated and how Mormons were expected to represent themselves.

Thus, when Eva LaRetta Gibbons embarked on her mission journey in 1933, the purpose of the Lady Missionary had evolved to focus more on helping the Church members understand their own role rather than standing on a street corner to show the people what a Mormon girl looked like. The LDS Church was spreading worldwide, and the missionaries had to teach the members how to look and act like Mormons themselves. Though many of the missionary duties were the same on the surface, as LaRetta wrote on March 20, 1934, “missionaries are supposed to set the example.”<sup>110</sup> Their numbers were still relatively small, but the LDS Church needed Lady Missionaries, in part because of the shortage of men due to the Depression, but especially to teach the Mormon women their role.

Along with this shift in focus came a shift in what qualified a young lady to represent “real, live Mormon women.” When Inez Knight started her mission, she was one of two Lady Missionaries in the world. She was chosen from a distinct family in a distinct town of Utah. She also had completed college and spent time away from home. Thirty years later, the LDS Church still wanted to send out competent women, but seemed less concerned about family background and life experience.

One piece of evidence that the Church was less focused on the prominence of its Lady Missionaries is how little is known of LaRetta Gibbons or her family. Articles and short biographies exist on Inez because of her pioneering role, and Stella included her

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<sup>110</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 130.

mission account within a life history. Unfortunately, no biographies of LaRetta have been found, and though she was a meticulous journal writer, she shared very little of her pre-mission life. In fact, she gave no indication of how she funded her mission, especially during hard economic times, and her journal does not contain one direct reference to the Great Depression. This omission shows that LaRetta purposely chose to write only about her private world as a missionary. Perhaps this serves as evidence that Lady Missionaries were not trying to change the whole world or enlarge their sphere, but simply work in the areas and among the people they were assigned to teach.

Still, some evidence does exist that sheds light on LaRetta's background, showing she fit the "image" of a Lady Missionary. According to the 1930 census, her father owned and ran a grain farm in Garden City, Utah, a small northern town adjacent to Bear Lake. He owned a home and a radio set, could read and write, and lived with his wife and four children, including one son who helped on the farm. LaRetta, the youngest at home, turned nineteen shortly before leaving, had completed only two years at the Utah Agricultural College in Logan, and as far as the record shows, had never lived farther away from home. Though both she and Inez Knight were young and capable, the fact that LaRetta had less exposure to prominence, education, and being away from home held no bearing against her now that her predecessors had paved the way.

In fact, not only did LDS Church leaders approve of the work the women were doing, but girls now dreamed early on of becoming missionaries. Beginning her diary with the events leading up to her mission, LaRetta wrote, "Mabel Cook, my best friend, had been called on a mission to the Southern States... Her being called as she was brought to me the development and opportunity that missionary experiences afforded those who



took advantage of it. I had always had a desire to go on a mission, but then I think that my desire became greater on seeing her have the opportunity.”<sup>111</sup> Though LaRetta had the desire, she did not say precisely what motivated her. Of course a mission meant travel, though now more likely within the states. It also meant adventure away from home and the glory within the community of later carrying the title “returned missionary.” While LaRetta may have had these in mind, her entries showed she understood the work aspect of missionary life and took it seriously. Following her arrival to Lincoln, Nebraska on September 23, 1933, and meeting her companion, Fae Heaton, she wrote, “The next week we spent going to primaries, cottage meetings, and visiting and tracting. I didn’t talk in any of the meetings. I liked tracting from the start and all the rest of it too.”<sup>112</sup> LaRetta had to be dedicated not only to endure six days a week of church meetings and responsibilities, but even more, to like it.

Of course, not only dedication, but training also, helped prepare LaRetta for the duties of being a missionary. Though some classes were now being offered, she never noted any mission preparation prior to arriving in Salt Lake City. However, what she did mention was the training she received that had not been available to either Inez or Stella. In 1924, Anthony W. Ivins, Second Counselor in the Church’s First Presidency, said, “I think it is a shame that our boys are permitted to come to this city [Salt Lake City] and wander around as they are doing. It seems to me we should have some place where we can take care of them and look after them while they are in the city.” A year later, Church President Heber J. Grant dedicated a “mission home” which H. Alan Reid called “a significant milestone in the history of modern day missionary work. This was the first

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<sup>111</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 1.

<sup>112</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 8.

effort made to train Church representatives under the direction of the General Authorities.”<sup>113</sup> LaRetta arrived at this “home” on September 11, 1933. While there she “received many valuable instructions as well as making many very nice acquaintances. There were four of us girls in a room at the missionary home.” She then explained her schedule, writing, “During the nine days we were in the mission home we arose at 6:30 a.m. had devotional at 7:15 a.m. Then breakfast, and after that many classes which were very interesting. We heard most of the leading men in the church: Pres. Heber J. Grant, Melvin J. Ballard, David O. McKay, Joseph F. Smith, Rulon S. Wells, etc. We were supposed to be in bed by 11 p.m. each night.”<sup>114</sup> Hearing from the top leaders certainly encouraged the missionaries, and living by a set schedule prepared them for the strict structure of missionary life. Thus the missionaries could head out unified in their message to non-Mormons and their goal to unify and strengthen new Mormons.

After nine days at the Missionary Home, LaRetta embarked on her mission. On September 20, LaRetta wrote, “Wednesday at 9 p.m. Sr. Elgan and I and nine Elders left Salt Lake City...They traveled with us to Pueblo...Sr. Elgan and I went on to Denver...And to our amazement and surprise Sr. Cobbly and Sr. Geering with a saint [church member] Bro. Bost were there to meet us. They told us that one was to labor in Denver and one go to Eastern Nebraska. I was to do the latter.”<sup>115</sup> LaRetta stayed in

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<sup>113</sup> H. Alan Reid, “History-LDS Missionary Training Programs” Paper written for class at Brigham Young University, S. George Ellsworth Papers, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, 2-3. Tally S. Payne explains, “The First Presidency approved a ‘Church Missionary Home and Preparatory Training School’ in May 1924 in which ‘lady missionaries were housed on the upper floor, while quarters for the elders were on the main floor and in the basement.’” Tally S. Payne, “‘Our Wise and Prudent Women’: Twentieth Century Trends in Female Missionary work,” in *New Scholarship on Latter-day Saint Women in the Twentieth Century: Articles Selected from the Women's History Initiative Seminars, 2003-2004*, ed. Carol Cornwall Madsen and Cherry B. Silver, (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2005), 128.

<sup>114</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 3-4.

<sup>115</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 4,6.

Denver one day, and then caught a bus for Lincoln where her companion would be awaiting her arrival.

Over the next two years, LaRetta worked in Nebraska, Colorado, and the mission office, also located in Colorado. Though her journal only covered the first year of her mission, *Liahona the Elders' Journal* filled in some of the gaps. From September 1933 until April 1934, she labored in the East Nebraska region, then mission leaders transferred her to the Pueblo, Colorado region, which included work in both Colorado Springs and Pueblo. In April 1935, she was then sent to the mission office in Denver as bookkeeper, where she remained until the completion of her mission in October 1935. The mission secretary noted of her arrival to the office, "We welcome this talented poetess to our ranks."<sup>116</sup>

The fact that LaRetta had four specifically designated locations shows growth and progress in the missionary program. Inez's journal indicates no specific areas of labor or time assigned in each. According to her life history and *Liahona the Elders' Journal*, Stella worked in Kansas City, was transferred to St. Joseph, Missouri, and then returned to Kansas City for the duration of her mission. LaRetta's doubled number of areas suggests two conclusions: first, that the number of Lady Missionaries was rising, resulting in more companionships to be sent more places. This is confirmed in Tally Payne's article on the quantitative history of Lady Missionaries, which shows that in 1910, the total number of female missionaries set apart was 44, but had tripled to 137 in 1931, two years before LaRetta began her mission.<sup>117</sup> Secondly, the increase in areas also

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<sup>116</sup> "News From the Missions," *Liahona the Elders' Journal* vols. 31-33.

<sup>117</sup> Payne, "Our Wise and Prudent Women," 127.

suggests that the number of congregations was rising, giving the Lady Missionaries more Church members with whom they could work.

Further evidence of the progress in structuring the missionary program includes the evolution of the duration of the mission. Inez's mission leaders asked her repeatedly how long she felt she should labor, as there was no specified time. On the other hand, Stella's life history clearly stated that her mission was set at eighteen months. However, at some point between Stella and LaRetta's missions, this was lengthened to two years, equal to that of the Elders. This time of service would last forty years, until 1971, when the length was lowered back down to eighteen months, where it has since remained.<sup>118</sup>

A third clear change in the overall missions of these three ladies was the number of companionships each had. In two years, Inez had a total of four companions, though she spent most of her time with Jennie Brimhall and Sister Chipman. Based on her life history and *Liahona the Elders' Journal*, Stella appears to have had four companions as well, though hers were condensed into the eighteen months she labored, instead of Inez's two years. Finally, in the eighteen months before LaRetta worked in the office as bookkeeper, she had no less than six companions. Again, though these numbers are not significantly different, they still show a slow and steady rise in Lady Missionaries and missionary work.

Meanwhile, as LaRetta made her trip to Lincoln to begin her labors, she had what may have been her biggest lesson on how some people viewed those of her faith, as it was one of only two instances of rejection she wrote about in the 242 pages of her

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<sup>118</sup> Tania Rands Lyon and Mary Ann Shumway McFarland, "'Not Invited, But Welcome': The History and Impact of Church Policy on Sister Missionaries" *Dialogue* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 101.

journal. A fellow seated in front of her on the bus had been watching her and offered her some beer to which she “emphatically shook [her] head.” He left, but came back and apologized and began a conversation with her. She wrote, “When he heard I was from Utah he said ‘Oh, a Mormon.’” The fellow then explained “he had a friend whose wife had joined a church, because of this he had lost his job[,] the children were austrisized [sic] from society, and [he] asked me if I were him if I wouldn’t speak to her and try to get her to stop ruining their lives. I told him that if I had something better to offer and thought I could do them some good I surely would, but otherwise not.” Later, a group behind her began talking about how much they disliked Utah. LaRetta continued, “I cried for a long time while they talked, but finally I decided I shouldn’t let their talk bother me, and so I put forth an effort and finally dried my tears. I think they were sorry for the fellow and...later I had a chance to explain some of my beliefs to them. I believe they made an impression because the lady said she wished she[’]d known me sooner.”<sup>119</sup> This incident showed that while sentiments were changing concerning the Latter-day Saints, negative connotations still arose when people heard “Mormon” and “Utah.” On the other hand, unlike Inez, LaRetta never wrote of mobs chasing her or of being followed from house to house by women sharing opposing viewpoints at each doorstep. Thus, while there was certainly rejection and small incidents of opposition, LaRetta was able to dry her tears and move on. It was no longer as essential to defend herself as a Mormon woman as in earlier years, thus freeing her to focus on other aspects of her missionary duties.

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<sup>119</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 11-13.

Another incident that illustrated a change in the mission field was a change in attitude from the Lady Missionaries over street meetings. Inez “recalled a sickly feeling when Bro. McMurrin announced that ‘real live Mormon women’ would speak.”<sup>120</sup> Stella “wanted to get right out there beside the Elders so everyone would know I was one of them.”<sup>121</sup> LaRetta, however, wrote, “They [the Elders] promised me a street meeting and that I should speak, but they didn’t fulfil their promise.”<sup>122</sup> Perhaps LaRetta was bravest of all in that she not only wanted to speak on a street corner, but felt let down when the Elders denied her the opportunity. However, the greater tolerance of Mormonism and the training she received possibly gave her greater courage to want to stand on that corner.

Meanwhile, LaRetta spent very little time on street corners and much more time working among the church members. One way she did this was by visiting them throughout the week. On Sunday, September 24, 1933, “We went out to Sr. and Bro Wrights for dinner. We always go there for dinner on the fourth Sunday of the month I was informed. We had a lovely dinner, enjoyed ourselves and came back for church.” One week later, “Sunday we went to S.S. [Sunday School] and then to dinner at Pres. Petersons president of the branch. We go there every fast Sunday each month... We came back to church and all bore our testimonies.”<sup>123</sup> These set dinners likely fostered strong relationships with the members to encourage them in fulfilling their role as Latter-day Saints, which included attending church meetings during the week and also sharing their beliefs with others. She noted that Pres. Peterson was the president of a branch, which the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* explains is “generally the smallest organized

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<sup>120</sup> Allen, Diary, 17.

<sup>121</sup> Wood, Letter to Sisters 13.

<sup>122</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 9.

<sup>123</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 8-9.

congregation of the Church (normally fewer than two hundred members)...these units were more commonly called ‘branches,’ reflecting the manner in which they were formed—members sharing the gospel and creating new congregations in neighboring communities.”<sup>124</sup> If the members were responsible for gaining converts, then LaRetta and her companion would need to make sure the “Saints” knew what they were sharing and were “living the gospel” themselves. On Wednesday, August 29, LaRetta wrote, “As usual we visited Saints all day. It seems [we] never will get them all visited before Sr. Fillerup [LaRetta’s companion] goes.”<sup>125</sup> These visits appeared throughout her journal and likely were a never-ending task.

Besides visiting families in their homes, the Lady Missionaries devoted much of their time to teaching and leading meetings of the Church’s women’s auxiliaries, including the Relief Society for adults, the Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Association, and the Children’s Primary. Of the Relief Society, LaRetta referred to two different responsibilities. The first was the regular Relief Society meetings, where the women met during the week to share lessons on “theological, cultural, and homemaking topics.”<sup>126</sup> Moreover, it was an opportunity for Mormon women to gather and feel part of a sisterhood. For the week of February 4-10, 1934, LaRetta noted, “Had dinner out to Wrights Friday night and then work and business hour in Relief Society. They served us cake and jello and valentines plates with pretty napkins.”<sup>127</sup> Sometimes the missionaries participated in the lessons as well, such as on November 3, 1933, when LaRetta wrote, “...I studied for the Relief Society lesson I had to give. I believe it went off fine, too. I

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<sup>124</sup> Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 219.

<sup>125</sup> Gibbons, *Missionary Diary*, 210.

<sup>126</sup> Ludlow, *Encyclopedia*, 1203.

<sup>127</sup> Gibbons, *Missionary Diary*, 104.

was quite proud of myself.”<sup>128</sup> LaRetta, being a young adult, would have been fairly new to the Relief Society herself. However, having grown up with the tradition of Relief Society in her home and community, she could participate fully and share her understanding of the role and significance of this sisterhood.

The other Relief Society responsibility LaRetta noted was “relief society teaching.” Because she dropped the capitalization in these instances, she likely was referring to the practice of “visiting teaching.” The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* defines visiting teaching as “an organized means whereby the women of the Church receive regular instructional and compassionate service visits...from other female members of the Church. The purpose is to promote sisterhood, present inspirational messages, and note instances of need wherein the temporal and spiritual resources of the Church might be helpful.”<sup>129</sup> These visits began with the founding of the Relief Society in 1842, and allowed for more personal relationships among the women, apart from their group meetings. As LaRetta recalled, “Monday we did our relief society teaching. And all the rest of the week we had our usual meetings.”<sup>130</sup> As the missionaries were supposed to “set the example,” it befitted LaRetta to participate in the duties of a society to which she herself belonged.

Another group that LaRetta surely participated in during her youth and helped lead as a missionary was the Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Association, often abbreviated to “Mutual”. Directed at teenage girls, LDS Church President Brigham Young formed this auxiliary in 1869 to encourage the young ladies “to grow spiritually,

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<sup>128</sup> Gibbons, *Missionary Diary*, 45.

<sup>129</sup> Ludlow, *Encyclopedia*, 1516.

<sup>130</sup> Gibbons, *Missionary Diary*, 103.



to resist idleness and gossip, to retrench from the styles of the world in dress and deportment, and thus to be proper examples of Latter-day Saints.”<sup>131</sup> Members of the YWMA were known as “Beehives” (12-15 year olds), “Junior Gleaners” (16-18 year olds), and “Golden Gleaners” (late teens and early 20s). Their male counterparts, members of the Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association, were known as “Scouts,” “Junior M-Men,” and “Master M-Men.”<sup>132</sup> On Tuesdays, all members attended “Mutual” night, where they had separate lessons and then an activity or talent program.<sup>133</sup> With experience in the YWMA and life experience as a Mormon, LaRetta naturally fit in to help the girls and their leaders, as on Sunday, March 4, 1934, in Colorado Springs, when she and Sr. Shaw “talked mutual work. I’m to help Sr. Anderson in the Gleanor class...We decided to have a Gleanor box luncheon party and invite the M. Men to buy our boxes. I’m going to enjoy my mutual work.”<sup>134</sup> This was an organization she had spent years in, and well understood how to lead.

One Mutual activity LaRetta and her companion, Sr. Hulse, attended was the St. Patrick’s social on March 16, 1934. LaRetta wrote, “Sr. Hulse and I sold bows and helped fix refreshments to keep out of mischief. Its great to be a missionary and not be able to dance. Everyone comes and asks you and it takes all your nerve to say, ‘No thank you.’ They just do it to tease.” This entry made several points on LaRetta’s role as a missionary. First, their presence showed how actively they participated in branch activities, in this case a youth activity that likely had new Mormons and non-Mormon

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<sup>131</sup> Ludlow, *Encyclopedia*, 1616.

<sup>132</sup> “More no-longer-used Mormon words” Mormon Times, Deseret News; [http://www.mormontimes.com/mormon\\_voices/reader\\_voices/?id=1993](http://www.mormontimes.com/mormon_voices/reader_voices/?id=1993); Internet; accessed February 27, 2008.

<sup>133</sup> Ludlow, *Encyclopedia*, 1617.

<sup>134</sup> Gibbons, *Missionary Diary*, 116.

friends. Second, LaRetta and her companion conformed to the missionary rules forbidding dancing. Their obedience re-enforced the idea of structure and order in the missionary program, which unified the missionaries as a whole and set them apart from the lay members. Finally, the fact that the gentlemen asked them to dance only to tease them showed that they recognized and respected these ladies in their unique role.

Another example of how the Mutual members looked up to the experience and aid of the Lady Missionaries happened six months later while LaRetta and her companion, Sr. Hulse, were working in Pueblo, Colorado. LaRetta recorded, “Then we visited Violet a minute where she works, Iris Schollick (her Mother wasn’t home) Mrs. Drew, Mrs. Brink and Mrs. Buttler. We went to Mutual with Buttlers, and I had to take over the Gleanor class with no preperation [sic]. We told stories and talked on personality. I [surely] felt weak.”<sup>135</sup> Throughout her journal, LaRetta tended to use the titles, “Br.” and “Sr.” (Brother and Sister, respectively) to denote members of the Church, while using “Mr.” and “Mrs.” to refer to non-Mormons. Presumably, the “Buttlers” were teenage children of Mrs. Buttler she was accompanying to Mutual when the youth looked to her to as a leader. Still, with “no preperation,” she held the meeting instead of canceling it, perhaps because she understood the necessity in unifying the youth, in order to fulfill President Young’s vision that they would be “proper examples of Latter-day Saints”.

The third women’s auxiliary in which LaRetta participated was the children’s Primary. While the program itself included both boys and girls, the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* explains, “The women of the Church were given the responsibility to organize and administer the Primary program.” Weekly meetings were “devoted to

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<sup>135</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 219.

songs, poems, and activities presented by children.”<sup>136</sup> LaRetta and her companions both attended and led Primary meetings several times a week for children in different neighborhoods, both at church members’ homes and even in their own apartment.

In the case of Primary, the Lady Missionaries were not only motivated to teach the children to conform to Mormonism, but more importantly, to show the parents how much good Mormonism could do for their youngsters. On November 28, 1933, LaRetta wrote, “Primary at Downers was very interesting. We played games. Afterwards we went with one of our little Primary girls, Ruth Feldt to visit her folks.”<sup>137</sup> Ruth Feldt may or may not have been a church member, as LaRetta gave her no distinguishing title. Furthermore, LaRetta did not mention the content of the visit, and yet considering the nature of the role of a missionary, that is, to preach the gospel, it seems likely Ruth was the avenue needed for LaRetta and her companion to discuss issues about the Church with Ruth’s parents.

Primary also seemed to be a good tactic for meeting non-Mormons, as LaRetta and her companions were always eager to gather up as many children as they could for each meeting. On May 16, 1934, she wrote, “Tracted and then prepared for our primary here in our Apartment. The attendance surprised us. We had 9 and it was the first time, too. I think they all enjoyed it and will come again.” Encouraged by her success, she wrote the following day, “Well, we had some tracting then went over on the East side trying to get children for our primary Friday. It was a job.” However, that Friday she reported,

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<sup>136</sup> Ludlow, *Encyclopedia*, 1146.

<sup>137</sup> Gibbons, *Missionary Diary*, 80.

Busy as usual and had a primary, too. We went early to try and advertise our primary some more. Well, when it came time only one lady who promised to bring her child brought it. We couldn't very well have primary with one. Mrs. Monson didn't seem very interested. She didn't even see that her children were there. Well, we were feeling pretty discouraged. We went out on the street down by the little store and found some children. We asked them to all come to primary. They went and asked their mothers and there was eight all together at our primary. We were [surely] glad.<sup>138</sup>

Again, because these Lady Missionaries were not assigned to work as babysitters, nor were LaRetta and Sr. Hulse paid to entertain the children, the fact they sought out participants for their Primary class shows how important this auxiliary was to the missionary program. Not only did the Mormon children need Primary to learn early how to be good Mormons, but non-Mormon parents could see the good activities in which the Mormons were including their children. Its positive effect was seen in later entries. Over and over again, Primary finished by a visit with Mrs. Monson, and some of the meetings were even held in the Monson's home, suggesting that the Lady Missionaries had succeeded in using Primary to form a relationship with Mrs. Monson that would include not only her support of Primary, but also her hospitality.<sup>139</sup>

While the Lady Missionaries did help organize and teach in the women's auxiliaries of the LDS Church, much of it was to show the laywomen how to run these programs and also to encourage non-Mormons--in these cases, women--to take interest in what the Church had to offer. However, because the members had to learn to run their own branches, the missionaries did not lead all meetings or teach all classes. On Sundays, church members attended two meetings, Sunday School in the morning, with a lesson and group participation, and Sacrament Meeting in the afternoon, in which they

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<sup>138</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 165.

<sup>139</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 196, 220.

took the Sacrament and listened to speakers typically from their own congregation. On October 15, 1933, LaRetta mentioned, “After a lovely dinner we went to meeting, but they didn’t call on Sr. Heaton to talk. Lo and behold the [Sunday School] union board had told them that they should use the branch members and not call in missionaries from other branches...”<sup>140</sup> Because the Lady Missionaries were informed at the Sacrament Meeting, the Sunday School board likely meant it as a general rule of thumb for both Sunday meetings. Nevertheless, the missionaries always needed to be ready to step in and participate. On October 22, one week later, LaRetta wrote, “I felt sure I’d have to talk in church. You can imagine my relief when I didn’t. I had studied though and wouldn’t have minded it so badly. Bro. Chidister and Sr. Peterson had the privilege.” Though she felt relieved at not having to speak, it is doubtful the relief was because she had developed timidity as a missionary. Rather, she might have felt a different kind of pressure to present a prepared sermon to an entire congregation of fellow Mormons as compared to her regular smaller meetings where she taught non-Mormons and answered questions. Still, she had prepared to speak, and was willing to do so, even though she was not called up to the pulpit. However, on December 3, 1933, she noted, “Went out to Petersons after S.S. [Sunday School]...I also studied for my talk on Jesus’ life...The speakers were: Sylvia Dunkle, La Retta Gibbons, Bill Stolesworthy, Fae Heaton. I couldn’t get all my say in 10 min, and so I spoke for 20...Everyone seemed to like the meeting even if I did prove chief speaker. Sorry, won’t do it again!”<sup>141</sup> In this case, the speakers included two missionaries (LaRetta and Sr. Heaton), and two branch members.

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<sup>140</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 25.

<sup>141</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 31, 86.

Although LaRetta spoke longer, the branch here was balancing its “trained” missionary speakers with its members, utilizing the experienced and those who needed experience.

Sunday School, the earlier meeting of the day, was usually left to the members to teach, though the missionaries did participate. For example, on October 8, 1933, LaRetta wrote from Lincoln, “We got up about 8:30 a.m. and got ready and went to Sunday school. As usual Bro. Allen gave us a very splendid lesson.” In November, she noted, “We went to Sunday School in the morning. Went to Gospel message class where all the rest of the missionaries were. I’m afraid the missionaries did most of the talking.” The following June she wrote from Colorado, “We went to Sunday School. I had to give a 2 1/2 min talk. Bro. Hatch taught our class and we [surely] enjoyed it.”<sup>142</sup> Again, the missionaries had been trained to preach and teach, and through the participation of both missionaries and lay members, they could learn and grow from each other.

While the missionaries participated in the church members’ meetings, LaRetta and her companions relied heavily on the participation of the members to find and teach potential converts. One of the best tactics was to hold “cottage meetings”. According to an article in the *Church News*, “For many years, through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cottage meetings were used to provide a relaxed, personal setting for teaching the gospel to non-members. Such meetings were typically conducted in the homes of Church members and were a significant part of the missionary effort.” The article also adds from a 1961

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 14, 68, 187. An article from the LDS Church on the history and purpose of Sunday School explains, “Sunday School has offered gospel learning through a number of means in addition to formal classroom instruction. The most important of these was partaking of the sacrament in Sunday School, before today’s Sunday meeting schedule was implemented. At that time Sunday School was a separate morning meeting and sacrament meetings, also offering the ordinance of the sacrament, were held in the afternoon or evening. In addition to the opportunity to contemplate the meaning of the Atonement during the administration of the sacrament, those earlier Sunday School meetings also offered inspirational “two-and-a-half-minute talks” by children and adults, as well as the “sacrament gem,” which was a scripture or thought voiced before the ordinance of the sacrament.” Harold G. Hillam, “Sunday School: Oil for Our Lamps,” *Ensign*, August 1999, 15.

Church magazine, “Whether there is only one person or whether there are several persons in the home, a cottage meeting may be held when the missionaries are allowed to give a prayer and a lesson in the home.”<sup>143</sup> By inviting groups of people to these meetings, the missionaries were preparing interested listeners to make up the membership of future branches. Though the Church members were more responsible for building up the Church around them, they needed the constant presence of the missionaries, who had been not only raised in the Church, but trained and prepared to teach the doctrines of the gospel.

Whereas Sunday meetings always met at the same time and place, cottage meetings were less formal, meeting weekday evenings at various homes. LaRetta mentioned a number of specific families who hosted these meetings, some even at the homes of non-Mormons. On October 17, 1933, she described her schedule, “Arrived in Lincoln just in time to rush up to our room after dinner, read our letters, and hastin [sic] to Wrights to cottage meeting.” The next day it was to “Deans cottage meeting and Newbils primary.” On November 23, they attended a cottage meeting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dillinger, non-Mormons they had previously taught. The following April she mentioned a particular cottage meeting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richter (non-Mormons), and in May at the Kemper’s home.<sup>144</sup> Though she did not give details of each meeting, there were times they were held often enough that in April she summarized, “We have cottage meetings scheduled for all this week and every night next week.” In this more casual atmosphere, a typical meeting happened as follows, “I talked on Prayer

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<sup>143</sup> Sheridan R. Sheffield, R. Scott Lloyd, and Mike Cannon, “Some Things Uniquely LDS” in *Church News*, <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22770/Some-things-uniquely-LDS.html>; Internet; accessed January 25, 1992.

<sup>144</sup> Gibbons, *Missionary Diary*, 28, 75, 135, 164.

and Sr. Heaton gathered up the stray ends which were many. Afterwards we had a round table discussion.”<sup>145</sup> In another meeting LaRetta chose to talk on the life of LDS Church founder, Joseph Smith, showing that these discussions allowed the missionaries to teach LDS doctrine and history in a relaxed setting that brought Mormons and non-Mormons into each other’s homes to build relationships and better understand Mormons in a comfortable setting.

Though the Lady Missionaries spent much of their days among the church members and relied heavily on them to aid in the missionary cause, LaRetta and her companions also spent a great deal of time searching out new converts through tracting. As all missionaries knew, tracting could be a very time-consuming chore--as well as a challenge because they could not know what would meet them on the other side of a door. LaRetta’s many entries on tracting revealed two interesting facets of missionary life: the usefulness of Lady Missionaries during the daytime and the way missionaries measured success.

One of the reasons LDS Church leaders decided to send women on missions was because many non-Mormon women were apprehensive about letting two unknown young men into their homes. Furthermore, once the women found out the strangers were Mormons, with whispers of polygamy still lingering in the air, the chances continued to decrease that the Elders would be allowed into the homes and lives of the non-Mormons. Because most men worked during the day, tracting meant meeting women who oftentimes were more willing and comfortable allowing two Lady Missionaries into their home. In the October 1928 General Conference of the LDS Church, Elder John G.

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<sup>145</sup> Gibbons, Missionary Diary, 89.



Allred, President of the North-Central States Mission, remarked, “I can’t speak too highly for the young ladies of our mission, young ladies who have come into the world to preach the gospel. They can get into the homes of the people and find an opportunity for explaining the gospel where the elders cannot go. Send us more lady missionaries...I am always glad to see them come, because my experience has taught me that they can do a great work.”<sup>146</sup>

Though LaRetta gave no statistics on the people she met by knocking on doors, the specific incidents she noted were almost always with women--women who might not have answered had the Elders knocked. On October 19, 1933, LaRetta wrote, “We got up and decided to go tracting...No one was home at the first place and at the second we were asked in. It was a Mrs. Tar and her mother. They had liked Sr. Gourley. It seemed she had been tracting there. We had a good talk and she gave us dinner.” In this case, two women, who obviously had not converted, allowed the Lady Missionaries into their home because of the example of a previous Lady Missionary. The next month, on November 27, she recalled, “We went out tracting in our district for an hour. It [surely] proved successful. I met a dear old lady, Mrs. Baird, who gave me a lot of good advice, and a lot of joy to talk to her...I loaned her a Book of Mormon and she said she’d read it. I hope she does, and that gives us a chance to go back.” A third example happened May 23, 1934, “We managed to drag ourselves out tracting, and had fairly good success. Met 2 women who were very nice and I believe have prospects of 2 more children for our primary.”<sup>147</sup> Since the Elders were not responsible for the Primary, it would have been

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<sup>146</sup> Elder John G. Allred, *Conference Report* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Company, October 1928), 59.

<sup>147</sup> Gibbons, *Missionary Diary*, 29, 78, 173.

more difficult not only to contact these women, but also to convince them to send their children to the homes of complete strangers. These three instances--two women who were familiar with Lady Missionaries, an older woman, and women with children--serve as examples of three different types of homes the Lady Missionaries had easy entrance into, where the Elders likely would have had more trouble.

The other observation from LaRetta's tracting experiences showed the way she measured success as a missionary. Tracting involved three tiers of success, with the lowest being a good conversation, the middle leaving a religious tract, and the best of all, loaning out a Book of Mormon. On November 9, 1933, LaRetta experienced all three, "Got up and decided to get a good lot of tracting in and so we went tracting for a couple of hours...Sr. Heaton gave out 24 tracts while I was giving 8. I was asked in to two places and had some nice conversation in some of the others. I loaned my first Book of Mormon. Now isn't that nice." While that day was "nice," LaRetta always noted her best days included loaning out a Book of Mormon, even if it was only one the entire day. "Tuesday Nov. 14 We got ambitious and went tracting. I [surely] enjoyed it too. Didn't have many tracts given out but had a lot of good conversations, loaned one Book of Mormon and have a chance to loan another." In March she noted, "Mon. and Tue. [March 5, 6] We've gone tracting both days and had a very good time of it. I loaned a Book of Mormon both days." A week later she wrote, "We went tracting after I'd gone to Harris' and got the milk. I [surely] had good luck. Loaned my last Book of Mormon and had a lot of good conversations."<sup>148</sup> Though these instances included good conversations, LaRetta only felt lucky and successful when mentioning the Book of

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<sup>148</sup> Gibbons, *Missionary Diary*, 52, 59, 116, 124.

Mormon. By this time, the Book of Mormon was one of the core differences between the LDS Church and other Christian denominations, as opposed to earlier years when polygamy was the most distinct and controversial aspect. LaRetta must have understood that people who were willing to examine the Mormon scripture had greater potential to join the Church than those whose interest went only as far as a good conversation.

For the two years LaRetta Gibbons acted as an LDS Lady Missionary, she set the example for new church members and sought out additional converts. She wrote of little opposition and looked for the greater good in her experiences. Following her mission, she married Oswald Ralph Myers and lived the rest of her life in Magna, Utah, where she raised three sons and taught home economics in the local high school. Though she undoubtedly served in her local congregation, she never held prominent church positions, but instead lived the example she had set on her mission, that of a typical Mormon woman.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Because the conversation on LDS Lady Missionaries is only beginning to open up, there is plenty of room to explore the reasons behind sending Mormon women out to preach the gospel and the effects their missions had on them, the LDS Church, and those with whom they came in contact. This thesis has shown that the Lady Missionaries had a very specific purpose, which evolved during the first three decades of the twentieth century largely into what it is today.

LDS female missionaries followed on the heels of their Protestant counterparts, who began serving missions following the Civil War with a purpose different from that of the LDS women. The literature shows that the Protestant female missionary movement was more generally a feminist movement, as women sought to broaden their sphere and gain more public exposure and independence within their churches and society. While these female missionaries broke barriers by assuming leadership roles and living independently, they were still largely confined to their domestic duties of teaching, nursing, and caring for other women. Though during the early twentieth century, Protestant female missionaries outnumbered the men, by the 1930s, female missionary numbers began to fall. This has been largely attributed to the fact that the popularity of the movement on the part of the women was short-term and declined after women won the vote and began to feel a stronger sense of equality with men.

On the other hand, LDS women were first appointed as missionaries to help the struggling image of the Church. Whereas the Protestant movement declined by the 1930s, the LDS movement became more tightly established, and has continued to grow to

this day. Furthermore, LDS Lady Missionaries were not viewed as feminist because they did not fill lifelong careers as missionaries, but instead gave one and a half to two years to defending their beliefs and seeking new converts before returning home to the traditional roles of wife and mother. This return to the domestic life shows that Lady Missionaries did not necessarily enlarge their women's sphere, but briefly stepped out of it to work in a unique and somewhat independent sphere. Thus, while Protestant and LDS women shared a common timeframe and societal expectations as women, their purpose in filling missions was clearly not the same.

Therefore, this thesis has focused on the role of LDS Lady Missionaries as it evolved over three decades through the eyes of three women who served in that capacity. It was an evolution that decreased the public sphere of Lady Missionaries as the world learned about Mormonism and converts needed to learn about their role in their new religion. However, because these women were not looking to enlarge their sphere, no complaints appear to have arisen over this transition. Instead, all three women did their work as they were assigned and felt it a privilege to have a part in sharing the Church's message.

Inez Knight's journal shows that she was called upon to show England what a "real, live Mormon woman" looked like at the turn-of-the-century. She spoke on street corners, in large halls, and in church meetings. Throughout her mission, she faced questions and opposition concerning Mormonism's recently abandoned practice of polygamy. She had to prove to the world in look and deed that she was not a "poor, downtrodden slave" as anti-Mormons often described Mormon women. Because Inez set

the precedent, she had to mark the path without rules or rigid structure, though because of her success, Church leaders would soon begin organizing the Lady Missionary program.

Twelve years after Inez, in 1912, Stella Sudweeks served a mission to the U.S. Central States Mission, where she fulfilled a dream of being a Lady Missionary so she too could educate people on Mormonism's polygamous past. However, by the time she began her mission, opposition was on the decline and so she spent more time teaching her beliefs rather than defending them. The missionary program was becoming better structured, with rules, length of service, and specific fields of labor. However, there were still more changes to come, including rules on companionships, and duties for the Lady Missionaries. Thus, Stella served in a transitional period, linking Inez to future generations and showing steady progress over the years.

Finally, in 1933 LaRetta Gibbons began her role as missionary in the U.S. Western States Mission at a time when organization became strongest and her role was well-defined. Because the Church was growing and spreading across the country, Church members were relied on more heavily to create a positive image of Mormonism to their neighbors. However, many Church members were recent converts and were still learning the intricacies of Mormonism themselves. Thus, while LaRetta still knocked doors, passed out tracts, and taught non-Mormons in home settings as did her predecessors, she focused more on educating those new to her faith. In this way, she set an example to help the Church grow and run as it did in Utah and throughout the world.

Though slight changes have been made, the Lady Missionaries--now called Sisters--have served the same purpose since the time of LaRetta. A century after Inez paved the way, Lady Missionaries continue to serve in strong numbers, still educating

people about Mormonism and seeking new converts. They follow strict rules and strict schedules. They still serve only temporarily and generally come home expecting fulfillment in the domestic roles of wife and mother. Though times, fashion, and ways of thinking have changed, today's LDS female missionaries continue a legacy to represent not only their Church, but "real, live Mormon women" wherever they are called to go.

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