On June 3, 1875, Martha Jane Coray, middle-aged mother and ranch wife of Mona, Utah, recorded in her diary that she had "washed
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forenoon, plowed afternoon." Such an entry — coupled with the oft-told tales of such exceptional Utah women as Patty Sessions, horticulturist; Romania B. Pratt, M.D.; Emmeline B. Wells, publisher; Eliza R. Snow, author and storekeeper; Alice Louise Reynolds, professor; and Martha Hughes Cannon, senator — raises the question of the degree to which the pioneer women of this mountain region anticipated the present century's movement towards occupational equality. The record of women building a silk industry, storing grain in their own granaries, organizing international societies, writing their own books, publishing their own newspapers, suggests that here, in the more or less controlled environment of Mormon Utah, women were decades ahead of their sisters in the American East in economic and professional opportunity.

But there are balancing statements to be reckoned into the equation, such comments as that of another diarist, Josephine Streeper Chase, who wrote from her experience that “woman poor woman must iron Sew Bake tend Babies,” in simple eloquence suggesting that there were the traditional tasks for women and those for men. The household responsibilities assigned to women in western civilization seem, in her view, to have been accepted without question, here as well as in the wider society.

To what degree, then, were the women of Mormon Utah ahead of, behind, or parallel to their American sisters generally in the work they did and their opportunity, or desire, to change the traditional role assignments. This paper investigates a portion of that question, approaching it through diary accounts of Utah women who, at various phases of settlement, recorded their activities in their homes and abroad.

The precedents are worth looking at, the experiences of women before they settled in Utah. Writers of the present age, enlightened by the advances of the women's movement toward equality of opportunity for both sexes, applaud Caroline and Eliza Partridge Lyman, unhappy with the lay of their log house in Mormon Winter Quarters, Nebraska, moving the thing log by log, or Mary Fielding Smith, told by the wagon master that she would be a drag to the company, driving her oxen ahead of the

1Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, Diary, June 3, 1875, manuscript, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

2 Fae Decker Dix, ed. “The Josephine Diaries: Glimpses of the Life of Josephine Streeper Chase 1881–94,” Utah Historical Quarterly 46 (1978): 179. A very human irony is reflected in her comment on the work of men at harvest time, when they must have been feeling as tired as she herself had felt: “It is a pretty sight to see the machine agoing & all of the men & boys so bussy all sweat & dirt. . . .”

3 Eliza Partridge Lyman, Reminiscence, holograph, Archives Division, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, hereinafter cited as LDS Archives.
What is overlooked is that those acts of spunky initiative were most probably taken on unwillingly; they were the requirements of survival. In those cases where a woman performed what is traditionally man’s work, it was under duress and eagerly relinquished as soon as a man was free to carry on. Caroline and Eliza were happy to have male help to roof their house and build the chimney, and widowed Mary would readily have walked beside the wagon had she had a husband to drive it — as it was, her nine-year-old son handled one team and wagon. Survival made its demands on all, but the women sensed other needs as well.

Women on the Mormon frontier were caught between two opposing thrusts, neither of which they could afford to ignore. First, there was the necessity of survival in a hostile environment, survival as a people in a region soon to be drawn into civilized America, the “Babylon” from which they had so recently escaped; then there was the thrust of civilization itself and the attempt to preserve the genteel traditions to which they had aspired in their eastern American homes. Much of the discrepancy, observed by historians of the Mormon movement, between the official policies of church leaders and the actual behavior of the women can be explained in the tension between these two forces.

Part of the women’s affirmation of identity was easily enough confirmed. “True women,” those pure, pious, and submissive ladies of American culture, were also domestic; and in that sphere pioneer Utah women could make their contribution to the temporal well-being of the community without offending their sense of womanliness. Constants in the lives of the women, as recorded in their diaries and letters, are the chores traditionally associated with their sex. The cleaning; the regular washing on Monday using snow or rain water to make the soap go farther, and ironing on Tuesday — or Wednesday, if the clothes froze on the line; the sewing of “imported” fabrics or — and this will be treated in some detail later — the spinning and weaving; the providing and processing of food or, in the more affluent homes, the procuring and preparing of food; the improving of the home for comfort or style; and the bearing and rearing of the children. The house itself — extended to include the kitchen garden and perhaps the cow shed and the chicken coop — was woman’s domain, and seldom did her work take her beyond that, and then not often of her own choosing.

4 Susa Young Gates, Heroines of Mormondom (Salt Lake City Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884), p. 37.
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Women in pioneer Utah spanned two phases of household organization and family life, making the transition between what Ann Oakley delineates as the "traditional" or preindustrial home and the later postindustrial household. In neighboring towns, even in houses next door to each other, one might find families functioning in either of these ways: one family living in the traditional "first house," the log cabin or dugout where one room encompassed all the family indoor activities, where cooking, eating, learning, socializing, and sleeping took place in one central area; and another already moved into the "big house," the adobe or rock dwelling, often two-storied, with kitchen-eating area separated from sleeping areas, and, if circumstances permitted, a parlor apart from all. And with the move to the house patterned after those of the Atlantic states from which place both the Saints and the builder's manuals for the most part originated, came styles of gracious living to which the women aspired as soon as their circumstances permitted.

Patty Sessions, midwife, middle-aged mother and grandmother, may not be typical in all ways of the Mormon frontier woman, but her account will serve to illustrate some of the generalizations. Well into middle age, Patty crossed the plains from Winter Quarters, Nebraska, to the Salt Lake Valley in the first general crossing. There is no inkling in her diaries as to the presence of her husband on the trek. His name is not mentioned during the entire crossing, although her son Perrigrine — "P. G." in the diary — comes and goes with some regularity. Patty brings her own wagon hitched to four oxen and says with some pride at the journey's end that she had driven "all the way but part of the two lasts mts [mountains] P G drove a little I broke nothing nor turned over."

Her daily activities on the trail differ little from what is recorded in other journals of the trail, such as those of Eliza Roxcy Snow or Jane Rio Baker, or the sketchier later accounts of Mary Goble Pay and Bathsheba Smith. In each case, with the rare exception of times when some women had to drive wagons, there is little mention of their doing what was traditionally "men's work." In most cases, men drove the wagons, women gathered fuel; men did the guard duty, women cooked the meals; men herded the cattle, women tended the children; men hunted buffalo and antelope, women jerked the meat. Patty was an exception in that

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6 Patty Bartlett Sessions, Diaries, holograph, LDS Archives. All direct quotations concerning Patty Sessions are from this source.
7 Ibid., September 25, 1847.
she carried more responsibility — mended her own wagon cover, a woman's task, probably, but also repaired her own wagon. Even so, when the wheel gave trouble, "the men set waggon tires."

The most surprising accounts, however, considering the general urgency of survival in the Salt Lake Valley that first winter and Patty's wide range of abilities, are those brief entries recounting her days in the first two years of her settlement there. While P. G. and Patty's husband were hauling load after load of logs for the first house, herding the cattle, and building a farm north of the main settlement, Patty was at home in a tent or the wagon box (the wagon, lifted from the running gears, was set on the ground where it served as shelter), doing little that in the most refined New England community could not have been considered truly domestic. Her cryptic account of those days lists such activities as "Mended my dress," "knit," "wrote letter," "mended soldier's clothes" (this would be for a member of the Mormon Battalion, stopping in the valley on his way east to meet his family and bring them on — she was paid in seed for services), "cut out coat for soldier," "sewed," "finished the coat, gave the making" (she made no profit on this one). Meanwhile, between farming operations, Mr. Sessions and P. G. finished the log house, and the family moved in.

The usual domestic tasks continued inside: Patty "put up curtains," "set dishes in the cupboard," "made soap," along with the continued sewing, quilting petticoats for herself and others, making dresses, tailoring a coat and two pairs of pants for her husband, and finally, the first nontraditional task since her arrival: "Helped Mr Sessions lay down a floor the first floor that I could set my foot upon as my own for more than two years."

The most amazing feature of the whole profile of Patty's activities, as reflected in the diary — and it must be admitted that the account will be skewed according to Patty's own sense of what was significant in each day's activities (she seldom mentions food preparation or general housework, though the washing almost always rates space) — is the frequency of visiting. Every other day, it seems, she and her sisters in the faith are either visiting or being visited, often on the occasion being offered some treat such as mince pie, hardly what one would expect in the desert where people were scraping for every bit of food and planting the last of their grain in optimistic gamble on return.

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8 Ibid., August 7, 1847.
9 Ibid., April 21, 1848.
These were called the starvation times, the first two winters in the valley. And yet here are the women at all costs preserving the vestiges of civilization. Deaths on the trail had been treated unceremoniously; in the valley, Patty makes a linen shroud for the first woman to die there. She “fringes” a handkerchief for a friend; there is a wedding, so she makes artificial flowers for a wreath. This making of “artificials” is not an hour’s diversion; it occupies Patty’s diary four days in two weeks, interspersed among making a straw hat — possibly for sale — and working on a bonnet for Martha Ann. One of the caps had “trimmings,” the making of which filled another day’s entry.

Mr. Sessions died less than three years into the valley; his going seemed to make little dent in Patty’s life. The note announcing her second marriage reveals once again, with a harsh candor, her wish to be freed of the masculine tasks: “I was married to John Parry and I feel to thank the Lord that I have some one to cut my wood for me.”

Not that Patty was afraid of hard work: she did all the gardening until she could afford a man to hoe and irrigate and dig the fence post holes, and certainly her three-day soapmaking projects (100 pounds was normal output) and her drying of fruit and making of turnip molasses represent tireless hours. But the delineation seems clear: some tasks are for men, some are for women.

The significance of this particular woman’s account, for the purposes of this paper, is amplified in the fact that Patty was not a typical woman (in her life she made so much money by her careful husbanding of everything except her husbands that she endowed a public school for the settlement) but that she does such typical, womanly things. Other women’s accounts, many of which report these same early times, suggest the same sort of division of labor, forcing a revision of a premature assessment from an earlier paper that “sex roles merged and everything got done.”

Everything did in fact get done; the community survived. More than that — it survived on the highest level of civilization of which the women, given the available resources, were capable. That meant not a merging of traditional roles but a tenacious clinging to the ideal of women doing women’s work, men doing men’s.

But there were times when the ardor with which the women clung to their genteel self-image ran up against the needs of survival in the

10 Ibid., December 14, 1851.
hostile new land, as, for example, in 1853, a year beset with Indian conflicts. Political and ecclesiastical leader Brigham Young had been warning the Saints, especially those in remote settlements, to “fort up.” His word had in some places not been heeded, and by July the depredations had increased to the point of near warfare. “Harvest is not time to build forts,” he admitted in a July 31 sermon, but it was clear that the danger necessitated immediate action. “Now the harvest is upon us,” he went on. “Now is the time for women and children to assist in the harvest fields, the same as they do in other countries.” Obviously, the women had not been doing the field labor to any extent in the six years the Mormons had been in the valley. And in the succeeding comment it is just as obvious that Brigham Young did not intend the practice to continue beyond the present emergency:

I never asked this of them before; I do not now ask it as a general thing, but those employed in the expedition south, in the work of defending their brethren from Indian depredations, who have heavy harvests on hand, rather than suffer the grain to waste, let the women get in the harvest.12

And in a very un-Brigham-like comment, he suggested that the women “carry a good butcher knife in your belt, that if an Indian should come upon you, supposing you to be unarmed, you would be sure to kill him. . . .” The church leader kept his word; no evidence has been found that he ever asked the women in so many words to work in the fields again.

There was no question, however, that the women should be useful. In an 1856 epistle to the Saints, Young makes it clear that women should be ready to sustain themselves and their offspring during those times when husbands are away from home.

Teach [your daughters] to sew, spin and weave; to cultivate vegetables as well as flowers; to make soap as well as cakes and preserves; to spin, color and weave and knit, as well as embroidery; to milk, make butter and cheese, and work in the kitchen, as well as in the parlor.13

In the structure of his phrases Young shows how he perceives what the women are doing, that they are already attending to the finer aspects


of homemaking — cultivating flowers, baking cakes, embroidering — and uses that as the starting place from which to encourage them into the more practical skills.

A generation later, Young was defining the work suited to each sex, as he viewed it, and confirmed what the women themselves had long since accepted, that farm labor is not rightfully part of women's work: "I have occasionally seen women in the harvest fields, ploughing, raking and making hay, and sometimes, though very seldom, I have seen them pitch and load hay. I think this is very unbecoming, this hard, laborious work belongs to men."14 At the time, the church president was pushing women into trades such as telegraph operator, store clerk, and typesetter. (The territory was sending far too much money east to pay for school books, and he could see no reason why women could not provide the labor to produce the books at home.)

"Home Industry" was a byword in the very practical sermons delivered to the Mormon faithful from the early 1850s on. Economically, Brigham Young intended the community to be self-sustaining, and he urged few things so strongly as he did the making do with available commodities and the purchase of locally manufactured goods. As the Deseret News editorialized in August 1856, "... We came peeled into a rude country, have been here but a brief period, and have had to combat strong previous habits of running to the store for everything."15 And another reporter for the Mormon wrote, "to a people so remote and isolated from the commercial world, [it] does not require much logic to show them [the Mormons] the necessity of sustaining themselves by producing and manufacturing what they consume."16 However, the movement, productive as it was of fine rhetoric, never succeeded in creating an independent economy; and in the case of the women it seems to have made little real difference in what they did or even in what they bought. The most convincing comment on the overall failure of the ideal comes in the never-changing preaching. As each new item, "the fashion of Babylon," was successfully imported and sold in Utah, the cry went out again over the pulpit. And each time, the women were seen as the culprits, their demands for eastern goods decried, their extravagance blamed for their husbands' financial failures and the community's empty coffers.

14 Brigham Young, April 7, 1873, in Journal of Discourses, 16:16.
15 Deseret News Weekly, August 20, 1856.
16 Wilford Woodruff to Editor of the Mormon, August 30, 1856, Historian's Office Letter-press Copy Book, 1:368, LDS Archives.
In no way is this argument so evident as in the matter of women's clothing. The arguing goes on long, the words of admonition on the one side, the passive rebellion on the other.

Many women diarists wrote of making clothes for themselves and their families. Many of them were by their needles self-sustaining. From the fabrics with which they had filled their trunks before they came west, even the earliest pioneers made dresses as nearly as they could to the style of the times. But once they were settled here, cloth was at a premium. One unidentified early pioneer wrote back to Winter Quarters, the eastern edge of the trail west, for jeans, shirting, brown sheeting, dark prints, bleached domestic, thread, tapes, and all kinds of trimming, saying that “you can get your buildings put up cheap [in exchange for] those articles.”

The order lists of the tithing store, the major retail outlet in early Utah, show the traffic in fabrics as the heaviest among imported commodities. As families entered the valley, husbands would often first find employment in the public works projects maintained by Brigham Young. Their salaries in the almost cashless economy would come as orders on the tithing store. From the ledgers available, it is obvious their wives and daughters were the heavy consumers, asking for bolt after bolt of calico, factory, shirting, flannel, as well as the more luxurious delaine, lawn, cambric, and gingham. It is no wonder that one of the early settlement missions sent by Brigham Young was to southern Utah where grand efforts were made to grow cotton and establish the industry there.

Along with the general attempt to encourage the milling of wool and cotton, there was a concerted drive to prod individual women to take up spinning and weaving, to do the entire clothing manufacturing task from the raw material to the finished garment. As the Deseret News encouraged on March 6, 1852, “We . . . understand that the Governor's lady has offered the use of her loom to her neighbors who have none, to weave their cloth. . . . If all follow this example, we shall not need to write much longer about home manufacture.” The comment was part of a campaign, one move of which was asking bishops to inventory the spinning wheels in their respective wards of the city. The five wards whose responses are available showed up well — nearly half the families in their jurisdiction had spinning wheels. One reported twenty-eight spinning wheels to four looms, with several hundred yards of fabric having

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17 Anonymous to Brigham Young, February 1848, Brigham Young Collection, Incoming Correspondence, LDS Archives.
18 Tithing Office Ledger, 1855, Trustee in Trust Collection, LDS Archives.
19 Deseret Weekly News, March 6, 1852.
been produced for sale outside of the ward itself.\textsuperscript{20} However, there were about four times as many wards that did not respond, either by neglect or by design: they had no such encouraging statistics to report.

The duration of the campaign tells its story: five years later, the call was still being heard, encouraging women to spin and weave. Obviously the project had not met the expectations of the leaders. Second in command in ecclesiastical organization, Heber C. Kimball, berated the women for their sloth in a long harrangue reported in the \textit{Deseret News}, December 30, 1857. “I have three wives who know how to spin,” he boasted, “and they can teach the rest. I am going to have a home manufacturing school in my home. . . . And if there is one that is a dressmaker. . . .”\textsuperscript{21} The implication is as obvious as it is unintentional; the future tense in which Kimball speaks, and his “if” clause, reveal that in all those years the Kimballs had not got their act together. What is more, it was another five years before Kimball would have much to brag about, and even then he had to hedge when he wrote to his sons in 1862 that

\begin{quote}
We are making a great deal of home made cloth this season; I do not know of one of the family, or a man who is laboring for me, but what is clothed, or will be clothed, with a full suit, and some two, of home made flannel, and this for over 100 persons. We design also to make about 20 or 30 pairs of thick hersey [jersey?] blankets, and also flannel for inside wear.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

That so much of the project was still, even at this later date, represented in the future tense speaks its own story. Purchase of imported piece goods continued to drain the Great Basin economy. Despite injunctions to dress in homespun — and abetted by the as yet unfulfilled hopes of the local woolen and cotton mills — the women and the men, too, wore eastern fabrics whenever their purse permitted.\textsuperscript{23}

For the women, States fabrics, like States fashions, represented more immediately than did anything else the gentility that they determined

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Deseret Weekly News}, January 24, February 21, May 1, 1852.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Deseret Weekly News}, December 30, 1857. Included in the sermon—which, if one might believe the transcription and the recurrence of the phrase “You need not laugh about it,” was not too well received—was mention of his wife’s former frugality and the implication that she had changed, presumably with the fashion: “When I married my wife, she was a spinner of both wool and flax and wove woolen dresses for winter and linen for summer and never put on a calico dress except to go to meeting, nor fine shoes—she would wear her coarse ones until she got to the meeting house and then she would change her shoes. You may laugh at it, but I have seen it hundreds of times.”
\textsuperscript{22} Heber C. Kimball to David and Charles Kimball, November 1862, Historian’s Office Letterpress Copy Book, 2:286, LDS Archives.
to build into their frontier society. There was for them no waiting for a promised future when the regional economy would have developed to a New England standard of sophistication in its own time and manner. Not yet a year in the valley, Mary Jane Lambson dressed her baby in high fashion. She wrote to her sister,

I will send a smole pece of Melissa Jane's best dressed & apron the delain is trimed with fringe, she wares the white josey apron with the pink one, has a nice little straw bonnet with a little bourder in the edge, pink ribbon one little flower and white pantelets with incirtin [inserts] above the hem as you may gess how sweet she looks...24

Before the child was old enough to know it, she was entered into the fray of fashion versus function. Male leaders at whatever level of authority cajoled, argued, pleaded with women to adjust their dress styles to the rough environment. From the pulpit in the tabernacle Bishop Lorenzo Young reasoned:

I see the sisters passing along the streets, even in muddy weather, with their dresses of silk and satin dragging in the mud. They could cut off from four to six inches from the skirt and make their children a dress of what they wear out and waste on the ground...25

That same time, revered leader among women, Eliza R. Snow, was modeling for the women's approval the "Deseret costume," a pants and tunic outfit very much like the Bloomer costume and similar styles promoted by various groups for differing purposes. The Mormon women did not approve, and the costume went into mothballs.

The debate went on, and studies of costume indicate that the dresses varied little in either style or fabric from those sold in the States or illustrated in Godey's Lady's Book, purveyor of high fashion in the West as well as in the East. Official objection to the haute couture of the East reached a peak in 1869 when, with the completion of the railroad, it was anticipated that more States goods would flow into Utah and more cash would flow out. Beginning in Brigham Young's own family, and spreading through the rest of the church, was a movement toward "re-trenchment," applied not only to dress but also to table and entertainments. "The time has come," said the leader, "when the sisters must agree to give up their follies of dress and cultivate a modest apparel, a meek

24 Mary Jane Lambson to Bathsheba Smith, September 10, 1848, Bathsheba Smith Papers, LDS Archives.
“Let your apparel be neat and comely,” he said, and then, echoing the familiar catch line, “and the workmanship of your own hands.” The “retrenchment” name lasted but a few years on the association Young founded. Even before it changed to Mutual Improvement Association, its major thrust had been lost in the interpretation of the older title to imply “retrenching from ignorance.” The women, it appears, would not retrench from those temporal niceties that so enhanced the image they had of themselves as being in every way the equals of their eastern sisters.

But if the women would not wear what they wove, they nonetheless wove. They made the more practical fabrics — the rough “hemp and linen,” the hemp being straw from the field shredded and hacked then woven with the linen in what must have been used not for clothing but for sacks and draperies; the linsey, half wool, half cotton; the flannel; and, in one case, “[mother] once wove a vest for father of dog’s hair.”

Diaries and reminiscences from outlying settlements more frequently than those from Salt Lake City itself record spinning and weaving, or spinning and then taking the yarn to the weaver to be finished. Relative poverty may explain the skewed proportion. But the craft seems not to have lasted beyond the second generation in any given settlement. Adelaide Jackson Slack wrote from Toquerville, a tiny town in Utah’s Dixie, that “We raised cotton. . . I have helped to pick the seeds out. I have seen a ton at a time piled up stairs on the floor to be seeded. Mother could spin and had a spinning wheel.” Her account ends abruptly with a terse comment on the final failure of the experiment: “Other things paid better so we quit raising cotton.” Other diarists reflect the same generalization: States-made cloth was not only more attractive, it was cheaper, even in a barter society. As Lucy Hannah White Flake wrote of her experience in Beaver, the southern Utah town where she and her grandmother had had a business spinning and weaving: “1871 the [wool] factory was built William done lots of work on it and had a large share in it When done this done away with the spining and weveing.”

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29 Lucy Hannah White Flake, Reminiscence, photocopy of holograph, LDS Archives.
As the home manufacture of the more practical fabrics declined, the official answer to the women’s desires for finer stuff came, encouraged by President Young, through the women’s Relief Society leaders. Young had decided that Utah could grow silk, and from the early 1860s into the next century faithful women tried to make true the prophecy of women’s leader Eliza R. Snow that eventually “the people would come to Zion to buy the finest of fabrics.”

But sericulture was a showpiece venture, and never did succeed in earning for Mormon women anything more than some good public relations — they filled their display at the American centennial celebration in Philadelphia in 1876 with their silk.

On several counts one would have expected the work of Mormon women of the nineteenth century to be different from that of their eastern sisters. Polygamy, one would immediately suggest, should have made a difference. And it did, in the families of some few of the 15 or 20 percent of the population directly affected. Ellis Reynolds Shipp could go off to medical school, leaving her children with a sister wife. Martha Cragun Cox could teach school to support her own children and those of her sister wives, all married to “the poorest man in Washington County”; and Mattie Hughes Cannon could run for state senate (in which election she beat even her own husband) with the off-hand comment that a woman who has three sister wives is “on duty” only one week in four. But in the majority of polygamous families the fact of plural wives more often meant that there were more women to tend to the traditional women’s tasks. During “the raid,” that period in the 1880s when men were being imprisoned for living with their plural wives, one ought to find women taking over the heavy farm duties. More often, however, a brother, father, or son filled in, as noted, for example, by Laura Ann Keeler Thurber: “My Brother Orson came over ... to haul me up some winters wood which I was verry glad of, he is after me a grist of flour now over to Richfield.” Of the farmwork, only the care of the cows fell to the women, in most cases: “Keeps me busy doing my house work and keeping [the children’s] clothes made and then I have been milking four and

32 Martha Cragun Cox, Reminiscence, holograph, LDS Archives.
five cows this summer and our own wood to chop so we don't get any time to was[t]e."

One would anticipate that the lay organization of the church—the pastoral functions as well as the missions were all performed by the lay priesthood holders—would take Mormon men so often from their homes that women would have to fill in the gap. There is some evidence that they did. Eliza Partridge Lyman, for instance, and her sister wife Caroline, swapped candle wicking for necessaries and gardened when their husband went on one of his many missions. But at the same time, they lived in their wagon box and tent until the men Lyman had contracted with came and built them a house rather than undertake the work themselves. Even before the Mormons left Nauvoo, Brigham Young, then chief apostle, had admonished the missionaries: “let not the Elders go until they have provided for their families. No man need say Again I have a call to preach — while he has not a good house. Lot, fenced, 1 years provision.” It is obvious from the women’s activities, however, that the advice often went unheeded, that families were seldom left so well provided for. In most cases, the women supported themselves and their families by selling goods and services traditionally within the scope of women.

One would look to the organizations the women set up as leading them to do unusual tasks, to adapt their home activities to make room for typically western or uniquely Mormon projects; but even those projects fell into patterns of an eastern cut. The Relief Society, the mother organization to all the other women’s auxiliaries, had the women sewing for the poor—Indians, initially, and their own numbers—and making carpets and weaving straw hats. Over the years, some women participated in service projects that were not typically female, but the lap over into their work at home is questionable. Some ward Relief Societies operated stores, but their merchandise consisted mainly of those items women used in their normal domestic activities: cloth, carpet rags, thread, trim-

34 Laura Ann Keeler Thurber, Reminiscence, holograph, Special Collections, Lee Library. The fact that it was expected that other men in the extended family would perform the men’s work for women whose husbands were away is reinforced in a much later comment, this of Josephine Monsen Anderson, who as a young bride was left when her husband was called to a European mission. Told that the irrigation ditch in front of her property needed to be cleared of the winter’s accumulation of wood, she asked her father-in-law to see that one of the boys did the task. No one came. She wrote to her husband, “Your Pa came in here today and told me I could easy do that myself but I told him I wouldn’t do it for I was ashamed.” The remaining correspondence suggests that this was an off day—usually the brothers carried on Josephine’s farm work and their own with no problem. Josephine Christensa Monsen Anderson to Joseph Peter Anderson, April 21, 1895, typescript in the author’s files, holograph in possession of Shirley Anderson Cazier, Logan, Utah.

35 Brigham Young, discourse delivered April 10, 1843, General Minutes, LDS Archives.
mings, quilts, straw for braiding, garden seeds, school books. There were no hammers, axes, plows, or even milk pails in the Fifteenth Ward Relief Society Store. The grain storage program called for women to participate in a traditionally male operation—the harvesting and saving of grain. Their methods, however, consisted not of farming itself but of gleaning, since Bible times a woman’s task, or selling the Sunday eggs for grain, or providing meals or clothing to men in exchange for an acre’s harvest. And all of it came under increasingly heavy priesthood, i.e. male, direction.

On the whole, the women seldom strayed from the concept of women’s work that they brought with them from their pre-Mormon homes or picked up from their States-born mothers. Far from being the avant garde of the women’s movement, the unconscious forefront for widening spheres, the women of Mormon country held all the stronger to the American society they remembered or to the seepings-in from the East of fashions and manners that reinforced those values they associated with refinement and culture. Women’s work on the Mormon frontier varied little from women’s work anywhere else in the western civilization. Gerda Lerner was right: even in the boldest of social reforms, “women were still in charge of child-rearing and housekeeping.” The Mormon frontier was no exception.

36 Fifteenth Ward Relief Society, Minutes 1869-1875, LDS Archives.