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## Presidential Address: An American Album, 1857

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*Presidential Address*  
An American Album, 1857

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LAUREL THATCHER ULRICH

SOMETIMES THE BEST WAY to approach a big topic is to focus on a small one. I would like to address a very large topic—conflict over marriage in the nineteenth-century United States—by considering a single object, a quilt made in the Territory of Utah in 1857.

The quilt survives today in two parts. According to family tradition, a twelve-year-old boy won it in a raffle in Salt Lake City in 1857, then years later, when his own children were grown, cut it in two for his oldest daughters. In 1996, Carol and Dan Nielson of Salt Lake City inherited one half. Carol was determined to find the other. Through savvy research and a bit of luck, she did. Then she set about identifying the sixty-three women whose signatures—in thread and in ink—are clearly visible on the squares. In 2004 she published the results of her research in *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*.<sup>1</sup> Her objective was to tell stories meaningful to the descendants of the quilters and to others interested in local and family history.

My objectives are different. Building on Carol's work, I would like to convince my fellow historians that focusing on a single artifact can yield unexpected insights. Like other forms of micro-history, an object-centered inquiry enlarges details, allowing us to see connections that might otherwise be invisible. The year 1857 was an important one in history. Specialists might point to the Dred Scott decision in the United States, the Great Mutiny against British rule in India, filibustering in Nicaragua, the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act in England, apocalyptic cattle-killing in South Africa, or the publication in France of Gustave Flaubert's novel of adultery, *Madame Bovary*. The quilt focuses attention on a different mix of race, imperialism, insurrection, religion, sex, and the law in a raging public controversy over the practice of polygamy by the Latter-day Saint (Mormon) inhabitants of the territory of Utah.

To their antagonists, the Latter-day Saints were not just sexual deviants. They were aliens. In the words of Representative Justin S. Morrill of Vermont, "Under the guise of religion this people has established and seek to maintain and perpetuate,

I would like to thank Nancy Cott, Jill Lepore, and Sarah Pearsall for comments on an earlier draft of this essay; Brittany Chapman, David Whittaker, and Ronald Walker for assistance in locating documents; and Carol Nielson for showing me the quilt and answering my many queries about it.

<sup>1</sup> Carol Holindrake Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt, 1857: Stories of the Relief Society Women and Their Quilt* (Salt Lake City, 2004), 7–11, 203, 206. Shirley Mumford, who owns the missing segment, is also a descendant of Richard Henry Horne, the boy who won the raffle.

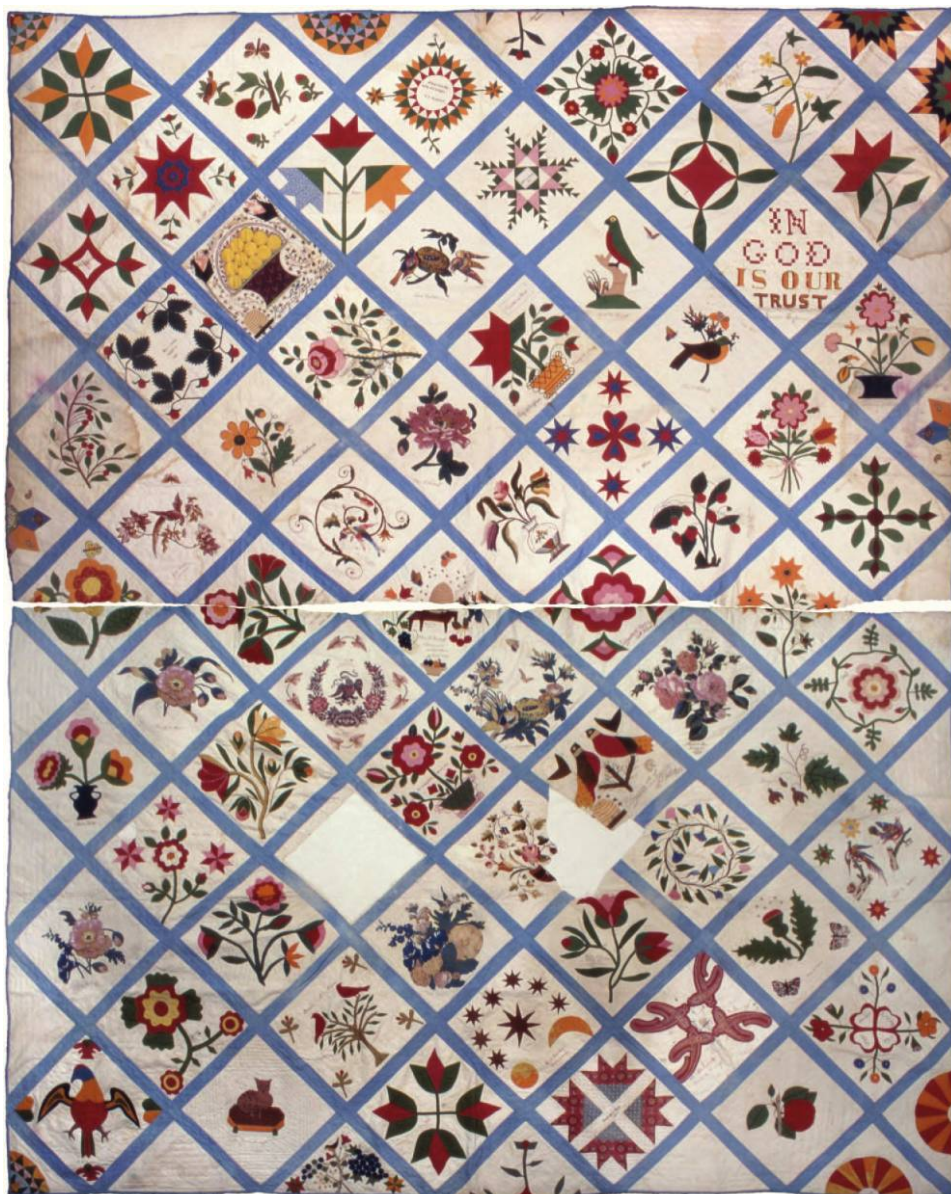


FIGURE 1: Fourteenth Ward Album Quilt. Salt Lake City, Utah, 1857. Courtesy of Dan and Carol Nielson and Shirley Mumford. Photographs by Dan Nielson. (The figures can be viewed in color in the online version of the article at <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/ahr>.)

a Mohammedan barbarism revolting to the civilized world.”<sup>2</sup> Novelists and the new illustrated weeklies took up the chorus, linking Utahns with Turks, Africans, and Indians on both sides of the world.<sup>3</sup> Utah leaders responded in kind. Characterizing

<sup>2</sup> Justin S. Morrill, “Utah Territory and Its Laws—Polygamy and Its License,” February 23, 1857, U.S. Congress, House, *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 2nd Sess., 284–290, quoted in William P. MacKinnon, ed., *At Sword’s Point, Part I: A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858* (Norman, Okla., 2008), 87.

<sup>3</sup> Compare, for example, “The Outbreak in India,” *Harper’s Illustrated Weekly*, August 1, 1857, 493–494, with “Scenes in an American Harem,” *Harper’s Illustrated Weekly*, October 10, 1857, 648–650. See

federal appointees as “dogs and skunks,” they vowed to resist those who trampled on their constitutional rights. In New York, St. Louis, and San Francisco, Mormon editors and their opponents exchanged charges and countercharges, multiplying claims of oppression on one side and sedition on the other. The conflict escalated until in 1857, President James Buchanan dispatched one-sixth of the U.S. Army to Utah to put down a supposed rebellion.<sup>4</sup>

Events played out in seemingly random ways. In May, near a rural courthouse in Arkansas, an aggrieved husband gunned down a Mormon apostle who he claimed had seduced his wife. In September, at Mountain Meadows, a lush grazing spot on the Old Spanish Trail through southern Utah, a group of Mormon settlers and their Paiute allies ambushed an emigrant wagon train bound for California and slaughtered most of its members. In early October, far to the north in Salt Lake City, sixty-three members of the Fourteenth Ward Female Relief Society won a prize for their “Album Quilt.”

At first glance, the quilt appears unrelated to the tumult. In fact, there are both direct and indirect links to public events of that year. Among the quilters were three wives of Parley P. Pratt, the apostle murdered in Arkansas. A more tenuous link runs through the origins of the Female Relief Society to the fateful alliance between Southern Paiutes and Latter-day Saints in the massacre at Mountain Meadows. More significant is the interplay between the seemingly innocuous imagery of the quilt and the coming of the federal army. The quilt does more than connect a particular group of women to a set of sensational events. It takes us beneath the headlines to unresolved issues about family, faith, marriage, and public authority, issues that mattered in 1857 and that matter today. It helps us to see that on both sides of the conflict, the issue was what it meant to be an American.

There are obvious differences between the fight over polygamy in the nineteenth century and the fight over same-sex marriage today. But there are also some striking similarities. Both conflicts involved a struggle between local and national authority and between minority rights and majority rule. In 1857, as today, people argued over what was innate and what was chosen, grounding their arguments both in science and in scripture. And in both cases, a stigmatized but assertive minority became the locus for extravagant fears over the survival of the nation.

TODAY THE CHURCH of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints dissociates itself from polygamy, which officially ended in 1890.<sup>5</sup> But for more than half a century, it fought

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also Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 72–76, 111–131; Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002), 29–54.

<sup>4</sup> Important works relating to the Utah War include, in addition to the documentary edition by MacKinnon cited above, Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict, 1850–1859* (New Haven, Conn., 1960); Kenneth M. Stampp, *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (New York, 1990); Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (1950; repr., Norman, Okla., 1961); Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York, 2008); Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (Norman, Okla., 2002); Matthew J. Grow, “Liberty to the Downtrodden”: *Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer* (New Haven, Conn., 2009).

<sup>5</sup> For official statements on this issue, see the many entries under “Polygamy” on the official church website, <http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/>.

the U.S. government's attempts to squelch the practice. Although rumors of polygamy contributed to the murder of Joseph Smith in Illinois in 1844, the church did not publicly endorse "plural marriage" until 1852, five years after the arrival in Utah. The announcement came in a sermon preached at Brigham Young's behest by Orson Pratt, a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles.

Pratt began with a seemingly conventional point, that God instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden and that he commanded Adam and Eve to "multiply and replenish the earth." But he took that idea of multiplying to unimagined heights, arguing that even in the next life, a man's posterity would "constitute his glory, his kingdom, and dominion." He estimated that less than one-fifth of the nations of the earth embraced monogamy, and suggested that those who did showed themselves to be contracted in spirit and in mind. By accepting the new order of marriage, righteous men could inherit the promise God gave to Abraham, that his posterity would be as numberless as the stars in the heavens or the sands of the sea. Righteous women could also achieve exaltation by preparing bodies for preexistent spirits that were clamoring to come to earth.<sup>6</sup>

To the astonishment of the nation, Mormons not only admitted to this strange new practice, they gloried in it, publishing tracts and engaging in public debate. As a consequence, polygamy became the focus of anti-Mormon writing. In the two years before the Utah War, four anti-polygamy novels and dozens of periodical pieces appeared. Building on a handful of known facts and a great deal of fantasy, writers defined Brigham Young as an oriental despot, Mormon men as lechers, and Mormon women as victims or dupes.<sup>7</sup>

Benjamin G. Ferris, a federal official who served six months in the Territory of Utah in 1852–1853, laid down the essential argument: polygamy was incompatible with American civilization. Although God had allowed it to exist among the ancient Jews because of the "hardness of their hearts," no modern civilized nation had adopted such a system. "It belongs now to the indolent and opium-eating Turks and Asiatics, the miserable Africans, the North American savages, and the Latter-day Saints. It is the offspring of lust, and its legitimate results are soon manifest in the rapid degeneracy of races." The only solution was the "ultimate disorganization of the Mormon community."<sup>8</sup>

Francis Lieber, soon to be elevated to the first chair in history and political science at Columbia University, built upon Ferris's narrative in an article addressing

<sup>6</sup> "A Revelation on Celestial Marriage," *Deseret News Extra*, September 24, 1852, in B. Carmon Hardy, ed., *Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy—Its Origin, Practice, and Demise* (Norman, Okla., 2007), 76–79.

<sup>7</sup> Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, "Illustrated Periodical Images of Mormons, 1850–1860," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1977): 82–94. For overviews that assume a consistency in this literature from the 1830s to the end of the century, see Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York, 1997); and Megan Sanborn Jones, *Performing American Identity in Anti-Mormon Melodrama* (New York, 2009). Important recent essays include Nancy Bentley, "Marriage as Treason: Polygamy, Nation, and the Novel," in Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman, eds., *The Futures of American Studies* (Durham, N.C., 2002), 341–370; and Bruce Burgett, "On the Mormon Question: Race, Sex, and Polygamy in the 1850s and the 1990s," *American Quarterly* 57 (March 2005): 75–102.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin G. Ferris, *Utah and the Mormons: The History, Government, Doctrines, Customs, and Prospects of the Latter-day Saints, from Personal Observations during a Six Months' Residence at Great Salt Lake City* (New York, 1854), 246, 249, 253, 257, 258.

Utah's petition for statehood. The real question for Congress, he argued, was whether granting such a request would infuse "a foreign and disturbing element" into the American system. It was not an issue of religious freedom, he continued. Mormons were free to believe anything they wished. It was a question of whether they should be allowed to undermine monogamy, which in his view was "one of the elementary distinctions—historical and actual—between European and Asiatic humanity." Unless Congress stood firm, the foundation of the nation might collapse. Another state or territory might adopt French communism or "become so filled with Chinese that the whites were absorbed," or worse yet, "become *bona fide* Africanized."<sup>9</sup>

The anti-polygamy crusade played into what Amy Kaplan has called "manifest domesticity," a discourse of imperialism that linked the security of the Christian home with the suppression of all things foreign. Popular writers not only patrolled the boundaries between civilized and savage nations, they attempted to eradicate "traces of the savage within."<sup>10</sup> It didn't help that Mormons showed some sympathy for American Indians, whom they identified with a people described in the Book of Mormon as "Lamanites," descendants of ancient Israelites who had migrated to the Americas before the fall of Jerusalem. Although God had cursed the Lamanites with dark skin for their sinfulness, he would eventually fulfill the promise made to their fathers that they would prepare the earth for the second coming of Jesus. Anti-Mormon writers picked up on this theme. An anonymous letter in the *American Journal* in the spring of 1857 even claimed that 100,000 Mormons allied with 200,000 spies and 300,000 Indians were prepared to fight the U.S. Army.<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, Mormons did not differ a great deal from other Americans in their racial assumptions. In his discourse on polygamy, Pratt assumed that in distributing preexistent spirits, God favored the mostly Caucasian converts to Mormonism over "the Hottentots, the African negroes, the idolatrous Hindoos, or any other of the fallen nations that dwell upon the face of this earth."<sup>12</sup> But to its detractors, Mormonism represented virtually anything and everything that appeared "un-American"—Islamic and Hindu religion, African and ancient Jewish religious practice, slavery in the American South, savagery on the American frontier, and heterodox ideas that to all appearances emanated from civilized countries. One of the characters in Metta Victor's novel *Mormon Wives*, which sold more than 40,000 copies in the 1850s, admitted that it was easy for her to accept Mormonism after she had "tainted the sweetness of womanhood, by yielding a belief to the philosophy of Socialism."<sup>13</sup> A character in Maria Ward's novel *Female Life among the Mormons*

<sup>9</sup> Francis Lieber, "The Mormons: Shall Utah Be Admitted to the Union?" *Putnam's Monthly* 5, no. 27 (March 1855): 225–236. On the continuing use of racial tropes in attacking polygamy, see Cott, *Public Vows*, 73–76, 88–89, 92.

<sup>10</sup> Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," in Pease and Wiegman, *The Futures of American Studies*, 129.

<sup>11</sup> Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 57; Walker, Turley, and Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, 28. See also MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 41–52. On Mormon relations with Utah Indians, see Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), chap. 7; Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), chap. 2; and Martha C. Knack, *Boundaries Between: The Southern Paiutes, 1775–1995* (Lincoln, Neb., 2001), 48–94.

<sup>12</sup> "A Revelation on Celestial Marriage," 79.

<sup>13</sup> Metta Victoria Fuller, *Mormon Wives: A Narrative of Facts Stranger Than Fiction* (New York, 1856), 313; Burgett, "On the Mormon Question," 87–90.

blamed her acceptance of polygamy on the “mystical magical influence” of the Mormon prophet, who had learned the art of mesmerism from a German peddler.<sup>14</sup>

A writer in *Harper's Illustrated* in the spring of 1857 raised an even more alarming possibility—that in addition to the dangers of mesmerism, socialism, and mental magnetism, Mormon women may have been tainted by what later generations would call feminism. Describing a purported visit to Utah, he said that among Brigham Young's wives were homely creatures “dressed in a kind of Bloomer costume, with pantaloons like those of the men, dresses made like a man's over-coat, tall straw hats with broad ribbons.” In Utah, he concluded, strong-minded women actually helped their husbands get more wives. “What a lesson for Miss Lucy Stone!” he exclaimed.<sup>15</sup>

With anti-polygamy arguments echoing through the nation, Buchanan felt safe in sending federal troops to Utah. The problem was getting them there. It took months to assemble and supply them, and even longer to move them across the plains to an uncertain welcome in the Rockies. As rumors flew back and forth across the mountains, the women of the Fourteenth Ward assembled their quilt. The quilt helps us to see the many ways in which they were like their fellow Americans. They, too, believed in the civilizing power of marriage, in the sanctity of motherhood, and in the necessity of monitoring and suppressing the savage within. Like women in the East, they contributed to their communities not only as wives and mothers but also through productive labor and their work in charitable societies. And like women elsewhere, they struggled with contradictions between the ideals they embraced and the realities they lived. In the face of their own private troubles and a federal assault on their homes and families, they created an American album.

ALBUM QUILTS WERE all the rage in the United States in the 1840s and 1850s. Like the paper albums popular among middle-class Americans, they brought together signatures, mottoes, and images contributed by many persons. Quilts of this sort are a treasure trove for historians. Signatures reveal local networks. Mottoes and images connect the quilters to a repertoire of national values, while place names and dates situate them in a specific setting. The Fourteenth Ward quilt is a model of the form. Every technique and most of the images used in it can be found in other quilts made in the United States in the same period.<sup>16</sup> Its historical significance comes from the interplay of these images with the lives of particular women in a moment of crisis.

Significantly, twenty-five of the seventy squares portray some sort of flower. The square made by Mary Isabella Horne, one of the officers of the Female Relief Society

<sup>14</sup> Maria Ward, *Female Life among the Mormons: A Narrative of Many Years' Personal Experience* (London, 1855), 38, 9, 230, quoted in Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 139, 140.

<sup>15</sup> “Scenes in an American Harem.”

<sup>16</sup> Sandi Fox, *For Purpose and Pleasure: Quilting Together in Nineteenth-Century America* (Nashville, Tenn., 1995), 34–42 (chintz cut-outs); 45–47, 86, 87, 134, 138 (geometric); 26–28, 50–67 (red and green); 148, 152 (mixed); and the many examples of mixed motifs and techniques in Patricia Cox Crews, ed., *A Flowering of Quilts* (Lincoln, Neb., 2001), 32–39, 46–49. The one unusual addition is three squares worked in worsted yarn. Although embroidered woolen coverlets were common in the Northeast, wool and cotton did not usually appear together. Perhaps Phebe Woodruff's sister, who was a native of Maine, brought a bit of unused worsted with her. The motifs that she used are very similar to those appearing on all-wool coverlets from the same period. See Carleton L. Safford and Robert Bishop, *America's Quilts and Coverlets* (New York, 1980), 64–72; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York, 2001), 323–339.



FIGURE 2: M. Isabella Horne, detail, Fourteenth Ward Album Quilt.

and the mother of the twelve-year-old boy who won the raffle, exemplifies nineteenth-century floral needlework, from the serrated edges on the leaves to the filigree overlay on the pot. Although scarcity forced her to use two different kinds of fabric for the leaves, she compensated by cutting carefully so that the pattern on the now-blue and probably once-green print suggested veins in the leaves. She finished her flat roses with graceful loops representing the flowers' pistils and stamens. One scholar has argued that nineteenth-century floral quilts reflected principles of landscape gardening in which each plant was meant to be unique yet contribute to an overall harmony.<sup>17</sup> The Fourteenth Ward quilt fits that description. Working with a limited repertoire of materials, the quilters created remarkable variety. Each square is unique. Where a pattern is repeated, different fabric is used; where common fabrics are used, different designs are employed. Blue strips, like gardens paths, simultaneously separate and unify the squares.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Curtis, "Blessed Be God for Flowers: Nineteenth-Century Quilt Design," in Crews, *A Flowering of Quilts*, 11–23.



Given their decade-long struggle to overcome drought and insect infestation, the emphasis on flowers is significant. In the early years of the settlement, many of the quilters had lived in dugouts, wagon beds, and temporary adobe shelters, eking out scarce harvests by gathering sego lily roots and wild berries. Utahns still feared drought and famine, yet in February 1857, the territory's Agricultural and Manufacturing Society announced that prizes would be given in the fall not only for field crops, vegetables, and fruits, but also for ornamental plants such as roses, dahlias, and asters.<sup>18</sup> For Latter-day Saints, the ability to grow flowers in the sagebrush-covered valley of the Great Salt Lake was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1). In an inscription, now almost too faint to read, one quilter captured the essence of that prophecy: "The desert shall blossom as a rose."<sup>19</sup> In their mountain fastness, Latter-day Saints were also bent on achieving respectability. This was no small feat. All the materials in the quilt, with the possible exception of bits of carded wool in the filling, had traveled more than a thousand miles by wagon train. One square, an intricately pieced patchwork, even displays sewing machine stitches around the borders of the central patch, announcing to the world that even though the woman who made it lived in the middle of nowhere, she had access to the latest technology.<sup>20</sup>

The quilters, too, had traveled. Elizabeth Cain, the owner of the sewing machine, was one of the twenty quilters who had been born in England. Five came from Scotland, and one each from Wales, Canada, and Switzerland. Of those born in the United States, thirteen were born in New England, nine in the Mid-Atlantic, seven in the Midwest, and five in the South.<sup>21</sup> But a simple identification of birthplace can be misleading. Almost all had moved several times, even before joining the Latter-day Saints. The quilter from Switzerland had spent time in Russia. A seamstress from New York City had accompanied her missionary husband to Chile, where in Valparaiso she gave birth to her second child.<sup>22</sup> Another was born in Georgia, moved with her family to Texas, then, after marrying a former Texas Ranger, moved to Kansas before migrating to Utah in 1855.<sup>23</sup>

There is little evidence of these diverse origins in the quilt. The one self-consciously ethnic square was made by Jane Ballantyne Taylor, the Scots-born wife of Apostle John Taylor, who created a thistle and a butterfly with plaid wings.<sup>24</sup> The

<sup>18</sup> *Deseret News*, February 25, 1857, 408.

<sup>19</sup> Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 93. Because Catherine Church's square is stained, the inscription on the pot is too faded to show up well in a photograph.

<sup>20</sup> Mrs. J. Cain square, in Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 85.

<sup>21</sup> I computed these numbers from the biographical sketches in Nielson's book. For a broader picture of Mormon immigration, see Dean May, "A Demographic Portrait of the Mormons, 1830–1980," in D. Michael Quinn, ed., *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* (Salt Lake City, 1992), 126. According to the 1860 census, 13.7 percent of the inhabitants of the United States in that year were foreign-born. The figure for Utah is 31.7 percent. Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States, 1850–1990," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division Working Paper No. 29 (February 1999), <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html> (accessed October 7, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 156–158. The published edition of Pratt's biography acknowledges his wife's presence on this mission but gives few details; *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, edited by Parley P. Pratt, Jr., 5th ed. (Salt Lake City, 1961), 386–393.

<sup>23</sup> Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 98–100.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 182–183.

emphasis was not on national or regional identity but on creativity. These were women interested in making the desert blossom.

As Donald Worster has observed, the writings of the world's great religions are filled with images of "gardens and oases that have been wrested from barren deserts by concerted, righteous human labor." In the western part of the United States—the Great American Desert—Latter-day Saints attempted to make that dream real, believing that if nature could be made productive, "then humanity too would be restored to its original innocence and peace."<sup>25</sup> This was a vision not just of earthly abundance, but of equality. In the words of a Mormon hymn written in Missouri but still sung today, "This earth was once a garden place, with all her glories common."<sup>26</sup>

That dream received new expression in the so-called Mormon Reformation of 1856–1857. Worried that the rigors of pioneering and an influx of immigrants were weakening spiritual commitment, Brigham Young and other church leaders urged the bishops who presided over individual parishes or wards to re-baptize their members and invite them to consecrate their worldly goods through token deeds of gift to the church. They also urged male members, especially those who held church positions, to take additional wives.<sup>27</sup> Every woman, they said, should have the opportunity to have a righteous husband and to become a mother. It is hardly surprising, then, that of the fifty-nine married women who contributed to the Album Quilt, forty-nine were involved in what Mormons called "plural marriage." The numbers reflect the religious commitment of the quilters as well as the status of their husbands.<sup>28</sup>

Equality meant cooperation, not sameness. Unlike some nineteenth-century utopian groups or twentieth-century polygamous sects, nineteenth-century Mormons did not dress alike or cultivate common fields. They were bound by their acceptance of a new religious vision and the opprobrium it brought.

PHEBE WOODRUFF'S SQUARE, now sadly split, was once at the center of the quilt. She probably modeled her old-fashioned bee skep on one portrayed in the emblem of the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society.<sup>29</sup> Although the beehive was a common symbol in the early United States, Latter-day Saint scripture gave it additional meaning. The original name for the Territory of Utah was Deseret, a term derived from an obscure passage in the Book of Mormon describing an ancient migration to the Americas in which voyagers carried, in addition to seeds of all kinds,

<sup>25</sup> Donald Worster, "The Kingdom, the Power, and the Water," in Thomas G. Alexander, ed., *Great Basin Kingdom Revisited: Contemporary Perspectives* (Logan, Utah, 1991), 35, 36.

<sup>26</sup> *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1985), 49; Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages* (Salt Lake City, 1988), 78, 79.

<sup>27</sup> Stanley S. Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," in Quinn, *The New Mormon History*, 171, found 65 percent more plural marriages in 1856 and 1857 than in any other period in his tabulation. His essay was first published in *Western Humanities Review* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1956): 229–239.

<sup>28</sup> This is a much higher proportion (84 percent) than in Salt Lake City as a whole, where 56 percent of married women were polygamists. Marie Cornwall, Camela Courtright, and Laga Van Beek, "How Common the Principle? Women as Plural Wives in 1860," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 139–153.

<sup>29</sup> The Utah certificate was similar to those used in other states. See Hal Cannon, ed., *Utah Folk Art: A Catalog of Material Culture* (Provo, 1980), 87; and Tammy Horn, *Bees in America: How the Honey Bee Shaped a Nation* (Lexington, Ky., 2005), 56–57.



FIGURE 3: Phebe W. Woodruff, detail, Fourteenth Ward Album Quilt.

“deseret, which, by interpretation, is a honey bee.”<sup>30</sup> Although there was not much honey raised in this period in Utah, bees flourished as a symbol.<sup>31</sup> The Fourteenth Ward quilters embellished their squares with everything but the buzz. They were no

<sup>30</sup> Book of Mormon, Ether 2:3. On the transformation of the beehive from a monarchical to a republican symbol, see Ann Fairfax Withington, “Republican Bees: The Political Economy of the Beehive in Eighteenth-Century America,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 18 (January 1988): 39–77.

<sup>31</sup> When the bees they brought to Utah did not thrive, settlers turned to raising sorghum. See Jill Mulvay Derr, “‘I Have Eaten Nearly Everything Imaginable’: Pioneer Diet,” in Ronald W. Walker and Doris R. Dant, eds., *Nearly Everything Imaginable: The Everyday Life of Utah’s Mormon Pioneers* (Provo, 1999), 230–232; Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900*, New Edition (Urbana, Ill., 2005), 116–120; Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York, 1985), 184–185; “A New Sugar Culture,” *Deseret News*, September 24, 1856, 3; “A New Plant,” *Deseret News*, February 4, 1857, 8; “Message from the Governor,” *Deseret News*, December 23, 1857.

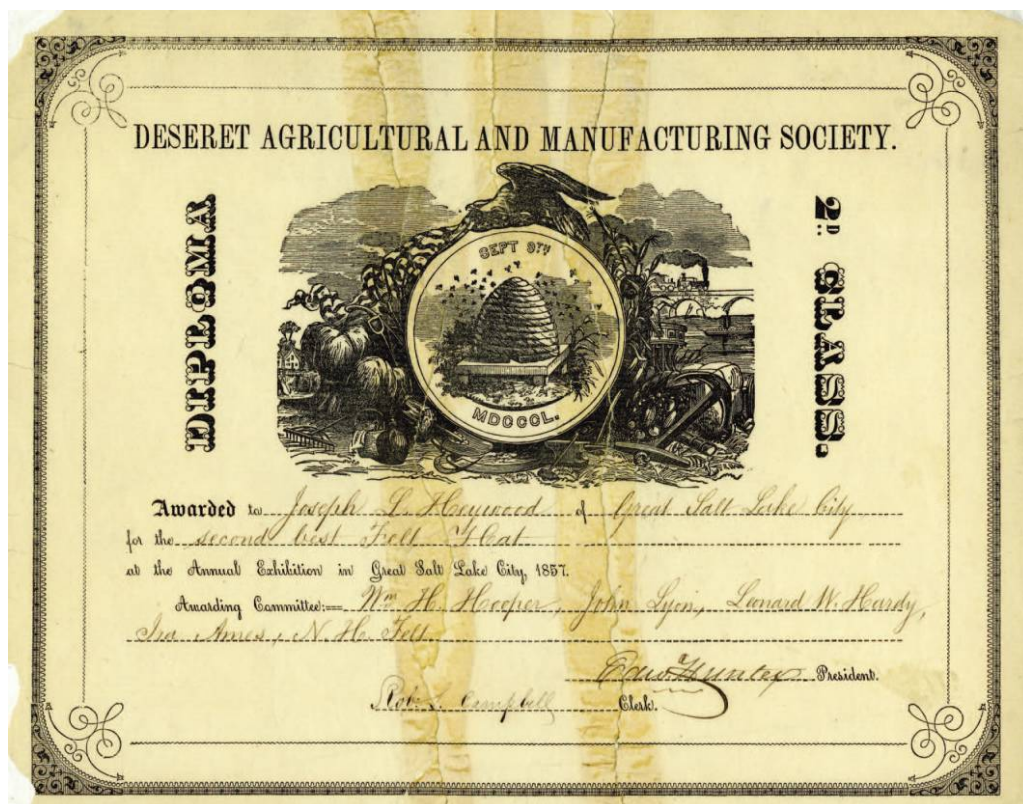


FIGURE 4: Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society Diploma. Courtesy LDS Church History Library and Archives.

doubt imitating Brigham Young, who even planted a carved hive on the cupola of his house.<sup>32</sup> For Joseph Cain, whose wife Elizabeth was one of the quilters, bees symbolized the wanderings of the Latter-day Saints. In Utah, he believed, the saints had at last found a hive. If their enemies dared to follow them there, they would discover that like “the bees who work and sing, / The Saints of God can also sting.”<sup>33</sup>

Phebe had also been a wanderer. Born in Scarborough, Maine, in 1807, she joined the Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1834. There she met and married Wilford Woodruff, a charismatic preacher whose expansive diaries tell us just enough about her to make us want to know more. In the next fifteen years, Phebe gave birth to nine children and lost five. One child died shortly after the Saints were driven from Missouri. Six years later, while huddled in Indian territory after fleeing her home in Nauvoo, Phebe lost a two-year-old son and a newborn baby. In July 1848, while she and Wilford were en route to Boston, where he would preside over the New England mission, their nine-month-old daughter Shuah died. “Mrs. Woodruff expressed her

<sup>32</sup> Rickey Lynn Hendricks, “Landmark Architecture for a Polygamous Family: The Brigham Young Domicile, Salt Lake City, Utah,” *The Public Historian* 11 (Winter 1989): 25–47; Colleen Whitley, ed., *Brigham Young’s Homes* (Logan, Utah, 2002), 100, 124. See also Hal Cannon, *The Grand Beehive* (Salt Lake City, 1980); Marilyn Conover Barker, *The Legacy of Mormon Furniture: The Mormon Material Culture, Undergirded by Faith, Commitment, and Craftsmanship* (Salt Lake City, 1995), 58, 59; Grow, “Liberty to the Downtrodden,” 68.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Cain, “The Bee,” *Deseret News*, January 25, 1851, 1; Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music: A History* (Urbana, Ill., 1989), 59–60, 65.

feelings concerning the loss of her Children & refused to be comforted," Wilford wrote. Three years later in Utah, she gave birth to a daughter, who lived, and then two years later to a son, her ninth child, who did not.<sup>34</sup> For her, the Mormon epic of persecution was a lived reality.

The motto on her square—"By industry we thrive"—reflects her investment in her family's survival. Although Wilford did not report on her ordinary labors, he did notice when something unusual happened, as in the fall of 1856, when the territory faced famine after grasshoppers devastated their crops. One day Phebe took her daughters into the field to glean wheat, sleeping over and coming home wet after it rained. Things were more promising in 1857. In the first two weeks of March, Wilford sowed gooseberry, currant, and cherry seeds, set out grapevines, transplanted almond, peach, apricot, and plum seedlings, and began grafting apples and pears. On April 23, he enumerated twenty-three varieties of apples in his orchard. The appliquéd fruit on Phebe's square acknowledges those labors.<sup>35</sup>

In the triangular space below the beehive on her square, Phebe claimed the honor of being "President of the 14th Ward Female Relief Society." This was not her first experience with such an organization. She was in Nauvoo in 1842 when Joseph Smith spoke to the first Relief Society, telling them that the "organization of the Church of Christ was never perfect until the women were organized." He promised them power and knowledge from on high and defended them against those who thought it was a sin for women to lay hands on the sick for healing. He urged them to do good works, to care for the poor, and to sustain and support their husbands. Although the minutes of the Relief Society do not reveal it, he also told them that part of their responsibility in the new dispensation was to accept plural marriage. In an interpretation that many of them carried with them into old age, this meant they would receive a holy endowment that would make them queens and priestesses in heaven. The sisters selected Emma Smith, the prophet's wife, as president.<sup>36</sup>

After Smith's death, conflict between Brigham Young and Emma, who did not go west, as well as the trials of relocation to Utah, ended formal meetings. Young reportedly told a group of church leaders, "When I want Sisters or the Wives of the members of the church to get up Relief Society I will summon them to my aid but until that time let them stay at home & if you see Females huddling together veto the concern."<sup>37</sup> Although Phebe and others continued to meet informally, especially during the difficult period after the expulsion from Nauvoo, there was no longer a church-sanctioned organization.<sup>38</sup>

In 1853, a shift in policy toward Utah Indians provided a new opportunity for the

<sup>34</sup> *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, edited by Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah, 1983), 1: 272, 348, 349, 426, 484, 485, 537; 2: 157, 264; 3: 95, 97, 358, 359, 361; Augusta Joyce Crocheron, *Representative Women of Deseret: A Book of Biographical Sketches, to Accompany the Picture Bearing the Same Title* (Salt Lake City, 1884), 33–39; Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City, 1991), 51–53, 76, 99–100, 168.

<sup>35</sup> *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5: 29, 31, 32, 47, 67; 4: 436.

<sup>36</sup> Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City, 1992), 43–58.

<sup>37</sup> "Seventies Record," March 9, 1845, LDS Archives, quoted in Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe, 1804–1879* (Garden City, N.Y., 1984), 352 n. 27.

<sup>38</sup> Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Eliza and Her Sisters* (Salt Lake City, 1991), 93–95.

women to exercise their organizational power.<sup>39</sup> Responding to the call to “redeem the Lamanites,” a group of Salt Lake City women met under the leadership of Matilda Dudley, who had been a member of the Nauvoo Relief Society, to form a society for Indian relief. They met weekly, elected officers, organized fundraising projects, and took in contributions in cash and in kind.<sup>40</sup> Their initiative reminded Brigham Young that women could be not only troublesome, but useful. Impressed with their efforts but perhaps just as concerned about their independence, he urged bishops to organize societies in each ward.<sup>41</sup>

By 1854, the bishops had called women to preside over at least twenty-four Indian Relief Societies. Within a few months, they had contributed nearly nine hundred items of clothing, valued at over \$1,500. At the peak of activity, women in one ward contributed an average of almost one day per week to the work.<sup>42</sup> Soon they had produced more clothing than the Indian mission could use. Brigham asked them to produce rag carpeting for the Salt Lake Tabernacle, a public meeting hall. Next he gave them responsibility for relieving the poor, including immigrants pouring into the valley.<sup>43</sup> Wilford Woodruff mentioned the society three times in his diary in 1857, the last time on June 17, when he addressed a meeting at his house where about fifty women were “knitting, sewing carpet rags, making quilts, etc.” He pronounced it a “laudable undertaking,” noting that the women met each Wednesday afternoon. “I wish all to go and do likewise,” he said.<sup>44</sup> Sharing their small cache of scraps, the Fourteenth Ward quilters demonstrated their charitable instincts, their artistic sensibilities, and their collective identity as heirs to the promises made in Nauvoo.

SARAH ANN CHURCH WAS probably not thinking of human reproduction when she appliquéd a cucumber vine on her square. She nevertheless portrayed all the stages of vegetable gestation, from the bright yellow and orange blossoms on the vine, to the tiny green bulges emerging from them as the fruit began to form. Her green cucumbers have prickles, and her ripe one has yellow flecks on its bright orange skin, just as real cucumbers would have had. If the maturing of the plants in her garden reminded her of the stages of pregnancy or of the seasons in a woman’s life, it would not be surprising. She gave birth to her fourth child on July 8, 1857. A few years later, she herself became a midwife. “The tree is known by its fruit,” she wrote across the top of her square.<sup>45</sup>

In the winter of 1857, Apostle Orson Hyde told a mixed audience of Saints in

<sup>39</sup> Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 19; Richard L. Jensen, “Forgotten Relief Societies, 1844–67,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 105–125; Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 75–82.

<sup>40</sup> Jensen, “Forgotten Relief Societies,” 110; Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 75; Record of the Female Relief Society Organized on the 9th of Feby in the City of Great Salt Lake 1854, Louisa R. Taylor Papers, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

<sup>41</sup> Matilda Dudley became president of the new church-sanctioned society in her own ward; Phebe Woodruff was called in hers. Record of the Female Relief Society, n.p. It is not clear whether Phebe was involved with Dudley. She was later active in encouraging women to organize. Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 19–20; *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 4: 281.

<sup>42</sup> Jensen, “Forgotten Relief Societies,” 113–115.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>44</sup> *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 5: 26, 59, 60.

<sup>45</sup> For Church’s biography, see Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 91–93. Her hus-



FIGURE 5: Sarah Ann Church, detail, Fourteenth Ward Album Quilt.

Springville, Utah, that human propagation was much like gardening. “You wouldn’t plant even a squash seed in the *Fall*,” he said. In like manner, there were times and seasons for sexual intercourse.<sup>46</sup> He said that husbands should leave their wives alone during pregnancy and lactation. “It is true that goats it is said will have sexual intercourse within fifteen minutes of the moment when the kid is born. Monkeys also, as some writers affirm are as debased in their practices, but most of the lower animals, may give us a lesson.” At stake was not just the health of the mother and the safety of the child, but the spiritual authority of the father. “I say suppose a family,

band’s second wife was a woman much older than she who had no children of her own but helped raise Sarah Ann’s.

<sup>46</sup> Orson Hyde, in Luke William Gallup, *Reminiscences and Diary*, February 11, 1857, LDS Archives, 193–195, in Hardy, *Doing the Works of Abraham*, 133–135.

where there is no intercourse of this kind, only with the prospect of having children born,—*That family can be governed.*<sup>47</sup>

In a letter originally written to her sister in New Hampshire, Belinda Pratt, Parley P. Pratt's sixth wife, explained that nature had prepared males and females for different purposes. "The strength of the female constitution is . . . to nourish and sustain the embryo, to bring it forth, and to nurse it on her bosom." A man had no such demand on his energies. "If God shall count him worthy of an hundred fold in this life, of wives and children, and houses and lands and kindreds, he may even aspire to patriarchal sovereignty, to empire; to be the prince or head of a tribe, or tribes; and like Abraham of old, be able to send forth for the defence of his country, hundreds and thousands of his own warriors, born in his own house."<sup>48</sup>

Mormons meant it when they described their marriage system as a "patriarchal order." But achieving Abrahamic command was not easy. In a sermon preached in February 1857, Apostle Lorenzo Snow warned those who thought that acquiring wives was an easy path to heaven. "Almost any fool can go & preach the gospel but it requires a very wise man to be a patriarch & save his own household," he said.<sup>49</sup> Wilford Woodruff understood that only too well. He had baptized hundreds, perhaps thousands, into the faith, but for years he had struggled with polygamy. In the spring of 1857, he was in divorce negotiations with one wife while in the process of marrying another. Over his lifetime, half of his ten plural marriages ended in divorce.<sup>50</sup>

But you would not know that from the quilt. Each of Woodruff's four wives at the time and all three of his daughters contributed squares, their shared fabric suggesting a harmony that may or may not have existed.<sup>51</sup> Sarah Brown Woodruff, who gave birth to her second son in January 1857, pictured two birds tending a nest. Fifteen-year-old Phebe Jr. and her father's nineteen-year-old wife Emma cut their flowers from the same printed fabric. Fourteen-year-old Susan and the newest bride, Sarah Delight Woodruff, each stitched bright-breasted birds. Since neither Emma nor Sarah Delight yet had a child, they may have related to the Woodruff girls more like sisters than wives. Six-year-old Bulah Woodruff, Phebe's youngest child, completed the portrait of family harmony by offering a spotted cat sitting contentedly on a tasseled cushion.<sup>52</sup>

A quite different pair of squares issued from the family of sixty-year-old Abraham Hoagland, bishop of the Fourteenth Ward. Although his own diary is silent on the

<sup>47</sup> Hyde, in Gallup, *Reminiscences and Diary*.

<sup>48</sup> [Belinda Pratt], *Defence of Polygamy, by a Lady of Utah* (1854), in Hardy, *Doing the Works of Abraham*, 96–97.

<sup>49</sup> *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5: 14, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, xiv, 168. See also Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 56–58, which has excerpts on Sarah Delight Stocking Woodruff from unpublished family histories. Todd Compton, "The Wives of Wilford Woodruff," <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/7207/WWfamilies.htm>, lists eleven women presumably sealed to Woodruff during his lifetime.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 161–189; Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 39–58.

<sup>52</sup> I have drawn birth and marriage dates from familysearch.org. See also Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 39–58; and Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 167–168. Alexander surmises that even though Woodruff married teenagers, he refrained from sexual relations until they became older. At the age of nineteen, Emma Brown had her first child.



topic, other sources tell us there was trouble in the family.<sup>53</sup> On January 22, 1857, Woodruff preached a sermon in the Fourteenth Ward, telling the people to “sustain their Bishop” and reminding them that “a mans family was his throne & kingdom & no man had a right to interfere with him.” But he was not really talking about interference from *men*. His real complaint was with women, who “would spin street yarn & go from house to House & try to turn away women from their Husbands & stir up strife in families.”<sup>54</sup>

The issue would not go away. On March 23, Woodruff attended a “council with the Presidency & Twelve & others on the Case of Bishop Hoagland & his wife Agnes. She brought a Complaint against him that He did not pay attention enough to her & provide well enough for her.”<sup>55</sup> Converted to Mormonism around the same time as her brother, Apostle John Taylor, Agnes Taylor Rich joined Hoagland’s family as a plural wife in 1847, after leaving her first husband, a non-Mormon who reportedly had tried to put her in jail to keep her from going west. Taking her three children with her, she gave birth to five more by Hoagland. In 1857 she had six living children, ranging in age from seventeen to one. She was clearly overwhelmed.<sup>56</sup> Brigham had little sympathy. He was weary from counseling disgruntled couples, who lined up at his doors at all hours of the day. Among them were women asking for a “bill of divorce,” a document legal only in Utah.<sup>57</sup>

Historians now know that informal and extralegal separations and remarriage were far more common in the nineteenth century than either legal records or prescriptive literature would imply. Marriages broke up because wives as well as husbands ran away, and because increased mobility and multiple jurisdictions allowed them to do so.<sup>58</sup> The Mormon system brought such practices within a system of church law. During his administration, Brigham Young authorized 1,645 divorces, three-fourths of those before 1866. One scholar estimates that divorces among women married in polygamy were three times as common as among those in monogamous marriages. Divorce was perhaps a safety valve that made polygamy work.<sup>59</sup>

But in this case, Brigham resisted Agnes Hoagland’s plea. “There is many women

<sup>53</sup> “History and Journal of Abraham Hoagland,” 3, available as a PDF file on the George Q. Cannon Family History website, [http://www.georgeqannon.com/GQC\\_Docs.htm](http://www.georgeqannon.com/GQC_Docs.htm).

<sup>54</sup> *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 5: 11.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 5: 42, 43.

<sup>56</sup> Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 187–193. See also “Abraham Lucas Hoagland 1” at <http://www.georgeqannon.com/> (accessed August 3, 2009); Catherine Rich South Spencer, “Elizabeth Taylor Rich South,” November 1937, <http://allenhackworth.com/South/elizabethsouthbio.htm> (accessed October 3, 2009); and Abraham Hoagland and Samuel Taylor Rich files on [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org). The 1850 census lists “Agnes Taylor” in the Hoagland household along with children John, age 10; Elisabeth, 8; Samuel, 7; Abraham, 5; and Agnes, 1. The first three are presumably her children by her first husband, John Rich.

<sup>57</sup> *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 5: 7.

<sup>58</sup> Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000); Beverly Schwartzberg, “‘Lots of Them Did That’: Desertion, Bigamy, and Marital Fluidity in Late-Nineteenth-Century America,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 573–600; Schwartzberg, “Grass Widows, Barbarians, and Bigamists: Fluid Marriage in Late Nineteenth-Century America” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake City, 1987), 176, 177. See also Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City, 1989), 92, 93; Eugene E. Campbell and Bruce L. Campbell, “Divorce among Mormon Polygamists: Extent and Explanations,” in Quinn, *The New Mormon History*, 181–200. On divorce as a theme in anti-Mormon critiques, see Cott, *Public Vows*, 110–111.

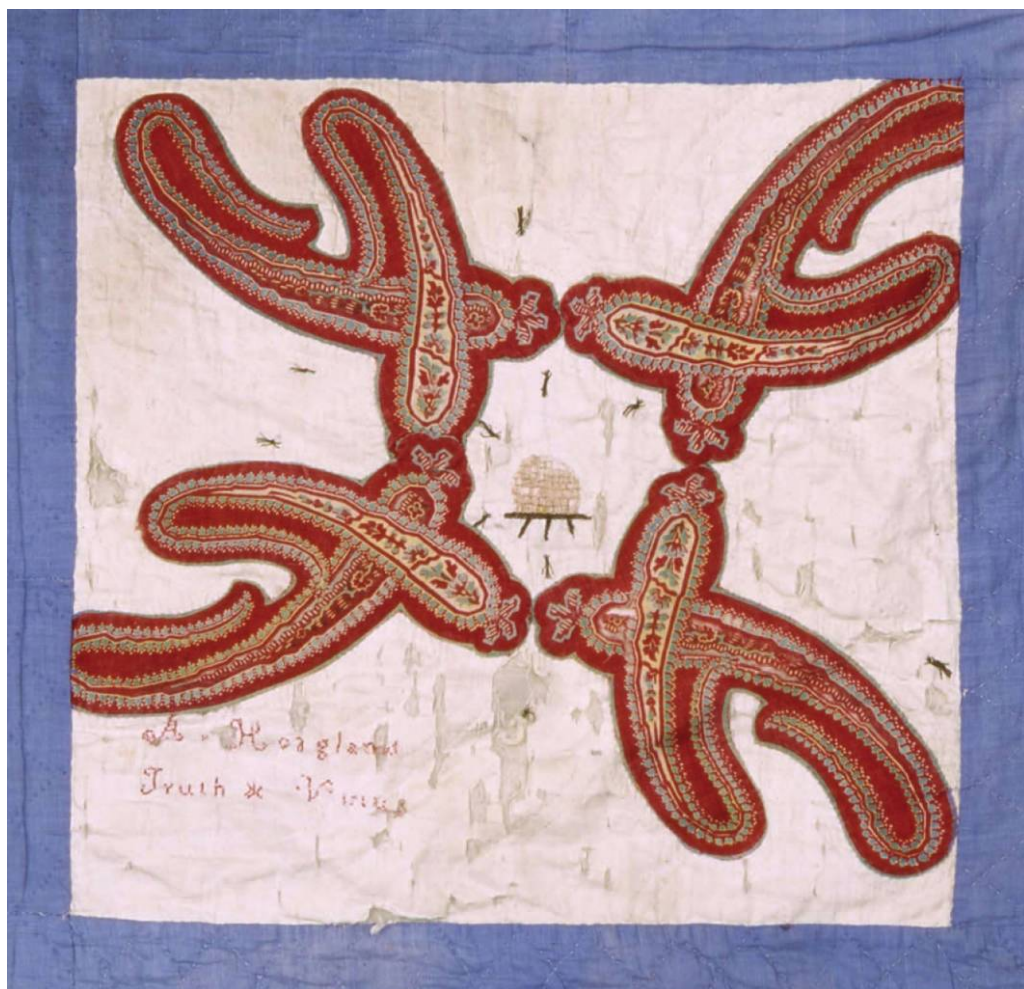


FIGURE 6: A. Hoagland, detail, Fourteenth Ward Album Quilt.

that care more about their Husband sleeping with them than they do about God or his kingdom,” he said, adding, “if a man was to submit to such women he would not be worth shucks in building up the kingdom of God.” From all appearances, Bishop Hoagland was a good bishop. If Agnes would follow his counsel, she would be saved. Her problem was that she wanted “pillow council instead of ward council.” He told her that if she never again got “pillow council,” she should simply “go home & do right.” Then he told Hoagland to “Baptize her if she wishes to be.”<sup>60</sup> That very day, Bishop Hoagland began to re-baptize members of his ward. Whether Agnes was among them, we do not know.

A square inscribed “A. Hoagland” is without question the least accomplished piece on the quilt. Cut-outs from a paisley print extend ominously from a womblike center where elongated black bees appear to be attacking a miniature hive. In halting letters just below the name are the words “Truth & Virtue.” Perhaps Agnes made the square in haste or despair. Or maybe, in an attempt to keep up with Bulah

<sup>60</sup> *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5: 42, 43.



FIGURE 7: E. A. Hoagland, detail, Fourteenth Ward Album Quilt.

Woodruff, her seven-year-old daughter, also named Agnes, did the work. Whatever its origins, it contrasts with the perfectly pieced Mariner's Compass made by the bishop's childless third wife, Ester Ann. Ester pieced forty-eight perfect points, then added eight-pointed stars and delicate buds in the four corners. In the center, she embroidered the comforting words "Father is at the helm. All is right." She surely meant God the Father, not any earthly man, though in Mormon theology there was a blurring of the two.

ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO way of knowing when the quilters began to work on their squares, the nine squares that give a month or day indicate a flurry of activity in July and August.<sup>61</sup> That was, of course, precisely the time when the threat of war became

<sup>61</sup> This dating of the quilt is reinforced by the presence of a square by Sarah Delight Woodruff, who

evident. Word of Parley Pratt's murder reached Salt Lake City on June 23. "We learn that all Hell is boiling over against the saints in Utah," Woodruff wrote. "The papers of the United States are filled with bitter revileings against us. The devil is exceeding mad."<sup>62</sup>

Papers from New York to San Francisco published details of the murder. In most accounts, Pratt appeared as a classic seducer, a man who, in the judgment of the *New York Herald*, "had great ability, which he perverted to the worst purposes." While living in San Francisco, he supposedly had enticed a respectable woman named Eleanor McLean to desert her children and become his ninth "concubine." When her husband, Hector McLean, sent his children to their grandparents in New Orleans, she followed them there, kidnapped them, and sped to a rendezvous with Pratt in Arkansas. McLean tracked them down and had Pratt arrested. When an Arkansas court dismissed the case, McLean had no choice but to kill Pratt.<sup>63</sup> "Thus did the hoary old villain meet a just retribution at the hands of a man whom he had most outrageously injured!" declared the writer for the San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*.<sup>64</sup> The *Fort Smith Herald* admitted, "We are pleased to see that such men—not men, demons—pursuing such a course cannot, with impunity, come into our midst, in Arkansas."<sup>65</sup>

It must have surprised readers to find a few days later a rejoinder from Eleanor McLean. Where the press portrayed Pratt as a seducer, she lauded him as an apostle of light. Where they pictured Hector McLean as an aggrieved husband, she condemned him as a drunken brute. Where they described her as a fallen woman, she insisted on her honesty and virtue. "I am free to declare, before angels and men, that Parley P. Pratt was innocent of the charges made against him."<sup>66</sup>

By August 1, Eleanor was back in Utah. At some point—perhaps shortly after her return, perhaps later—she completed a sixty-two-page handwritten account that in its intensity and detail reads like a pro-polygamy novel that never got published. In it, she sketched out a personal struggle carried out in a world of duplicity and danger. At one point, she described "officers, merchants, & clergymen" pushing into the room where she was being held awaiting trial. "The gentlemen apologized for crowding to see me, by saying they had never seen a Lady from Utah . . . I told them I was aware a living Mormon woman who had been so fortunate as to escape from Salt Lake City was a great curiosity, but they must not take me as a fair specimen

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was married on July 28 and therefore could not have signed as a "Woodruff" before then. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5: 70, July 28, 1857.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 5: 61.

<sup>63</sup> "Obituary," *New York Herald*, May 27, 1857, 4; "Another Startling Tragedy," *New York Herald*, May 28, 1857, 8. Reports of the story appeared in many newspapers, including the *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel* (Augusta, Ga.), May 29, 1857; *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (New York), June 6, 1857, 3; and the *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), July 1, 1857, col. A. The most detailed secondary account is Steven Pratt, "Eleanor McLean and the Murder of Parley P. Pratt," *BYU Studies* 15 (Winter 1975): 1–27. I also thank Patrick G. Mason for allowing me to read his unpublished paper "Honor, the Unwritten Law, and Extralegal Violence: Contextualizing Parley Pratt's Murder" (given at the Mormon History Association Conference, Springfield, Ill., May 21–24, 2009), and Terryl Givens and Matthew Grow for sharing a chapter from *Parley P. Pratt: The Paul of Mormonism* (forthcoming from Oxford University Press).

<sup>64</sup> *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin*, July 1, 1857, col. A.

<sup>65</sup> *Fort Smith Herald*, May 16, 1857, reprinted in the *New York Herald*, May 28, 1857, 8, col. E.

<sup>66</sup> *New York Herald*, June 9, 1857, 2, col. A.

for they had so nearly killed me that I could not be like myself.”<sup>67</sup> Her sarcasm betrayed both her anger and her awareness of the self-righteousness of those who claimed to be protecting Latter-day Saint women by assaulting their choices.

To the judge who asked if Pratt had lured her away from her family, she responded that long before she heard of Mormonism, McLean had driven “happiness from our home by imbibing that spirit that comes in bottles . . . Who but a wife knows bedroom scenes. It is true if I had gone for my neighbours and brought them to see him lying with his head hanging nearly off the bed, one coat sleeve off, and the other on, one boot off and the other on, and the vomit over his boots and all richly perfumed with old bourbon, (or some other well known beverage that adorns the shelves of the fashionable saloon) then I might have hundreds of witnesses to what I now state.” But she was ever a faithful wife, keeping her husband’s failings to herself, cleaning up after him, and providing clean clothing and a warm breakfast before he left for the day. And if he chose to preach a temperance sermon to his fellow lodge members at night, no one would know his secret.<sup>68</sup> When challenged with the assertion that polygamy was unjust by giving one man sixty wives and leaving fifty-nine others without, she had a quick response: What virtuous woman would not prefer one-sixtieth of a man like Pratt to all of a husband like McLean?<sup>69</sup>

Eleanor did not contribute to the quilt, but Kezia Pratt, the sister wife who was closest to her, contributed one of the two American eagles on the quilt. Kezia cut her dignified bird from pre-printed fabric, then stitched it onto a plain background with hundreds of invisible stitches. The thirteen stars and the motto *e pluribus unum* proclaim her allegiance to the United States, even though she had been born in England. The print she used was probably a decade or two older than the quilt, suggesting that it had been saved for years in someone’s scrap bag for just such an important project.<sup>70</sup> Aura Annette Cummings, who made the second eagle, used plain bright cottons to construct a jaunty bird with flamboyant striped legs. Designs like these, based on the spread eagle in the Great Seal of the United States, were common in American folk art from the 1830s to the end of the century.<sup>71</sup> For Latter-day Saints, however, eagles had complex meanings. As early as 1839, a Mormon poet described the country’s treatment of Mormons as a “foul stain on the Eagle’s crest.”

<sup>67</sup> Eleanor J. McComb [McLean Pratt], Account of the Death of Parley P. Pratt, ca. 1857, MS 525, LDS Church History Library and Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah, 7–9.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–15.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Born in Cheshire, England, in 1812, she was baptized by Parley P. Pratt in 1842, then married him shortly after arriving in Salt Lake City. The fabric she used, which came in different colorways, may have been manufactured in England for the American market. Linda Eaton, *Quilts in a Material World: Selections from the Winterthur Collection* (New York, 2007), 160, 161; and e-mail communication from Linda Eaton, July 23, 2009. On other uses of the American eagle, see Eaton, *Quilts in a Material World*, 93, 109; on politics in quilts, see chap. 6. For sales of artifacts made from the same fabric, see “Garth’s Auction” in the database of past auction prices at <http://www.prices4antiques.com/>; and “Auction Fall 2006” at [http://www.cowanauctions.com/past\\_sales\\_view\\_item.asp?itemid=36136](http://www.cowanauctions.com/past_sales_view_item.asp?itemid=36136) (accessed July 18, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 95–97. On eagle designs, see Celia Y. Oliver, *55 Famous Quilts from the Shelburne Museum in Full Color* (New York, 1990), 46; Amelia Peck, *American Quilts and Coverlets in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1990), 48–49; Pat Ferrero, Elaine Hedges, and Julie Silber, *Hearts and Hands: The Influence of Quilts on American Society* (San Francisco, 1987), 20. See also variants in the eagle motif from the 1830s to the present by searching the Quilt Index, <http://www.quiltindex.org/>.



FIGURE 8: Kezia Pratt, detail, Fourteenth Ward Album Quilt.

Others insisted that Latter-day Saints were the true custodians of liberty, and that with them the American eagle had “fled to the mountains.”<sup>72</sup> No piece of needlework constructed in Utah in 1857 could have avoided that meaning.

On August 16, a day Woodruff considered “one of the most important days that the Church & kingdom of God has seen in this dispensation,” Brigham Young addressed the assembled saints, telling them that the “United States had turned mob & were breaking the Constitution of the United States & we would now have to go forth & defend it & also the kingdom of God.” He asked if they were willing to give up all they had accomplished in the past ten years, lay waste to their own homes and farms, and flee into the mountains. In Woodruff’s words, “The shout of Yes rent the air of the assembled thousands.”<sup>73</sup> One female member of the congregation wrote

<sup>72</sup> “Oh Liberty! O Sound Once Delightful,” in Eliza R. Snow, *The Complete Poetry*, ed. Jill Mulvay Derr and Karen Lynn Davidson (Provo, 2009), 85; *Deseret News*, August 3, 1850, 3, 5. Snow used the same image again in “The Fourth of July 1861” and “National Anthem, for the Opening of the Theater in Great Salt Lake City,” in *The Complete Poetry*, 674, 631.

<sup>73</sup> *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 5: 69, 74, 75–80.



FIGURE 9: A. A. Cummings, detail, Fourteenth Ward Album Quilt.

her fiancé in California, “I have never saw such unity in all my life.”<sup>74</sup> Unity was also a theme for the quilters. “United we Stand Divided We Fall,” Elizabeth Johnson wrote on her square. “United we Stand City of Brigham,” Hannah Morley wrote, making clear which leader she was prepared to follow.

On August 30, Apostle John Taylor gave a powerful sermon on the relationship of the Latter-day Saints to the American tradition of natural rights. The first part of his narrative could have come from any Fourth of July oration in the country, but he moved on to recount the innocence of the Latter-day Saints in their current struggle. “We have turned this desert into a flourishing field, and the desert has blossomed as the rose, and God has blessed our labours. And whom have we interfered with? Have we gone over to the States and interfered with them?” Yet just as monarchs had abused the rights of their subjects and Americans had cheated and oppressed their Indian neighbors, government officials were now denying Mormons their rights.

<sup>74</sup> Harriet Ann Thatcher to William B. Preston, August 5, 1857; MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 236, 237. Either the letter is misdated or there were several meetings at which Young asked the congregation whether they would support him in abandoning their homes.



FIGURE 10: Leonora Taylor, detail, Fourteenth Ward Album Quilt.

“What are we going to do, then?” he asked. “We are going to establish the kingdom of God upon the earth.”<sup>75</sup> In the square she contributed to the quilt, Taylor’s wife Leonora made the same point more succinctly. She built the first five letters of her motto from eighty-nine pieces of cloth, the smallest only one-quarter inch square, then finished the sentence in crewel embroidery: “In God Is Our Trust.”<sup>76</sup>

Through the month of September, someone in the Fourteenth Ward Female Relief Society must have been busy stitching all the squares together with bright blue sashing. By the end of the month, it was ready for display. Then on September 29, shocking news arrived from the southern part of the territory. Wilford Woodruff reported that John D. Lee had come into the city with “an awful tale of Blood.” Over

<sup>75</sup> John Taylor, “The Rights of Mormonism . . . Delivered in the Bowery, Great Salt Lake City, August 30, 1857,” *Journal of Discourses* 5 (1858): 182–192.

<sup>76</sup> Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 33.



a hundred California emigrants had been slaughtered at Mountain Meadows. Only a few very young children had survived. Lee blamed the slaughter on the Paiutes, who were supposedly enraged by the immigrants' having poisoned a spring and fed them tainted beef. But he betrayed his own feelings when he connected the immigrants with the persecution of the Saints. Some of them "belonged to the mob in Missouri & Illinois," he claimed. He went so far as to say that "He did not think their was a drop of innocent Blood in their Camp for he had too [two] of their Children in his house & he Could not get but one to kneel down in prayer time & the other would laugh at her for doing it & they would swear like pirates." Years later, Lee would hang for his role in the massacre, but at this point, people in Salt Lake apparently believed him. To the quilters, it must have seemed a terrifying sequel to their own work in making clothing for the Paiutes. For his part, Woodruff believed that the slaughter was the beginning of the terrible struggle predicted in the Book of Revelations before the second coming of Christ. "The scene of Blood has Comenced & Joseph said we should see so much of it that it would make our hearts sick."<sup>77</sup>

The next day he went to the Agricultural Fair to judge the fruits and flowers. Although his diary does not mention it, the newspaper tells us that the Fourteenth Ward album quilt won a first prize "for design."<sup>78</sup>

THE FEDERAL ARMY did not make it to Utah that fall, having been stopped by snow and the harassment of Utah troops, but in the spring the inhabitants of Salt Lake City did leave their homes, just as Brigham Young had asked, filling them with straw and leaving behind someone to ignite them should the army attempt to touch their property. In one of the strangest occupations in history, the federal troops marched straight through the silent city and camped in another part of the valley. Within a few weeks, the citizens returned to take up their lives and their long struggle with the U.S. government over whose God, whose economy, whose community, whose families mattered. Although the Relief Society once again disbanded, the quilt survived.

The Fourteenth Ward quilt is an American album. It is American not only because it was made in a territory of the United States from materials and patterns common in other parts of the country, nor because it was displayed at an agricultural fair like those in other states, but because it portrays aspirations and contradictions embedded in the history of the American republic. The quilters stitched mottoes so familiar as to be virtually invisible: In God We Trust. By Industry We Thrive. United We Stand. The Tree Is Known by Its Fruit. But through their lives, they exemplified the fraught meanings of those words. Like other Americans, Latter-day Saints believed that righteous families were the bulwark of the nation. That their homes and families were under attack only reinforced their sense of mission.

The Fourteenth Ward quilt is American in its melding of piety and gentility, domesticity and patriotism. It is also American in its portrayal of a world without

<sup>77</sup> *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5: 102–103, September 29, 1857.

<sup>78</sup> *Deseret News*, October 21, 1857, 8.

Indians, an oasis of potted plants and beehives in the midst of an American desert. Like other Americans, Latter-day Saints appropriated Indian land, established Indian missions, adopted Indian children, enlisted Indian men in their own conflicts with their enemies, and forgot Indians when they could. The quilt is American as well in its origins in a female voluntary society that in supporting the dominant values of its own community found itself at odds both with its male leaders and with a larger American public. Latter-day Saint women supported their church, sustained the local economy, gave generously of their time and talents for the public good, and sometimes found themselves without voice or power either within the United States or in their own towns and territory.

But they used the resources that they had. In 1861, Agnes Hoagland succeeded in divorcing her husband. The next year, at the age of forty-one, she married a twenty-four-year-old German immigrant named Wilhelm Schwartz, and gave birth to three more children. She did not leave Utah or her church.<sup>79</sup> Her story is unusual, but not unique. Eight of the fifty-nine married quilters (14 percent), including Agnes's sister wife Ester Ann, were eventually divorced or separated from their husbands.<sup>80</sup> In this too they were American.

The quilters were American in another way as well. Like generations of the down-trodden before them, they used their own history of oppression to claim their rights as Americans. In 1870, Phebe Woodruff and other members of a newly constituted Female Relief Society participated in an Indignation Meeting to protest a renewed federal assault on plural marriage. In the process, they proved themselves "strong-minded women" by asking for and receiving the vote from the Territorial Legislature. As Willmirth East, one of their fellow quilters, explained, she had always wanted "a voice in the politics of the nation."<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 188.

<sup>80</sup> The women were Ann Carrigan (Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt*, 89), Mary Emma Hill (*ibid.*, 104–105), Agnes Hoagland (*ibid.*, 187–189), E. A. Hoagland (*ibid.*, 193), Elizabeth Horne (*ibid.*, 115), Matilda Rhoads (*ibid.*, 163), Josephine Richards (*ibid.*, 60), and Hannah Winder (*ibid.*, 143–144). The Utah Gravestones website has a photograph of a gravestone marked Esther A. Hoagland, Dec. 5, 1826–Sept. 19, 1910, <http://www.utahgravestones.org/view.php?id=14275> (accessed August 3, 2009).

<sup>81</sup> Lola Van Wagenen, *Sister-Wives and Suffragists: Polygamy and the Politics of Woman Suffrage, 1870–1896* (Provo, 2003), 7.

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