



*Woman Suffrage
in Territorial
Utah*

BY BEVERLY BEETON

*Charlotte Cobb Godbe,
a leader in the woman
suffrage movement
and a rival of
Emmeline B. Wells.
Susa Young Gates
Collection, Utah State
Historical Society.*

Utah is the land of marvels. She give us, first, polygamy, which seems to be an outrage against 'woman's right,' and then offers to the nation a 'Female Suffrage Bill'. . . . Was there ever a greater anomaly known in the history of a society?

The Phrenological Journal
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THE POLITICAL FRANCHISE WAS EXTENDED to women in the United States in 1920 with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, but in some areas of the American West women had been voting for a half-century. Although organized efforts to achieve woman suffrage in the late nineteenth century were concentrated in New England and New York, women were first allowed to vote in the Rocky Mountain West.¹

Desiring to publicize the newly created Wyoming Territory and attract investors and settlers, the Territorial Assembly of Wyoming passed

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¹ The single most comprehensive, basic source of original material on the woman suffrage movement in the United States is the six-volume *History of Woman Suffrage* edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda J. Gage, and Ida H. Harper and originally published during 1881-1922 (reprint ed., New York: Arno, 1969). Chapter 66 of volume 4 is devoted to activities in Utah, based on information provided by Emmeline B. Wells and Emily S. Richards. An analysis entitled *Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement* by Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler was published in 1923; recently it was reprinted with an introduction by T. A. Larson (Seattle: University of Washington, 1969). Pauline W. Davis's small volume, *A History of the National Woman's Rights Movement* (New York, 1871), reprinted by Source Book Press in 1970, is a good source of details on woman suffrage for the years 1870-71. William L. O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969), presents an interesting analysis of suffrage. The two best interpretive studies of woman suffrage are Eleanor Flexner's *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1958) which is an institutional study and Aileen Kraditor's ideological study, *The Ideas of the Woman's Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University, 1965).

Susa Young Gates brought together most of the information on woman suffrage in Utah that found its way into official histories of the suffrage movement in the United States. Additional information can be found in the Susa Young Gates Collection at the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City. Kate B. Carter compiled selections from newspapers, histories, and summary accounts, especially those of Gates, on woman suffrage in the West for volume 5 of *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1944). Ralph Lorenzo Jack's "Woman Suffrage in Utah as an Issue in the Mormon and Non-Mormon Press of the Territory, 1870-1887" (M.S. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1954) does not attempt to analyze the woman suffrage activities in detail, but it does demonstrate how the two sides used the idea of woman suffrage to promote their cause. In her February 14, 1974, Charles Redd Lecture at Brigham Young University, Jean B. White detailed the events surrounding the inclusion of woman suffrage in the Utah constitution. See "Woman's Place Is in the Constitution: The Struggle for Equal Rights in Utah in 1895," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 42 (1974): 344-69. In *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage* (New York: Oxford, 1967), which deals primarily with woman suffrage in the West, Alan P. Grimes, employing status anxiety techniques similar to those developed by Richard Hofstadter, argues that "the constituency granting woman suffrage was composed of those who also supported prohibition and immigration restriction and felt woman suffrage would further their enactment." In his article "An Experiment in Progressive Legislation: The Granting of Woman Suffrage in Utah in 1870," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 38 (1970): 20-30, Thomas G. Alexander argues that the Mormons were progressive, ahead of their time in supporting woman suffrage.

legislation giving women the right to vote in December 1869.² Two months later the women of Utah Territory were enfranchised. But the experiment with woman suffrage in Utah received much more attention because it admitted nearly forty times as many, about 43,000, women to the polling place as had the action in Wyoming; moreover, most of those Utah women followed a religious faith that practiced plural marriage.

Reformers as well as critics intently watched the development of the female franchise among the Mormons. The principal preoccupation was: how could what appeared to be the most liberal view of women's rights—suffrage—and the most enslaving marital arrangement—polygamy—develop and coexist in the same environment.

Assuming that woman suffrage and polygamy were inherently antithetical, earlier reformers had suggested that woman suffrage be employed to destroy polygamy. For at least three years prior to the legislation vesting the women of Utah with the political franchise, this idea had been discussed in the East. The United States Congress had gone so far as to consider enfranchising Utah women on the assumption that the women would immediately vote down polygamy. When discussed by easterners, the right of Utah women to vote was almost always seen as a means to eliminate polygamy. The assumption, as illustrated by Reconstruction legislation, was that the ballot would be used to free those in slavery from their oppressors. The argument held that plural marriage existed only where women were degraded; therefore, it would disappear if women were elevated. And political power was seen as the means of elevation. In their zeal to eradicate "the second twin relic of barbarism," many Reconstruction reformers seized the idea of having Mormon women vote.

In 1867–68 when New York suffragist Hamilton Willcox proposed experimenting with woman suffrage in the territories, he gave particular emphasis to the value of testing the idea in Utah. Not only could the system be observed in a territory where there was a large female population; but, as a fringe benefit, the Mormon system of plural wives would be eliminated.³ The *New York Times* popularized this proposal, suggesting

² T. A. Larson has made the most detailed study of suffrage in Wyoming. The most thoroughly documented version of his analysis is "Emancipating the West's Dolls, Vassals, and Hapless Drudges: The Origins of Woman Suffrage in the West," in Roger Daniels, ed., *Essays in Western History in Honor of T. A. Larson* (Laramie: University of Wyoming, 1971), pp. 1–16.

³ In an 1871 article in *Revolution* (New York), Willcox gave the Universal Franchise Association, of which he was a leading member, credit for woman suffrage in Utah. Three years later in an address before the House Committee on Territories he publicly took credit for originating the idea of enfranchising Utah woman; George Q. Cannon admitted that Willcox's statement was substantially correct. See *Sacramento Union*, January 14, 1874; *Woman's Journal* (Boston), January 24, 1874.

that perhaps the enfranchisement of Utah women would result in the casting out of polygamy as well as Mormonism. At the very least, Utah would be a good place to experiment with woman suffrage.

In the spring of 1869, when his legislation designed to enfranchise the women of the western territories stalled in Congress, Indiana Republican George Washington Julian followed Willcox's lead and limited his woman suffrage bill to Utah with the justification that women there would use the ballot to stop the practice of taking multiple wives. The Utah delegate to Congress, William Henry Hooper, spoke in favor of the bill, but it never came to a vote.

Generally, this national concern with women in Utah amused the Mormons. Assuring his readers that Utah women could be enfranchised "without running wild or becoming unsexed," George Q. Cannon, editor of the Mormon *Deseret News*, voiced approval of woman suffrage, calling it an opportunity for the Mormons to be an example to the world. The newspaper also noted that both Mormon men and women voted in the semiannual church conferences on all matters brought before the membership.

In 1869, when the subject of the women of Utah was before the national Congress, many easterners traveled to Salt Lake City on the newly completed transcontinental railroad and returned home with tales of the Mormon mecca. As one Christian worker summarized the situation for the *Chicago Advance*: Nearly all the Mormons believed in polygamy but less than one-fourth practiced it. Moreover, if the women were left to themselves nine-tenths of them "would vote it so thoroughly out of existence that it would never be heard of again."⁴

The headliners of the period who made political names for themselves, and considerable sums of money, touring the country lecturing on the Mormons were Anna Dickenson, Kate Field, and Vice-president Schuyler Colfax. Colfax, who in 1872 was himself the subject of an exposé when the *New York Sun* charged him with accepting stock of the Credit Mobilier in return for political influence, delivered his lecture "Across the Continent" to numerous audiences, including members of Congress. Famous for his public piety, the Indiana politician enhanced his nickname, "the Christian Statesman," by his revelations about Mormonism.

Anna Dickenson, an advocate of woman suffrage, toured the East after her visit to Salt Lake City in 1869 in the company of the United

⁴ "Journal History of the Church," July 5, 1869, Archives Division, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

States House of Representatives' Ways and Means Committee. Her specialty at those appearances was a message of the "Whited Sepulchres" in which she depicted the condition of Mormon women as deplorable. She told of their haggard countenances, their dejected looks, and their slavish obedience. A Mormon missionary in Connecticut reported that Anna Dickenson was paid \$150 for an hour and a half lecture in which she called for the nation to put down polygamy as it had Black slavery. In the years after the Civil War, Dickenson had been one of the most popular lecturers on the lyceum circuit, averaging 150 lectures a season and earning as much as \$20,000 annually. Although it was just one of her regular lectures, the "Sepulchres" speech popularized the image of the degraded Utah women. Reporting the lecture success of the "incorrigible spinster," as Mormon elder John Jaques referred to Dickenson, the *Millennial Star* writer visualized a confrontation between the suffragist lecturer and her "fellow-labourer in the cause of human progress," George Francis Train. Jaques decided they "would make a magnificent team, especially when pulling in opposite directions."⁵

And opposing Anna Dickenson was exactly what George Francis Train did. Avid Democrat and friend of unconventional people and radical movements, Train had been a friend of the suffragist leaders Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton during the 1867 Kansas suffrage campaign; later he sponsored the suffrage newspaper *Revolution*. In numerous speeches and newspaper articles he countered the critics of the Mormon marriage system. After his visit to Salt Lake City in 1869, while campaigning for the United States presidency, "Citizen Train," as he liked to be called, lectured before two thousand people in New York's Tammany Hall. As an obvious challenge to Anna Dickenson, his oration was entitled "Old Fogies of the Bible and Blackened Sepulchres." That "conglomeration of oddities and eccentricities," as the Mormon press affectionately referred to Train, was a lifelong supporter of Mormon virtues and Utah's right to statehood. In fact, he was such an avid defender of the Saints that he was once asked if he was a Mormon. He answered by declaring he had only one wife and was not a Mormon, but he was not sure that he would not become one. In 1870, while lecturing in the Salt Lake Theatre as Brigham Young's guest, Train jokingly conceded that he never committed adultery and was therefore almost a Mormon, adding, "No wonder they call me a crazy man."⁶

⁵ *Millennial Star* (Liverpool, England), October 1869, p. 683.

⁶ *Deseret News*, July 23, 1870.

Train's continuing praise of Brigham Young, whom he called the "Napoleon of colonists," won Train a place in the hearts of the Mormons. Brigham returned Train's compliment by describing the eccentric entrepreneur as a gentleman and scholar who had brains and decency even though he would occasionally play the buffoon when it appeared profitable. When Brigham Young died in 1877, Train published a long poem in the Buffalo, New York, *Agitator* commemorating his friend and reaffirming his affection for the Mormons, ending with the following play on words:

And though too *Young* to miss the *Train*
We never shall shake hands again!
 Tell my Utah friends to Hold the Fort
 And I will guarantee support.

Through the years the Mormons were reluctant to be too closely identified with Train because of his wild campaigns in support of Woodhull and Claflin, Fenians, Paris Communards, Anarchists, and Young America, and because of his public displays such as protest fasting and his eighty-day whirl around the world that inspired Jules Verne's famous story. Nevertheless, Train continually lauded the Utah experiment with woman suffrage, campaigned for Utah statehood, and generally defended the Mormons against their defamers. But, because of Train's reputation, his defense of the Mormons did not always do them service. As an observer in the *Salt Lake Tribune* saw it, Train was inclined "to rush in with his mad force . . . and make Deseret his hobby."⁷

In this period the Mormons attracted supporters who were considered at least radical if not the lunatic fringe of eastern society. Even P. T. Barnum, master promoter of oddities, freaks, and fakes, wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Tribune* after his trip to Salt Lake Valley in the spring of 1870, defending the Mormons against Anna Dickenson's accusations about their treatment of their women.

While "the Mormon Question," as the polygamy problem was referred to, was being aired in the press and on the lecture circuit, the idea of experimenting with woman suffrage in Utah became more popular. However the stock argument that the vote would cause women to migrate to the territory was not used in the case of Utah, both because the Mormons promoted their marital system as a means to deal with surplus women⁸ and because easterners did not want to encourage more

⁷ *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 23, 1871.

⁸ In both England and the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century considerable discussion centered on what was called the "surplus women problem." While society

women to move to Utah because they feared they might become plural wives. On the contrary, the principal ends easterners hoped to serve by enfranchising women in the Mormon region were, first, to eliminate polygamy and, second, to experiment with the idea of woman suffrage. Even the National Woman Suffrage Association at its 1870 convention resolved that the enfranchisement of Utah women was the one safe, sure, and swift means to abolish polygamy in that territory.

Responding to the proposed experiment with the female franchise, the Mormon press cynically noted, "It is only the 'Mormons' who will suffer; they will have all the trouble, and the people of the East can look calmly on until the question is settled."⁹

Because the proposal to enfranchise Utah women was tied to the desire of many people to eliminate polygamy, the fortunes of the female franchise in Utah would rise and fall for the next twenty years with the battle over plural marriage. Additionally, women's right to vote would be argued on the local and national scene each time the question of statehood for Utah was considered.

This concern of people outside the territory for women's right to vote in Utah was the most influential force in bringing about the enfranchisement of Utah women. Nonetheless, there were woman suffrage advocates in the territory. The first talk of woman suffrage within Utah was heard from a group of liberal Mormon intellectuals who published their ideas in the *Utah Magazine*, which developed into the *Mormon Tribune* that in turn became the *Salt Lake Tribune*. These Mormon reformers—the principals being William S. Godbe, Edward W. Tullidge, E. L. T. Harrison, Amasa M. Lyman, Henry W. Lawrence, William H. Shearman, and Eli B. Kelsey—created a scheme to end the economic and social insularity of the Mormon community in the Great Basin. At the time of the completion of the transcontinental railroad, these liberals suggested that the Mormons should cooperate with Gentiles¹⁰ to develop

was resisting efforts by some to allow women greater independence and fuller participation, it was also concerned about the excess number of females over males. In a culture that prescribed that woman's role was to serve as mother and wife in a monogamous family, the fact that there were more women of marriageable age than men was a real problem. Immigration to the United States was seen by some as one alternative.

In their proselyting efforts in England, the Mormons capitalized on this problem by actively seeking female converts and advertising the opportunities for prosperity and social mobility in America. However, they never officially proposed polygamous marriage as a solution to the "surplus women problem." Instead, they consistently defended plural marriage in terms of religious conscience. The *Deseret News*, nevertheless, printed countless articles on the subject of surplus women and reprinted stories from all over the world on the problem.

⁹ *Deseret News*, March 18, 1869.

¹⁰ "Gentile" was used by Mormons to describe anyone outside their faith.

manufacturing and mining. Mormon church officials, however, defended their policy of remaining an agricultural, self-sufficient kingdom. In addition to being estranged from Brigham Young's concept of Zion, the reformers wanted to infuse spiritualism into Mormonism. Conflict ensued, the end result of which was that Godbe and most of his followers were excommunicated or voluntarily left the church.¹¹

One of the issues championed by the Godbeites was the equality of women.¹² In the next twenty-five years, the *Deseret News* often credited them with initiating the push for the enfranchisement of women. Why were these liberal Mormon men advocates of woman suffrage? All the principal leaders—except Godbe and Lawrence who were first and foremost merchants—had served as missionaries in England during the liberal era. Since most of them were directly involved in the editing of the *Millennial Star*, the Mormon newspaper there, they must have heard the arguments in favor of equality from reformers of the day such as John Stuart Mill. Godbe, on the other hand, frequently traveled to the East Coast to purchase goods for his mercantile enterprises and thus was exposed to the frequently discussed ideas of the day.

Early women's rights activities in Utah centered around the Godbe family. William S. Godbe and three of his four polygamous wives—Annie Thompson Godbe, Mary Hampton Godbe, and Charlotte Ives Cobb Godbe—were active in the women's rights movement. They made the initial contacts with eastern suffrage leaders and convened the first meeting in Utah Territory dealing with woman suffrage. Of all the people identified with the Godbeite movement, Charlotte Godbe was the most important figure in woman suffrage.

After William Godbe's excommunication all his wives left the Mormon church except Charlotte, who did not abandon the religion because of her mother. Charlotte's mother was Augusta Adams Cobb Young, Brigham Young's fifth wife. Charlotte had been raised as one of Young's daughters, even living for a time in the Lion House. Thirty years earlier, Charlotte's mother, a member of the prominent Adams family, had fled Boston to become one of Brigham Young's wives and in so doing had

¹¹ Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 243-44. The July 1871 *Phrenological Journal* ran a detailed biographical article on the "Leaders of the Mormon Reform Movement—with Portraits." A more recent analysis of the Godbeites is Ronald W. Walker, "The Commencement of the Godbeite Protest: Another View," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 42 (1974): 216-44.

¹² "Manifesto from W. S. Godbe and E. L. T. Harrison," *Utah Magazine*, November 27, 1869, pp. 470-73. The 1869 issues of the magazine carried a number of articles in support of women's rights.

abandoned her husband and five of her children, taking with her six-year-old Charlotte and an infant who later died.¹³

Many years later Charlotte wrote to Wilford Woodruff, who was then president of the Mormon church, explaining that when her mother had lived in Boston she had been an acquaintance of suffragist Lucy Stone and had maintained contact with her over the years. Charlotte attributed the commencement of woman suffrage activities in Utah to her mother and reported that it had been her mother's deathbed wish that Charlotte continue the work she had begun.¹⁴ Charlotte did make woman suffrage her life's work.

In April 1869, seven months before he excommunicated William Godbe, Brigham Young had sealed Charlotte to Godbe as his fourth wife. This marriage, which Charlotte later referred to as her "painful domestic experience in polygamy," ended ten years later with a divorce after a number of years of separation. Though she did not leave the church, Charlotte was never listed among the Mormon women speaking out for woman suffrage or protesting antipolygamy legislation. The Mormons' refusal to accept her as one of their own may have been as much a result of her spiritualistic activities as the fact that she was married to Godbe. Nevertheless, for many years Charlotte continued her women's rights work independently, through letters to the editor and feminist speeches. In those early years she also had considerable contact with eastern suffragists.

Nearly twenty years later Charlotte recounted how she had "assumed a prominence among" the women of the national suffrage movement and been elected by them "to speak before the House Committee on this subject, and claim for all women the right [to vote]."¹⁵ In 1871 in Boston's Tremont Temple she did speak before a large audience on woman suffrage and on "the fine and noble women" of Utah. In doing so, she became the first American woman with voting rights to address eastern suffragists. Although the ten minutes of her discourse devoted to a defense of Mormon women earned her the praise of Boston newspapers, they called down the damnation of Emmeline B. Wells, prominent leader of the polygamous women of Salt Lake City and editor of the *Woman's Exponent*, a Utah journal established in 1872 as the explicit vehicle

¹³ Mary Cable, "She Who Shall Be Nameless," *American Heritage*, February 1965, pp. 50-55.

¹⁴ Kirby to Woodruff, February 16, 1869, Incoming Letters, Wilford Woodruff Papers, LDS Archives.

¹⁵ Kirby to Woodruff, February 5, 1889.

whereby Mormon women could explain themselves to the world and report the labors of their Relief Society. In an article in the *Exponent*, Emmeline discussed Charlotte's unsuccessful polygamous marriage to Godbe and concluded that Charlotte "was not now an advocate for this principle of the Church, hence could not be a representative for the women here [in Utah]." As Charlotte later reported, "the *motive* for this I saw a year after when E.B.W. *tried* to be—what I was—a representative woman in *political* circles."¹⁶



Emmeline B. Wells

The contest between Charlotte and Emmeline would continue through their long careers. Charlotte was a feminist, while Emmeline stood as the symbol of the polygamous wife. Both remained members of the Mormon church, and both worked for woman suffrage from their own point of view. Charlotte persisted because, as she often said, it was morally right for women to participate in their government. Emmeline worked for woman suffrage as a means to promote Mormon women, their Relief Society, and the church's goals such as statehood for Utah. The conflict between these two proud, effective women was constantly being renewed; when Charlotte made a feminist statement or observation about Mormon women in the national or suffrage press Emmeline usually countered in the *Exponent*.

Like Charlotte, Annie Thompson Godbe was an active suffragist in touch with national movement leaders. She was probably the "Mrs. Godby [*sic*], wife of the leading reform advocates of Utah," who with Margaret Lucas, sister of English woman suffrage advocate Jacob Bright, was among the distinguished guests at the twentieth anniversary celebration of the inauguration of the women's rights movement held in New York City in 1870. The organizer of the meeting, Pauline W. Davis, concluded, "In Utah it [woman suffrage] is of less account [than the

¹⁶ Ibid.

Wyoming example] because the women are more under a hierarchy than elsewhere, and as yet vote only as directed."¹⁷

Within the ranks of the Mormon faithful there were people who favored woman suffrage at this early date. In 1868 the editor of the *Deseret News* noted some justice in women's claim to the right to vote; referring to the recent enfranchisement of Black men, he noted women's intelligence and said he saw no reason why they should not be admitted to the polls also. In addition, the editor speculated, "before long, probably in Massachusetts at any rate, they will have the privilege granted to them."¹⁸ Over the years the *Deseret News* was supportive of woman suffrage. Editors George Q. Cannon and Charles W. Penrose not only used the paper to promote woman suffrage but often pursued the cause on the lecture platform. Likewise, Franklin D. Richards, who edited the *Ogden Junction* in Utah's second city, supported woman suffrage in both arenas.

Franklin D. Richards, his wife Jane S. Richards, their son Franklin S. Richards, and the latter's wife Emily S. Tanner Richards were among the most forceful voices in favor of women's rights within the Mormon church. The Richards family frequently hosted eastern suffragists during their stopovers in Utah; and since Franklin S. was often in the national capital in his role as attorney for the church, he and Emily had occasion to make the acquaintance of prominent suffragists. As a worker for women's rights, Emily would serve on the Board of Lady Managers of the 1892 World's Fair in Chicago and as a delegate to the International Council of Women. Ultimately she would be the initiator of the organization of the first woman suffrage association in Utah in 1888.

When the question of extending the vote to women was considered by the Utah Territorial Legislature in 1870 national attention was focused on the Mormons. Vice-president Colfax was carrying out a vigorous anti-Mormon newspaper and lecture campaign. At the same time, Congress was inundated with legislation relating to the Mormons. As George A. Smith noted in a letter to his cousin Hannah P. Butler, "I understand about a dozen bills have been presented to the Congress in relation to Utah." These bills varied from schemes to partition Utah, giving segments to the surrounding territories and states, to proposals disfranchising the Mormons, disqualifying them from holding public office and sitting on juries, depriving them of the right to homestead or preempt public lands, or disinheriting their children.¹⁹

¹⁷ Davis, *A History of the National Woman's Rights Movement*, p. 25; see also pp. 4-5.

¹⁸ *Deseret News*, December 2, 1868.

¹⁹ Smith to Butler, February 1, 1870, in "Journal History."

But the legislation that sparked the greatest response in Mormonism was that introduced by the chairman of the House Committee on Territories, Shelby M. Cullom. He sponsored a bill designed to enforce the antipolygamy law of 1862. In a letter to William H. Hooper, Utah's delegate to Congress, Brigham Young assessed reaction to the Cullom bill, saying: "Our sisters here are in high dudgeon over it."²⁰ During the first week of January 1870 the women of the Fifteenth Ward in Salt Lake City met to express their opposition to Cullom's legislation. With Sarah M. Kimball presiding, the women unanimously protested the bill and resolved to bring their moral influence to bear against it. A Sister Smith even demanded of the governor that women be allowed to vote. At the close of the meeting Eliza R. Snow, who had successively been married to Joseph Smith, Jr., and Brigham Young and was recognized as the voice of the Mormon leadership on subjects relating to women, suggested that the example of the women of the Fifteenth Ward be followed by the sisterhood throughout the territory.²¹

On January 13 "a great indignation meeting" was held at the Old Tabernacle on Temple Square. Despite the inclement weather over 5,000 women of all ages rallied to hear their sisters decry Cullom's "mean, foul legislation." For the next six weeks women throughout the territory responded to the call to voice their objection to Congressman Cullom's proposal. From Providence in the north to Manti in the south, mass meetings of women were convened to sustain resolutions protesting the proposed legislation. These gatherings demonstrated how effectively the church organizational structure could be utilized to gather and to display support for a cause. In subsequent years this tactic would be used frequently.

Referring to "the great indignation meeting" as one of the grandest female assemblages in all history, the *New York Herald* editorialized:

It will not be denied that the Mormon women have both brains and tongues. Some of the speeches give evidence that in general knowledge, in logic, and in rhetoric the so-called degraded ladies of Mormondom are quite equal to the women's rights women of the East.²²

Most eastern newspapers of the day had some positive comments to make about Mormon women as a result of these mass meetings. The New York

²⁰ Young to Hooper, January 11, 1870, Young Letterbooks, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Archives.

²¹ Riverside Stake, Fifteenth Ward Relief Society Minutes, January 6, 1870, LDS Archives. This ward was in the Salt Lake Stake until 1940. See also *Deseret News*, January 11, 1870.

²² *New York Herald*, January 23, 1870.

Journal of Commerce confessed that the arguments presented by the women in Utah were fully up to the mark of the best efforts of Mrs. Mott, Mrs. Stanton, Miss Anthony, or any of the female suffrage women who were trying to stir up public sentiment east of the Rocky Mountains.²³

Against this background, the Utah Legislative Assembly considered the advisability of extending the ballot to women. Though the council aired some reservations, after two weeks of discussion members of both houses, by unanimous vote, passed a bill enfranchising women.²⁴ The motives behind the approval of this bill were explained to Congress by Delegate William H. Hooper:



Susan B. Anthony

To convince the country how utterly without foundation the popular assertions were concerning the women of the Territory, some members of the Legislative Assembly were in favor of passing the law; . . . others favored it, convinced of its propriety by the arguments of the friends of that great political reform.²⁵

On February 12, 1870, Territorial Secretary S. A. Mann, serving as acting governor, signed into law the act conferring the elective franchise upon women twenty-one years of age or older who had resided in the territory six months, were born or naturalized in the United States, or were the wives, widows, or daughters of native-born or naturalized citizens. Though he expressed his personal doubts as to the wisdom of this legislation, Mann justified his signing of the bill by the unanimous legislative vote.

Mann was not a Mormon, yet he was popular with the Saints.²⁶ His prompt signing of this legislation endeared him to the women, who quickly convened a meeting and drew up a resolution expressing their

²³ *New York Evening Express*, January 26, 1870.

²⁴ For details of the legislature's considerations and the actions of Deseret's "ghost government," see Alexander, "An Experiment in Progressive Legislation," pp. 25-26.

²⁵ Hooper's speech before the House on January 29, 1873, was reported in the *Deseret News*, February 14, 1873.

²⁶ George A. Smith to J. S. Harris, May 27, 1870, in "Journal History."

appreciation. The resolution was delivered to Mann by a delegation of women headed by poet Eliza R. Snow. In response he penned a letter philosophizing about the intelligent use of the ballot, cautioning that the application of woman suffrage in Utah would "be watched with profound interest, for upon its consistent and harmonious working depends in a great measure its universal adoption in the Republic."²⁷

Mormon faithful William Clayton was less philosophical when he noted, "the poor, enslaved downtrodden!!! women of Utah can now act for themselves and take revenge on the men of Israel." But as Clayton gleefully observed, those who expected the Mormon women to use the vote against polygamy would "gnash their teeth with rage" and "foam worse than ever," for "there are not many women here but will sustain all the measures of the authorities better than some of the men do."²⁸

Once the news was out, messages came in commending the Mormons for their action. "Congratulations. Woman Suffrage, Greenbacks, Protection, Morality, Temperance, Statesmanship, Presidential Platform." So read the telegram sent by that perennial friend of the Mormons, George Francis Train, upon the passage of the bill. Brigham Young's reply to Train was a cautious, "Family and friends all well. Return congratulations. Truth, liberty, happiness, and mountain air are lovely and desirable."²⁹

The British press reacted differently. The *London Daily Telegraph* rhetorically addressed its comments to philosopher John Stuart Mill and asked how the women of Utah could vote yet sustain plural marriage, as "the great indignation meeting" appeared to do.

Two days after the act was signed into law, municipal elections were held in Salt Lake City, and, according to Brigham Young, twenty-five women exercised their newly gained right to vote. Reportedly, Seraph Young, Brigham's niece, was the first woman to cast her ballot.³⁰ The *New York Globe* summarized the historic occasion:

A morning dispatch informs us that the women of Utah vote to-day, since female suffrage has become a law in that territory. We expect they will go to the polls in a quiet orderly, lady-like manner, and deposit their votes without any jeers or opposition from the gentlemen. If this thing can be done in the "wicked and immoral" city of Salt Lake, where women

²⁷ Mann to Eliza R. Snow, Bathsheba W. Smith, Marinda M. Hyde, Phoebe W. Woodruff, Amelia H. Young, et al., February 19, 1870, Mann Papers, LDS Archives.

²⁸ Clayton to Brother Jesse and Clayton to Brother East, February 13, 1870, Clayton Letterbooks, microfilm, LDS Archives.

²⁹ "Journal History," May 14, 1870.

³⁰ *Deseret News*, February 15, 1870.

are supposed to be held in less estimation than they are in the high-toned and healthy cities of New York and Boston, why may it not be accomplished in every town and hamlet in the Union? That the women of Utah will to-day vote to abolish polygamy, we do not expect. They are as much in favor of that system as the men. It is wrong to expect this of women of Utah, and it will be unfair to call female suffrage a failure if they do refuse to abolish polygamy. The question, however, is not up for decision.³¹

Woman suffrage was a reality in Utah Territory. Mormon women had registered their dismay with the Cullom bill and in so doing had, to a degree, sustained the patriarchal family system of multiple wives practiced by the Saints. Now the Mormons were able to say to the world that women were not held in bondage but were free, thinking beings willingly participating in plural marriage. Nevertheless, Senator Cullom continued to push for legislation to abolish polygamy. When the House approved his bill, many newspapers talked of imminent war if it became law. Back in Zion, Mormon military regiments drilled while committees throughout the territory held mass meetings of men and women to draw up remonstrances protesting the pending legislation as tyrannical.³²

These mass meetings were well planned and aimed for long-range results. Acting under Brigham Young's direction, Daniel H. Wells corresponded with Delegate Hooper, advising him that John T. Caine would be arriving in Washington, D.C., to deliver proceedings of the mass meetings and to assist Hooper with some "efficient aid, by forming public opinion through the press and otherwise, not only paving the way towards the defeat of the Cullom bill in the Senate, but also in the matter of our admission as a State into the Union."³³

As agitation against the "second twin relic of barbarism" reached a high pitch in the national capital, even the Godbeites, who had been excommunicated from the Mormon church or had left voluntarily, met with non-Mormon friends at the Masonic Hall in Salt Lake City to draft a memorial to the Senate asking for a modification of the most obnoxious portions of the Cullom bill as passed by the House. Most attending the meeting voiced their objection to polygamy but noted that the proposed legislation against it appeared unjust and overly severe.

The House of Representatives had approved the bill after amending it to remove the sections empowering the president to send troops to Utah. And although Utah women had been enfranchised less than three

³¹ *New York Globe*, February 14, 1870.

³² "Journal History," March 26, 29, 1870.

³³ Wells to Hooper, April 2, 1870, Young Letterbooks.

months, a clause had been added to Cullom's bill withdrawing that privilege. This section of the legislation would have deprived the women of suffrage and the right to serve on juries. Senator Cullom was pushing hard; he had tried to make it the official mission of the Republican party to eradicate polygamy along with slavery. However, the Senate adjourned for the summer without acting on the matter.

During the summer of 1870, national concern about the Mormons was amplified by the agitation of Rev. J. P. Newman, Methodist preacher and chaplain of the United States Senate. In reaction to the Cullom bill debates and Delegate Hooper's defense of polygamy, Newman delivered numerous speeches in Washington, D.C., against polygamy. That summer he appeared in Salt Lake City to challenge Brigham Young to debate the question of whether or not the Bible sanctions polygamy. Young refused Newman's challenge, but Orson Pratt did present the Mormon view in a debate staged in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. Upon returning to the national capital, Newman's wife organized a Woman's Christian Association for the benefit of Utah women with a Mrs. Hollister, Vice-president Colfax's sister, in charge of the activities of the association in Salt Lake City.³⁴

Six months after the passage of the act permitting Utah women to vote, and amid talk of having the legislation pronounced unconstitutional by the territorial supreme court, the women of Utah went to the polls to cast their ballots in territorial elections. Despite a considerable amount of what men referred to as "good humored chaffing," a large number of women entered the polling places through the separate women's entrances and cast their votes. A few individualists took their feminism seriously and voted for women for public office. "One lady voted for a lady to be a Commissioner to locate University Lands, also for one to be a Representative in the Territorial Legislature, and for one to be County Treasurer."³⁵ A visiting observer was not impressed. As he saw it, "the Mormon women cared but little for the privilege of voting and cast their ballots just as their Bishops directed."³⁶

No doubt many Mormon women were ambivalent about their newly gained political role; some were even openly opposed to women taking part in political affairs. The minutes of women's meetings in the Salt Lake City Fifteenth Ward reflect the full spectrum of views on voting. Some

³⁴ *Deseret News*, May 17, 1871; "Journal History," August 8, 12 and October 20, 1870.

³⁵ *Deseret News*, August 3, 1870.

³⁶ Wilford H. Munro, "Among the Mormons in the Days of Brigham Young," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, new series 36, October 1926, p. 229.

women clearly declared themselves for women's rights; some said they had little interest in politics but would vote "for good men in office not enemies." Others admitted they had always considered politics beneath women and were thus not interested in voting.³⁷

Brigham Young's analysis of Utah women's first experience at the polls was that the ladies of Mormondom had gone "forth in force and voted for the only man who raised his voice in the Halls of Congress in defense of a pluralities of wives"³⁸—William H. Hooper. In short, the women had used their political power to affirm the institution of polygamy by reelecting Hooper. It is doubtful that this was a conscious affirmation on the part of women. Hooper was, after all, an aggressive advocate of woman suffrage during his days as delegate to Congress.

Reportedly it was Hooper, possibly inspired by Charlotte Godbe, who had proposed the idea of granting Utah women the franchise in 1869 when Congress was considering imposing female suffrage on Utah. Hooper was also credited with engineering the signing of the bill by Acting Governor Mann. Hooper, who was in Washington when the territorial legislature passed the enfranchising bill, allegedly persuaded Thomas Fitch, congressman from Nevada, to telegraph Mann to sign the bill. Gov. J. Wilson Shaffer, who was also in Washington, was about to instruct Mann to veto the bill when Hooper and Fitch convinced him that the whole woman suffrage thing was a hoax.³⁹

While the Mormons pointed to the reality of women voting in Utah as a refutation of Anna Dickenson's "Whited Sepulchres" and "Woman's Cry from Utah" speeches, Hamilton Willcox, in a *Revolution* article, insisted that women's enfranchisement had sealed polygamy's doom. Utah women held their future in their own hands, he said; therefore, Congress should let Utah alone. At the same time, the *Revolution* articles objected to the Cullom bill since it had been altered to take the right of suffrage from Utah women.

At this juncture the Mormons repeatedly reminded Congress that the idea of enfranchising women in Utah had been first pursued by Congress and that the territorial legislature had passed its female franchise act at the very time that similar measures were being considered in Washington. "Bah!" was the *Salt Lake Herald's* response to the fre-

³⁷ Fifteenth Ward Relief Society Minutes, July 20, 1871; see also January 6 and February 19, 1870.

³⁸ *Millennial Star*, August 30, 1870, p. 550.

³⁹ "William H. Hooper, the Utah Delegate and Female Advocate," *Phrenological Journal*, November 1870, pp. 330–31; see also Kirby to Woodruff, February 5, 1889.

quently heard accusation that the Mormon-dominated legislature had given the women the vote as a means of strengthening their potential power against non-Mormons in Utah.

Still, most analysts see the reason for the enfranchisement of Utah women solely in terms of the dynamics within the territory, and most accept the theory that it resulted from an effort on the part of the Mormons to increase their political power in hopes of keeping political control out of the hands of non-Mormons. As Alan P. Grimes argues in his *Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage*, "Women voters were not so much pawns in this struggle as reserve troops to be called upon when needed."⁴⁰

One contemporary version credits Brigham Young—supposedly afraid of the influx of miners into the territory—with devising the scheme of granting the right to vote to women:

Capitalists and prospectors multiplied. The wily deceiver then evolved from his narrow soul the magnanimous scheme of *enfranchising the women*. The Mormon legislature passed the bill. The Gentile miners were mostly unmarried men, or had left their families in the East. Every Mormon citizen thus had his civil power extended in correspondence with his numerous alliances.⁴¹

Certainly, some Mormons may have feared that the territory would be overrun by outsiders once the railroad provided easy access. Nevertheless, at the time the woman suffrage legislation was passed in 1870, the territory's population was 87,000—less than 4,500 of whom were non-Mormons.⁴² Although the *Deseret News* admitted that such an influx was possible, it did "not anticipate such a result." Even when the non-Mormon population did increase, the Mormons securely maintained their political superiority. During the final twenty-five territorial years, the Mormon men alone outnumbered the non-Mormon men four to one. If there were already more than four Mormon voters for every non-Mormon voter, it obviously was not necessary to double the Mormon electorate by giving women the vote. "Reserve troops" would never be needed, not even if the men who practiced polygamy (probably around one-fourth of the total Mormon men) were disfranchised. Speculation based solely on events within the territory might, instead, lead to the conclusion that the Mormon leaders, shaken by the liberal schism, were not afraid of growing non-Mormon political power but were questioning their own ability to maintain Mormon political solidarity.

⁴⁰ Grimes, *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage*, p. 41.

⁴¹ U.S., Congress, Senate, 49th Cong., 1st sess., 1886, *Miscellaneous Documents*, 122:3.

⁴² The 1880 census data show that there were 120,000 Mormons in Utah and 24,000 other residents.

Though motives for enfranchising the women of Utah can be found within the territory and within the Mormon structure, the most compelling reasons were external: the need to counter the image of downtrodden Mormon women, thus stemming the tide of antipolygamy legislation, and the desire to find lobbying power and congressional support in the move to achieve statehood. Some astute Mormon politicians saw that the enfranchisement of women in Utah territory would rally the eastern-based woman suffrage organizations and congressmen favorable to women voting and that these lobbyists would counter attempts by



Elizabeth Cady Stanton

some members of Congress to pass legislation designed to eradicate polygamy. The Mormon leaders also saw the possibility that this same woman suffrage lobby could be recruited to assist with statehood. As George Q. Cannon, the Utah delegate to Congress following Hooper, summarized it, "The extension of suffrage to our women was a most excellent measure. It brought to our aid the friends of women suffrage."⁴³

If motives derived from the Mormons' relationship with the larger American society and the federal government are accepted, then Mormon women and eastern suffragists were pawns, not reserve voting troops. The woman suffrage movement gave the Mormons a national stage upon which they could demonstrate that polygamous wives were intelligent beings capable of thinking for themselves and therefore willing participants in plural marriage, not the downtrodden slaves painted by lecture-bureau circuit riders.

National suffrage leaders carefully watched the Utah experiment. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton of the National Woman Suffrage Association were particularly concerned. The "maidenly Susan B." and the "motherly Stanton," as the *Deseret News* referred to them, visited Utah in the 1870s to see firsthand what impact the ballot in the

⁴³ Cannon made similar comments on a number of occasions, but his most revealing statement is in his letter of February 7, 1880, to John Taylor, Mormon church president, in George Q. Cannon Papers, LDS Archives.

hands of women was having. Stanton held a five-hour meeting with a large gathering of Mormon women in the Old Tabernacle. Having discussed various possible marital arrangements, Stanton concluded that none was ideal from the female point of view. She talked openly of what would be termed "family planning" today. She advised Mormon women that "quality rather than quantity" should be sought in their offspring and that they should not become mothers oftener than once in five years. Subsequently, Stanton was barred from Mormon podiums.

From 1870, when women were enfranchised in Utah, until 1887 when Congress took the vote from Utah women with the Edmunds-Tucker Act, the National Woman Suffrage Association lobbied Congress in defense of Utah women's rights. Belva Lockwood, the first woman lawyer to be permitted to practice before the Supreme Court, led the suffragists' defense of Mormon women in Washington. As Lockwood saw it, the fight against the numerous bills designed to "elevate" women of Utah and "relieve" them from their "bondage" by repealing the territorial act giving them the franchise was "not only a fight for 'Mormon' female votes—it is a contest for women's equal rights on principle."⁴⁴ While national suffrage leaders such as Anthony and Lockwood were defending Mormon women's rights, antipolygamy associations that were closely tied to the early Women's Christian Temperance Union were campaigning against women voting in Utah. The issue came to full boil in 1887 when Congress disfranchised Utah women and polygamous men.

In 1895 during the Utah Constitutional Convention the hottest subject of debate was the woman suffrage question. Should the Utah State Constitution define the electorate to include women? Most Mormons said yes and most non-Mormons said no. One articulate Mormon, the delegate from Davis County, Brigham Henry Roberts (also known for his work as a historian), aggressively opposed women voting. First, he said, it would endanger statehood; but, when pushed, he admitted that he did not believe women should be involved in politics. Roberts's "manly stand" made him a hero in some circles. In recognition of his efforts against woman suffrage, he received bouquets of roses from anonymous admirers and members' privileges for thirty days at the all-male Alta Club in Salt Lake City.

In response, the Utah Woman Suffrage Association rallied their supporters. Franklin S. Richards and Orson F. Whitney, another his-

⁴⁴ See Belva A. Lockwood's speech before the National Woman Suffrage Association, January 24, 1883, as printed in the *Ogden Daily Herald* of June 9, 1883.

torian, debated against Roberts. The final decision was in favor of including woman suffrage in the constitution which became effective when Utah became a state in 1896.⁴⁵ With statehood, women in Utah gained full voting privileges. Women in the surrounding states of Wyoming, Colorado, and Idaho also were permitted to vote in 1896, but it would be another twenty-four years before the Nineteenth Amendment would be ratified making it illegal to deny access to the polling place on the basis of one's sex in all states of the Union.

The national suffragists' experience with the question of woman suffrage in Utah helped to move them closer to what is referred to as the Victorian Compromise and preoccupation with the franchise. The National Woman Suffrage Association—which had been most critical of the monogamous marital system—had been pressured, as William L. O'Neill has said, not to allow the organization to be used by Victoria Woodhull to promote free love. Likewise, moderate suffragists objected to Belva Lockwood defending Mormon women in words often interpreted as a defense of plural marriage. For two decades the National Woman Suffrage Association championed Utah women's right to vote and in so doing damaged its image. That wing of the suffrage movement was discredited because of its identification with the nontraditional family structure and its critiques of monogamous marriage. Faced with attacks from all sides if they attempted to analyze the traditional family structure, women's rights advocates began at the turn of the century to confine themselves more and more to one subject—the vote. Suffrage became the panacea. Thus, a feminist ideology of woman's role in society, which might have resulted in a much greater change in society than woman suffrage produced, was not forthcoming.

⁴⁵ For an analysis of the constitutional convention debate see White, "Woman's Place Is in the Constitution," pp. 344–69.

TWO HOME MAKERS

. . . My sister Caroline and I have been trying to build a log house for ourselves as we do not feel quite comfortable where we are. We first got possession of an old house which we pulled down and had the logs moved to a spot where we wanted it put up again. As we could not get any one to lay it up for us, we went at it ourselves and laid it up five or six logs high when some brethren came and laid it up the rest of the way and put a dirt roof on it. Then I built a fire place and chimney till it was about as high as my head and some brother topped it out for me. We had one window of 3 panes of glass. Now we have a house. . . .

"Life and Journal of Eliza Maria Partridge Lyman," p. 40
Utah State Historical Society Library