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Homespun Respectability: Silk Worlds, Women's Work, and the Making of Mormon
Identity

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Sasha P. Coles

Committee in charge:

Professor Lisa Jacobson, Chair

Professor Erika Rappaport

Professor James F. Brooks

Professor Randolph E. Bergstrom

Professor David Walker

March 2021

The dissertation of Sasha P. Coles is approved.

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Lisa Jacobson, Committee Chair

March 2021

Homespun Respectability: Silk Worlds, Women's Work, and the Making of Mormon
Identity

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Sasha P. Coles

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Many other people made essential contributions. At the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), my arguments became much clearer after receiving feedback during meetings of the Gender and Sexualities Research Cluster, convened by Jarett Henderson. Sarah Case always made me feel valued as a scholar, teacher, and public history practitioner. Eileen Boris, Jane De Hart, Ann Marie Plane, and Patricia Cline Cohen showed up for me on many occasions. Darcy Ritzau and Rhiannon Parisse helped me find solutions to seemingly intractable problems.

After I moved to Salt Lake City in August 2019, Colleen McDannell, W. Paul Reeve, Ben Cohen, Nadja Durbach, Greg Smoak, Ginger Smoak, Bob Goldberg, Erika George, Beth James, and others at the University of Utah gave me a sense of community. Annual conferences of the Mormon History Association, the Western History Association, and the Western Association for Women Historians gave me the opportunity to circulate and refine my ideas. Thank you to the staff who made those meetings possible and the panelists and audience members for their insights.

It takes money and time to research and write. Fellowships from the University of Utah's Tanner Humanities Center and UCSB's Graduate Division freed me up to focus exclusively on my dissertation. Grants from the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute, the Huntington Library, the Coalition for Western Women's History, the Mormon Women's History Initiative, as well as UCSB's Walter H. Capps Center, History Associates, and Department of History made it possible for to take trips to conferences and archives. Heather Seybolt and Daniel Liepins graciously hosted me during my time at the Huntington. I would also like to express my gratitude for UAW 2865, the union that represents graduate students across the University of California system. In a world that is so often hostile to movements for economic justice, the leaders and members of UAW 2865 have worked unceasingly to secure healthcare, livable wages, and humane teaching conditions for me and many other students.

I have more folks to thank for their intellectual and emotional labors. Anne Berryhill and Jennifer Barkdull at the Church History Library and Tony Castro, Doug Misner, and Heidi Stringham at the Research Center for Utah State Archives and Utah State History walked me through bureaucratic procedures and brought my attention to hidden gems. So did Peter J. Blodgett and Emmy Zhang at the Huntington Library, Clint Pumphrey at Utah State

University, Ryan Lee at Brigham Young University, and Alan Morrell at the Church History Library.

This project would look a lot different if it were not for the welcoming and sharp people working in Mormon Studies. Matt Godfrey, Charlotte Hansen Terry, Elizabeth Mott, Kristine L. Wright, Vinna Chintaram, Alexa Himonas, Janan Graham-Russell, Hazel O'Brien, Amy Hoyt, Farina King, Jenny Pulsipher, Brittany Romanello, Alison Halford, Kate Holbrook, Laurie Maffly-Kipp, Brennan Keegan, Jennifer Reeder, Barbara Jones Brown, Cristina Rosetti, Luli Josephson, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, and Jill Mulvey Derr influenced my thinking and kept me from making embarrassing errors. Recently, I went to southern Utah with Hannah Jung, Joseph Stuart, Jeff Turner, and Janiece Johnson, after getting tested for COVID-19. We made good food, took in breathtaking scenery, and got lost among some rocks. Before, during, and after this trip, they made it possible for me to finish this dissertation in a new city during a pandemic.

That brings me to my main point. As much as I felt alone when writing this dissertation, I never was. Colleagues, friends, and family were always there to keep me company. I will never forget how my fears about graduate school quickly dissipated when I met the other members of my PhD cohort at UCSB. They all showed me great kindness from the very first time we got together. Lisa Meyers Johnson, Mariel Aquino, Kashia Arnold, and Ryan Minor became important fixtures of my personal life and gave me advice and energy at key moments.

Many other people at UCSB brought joy to the grinding experience of graduate school. My charming and smart office mates—Gokh Alshaif, Kandra Polatis, Caitlin Koford, and Laura Hooton—modeled a compassionate professionalism that I am always trying to emulate. I am lucky to have shared meals, hotel rooms, long car rides, and ideas in and out of the classroom with Christopher MacMahon, David McIntosh, Sergey Salushchev, Shane Sprandio, Neil Johnson, Serge Ferrari, Thomas Franke, Stephanie Seketa, Fang He, Rana Razek, Nicole Rehnberg, Nicole de Silva, Elizabeth Schmidt, Andreina Soto, Mika Thornburg, Amy Fallas, Mattie Webb, Nora Kassner, Sarah Dunne, Giulia Giamboni, and many others. These folks taught me a lot about the past. They also showed me how to be better in the present. Seeing some of these faces at my dissertation defense in February 2021 was the perfect end to a long journey.

The lasting friendships that I made at UCSB made graduate school worth it. I am certain that these are the best people in the world. The Department of History assigned Holly Roose to be my mentor in 2013. I got lucky with that one. Over many, many cups of coffee, Holly gave me good and honest advice and unyielding support. I will always cherish the times that I got to sip wine, meander along the Goleta coastline, and, on the rare occasion and in quite a spectacular fashion, close down Santa Barbara bars with Caitlin Rathe, Laura Moore, Anna Katharina Rudolph, Sarah Hanson-Kegerreis, and Julie Johnson. The afternoons and evenings that I spent with them and others—Andrew Elrod, Chris Kegerreis, Eric Massie, Jesse Ronald Halvorsen, David Baillargeon, Kit Smemo, Samir Sonti, Morag Murphy, Will Murphy, Dusty Hoesly, Clio Lu, Jackson Warkentin, Brian Tyrrell, Tim Paulson, Sean Piers,

and Casey Ortiz—at Bagel Café, Cajé, the Funk Zone, West Campus Family Housing, and the beloved local Chili’s delighted me to no end. Heather Berg and Sarah Johnson loom large for me, both then and now, as steadfast, kind, and clever comrades. Several graduate students with families made time to welcome me into their lives, all while grappling with the demands of school and parenthood. I am lucky to know Ryan, Brittany, Chloe, and Ben Minor; Will, Lauren, Leslie, and Bradley Thompson; Maria Fedorova, Paul Warden, and their kids, Sasha and Amélie; and Brian, Stephanie, Matteo, and Giada Griffith. And let’s not forget my furry friends. Watching Gus, Finch, Gracie, and Charlie romp through fields, chase seagulls, eat sticks, sit under tables (not always patiently), and roll in dead things on the beach made my day over and over again.

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My family helped make this entire process livable, even enjoyable. My parents, Jeri and Jeff, attended my talks, listened to my concerns, and came to my aid without hesitation. My passion for research and appreciation for family history comes from them, as well as from grandparents on both sides. My in-laws, Debbie and Claes Jansson and Les and Tracey Stephens, have always made me feel at home. I am lucky that my talented siblings—Lauren Coles, Jennifer Condliffe, Jackson Stephens, and Carlie and Chris Steele—know how to have a good time. I have shared so many fun and memorable moments with them. My nieces and nephews—Aspen, Maddie, Colton, Brayden, Ellie, Alexea, Jacob, and Chloe—kept me away from my work long enough for me to remember that I am not just my work. The heartiest thank you that I can muster goes to my husband, Cody. My relationship with him is the most treasured thing that I am leaving graduate school with. No amount of home-cooked meals or happy hours could ever repay Cody for all that he has given me.



Curriculum vitae

Sasha P. Coles

March 2021

EDUCATION

University of California, Santa Barbara

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2015-Present PhD Candidate, US History

- Dissertation: “Homespun Respectability: Silk Worlds, Women’s Work, and the Making of Mormon Identity”
- Committee: Lisa Jacobson (chair), Erika Rappaport, James F. Brooks, Randy Bergstrom, David Walker

2013-15 MA, US History

Arizona State University

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2009-13 BA, History, *summa cum laude*

- Minors in Art History and Women and Gender Studies
- Graduate, Barrett Honors College Program

PUBLICATIONS

Refereed Journal Articles

- 2020 “A Common Struggle for Refinement’: Mormon Women, Railroad Reconstruction, and the Politics of Respectability in Salt Lake City, 1869-1877.” *The Journal of Women’s History* (Forthcoming, Fall 2021)
- 2013 “You Look Like a Boy’: Gendered Representations of Hair Loss in Books for Children with Cancer.” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 126-142.

Edited Collection

- 2020 Boris, Eileen and **Sasha Coles**, co-editors, *Work, Poverty, and Policy*, a special issue of the *Women’s History Review* (May 2020).

Book Reviews

- 2020 Review of Konden Smith Hansen, *Frontier Religion: Mormons & America, 1857-1907* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019) in the *Western Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 1. Spring 2021.
- 2020 Review of Clyde A. Milner II and Brian Q. Cannon, eds., *Reconstruction and Mormon America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019) in the *Journal of Mormon History* 46, no. 4. October 2020.

- 2019 Review of Sam Wineburg, *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018) in the *Public Historian* 41, no. 3. August 2019.
- 2018 Review of Julia Bricklin, *America's Best Female Sharpshooter: The Rise and Fall of Lillian Frances Smith* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017) in *Great Plains Quarterly* 38, no. 4. Fall 2018.
- 2018 Review of Mark W. Robbins, *Middle Class Union: Organizing the 'Consuming Public' in Post-World War I America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017) in the *Michigan Historical Review* 44, no. 1. Spring 2018.
- 2018 Review of Rachel Cope et al., eds., *Mormon Women's History: Beyond Biography* (Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017) in *Reading Religion*. May 2018.

PUBLIC HISTORY PROJECTS

2017-Present Founder and Chief Historian, The Enchanted Archives

- Created digital public history project that introduce users to the historical roots of the food, rides, characters, and designs at Disney parks in California and Florida
- Developed twenty articles and two walking tours for the platform
- Generated location-enabled maps in consultation with GIS specialist
- Secured and edited contributions from other scholars and public historians
- Facilitated all financial planning, grant applications, and social media outreach
- Cited in January 2021 *Smithsonian Magazine* article on changes to Disney's Jungle Cruise attractions

2019 Researcher, Relevancy & History Project, California State Parks

- Lead researcher for the Carpinteria State Beach site from January to July
- Developed a history walking tour and activity for fourth graders in conjunction with the Every Kid Outdoors program

2016-17 Assistant Reviews Editor, The Public Historian

- Utilized database to locate reviewers for books, exhibits, films, and digital media
- Copyedited review submissions and journal article manuscripts when necessary
- Managed review publication schedule from start to finish
- Assisted managing editor with data analysis and infographic development
- Served on journal's editorial board

FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS, HONORS

- 2019-21 Fellow, The Maxwell Institute's Consultation on Latter-day Saint Women in Comparative Perspective, Brigham Young University
- 2019-20 Tanner Humanities Center Fellow in Latter-day Saints Studies, University of Utah
- 2020 Student Award, Mormon Women's History Initiative
- 2020 Regent's Dissertation Fellowship, History Department, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2020 Organization of American Historians Presidents' Travel Fund for Emerging Historians Grant
- 2020 Travel Grant, Labor and Working-Class History Association
- 2020 Travel Grant, Berkshire Conference of Women Historians
- 2019 Graduate Student Prize, Western History Association
- 2019 Travel Grant, Mormon History Association
- 2018 Travel Grant, Coalition for Western Women's History
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- 2017 William H. Ellison Best Graduate Student Paper Prize, History Associates, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2017 Van Gelderen American West Graduate Fellowship, History Associates, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2017 Charles Redd Fellowship Award in Western American Studies, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, Brigham Young University
- 2017 Travel Grant, Graduate Student Association, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2017 Travel Grant, History Department, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2016 Wilbur Jacobs Frontier Studies Prize, History Associates, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2016 Robert L. Kelley Public History Fellowship, History Associates, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2015 Conference Travel Grant, American Society for Ethnohistory
- 2015 Dick Cook Memorial Fellowship, History Associates, University of California, Santa Barbara

SELECTED CONFERENCE ACTIVITY

Sessions Organized

- 2021 "A Certain Disease Among the Silkworms": *N. bombycis* and the Global Prospects of Mormon-made Silk in the Utah Territory, 1860s-1875," Agricultural History Society Conference, June 1-5
- 2020 "Monuments and Mulberry Trees: Mementos of the Mormon Silk Industry and the Legacies of Latter-day Saint Colonialism," Western History Association Conference, October 14-17
- 2020 "Utah Silk and Memories of its 'Ardent Supporters,'" Mormon History Association Conference, June 4-6 [Rescheduled due to COVID-19]
- 2020 "A Glorious Industry: Mormon Women and the Great Basin Silk Business," The Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, May 21-23 [Cancelled due to COVID-19]
- 2020 "Serving California's Publics: A Roundtable," Western Association of Women Historians Conference, April 23-25 [Cancelled due to COVID-19]
- 2020 "'A Gold Mine in Embryo': Mormon Women, Silk Work, and Transnational Business in the Nineteenth-Century American West," Organization of American Historians Conference, April 2-5 [Cancelled due to COVID-19]
- 2020 "'The World of Yesterday, Tomorrow, and Fantasy': Digital Walking Tours of the Disney Parks," National Council on Public History Conference, March 18-21 [Cancelled due to COVID-19]
- 2019 "'The Whole World for a Market': Great Basin Entrepreneurs and the European Silkworm Crisis of the 1860s," Western History Association Conference, October 16-19
- 2019 "'Disneyfication' Revisited: Public History and The Walt Disney Company," National Council on Public History Conference, March 27-30
- 2018 "'A Nation's Wealth Surrounds a Worm': Mormon Women and the Utah Silk Commission, 1896-1910s," Western History Association Conference, October 17-20
- 2017 "The Pioneer Spirit: Nation Building, Heritage Tourism, and the LDS Church," Western History Association Conference, November 1-4

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- 2020 "Mormon Entrepreneurs and Missionaries in the Nineteenth-Century Global Silk Trade," World History Association Conference, June 25-27 [Cancelled due to COVID-19]
- 2020 "The World of Yesterday, Tomorrow, and Fantasy: Digital Storytelling at the Disney Parks," Invited Talk, Digital Matters Lab, University of Utah, March 30 [Cancelled due to COVID-19]
- 2020 "Mormon Women and Latter-day Saint Secularism," Invited Talk, New Directions in North American Religion Symposium, University of California, Santa Barbara, February 29
- 2019 "Reconstruction by Rail: Mormon Women, Silk Work, and the Politics of Fashion," Mormon History Association Conference, June 6-9

- 2018 “EnchantedArchives.com: Using Disney To Teach History,” National Council on Public History Conference, April 18-21
- 2017 “Building the Kingdom: Anti-Polygamy Legislation and the Silk Industry in Utah, 1860-1904,” Western Association of Women Historians Conference, April 27-29
- 2016 “This is the Place: Articulating a Mormon Pioneer Past,” American Society for Ethnohistory Conference, November 9-12

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Utah

Instructor of Record

- HIST 4990: Undergraduate Research Seminar, Utah Women’s History (Spring 2021, Online)
- HIST 4650: History of the U.S. West (Fall 2020, Online)

University of California, Santa Barbara

Instructor of Record

- HIST 17B: The American People, 1830s-1919 (Summer 2021, Online)
- HIST 159C: Women in Twentieth Century American History (Spring 2021, Online)
- HIST 159B: Women in American History, 1800-1900 (Summer 2018)
- WRIT 2: Introduction to Composition (Fall 2018, Winter 2019, Spring 2019)

Teaching Assistant

- HIST 4C: Western Civilization, 1715-Present (Spring 2016)
- HIST 5: History of the Present (Fall 2015)
- HIST 2C: World History, 1700-Present (Summer 2015)
- HIST 17C: The American People, 1917-Present (Spring 2014, Spring 2015)
- HIST 17B: The American People, 1830s-1919 (Winter 2015, Winter 2016)
- HIST 17A: The American People, 1600s-1830s (Fall 2014)

SERVICE

Service to the Profession

- 2020-Present Member, Committee on Assault Response and Educational Strategies, Western History Association
- 2020-Present Member, Program Committee, National Council on Public History 2021 Conference
- 2019-Present Co-chair, Local Arrangements Committee, National Council on Public History 2021 Conference
- 2018-Present Member, Mentoring Committee, Coalition for Western Women’s History
- 2019-20 Member, Education Committee, California Preservation Foundation

- 2019-20
2019 Member, Program Committee, Mormon History Association 2020 Conference
Webinar Speaker, *“Take me on a Trip”*: *The Architectural Styles & History Behind Disney’s Attractions*, hosted by the California Preservation Foundation, September 18
- 2018-19 Recurring guest on the Main Street Style Podcast, the “first ever female-led theme park and fandom style podcast”
- 2017-18 Conference Planning Assistant, International Federation for Research in Women’s History (IFRWH) 2018 Conference, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, August 12-15, 2018
- 2015 Conference Planning Assistant, Conference in Honor of Patricia Cline Cohen, University of California, Santa Barbara, May 1-3

University Service

- 2020-Present Mentor, American Association of University Women Mentorship Program, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2016-18 Representative, Chancellor’s Committee on the Status of Women, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2016-17 Graduate Assistant, Campus Advocacy, Resources & Education (CARE) Office, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 2013-15 Officer, Graduate Student Association, University of California, Santa Barbara

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Coalition for Western Women’s History
 Coordinating Council for Women’s History
 Labor and Working-Class History Association
 Mormon History Association
 National Council on Public History
 Organization of American Historians
 Western History Association
 World History Association

RELEVANT SKILLS

Intermediate Spanish (reading)
 Basic use of Adobe Suite software

Abstract

“Homespun Respectability: Silk Worlds, Women’s Work, and the Making of Mormon Identity”

by

Sasha P. Coles

This dissertation examines silk production in western Latter-day Saint (Mormon) settlements from the 1850s to the early 1900s. After Latter-day Saints began to colonize the Great Basin region—the homelands of Ute, Shoshone, Paiute, and Goshute peoples—in the late 1840s, church president and prophet Brigham Young tasked his followers with building a self-sufficient economy independent of “Gentile,” or non-Mormon, influences. Young and other male church leaders envisioned silk as a viable source of employment for women, children, and other household “dependents.” From the 1850s to the early 1900s, Mormon women attempted to plant mulberry trees, raise silkworms, and produce cocoons, thread, and cloth of a high-enough quality to use and sell. By most measurements, they failed. Even so, there is much to learn about Mormon women’s working lives, market entanglements, and political engagements from this silk experiment.

Women Latter-day Saints mobilized silk work and goods to satisfy a range of needs and desires. The industry provided them with a venue to make their own money, shape transnational labor and commodity markets, and understand ever-changing environmental conditions. These and other material realities shaped the cultural values assigned to

homemade silk. Mormon women embraced the exotic mystery typically attached to silk imports from “the Orient” as well as the image of silk as tasteful, refined, and suitable for middle-class women. They also generated meanings unique to their religious, political, and economic circumstances. At church assemblies, homemade silk laces and dresses communicated obedience to church leaders, commitment to building God’s earthly kingdom, and their status as an elect, “chosen” people. In public forums like the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, Mormon-made silk communicated church members’ white, middle-class respectability, American citizenship qualities, and central role in bringing “civilization” and “productivity” to the Great Basin region. As producers and consumers of silk, Mormon women reconciled tensions between economic cooperation and competition, market isolation and integration, and religious exceptionalism and national belonging. By centering Mormon women’s economic experiences, this dissertation brings to light how gendered acts of production and consumption shaped constructions of Mormon identity and how economic ideas and exchanges animated debates over religion, sovereignty, and citizenship in the American West.

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Introduction—Mormon-Made Silk, Past and Present

On November 21, 2019, an exhibit titled *Sisters for Suffrage* opened at the Church History Museum—an institution sanctioned and sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—in Salt Lake City, Utah. According to promotional materials, this exhibit celebrates the “pioneering role” of Latter-day Saint (or Mormon) women and the Relief Society, their church auxiliary organization, in local and national suffrage activism.¹ This exhibit includes cocoons, a silk handkerchief, and other remnants of the nineteenth-century Mormon silk experiment. A life-size cut-out of a black silk dress belonging to famed women’s rights advocate Susan B. Anthony is the star of the show. Anthony opposed the church’s practice of polygamy, or a man marrying multiple women, but she celebrated the passage of Utah Territory’s equal suffrage law in 1870 and forged allegiances with Mormon women suffragists. These relationships provoked criticism from Anthony’s friends and created deep rifts within and between pro-suffrage organizations. Even so, Anthony continued to mentor Mormon women and vehemently defend their voting rights.²

¹ “Sisters for Suffrage: How Utah Women Won the Vote,” Church History, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, accessed November 29, 2020, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/landing/museum/sisters-for-suffrage?lang=eng>. Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms “Latter-day Saints” and “Mormons” to refer to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Mormonism” to refer to their belief system, and “the church” to refer to their religious institution. I am aware of church president Russell M. Nelson’s August 2018 statement about a revelation regarding the divine importance of using the church’s full name. The church has updated its official style guide to discourage the use of labels like “Mormon Church,” “Mormon,” and “Mormonism.” I respect this preferred usage in the present. In this dissertation about nineteenth- and early twentieth-century people, I use the terms that they used when writing and talking about the church and its members. For information about and responses to the style guide changes, see Tad Walch, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Issues New Name Guidelines, Dropping Terms Mormon, LDS in Most Uses,” *Deseret News*, August 16, 2018, <https://www.deseret.com/2018/8/16/20651374/the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints-issues-new-name-guidelines-dropping-terms-mormon-lds>; Julia Jacobs, “Stop Saying ‘Mormon,’ Church Leader Says. But Is the Real Name Too Long?,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/18/us/mormon-latter-day-saints-name.html>.

² Joan Iversen, “The Mormon-Suffrage Relationship: Personal and Political Quandaries,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 11, no. 2/3 (1990): 8–16. For more on Mormon women and the suffrage movement, see Carol Cornwall Madsen, ed., *Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870-1896* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1997).



Figure 1: Susan B. Anthony with Utah suffrage leaders in 1895
Courtesy of the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

In the *Sisters for Suffrage* exhibit, Susan B. Anthony's black silk dress captures the friendships and ideological ties that bound her and Mormon women together. The board members of the Utah Silk Commission (USC) gifted Anthony with the dress's fabric, which had been raised, reeled, and woven in the state, in 1900.³ All of USC's board members were women. Most were suffragists and practicing Latter-day Saints. The dress pattern reached Anthony at the February 1900 convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, held in Washington, DC.⁴ This meeting overlapped with Anthony's eightieth birthday. In a letter that accompanied the gift, USC board members told Anthony, "The

³ Augusta W. Grant, "R.S. Reports," *Woman's Exponent* 28, no. 20-21 (March 15, 1900): 117-118; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835-1870* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 386.

⁴ Emmeline B. Wells, "Utah," in *History of Woman Suffrage*, ed. Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper, vol. 4 (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press, 1902), 950.

Utah Silk commission sends greetings and hearty congratulations on this, your eightieth birthday anniversary...we are very happy in presenting to you a silk dress, which is a production of one of your own equal suffrage States.”⁵ According to one account, Anthony’s letter of acknowledgement stated, “The fact that the mulberry trees grew in Utah...in a state where women are politically equal with men, greatly enhances its value.”⁶ In 1900 and then again in the *Sisters for Suffrage* exhibit, silk signaled the exceptional part that Mormon women played in the suffrage struggle. In this respect, Mormon women’s homemade was worth more than what it could earn on the market.

Dissertation Summary

This dissertation is about the decades-long attempt to raise silkworms and mulberry trees and manufacture silk in western Mormon communities. Beginning in the 1840s, thousands of Latter-day Saints from Europe and the United States colonized the Great Basin region to escape harassment, violence, and federal government oversight. Latter-day Saints tried to establish a self-sufficient economy free from the influence and intervention of “unfriendly outsiders.” Church leaders called members to invest in many home industries, including silk. From the 1850s to the early 1900s, Mormon men dedicated land, money, and time to the silk endeavor. Meanwhile, a diverse cohort of Mormon women performed most of the necessary tasks required to make silk of a high-enough quality to use, wear, and sell. They made space in their homes, work schedules, and budgets for worms, reels, and looms. Locally raised and manufactured silk did not generate much cash or replace imported goods.

⁵ “Miss Anthony’s Utah Gift,” *Salt Lake Tribune* 40, no. 126 (February 18, 1900): 4.

⁶ Quoted in Mary F. Kelly Pye, “Susan B. Anthony Honored,” *Improvement Era* 40, no. 2 (February 1937): 110-111.

In fact, by the time Susan B. Anthony received silk fabric from Mormon women in 1900, the industry only had a few more years of life left. Latter-day Saints discovered that homegrown silk was time-consuming, onerous, and practically impossible to profit from, primarily due to the superior quality of European and Asian raw silk imports. Even so, Mormon women invested silk with political and religious significance that outweighed its economic value.

The Anthony dress has attracted a lot of attention, but silk did not start as source or symbol of women's emancipation. The Mormon silk experiment had its roots in patriarchal beliefs about marriage, the family, domesticity, and the economy. Much like preceding and contemporary American silk entrepreneurs, male church leaders turned to sericulture—defined as the activities required to produce a silk cocoon supply—as a viable source of employment for women, children, disabled people, and other household “dependents” with supposedly limited skills and “idle” hands. Because husbands and fathers owned the labor and capital of all household members, they would be the industry's primary beneficiaries. This power distribution shaped the lived experiences of monogamous and polygamous Mormon families who worked with silk. Beginning in the 1850s, men elected whether to get involved and advertised the project in public. Mormon women and their children handled much of the dirt, grime, and frustration endemic to raising mulberry trees and silkworms and producing silk goods at home. Boosters, most often men, made grand promises about easy work, quick money, and attractive clothing. Producers, most often women, grappled with stifling heat and bitter cold to lack of resources and lukewarm enthusiasm. In other words, Mormon women had the most direct contact with silk but little formal decision-making power over economic policy.



Figure 2: Susan B. Anthony’s silk dress, *Sisters for Suffrage* exhibit, February 2021
 Church History Museum, Salt Lake City, Utah
 Courtesy of Alan Morrell

The Anthony dress is just one indication of how Mormon women found both expected and unforeseen utility in the silk industry, despite its financial limitations. A handful of studies have already recovered some of the ideas, individuals, and institutions that made the Mormon silk project possible.⁷ A consensus has emerged that this experiment did not have much of an impact. One scholar has called the silk industry a “showpiece

⁷ Margaret Schow Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah” (MS Thesis, Corvallis, OR, Oregon State College, 1949); Leonard J. Arrington, “The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women,” *Western Humanities Review* 9 (Spring 1955): 152–57; Chris Rigby Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics: Mormon Women and the Silk Industry in Early Utah,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (Fall 1978): 376–96; Jude Daurelle, “Produce What You Consume: The Silk Industry in Utah,” *Piecework* 2, no. 4 (August 1994): 45–47; Clark S. Monson, “Mulberry Trees: The Basis and Remnant of the Utah Silk Industry,” *Economic Botany* 50, no. 1 (1996): 130–38; Kathleen Haggard, “‘In Union Is Strength’: Mormon Women and Cooperation, 1867-1900” (MS Thesis, Logan, UT, Utah State University, 1998), 27–51.

venture.”⁸ To the contrary, I argue that from the moment that Mormon women began the first chapter of the experiment until they wrote its last pages in the early twentieth century, they used silk work and goods to satisfy a wide range of needs and desires. By taking up silk, women could accommodate the demands of male household heads and men and women church leaders. They could also make their own money and clothing, manage the employment needs of their communities, and understand and influence local environments.

These pressures and incentives remained relatively constant. Ever-changing economic and political circumstances created new ones. The homegrown silk industry at once reflected and shaped developments in Mormonism, the American West, and industrial capitalism. For one, the construction of the transcontinental railroad in Utah Territory in the 1860s exacerbated anxieties about Mormon women’s consumer desires, provoked boycotts of non-Mormon businesses, and intensified commitments to home industries. At the same time, steam-powered ships and railroads better-connected Mormon sericulturists to transnational sources of information, capital, and labor and dramatically expanded the market possibilities of Mormon-made silk. Federal government programs had a similar effect. In the 1870s and 1880s, the US Department of Agriculture invested in Utah Territory’s silk program at the same moment that vigorous anti-polygamy legislation forced Mormon silk workers into hiding or in prison. In response, church leaders decided to create distance from plural marriage and other controversial church practices at the turn of the twentieth century. Utah Territory’s notable performance at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair and the approval of statehood for Utah in 1896 signaled Mormonism’s improving

⁸ Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, “Women’s Work on the Mormon Frontier,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 288.

reputation with national and global audiences. These developments also gave Mormon women new opportunities to sell silk cocoons, thread, and cloth.

These material realities shaped the cultural values assigned to Mormon-made silk. In nineteenth-century America, silk production's historical roots in Asia and the Middle East and the importation of silk goods from these parts of the world imbued the commodity with exotic, "Oriental" mystery. At the same time, popular publications like *Godey's Lady's Book* marketed silk as tasteful, refined, and suitable for middle-class women. As consumers and producers of silk, Mormon women in Utah Territory embraced these widespread values. They also created new ones unique to their religious, political, and economic circumstances. At assemblies of Latter-day Saints, homemade silk laces and dresses communicated obedience to church leaders, commitment to building God's earthly kingdom, and their status as an elect, "chosen" people. In public forums like the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Mormon-made silk communicated church members' white, middle-class respectability, American citizenship qualities, and central role in bringing "civilization" and "productivity" to the Great Basin region. Preserved memories emphasized Mormon women's sacrifices on behalf of silk as well as their instrumental role in economic development. The expression of freedom and democracy encapsulated in Susan B. Anthony's black dress was just one part of the cultural world surrounding silk. Mormon women used silk work and goods to reconcile tensions between economic cooperation and competition, market isolation and integration, and religious exceptionalism and national belonging. By centering Mormon women's economic experiences, this project brings to light how gendered acts of production and consumption shaped constructions of Mormon identity and how economic ideas and exchanges animated debates over religion,

sovereignty, and citizenship in the American West.

Historiographical Interventions and Chapter Summaries

This dissertation makes several key historiographical interventions. First, Latter-day Saint silk boosters and producers had a lot in common with American sericulturists, elsewhere, but the Mormons have largely fallen outside of the temporal and regional scope of the literature on North American silk.⁹ Historians Gertrude Working Brown, David John Rossell, Ben Marsh, and others have already explored sericulture in New Spain, New France, British North America, and the early United States. Colonial officials, politicians, horticulture experts, and plantation and factory owners promoted and invested in silk production. Meanwhile, women, children, poor people, and enslaved people performed the arduous tasks involved in making silk.¹⁰ Boosters and producers were ultimately disappointed in the industry's lackluster results. Still, silk served many social, economic, and cultural functions. For colonists, the industry could rectify trade imbalances, colonize

⁹ Latter-day Saints occasionally appear in these studies, but only as an afterthought. See David John Rossell, "The Culture of Silk: Markets, Households, and the Meaning of an Antebellum Agricultural Movement" (PhD Diss., Buffalo, NY, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2001), 42; Jacqueline Field, Marjorie Senechal, and Madelyn Shaw, *American Silk, 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs and Artifacts* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 59; Ben Marsh, *Unravelling Dreams: Silk and the Atlantic World, 1500-1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 449.

¹⁰ Historian Ben Marsh is the foremost expert on this subject. See Ben Marsh, "Silk Hopes in Colonial South Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* 78, no. 4 (November 2012): 807–54; Ben Marsh, "The Republic's New Clothes: Making Silk in the Antebellum United States," *Agricultural History* 86, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 206–34; Marsh, *Unravelling Dreams*. For other studies of silk in North America, see Gertrude Brown Working, "The History of Silk Culture in the North American Colonies" (PhD Diss., Cambridge, MA, Radcliffe College, 1932); Nelson Klose, "Sericulture in the United States," *Agricultural History* 37, no. 4 (1963): 225–34; Joyce E. Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 158–64; Giovanni Federico, *An Economic History of the Silk Industry, 1830-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Rossell, "The Culture of Silk"; Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*; Allison Margaret Bigelow, "Gendered Language and the Science of Colonial Silk," *Early American Literature* 49, no. 2 (2014): 271–325; Zara Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk: Hidden Histories of the British Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

unfamiliar environments, and help “manage” indigenous populations.¹¹ For nineteenth-century farmers and communitarians in the American Northeast, sericulture could decrease dependence on imported goods, keep women and girls out of unfamiliar industrial environments, and fund reform projects.¹² White settlers in California believed that the superior coastal environment and access to inexpensive Chinese and Native American labor guaranteed silk’s success.¹³ Despite this industry’s long history of failure, Americans repeatedly returned to silk.

Until now, historians have not fully explored why and how Mormon settlers in the Great Basin region took up silk. I argue that widespread assumptions about labor inspired the Mormon silk project. Chapter 1 shows how Latter-day Saint silk boosterism emphasized the ease with which otherwise “idle” women, children, people with disabilities, the poor, and the elderly could feed silkworms in their “spare time.” This mentality reflected a larger ideological shift taking place in response to an increasingly cash-based, industrializing nineteenth-century economy. Women’s unpaid labors in the domestic sphere lost their perceived value as Americans began to associate “work” with men’s wage-earning activities outside of the home. In the minds of the Mormons, silk offered to render the domestic sphere “productive” once again.

Chapter 1 also follows the Latter-day Saints who raised, bought, and sold mulberry trees, cultivated and circulated silkworms, and spun thread in the 1850s and 1860s. Husbands

¹¹ Working, “The History of Silk Culture in the North American Colonies”; Bigelow, “Gendered Language and the Science of Colonial Silk”; Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk*, chap. 7.

¹² Christopher Clark, *The Communitarian Moment: The Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), chap. 5; Ellen Wayland-Smith, *Oneida: From Free Love Utopia to the Well-Set Table* (New York: Picador, 2016), 91–101; Marsh, *Unravelled Dreams*, 442.

¹³ Nelson Klose, “California’s Experimentation in Sericulture,” *Pacific Historical Review* 30, no. 3 (1961): 213–27; Nelson Klose, “Louis Prevost and the Silk Industry at San Jose,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1964): 309–17.

and fathers circulated raw materials and capital throughout their communities and commanded the labor of wives, children, and other “dependents.” Single and married women (some monogamous, some polygamous) earned money from their goods and respect for their horticultural knowledge. For the most part, however, women found themselves adding yet another activity to their already overwhelming work schedules. As much as the church’s practice of plural marriage deviated from the nineteenth-century monogamous nuclear family, the silk industry was designed to support the patriarchal household.

The Mormon silk project looked familiar in other ways, as well. While church leaders installed home industries to create distance between Latter-day Saints and the outside world, Chapter 2 shows how external botanical expertise, transnational labor flows, global markets, and steam-powered transportation technologies shaped local silk. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in Promontory Summit, Utah, in 1869 challenged the political and economic autonomy of Latter-day Saint communities. It also dramatically decreased the cost of shipping silkworm eggs, cocoons, and raw silk across the North American continent at the very same moment that a silkworm parasite ripped through European and Asian cocooneries. Chapter 2 follows the Latter-day Saint sericulturists who tried to take advantage of these events and convert Utah Territory into the world’s supplier of healthy silkworm eggs and cocoons. In the 1860s and 1870s, they imported raw materials, skilled workers, and manufacturing technologies via the church’s missionary network. They also learned and applied lessons from silk operations in California, Europe, and the Middle East. These transnational connections facilitated local sericulture. They simultaneously supported Latter-day Saint colonization of the Great Basin. Mormons used mulberry tree orchards and cocooneries to employ immigrants, establish settlements in new areas, and transform

supposedly “empty” western environments into “productive,” manicured landscapes. In these respects, Mormons replicated the same mentalities and arrangements that sustained capitalist relations of production.

These findings require revising long-held assumptions about the distinctive qualities of Mormon economic life in the nineteenth century. Previous studies have emphasized how unique religious beliefs and practices determined their economic decisions and infrastructure. Latter-day Saints aspired to sever ties with a sinful, unrighteous “Babylon” and build an earthly society worthy of the Second Coming. In pursuit of these goals, Brigham Young—the church’s second president and prophet—and other church leaders intervened directly into economic affairs.¹⁴ They set the terms of local production and consumption. They also collected and redistributed labor and goods throughout western settlements and cast individual Latter-day Saints as temporary “stewards,” as opposed to permanent owners, of land and resources. Scholars have concluded that Mormons formed an inward-looking, isolated economic system that prioritized common ownership and cooperation over speculative risk, class disparities, and unrestrained industrial enterprise.¹⁵ In the words of historian Mark P. Leone, Latter-day Saints constructed a “socialist commonwealth predicated

¹⁴ In this study, I use the word “prophet” to refer to an official position in the church hierarchy. At any one time, one man serves as president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormons believe that the church president is a prophet who receives revelations directly from God. The official definition from the church reads, “One designated by God to be His spokesperson and to be a teacher, revelator and witness of gospel truths.” See “Prophets,” Newsroom, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/prophets>.

¹⁵ The landmark studies of Mormon economic life in the American West include Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1830-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958); Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community & Cooperation among the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976); Mark P. Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Dean L. May, *Three Frontiers: Family, Land, and Society in the American West, 1850-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also Jan Shippo, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), chap. 1.

on a radical critique of the American economy and class structure.”¹⁶ This system survived for a time but, as the story goes, an increased population of non-Mormons, attacks from the federal government, and other external intrusions brought an “alien” capitalist ethos their doorstep.¹⁷ For example, historian Chris Rigby Arrington has argued that the silk industry functioned as one pillar of the “cooperative economy the Mormons sought to establish in their promised land.” The completion of the transcontinental railroad and other “encroachments” brought the experiment to a close.¹⁸

While religious ideals and organizations infused economic programs in western Mormon settlements, silk reveals the ways that Latter-day Saints worked with the same ideas and technologies that fueled nineteenth-century capitalism. Chapters 1 and 2 show that patriarchal households, colonial aspirations, competitive markets, and global networks underpinned the Mormon silk project. In this respect, I agree with more recent scholarship that has made the functioning relationship between Mormons and capitalism more explicit.¹⁹ Architectural historian Thomas Carter has shown that Latter-day Saints formed a “workable synthesis” between seemingly antithetical cooperative and capitalist ideologies.²⁰ In a similar vein, religious studies scholar David Walker has argued that the church “found new ways of existing in the spaces between...capitalism and communalism.”²¹ The silk project drew on

¹⁶ Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*, 27.

¹⁷ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, chap. 13; Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, 337–38. Quote from May, *Three Frontiers*, 272.

¹⁸ Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics,” 377.

¹⁹ See, for example, Matthew Bowman, “Liberty and Order: The Mormon Struggle with American Capitalism,” in *The Business Turn in American Religious History*, ed. Amanda Porterfield, Darren Grem, and John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 108–30; Eugene McCarragher, *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), chap. 5.

²⁰ Thomas Carter, *Building Zion: The Material World of Mormon Settlement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xxviii, 67.

²¹ David Walker, *Railroading Religion: Mormons, Tourists, and the Corporate Spirit of the West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 195.

cooperative principles and religious community-building goals. It also tapped into the infrastructure and incentives of industrial capitalism.

This dissertation breaks down other monoliths, as well. Historians Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, Jill Mulvay Derr, Jennifer Reeder, Colleen McDannell, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, and others have already shown how Mormon women's labors in and out of the home sustained their families and kept their religious communities afloat.²² Analyses of this balance between cooperation and capitalism, however, have focused primarily on the words and actions of men. This study clarifies how women managed and shaped this economic in-between space. Church leaders installed sericulture to take advantage of cheap labor sources. Mormon women were not merely passive recipients of Mormon economic ideology and policy, however. In the process of learning how to work with and for silk, they greatly expanded the industry's possibilities and religious, economic, and political significance.

Chapter 3, for example, shows how women Latter-day Saints bore the weight of concerns about economic interconnectedness. While male silk boosters approached the transcontinental railroad with enthusiasm, this increased commercial contact exacerbated anxieties about women's consumer choices and intensified their labors. In the 1860s and 1870s, anti-Mormon discourse used racialized images of Mormon women's "degraded"

²² See, for example, Beecher, "Women's Work on the Mormon Frontier"; Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority: Re-Emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992); Madsen, *Battle for the Ballot*; Claudia Bushman, ed., *Mormon Sisters: Women In Early Utah* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1997); Janeth Russell Cannon, Jill Mulvay Derr, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2002); Catherine A. Brekus, "Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 58–87; Jennifer Reeder, "'To Do Something Extraordinary': Mormon Women and the Creation of a Usable Past" (PhD Diss., Fairfax, VA, George Mason University, 2013); Jill Mulvay Derr et al., eds., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-Day Saint Women's History* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016); Colleen McDannell, *Sister Saints: Mormon Women since the End of Polygamy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*.

bodies and households to demonize polygamy. Meanwhile, some critics of the church predicted that the transcontinental railroad would “reconstruct” Mormonism by injecting fashionable clothing into Utah Territory, bankrupting polygamous families, and eroding the church’s influence. Mormon women and girls became responsible for shoring up community boundaries. Church leaders asked them to “retrench” from elaborate food and fashions, patronize church-friendly establishments, and support home industries, including silk. Chapter 3 focuses on the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association, the central board of elite Mormon women in charge of the retrenchment movement. These Latter-day Saints recruited popular conceptions of good taste for their own purposes. Retrenchment advocates and their homemade silk goods communicated allegiances to white, middle-class respectability while also signaling their status as God’s “chosen people.” Mormon women used dress to forge a strategic alliance between religious distinctiveness and American citizenship.

The silk industry had utility for colonial expansion in the Great Basin, as well. While many parts of this dissertation focus on Salt Lake City, Chapter 4 examines women’s silk work in St. George. Latter-day Saints established this settlement on southern Paiute homelands in the 1860s. In response to deteriorating relations between Mormons and Native Americans just a few years earlier, Mormon women reestablished the Relief Society, a church auxiliary organization focused on charity. Members made shirts, pants, and other items of clothing for Native American “wards,” sometimes in exchange for goods or labor. This program delivered few tangible returns and quickly lost steam. Relief Societies throughout Utah Territory began to focus more on spiritual improvement, the preservation of public health, the distribution of poor relief, and investing in home industries, including

straw-braiding, grain-saving, and silk production. Chapter 4 documents how the Relief Society branch in St. George instituted mulberry tree cultivation, silkworm raising, and thread reeling in an unforgiving climate plagued by drought, disease, and death. In pursuit of sericulture, women registered the characteristics of their environmental surroundings as well as the costs and benefits of physical isolation. They also strategized how to handle shifts in the labor market and so-called “Indian troubles.” Sericulture and other Relief Society activities rendered new territories recognizable and facilitated accumulations of land, labor, and resources. In the process, white Mormon women extended the church’s presence and eroded Native sovereignty in the region.

They also used silk to mediate between Mormonism and the federal government. For years, Latter-day Saint silk producers strained against the high cost of reels, looms, and labor. Beginning in the 1870s, Mormon women and men formed organizations to resolve these and other industry issues. For almost two decades, three groups—the Deseret Silk Association, Utah Silk Association, and Utah Stake Silk Association—brought experienced sericulturists together with amateurs to discuss best practices and exchange resources. Chapter 5 examines how these groups raised funds, located and created markets, and secured industry technologies and skilled workers. But members did not always feel the same about the best way to sponsor silk. Their activities coincided with two federal government programs: the amplified criminalization of polygamy and increased investment in American-made silk. At least one prominent member of the Deseret Silk Association went to the state penitentiary for being married to more than one woman. Meanwhile, other silk bureaucracy participants swapped correspondence, cash, and raw materials with US Department of Agriculture officials. A disagreement emerged over whether to engage in commerce with the entity

threatening the Mormon way of life. Other conflicts broke out over wages, profits, and religious commitments. By focusing on these debates, Chapter 5 divulges the range of expectations and demands that Latter-day Saints brought to the silk project. As leaders and members of these silk organizations, Mormon women were instrumental to accommodating a diverse set of spiritual and temporal visions.

They continued to chart this course at the turn of the twentieth century. In the 1890s and early 1900s, after years of pressure from the federal government and other church critics, Latter-day Saints began to abandon some of their distinctive practices and programs. Historians have explained how church president Wilford Woodruff issued an official proclamation withdrawing church approval for plural marriage in 1890. Also, church members began to vote along national party lines and more fully embrace the factors and ideals of capitalist competition.²³ Chapter 6 argues that in many different venues, Mormon women used homemade silk goods to tell new and old stories about Mormonism. A coalition of Mormon and non-Mormon women from Utah Territory sent silk goods and workers to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. There, industry boosters excitedly predicted that silk from Utah Territory could resolve a national trade deficit with Asia. Meanwhile, exhibits of homemade silk positioned white women Latter-day Saints as respectable American citizens, Utah Territory as a cosmopolitan hub of industrial capitalism, and the church as a fundamental component of white westward expansion. Corresponding exhibits of "prehistoric" Native American populations solidified these meanings.

The Utah Silk Commission (USC), established after Utah secured statehood in 1896,

²³ See, for example, Gustive O. Larson, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1971); Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*; Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

did something similar. For just under a decade, USC generated working relationships between Mormons, non-Mormons, and local and federal government officials. These activities did not sever Mormon women from old goals, however. Women continued to use silk to proclaim obedience to Brigham Young's directives and building a godly kingdom on earth. Silk work and goods synthesized preexisting and emerging traditions.

These silk experiences shed light on the intersecting paths of American consumer politics and Mormon identity construction from the 1850s to the 1910s. Buying and selling shaped conceptions of citizenship in nineteenth-century America, but preceding literature on this topic tends to focus on people and events on the eastern half of the continent.²⁴ This dissertation argues that consumer politics also infused controversies over religion, economic development, and sovereignty in the American West. Some critics of Mormonism glorified free trade and women's "natural" propensities for uninhibited consumption to criticize plural marriage, locate Latter-day Saints outside of Americanness, and rationalize federal intervention into Utah Territory. Anti-polygamy actions disrupted circulations of goods, workers, and capital throughout western Mormon settlements. Meanwhile, Latter-day Saints discussed the value of economic cooperation and home industries to their religious operations. Mormon women's silk work and goods stood at the nexus of these negotiations. In some venues, the silk experiment created solidarities among Latter-day Saints, extended the church's presence in the Great Basin region, and established spiritual continuity from one generation to the next. In others, it located Mormons within the boundaries of "civilization," modernity, and competitive capitalism. In sum, Latter-day Saints and non-Mormon

²⁴ Margaret Mary Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture & Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Joanna Cohen, *Luxurious Citizens: The Politics of Consumption in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

commentators alike used economic ideas and exchanges to determine Mormonism's boundaries of belonging.

This dissertation provides a western history perspective on consumer politics in the nineteenth century. It also reconsiders where Latter-day Saints fall in western history. Historians have already shown the significance of western lands, people, and resources to US state-building in the nineteenth century, but especially in the decades surrounding the American Civil War. The United States battled with Mexico and Native nations and acquired vast amounts of western territory. Government officials and railroad corporations distributed land and enforced the rules of private property, often at the expense of people already living there. Legislatures passed exclusion laws to police the comings and goings of “unfree” Chinese workers. US soldiers exterminated Native peoples and facilitated the reservation system.²⁵ These details have led some scholars to conclude that the federal government's Reconstruction project extended beyond black-and-white racial politics in the US South from 1865 to 1877. Most famously, Elliott West has argued for a coast-to-coast “Greater Reconstruction,” where Mexicans, Chinese immigrants, Native Americans, and others became targets of federal power as early as the 1840s. The intent was to bring these groups in line with the perceived requirements of American citizenship. If that did not work, they

²⁵ See, for example, Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987); Richard White, *“It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own”: A History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994); Anne Farrar Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800-1860* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011); Noam Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism: Frontiers of Wealth and Populism in America's First Gilded Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017); Megan Kate Nelson, *The Three-Cornered War: The Union, the Confederacy, and Native Peoples in the Fight for the West* (New York: Scribner, 2020).

needed to be expelled or eliminated.²⁶

Latter-day Saints were both subjects and agents of these processes. In the second half of the nineteenth century, American presidents and politicians tried to forcefully shape Latter-day Saints into the mold of republican, monogamous, Protestant body politic. The 1856 Republican Party platform promised to rid the nation of both slavery and polygamy. Politicians used military and legislative action to eliminate the church's influence over political, economic, and Indian affairs Utah Territory.²⁷ While Latter-day Saints did come under fire for their beliefs and practices, they were not just victims. As historians Ned Blackhawk, Angela Pulley Hudson, Elise Boxer, Jane P. Hafen, Farina King, and others have shown, white Mormons acted as agents of Indigenous dispossession.²⁸ The silk industry provides new insights into how Mormons took land, commodified resources, and displaced Native peoples in the Great Basin region. Industry boosters celebrated mulberry trees as

²⁶ Elliott West, "Reconstructing Race," *Western Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 6–26. For other studies of the American West and Reconstruction, see Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Joshua Paddison, *American Heathens: Religion, Race, and Reconstruction in California* (Berkeley: Huntington Library Press & University of California Press, 2012); D. Michael Bottoms, *An Aristocracy of Color: Race and Reconstruction in California and the West, 1850–1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013); Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

²⁷ Richard D. Poll, "The Political Reconstruction of Utah Territory, 1866–1890," *Pacific Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (May 1958): 111–26; Stephen Edward Cresswell, *Mormons and Cowboys, Moonshiners and Klansmen: Federal Law Enforcement in the South and West, 1870–1893* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991); David Prior, "Civilization, Republic, Nation: Contested Keywords, Northern Republicans, and the Forgotten Reconstruction of Mormon Utah," *Civil War History* 56, no. 3 (September 2010): 283–310; Brent M. Rogers, *Unpopular Sovereignty: Mormons and the Federal Management of Early Utah Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017); Clyde A. Milner II and Brian Q. Cannon, eds., *Reconstruction and Mormon America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019).

²⁸ Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), chap. 7; Elise Boxer, "'This Is the Place': Disrupting Mormon Settler Colonialism," in *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion*, ed. Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018), 77–99; Angela Pulley Hudson, "There Is No Mormon Trail of Tears: Roots, Removals, and Reconstructions," in *Reconstruction and Mormon America*, ed. Clyde A. Milner II and Brian Q. Cannon (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 19–51; P. Jane Hafen and Brenden W. Rensink, eds., *Essays on American Indian and Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019); Farina King, "Indigenizing Mormonisms," *Mormon Studies Review* 6 (2019): 1–16.

symbols of civilization, tools of beautification, and agents of productivity on otherwise “empty” land. Silkworm egg and cocoon sales linked Latter-day Saint settlements to the global marketplace. Relief Society members made white settlement possible by managing unfamiliar environments and negotiating with Native Americans. Mormon women used their silk goods to signal their whiteness and middle-class values. In both subtle and explicit ways, Mormon-made silk contributed to the uneven process by which the American West became incorporated into the US state and a capitalist economy.

Silk continued to perform this function long after the industry died out. Susan B. Anthony’s black silk dress represents just one of many silk-centered mementos that have shaped how we think about Latter-day Saint relationships to the economy, the environment, and white, westward expansion. Since the late 1890s, parade floats, personal reminiscences, academic and popular histories, and lingering mulberry trees have communicated lessons about the exceptional, benevolent quality of Mormon settlement and the foundational role that women played in bringing stable households and prosperity to an otherwise “barren” landscape. Inserting silk into Mormon pioneer nostalgia in the twentieth century required obscuring plural marriage, Mormon-Indian violence, and many other realities of the nineteenth century. By examining the political valences of silk mementos, this epilogue considers the understudied role of exclusion and displacement in Mormon women’s agency.

A Note on Sources

This history of silk depends on a wide range of sources because, like other global commodities, silk intersected with many different aspects of human life. For Latter-day Saints in the Great Basin region, the production and consumption of this commodity moved

through the realms of science and technology, politics, culture, religion, and the economy. To bring life to these elements, this dissertation brings a wide range of new, underutilized, and more familiar sources into conversation with one another. First, men and women church leaders oversaw the spiritual and temporal affairs of western Mormon settlements. They became the most visible and influential boosters of homemade silk. In their sermons, speeches, and other public discourses, these elite Latter-day Saints discussed heady topics like theology, polygamy, sovereignty, and suffrage. They also articulated their expectations for workers and capitalists and, more specifically, the aspirations and anxieties that attracted them to silk. By reading these conventional sources against the grain, this study offers new insights into the comingling of economic and religious ideologies in nineteenth-century Mormonism.

As much as these community leaders fundamentally shaped the silk experiment and the Great Basin economy more generally, they are only one part of this story. For its decades-long existence, the homegrown silk experiment consumed the mental energies, working hours, and households of many average Latter-day Saint settlers from the US, Europe, and Pacific Islands. Diaries, letters, oral histories, personal reminiscences, newspaper articles, and census records explain when, why, and how Latter-day Saints throughout Utah Territory took up the call to raise silkworms and mulberry trees, reel thread, and weave cloth. Everyone from farmers and carpenters to watchmakers, amateur gardeners, textile workers, missionaries, monogamous and polygamous wives, and their children interacted with silk. In ways not previously acknowledged, a variety of factors—class status, political alignments, gender, disability, national origin, proximity to transportation and communication networks, Mormon-Indian relations, and local and national legislation, for example—shaped their

expectations for the industry and on-the-ground experiences with silk.

Other materials bring the industry's investment infrastructure and market impacts more fully into view. Articles, advertisements, and published correspondence from the *Deseret News*, *Millennial Star*, and the *Woman's Exponent*—all church-sponsored newspapers—announced the movement of silkworm eggs, mulberry trees, finished silk goods, skilled and unskilled workers, reeling and weaving machinery, and horticultural expertise into and out of Utah Territory. In addition, Latter-day Saints formed and belonged to various organizations—Relief Society, the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association, the Deseret Silk Association, and the Utah Silk Commission, for example—that supported the silk project. Leaders and members kept meeting minutes, logged donations and stock sales, wrote letters, and published reports and treatises. These sources contain critical financial details like production rates, compensation patterns, and prices as well as in-depth discussions about environmental conditions, resource management, and industry best practices. By mining these records for information about the circulation of workers, capital, goods, and technologies, this dissertation offers the most comprehensive, up-to-date account of the silk project's economic footprint.

In addition to these material conditions, this project investigates the diverse cultural meanings assigned to Mormon-made silk. Ever since the church's establishment in 1830, people have had a lot to say about the Mormons. Controversial practices in Great Basin Mormon settlements—namely plural marriage, the unity of church and state, and the church leadership's involvement in the economy—generated an overwhelming amount of commentary. Tourists, government officials, business owners, former church members, and practicing Latter-day Saints assessed Mormonism's impacts on American life in newspaper

articles, speeches, travelogues, novels, pamphlets, and other published materials. This dissertation brings a new, economic focus to these sources. Discussions about silk production and consumption reveal the centrality of Mormon women's bodies, households, and work regimens to public debates about Mormonism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter 1—Silk Work, Polygamy, and the Patriarchal Household in Utah Territory, 1850s-1860s

Zina D. H. Young never cared much for worms. Her sister wife's daughter, Susa Young Gates, remembered "Aunt Zina" sharing the reason why. When Zina was still in the womb, her mother had an unpleasant encounter with a worm. This experience planted within Zina a deep, durable fear that also took on a physical manifestation: a worm-shaped birthmark in the middle of her hand.¹ Imagine the surprise and dismay Zina D. H. Young must have felt when, in the 1860s, her husband, Brigham Young, called her to become a vocal promoter of silk production throughout settlements in the Utah Territory and the manager of a silkworm cocoonery on the family's property in Salt Lake City. As one of the earliest converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a plural wife of the first two church prophets, Zina D. H. Young enjoyed a relatively comfortable economic position and political and ecclesiastical influence. In the words of historian Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, she and a small cohort of "leading sisters" held the "reins of leadership" among nineteenth-century Mormon women.²

Her prominence could not save her from the silkworm. To the contrary, Zina D. H. Young's visibility, privilege, and vast religious and familial networks likely sealed her fate as the "mother" of the Mormon silk movement. Brigham Young knew that other women admired his wife and looked to her for guidance. She already possessed skills in managing and directing church projects, as well. For several decades, Zina D. H. Young spread the silk

¹ Susa Young Gates, "Chapter on Sericulture," 5-6, Susa Young Gates Papers, circa 1870-1933, MS 7692, Box 88, Folder 7, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as the Church History Library).

² Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "The 'Leading Sisters': A Female Hierarchy in Nineteenth Century Mormon Society," *Journal of Mormon History* 9 (1982): 25-39.

production gospel, presided over sericulture organizations, and tended to silkworms. Susa Young Gates recalled how Zina “told no one of her horror of worms.” Instead, she “went bravely forward, suffering agony with each contact of the wriggling creatures in her hands.”³



Figure 3: Zina D. H. Young, photographed by Edward Martin
Bathsheba W. Bigler Smith photograph collection, circa 1865-1900
Courtesy of the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

This memory has something in common with the meanings attached to Susan B. Anthony’s black silk dress at the *Sisters for Suffrage* exhibit. Both mementos tell us more about enduring mythologies of Mormon women pioneers than about the actual historical circumstances that shaped the silk project. By focusing on the activities Mormon industry

³ Gates, “Chapter on Sericulture,” 5-6.

boosters and early adopters in the 1850s and 1860s, this chapter makes contributions to two historiographical debates. First, preceding literature has argued that the silk industry constituted one pillar of a church-directed, self-sufficient economy that departed from the mentalities and arrangements of nineteenth-century capitalism.⁴ According to these accounts of sericulture and of Mormon economic life more generally, Latter-day Saints valued cooperation, egalitarianism, and the common good over the chaos, competition, and inequality endemic to the nineteenth-century capitalist marketplace.⁵

Latter-day Saints dedicated resources to community development, imbued their economic activities with religious significance, and engaged in central planning. But, as more recent scholarship has shown, they did not entirely abandon the mentalities and goals that non-Mormon Americans brought to their economic activities.⁶ This chapter argues that traditional ideas about gender, ability, and work inspired and shaped the Mormon silk project. Male church leaders grounded their justifications for sericulture in widespread nineteenth-century concerns about a supposedly “unproductive” domestic sphere and economic dependency. In a period when textile manufacturing moved from the home and into the factory, these boosters believed that silk production in the home offered “idle” women, children, elderly people, and people with disabilities a way to remain under the authority of husbands and fathers and contribute to the patriarchal household’s coffers. In the

⁴ See, for example, Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics”; Daurelle, “Produce What You Consume”; Monson, “Mulberry Trees.”

⁵ The seminal study on this topic is Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*. See also Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 217–25; May, *Three Frontiers*; Dean L. May, “One Heart and Mind: Communal Life and Values among the Mormons,” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 135–58.

⁶ Carter, *Building Zion*; Bowman, “Liberty and Order”; Walker, *Railroading Religion*.

words of one Latter-day Saint silk promoter, this industry would permit young women to “gain a comfortable living at their own firesides and under the eye of their parents.”⁷

Whether monogamous or polygamous, Mormons who engaged in silk production in the 1850s and 1860s generally maintained the domestic work arrangements of the patriarchal household. This finding runs against long-held assumptions about silk as a source of liberation for women. Historians have long debated the impact of plural marriage on Mormon women’s labors in and out of the home. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, Jessie L. Embry, and Kathryn M. Daynes have argued that polygamous women occasionally took on economic responsibilities outside of the domestic sphere, but only in exceptional circumstances. Overall, plural marriage merely made more women available to complete traditional tasks.⁸ Scholars of the alternative interpretation agree that plural marriage entrenched patriarchal power but still emphasize the economic independence Mormon women enjoyed. The necessities of “frontier” conditions as well as plural marriage and other church practices gave women the opportunity to manage farms and businesses, earn wages at non-traditional jobs, go to medical school, and become politicians. Such roles, these historians argue, granted women with status and the chance to cultivate an identity separate from male household heads.⁹ Interestingly, scholars in both camps have pointed to silk production as evidence that Mormon women were ahead of their time. In these accounts, silk is the rule or the exception

⁷ “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 5, no. 44 (January 9, 1856): 349.

⁸ Beecher, “Women’s Work on the Mormon Frontier”; Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, Inc., 2008), 134; Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 135–36.

⁹ Kathleen Marquis, “Diamond Cut Diamond: Mormon Women and the Cult of Domesticity on the Nineteenth Century,” *The University of Michigan Papers in Women’s Studies* 2 (1974): 105–24; Joan Iversen, “Feminist Implications of Mormon Polygyny,” *Feminist Studies* 10, no. 3 (1984): 505–22; Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 192–93; May, *Three Frontiers*, 136–41.

that proves the rule.¹⁰ As will be discussed in later chapters, the industry did draw women into the realms of business and politics, but sericulture was not designed to deliver women from drudgery or grant them more influence in the public sphere. Mormon women found opportunities to make their own money and earn respect for their expertise, but these outcomes were not inherent to the silk industry. Sericulture preserved male control over the capital and labor of women, children, and other household “dependents.”

“Liabilities” into Assets: Silk Boosters and Workers in North America

The same held true for silk experiments, elsewhere. By the time that Mormons in Great Basin settlements turned their attention to sericulture, marginalized workers with little formal power in society had been fueling silk industries on the North American continent for centuries. European explorers and colonizers located and commented on the ubiquity of native mulberry trees and silkworms.¹¹ After the military conquest of the Aztec Confederacy and the establishment of New Spain in the early 1500s, Spanish colonists established Franciscan missions and military forts, demarcated and distributed property, and secured the labor of Indigenous peoples via the *encomienda* system. On Hernan Cortes’s estate in Cuernavaca, the capital city of the Morelos state, *encomienda* workers bred livestock, raised sugar cane, and cultivated maize, grapes, and other crops. They also attended to mulberry trees and silkworms, which Cortes imported from Spain as early as 1523. By the late 1540s, mulberry tree groves occupied 126 acres of the Cortes estate. But the enterprise failed,

¹⁰ Marquis, “Diamond Cut Diamond,” 114; Beecher, “Women’s Work on the Mormon Frontier,” 277.

¹¹ Working, “The History of Silk Culture in the North American Colonies,” 167–68, 176–80, 212.

largely because Indigenous workers neglected the mulberry trees and interacted with the silkworms only when compelled.¹²

Silk production struggled to gain a foothold in the British and French North American colonies, as well. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mercantilist European monarchs and administrators hoped to rectify trade imbalances by generating raw materials for Europe's expanding manufacturing centers and then purchasing the finished products. To make silk a viable export commodity, colonial assemblies made demands and introduced incentives. They required landholders to dedicate a portion of their property to mulberry trees and funded cocoon and raw silk bounties. They also passed friendly import duties, approved the construction of filatures and training schools, and imported skilled workers from France and Italy. Farmers and planters responded enthusiastically. In their minds, agricultural diversification could resolve the pressures of dramatic price drops for other crops. Boosterism from male elites entrenched sericulture's popularity. Physicians, horticulturists, colonial officials, and others argued that silk work transformed possible economic "liabilities"—specifically women, children, the elderly, sick people, Native people, and enslaved people—into assets. People supposedly too young, too old, too weak, or not skilled enough for other kinds of work could generate capital by collecting mulberry tree leaves, raising silkworms, and reeling thread.¹³ In the words of William Bull, the governor of the South Carolina colony from 1737 to 1743, plantation owners "employ their young Negroes,

¹² Woodrow Wilson Borah, *Silk Raising in Colonial Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943); G. Micheal Riley, "Land in Spanish Enterprise: Colonial Morelos 1522-1547," *The Americas* 27, no. 3 (1971): 242–43, 247–48, 250; Marsh, *Unravelling Dreams*, chap. 2.

¹³ Working, "The History of Silk Culture in the North American Colonies"; Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 158–64; Marsh, "Silk Hopes in Colonial South Carolina"; Bigelow, "Gendered Language and the Science of Colonial Silk"; Marsh, *Unravelling Dreams*, chaps. 3–7.

unfit for field labour, in gathering leaves of mulberry to feed the worms.”¹⁴ Free and unfree workers ultimately undertook silk projects in every colony except Maryland.¹⁵

These colonial experiments suffered from labor shortages and other shortcomings. Silk production requires precise timing. Mulberry trees cannot serve as a viable food source until they reach maturity. Families also discovered that raising silkworms involves short but intense bursts of work that overlap with the seasonal schedules of other agricultural products. Very few inhabitants of European colonies in North America had previous experience with the careful, painstaking procedures involved. If producers managed to raise cocoons, reelers often could not process these crops quickly enough or to a high-enough standard. Settlers directed their time and capital toward securing necessities and profitable cash crops like indigo, rice, and tobacco, instead. As on-the-ground interest waned, misgivings among colonial authorities mounted. State-level investment contracted and eventually dried up.¹⁶ Support for American-made silk took another hit during the American Revolution, when non-importation agreements and anti-British rhetoric stigmatized silk as an excessive luxury and symbol of imperial oppression.¹⁷

American silk experiments did not disappear. In fact, they experienced an impressive, short-lived resurgence in the antebellum period, primarily in the Northeast and along the Atlantic coast.¹⁸ Utopian abolitionists established a silk enterprise in Massachusetts to extricate themselves from markets tainted by slavery.¹⁹ Elsewhere, newspaper editors,

¹⁴ Quoted in Marsh, “Silk Hopes in Colonial South Carolina,” 842.

¹⁵ Working, “The History of Silk Culture in the North American Colonies,” 44.

¹⁶ Working, 197–98; Marsh, “Silk Hopes in Colonial South Carolina,” 813–16; Marsh, *Unravelling Dreams*, 28–29.

¹⁷ Marsh, “The Republic’s New Clothes,” 208–9.

¹⁸ Marsh, *Unravelling Dreams*, chaps. 8, 9.

¹⁹ Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, chap. 5.

nurserymen, entrepreneurs, agricultural society organizers, and other advocates fueled the industry's rebirth.²⁰ Boosters distanced silk from its reputation as an excessive Old-World indulgence with commentary about republican virtue and independence. They emphasized the industrious qualities of the silkworm, the strength of homespun silk fabric, and the low cost, efficiency, and patriotic qualities of the industry.²¹ In the words of a nineteenth-century American nurseryman named William Kenrick, the silk industry would "awaken to habits of industry and of virtue the rising generation."²²

Industry boosters also infused literature with comments about control during a moment of major economic, environmental, and demographic transformation. According to them, silk promised to revitalize overworked soils, stymie the tide of east-to-west migration, and provide jobs for poor people in rapidly expanding urban locales.²³ Boosters simultaneously claimed that the industry could roll back the problems of an increasingly cash-based economy and the movement of textile production into factories. By putting "dependents" to work at home, sericulture could prevent women from spending cash on consumer goods, return productivity to the domestic sphere, and restore the father's authority over the patriarchal household.²⁴ These arguments worked. Petitions to state and federal governments yielded subsidies like bounties for cocoons and tax-free land for mulberry trees.²⁵ American silk never achieved much success as a local commodity or national export, however. The bloated rhetoric of boosters obscured the sheer difficulty and unpredictability

²⁰ Rossell, "The Culture of Silk," chap. 4.

²¹ Rossell, 61–62, 76–85; Marsh, "The Republic's New Clothes," 209, 218–19.

²² William Kenrick, *The American Silk Grower's Guide; or the Art of Raising the Mulberry and Silk, and the System of Successive Crops in Each Season*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Weeks, Jordan & Co., 1835), 16.

²³ Rossell, "The Culture of Silk," 95–97, 105–10.

²⁴ Rossell, 88–95.

²⁵ Rossell, 182–90; Marsh, "The Republic's New Clothes," 224–26.

of silk production. Also, communities lacked the skilled labor and manufacturing technologies necessary to make silk profitable. Above all else, superior silk products from European and Asian suppliers ensured American sericulture's peripheral status.²⁶

The Spiritual and the Temporal in Early Mormonism

At the same moment that silk enthusiasms boiled over in the antebellum Northeast and South, a young man from New York named Joseph Smith emerged as president and prophet of a new and soon-to-be infamous millenarian American religion. Mormonism arrived on the scene during the Second Great Awakening, a transformational moment for American Christianity. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, evangelical Protestant revivals led by charismatic leaders like Barton Stone, Charles Finney, and Alexander Campbell encouraged individual interpretation of scripture and, to a certain extent, democratized access to spiritual authority. Many of these religious movements also challenged religious orthodoxy.²⁷ Long before The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gained notoriety for plural marriage, other aspects of the faith—a living prophet, re-baptism, and claims of restoring Christianity—provoked the ire of non-Mormons.²⁸

So did the church's infrastructure of economic communalism and centralized planning. In 1831, Joseph Smith implemented the Law of Consecration and Stewardship, a policy based on the early Christian practice of holding "all things in common." In Mormon communities in Kirtland, Ohio, and then in Jackson County, Missouri, bishops required household heads to provide an itemized list of belongings and deed, or "consecrate," these

²⁶ Rossell, "The Culture of Silk," 241–42; Marsh, "The Republic's New Clothes," 226–27.

²⁷ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

²⁸ Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

possessions to God. The bishops then leased this property back to the individual, who agreed to manage, or “steward,” the property and annually return to the church any surplus above and beyond the “support and comfort” of the family. This system was designed to place all Latter-day Saints on the same economic plane and create order and unity. In Smith’s mind, the surrounding world suffered from excessive individualism and economic competition.²⁹

While the Law of Consecration and Stewardship socialized surpluses, it did not completely do away with the capitalist marketplace. Each steward—the male household head—retained control over what goods to produce and what services to offer. Also, as one historian writes, “The profit system, the forces of supply and demand, and the price system presumably would continue to allocate resources, influence some production decisions, and distribute primary or earned income.”³⁰ Despite these shared qualities, the economic and political cohesion of Mormon communities and Latter-day Saint religious practices drew virulent critiques, political pressure, and even violence. Politicians, religious figures, journalists, and other commentators cast Joseph Smith as an exploitative fraud, church leaders as despotic con artists lusting after power and influence, and the Latter-day Saints as delusional dupes or violent “ruffians.”³¹

Over the next several decades, Mormons mostly abandoned the Law of Consecration and Stewardship but continued to direct cash, labor, and property toward church projects and community development. After experiencing hostility from anti-Mormon politicians, militias,

²⁹ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 7–9; Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, chap. 2; Kenneth H. Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), chap. 3; May, “One Heart and Mind,” 140–43.

³⁰ Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, 17.

³¹ For a thorough exploration of nineteenth-century anti-Mormonism, see J. Spencer Fluhman, *A Peculiar People: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

and mobs in Ohio and Missouri, the Latter-day Saints relocated to Nauvoo, Illinois, in the late 1830s. There, church leaders narrowed the scope of economic cooperation.

“Consecration” became an annual tithing contribution of ten percent on net income.

“Stewardship” started to refer to temporary assignments within the church. The church could no longer depend on consecrations to fund operations, so leaders relied on land sales, joint-stock companies, and other profit-making enterprises.³² Joseph Smith established home industries in Nauvoo, as well, with the goal of providing Latter-day Saints with economic security and employment for the town’s burgeoning population of converts.³³

It was also during the Nauvoo period that Smith recorded a revelation regarding another sacred practice from early Christianity—polygamy—and began to sanction and secretly spread the word about plural marriage among the Latter-day Saints. Responses ranged from obedience and reluctant acceptance to formidable opposition and disaffection. The tensions and controversies caused by plural marriage ultimately resulted in the imprisonment and murder of Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, in Carthage, Illinois, in 1844.³⁴ A lengthy, messy succession crisis split the community into several branches, the largest of which selected Brigham Young, then-president of a church executive body called the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, for its new leader.³⁵

Because anti-Mormon discourse and action continued to plague the Mormons, Brigham Young’s first big undertaking was a planned migration to what was then Mexican

³² Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 17–18; Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, 37–38; May, “One Heart and Mind,” 143.

³³ Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), chap. 6.

³⁴ Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, chap. 8; Daynes, *More Wives than One*, chap. 1; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, chap. 4.

³⁵ Thomas Richards, Jr., *Breakaway Americas: The Unmanifest Future of the Jacksonian United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), 99.

territory, traversed and occupied by Shoshone, Ute, Paiute, and Goshute Indians, in western North America.³⁶ Remoteness from other white settlers indicated to Young that the Great Basin was, in his words, “a good place to make Saints.”³⁷ After Young and a small contingent completed the trip to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, he issued an epistle calling Latter-day Saints throughout the world to “emigrate as speedily as possible” and bring with them “all kinds of choice seeds, of grain, vegetables, fruits, shrubbery, trees, and vines” as well as “machinery for spinning, or weaving, and dressing cotton, wool, flax, and silk.”³⁸ The resulting migration stream from Liverpool, England—the church’s international entrepot—and various US staging cities depended on the church-operated Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company (PEF), which collected donations, tithes, and dividends to pay the cost of transportation and supplies. After converts arrived and established themselves, they were expected to replenish the fund with deposits of cash, goods, and labor.³⁹ By 1857, thousands of Latter-day Saints had relocated to the area and established almost one hundred settlements throughout the Great Basin, primarily in the southern region.⁴⁰ For his supervision of this process, Brigham Young became known as the “Great Colonizer.”⁴¹

In what would become the Utah Territory in 1850, church authorities continued to administer economic programs as well as the solidification and expansion of a plural marriage system. Because of the secrecy surrounding polygamy during the Nauvoo period,

³⁶ For an account of Brigham Young’s western migration program, see Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), chaps. 9–11. The definitive history of Indigenous people in this region is Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land*.

³⁷ Brigham Young, August 17, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854–86), 4:32. Quoted in May, *Three Frontiers*, 154.

³⁸ “General Epistle from the Council of the Twelve Apostles,” *Millennial Star* 10, no. 6 (March 15, 1848): 81–88.

³⁹ Gustive O. Larson, “The Story of the Perpetual Emigration Fund,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 18, no. 2 (1931): 184–94; Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 77–79, 97–108.

⁴⁰ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 88; Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 172.

⁴¹ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 353.

the rules and regulations governing the practice did not blossom until the Latter-day Saints began to engage in plural marriages, or “live the principle,” more openly in the American West.⁴² Polygamy proved conducive to colonization of the Great Basin region, because plural marriages provided a steady supply of settlers and laborers.⁴³

In addition to providing practical benefits, polygamy occupied a central place in the theological framework of Latter-day Saints. They believed in the reunification of families after death and for eternity. Sacred sealing rituals secured these everlasting bonds between men and women and parents and children. Nineteenth-century Mormonism dictated that exaltation—the highest echelon of salvation in the afterlife—could only be attained by participating in plural marriage on earth. Large families also brought glory in the hereafter. According to Mormon cosmology, “tabernacles,” or mortal bodies, provide a home for pre-existing spirits. Eternal rewards awaited people who brought many children into the world. These rites explain the diverse types of plural marriages that Mormons formed. Time-and-eternity unions, for example, joined husbands and wives together during their lifetimes and in the afterlife, while proxy marriages formed earthly ties that did not persist after death. Flexible, non-adversarial, and non-legalistic divorce procedures provided an essential “safety valve” for unhappy couples. At the same time, Mormons observed strict rules regarding sexual mores and met premarital sex, sexual misconduct, and other indiscretions with swift and hefty penalties. They believed in the superiority of their system—a departure from the

⁴² Daynes, *More Wives than One*, chap. 11.

⁴³ Marquis, “Diamond Cut Diamond,” 109.

Victorian ideal of companionate, private, monogamous marriage—so much so that they made great sacrifices to protect it.⁴⁴

Mormons also found themselves defending their centralized, church-directed economic programs and policies. Church-appointed surveyors controlled and distributed land to colonists. Because of their limited access to cash, Latter-day Saints often contributed tithing in property and labor. Church authorities then chose which public works projects—the construction of roads, canals, bridges, railroad tracks, or telegraph lines, for example—to apply these working hours to. The leadership simultaneously invested in home industries. Sugar beets, iron, paper, beer, cotton, flax, wool, pottery, and more “home manufactures” occupied the attention of individual or small groups of Latter-day Saints or, in some cases, entire colonies.⁴⁵ Day-to-day mismanagement and other hardships, including cataclysmic drought, grasshopper infestation, and a record influx of immigrants, catalyzed the reemergence of the Law of Consecration and Stewardship in 1854 and then, from 1856 to 1857, a religious revival known as the Mormon Reformation. In response, Latter-day Saints increased their participation in plural marriage and church attendance but consecrated very little property. Church leaders decided to encourage the payment of tithes, instead.⁴⁶ This refusal to pass along property to the church offers just one example of how dissent existed within church-led cooperation. While critics railed against this program as domineering,

⁴⁴ Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 28–31, 48–49, 64, 70–72, 82, 143–47, 202–4; Christine Talbot, *A Foreign Kingdom: Mormons and Polygamy in American Political Culture, 1852-1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 212, 269–87, 346–47.

⁴⁵ A detailed account of economic development in Great Basin Mormon communities in the 1850s and 1860s can be found in Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, pt. 2.

⁴⁶ Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, chap. 4; Paul H. Peterson, “The Mormon Reformation of 1856-1857: The Rhetoric and the Reality,” *Journal of Mormon History* 15 (1989): 59–87; Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 116–23, 205.

theocratic, and un-American, the fact is that Latter-day Saints continued to exercise individual decision-making power regarding their economic affairs.⁴⁷

The knitting together of church and economic authority offers just one example of how the spiritual and temporal spheres overlapped for Latter-day Saints.⁴⁸ Building Zion, or the kingdom of God on earth, in preparation for the Second Coming required ceremonies of worship, like sealings, prayer, and sacrament meeting attendance. This effort also included planting gardens and orchards, raising livestock and children, and building roads, homes, fences, and irrigation ditches. In this context, economic tools, products, and goals took on sacred qualities.⁴⁹ “All things temporal, and all things spiritual, things in heaven, things on earth, and things that are under the earth are circumscribed by our religion,” said Brigham Young in April 1868.⁵⁰ From the pulpit, church leaders yoked together these two spheres by attributing the presence of natural resources to providential intervention and defining work as a measure and source of religious commitment. God made ready what Young called the “elements,” which Mormons could mold into the essential ingredients—edible grains, fruits, and meat and wearable wool and silk—of building and beautifying Zion.⁵¹ In November 1857, Heber C. Kimball, one of Young’s counselors, asserted that home industries would secure the “temporal and spiritual salvation” of the Mormons.⁵² These dynamics led one outside observer, First Lieutenant John Williams Gunnison of the Corps of Topographical

⁴⁷ May, *Three Frontiers*, 230–32.

⁴⁸ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 5.

⁴⁹ Arrington, 5; Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*, 103; Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 125; May, *Three Frontiers*, 219, 270–71.

⁵⁰ Brigham Young, April 8, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:205.

⁵¹ Brigham Young, April 7, 1861, *Journal of Discourses* 9:32 and Brigham Young, February 23, 1862, *Journal of Discourses* 9:283–5. For a thorough examination of Mormon environmental ideologies, see Jedediah S. Rogers and Matthew C. Godfrey, eds., *The Earth Will Appear as the Garden of Eden: Essays on Mormon Environmental History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019).

⁵² Heber C. Kimball, November 29, 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 6:103.

Engineers, to comment in 1852 that “the labor for support of oneself and family is taught to be of as divine a character, as public worship and prayer.”⁵³

Silk, Domesticity, and Dependency in Latter-day Saint Settlements

While everyone had a role to play in the grand drama of Zion-building, gender, age, and ability shaped how church authorities determined the delegation of tasks and the distribution of skills. “All men and women, according to their health, strength, and ability, ought to labor to sustain themselves, and for the welfare of the community,” said church authority George A. Smith in 1867.⁵⁴ When talking about work, church leaders maintained the same gendered division of labor that characterized the patriarchal household. According to Brigham Young, “It is the duty of the husband to provide for the wife or wives and children, and it is the duty of the wife or wives and children to assist the husband and father all they can.”⁵⁵ Cleaning, childrearing, and the production of food and textiles within the home belonged to women. Breadwinning, managing property—herds, homes, businesses, and fields—and financially supporting household “dependents” belonged to men. Parents should also expect children to participate in these operations and equip girls and boys with the appropriate skills for adulthood.⁵⁶ Daughters needed to learn the ins and outs of housekeeping.⁵⁷ Give boys tools with which to make sleds and wagons, said Brigham Young, so that “when they grow up, they are acquainted with the use of tools and can build a

⁵³ J. W. Gunnison, *The Mormons, or, Latter-Day Saints, in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake: A History of Their Rise and Progress, Peculiar Doctrines, and Prospects, Derived from Personal Observation, During a Residence Among Them* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1852), 52.

⁵⁴ George A. Smith, October 9, 1867, *Journal of Discourses* 12:145.

⁵⁵ Brigham Young, October 8, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:299.

⁵⁶ Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, 130, 141.

⁵⁷ Brigham Young, February 2, 1862, *Journal of Discourses* 9:188.

carriage, a house, or anything else.”⁵⁸ Church leaders surmised that obedience to these work schedules, as opposed to a reliance on charity, would secure Mormon family units and communities and facilitate the construction of Zion.⁵⁹

When articulating the multiple benefits of work and independence, church authorities made frequent mention of women’s “idle hands.” In January 1862, Brigham Young lamented a decline in knitting, making shoes, cutting clothing patterns, and other tasks that women used to teach to their “little girls.” He complained how women relied on expensive tailors and merchants, instead, and seemed unwilling “to move a finger to sustain” themselves.⁶⁰ According to church leaders, this perceived abandonment of traditional household tasks and the lack of skill transfer from mothers to daughters left many unfit for marriage. Heber C. Kimball, one of Young’s counselors, observed in December 1857 that young women “have scarcely learned to wash the dishes properly or to take care of things about the house.”⁶¹ The introduction of new technologies was partly to blame. During one public discourse, Young took aim at the sewing machine. Recent improvements “in matters pertaining to domestic life are wonderful,” he said, but women no longer spun and wove cloth at home.⁶² To add insult to injury, this shift to consumption drained households of much-needed hard currency, which has “passed swiftly” into merchants’ hands, explained Lorenzo D. Young, Brigham Young’s younger brother.⁶³ In response, Brigham Young advocated an enthusiastic recommitment to producing and making goods out of “useful material”—silk, linen, wool, and straw, for

⁵⁸ Brigham Young, January 26, 1862, *Journal of Discourses* 9:173.

⁵⁹ See, for example, D.H. Wells, March 22, 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 5:44 and Brigham Young, February 3, 1867, *Journal of Discourses* 11:297.

⁶⁰ Brigham Young, January 26, 1862, *Journal of Discourses* 9:168.

⁶¹ Heber C. Kimball, December 27, 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 6:189.

⁶² Brigham Young, November 13, 1870, *Journal of Discourses* 13:304.

⁶³ Lorenzo D. Young, December 13, 1857, *Journal of Discourses* 6:213.

example—at home.⁶⁴ On one occasion, he asked Mormon wives and daughters to “make some good warm clothing for the men and boys” instead of “passing their hours in idleness, folding their hands, and rocking themselves in their easy chairs.”⁶⁵

These concerns spoke less to an actual decline in the frequency or intensity of women’s domestic tasks and more to the shifting shape and significance of household work in the decades leading up to the American Civil War. According to historian Alice Kessler-Harris, the colonial American family functioned as the “centerpiece of the economic system.” All family members—men, women, children, servants, and enslaved people—worked to sustain this unit. Americans understood that domestic labors underpinned the family’s economic success.⁶⁶ At the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the status assigned to women’s work in the home declined. Wages and cash exchanges became increasingly central to an industrializing economy. Because the sewing, cooking, cleaning, and childrearing that women undertook did not directly engage with this cash nexus, historian Jeanne Boydston has found that the perceived value of women’s unpaid work dissolved. Commentators reclassified the home as a site of passive, regenerative leisure and housework as a natural expression of womanhood. This process, which Boydston calls the “pastoralization of housework,” stripped women of their status as economic agents and “reinforced both the social right and the power of husbands and capitalists to claim the surplus value of women’s labor, both paid and unpaid.” Women still earned wages, produced goods for the market, and provided financial support for themselves and their families. They also assumed *more*

⁶⁴ Brigham Young, August 1-10, 1865, *Journal of Discourses* 11:134.

⁶⁵ Brigham Young, February 2, 1862, *Journal of Discourses* 9:190.

⁶⁶ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 7–8. Quote on p. 4. For more on women’s work in the colonial period, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

responsibility for household tasks as husbands and children left to work for wages in factories. Even so, “labor” began to apply exclusively to male wage-earning, and the “economy” came to mean activities and operations outside of the domestic sphere.⁶⁷

Economic shifts in this period also amplified preexisting concerns about “idleness.” In the colonial period, officials incentivized and coerced the labor of children, unmarried women, widows, and poor people with an eye toward preventing reliance on charity. Desires to stop a drain on public resources took on a new urgency at the turn of the nineteenth century, when the rise in industrial manufacturing decreased the frequency and consistency with which women made candles, soap, cloth, and other goods at home. The centralization of textile production in factories, an uptick in household consumption of fabric, and the arrival of new technologies like cast-iron stoves and sewing machines created concerns about women’s decaying domestic skills and the interrupted diffusion of these skills from mothers to daughters. Commentators also worried about women encountering swearing, sexual advances, and other inappropriate behavior in industrial workplaces. These conditions, they argued, put women’s virtue and maternal functions at risk. While some emphasized factory production’s myriad problems, others argued that wage work in the factory and given-out, or “putting-out,” work at home would eat up the “spare time” of women and children and keep them off the public dole.⁶⁸

The impulse to tap into the labor potential of all household “dependents” extended to people with disabilities, as well. Historian Sarah F. Rose has found that for most of the nineteenth century, poor and middling families expected household members with acquired

⁶⁷ Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Quote from p. 158.

⁶⁸ Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, chaps. 2 and 3.

and/or congenital disabilities to make economic contributions. In fact, these labors were essential to a family's survival. Relatives, servants, and enslaved people living with blindness, "insanity," a missing limb, or other disabilities performed a variety of labors. They cleaned, worked on the farm, and watched young children, for example. If they spent time in asylums or schools for the deaf or blind, they learned sewing, broom-making, or other trades and received training—domestic work for girls and women and agricultural labor for boys and men—that would make them less of a burden. Then, they often returned to their families, which functioned as the primary locus of care for people with disabilities until the late nineteenth century.⁶⁹

These assumptions about domestic work and dependency underpinned the wage system and the development of industrial capitalism. They also explain why Mormon church leaders put so much stock into silk production. Brigham Young argued that "Our young ladies can be amused and profitably employed" by feeding silkworms, reeling silk thread, and weaving fabric.⁷⁰ According to George A. Smith, the labor of the "feeble, the aged, the lame, and almost any person, no matter how weakly"—labor that he said "now counts for very little"—could be channeled toward creating silk "worth their weight in gold."⁷¹ To inspire commitments to the industry, George D. Watt, a clerk in Brigham Young's office, introduced the image of a toiling, impoverished farmer with children and "maybe an aged mother or father" unable to "help him bear his expenses." An "easy pursuit" like sericulture would allow these household members, especially the swelling population of Mormon

⁶⁹ Sarah F. Rose, *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s–1930s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

⁷⁰ Brigham Young, June and July, 1865, *Journal of Discourses* 11:113-4.

⁷¹ "Discourse," *Deseret News* 17, no. 13 (May 6, 1868): 99.

children, to pull their own weight.⁷² Drawing on internal labor sources for the industry had the added benefit of keeping more unsavory workers at bay. In 1868, Young made clear that if these segments of the population failed to adequately “attend to this business,” he would be forced to bring “Chinamen” to the territory.⁷³ Here, Young employed the powerful, popular specter of a “heathen coolie.” White Americans registered Chinese immigrants as foreign invaders who threatened to degrade the worth and quality of “free labor” in the nineteenth-century American West.⁷⁴

Silk’s success required not only the participation of a proactive, familial labor force but also buy-in from male breadwinners, who possessed decision-making power over capital. George D. Watt made clear that Mormon men needed to facilitate the “immediate establishment” of the industry so as to “create a light and remunerative labor for their numerous families, and for weak and indigent persons in our society.”⁷⁵ Brigham Young used more acerbic language to clarify these duties. He expected men with “money and other available means” to buy and import the machinery necessary to produce “everything that we require to clothe ourselves.”⁷⁶ God did not object to an accumulation of wealth. He did, however, fully expect his people to devote it to “the advancement of his cause and kingdom on earth,” Young said.⁷⁷ Failure to do so indicated spiritual shortcomings. “If a man was worth a million of dollars” and “possessed the Spirit of the Lord,” said Young, he would not

⁷² George D. Watt, “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 5 (March 11, 1868): 33.

⁷³ Brigham Young, April 8, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:202.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chap. 2; Smith, *Freedom’s Frontier*, chap. 3; Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), chap. 1.

⁷⁵ “Items,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 40 (November 1, 1868): 316.

⁷⁶ Brigham Young, February 2, 1862, *Journal of Discourses* 9:187.

⁷⁷ Brigham Young, February 3, 1867, *Journal of Discourses* 11:294.

hesitate to secure silkworms and the machinery necessary to manufacture silk thread.⁷⁸ The extent to which Latter-day Saints would apply time and resources to the silk project remained to be seen.

Buying and Making Silk in Utah Territory

When the Mormon silk project began in earnest in the 1850s, people who sold and worked with the commodity already had a presence in the local economy. Merchants imported silk lace, handkerchiefs, hats, bonnets, veils, cravats, and belts to Salt Lake City. They accepted payment in cash and in kind.⁷⁹ In March 1860, for example, George Goddard advertised gentlemen's silk handkerchiefs at seventy-five cents to one dollar each.⁸⁰ Other sellers, like W.M. Nixon and W.M. Jennings, offered silk bonnets, parasols, and handkerchiefs in exchange for livestock, butter, hides, oats, barley, or horses.⁸¹ During his visit to Utah Territory in the 1850s, American journalist and explorer Fitz Hugh Ludlow encountered cocoons and raw silk alongside preserves, candy, mattresses, salt, corn, and rawhide in a Mormon tithing store.⁸² Meanwhile, cleaners, dyers, embroiderers, milliners,

⁷⁸ Brigham Young, January 13, 1867, *Journal of Discourses* 11:287.

⁷⁹ I have identified at least fifteen merchants or mercantile establishments selling silk in Salt Lake City during this period. See, for example, "New Goods," *Deseret News* (June 29, 1850): 18; "Cheap Goods For Sale," *Deseret News* 2, no. 7 (February 7, 1852): 27; "J. M. Horner & Co.," *Deseret News* 4, no. 26 (September 7, 1854): 93; "Great Attraction at George Goddard's Fancy Store," *Deseret News* 4, no. 26 (September 7, 1854): 94; "New Goods," *Deseret News* 4, no. 28 (September 21, 1854): 101; "English Goods," *Deseret News* 4, no. 33 (October 26, 1854): 125; "Nixon's---Council House St." *Deseret News* 5, no. 2 (March 21, 1855): 15; "Wonders Never Cease!" *Deseret News* 5, no. 14 (June 13, 1855): 112; "New Store," *Deseret News* 5, no. 35 (November 7, 1855): 279; "Hooper & Williams' Column," *Deseret News* 6, no. 12 (May 28, 1856): 96; "Taylor's Depot and Variety Store!!" *Deseret News* 9, no. 8 (April 27, 1859): 62; "Last Train and Best Goods," *Deseret News* 9, no. 32 (October 12, 1859): 252; "Walker Brothers," *Deseret News* 10, no. 16 (June 20, 1860): 128; "Thomas Hawkes," *Deseret News* 11, no. 14 (June 5, 1861): 112; "For Sale!" *Deseret News* 12, no. 32 (February 4, 1863): 256.

⁸⁰ "George Goddard's Price List," *Deseret News* 10, no. 4 (March 28, 1860): 32.

⁸¹ "Nixon's---Council House St." *Deseret News* 5, no. 2 (March 21, 1855): 15; "For Sale!" *Deseret News* 12, no. 32 (February 4, 1863): 256.

⁸² Fitz Hugh Ludlow, *The Heart of the Continent* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), 540–41. Quoted in Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 141.

and dressmakers publicized their services. Cunnington and Waddington manufactured silk umbrellas.⁸³ Willis & Frost made a business of cleaning, dyeing, and repairing men's vests and pantaloons and women's silk dresses, ribbons, and veils.⁸⁴ Elizabeth Tuffs embroidered silk as well as leather, cotton, and linen.⁸⁵ Occasionally, readers of the *Deseret News*—an outlet sanctioned and sponsored by the church—encountered instructions for how to perform these labors at home. One recipe recommended using sugar cane sap to dye silk pink.⁸⁶ Another pointed out that ammonia would produce “beautiful lilac colors” on silk and wool fabrics.⁸⁷

These advertised goods and services convey the realities of fabric production and consumption in early Utah Territory. According to historian Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, “The order lists of the tithing store...show the traffic in fabrics as the heaviest among imported commodities.” Mormon wives and daughters desired bolts of flannel, calico, gingham, and other fabrics.⁸⁸ Latter-day Saint converts as well as merchants, gold-seekers, soldiers, and other travelers brought commodities to the region, but not with much regularity. Wagon trains had to travel long distances on difficult, sometimes dangerous roads to reach Utah Territory. Bad weather put a stop to deliveries for a large part of the year. In addition, Latter-day Saints did not have consistent access to hard currency or mail deliveries, two essential components of conducting business.⁸⁹ The completion of the transcontinental

⁸³ “Notice to the Public,” *Deseret News* 3, no. 21 (November 12, 1853): 83.

⁸⁴ “Dyeing Establishment,” *Deseret News* 4, no. 32 (October 19, 1854): 118.

⁸⁵ “Home Manufacture,” *Deseret News* 10, no. 3 (March 21, 1860): 22.

⁸⁶ “Chinese Sugar Cane,” *Deseret News* 6, no. 50 (February 18, 1857): 399.

⁸⁷ “The Utility of Refuse Things,” *Deseret News* 11, no. 3 (March 20, 1861): 23.

⁸⁸ Beecher, “Women’s Work on the Mormon Frontier,” 284.

⁸⁹ William R. Palmer, “Early Merchandising in Utah,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Winter 1962): 36–50.

railroad in 1869 sped up the rate of trade. Until then, local women and girls spent large portions of their days spinning thread, weaving cloth, and sewing clothing, themselves.⁹⁰

When it came to silk, producer and consumer identities collided. In her study of the British empire in the 1700s, historian Zara Anishanslin has found that silk “personified” tensions between “urban commercial trade and agrarian lifestyles, luxury and frugality, virtue and vice.”⁹¹ The same held true in the nineteenth-century American West. Utah Territory newspapers linked silk goods to leisure, elegance, and fashion.⁹² Reports of “splendid” silk shawls from Delhi, elegant silk lanterns in China, and Middle Eastern women wearing shiny silk trousers and jackets embroidered with silk braids also populated the pages of the *Deseret News*.⁹³ These accounts tapped into and reflected a widespread American fascination with “the Orient” during the nineteenth century. Fabrics, fans, stockings, handkerchiefs, and other goods imported from China, Japan, and the Middle East signaled good taste as well as the means to travel and acquire worldly knowledge of exotic, far-off places.⁹⁴ Silk also assumed the mantle of sensibleness and practicality. Newspaper contributors illustrated the functions that silk fabric performed for the body, in the home, and on the farm. Silk stockings and

⁹⁰ Beecher, “Women’s Work on the Mormon Frontier,” 283–87.

⁹¹ Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk*, 18.

⁹² “Wheat Gleaning,” *Deseret News* 1, no. 18 (October 19, 1850):140; Fanny Fern, “Fashionable Young Ladies,” *Deseret News* 4, no. 28 (September 21, 1854): 101; “Merchandizing in Utah,” *Deseret News* 4, no. 29 (September 28, 1854): 105; Aimee Carleton, “I Never Gossip,” *Deseret News* 6, no. 39 (December 3, 1856): 307; “Female Extravagance,” *Deseret News* 8, no. 8 (April 28, 1858): 42; “How to Earn a Home,” *Deseret News* 9, no. 10 (May 11, 1859): 74; “Miscellaneous,” *The Deseret News’ Supplement*, May 3, 1865, 242.

⁹³ “Life in Palestine,” *Deseret News* 4, no. 28 (September 21, 1854): 100; “The Garden of the East,” *Deseret News* 4, no. 29 (September 28, 1854): 104; Bayard Taylor, “Chinese Dinner,” *Deseret News* 6, no. 4 (April 2, 1856): 29; “Delhi, the Ancient Capital of the Mogul Empire,” *Deseret News* 7, no. 36 (November 11, 1857): 285.

⁹⁴ Richard Harrison Martin and Harold Koda, *Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Madelyn Shaw, “Exoticism in Fashion: From British North America to the United States,” in *Global Textile Encounters*, vol. 20, Ancient Textiles Series (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 177–88.

handkerchiefs could keep feet and faces warm in the winter months.⁹⁵ Silk fabric could be used to can and preserve fruit or safely remove straw lodged into a farm animal's eye.⁹⁶ Silk imaginaries stretched to encompass not just an upper-class existence and the mysterious beauty of the "Orient" but also the routine tasks of day-to-day life.

The glamorous qualities of silk were likely far from the minds of Latter-day Saints who spent their days with mulberry trees and silkworms. Elaborate instructions for intricate care and rigorous labor issued by experienced sericulturists contradicted proclamations about the industry's ease or simplicity. In 1880, Daniel Graves, a resident of Provo, Utah, published a treatise on the planting, picking, feeding, cleaning, and stifling required to raise silkworms successfully. His personal experience and thorough research of European and American literature indicated that mulberry tree cultivation should begin with digging deep furrows, filling them with rich compost, and pushing in seeds that had been soaked in "blood warm" water for twenty-four to thirty-six hours beforehand. Cultivators could expect one ounce of seeds to produce five thousand trees. Graves recommended that families plant trees on a small piece of land or along fences "so as to let the children pick the leaves and feed the worms." Once the leaves had been picked, they needed to be kept dry. Otherwise, said Graves, they might start fermenting.⁹⁷ Sericulturists needed a substantial supply of mulberry trees to sustain even a small population of silkworms. In the late 1860s, Louis A. Bertrand, a

⁹⁵ "Winter Clothing," *Deseret News* 4, no. 7 (February 16, 1854): 28; "Winter Rules," *Deseret News* 10, no. 34 (October 21, 1860): 271.

⁹⁶ "A Simple and Effectual Method," *Deseret News* 8, no. 25 (August 25, 1858): 110; S. Edwards Todd, "Removing Chaff or Beards from the Eye of an Ox," *Deseret News* 8, no. 23 (August 11, 1858): 4.

⁹⁷ Daniel Graves, *A Treatise on Sericulture* (Salt Lake City: Star Book and Job Office, 1880). Quotes on p. 13 and 15.

French Mormon convert with exposure to sericulture, estimated that a single worm consumed twenty pounds of mulberry leaves in its lifetime.⁹⁸



Figure 4: The silkworm at various stages of development
Chromolithograph, 1877
Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London, England
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Even more challenging than maintaining the food supply, silkworms required careful and constant monitoring and a great sacrifice of time and space. Daniel Graves estimated that the worms hatched from one ounce of eggs, or around 40,000 eggs, required roughly 180

⁹⁸ Louis A. Bertrand, "Sericulture—Feeding the Worms," *Deseret News* 18, no. 4 (March 3, 1869): 45.

square feet on which to grow and form approximately 120 pounds of cocoons. He recommended utilizing a small space or room within the home or, resources permitting, constructing an on-property cocoonery. Eggs needed to be preserved at 63 to 64 degrees Fahrenheit to keep them from hatching until the mulberry trees came of age in the early spring, when cultivators should raise the temperature over the course of nine days until the area reached 81 degrees. Then, the rigorous work of feeding the worms through its four “ages,” or molting stages, began.⁹⁹

For approximately one month, silkworms demanded that their raisers defend against a variety of enemies. An unfortunate encounter with spiders, ants, wasps, mice, chickens, and other predators could end in death. Infection by a dangerous parasite could cause bloating, the degeneration of organs, and paralysis. Hunger may have posed the biggest threat. Worms also needed precise amounts of leaves cut into small pieces and delivered at a specific frequency. Leaf poundage fluctuated up and down but, in general, increased exponentially from one pound for a group of worms the day after hatching to around 190 pounds before spinning commenced. It took a silkworm from seven to eight days to form a cocoon and transform into a chrysalis, which producers needed to kill by baking the cocoons in an oven or hot sun, steaming them with boiling water, or suffocating them with gas. Graves advised silk growers to permit male and female moths to emerge from the most attractive cocoons. Then, these moths could mate and lay the eggs for the next hatching season.¹⁰⁰ According to Louis A. Bertrand, two marginal household laborers—“an intelligent person” over the age of

⁹⁹ Graves, *A Treatise on Sericulture*.

¹⁰⁰ Graves.

sixty and an adolescent boy—could perform all of these tasks for “about 50,000 worms” each season.¹⁰¹

Sericulture may have seemed like a promising undertaking. But much like other rural women in the nineteenth-century American West, Mormon wives and daughters already had a lot on their plates. Plural wives did share chores, benefit from each other’s expertise, and care for each other in sickness and childbirth.¹⁰² In general, however, they lived in households governed by a gendered division of labor and spent their days completing an unending list of chores that, unlike men’s responsibilities, did not change with the seasons.¹⁰³ Men cleared and prepared land, planted and cultivated crops and livestock, and took on outside jobs to earn extra money. All year long, women made, repaired, and washed clothing, gave birth to and raised children, cleaned the house, managed kitchen gardens, and procured and prepared food. In addition to supplying the immediate needs of their households, they made fabric, eggs, soap, butter, cheese, and molasses for the market. Some took in boarders and laundry or worked for wages as teachers, midwives, domestic servants, or clerks, but typically did so temporarily.¹⁰⁴ They also spent precious time attempting to approximate a modest gentility by displaying symbols of refinement, including curtains and flowers, in their

¹⁰¹ “Correspondence on Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 2, no. 16 (June 8, 1869): 4.

¹⁰² Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, 134–37, 164–65.

¹⁰³ For a discussion of women’s work in rural settings, see Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 24–26. For more on the division of labor for white settlers in the American West, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: “Civilizing” the West? 1840–1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), chap. 1; John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), chap. 7; Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (University of Arizona Press, 2007), chap. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Arrington, “The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women”; Beecher, “Women’s Work on the Mormon Frontier”; Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, 127, 136–37, 143–46; Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 135–36; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*.

one-room dugouts and log cabins.¹⁰⁵ Women and other “dependents” generated economic and cultural capital that belonged to the male household head. Husbands and fathers had decision-making power over land, crops, and domestic labor.

The Mormon silk experiment fell into this same pattern. By featuring the experiences of industry early adopters, the remainder of this chapter uncovers the many factors that shaped how and why Latter-day Saints became involved in sericulture. In the case of the Oliphant family, for example, physical disability and family networks inspired investments in horticulture. For the Whitakers, child labor featured prominently in their silkworm-raising endeavor. The Ursenbach family’s transnational connections came in handy when experimenting with silk. Variations existed among these and other families, but Mormon sericulturists all shared one thing in common: the expectations and work arrangements of the patriarchal household.

“Brain Fever”: The Oliphants

Charles H. Oliphant was born in Canandaigua, New York, to Richard Oliphant and Susannah Young, Brigham Young’s sister, in November 1825. Soon after, Susannah and Charles moved to Mendon, New York. The 1830 census records Charles’s grandfather, John Young, living there with his wife and many of his children, including Brigham and Susannah.¹⁰⁶ According to his reminiscences, Oliphant had a difficult time adjusting to his mother’s marriage to William B. Stilton in 1829. He remembered Stilton beating his stepchildren, drinking heavily, and going into debt. In the fall of 1831, Susannah relocated to

¹⁰⁵ Beecher, “Women’s Work on the Mormon Frontier,” 280. For more on the democratization of gentility in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

¹⁰⁶ Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 16.

Rochester and, likely to ease financial burdens, bound Charles out to Ezekiel and Lucretia Fox. Over the next few years, Oliphant developed skills in horticulture, clerking, carpentry, and newspaper printing and found time to acquire knowledge in history and science. He also suffered abuse. In one instance, Lucretia Fox hit him over the head with a mop. According to his autobiography, this and other violent encounters left Charles with serious impairments to his memory and eyesight.¹⁰⁷

His health problems persisted after his marriage to Agnes Britton in June 1846. The couple struggled to support themselves and their three young sons, she as a vest maker and he as a carpenter. This unceasing pace of work often left Charles debilitated and Agnes with more responsibility in and out of the home. They had no nearby family members to rely on for support. Charles's father had little to no presence in his life, and his Mormon mother, brothers, and half-sister had relocated to Salt Lake City by the early 1850s. Determined to join them, Charles moved Agnes and their three boys to St. Louis in 1852 and then set himself to earning enough money to cross the Great Plains. Two of their sons died from scarlet fever. At the end of this "fiery trial," Charles recalled in his autobiography, poverty "had a firm grip" on the family. The crisis finally lessened when friends and relations, including Brigham Young and Charles's brother, Feramorz Little, supplied the capital for the Oliphants to emigrate. After a long and difficult journey, during which Charles contracted "brain fever," he, Agnes, and Edwin, the couple's youngest and only surviving son by that point, arrived in Salt Lake City on September 25, 1853.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Charles H. Oliphant autobiography, MS 4448, Church History Library.

¹⁰⁸ Charles H. Oliphant autobiography.

Despite his flagging health, Charles recalled feeling a “spirit” motivating him to “labor for the introduction of fruit into Utah.” In the spring of 1854, he spent \$250 on a lot in Salt Lake City’s Twelfth Ward and “went into the business of raising trees.” Experience taught him that horticulture could be an expensive, risky undertaking. Here, his carpentry skills came in handy. A woodworking contract for the Utah Penitentiary generated the necessary funds to improve his property and repay Feramorz Little for his financial assistance. He also asked Latter-day Saints in the US and abroad to bring or send “good fruit” to Utah Territory. Varieties from California arrived during the spring months of 1856. By this time, Charles had the nursery “well under way.” This horticultural endeavor was both a business and a religious commitment. At one point, Charles remembered, Brigham Young “put his hands on my head and set me apart to make my calling the growing of trees, shrubs and etc. and the introducing of everything of this kind that is good among the Latter-day Saints in Utah, and to this end he blessed me.”¹⁰⁹ Oliphant’s impairments may also have factored into his decision to cultivate plants for a living.

In the 1850s and 1860s, Charles and Agnes Oliphant established themselves as skilled horticulturists. In 1855, Charles became a founding executive board member of the Deseret Horticultural Society.¹¹⁰ Not long after, the Deseret Horticultural Society evolved into the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society (DAMS), established by an act of the territorial legislature.¹¹¹ With the support of appropriations and membership fees, DAMS collected agricultural data, distributed information about plants and livestock, supported an experimental garden, hosted annual fairs, and sponsored premiums for everything from

¹⁰⁹ Charles H. Oliphant autobiography. Charles Oliphant advertised for a carpentry apprentice in April 1854. See “Wanted,” *Deseret News* 4, no. 12 (April 27, 1854): 255.

¹¹⁰ “Horticultural,” *Deseret News* 5, no. 28 (September 19, 1855): 224.

¹¹¹ “Legislative Proceedings,” *Deseret News* 5, no. 47 (January 30, 1856): 372.

livestock and vegetables to furniture, embroidery, and farming machinery. Prominent church authorities managed the society's operations. At the local level, bishops functioned as agents.¹¹²



Figure 5: Charles Oliphant
Lucile G. Oliphant family photographs, circa 1858-early 1950s
Courtesy of the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

Mormon women also traversed this horticultural landscape as garden workers, meeting attendees, and prize-winners. Directors listed of embroidery, needle work, and quilting under “Women’s Work.”¹¹³ But women could and did win awards in other

¹¹² Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 226–27. Leonard J. Arrington, “The Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society in Pioneer Utah,” 165-170, PAM 3592, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, UT.

¹¹³ “List of Premiums,” *Deseret News* 6, no. 12 (May 28, 1856): 96; “Deseret Agricultural Manufacturing Society,” *Deseret News* 7, no. 3 (March 25, 1857): 24.

categories. At the second annual DAMS exhibition in October 1857, Agnes Oliphant's first-place flowers came with a \$7 prize, while her husband's Chinese sugar cane, Dutch cabbage, and purple eggplant earned him \$7.50.¹¹⁴ Agnes no doubt helped to nourish the crops identified as the expression of her husband's work.

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the Oliphants grew their nursery business. They also did their part to foster silk production. Newspaper advertisements and articles announced a wide assortment of products, like sugar cane and flower seeds, grape vines, roses, strawberries, and peach, apricot, apple, almond, and plum trees, available at the Oliphant nursery in exchange for cash but also manure, wheat, lumber, and other forms of in-kind payments.¹¹⁵ Via the *Deseret News*, Charles Oliphant circulated recommendations about when and how to plant crops.¹¹⁶ He also asked Latter-day Saints abroad to supply him with mulberry tree cuttings.¹¹⁷ These efforts paid off. In September 1859, a visitor described spending more than one hour "viewing the beauty and variety" of the Oliphant nursery.¹¹⁸ The 1860 census testifies to the family's growth on multiple fronts. By that point, the couple had five children. Charles reported property and a personal estate worth \$5000.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ "List of Prizes," *Deseret News* 7, no. 33 (October 21, 1857): 264. This same year, Charles Oliphant served on the committee to determine the premiums for the fair. See "Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society," *Deseret News* 6, no. 51 (February 25, 1857): 408.

¹¹⁵ "By their fruits, ye shall know them," *Deseret News* 6, no. 38 (November 26, 1856): 303; "Fence Poles for Trees!" *Deseret News* 7, no. 2 (March 18, 1857): 16; "Sugar Cane Seed," *Deseret News* 7, no. 47 (January 27, 1858): 373; "Apple Trees! Apple Trees!!" *Deseret News* 8, no. 36 (November 10, 1858): 156; "Beautify Your Inheritances," *Deseret News* 8, no. 37 (November 17, 1858): 160; "The Desert Shall Blossom as the Rose," *Mountaineer* 1, no. 37 (May 5, 1860): 148; "Acknowledgement," *Deseret News* 10, no. 18 (July 4, 1860): 141; "Strawberries! Strawberries!" *Deseret News* 10, no. 31 (October 3, 1860): 243; "Trees, Trees, Trees," *Deseret News* 10, no. 34 (October 24, 1860): 270.

¹¹⁶ "Correspondence," *Deseret News* 5, no. 52 (March 5, 1856): 416; Charles H. Oliphant, "Chinese Sugar Cane," *Deseret News* 7, no. 47 (January 27, 1858): 375.

¹¹⁷ "Horticultural," *Deseret News* 6, no. 43 (December 31, 1856): 341.

¹¹⁸ "Mr. Oliphant's Garden," *Deseret News* 9, no. 28 (September 14, 1859): 220.

¹¹⁹ "United States Census, 1860," database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>: accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication M653.

Charles Oliphant functioned as the nursery's public face. Other sources speak more directly to Agnes Oliphant's contributions. From September 1860 to September 1862, Charles served as a missionary in the eastern United States.¹²⁰ During this time, Agnes tended to the gardens and her husband's business networks, as evidenced by correspondence between Harry C. Crosse and Brigham Young. On October 21, 1863, Crosse wrote to Young inquiring after "an esteemed friend" he lost track of. In 1861, said Crosse, Charles Oliphant arrived in St. Louis with some other Mormon men. Crosse and Oliphant bonded over a shared interest in plants and visited "several nurseries and fruit Gardens" over the course of two days. Before they parted, Charles asked Crosse to collect seeds and cuttings and send them to his wife, Agnes. He also suggested that Crosse gather to Salt Lake City and establish his own nursery with Agnes's help. Unfortunately, Crosse lamented in his letter to Young, "I cannot find her!" Crosse asked to be put in touch with the Oliphants or, "if Brother Oliphant has not returned from his mission, and his Agnes cannot oblige me," with another "intelligent" person.¹²¹

Significant changes within the Oliphant family could explain this missed connection. By the time Harry C. Crosse dated this letter, the Oliphants had ended their marriage. Agnes moved back to New York, and Charles married Sabina Augusta Dollinger. The 1870 census lists Sabina keeping house and Charles gardening in Eagleville, Utah.¹²² A plural wife, Lucinda Abigail Judd, joined the family that same year. By 1880, the Oliphants lived at two

¹²⁰ "Charles Henry Oliphant," Church History, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/missionary/individual/charles-henry-oliphant-1825?lang=eng>.

¹²¹ Harry C. Crosse letter to Brigham Young, October 21, 1863, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 20, Folder 1, Church History Library.

¹²² "United States Census, 1870," database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>; accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication M593.

addresses in Kanab, Utah.¹²³ Charles continued to operate as an “Importer and Grower of all kinds of Plants, Trees and Shrubs,” according to the *Deseret News*.¹²⁴ But his separation from Agnes seemed to have a deleterious impact on his business. The divorce may have severed lucrative commercial ties. Subsequent census records indicate Charles’s declining economic fortunes.¹²⁵ In Latter-day Saint communities, marriage reified religious commitments and solidifying and expanding kinship ties.¹²⁶ In the case of the Oliphants, these unions also secured commercial networks.

“Many Things Around the House”: The Whitakers

The experiences of the Whitaker family demonstrate the centrality of child labor to the Mormon silk project. After Elizabeth Mills, born in the British Isles in March 1839, and her parents converted to Mormonism, they emigrated to the United States and spent a portion of Mills’s childhood in Nauvoo, Illinois. In 1853, her family established themselves in the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Elizabeth’s first husband, William Oakden, drowned in a nearby river, leaving Mills and her infant son to manage on their own. Then, in 1858, these two formed a new family with Thomas William Whitaker.¹²⁷ Whitaker had only recently relocated to the area. According to his diary, after he was baptized in San Francisco in 1849, the church sent him to what was then French Polynesia due to his “knowledge of the Tahitian language.” Whitaker’s account briefly mentions that during his trip, he met and married a

¹²³ “United States Census, 1880,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>; accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication T9.

¹²⁴ “Dahlia!” *Deseret News* 26, no. 18 (June 6, 1877): 286.

¹²⁵ Census records from 1870 and 1880 indicate two remarriages but also a significant deterioration in personal and physical property.

¹²⁶ Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 122.

¹²⁷ “Was First to Weave Silk Cloth in Utah,” *Salt Lake Telegram* 33, no. 108 (June 4, 1934): 8; “Mrs. E.B. Whitaker Beloved Resident of Centerville Dies,” *Davis County Clipper* 47, no. 17 (June 11, 1937): 1.

“native wife,” and the couple adopted a child. This first family quickly drops out of his reminiscences. Whitaker focuses on his move to Utah Territory in 1856 and the roots he put down in Centerville, located about fifteen miles north of Salt Lake City. That is where he made a home with Mills, a second wife named Hannah Waddoups, and their many children. “The Lord has always provided me with means to make them comfortable,” he wrote in his journal.¹²⁸

This economic security did not emerge exclusively from Thomas Whitaker’s efforts. Women and children oversaw multiple projects. John Mills Whitaker, born in October 1863 to Thomas and Elizabeth, remembered his mother teaching him and his siblings many lessons, including how to contribute to the household. Elizabeth expected her children to “do many things around the house,” including sewing buttons, darning socks, and washing and hanging clothes. John and his siblings supported Elizabeth’s business of selling pies, cakes, and dried fruit to earn money. The Whitaker children also helped their father—an experienced ship builder and “one of the very first” horticulturists in the valley—manipulate lumber into water-worthy hulls, plant seeds, and graft and bud trees. Helping “mother in the home and father in his work” and weeding and watering other people’s gardens in exchange for produce occupied much of John’s childhood.¹²⁹ To their parents, the Whitaker sons and daughters offered not only spiritual fulfillment and emotional support but a steady supply of working hours.

Success in silk production depended on the active participation of all of Whitaker’s “dependents.” Thomas’s property boasted a barn, chicken coop, pig pen, and adobe house, as

¹²⁸ Thomas William Whitaker journal, John Mills Whitaker papers, 1847-1963, MS 0002, Box 1, J. Willard Marriott Library Special Collections, The University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as J. Willard Marriott Library Special Collections).

¹²⁹ Notes on the life of John M. Whitaker (1863-1887), John Mills Whitaker papers, Box 4, Folder 12.

well as a nursery and garden with fruits, vegetables, and pear, apple, peach, and plum trees. Thomas added yet another agricultural project to the farm when he planted mulberry trees and sent to England for silkworms. Then, in the basement of the family home, wrote John Mills Whitaker, “mother kept the silk worms.” John and his siblings helped. John remembered feeding the “ravenous” creatures and watching them “weave their cocoons.”¹³⁰ During the raising season, silkworms ate and grew and ate some more not far from where the Whitaker children slept, played, and prayed.

Coverage of the Whitaker silk business featured only the family patriarch, however. In the summer of 1862, Thomas Whitaker drew attention to his successful crop. In the advertisement section of the *Deseret News*, Thomas announced to “to all those who have Mulberry Trees” that he was in possession of 1,400 healthy worms ready to be distributed to interested parties.¹³¹ The Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society spread the word that the silkworm “can be procured from...Mr. Whittaker, of Centreville.”¹³² Advertisements published in May 1863 priced them at one dollar per one hundred worms. Thomas offered to deliver silkworms to Salt Lake City. “Send in your orders,” he wrote, “and they shall be promptly filled.”¹³³

Twentieth-century reminiscences were much more likely to emphasize Elizabeth Whitaker’s contributions. Growing up, John Mills Whitaker saw his mother managing silkworm raising but also completing the more skilled tasks of reeling the silk onto spools, setting the thread into the loom, and weaving fabric. Among other clothing and accessories,

¹³⁰ “Mrs. E.B. Whitaker Beloved Resident of Centerville Dies,” *Davis County Clipper* 47, no. 17 (June 11, 1937): 1.

¹³¹ “Something New in Deseret,” *Deseret News* 11, no. 49 (June 4, 1862): 392.

¹³² “Deseret Agricultural Manufacturing Society,” *Deseret News* 12, no. 6 (August 6, 1862): 48.

¹³³ “Silk Worms,” *Deseret News* 12, no. 46 (May 13, 1863): 368; “Silk Worms,” *Deseret News* 12, no. 47 (May 20, 1863): 374.

Elizabeth produced a scarf for Brigham Young. In John's words, the church president "honored mother" by coming to Centerville and accepting the gift in-person.¹³⁴ Later accounts of Elizabeth's life speak to the significance of this event. The announcement of her death in 1937 said that in addition to making candle from tallow and molasses from sugar cane, Elizabeth "made the first silk in the western part of the United States."¹³⁵

"Large Heaps of Cocoons": The Ursenbachs

Octave Ursenbach directed the silk activities of his family in much the same way. In his diary, Octave describes acquiring the skills of watch- and clock-making while living in Switzerland in the 1830s and 1840s. After encountering Mormonism through a neighbor, he was baptized and emigrated to Utah in 1858. He and Josephine De la Harpe, also a Swiss immigrant, married in November 1859.¹³⁶ In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Octave earned money for the family by making, repairing, and selling watches and clocks and working with gold and silver in exchange for cash, scrip, or produce.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Notes on the life of John M. Whitaker.

¹³⁵ "Mrs. E.B. Whitaker Beloved Resident of Centerville Dies," *Davis County Clipper* 47, no. 17 (June 11, 1937): 1.

¹³⁶ Biography of Octave Ursenbach, 22 November 1832-21 February 1871, BX 8670.1.Ur7b, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as L. Tom Perry Special Collections).

¹³⁷ "Barlow & Ursenbach," *Deseret News* 8, no. 42 (December 22, 1858): 180; "Octave Ursenbach," *Deseret News* 9, no. 29 (September 21, 1859): 227; "Octave Ursenbach," *Deseret News* 9, no. 30 (September 28, 1859): 235; "Octave Ursenbach," *Deseret News* 9, no. 31 (October 5, 1859): 246; "Octave Ursenbach," *Deseret News* 9, no. 37 (November 16, 1859): 291; "Octave Ursenbach," *Deseret News* 9, no. 42 (December 21, 1859): 334; "Watchmaking," *Deseret News* 10, no. 35 (October 31, 1860): 275; "New Year's Gifts," *Deseret News* 10, no. 43 (December 26, 1860): 342; "Ursenbach & Reiser," *Deseret News* 10, no. 50 (February 13, 1861): 398; "Ursenbach & Reiser," *Deseret News* 10, no. 51 (February 20, 1861): 406; "Ursenbach & Reiser," *Deseret News* 10, no. 52 (February 27, 1861): 414; "Where Has Ursenbach Gone?" *Deseret News* 11, no. 46 (May 14, 1862): 368; "Where Has Ursenbach Gone?" *Deseret News* 11, no. 48 (May 28, 1862): 383; "Time is Money," *Deseret News* 13, no. 11 (September 30, 1863): 84.

This enterprise overlapped with Octave Ursenbach's important life event of becoming, according to a family biography, "the pioneer in the silk industry."¹³⁸ In 1860 he received four varieties of mulberry tree seeds from France.¹³⁹ The crop that he likely generated from this stock earned him a diploma for the best mulberry tree specimen at the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society fair in 1861.¹⁴⁰ That same year, he asked Louis A. Bertrand to send him literature on sericulture and silkworm eggs. Bertrand did not manage to acquire the eggs.¹⁴¹ Even so, by July 1865, the *Deseret News* announced that Octave "has had several thousand silk-worms at work this season, and intends entering largely into worm breeding and silk producing."¹⁴²

In these years, Octave Ursenbach believed in but struggled with silk experimentation. In November 1864, he wrote to Brigham Young to report his progress and request counsel. Ursenbach predicted that silk produced in Utah Territory would ultimately compete with French and Italian imports, in part because the Great Basin region did not see the "impure" and "suffocating" air that collected in the European atmosphere. This climactic advantage, combined with the fact that women residing in urban spaces and outlying settlements could engage in silk work "without much expense," pointed the way toward success. Ursenbach ultimately concluded, however, that "silk cannot be raised profitably at the present time." Latter-day Saints did not have access to a mulberry tree supply capable of feeding hundreds of silkworms.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Biography of Octave Ursenbach. Emphasis mine.

¹³⁹ "For Sale," *Deseret News* 10, no. 31 (October 24, 1860): 272.

¹⁴⁰ "Premiums Awarded," *Deseret News* 11, no. 24 (October 23, 1861): 190.

¹⁴¹ Louis A. Bertrand, "Silk Culture Preface," *Deseret News* 17, no. 44 (December 9, 1868): 352.

¹⁴² "Silk in Utah," *Deseret News* 14, no. 40 (July 5, 1865): 313.

¹⁴³ Octave Ursenbach letter to Brigham Young, November 7, 1864, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 30, Folder 5, Church History Library.

While not ideal, these circumstances presented Octave Ursenbach with an attractive silver lining. Instead of idling in Utah Territory until the mulberries matured, he offered to tour Europe's silk farming and manufacturing sites.¹⁴⁴ Later correspondence indicates that he did not go anywhere but maintained this desire to travel. In March 1865, he wrote that it would take eight to ten years "to raise silk here profitably." The church's global presence offered a solution. The "Sandwich Islands," or the Hawaiian Islands, where Latter-day Saint missionaries already exerted a presence, could nurture enough mulberry tree growth to feed silkworms in only three years. Just say the word, and Ursenbach promised, "I will sell my place, gather my means, take my family and go this spring." The wavering prospects of his watchmaking business made a fresh start in the Pacific attractive.¹⁴⁵ While none of these requests to operate as an agent abroad came to fruition, Ursenbach did get his chance to leave the Great Basin. From April 1867 to July 1869, he served a church mission in Europe.¹⁴⁶

One wonders what Octave Ursenbach's family members thought about a dramatic change in scenery on behalf of sericulture. As early as 1861, Josephine De la Harpe Ursenbach raised silkworms, reeled silk thread, and participated in Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society fairs.¹⁴⁷ According to a *Deseret News* article from January 1869, she spent six years breeding worms, and her husband forwarded some of her crop to Tooele,

¹⁴⁴ Octave Ursenbach letter to Brigham Young, November 7, 1864.

¹⁴⁵ Octave Ursenbach letter to Brigham Young, March 9, 1865, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 30, Folder 17.

¹⁴⁶ "Octave Ursenbach," *Church History*, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/missionary/individual/octave-ursenbach-1832?lang=eng>; "Correspondence," *Deseret News* 16, no. 41 (November 20, 1867): 321; "Correspondence," *Deseret News* 17, no. 13 (May 6, 1868): 97; "From Switzerland," *Deseret News* 17, no. 34 (September 30, 1868): 267; "Correspondence," *Deseret Evening News* 1, no. 302 (November 12, 1868): 2; "Correspondence," *Deseret Evening News* 2, no. 50 (January 20, 1869): 2; "The New Arrivals," *Deseret Evening News* 2, no. 231 (August 23, 1869): 3.

¹⁴⁷ "Premiums Awarded," *Deseret News* 11, no. 24 (October 23, 1861): 190; "Silk," *Deseret News* 25, no. 9 (March 29, 1876): 137.

Utah, before leaving on his European mission.¹⁴⁸ After Octave returned, he married Eliza Durrant, and in October 1870, the couple welcomed a son, Octave Frederick Ursenbach.¹⁴⁹ The family patriarch passed away in February 1871, after suffering from a “severe sickness arising from disease of the lungs,” according to a published obituary.¹⁵⁰

This event did not mark the end of industry involvement for his spouses and children, however. After their husband’s death, both Eliza and Josephine made their own money on silk. Octave Frederick recalled his mother, Eliza, struggled to support herself and her children after her husband’s passing. She earned money by making calls as a “country doctor,” raising silkworms, and manufacturing and selling silk lace, worth as much as \$100 per piece.¹⁵¹ Other accounts say that Eliza worked as a lace maker for Queen Victoria and produced the lace collar that the Mormons presented to first lady Lucy Webb Hayes during her and President Rutherford B. Hayes’s visit to Utah Territory.¹⁵² Octave Frederick grew up surrounded by “large heaps of cocoons,” in his words, and helped his mother with the reeling process.¹⁵³ In the meantime, Josephine raised and supplied the local community with mulberry trees and silkworm eggs and circulated information about how to protect fruit trees from pests.¹⁵⁴ Josephine and Eliza no doubt had ideas about how to sustain and improve silk

¹⁴⁸ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture, Silkworms—Their Different Varieties,” *Deseret Evening News* 2, no. 64 (January 25, 1869): 2.

¹⁴⁹ Verena Hatch, ed., “Octave Frederick Ursenbach,” in *Life History of Octave Frederick and Hannah Maria Turner Ursenbach* (Provo: Ursenbach Family Organization, 1980), 59–92. See also “Ursenbach Rites are Held Here,” *Morgan County News* 27, no. 20 (May 11, 1951): 1.

¹⁵⁰ “Obituary,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 1, no. 229 (February 26, 1871): 3.

¹⁵¹ Hatch, “Octave Frederick Ursenbach.”

¹⁵² Gates, “Chapter on Sericulture,” 12, 15, Church History Library. See also Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah,” 39.

¹⁵³ Octave F. Ursenbach statement regarding Utah silk industry, April 9, 1920, MS 11925, Church History Library.

¹⁵⁴ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 2, no. 244 (March 22, 1872): 2; “Mulberry Trees! Mulberry Trees!” *Deseret Evening News* 7, no. 3 (April 2, 1874): 3; “Codling Moth Again,” *Deseret News* 23, no. 23 (July 8, 1874): 361.

production and could have made their own recommendations to Brigham Young. If these interactions ever happened, they remain hidden.

“They Made Me So Deathly Sick”: Other Silk Snapshots

Other accounts of silk work in Mormon families add texture to these in-depth accounts. Class shaped the integration of sericulture into the household. Larger properties and homes, financial stability, and spare hands lessened the severity with which this home industry intruded into daily life. Take, for example, the experiences of Brigham Young’s wives and children. Young owned many properties in Salt Lake City, including an experimental agricultural station known colloquially as Forest Farm. Clarissa Young Spencer—daughter of Brigham Young and plural wife Lucy Ann Decker—remembered how in the 1860s, her father built a cocoonery at Forest Farm and asked Zina D. H. Young to oversee operations. He hired male gardeners to prepare several acres of land for a mulberry tree orchard.¹⁵⁵ He also had a small, two-story brick cocoonery installed near the Beehive House, the family’s primary Salt Lake City residence.¹⁵⁶ While George D. Pyper—fifteen-year-old son of Alexander Pyper, Brigham Young’s business manager—supervised the cocoonery, Clarissa Young Spencer and her sisters fed the worms three times a day. Spencer, only a young child at this point, did not enjoy the job. “I tended the silkworms until they made me so deathly sick that Father said I didn’t have to do it any more,” she wrote.¹⁵⁷ These

¹⁵⁵ Clarissa Young Spencer and Mabel Harmer, *Brigham Young at Home* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1940), 250. One of the gardeners also remembered using this phrase. See Elinor G. Hyde, “The Brigham Young Farm House,” in *Brigham Young’s Homes*, ed. Colleen Whitley and Sandra Dawn Brimhall (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2002), 151.

¹⁵⁶ Rickey Lynn Hendricks, “Landmark Architecture for a Polygamous Family: The Brigham Young Domicile, Salt Lake City, Utah,” *The Public Historian* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 25–47.

¹⁵⁷ Spencer and Harmer, *Brigham Young at Home*, 250–52.

accounts indicate the control that Young exerted over “dependents” in his household as well as the relative privilege of this elite Mormon family.

Most Latter-day Saint could not so easily stand at arm’s length. They introduced production into their spaces and routines amid other obligations. It was rare to have easy access to a mulberry tree orchard, for example. Husbands, wives, and children sometimes woke up before dawn to secure silkworm feed and spent their evenings trying to locate available trees.¹⁵⁸ English farmer John Groves traveled four miles into the heart of Salt Lake City each day to secure fresh leaves. After carrying them back to his modest adobe house, his wife patiently fed them to the silkworms, which she stored “on the floor, in the corner of a very small room.”¹⁵⁹ The ever-expanding time and space requirements of the worms put pressure on even the most affluent Mormons. Sericulturists sacrificed room after room and then barns, granaries, and other outbuildings to the worms. Eventually, the creatures forced families to vacate their households and camped outside.¹⁶⁰ For Lucy Clark’s family, “All went well until the eggs hatched,” wrote Susa Young Gates. Then, Clark “gave up one room after another to her guests, until they had possession of every room in her house and one room in the schoolhouse.”¹⁶¹ Household residents did not always respond well to these intrusions. In 1864, William S. Muir, a British immigrant and resident of Bountiful, Utah, lamented, “Our silk worms were eaten up by the cat.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Daurelle, “Produce What You Consume,” 46.

¹⁵⁹ “Sericulture,” *Deseret News* 21, no. 40 (November 6, 1872): 599.

¹⁶⁰ Beatrice Cannon Evans and Janath Russell Cannon, eds., “Ann Cannon Woodbury,” in *Cannon Family Historical Treasury* (Salt Lake City: George Cannon Family Association, 1967), 181; Daurelle, “Produce What You Consume,” 46.

¹⁶¹ Gates, “Chapter on Sericulture,” 6, Church History Library.

¹⁶² “From Davis County,” *Deseret News* 13, no. 45 (August 3, 1864): 354.

Some silk workers arrived at a keen awareness of how the industry kept them from other valued activities. To encourage hatching at the precise moment of mulberry tree maturation, Logan resident Priscilla Jacobs placed a package of silkworm eggs against her chest. While effective, this method put Jacobs in a bind. The eggs hatched during church service, forcing her to quickly exit and escort her wards back home.¹⁶³ The stresses that silkworms placed on their caretakers collided with schedules of worship and work. In her autobiography, Annie Clark Tanner—born to Ezra T. Clark and Susan Leggett in September 1864—recalled “Aunt Nancy,” her mother’s sister wife, acquiring eggs, emptying rooms in her home, constructing shelves and scaffolding for the worms, and reeling and dyeing thread. As a child, Annie joined Nancy on trips to Bountiful, Utah, to fill up “dozens of sacks” with mulberry leaves. She quickly learned that this was “hard work.” The shock of this realization was matched only by Tanner’s surprise that her mother, Annie, “spared” her children for this task when there was so much else to do at home.¹⁶⁴ The silk industry did not widen the scope of women’s influence out of the home. The demands of the silkworms constantly brought them back to it.

“Communize the Self”: Women’s Work in Religious Utopias

These patterns appear relatively conservative when considered alongside those adopted by contemporary millenarian religious groups. Take, for example, the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing, a Protestant sect founded by prophet Mother Ann Lee in the 1740s. In the model of the early Christian church, members—commonly referred

¹⁶³ Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics,” 381.

¹⁶⁴ Annie C. Tanner, *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography by Annie Clark Tanner*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, 1983), 45.

to as Shakers—relinquished personal property to the community and distributed resources according to need. Shakers departed from other Christians in their belief that that God contained both male and female entities. As a result, men and women held spiritual and temporal leadership roles. Also, Shakers embraced all labor as equally vital and practiced celibacy and communal childrearing, thus alleviating significant burdens on women.¹⁶⁵

In the Oneida Community, a perfectionist group established by preacher John Humphrey Noyes in the 1840s, members attempted to “communize the self,” or subsume individual preferences and attachments for the sake of community betterment. Noyes implemented the controversial practices of complex marriage, which included sexual engagement between all consenting adults; male continence, or intercourse without ejaculation; the separation of parents from children at an early age; and communal childrearing. These systems eroded the equation of women and children with private property and freed women from constant pregnancies and raising children individually. At the same time, work-sharing restored pride to all labor and nullified distinctions between “men’s work” and “women’s work.”¹⁶⁶ These arrangements would have seemed strange to Josephine and Eliza Ursenbach, Elizabeth Whitaker, Agnes Oliphant, and other Mormon silk workers.

¹⁶⁵ Studies of the Shakers include D’Ann Campbell, “Women’s Life in Utopia: The Shaker Experiment in Sexual Equality Reappraised — 1810 to 1860,” *The New England Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1978): 23–38; Matthew Cooper, “Relations of Modes of Production in Nineteenth Century America: The Shakers and Oneida,” *Ethnology* 26, no. 1 (1987): 1–16; Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, chap. 2; Priscilla J. Brewer, “The Shakers of Mother Ann Lee,” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 37–56.

¹⁶⁶ For more on the Oneida Community, see Cooper, “Relations of Modes of Production in Nineteenth Century America”; Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, chap. 6; Lawrence Foster, “Free Love and Community: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Perfectionists,” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 253–78; Anthony Wonderley, “The Most Utopian Industry: Making Oneida’s Animal Traps, 1852-1925,” *New York History* 91, no. 3 (2010): 175–95; Wayland-Smith, *Oneida*, chap. 5.

Problems and Persistence in Utah Territory

In April 1864, a *Deseret News* article rattled off the many problems plaguing European and American silk industries. “Irregularities of climate, sudden changes of weather, rain storms and showers, undue moisture in the atmosphere, thunder and lightning, diseases of the insects, the high price or high rent of land, diseases of the mulberry tree,...and the great amount and the increasing price of labor required in those countries for producing silk” presented consistent challenges to success.¹⁶⁷ Other commentary spoke more directly to which issues felt most salient to Latter-day Saints in Utah Territory. “The greatest difficulty experienced is the procuring a sufficient quantity of mulberry leaves for feeding purposes,” wrote one observer in July 1865. This person predicted that it would take “a few years” of cultivation to generate “sufficient feed for enough silk-worms.”¹⁶⁸

Other American silk producers would have been familiar with these problems. In the colonial period and during the antebellum years, sericulturists managed many complications. The difficulties involved in production contradicted the unblemished reputation that industry entrepreneurs peddled, no matter the rate of failure. The trend to employ what historian Ben Marsh calls “agroenvironmental exceptionalism” worsened this situation. Promoters talked ad nauseum about the continent’s superior climate and soil.¹⁶⁹ Brigham Young imbued similar rhetoric with religious significance. “We prayed over the land, and dedicated it and the water, air and everything pertaining to them unto the Lord, and the smiles of Heaven rested on the land and it became productive,” he said during a public discourse in October 1868.¹⁷⁰ This account departed dramatically from a more realistic description delivered by

¹⁶⁷ W.G. Wyman, “Silk Culture in California,” *Deseret News* 13, no. 28 (April 6, 1864): 218.

¹⁶⁸ “Silk in Utah,” *Deseret News* 14, no. 40 (July 5, 1865): 313.

¹⁶⁹ Marsh, “The Republic’s New Clothes,” 218.

¹⁷⁰ Brigham Young, October 8, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:288.

George A. Smith. “We live in a high altitude, in a country subject to frost and to extreme drought, that we have several times lost our crops, and that we have twice been reduced to famine or half rations through the crickets or grasshoppers,” he told his listeners.¹⁷¹ But these problems did not put an end to making silk work. “The way to succeed,” wrote one observer of the local silk industry in 1854, “is to never give up.”¹⁷²

Resilience features prominently in preceding literature on Mormon women and the silk project. In the words of one historian, “The silk industry provided an opportunity for women to develop leadership skills and to demonstrate their perseverance.”¹⁷³ As this chapter has shown, women silk workers did find opportunities to make their own living, become players in local commerce, and gain respect. After the death of their husband, plural wives Eliza and Josephine Ursenbach supported themselves and their families with silkworms, mulberry trees, and textile production. When Elizabeth Whitaker made a silk scarf for Brigham Young, he went to Centerville to thank her himself. Agnes Oliphant managed the nursery business when her husband went on a mission. Silk opened some doors to independence from husbands and fathers. In general, however, the silk industry fell into and even entrenched the patterns of the patriarchal household. Much like American silk boosters elsewhere, male church leaders advocated for sericulture with descriptions of an unproductive domestic sphere and languishing women, children, poor people, and other economic “dependents.” Mormon men promoted the industry in public and oversaw the silk labors of their family members. Meanwhile, the demands of mulberry tree cultivation and silkworm-raising tethered women even more firmly to the domestic sphere. In this and other

¹⁷¹ George A. Smith, October 9, 1867, *Journal of Discourses* 12:142.

¹⁷² “General Items,” *Deseret News* 4, no. 9 (March 16, 1854): 35.

¹⁷³ Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics,” 383.

ways, Mormon economic life reflected the same ideas and systems that facilitated nineteenth-century American capitalism.

Chapter 2—Disease, Steam Power, and the Global Contexts of the Mormon Silk Project, 1860s-1875

“A certain disease among the silkworms” has “baffled the science of the whole world to provide a remedy,” wrote French Mormon Louis A. Bertrand in February 1869. Silkworms across Europe were dying at an astonishing rate. Producers suffered from an estimated fifty percent annual loss. Some blamed the epidemic on weak mulberry trees and leaves with nutritional deficits. Others pointed to cocooneries kept at temperatures much too high for the delicate creatures. In Bertrand’s opinion, a look under the microscope offered the most conclusive explanation. Renowned French scientist Louis Pasteur had discovered that the sick worms all had “corpuscles,” or spores, at the bottom of their digestive canals. Bertrand, a local sericulture expert, recommended purchasing eggs “from countries exempt from the malady, or by allowing none but healthy insects to propagate.” At that point, Japan was “the only region in the world” that could offer disease-free worms, but that would not always be true. Bertrand predicted that the “malady will certainly have an important bearing on the destiny of silk husbandry in Utah.” The transcontinental railroad would soon bring Salt Lake City “within three or four days’ travel of New York, and nearer to Lyons, the silk mart of the world, than San Francisco.” “The farmers of Utah,” he wrote, must “promptly avail themselves of their providential advantages for sericulture.”¹ In the pages of the *Deseret News*, Bertrand shared these grand visions about Latter-day Saints becoming key players in the global silk trade.

The silkworm “malady” that Louis A. Bertrand referred to was pébrine, or “the pepper disease.” Pébrine, derived from the French word *pébré*, meaning pepper, gets its

¹ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture-The Silkworm Malady in Europe,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 1 (February 10, 1869): 10.

name from the small brown dots that appear all over the bodies of infected silkworms. Pébrine is caused by *Nosema bombycis*, one of roughly 1400 species of microsporidia, or a diverse group of fungi-like intracellular parasites. These organisms use a highly sophisticated, straw-like apparatus known as a polar tube to penetrate and infect the host cell. For a silkworm with the *N. bombycis* parasite, the prognosis is grim. Spores—what nineteenth-century observers called “corpuscules”—cluster in and around a silkworm’s intestines, ovaries, silk glands, and trachea. This invasion causes low body weight, an inability to digest food, and severely reduced fertility if not complete sterility. Another ominous quality of pébrine is its ability to spread both horizontally and vertically. *N. bombycis* spores can survive in carcasses, feces, and detached body parts for quite a long time. Horizontal exchange between silkworms happens through ingestion of infected material or the exchange of bodily fluids. The disease can also spread vertically, from a female moth to the next generation of silkworms. Historically and into the present, microsporidia cause massive losses in silkworm, bee, and fishery industries.²

For some Latter-day Saint sericulturists, pébrine and the completion of the transcontinental railroad added a new global dimension to local economic development. Since the late 1840s, church leaders encouraged Great Basin Mormons to produce commodities—everything from wool and cotton to soap, paper, rope, and alcohol—at home to sever economic ties with non-Mormons. As discussed in chapter 1, they also asked the

² For discussions of *Nosema bombycis* in general and pébrine in particular, see Yanji Xu and Louis M. Weiss, “The Microsporidian Polar Tube: A Highly Specialised Invasion Organelle,” *International Journal for Parasitology* 35, no. 9 (August 2005): 941–53; Patrick Keeling, “Five Questions about Microsporidia,” *PLoS Pathogens* 5, no. 9 (September 2009); Sunil Kumar Gupta et al., “Impact of Microsporidian Infection on Growth and Development of Silkworm *Bombyx Mori* L. (Lepidoptera: Bombycidae),” *Agriculture and Natural Resources* 50, no. 5 (2017): 388–95; Xian-Zhi Meng et al., “Pathological Analysis of Silkworm Infected by Two Microsporidia *Nosema Bombycis* CQ1 and *Vairimorpha Necatrix* BM,” *Journal of Invertebrate Pathology* 153 (March 2018): 75–84; Guoqing Pan et al., “Invertebrate Host Responses to Microsporidia Infections,” *Developmental & Comparative Immunology* 83 (June 2018): 104–13.

Latter-day Saints to integrate mulberry tree cultivation, silkworm raising, and silk reeling and weaving into their households. In their minds, a homegrown silk industry would render household dependents more productive and prevent a drain on hard currency. This push for economic independence took on more urgency in the years surrounding the railroad's completion. Religious studies scholar David Walker has found that an informal cohort of anti-Mormon commentators promoted the "death knell thesis," or the idea that the railroad would do the work of eroding the integrity of Mormon communities and modernizing Utah Territory. But Mormonism was not railroaded into oblivion the way that some critics hoped. In fact, Latter-day Saint leaders and businessmen found ways to "bend railroads to their benefit or to reshape Mormon institutions themselves in order to flourish in their increasingly networked world," Walker argues.³

Concurrent developments in the Mormon silk project clarify the role of international contexts in these negotiations. Historians have described the transcontinental railroad as a source of the industry's decline.⁴ To the contrary, Latter-day Saint silk boosters approached the railroad as a strategic entry point to disease-damaged global markets and a pathway to economic and spiritual security. While these men did not exert tremendous influence in their communities, their boosterism signals how events beyond national borders facilitated the articulation and institutionalization of Mormonism during the railroad age.

By the same token, the movement of ideas, people, animals, and goods across borders and oceans shaped the economic infrastructure of Great Basin Mormon settlements.

Preceding studies have emphasized how home industries and church-directed efforts at self-

³ Walker, *Railroading Religion*. Quote on p. 247.

⁴ Arrington, "The Finest of Fabrics," 396; Monson, "Mulberry Trees," 133–34.

sufficiency isolated the Latter-day Saints from the outside world.⁵ By the same token, the foremost study of the Mormon silk project has argued that “the Utah silk industry basically lived and died inside the Great Basin.”⁶ But many external interactions and exchanges made the silk industry possible. Experiments in contemporary California supplied expertise, motivation, and justification. Mulberry tree seeds and silkworm eggs from Europe made possible Utah Territory’s tree orchards and cocooneries. The church’s missionary complex secured workers, machinery, and paying customers. In tracing the transits, this chapter borrows from the robust literature on global commodities and the flow of ideas, people, and goods across the Pacific Ocean.⁷ Mormon economic independence depended on steam-powered ships crossing oceans, infected silkworms in Europe, gardens in California, factory towns in England, horseback rides in Greater Syria, and discoveries in French laboratories. In other words, silk brought Mormons into close proximity with far-flung botanical networks and the ebbs and flows of transnational markets.

Steam Power, Pacific Crossings, and Mormon Economic Futures

“A few days ago,” reported the *Deseret News* in January 1874, more than nine tons of silkworm eggs, each about one quarter the size of a pin head, traveled through Ogden, Utah, the official junction of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads. The small but mighty freight, estimated to be worth \$2 million, marked “the first attempt yet made to import silk

⁵ See, for example, Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*; Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*; May, *Three Frontiers*; May, “One Heart and Mind.”

⁶ Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics,” 392.

⁷ See, for example, Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986); David Iglar, *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Erika Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

worms via the United States,” according to the article.⁸ This “curious shipment of livestock” arrived in New York later that month, “after nearly circumnavigating the globe.” The crop had already traveled across the Pacific Ocean from Yokohama, Japan, to San Francisco and spent eight days in a railroad car to New York. It would eventually end up crossing the Atlantic Ocean to Paris, France. In the past, the French government imported worms and eggs from Japan via the Suez Canal. Recently, announced the newspaper, government agents decided to have the eggs shipped across the United States to save money and time.⁹ This exchange of silk industry raw materials from the Pacific to the Atlantic via the North American continent had only recently become commercially viable. Multiple shocks to the global silk market and developments in transportation technologies fundamentally reorganized the industry in the same decades as Latter-day Saint silk boosters cultivated mulberry trees and silkworms in the Salt Lake Valley and attempted to improve the reputation of Mormon-made stock abroad. Global and globalizing forces shaped the Mormon silk project.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, it was not business-as-usual for European and Asian silk industries. The devastating “pepper disease” did more than empty cocooneries. Pébrine distorted yield measures, forecasts, and prices and made European stock undependable. Japan became the preferred source of healthy crops. Differences in silk markets, labor systems, and processes of technological change during Japan’s Tokugawa period (1603 to 1868) explain why Japan largely avoided the epidemic’s devastation. European countries prioritized labor-saving mechanization to accommodate a growing,

⁸ “Our Country Contemporaries,” *Deseret News* 22, no. 49 (January 7, 1874): 781. Other records suggest that this was not the first instance of silkworm eggs traveling through Ogden. See “Our Country Contemporaries,” *Deseret News* 21, no. 48 (December 31, 1873): 755.

⁹ “Extraordinary Shipment of Silkworms,” *Deseret News* 22, no. 51 (January 21, 1874): 802.

standardized mass market. By contrast, a heavily segmented silk market and more abundant labor sources in Japan intensified and encouraged experimentation in raw material production. The patriarchal farm family governed nineteenth-century Japanese silk work. Men supervised production. Women worked for the worms. They cut mulberry leaves into tiny pieces, changed their clothes to prevent contamination, whispered to keep from agitating the worms, and slept next to the worms to regulate temperature. These intimate interactions kept costs down, preserved high standards, and made producers more keenly aware of how to keep silkworms healthy. As a result, Japan had relatively minor pébrine outbreaks when compared to Europe.¹⁰

Disease alone does not adequately explain Japan's dominance. From 1850 to 1864, the Taiping Rebellion raged on in almost all of China's provinces. The conflict destroyed mulberry trees, stalled production, and slashed China's raw silk exports.¹¹ Japan's relatively politically stable ports became much more attractive. In addition, protective tariffs installed during the American Civil War prompted the growth of silk manufacturing in the Northeast and dramatically increased raw silk imports. American buyers appreciated the responsiveness and attentiveness of Japanese suppliers.¹² Robust commercial and transportation links between the US eastern coastline and entrepôts throughout the Pacific World further entrenched Japan's position.

¹⁰ These processes, in the words of historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki, also provided the "economic basis" and "intellectual framework" for industrialization in Japan. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Sericulture and the Origins of Japanese Industrialization," *Technology and Culture* 33, no. 1 (1992): 101–21. Quote on p. 21.

¹¹ Lillian M. Li, *China's Silk Trade: Traditional Industry in the Modern World, 1842-1937* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1981), 105, 119.

¹² Robert Y. Eng, *Economic Imperialism in China: Silk Production and Exports, 1861-1932* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986), 27–28, 166; Debin Ma, "The Modern Silk Road: The Global Raw-Silk Market, 1850-1930," *Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 2 (1996): 330–55; Federico, *An Economic History of the Silk Industry*, 36–41.

To be sure, these transoceanic connections were not new. For centuries, people traveled across what eventually became known as the Pacific Ocean to trade, explore, and conquer. This was, according to historian Matt Matsuda, “a crowded world of transits, intersections, and transformed cultures.”¹³ The Chumash, Tongva, Aleut, Kodiak, and other Indigenous peoples made interisland contact with one another. Merchants, explorers, naturalists, and their crew members exchanged ideas, viruses and bacteria, and commodities. British, Spanish, Russian, French, and US commercial ventures firmly knit these locales together in the early 1800s.¹⁴ During the colonial period and into the nineteenth century, the extraction and exchange of goods like ginseng, fur pelts, tobacco, and tea developed networks of trade between North America and Asia. White politicians and businessmen envisioned the North American continent as a viable commercial highway between Europe and Asia.¹⁵ Discoveries of gold in California, Australia, western Canada, and New Zealand widened the transpacific flow of capital, trade, and migratory labor.¹⁶

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the proliferation of steamship travel and the construction of transcontinental railroads brought Asia much closer to the United States in space and time. Two US government-subsidized shipping lines—the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and the Atlantic-based US Mail Steamship Company—along with the Panama Railroad (the world’s first-ever transcontinental line, completed in 1855) put San Francisco and New York within one month of each other. This route compared favorably to

¹³ Matt K. Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Quote on p. 3.

¹⁴ Iglar, *The Great Ocean*; Matthew Kester, *Remembering Iosepa: History, Place, and Religion in the American West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 1.

¹⁵ Kariann Akemi Yokota, “Transatlantic and Transpacific Connections in Early American History,” *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (2014): 204–19.

¹⁶ John E. Van Sant, *Pacific Pioneers: Japanese Journeys to America and Hawaii, 1850-80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Elizabeth Sinn, “Pacific Ocean: Highway to Gold Mountain, 1850–1900,” *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (2014): 220–37.

the four-month voyage around the Cape of Good Hope, located at South America's southernmost tip. In 1867, Pacific Mail established regular service between San Francisco, the British colony of Hong Kong, and Yokohama, Japan, but the line lost its government subsidy not long after, thanks in large part to the aggressive political machinations and market interventions of the steamship's main competitor: transcontinental railroads.¹⁷ The first transcontinental line in the United States, joined at Promontory Summit, Utah, in 1869, improved the prospects of Japan's silk exports. Silkworm eggs and raw silk started traveling by steamship to San Francisco, to ports and silk manufacturing centers on the East Coast by railroad car, and then across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe.¹⁸

Latter-day Saints greatly anticipated the railroad's completion. Some felt anxious about increased traffic of imported goods and non-Mormon people. Church leaders implemented boycotts of non-Mormon firms, home industry projects, mercantile cooperatives, and labor contracts with railroad companies to preserve church control of trade and the "character" of Mormon communities.¹⁹ While much energy and attention went to forestalling threats, Latter-day Saints also welcomed the exchange of machinery, people, and goods within and beyond borders. In the *Deseret News*, one commentator predicted that the railroad would relieve the pressure of an enlarged local labor force. Mormonism's "peculiar

¹⁷ White, *Railroaded*, 166, 171–73. The seminal studies on American steamship companies include John Haskell Kemble, "The Genesis of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1934): 240–54; John Haskell Kemble, "The Transpacific Railroads, 1869-1915," *Pacific Historical Review* 18, no. 3 (1949): 331–43; E. Mowbray Tate, *Transpacific Steam: The Story of Steam Navigation from the Pacific Coast of North America to the Far East and the Antipodes, 1867-1941* (New York: Cornwall Books, 1986). For more on the significance of steam travel conglomerates in nineteenth-century North America, see Jay Sexton, "Steam Transport, Sovereignty, and Empire in North America, circa 1850–1885," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7, no. 4 (2017): 620–47.

¹⁸ Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, 97–99.

¹⁹ Leonard J. Arrington, "The Transcontinental Railroad and Mormon Economic Policy," *Pacific Historical Review* 20, no. 2 (May 1, 1951): 143–57; Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, chap. 8; Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, 88, 106; Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 348–50.

domestic institution”—polygamy—had dramatically increased the number of young people. By reducing the cost of importing machinery, the railroad would expand manufacturing capacity and provide employment for “our rapidly increasing rising generation.”²⁰

Latter-day Saints stood to gain spiritually, as well. The new route that brought London, San Francisco, and Japan “within a few days travel of each other” simultaneously facilitated the “gathering” of newly converted Mormons to the Great Basin region, according to another *Deseret News* article.²¹ Widened commercial contact also boded well for local sericulture. Much to the chagrin of US journalists who assumed that Latter-day Saints dreaded the “inevitable changes that are to take place in Utah,” the Mormons “are not bitterly and openly opposed” to the railroad, reported the *Deseret News* in June 1868. This technology would carry away and help “find a ready sale” for locally produced goods like fruit, wool, and silk.²² In the 1860s and 1870s, two Latter-day Saints did what they could to bring this proclamation into being.

The “Utah Silk Fever”: Louis A. Bertrand and George D. Watt

In this period, the Mormon silk project gained two important and outspoken champions. The sustained attention of enthusiastic promoters had always been essential ingredients for sericulture on the North American continent. During the colonial and antebellum periods, an informal cohort of male newspaper editors, religious authorities, nursery owners, agricultural society organizers, and political and economic elites did much to foster and spread interest in mulberry tree and silkworm cultivation. They studied, recorded,

²⁰ “Silk Culture,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 30 (September 2, 1868): 239.

²¹ “The Completion of the Pacific Railroad,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 15 (May 19, 1869): 174.

²² “Imports and Exports-Territorial Prosperity,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 20 (June 24, 1868): 157.

and disseminated information about best practices; raised and sold mulberry trees and silkworm eggs; established and bought stock in local companies; submitted articles for publication in local newspapers; and petitioned governments for favorable bounties and legislation. These men relied on and contributed to transnational botanical and natural history networks. And perhaps more than any other factor, these individuals determined whether silk industries took root and flourished—or failed.²³ In the 1860s and 1870s, Louis A. Bertrand and George D. Watt became these nexus points for Mormon-made silk.

Born in southern France in 1808, Louis A. Bertrand spent his early adult life as a daguerreotypist, world traveler, communist political agitator, newspaper editor, and sericulturist.²⁴ He acquired a familiarity with silk during his time in New York in the 1830s, when he imported French and Italian mulberry tree seeds, managed a nursery, and raised silkworms. Unfortunately, according to his reminiscences, a speculative bubble in mulberry trees and a subsequent collapse in the market ruined his business.²⁵ Not long after, Bertrand embedded himself in communist groups and actively participated in France's Revolution of 1848. For that, he served a three-month prison sentence. In 1850, Bertrand converted to Mormonism and received his baptism from John Taylor, an Englishman who would go on to serve as church president and prophet from 1880 to 1887. After that, Bertrand pivoted away from his political activities. He became an active member of the church's Parisian branch and

²³ Working, "The History of Silk Culture in the North American Colonies"; Rossell, "The Culture of Silk"; Marsh, "The Republic's New Clothes"; Marsh, "Silk Hopes in Colonial South Carolina"; Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk*, 54, 92, 159.

²⁴ This study rests heavily on Richard D. McClellan's research. See Richard D. McClellan, "Not Your Average French Communist Mormon: A Short History of Louis A. Bertrand," *Mormon Historical Studies* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 3–24. Bertrand's birth name was John Francis Elias Flandin. McClellan figures that Bertrand changed his name to protect his family during France's political turmoil in the 1840s.

²⁵ Louis A. Bertrand, "Sericulture-My Experience on This Continent," *Deseret News* 17, no. 50 (January 20, 1869): 399. For more on what became known as the "*Morus multicaulis* craze," see Marsh, "The Republic's New Clothes."

set to work translating the Book of Mormon into French. Bertrand's wife and two sons did not become church members, so when he elected to travel to the Utah Territory in 1855, he made the trip alone.²⁶

Over the next decade or so, Louis A. Bertrand established a close, almost familial relationship with then-church president Brigham Young and became a vocal supporter of agriculture in Utah Territory.²⁷ In March 1856, he announced his plans to "introduce into fair Utah three things that are not now here," including wine production, sugar cane cultivation, and "the manufacture of our own silk."²⁸ In the late 1850s, Bertrand returned to Paris as the head of the church's French mission. There, he attempted to improve Mormonism's reputation among French journalists and politicians. He also published widely read biographical treatises on theology and helped translate canonical church texts.²⁹

He also took proactive steps toward securing Mormon-made silk's future. For example, he went to the Imperial National Library and perused French literature about sericulture.³⁰ In June 1863, he notified Brigham Young that four pounds of mulberry tree seed would soon be making its way to the Salt Lake Valley. Bertrand hoped that Young's son, who planned to travel from Europe to North America that September, would transport the supply.³¹ In May 1864, Bertrand announced in another letter his plans to come to Utah, "wifeless & entirely pennyless, but extremely rich by my faith." "The only thing I want," Bertrand told Young, "is a good young Zion wife, and a little farm to make several

²⁶ McClellan, "Not Your Average French Communist Mormon," 4–12.

²⁷ McClellan, 13.

²⁸ Louis A. Bertrand, "Horticultural," *Deseret News* 6, no. 3 (March 26, 1856): 24.

²⁹ "Brother Bertrand, Mormon Missionary," *All the Year Round* 9 (March 14, 1863): 68-72; McClellan, "Not Your Average French Communist Mormon," 13–17.

³⁰ Louis A. Bertrand, "Sericulture-A Glance at the History of Silk," *Deseret News* 18, no. 1 (February 17, 1869): 12.

³¹ Louis A. Bertrand letter to Brigham Young, June 27, 1863, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 29, Folder 8.

agricultural experiments.”³² Bertrand returned to the Utah Territory in June 1864, when he was fifty-six years old.³³ It seems that Young did not fulfill either of Bertrand’s requests. That winter, he lived with Octave Ursenbach, the local watchmaker and silk-raiser discussed in chapter 1.³⁴ In January 1865, Bertrand once again asked Young for “some good land” of his own on which to cultivate French agricultural products and generate “several samples” of “superior” cocoons.³⁵

Unfortunately, Louis A. Bertrand’s activities during the next few years are not clear. He reappears in the winter months of 1868, when he begins to make a name for himself as a local agriculture expert. While viniculture and olive oil production interested him, he reserved his most potent commitments for sericulture.³⁶ He used the *Deseret News* to broadcast information about production and provide public responses to individual inquiries. The first step necessary to support the “infant” industry, according to an article from December 1868, was to “plant mulberry trees everywhere.” The soon-to-be-completed transcontinental railroad would make possible the introduction of the *Morus multicaulis*, a species native to China, on a grand scale.³⁷ While he acknowledged that frosts in the north and droughts in the south affected the planting season, Bertrand also believed that mulberry trees would thrive in Utah Territory’s environment, no matter the setting. The region’s

³² Louis A. Bertrand letter to Brigham Young, May 26, 1864, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 29, Folder 16.

³³ “Louis A. Auguste Bertrand,” Pioneer Database, 1847-1868, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/pioneers/42888/louis-a.-auguste-bertrand>.

³⁴ Octave Ursenbach letter to Brigham Young, March 9, 1865, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 30, Folder 17.

³⁵ Louis A. Bertrand letter to Brigham Young, January 31, 1865, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 30 Folder 8.

³⁶ See, for example, “Correspondence,” *Deseret Evening News* 1, no. 234 (August 25, 1868): 2; Louis A. Bertrand, “Pruning and Training the Grape-Vine,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 41 (November 18, 1868): 328.

³⁷ Louis A. Bertrand, “Silk Culture-the Mulberry,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 46 (December 23, 1868): 363.

valleys, benches, and hills boasted, in his words, “extensive tracts” of “light, friable and perfectly permeable” soil. Perhaps to render a foreign tree more familiar, Bertrand added that any soil friendly to the peach tree “is suitable for the mulberry.” In addition to these “rich” natural qualities, the “peculiar system of irrigation” unique to Latter-day Saint communities “will enable us to transform thousands of barren spots into magnificent mulberry plantations.”³⁸

For Louis A. Bertrand, the mulberry tree functioned as a viable source of silkworm food and as an agent of civilization. “As an ornamental tree, the mulberry has no superior,” he wrote. Rows of mulberry trees would transform one of Salt Lake City’s main thoroughfares into “one of the most splendid avenues of the whole world.”³⁹ Bertrand offered the Cévennes mountain range in France as a case study for the tree’s ability to alter both physical, cultural, and spiritual terrain. These “bare” mountains were “thinly inhabited by wild tribes” decades ago, argued Bertrand. Now, the mulberry tree—a “*tree full of God’s blessings*”—“grows everywhere,” “and every village appears as in a verdant basket.” This proliferation brought the region out from the darkness of “barbarity” and into the light of “humanity.”⁴⁰

While invested in mulberry tree cultivation, most of Louis A. Bertrand’s energies went toward generating a supply of and demand for eggs raised in Utah Territory. To get things started, he told *Deseret News* readers in early 1869, he imported silkworm eggs from Europe, provided recommendations for which variety of silkworm would perform best, and

³⁸ Louis A. Bertrand, “Silk Culture-the Soil,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 47 (December 30, 1868): 375.

³⁹ Louis A. Bertrand, “Silk Culture-the Mulberry,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 46 (December 23, 1868): 363.

⁴⁰ Louis A. Bertrand, “Silk Culture-the Soil,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 47 (December 30, 1868): 375.

offered examples of previous successes producing “beautiful cocoons” in the territory.⁴¹ He also shared information about how best to care for silkworms through their life stages.⁴² The local climate would supposedly ease the burdens of this delicate process. “Our mountain home is so well adapted to sericulture,” Bertrand argued, that silkworms “can be profitably cultivated in almost every county.”⁴³ While Bertrand insisted that his vibrant enthusiasm stopped short of the “speculative furor” that caused a mulberry tree bubble in the American northeast, in the next breath, he promised to “create a Utah silk fever.”⁴⁴ He predicted that on one acre of Great Basin land, Latter-day Saints could turn a profit of \$3,000.⁴⁵

Bold pronouncements about Utah Territory’s superior silk-raising conditions pivoted on criticisms of Europe’s inefficient production processes, painful accounts of disease-ridden worms, and the financial enticements of a market vacuum. Cold, wet climates in Europe made even a “first class cocoonery” very costly, Bertrand said. European sericulturists needed to perform “minute and trifling practices”—cutting mulberry tree leaves into small pieces and creating a source of artificial heat to coax worms out of their eggs, for example—that were unnecessary in Utah.⁴⁶ The Great Basin boasted an atmosphere of “matchless purity” that far exceeded moist, foggy conditions in France and Italy.⁴⁷ A “celebrated” French sericulturist corresponding with Bertrand at the time believed that Utah Territory and

⁴¹ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture, Silkworms-Their Different Varieties,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 52 (February 3, 1869): 415.

⁴² Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture-a Glance at the History of Silk,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 3 (February 24, 1869): 33.

⁴³ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture, Silkworms-Their Different Varieties,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 52 (February 3, 1869): 415.

⁴⁴ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture-My Experience on This Continent,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 50 (January 20, 1869): 399. For more on the collapse of the mulberry tree market in the antebellum period, see Marsh, *Unravelling Dreams*, 456.

⁴⁵ “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 19 (June 16, 1869): 228.

⁴⁶ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture-a Glance at the History of Silk,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 3 (February 24, 1869): 33.

⁴⁷ “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 44 (December 9, 1868): 352.

Chile shared a latitudinal position and “atmospheric and climaterial influences.” For that reason, the European expert indicated to Bertrand that Utah’s silkworm eggs “will always command the highest prices.”⁴⁸ The inability of other nations to consistently supply good-quality, disease-free eggs improved these possibilities in the global silk market. The “tender and delicate” silkworm “is liable to epidemics which rage with peculiar violence and fatality,” Bertrand explained.⁴⁹ Thankfully, the maladies “destined to destroy” the silk industries of Europe and Asia had not appeared in the Americas.⁵⁰

Louis A. Bertrand was not the only one who theorized about, invested in, and generated support for Mormon sericulture. During these years, George D. Watt gained notoriety as a church office insider and agricultural authority. In 1837, Watt—an Englishman born in Manchester—converted to Mormonism. After he relocated to the Utah Territory in 1851, Watt put previously acquired stenographical skills to use as Brigham Young’s private clerk. In this capacity, he processed correspondence, copied letters, recorded and published sermons, and accompanied Young on excursions to outlying Mormon settlements. Watt also committed himself to local agriculture. He served as corresponding secretary and reporter for the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society (DAMS), fostered the formation of DAMS branches throughout the Utah Territory, and participated in fairs. He collected seeds from across the country and abroad. He also introduced and experimented with crops on his property.⁵¹ As early as March 1860, Watt offered a variety of seeds—broccoli, cauliflower,

⁴⁸ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 2, no. 244 (March 22, 1872): 2.

⁴⁹ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture, Silkworms-Their Different Varieties,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 52 (February 3, 1869): 415.

⁵⁰ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture-The Silkworm Malady in Europe,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 1 (February 10, 1869): 10.

⁵¹ Ronald G. Watt, “Sailing ‘The Old Ship Zion’: The Life of George D. Watt,” *BYU Studies* 18, no. 1 (1977): 48–65; Ronald G. Watt, *The Mormon Passage of George D. Watt: First British Convert, Scribe for Zion* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2009). See chapter 1 of this dissertation for more on the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society.

turnip, carrot, beet, parsnip, onion, radish, lettuce, celery, tomato, and eggplant—for sale.⁵² In July 1865, he reported generating many “well formed” cocoons from eggs supplied by Octave Ursenbach, the same Latter-day Saint who hosted Louis A. Bertrand the previous winter.⁵³



Figure 6: George D. Watt
Classified Photograph Collection
Courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah

In the late 1860s, George D. Watt became a public advocate for sericulture and an officially sanctioned emissary of the industry. Certain assumptions about labor, the environment, and transportation technologies shaped his boosterism. At the most basic level, he believed that the industry could employ “non-producers” who otherwise depended on “the

⁵² “Seeds! Seeds! Seeds!” *Deseret News* 10, no. 3 (March 21, 1860): 24.

⁵³ “Home Items,” *Deseret News* 14, no. 40 (July 5, 1865): 313. See chapter 1 for more on Octave Ursenbach.

over taxed energies of the able-bodied few,” he wrote in November 1868.⁵⁴ In addition, the region offered fruitful soil and a salubrious climate. “That Utah is decidedly a silk country, there can be no doubt whatever,” Watt said in the *Deseret News* in March 1868. Even this ideal environment needed work, however. Watt told readers to make space for mulberry trees, which provided “wholesome,” pleasant-tasting berries with medicinal qualities and a steady supply of silkworm food. Mormons who took up what he called an “easy pursuit” would find buyers both near and far. “The whole world is a market for our surplus production,” Watt said.⁵⁵ Developments in transportation made these connections possible. Watt argued that the transcontinental railroad would reduce the cost of shipping goods to and from Utah Territory. While he entertained the possibility that railroad tycoons would exploit their monopoly position and charge high rates, he ultimately concluded that light-weight, high-value silkworm eggs and silks “will supply a very reliable and extensive export.”⁵⁶ In addition to cash, sericulture would provide much-needed security. “Persecution, an Indian war, a deep snow, great floods, national troubles, and other unforeseen circumstances” could stymie trade and force dependence on homemade silk fabrics, he said.⁵⁷

These arguments found their way into Mormon meeting halls in late 1868. That year, Brigham Young appointed George D. Watt to travel to settlements throughout the Utah Territory, deliver lectures on the silk production, and spur the creation of local silk cooperatives (more accurately, joint-stock corporations).⁵⁸ Watt performed this role for a few months. In a public letter published by the *Deseret News* in November 1868, he encouraged

⁵⁴ “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 41 (November 18, 1868): 323.

⁵⁵ “Correspondence,” *Deseret Evening News* 1, no. 92 (March 9, 1868): 4.

⁵⁶ “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 42 (November 25, 1868): 335.

⁵⁷ “Correspondence,” *Deseret Evening News* 2, no. 19 (December 12, 1868): 4.

⁵⁸ “Items,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 39 (November 4, 1868): 312.

individual wards to form these organizations and then “procure mulberry cuttings to be in readiness for early spring planting.”⁵⁹ During visits to Mormon settlements, Watt described the industry’s benefits and necessary steps and put cocoons, manufacturing technologies, and finished goods on display.⁶⁰ On some occasions, Watt produced results. James Mellor, a resident of Fayette, Utah, reported in February 1869 that Watt’s “eloquent appeals on the subject” catalyzed the creation of a “sericultural society” and the fencing of five acres of land for a mulberry tree orchard.⁶¹ In the meantime, Watt provided updates about local silk production to the School of the Prophets, an organization for male community leaders that managed political, economic, and ecclesiastical affairs.⁶²

Talking points about the Great Basin region’s climactic advantages and the civilizing qualities of the mulberry tree were deeply rooted in colonial environmental ideologies. Both George D. Watt and Louis A. Bertrand mobilized popular racialized tropes about the conversion of a hostile, barren wasteland into a refined, well-tended utopia. The area that Latter-day Saints began to occupy in the 1840s had sustained Indigenous peoples for decades. These lands are arid but are also supplied with grassy vegetation, pliable soil, and heavy mountain rainfall. Nineteenth-century Mormons managed the lack of precipitation during growing season by constructing rudimentary dams, ditches, and canals and diverting water from mountain streams.⁶³ Despite these realities, myth-making about roving bands of Indians scraping out a pathetic existence and white settlement transforming, in historian

⁵⁹ “Correspondence,” *Deseret Evening News* 2, no. 3 (November 24, 1868): 2.

⁶⁰ “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 41 (November 18, 1868): 323.

⁶¹ “Local and Other Matters,” *Deseret Evening News* 2, no. 75 (February 18, 1869): 3.

⁶² Devery S. Anderson, ed., *Salt Lake School of the Prophets, 1867-1883* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2018), 77, 78, 86, 88.

⁶³ For studies of Latter-day Saint irrigation, see Leonard J. Arrington and Dean May, “‘A Different Mode of Life’: Irrigation and Society in Nineteenth-Century Utah,” *Agricultural History* 49, no. 1 (1975): 3–20; Thomas G. Alexander, “Irrigating the Mormon Heartland: The Operation of the Irrigation Companies in Wasatch Oasis Communities, 1847-1880,” *Agricultural History* 76, no. 2 (2002): 172–87.

Jared Farmer's words, "a parched, pest-infested wilderness into a garden" began as early as the 1860s and persists to this day.⁶⁴ Plants had a role to play in these colonial mentalities. In the American Northeast and South in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, white colonists like Thomas Jefferson understood plant cultivation as part of the process of gaining control over new lands.⁶⁵ Many Anglo-American settlers in the nineteenth-century American West looked to "ornamental" palm and eucalyptus trees, "productive" grapevines, and other plants as tools of domestication and improvement for landscapes—and races—deemed profligate, wild, and "deficient."⁶⁶ Bertrand and Watt endowed the mulberry tree with these same qualities. With these arguments, these men made sense of silk.

The Mormons Meet the Californians

They did not do so, alone. Interactions with California-based silk experts shaped Latter-day Saint silk visions. In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, a handful of entrepreneurs began experimenting with production in California.⁶⁷ Most famously, a small cohort of Japanese immigrants established a silk and tea farm near Placerville, California, in 1869.⁶⁸ In June 1869, the *Deseret News* took note of these arrivals and their cargo of

⁶⁴ Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), chap. 3. Quote on p. 127.

⁶⁵ Philip J. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), chap. 1.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Jared Farmer, *Trees in Paradise: A California History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013); Erica Hannickel, *Empire of Vines: Wine Culture in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

⁶⁷ Walton E. Bean, "James Warren and the Beginnings of Agricultural Institutions in California," *Pacific Historical Review* 13, no. 4 (December 1944): 361–75; Klose, "California's Experimentation in Sericulture."

⁶⁸ The short-lived Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony is memorialized today as the first permanent settlement of Japanese people in North America. Sant, *Pacific Pioneers*, chap. 6. For a recent and comprehensive study of the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony, see Daniel A. Métraux, *The Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Farm and the Creation of Japanese America* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019).

mulberry trees and tea plants.⁶⁹ Utah Territory residents also became aware of two pioneering California sericulturists, Louis Prevost and I. N. Hoag, as early as April 1864, when the *Deseret News* identified Prevost as the “pioneer of silk culture in California.”⁷⁰ While pébrine wreaked havoc abroad, California’s silk exports enjoyed steady growth.⁷¹ George D. Watt and Louis A. Bertrand took note of these developments and the men responsible. To them, California symbolized what Utah Territory could be.

Louis Prevost’s silk career began in his hometown of Normandy, France. As a young adult, he established a career as a botanist and then transported these skills to San Jose, California, in 1854. He cultivated worms and trees on his property, which he opened to public visitors and became known as Prevost’s Gardens.⁷² His trees, worms, and cocoons made appearances at local fairs, and he hosted public silkworm feedings.⁷³ He corresponded with industry experts in Europe, sent samples to France, and translated articles from European silk journals for re-publication in California newspapers.⁷⁴ He also pushed for and secured sponsorship from the legislature, which provided bounties for mulberry trees, cocoons, and raw silk.⁷⁵

In 1867, Louis Prevost released his much-anticipated *California Silk Grower’s Manual*. Prevost’s explicitly stated intent was to “show California as the best silk-producing

⁶⁹ “By Telegraph,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 17 (June 2, 1869): 197.

⁷⁰ W.G. Wyman, “Silk Culture in California,” *Deseret News* 13, no. 28 (April 6, 1864): 218. An August 1868 article listed Louis Prevost and I. N. Hoag as the “most prominent” sericulturists in the state. See “Silk Culture,” *Deseret Evening News* 1, no. 235 (August 26, 1868): 2.

⁷¹ Klose, “Louis Prevost and the Silk Industry at San Jose,” 310–11.

⁷² Klose, 310; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Bancroft’s Works: History of California*, vol. 7 (San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1890), 33.

⁷³ Louis Prevost, *California Silk Grower’s Manual* (San Francisco: H. H. Bancroft, 1867), 17, 53.

⁷⁴ “By Telegraph,” *Deseret News* 15, no. 23 (May 10, 1866): 178; Prevost, 32, 39.

⁷⁵ Prevost, 27, 29; Klose, “California’s Experimentation in Sericulture,” 214–15; Klose, “Louis Prevost and the Silk Industry at San Jose,” 311–12.

country.”⁷⁶ To make this point, Prevost addressed climate, disease, and cost. California’s blue skies, dry air, and unrelenting sunshine compared favorably to Europe’s damp and stormy weather.⁷⁷ Californians could depend on the “genial rays of our sun” to produce strong mulberry trees, maintain “*fresh and pure*” air, and keep worms “comfortably *warm and dry*.”⁷⁸ These conditions boded well for the market possibilities of California silk. “Of late years a fatal disease has made havoc with the silkworm of France and Italy,” said Prevost. Europeans needed to look no further than California for a steady supply of healthy silkworms.⁷⁹ While California had a lot to offer silk, silk also had a lot to offer California. The mulberry tree offered pleasant aesthetics, “compact, elastic, and hard wood,” and “wholesome” fruit.⁸⁰

More importantly, a local silk industry could employ “dependents.” Children, “aged and infirm” enslaved people, and elderly and disabled family members “whose labor is of little value” in the home, on the farm, or on the plantation could easily manage a cocoonery.⁸¹ So could residents of “*poorhouses and orphan asylums*,” which would ease the “public burdens” of these institutions.⁸² If interested parties needed to rely on wage workers, instead, Prevost recommended Chinese immigrants. They were not only cheap but “accustomed” to silk work.⁸³ Goods generated by low- to no-cost laborers and California’s conducive climate would lessen the “alarming” rate at which “our imports have exceeded our exports.”⁸⁴ Silkworm eggs, silk thread, and cloth would be met with excitement at home and

⁷⁶ Prevost, *California Silk Grower’s Manual*, viii.

⁷⁷ Prevost, 19–20, 38.

⁷⁸ Prevost, 202, 245.

⁷⁹ Prevost, 43.

⁸⁰ Prevost, 168.

⁸¹ Prevost, 82–83.

⁸² Prevost, 237–38.

⁸³ Prevost, 144–45.

⁸⁴ Prevost, 64.

abroad. “We have not only California for a market, but we have the whole world,” Prevost proclaimed.⁸⁵

In I.N. Hoag’s publication, *Observations on the Culture of Silk in California* (1870), readers could find similar declarations about the state’s silk futures. Hoag recommended that Californians give heed to a growing international demand for homegrown silkworm eggs. Because of the spread of disease throughout their cocooneries, European sericulturists spent from six to ten million dollars each year importing eggs from China and Japan.⁸⁶ Evidence of parasites in Japanese cocooneries and rumors of deception from Japanese sericulturists had recently eroded European confidence in Japan, however.⁸⁷ Europeans shared with Hoag their plans to pivot toward the disease-free “California product,” instead.⁸⁸ All evidence confirmed to Hoag that Californians would soon become Europe’s primary suppliers.⁸⁹ The state could only capture this market share after securing a reliable, inexpensive workforce, however. I.N. Hoag agreed with Louis Prevost about Chinese wage workers. Hoag personally relied on this labor force to fuel his own silk experiment. In his words, “My Chinamen, some of whom have been brought up from childhood in the [silk] business,” generated successful crops and determined why others failed.⁹⁰

These and other California-based ideas and techniques shaped Latter-day Saints practices, publications, and ambitions. In 1870, John Willard Young, son of Brigham Young and Mary Ann Angell, traveled to California “to inspect the cocooneries and silk

⁸⁵ Prevost, 45.

⁸⁶ I.N. Hoag, *Observations on the Culture of Silk in California* (Sacramento: D.W. Gelwicks, 1870), 8. Quote on p. 9.

⁸⁷ Hoag, 20.

⁸⁸ Hoag, 19.

⁸⁹ Hoag, 20.

⁹⁰ Hoag, 11. Quote on p. 13.

manufactories of that State,” he wrote. What he saw there persuaded him that silk “should engage the attention of our people.”⁹¹ This investigation fell precisely within the younger Young’s wheelhouse. As a frequent representative of the church’s economic interests, he played a central role in developing railroad, mining, and tourism industries in nineteenth-century Utah Territory.⁹² This and other visits left Latter-day Saints feeling optimistic. T. B. H. Stenhouse, a prominent church member and well-known figure Salt Lake City’s mercantile sector, visited Louis Prevost’s cocooneries in 1868 and reported back that Utah Territory was actually better positioned for “the production of this valuable article of commerce.”⁹³

Louis Prevost’s shadow loomed large for Mormon sericulturists. During the few impactful years passed between the publication of the *California Silk Grower’s Manual* (1867) and Prevost’s death in April 1869, his ideas and insights spread beyond the Pacific Coast. In a *Deseret News* piece, Louis A. Bertrand announced a newly released manual “by my excellent friend Monsieur Louis Prevost” that contained hints “fully applicable to Utah.”⁹⁴ George D. Watt also felt and extended Prevost’s influence. He encouraged producers to adopt Prevost’s silkworm feeding technique so as to generate silk at a fast-enough rate and of a high-enough quality to “undersell” European producers.⁹⁵ Here, Watt

⁹¹ “Local and Other Matters,” *Deseret News* 19, no. 21 (June 29, 1870): 245. In a letter to his father written on July 1, 1870, Jon Willard Young described a day spent at the California Silk Company’s cocoonery in Davisville. Young “taxed” the “exceedingly patient” Monsieur Blanc, the manager of the operation, with many questions, “the answers to which I have writ[t]en down.” John W. Young letter to Brigham Young, July 1, 1870, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 45, Folder 5.

⁹² Walker, *Railroading Religion*, 170–73, 188–90. For more accounts of John Willard Young’s activities, see Charles L. Keller, “Promoting Railroads and Statehood: John W. Young,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1977): 289–308; M. Guy Bishop, “Building Railroads for the Kingdom: The Career of John W. Young,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 66–80.

⁹³ Brigham Young, “Correspondence,” *Millennial Star* 30, no. 51 (December 19, 1868): 811.

⁹⁴ “Correspondence on Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 2, no. 16 (June 8, 1869): 4

⁹⁵ “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 42 (November 25, 1868): 335.

referred to what Prevost called the “California system,” which involved removing entire branches from the mulberry tree and placing them on top of the silkworms. This method allowed one man to, in Prevost’s words, “take care of and raise as many silkworms as eight men would in France or Italy under the old system” of picking individual leaves from the mulberry tree.⁹⁶ Clearly, labor was never far from the minds of male silk boosters.

The Working Homes of Mormon Silk Boosterism

Louis A. Bertrand and George D. Watt published articles about sericulture and traveled throughout Mormon communities. They also supervised silk workers. Bertrand and Watt’s public pronouncements about climates and markets always occurred against a backdrop of domestic labor, which made possible their visions of Mormon-made silk in the global marketplace. For years, silk germinated in George D. Watt’s own household. Over the course of his life, Watt married six women—Mary “Molly” Gregson, Jane Brown, Alice Longstroth Whittaker, Elizabeth Golightly, Sarah Ann Harter, and Martha Bench—and fathered twenty-seven children. Watt strongly believed that all family members had the potential—and the obligation—to labor.⁹⁷ For most of the 1850s and 1860s, Watt, his wives, and their children lived and worked in semi-self-sufficient Salt Lake City residences. The family relied on the church tithing store for staples and imported cloth and clothing from London. They also kept cows, raised produce, and tended to silkworms.⁹⁸ These busy homes attracted attention. In October 1865, T.B.H. Stenhouse commented on the impressive orchard and gardens surrounding Watt’s home and the unceasing production of his household, which

⁹⁶ Prevost, *California Silk Grower’s Manual*, 121, 123. I.N. Hoag agreed that worms and workers benefitted from Prevost’s “California mode of feeding.” See Hoag, *Observations on the Culture of Silk in California*, 30.

⁹⁷ Watt, *The Mormon Passage of George D. Watt*, 207.

⁹⁸ Watt, 182–85.

included “cotton spinning, woollen spinning, weaving of all the varied classes,” and “*his* thousands of silk worms.”⁹⁹ Stenhouse’s account gave much if not all of the credit for household productivity to the male household head. In the process, he rendered domestic silk workers—the women and children who plucked, fed, spun, and wove—invisible.

The labors of women and children in the Watt family appear only as faint outlines in other descriptions, as well. In July 1868, for example, the *Deseret News* applauded George D. Watt for keeping “about 10,000” silkworms busy converting mulberry tree leaves “into rich and glossy silk.”¹⁰⁰ One month later, Watt presented to the newspaper office a one-ounce silk skein that an article said was “spun by hand, and all done in his own house.” This evidence of domestic productivity inspired the journalist to write, “Go ahead, George, *your* perseverance merits success.”¹⁰¹ Watt labored as a public advocate of the local silk industry. What is less clear is if, or how often, he plucked mulberry tree leaves, fed and cleaned silkworms, steamed cocoons, reeled thread, and wove cloth.

Silk would not be one of the Watt family’s businesses for very long. Personal disagreements and public confrontations ended George D. Watt’s career as a church-approved sponsor of sericulture. In May 1868, a dispute over wages led Watt to leave Brigham Young’s employ. Soon after, he and a few partners established a store in Salt Lake City, but Watt refused to take part in the church’s cooperative merchandising program. He deemed it unfair to buyers and sellers and contradictory to the “natural” law of supply and demand.¹⁰² This disagreement partly explains why Watt joined the Godbeites, a group of

⁹⁹ Thomas Stenhouse, “The Irrepressible George—A Utah Man,” *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, October 16, 1865, 3. Quoted in Watt, 201. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁰ “Items,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 23 (July 15, 1868): 180.

¹⁰¹ “Local and Other Matters,” *Deseret Evening News* 1, no. 230 (August 20, 1868): 3. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰² Watt, *The Mormon Passage of George D. Watt*, 229–39, 255–59, 273–76.

dissident Latter-day Saints who embraced spiritualism and rejected Brigham Young's economic policies.¹⁰³ Watt also started to attack economic cooperation in public venues.¹⁰⁴ Brigham Young dismissed Watt from his traveling lecturer position. Financial difficulty and formal excommunication soon followed. In late 1869, the Watt family relocated to a farm in Kaysville, Utah, where they barely scraped by. At the time of Watt's death on October 24, 1881, they lived in poverty.¹⁰⁵ According to an obituary published by the *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, Watt "made four applications to rejoin the church, but...those applications were not acceded to and he died out of the faith."¹⁰⁶

Louis A. Bertrand remained significant to the silk project for a few years after George D. Watt's exit. While the Watt family took on domestic silk production, Bertrand supervised the sericulture operations of Brigham Young's wives, children, and employees. In the late 1860s, the church president hired Bertrand to oversee the cocoonery at Forest Farm. This Salt Lake City property eventually included more than eleven thousand acres. At the farm, Latter-day Saints planted and tested the viability of seeds and cuttings, typically brought to the valley by missionaries. Peach, apple, pear, cherry, and black walnut trees and alfalfa, corn, and potatoes all performed well. Other work—adobe brick manufacturing, livestock raising, cheese and butter production, wool spinning, and childrearing—took place at Forest Farm. Typically, Young's family members performed these chores while one of his wives

¹⁰³ Ronald W. Walker, *Wayward Saints: The Godbeites and Brigham Young* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 265–68. See chapter 3 of this dissertation for more on the Godbeites.

¹⁰⁴ "Correspondence," *Deseret News* 17, no. 41 (November 18, 1868): 323; James A. Leishman letter to Brigham Young, April 1, 1869, and John King letter to Brigham Young, March 25, 1869, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 33, Folder 5, Church History Library; Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 121–22.

¹⁰⁵ Watt, *The Mormon Passage of George D. Watt*, 239.

¹⁰⁶ "Geo. D. Watt Dead," *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* (October 25, 1881): 8.

supervised. For tasks deemed more burdensome or specialized, Young relied on hired help.¹⁰⁷

Sericulture demanded both paid and unpaid workers. After Brigham Young imported thousands of mulberry tree seeds from France, Hamilton G. Park—Young’s business manager—planted them on one acre of Forest Farm property.¹⁰⁸ In July 1865, the *Deseret News* reported 100,000 mulberry trees growing there.¹⁰⁹ By November 1868, the property boasted a well-established tree nursery and orchard, perhaps as large as thirty acres. Construction had also commenced on an adobe brick cocoonery, one-hundred feet by twenty feet in size.¹¹⁰ At one point, Young estimated that the building could “contain a million worms.”¹¹¹ As mentioned in chapter 1, Zina D. H. Young and some of Brigham Young’s children tended silkworms at Forest Farm and in a cocoonery behind the Beehive House.¹¹² Forest Farm ultimately became a source of information and raw materials for silk producers in other Mormon settlements.¹¹³

Brigham Young counted on household “dependents.” He also wanted to install an experienced sericulturist at Forest Farm. In 1869, he hired Louis A. Bertrand.¹¹⁴ In his role, Bertrand tended to silkworms, imported and disseminated mulberry tree seeds, and sent, received, and published correspondence containing information about sericulture.¹¹⁵ While

¹⁰⁷ Hyde, “The Brigham Young Farm House.”

¹⁰⁸ Hyde, 151.

¹⁰⁹ “Home Items,” *Deseret News* 14, no. 40 (July 5, 1865): 313.

¹¹⁰ “Items,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 41 (November 18, 1868): 325; Brigham Young, “Correspondence,” *Millennial Star* 30, no. 51 (December 19, 1868): 811.

¹¹¹ “Remarks,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 40 (November 11, 1868): 314.

¹¹² Spencer and Harmer, *Brigham Young at Home*, 75–76, 249–50; Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics,” 384–85; Hyde, “The Brigham Young Farm House,” 150.

¹¹³ Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah,” 18.

¹¹⁴ Brigham Young, October 8, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:300; George D. Pyper, “Silk Culture in Utah,” *The Contributor* 2, no. 4 (January 1881): 1115.

¹¹⁵ “Correspondence on Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 2, no. 16 (June 8, 1869): 4; “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 24 (July 21, 1869): 277.

Bertrand did his own share of silkworm raising, the uncompensated labors of women and children no doubt freed Bertrand from some of the mundane tasks at the cocoonery. They also likely supplied him with the data necessary to generating and refining production advice and procedures.



Figure 7: Forest Farm, an experimental agricultural station and Young family residence
Classified Photograph Collection
Courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah

Louis A. Bertrand did not last long in his position. George D. Pyper, who helped cultivate silkworms at the Beehive House cocoonery, recalled how in 1870 “a Frenchman named Bertrand, a questionable expert in the silk line, through mismanagement, made a failure.”¹¹⁶ Surviving correspondence tells a story of difficult environments, human error,

¹¹⁶ George D. Pyper, “Silk Culture in Utah,” *The Contributor* 2, no. 4 (January 1881): 1115.

and financial tensions. On August 27, 1869, Bertrand wrote to Brigham Young that the “chief cause of all my troubles and disappointment” was the “great mortality” among the silkworm crop. He placed the blame on irregular, wet temperatures, but also on Brigham Young’s own children. Bertrand made the “painful confession” that it was “difficult to obtain from your sons a sufficient quantity of leaves to feed regularly the worms.” In response, he threw away a “large quantity” of silkworm eggs. To add insult to injury, other local raisers presented Bertrand with either completely barren or decidedly inferior silkworm eggs.¹¹⁷ Later on, Bertrand would make the case that he failed not because of “incompetency,” in his words, but because he “was too old” to effectively manage cocoonery operations.¹¹⁸ Surviving correspondence also reveals controversy regarding Bertrand’s pay.¹¹⁹

At some point, Brigham Young elected to fire the Frenchman of his position at the Forest Farm cocoonery. Soon after, Robert Wimmer, a nurseryman and farmer living Payson, Utah, took over.¹²⁰ Young’s comments on the matter seethed with disappointment. “I would have had plenty [of raw silk] for hundreds of silk dresses this year if I could have been blessed with some person who would have taken care of my silkworms and done justly by me,” he said in January 1870.¹²¹ Louis A. Bertrand did what he could to earn back his former

¹¹⁷ Louis A. Bertrand letter to Brigham Young, August 27, 1869, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 33 Folder 1, Church History Library. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁸ Louis A. Bertrand letter to Brigham Young, September 15, 1869, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 33, Folder 1, Church History Library.

¹¹⁹ Louis A. Bertrand letter to Brigham Young, September 15, 1869, Church History Library; Hamilton G. Park letter to Brigham Young, October 15, 1869, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 33, Folder 8, Church History Library.

¹²⁰ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 8, no. 27 (June 25, 1872): 2; George D. Pyper, “Silk Culture in Utah,” *The Contributor* 2, no. 4 (January 1881): 1115; “United States Census, 1870,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>; accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication M593; “United States Census, 1880,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>; accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication T9; Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics,” 385; Hyde, “The Brigham Young Farm House,” 151.

¹²¹ Brigham Young, January 2, 1870, *Journal of Discourses* 13:87-95.

employer's favor. In February 1871, he wrote to the church president to, in his words, "beg your pardon for the loss I have caused to your interests, when I was the manager of your cocoonery...Please forgive me this offence."¹²²

Trees, Eggs, Workers, and the Mormon Mission Field

This incident did not spell the end of Louis A. Bertrand's silk work. He pivoted his attention toward international institutions and connections. In November 1872, he wrote that "Our people will derive much good from the visit of these noble and intelligent representatives of 'Mormonism' to the religious, scientific, artistic, agricultural and manufacturing institutions of the Old World." Here, Bertrand referred to a group of Latter-day Saints who had recently embarked on a trip to Europe and the Middle East at Brigham Young's request. The delegation included Lorenzo Snow, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Relief Society general president Eliza R. Snow; Paul A. Schettler, a French and German interpreter; and church authority George A. Smith. This group aspired to correct misinformation about Mormonism and pave the way for the presence of Latter-day Saint missionaries abroad. While not physically present, Bertrand still participated. He asked Schettler to deliver a handful of introductory letters and "beautiful" cocoon samples to European sericulturists and silk manufacturers. In these notes, Bertrand told the reader "It is only a question of time" before Utah Territory would become famous for silk production.¹²³ This calculated effort to improve silk's prospects and extract commercial benefits from the

¹²² Louis A. Bertrand letter to Brigham Young, February 18, 1871, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 34, Folder 2, Church History Library.

¹²³ "Sericulture," *Deseret News* 21, no. 40 (November 6, 1872): 599.

mission field offers just one example of how the church's international presence and convert network made the local silk industry possible.

In the early 1870s, published correspondence in the *Deseret News* indicates that Louis A. Bertrand functioned as the connective tissue between the European silk manufacturers and raisers in Utah Territory. In September 1870, he exchanged letters with silk growers in France to, in his words, “open the market of my native land to our domestic silk worm eggs.” According to his contacts, pébrine forced European silk growers to rely on Japan for silkworm eggs. This bad news for Europe was good news for Utah Territory. Bertrand figured that locally raised eggs could generate three to five dollars per ounce in gold on the French market.¹²⁴ He sent a sample of locally raised eggs to a French importer who pronounced the crop ““healthy and perfectly reliable”” and decided to hatch them in his cocoonery.¹²⁵ The results were mixed but still confirmed for the correspondent that ““Utah will promptly become a great silk growing State”” competitive with Japan. He quoted Bertrand a price of four dollars for each ounce of silkworm eggs.¹²⁶ On several occasions, Bertrand advertised to the Latter-day Saints his willingness to collect and send Utah Territory's silkworm egg crops to France.¹²⁷ By November 1872, Bertrand was prepared to ship 230 ounces to his European contact.¹²⁸

These activities on behalf of silk and Louis A. Bertrand's European origins provide just one example of Mormonism's global reach in the nineteenth century. From the

¹²⁴ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture,-Interesting News from France,” *Deseret News* 20, no. 45 (December 13, 1871): 531.

¹²⁵ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 2, no. 244 (March 22, 1872): 2.

¹²⁶ “Sericulture,” *Deseret News* 21, no. 35 (October 2, 1872): 525.

¹²⁷ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 8, no. 27 (June 25, 1872): 2; “Sericulture,” *Deseret News* 22, no. 30 (August 27, 1873): 476.

¹²⁸ “Sericulture,” *Deseret News* 21, no. 43 (November 27, 1872): 649.

beginning, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was an international institution.¹²⁹ In 1837, Mormon missionaries traveled from the United States to England and then to Ireland and Scotland soon after. Liverpool became the hub for all missions throughout Europe and the main departure point for newly converted Latter-day Saints “gathering” to “Zion,” whether that be in Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, or Utah. At the same time, the church reached its hand into the Pacific World, starting with French Polynesia in 1843, then Hawai’i, India, China, and New Zealand in the 1850s.¹³⁰ Latter-day Saint doctrine dictated that blood descendants of the ancient tribes of Israel had scattered across the globe and proliferated. This belief justified widespread proselytizing and offered a foundation for a shared Mormon identity that transcended national borders.

Racial differences remained salient, however. Historian Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp has found that Latter-day Saints from the Pacific “brought to their embrace of the faith particular ways of seeing the world based on indigenous customs, beliefs, and political needs in the face of an increasingly bewildering colonial situation.”¹³¹ Also, nineteenth-century stereotypes of religious superstition and racial degeneracy continued to frame white Mormon views of potential converts and shore up boundaries between the “chosen people” and the “other.”¹³² Reports from the group of Latter-day Saints traveling through Europe and the

¹²⁹ Reid Larkin Neilson and Fred E. Woods, eds., *Go Ye into All the World: The Growth & Development of Mormon Missionary Work* (Provo, Utah; Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, Deseret Book, 2012).

¹³⁰ Conway B. Sonne, *Saints on the Seas: A Maritime History of Mormon Migration, 1830-1890* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983); Kester, *Remembering Iosepa*, chap. 2; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 245–48.

¹³¹ Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, “Looking West: Mormonism and the Pacific World,” *Journal of Mormon History* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 45. The literature on Mormonism in what is known as the Pacific World is extensive. See, for example, S. George Ellsworth, *Zion in Paradise: Early Mormons in the South Seas* (Logan: Faculty Association, Utah State University, 1959); Hokulani K. Aikau, *Chosen People, a Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai’i* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Kester, *Remembering Iosepa*, 2013.

¹³² Jason E. Pierce, *Making the White Man’s West: Whiteness and the Creation of the American West* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016), chap. 7.

Middle East in 1872 and 1873, for example, confirm that early Mormons preferred “hard-working” and “clean” Northern Europeans to “ignorant” Southern Europeans and Middle Easterners.¹³³

In this and other ways, industry, work, and economics shaped nineteenth-century Mormon conversion and missionizing. British converts from working-class factory towns made up a significant portion of church membership throughout the nineteenth century.¹³⁴ Mormon missionaries offered these individuals a much-desired message of control, unity, and economic security in a time when rapid industrialization and the deskilling of artisanal trades had made life increasingly chaotic.¹³⁵ The church’s European and Pacific connections proved essential to securing souls but also supplies and labor for the Nauvoo and Great Basin community-building projects.¹³⁶ Historian Valerie Florance has found that Mormon missionaries exposed to diseases and medicinal treatments while in the field brought and distributed that information back home.¹³⁷ Church leaders instructed Latter-day Saints in Hawai’i to form cotton and sugar cane plantations. A 6500-acre plot in Laie, Oahu, supplied Salt Lake City with sugar and molasses in the 1860s.¹³⁸

Silk became significant to the missionary program as early as May 1850, when Brigham Young asked Orson Pratt, president of the British Mission, to transport machinery

¹³³ Pierce, 195–99.

¹³⁴ Dean L. May, “A Demographic Portrait of the Mormons, 1830-1980,” in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 21–35; Walker, *Wayward Saints*, 73–75.

¹³⁵ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-Day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 128–29; May, *Three Frontiers*, 50–68, 150–52.

¹³⁶ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 97–98; Richard L. Jensen, “Transplanted to Zion: The Impact of British Latter-Day Saint Immigration upon Nauvoo,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 31, no. 1 (1991): 76–88.

¹³⁷ Valerie Florance, “Healing and the Home: Home Medicine in Pioneer Utah,” in *From Cottage to Market: The Professionalization of Women’s Sphere*, ed. John R. Sillitio (Salt Lake City: Utah Women’s History Association, 1983), 32.

¹³⁸ Leonard J. Arrington, “Inland to Zion: Mormon Trade on the Colorado River 1864-1867,” *Arizona and the West* 8, no. 3 (1966): 245.

to the American West and, in his words, “further the emigration of artisans and mechanics,” including converts with experience in silk manufacturing.¹³⁹ Later that year, church apostle John Taylor suggested that the Saints transport silkworm eggs from England, France, or the United States and “raise the worms and silk in the [Salt Lake] Valley.” Then, British church members could “manufacture it.”¹⁴⁰ The *Millennial Star*, the most important and widely circulated Mormon missionary journal from the period, made frequent mention of Latter-day Saints in Scotland, England, Switzerland, and Italy working in the silk industry, either as raisers, reelers, weavers, or traders.¹⁴¹

A consensus emerged among observers that silk in Utah Territory depended on workers from abroad. In January 1856, for example, James G. Brown, a Scottish convert with experience in textile production and embroidering, announced his plan to introduce silk fabric manufacturing to the Salt Lake Valley.¹⁴² Perhaps his own European origins made Louis A. Bertrand keenly aware of how the church’s international convert cohort made local silk production possible. “The people of Utah are a very peculiar people, being composed of representatives of every nation of Christendom,” he wrote in March 1869. For that reason, Utah Territory boasted a “few French, Swiss and Italian sisters” able to reel cocoons into thread.¹⁴³ The same held true almost two decades later. In 1886, Territorial Governor Caleb Walton West reported that Utah boasted “skilled silk workers from the great silk producing

¹³⁹ Brigham Young, “Letters to the Editor,” *Millennial Star* 12, no. 9 (May 1, 1850): 141.

¹⁴⁰ Brigham Young, “General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, for Great Britain and Adjacent Countries,” *Millennial Star* 12, no. 23 (December 1, 1850): 357-365.

¹⁴¹ See, for example, “Extraordinary Case,” *Millennial Star* 11, no. 4 (February 15, 1849): 61; “Minutes of the Special General Council,” *Millennial Star* 16, no. 31 (August 5, 1854): 488; “Minutes of a Special Council of the Authorities of the European Mission,” *Millennial Star* 21, no. 5 (January 29, 1859): 74.

¹⁴² “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 5, no. 44 (January 9, 1856): 349. The next month, James G. Brown wrote to Brigham Young asking if a member of the First Presidency would come visit his “young, useful and prosperous Institution,” so as to boost the morale of “the minds of those engaged therein.” James G. Brown letter to Brigham Young, February 9, 1856, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 24, Folder 15.

¹⁴³ Louis A. Bertrand, “Sericulture-Producing Eggs,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 7 (March 24, 1869): 81.

countries of the old world in great numbers.”¹⁴⁴ Immigration furnished not just experienced workers but unskilled laborers, as well. Commentators envisioned wool, flax, and silk production providing them with a viable source of employment.¹⁴⁵

Silkworm eggs also crossed international borders. Take, for example, the case of Samuel Cornaby. During Brigham Young’s visit to Spanish Fork, Utah, in September 1868, residents greeted the church president with a banner on which silk cocoons spelled out “Spanish Fork Silk.” Local bishop Albert King Thurber’s recent British mission trip made this display possible. He brought home a supply of European silkworm eggs.¹⁴⁶ Thurber’s crop produced cocoons for the banner and a foundation for Cornaby’s foray into sericulture.¹⁴⁷ It seems that Cornaby got around fifty of Thurber’s eggs. He managed to raise sixteen to the cocoon-spinning stage. His neighbors initially looked on with skepticism, but his success during the 1868 season—he generated about 60,000 eggs—encouraged them to change their tune. In July 1869, Cornaby reported distributing some of his crop throughout Utah County and thirty families busily raising silkworms.¹⁴⁸ The number of local families invested in sericulture increased to fifty during the 1871 season.¹⁴⁹ In May 1871, Cornaby reported receiving Japanese eggs from a contact in California and also purchasing California-raised mulberry trees with Utah Territory silkworm eggs.¹⁵⁰ Much like Louis A. Bertrand and George D. Watt, Cornaby swapped advice and goods with California sericulturists and

¹⁴⁴ “Governor West’s Report,” *Deseret Evening News* 19, no. 279 (October 19, 1886): 1.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, “Development of New Industries,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 7 (March 25, 1868): 52.

¹⁴⁶ “Editorial Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 34 (September 30, 1868): 266.

¹⁴⁷ “Items,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 22 (July 7, 1869): 261.

¹⁴⁸ “Correspondence on Sericulture,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 24 (July 21, 1869): 277.

¹⁴⁹ “Editorials,” *Deseret News* 20, no. 30 (August 30, 1871): 342.

¹⁵⁰ “Utah News,” *Millennial Star* 33, no. 24 (June 13, 1871): 381.

aspired to sell silkworm eggs beyond Utah Territory's borders. He shared their belief that, in his words, "Utah is eminently a silk producing country."¹⁵¹

Latter-day Saints abroad also operated on behalf of the nascent Great Basin silk industry. In between visits to historic sites and meetings with esteemed heads-of-state, Lorenzo Snow, Eliza R. Snow, Paul A. Schettler, and George A. Smith sought out expert opinions on the condition of Utah Territory's cocoons and inspected foreign silk industry infrastructure. On December 20, 1872, Paul A. Schettler reported how while in Paris, he and his companions visited the Louvre and Notre Dame. They also met with local sericulturists, an engagement made possible by Louis A. Bertrand's letter of introduction. Schettler explained how producers "pronounced the sample of cocoons which I had brought along from home of very excellent quality, and expressed the opinion that this branch of industry would prove to our people an almost inexhaustible gold mine."¹⁵² A few days later, the travelers traveled to France and used another letter of introduction from Bertrand to call on a seed dealer named Jacquemet Bonnefont. Bonnefont's agent escorted the party to a silk portrait workshop. They opted to purchase renderings of President George Washington, loom inventor Joseph Marie Jacquard, and Brigham Young.¹⁵³

The group's silk encounters continued during their travels through the Middle East. George A. Smith reported that "the cultivation of the mulberry and the production of silk are carried on to a considerable extent" in Greater Syria, a territory that contained present-day

¹⁵¹ "Local and Other Matters," *Deseret News* 19, no. 16 (May 25, 1870): 192; "Correspondence," *Deseret News* 19, no. 44 (December 7, 1870): 511. Cornaby was not the only one to make use of imported eggs. In July 1874, for example, Walter Reynolds successfully produced silk cocoons from two thousand British eggs. "Utah News," *Millennial Star* 36, no. 28 (July 14, 1874): 445.

¹⁵² Paul A. Schettler to editors, *Salt Lake Herald*, in George A. Smith et al., *Correspondence of Palestine Tourists; Comprising a Series of Letters by George A. Smith, Lorenzo Snow, Paul A. Schettler, and Eliza R. Snow, of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Steam Printing Establishment, 1875), 87–88.

¹⁵³ Paul A. Schettler to editors, *Salt Lake Herald*, in Smith et al., 90–91.

Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan.¹⁵⁴ During a horseback ride along the Anti-Lebanon range, located on the border between today's Syria and Lebanon, Eliza R. Snow reported seeing "fields of mulberry" lining the road. "These trees have an old appearance—the trunks being very large, and the branches young and small from constant pruning," she wrote in April 1873.¹⁵⁵ Lorenzo Snow described how Beirut's "chief article of export is raw silk." In the capital city's vicinity, "the country is being filled with mulberry orchards."¹⁵⁶

Silk production and trade had only recently begun to dominate the economy of Mount Lebanon, a province of what was then Greater Syria. In response to the pébrine crisis, peasants and landowners planted more and more mulberry trees, often in lieu of subsistence crops, throughout Mount Lebanon's mountainous regions and coastal areas. French and British capital then flowed in to fund manufacturing infrastructure, including silk factories. An emerging merchant class based in Beirut—a burgeoning metropole that functioned as the "door" between East and West—brokered exchanges between local producers and the French market.¹⁵⁷ In other words, when these Latter-day Saints encountered Syrian mulberry trees, they also bore witness to the knitting together of the Lebanese peasantry with European capitalism.

¹⁵⁴ George A. Smith to Brigham Young, in Smith et al., 295.

¹⁵⁵ Eliza R. Snow to editor, *Woman's Exponent*, in Smith et al., 305.

¹⁵⁶ Lorenzo Snow to editor, *Deseret News*, in Smith et al., 325.

¹⁵⁷ Kais Firro, "Silk and Agrarian Changes in Lebanon, 1860-1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 2 (1990): 151–69; Akram Fouad Khater, "'House' to 'Goddess of the House': Gender, Class, and Silk in 19th-Century Mount Lebanon," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 3 (1996): 325–48; Fawwaz Traboulsi, "Beirut, Capital of Trade and Culture (1820–1918)," in *A History of Modern Lebanon* (Pluto Press, 2012), 52–72.



Figure 8: Young girls boil silk cocoons in a Syrian reeling plant, circa 1914
 Underwood & Underwood Photography Studio
 Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

These European and Middle Eastern engagements bore fruit in the Salt Lake Valley. Paul A. Schettler—an emigrant from Germany who served as Salt Lake City’s treasurer for several years—claimed in an August 1874 *Millennial Star* article that during a stop in Florence, Italy, he “got an order for 4,000 pounds of cocoons merely as a sample, with the encouragement that all that could be raised in Utah would be readily purchased, whether cocoons, reeled silk, or eggs.” As the owner of a purported six to seven thousand mulberry trees, Schettler may have planned to take advantage of this offer.¹⁵⁸ In more ways than one, transnational connections brought life to the Mormon silk project.

¹⁵⁸ “Utah News,” *Millennial Star* 36, no. 32 (August 11, 1874): 510; *Utah Directory and Gazetteer for 1879-80* (Salt Lake City: J. C. Graham & Co., 1879), 54, 314.; “United States Census, 1880,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>: accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication T9. Louis A. Bertrand’s previous correspondence with a Florentine silk house likely secured the order that he received during his trip. “Sericulture-The Latest News from France,” *Deseret News* 22, no. 48 (December 31, 1873): 763.

The Demise of Pébrine and Louis A. Bertrand

Latter-day Saint sericulturists had to alter course in the mid-1870s. On-the-ground issues with suppliers, silkworms, and mulberry trees frustrated their experiment. “When I reflect how hard I have labored to get a return for our Utah eggs, and the perplexities I have endured, I am exceedingly annoyed at the result,” wrote Louis A. Bertrand in September 1873.¹⁵⁹ As much as he and other silk boosters celebrated the health and climactic advantages of Utah Territory, successful crops would not come easily. During these years, Zina D.H. Young and George D. Watt reported issues with silkworm food sources and diseased or inert silkworm crops.¹⁶⁰ Their window into the international silkworm egg market was also closing, thanks to French scientist Louis Pasteur.

Pébrine first appeared in Europe in 1849 and quickly ate its way through French and Italian cocooneries. Sericulturists experimented with various cures, including electroshock therapy, chlorine gas fumigation, and prescriptions of rum, sugar, and absinthe. The spread of the disease forced producers to look farther and farther for healthy eggs.¹⁶¹ French mayors, breeders, and capitalists pled for help from the state. French officials ultimately decided to reach out to Louis Pasteur.¹⁶² Despite his limited experience with silkworms, Pasteur agreed to take the case. From 1865 to 1871, Pasteur pursued cures for the disease at a laboratory in Alés, a small town in southern France.¹⁶³ He and his team—professional assistants plus his wife and daughter—discovered pébrine’s capacity for horizontal and vertical transmission.

¹⁵⁹ “Sericulture,” *Deseret News* 22, no. 31 (September 3, 1873): 487.

¹⁶⁰ “Correspondence on Sericulture,” *Deseret News* 18, no. 24 (July 21, 1869): 277; June 7, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes, 1875 June-1878 October, MS 14029, Church History Library.

¹⁶¹ René Valléry-Radot, *Louis Pasteur: His Life and Labours*, trans. Lady Claud Hamilton (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1885), 132.

¹⁶² Patrice Debre, *Louis Pasteur*, trans. Elborg Forster (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 178.

¹⁶³ Debre, 185.

To keep the disease from spreading, the scientists ground up the bodies of female moths, mixed the corpses with water, and peered at the matter under the microscope. Then, they destroyed all eggs produced by infected moths.¹⁶⁴

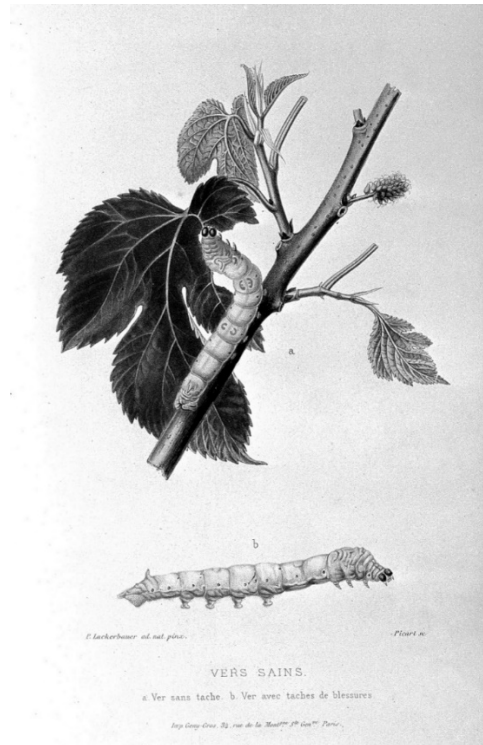


Figure 9: Silkworm on a mulberry tree branch
Published in Louis Pasteur, *Études sur la maladie des vers à soie* (1870)
Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London, England

Not everyone appreciated these conclusions. Silkworm egg merchants, for example, preferred to continue their lucrative trade rather than seeing Europe's supply restored, so they spread rumors about Louis Pasteur's supposed failure.¹⁶⁵ For similar reasons, American producers appreciated and lamented Pasteur's insights. Industry participants embraced the scientist's methods of cleaning cocooneries and destroying the infected but recognized that

¹⁶⁴ Debre, 192.

¹⁶⁵ Debre, 208–9.

these same methods would return the silk market to the status quo.¹⁶⁶ By the 1870s, Pasteur's method of identifying sick parents dramatically dropped silkworm infection rates. The market shares of silk-producing nations returned to pre-pébrine levels, except for the much stronger presence of Japan.¹⁶⁷

Louis A. Bertrand's mental and physical deterioration accompanied the dissolving global prospects of Utah Territory silk. The "aged and respected gentleman has become seriously affected in his mind," announced the *Deseret News* on March 17, 1875. Bertrand's "affliction"—most likely dementia—surfaced after he received news that his Parisian family members, perhaps the wife and son he left behind, suffered from "serious illness." Bertrand came into the care of city authorities.¹⁶⁸ Officials eventually relocated him to the local insane asylum. Bertrand seemed to recover his "sanity" a few days later but suffered from "great physical prostration." He died on Sunday, March 21, 1875, at the age of 67.¹⁶⁹ This was a tragic end for a man described by one biographer as "possessed of incredible talents and a brilliant mind."¹⁷⁰ But the silkworms and mulberry trees that Bertrand gave life to in previous decades continued to dot the local landscape.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Charles V. Riley, the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Chief Entomologist in the 1880s and 1890s, explained how raisers "seized the opportunity to produce eggs" and realized fantastic profits. "But the day for such work is past," Riley wrote. See Charles V. Riley, "Report of the Entomologist," in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture 1885* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 215.

¹⁶⁷ Klose, "California's Experimentation in Sericulture," 216; Federico, *An Economic History of the Silk Industry*, 41.

¹⁶⁸ "Local and Other Matters," *Deseret News* 24, no. 7 (March 17, 1875): 104; McClellan, "Not Your Average French Communist Mormon," 4.

¹⁶⁹ "Local and Other Matters," *Deseret News* 24, no. 8 (March 24, 1875): 124; McClellan, 20–21; Christina Giardinelli, "Marker Memorializes 55 Patients Who Died in Utah's First Asylum," *Deseret News*, July 2, 2019, <https://www.deseret.com/2019/7/2/8935487/marker-memorializes-55-patients-who-died-in-utah-s-first-asylum>.

¹⁷⁰ McClellan, "Not Your Average French Communist Mormon," 4.

¹⁷¹ Quote from Davis Bitton and Gordon Irving, "The Continental Inheritance," in *The Peoples of Utah*, ed. Helen Z. Papanikolas (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1976), 243. C.A. Christensen, a resident of Fountain Green, Utah, received mulberry tree seeds from Louis A. Bertrand in the early 1870s and grew two thousand trees. This experience instilled in him a "strong faith that sericulture could be made a prolific source of wealth to Utah." "Local and Other Matters," *Deseret News* 26, no. 39 (October 31, 1877): 611.

Louis A. Bertrand and George D. Watt spent years trying to foster faith in sericulture. Bold claims about climate, price, and labor issued from the mouths and pens of industry promoters could be inspiring. They could also be perilous.¹⁷² Misplaced optimism and ill-advised investments made up the dark underbelly of industry boosterism throughout the nineteenth century. Californian Louis Prevost—Bertrand’s “excellent friend”—became notorious among USDA officials for precisely this reason.¹⁷³ In neglecting to mention the difficult, at times disgusting realities of silk raising, Mormon boosters may have done more harm than good. Even so, the actions that Bertrand and Watt took on behalf of locally raised silk speak to understudied aspects of the transcontinental railroad and Mormon economic independence. Transnational events shaped how Latter-day Saints responded to the transcontinental railroad. Connections beyond the borders of the Utah Territory brought workers, eggs, seeds, and industry best practices to the Great Basin region. Mormon economic self-sufficiency meant isolating from some certain markets but also connecting with others.

As subsequent chapters will show, women’s work in and out of the home kept the Mormon silk project alive in the post-pébrine years. In 1875, Ann Kempton Brown Dunyon assumed responsibility of the Forest Farm cocoonery. According to one report, Dunyon—already an experienced silk worker before she came to the Great Basin—emerged from the 1875 season with more than 360,000 healthy worms. These creatures kept Dunyon and her

¹⁷² Ben Marsh has found that in the antebellum period, “omissions, exaggerations, false claims and inflated ‘scientific’ data in the chorus of pro-silk propaganda all played their part in concealing the gap between rhetoric and reality.” See Marsh, “The Republic’s New Clothes,” 227.

¹⁷³ In 1879, Charles V. Riley blamed the “extravagant statements and excessive enthusiasm, verging on fanaticism, which characterized all of M. Pr[e]vost’s writings and utterances” for the lackluster results of California’s silk experiment. See Charles V. Riley, “A New Source of Wealth to the United States,” in *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science*, ed. Frederick W. Putnam (Salem, MA: The Permanent Secretary, 1879), 277–83.

handful of helpers, likely women and children from Brigham Young's family, quite busy.¹⁷⁴ Before Margaret A. White started paying weekly visits to Forest Farm in the mid-1870s, she had never seen a silkworm. At the cocoonery, Dunyon and Zina D.H. Young gave White not only lessons but a supply of silkworm eggs, which she took home and raised with the help of her eleven-year-old daughter. The Whites ultimately had thirty pounds of cocoons to show for it.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ "Silk Cocoonery," *Deseret Evening News* 8, no. 195 (July 12, 1875): 3; Susan A. Stringham, "Silk Culture in Utah," *Woman's Exponent* 21, no. 22 (May 15, 1893): 162; Arrington, "The Finest of Fabrics," 385; Hyde, "The Brigham Young Farm House," 154.

¹⁷⁵ "The Silk Question," *Deseret News* 24, no. 2 (August 4, 1875): 9.

Chapter 3—Silk, Railroad Reconstruction, and the Politics of Fashion in Salt Lake City, 1869-1877

On March 30, 1872, Eliza R. Snow warned an assembly of Mormon women that “the powers of darkness are so thick around us we can almost feel them.”¹ Wilmirth East, a prominent member of the church’s Fourteenth Ward in Salt Lake City, shared Snow’s concerns. She alerted listeners to the fact that “We are surrounded on all sides” by enemies intent on destroying the Latter-day Saints and the communities they had built.² Snow and East issued their cautions in Salt Lake City’s Fourteenth Ward assembly hall during meetings of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association, known later on as General Retrenchment or the Ladies’ Semi-Monthly Meeting. During their biweekly assemblies, Mormon women discussed the new and seemingly perilous context in which they operated. While some Latter-day Saints, including silk industry boosters Louis A. Bertrand and George D. Watt, saw great potential in the transcontinental railroad, from the perspective of Mormon women, the influx of strangers and goods from the eastern United States injected uncertainty into their communities. In her history of the organization published in 1911, Susa Young Gates encapsulated the retrenchment movement’s ethos. “All that was ennobling was encouraged,” she wrote, “while that which was degrading and corrupting was recognized and battled against in a common struggle for refinement.”³

¹ Quote from March 30, 1872, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association, 1870-1880, CR 100 904, Church History Library.

² April 26, 1873, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association. For more on Wilmirth East, see “Biography and Resolutions,” *Woman’s Exponent* 30, no. 14 (May 15, 1902): 111; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, xv, 340, 382.

³ Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 41.

This lofty goal can be traced back to the movement's first champion, Brigham Young, who understood the completion of the transcontinental railroad in gendered terms. He believed that Mormon women and girls were uniquely susceptible to fashionable clothing's appeals and needed a formal organization to help them stem the tide of supposedly overwhelming consumer impulses. Young tasked Mary Isabella Hales Horne, a visible leader of Mormon women, with teaching values of plain living and self-sufficiency to other Latter-day Saints.⁴ Horne then asked two other well-known Mormon women—Eliza R. Snow, one of Brigham Young's wives, and Margaret T. Smoot, wife of a prominent Mormon businessman and politician—to spread interest in the cause.⁵ On February 10, 1870, twelve people met at Horne's home and resolved to, among other things, consider "any table neatly spread, with no matter how plain, but wholesome food, . . . *fashionable*."⁶ At around the same time, Brigham Young and his wives and daughters assembled in the parlor of the Lion House, their family home in Salt Lake City. At this meeting, he announced that expensive clothing and elaborate culinary displays made women "slaves" and trapped husbands beneath crushing debt. For that reason, he told his listeners to abstain from "extravagance in dress, in eating, and even in speech" and "Let our apparel be . . . the workmanship of your own hands."⁷ After that, Horne and her supporters formally organized the Senior and Junior Cooperative

⁴ Gates, 31; Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 252–53.

⁵ Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, 31; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 338–40.

⁶ "Table Retrenchment," *Deseret Evening News* 3, no. 72 (February 16, 1870): 2.

⁷ As reported by Bathsheba W. Smith in Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, 8–10. See also Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 352–53. On May 27, 1870, Young's daughters, ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-two, adopted formal resolutions for the First Young Ladies' Department of the Ladies' Cooperative Retrenchment Association and sustained Ella Y. Empey as president. See "Resolutions," *Deseret Evening News* 3, no. 178 (June 20, 1870): 2 and Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 353–57.

Retrenchment Association.⁸ The retrenchment movement quickly spread beyond Young's home and family circle and captured the energies of women and girls throughout the Utah Territory.

Their activities provide fresh insight into how Mormon women and images of them operated in and influenced Utah Territory's political and economic landscape in the mid-nineteenth century. Historians have already explored some of the ways that Latter-day Saints grappled with the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the discursive "othering" of Mormonism, and the federal government's attempt to break apart the church's influence in the 1860s and 1870s.⁹ Brigham Young and other male decision-makers responded to these threats by demanding a halt in imported commodities, installing boycotts of non-Mormon firms, and amplifying their boosterism of local manufacturing.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Latter-day Saint women produced newspapers and pamphlets, hosted "indignation meetings," attended national assemblies, and lobbied state and federal politicians.¹¹ These activities forced outsiders to reckon with assumptions about the "enslavement" of Latter-day Saint women,

⁸ This organization brought together representatives of Salt Lake City's "young ladies' departments" and presidents of the Relief Society to oversee retrenchment activities and the goals of Relief Society and Primary Association, a group dedicated to children. This organization governed these institutions until 1880, when church leaders established separate presidencies for each. See Jill Mulvay Derr and C. Brooklyn Derr, "Outside the Mormon Hierarchy: Alternative Aspects of Institutional Power," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 4 (1982): 23; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 343, 353–57.

⁹ See, for example, Davis Bitton and Gary L. Bunker, "Double Jeopardy: Visual Images of Mormon Women to 1914," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 184–202; Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Fluhman, *A Peculiar People*; Talbot, *A Foreign Kingdom*; W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ Arrington, "The Transcontinental Railroad and Mormon Economic Policy"; Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*; Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*; Arrington, *Brigham Young*, 348–50; May, "One Heart and Mind"; Walker, *Wayward Saints*.

¹¹ For histories of Mormon women in this period, see Jill Mulvay Derr, "'Strength in Our Union': The Making of Mormon Sisterhood," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 153–207; Madsen, *Battle for the Ballot*.

who defended their church and “the right to speak for themselves,” in the words of historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich.¹²

This chapter argues that in this period, debates over Mormonism incorporated gendered assumptions about fashion and emerging conceptions of consumer citizenship. As described in chapter 2, anti-Mormon writers, congressmen, reporters, religious leaders, and others believed that the transcontinental railroad would do the essential work of eroding the church’s power and influence. This so-called “death-knell thesis” rested on one important assumption: that Mormon women would jump at the chance to buy newly arrived eastern goods and bankrupt polygamous families.¹³ Scholars have yet to explain why this feature of anti-Mormonism gained purchase. By the mid-nineteenth century, many Americans began to embrace genteel display as the foundation of white middle-class identity, moral superiority, and political status.¹⁴ At the same moment, retailers, manufacturers, and other boosters redefined free trade and uninhibited consumption as guaranteed rights of American citizenship.¹⁵ This constellation of ideas about buying and selling placed women in an uneasy position. Commentators expected women adorn themselves and their homes with respectable commodities but also criticized them for overspending, especially in times of economic distress.¹⁶ This chapter argues that elite Mormon men, church “apostates,” politicians, travel writers, and other commentators facilitated the ascendance of these ideas. In the process, they added a layer of political significance to Mormon women’s homes, bodies, and labors.

¹² Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 37. In indignation meetings, according to Ulrich, Mormon women channeled longstanding “radical energies.” See Ulrich, xiv.

¹³ Walker, *Railroading Religion*, chap. 1.

¹⁴ The seminal study on this subject is Bushman, *The Refinement of America*.

¹⁵ Cohen, *Luxurious Citizens*. For more on the ascendance of free trade, see Douglas A. Irwin, *Against the Tide: An Intellectual History of Free Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 305; Cohen, *Luxurious Citizens*, 212–13.

The activities of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association offer a much-needed glimpse into how Mormon women navigated this environment. Historians have already shown how Latter-day Saints embraced the values of gentility, believed in the social power of good taste, and adorned themselves with markers of respectability.¹⁷ In the words of Richard Bushman, refinement in nineteenth-century Mormon culture functioned as “a desirable polish to make the Saints shine in the world’s eyes” as well as “a worldly pride that hindered acceptance of the gospel.”¹⁸ What scholars have not yet explored is how Latter-day Saint women shouldered much of the responsibility for adhering to the dictates of respectability. Retrenchment women took on a broad agenda ranging from protecting young people from non-Mormons to responding to political developments and producing silk clothing at home. For them, dress became a tool with which to negotiate loyalties to Mormon exceptionalism and American citizenship. In the process, Mormon women eased the gendered political, economic, and cultural tensions created by increased commercial contact with the outside world.

Consumer Boycotts and Mormon Economic Self-Sufficiency in the 1860s

On December 20, 1866, representatives from twenty-three Salt Lake City mercantile firms sent a letter to Mormon leaders. They condemned the church for instructing locals “not

¹⁷ See, for example, Beecher, “Women’s Work on the Mormon Frontier,” 290; Ruth Vickers Clayton, “Clothing and the Temporal Kingdom: Mormon Clothing Practices, 1847 to 1887” (PhD Diss., West Lafayette, IN, Purdue University, 1987); Kari M. Main, “Pursuing ‘The Things of This World’: Mormon Resistance and Assimilation as Seen in the Furniture of the Brigham City Cooperative, 1874-88,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 191; Gregory (“Fritz”) Umbach, “Learning to Shop in Zion: The Consumer Revolution in Great Basin Mormon Culture, 1847-1910,” *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 29–61; Reeder, “To Do Something Extraordinary”; Carter, *Building Zion*, chap. 4; Michelle Hill, “Hoop Mania: Fashion, Identity, and Religious Condemnation in Nineteenth-Century Utah,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (2017): 127–44.

¹⁸ Richard L. Bushman, “Was Joseph Smith a Gentleman? The Standard for Refinement in Utah,” in *Believing History: Latter-Day Saint Essays*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 206.

to trade, or do any business” with “Gentile” (non-Mormon) merchants.¹⁹ In the years leading up to the completion of the transcontinental railroad, Brigham Young did not oppose all firms owned by non-Mormons. But he showed no affection for business owners who extracted resources from trusting Latter-day Saints but failed to come to the church’s defense, or even intentionally stoked controversies over Mormonism.²⁰ Young disavowed the “class of men who are here to pick the pockets of the Latter-day Saints, and then use the means they get from us to bring about our destruction,” he said in December 1866.²¹ In the 1860s, progress on the railroad heightened tensions between Mormons and non-Mormons in Utah Territory. In October 1868, it became official church policy that any Latter-day Saint caught entering stores owned by non-Mormons would be cut off. Anti-merchant rhetoric reached a fever pitch.²²

Brigham Young conveyed his anxieties about other, perhaps more menacing enemies: imported clothing and women’s consumer impulses. Church leaders made the buying and selling of individual Latter-day Saints a matter of public interest as early as the 1850s. This was a relatively tumultuous period for Mormonism. From 1856 to 1857, for example, church leaders responded to crop failures, “apostasy,” and other strains on Latter-day Saint western settlement with a campaign of spiritual renewal and reform known as the Mormon Reformation.²³ In addition, after receiving complaints of Brigham Young’s “despotism,” the harassment of federal officials, and general lawlessness in the region, President James

¹⁹ “Gentile Merchants’ Remonstrance,” December 20, 1866, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 49, Folder 29.

²⁰ Walker, *Wayward Saints*, 84–86, 93–95.

²¹ Brigham Young, December 23, 1866, *Journal of Discourses* 11:276.

²² Brigham Young, October 9, 1865, *Journal of Discourses* 11:139, 277; Anderson, *Salt Lake School of the Prophets*, 27. Church leaders did not ultimately disfellowship any Latter-day Saints for policy violations. See Peter Garff, “Causes of the Mormon Boycott Against Gentile Merchants in 1866 and 1868” (MA Thesis, Provo, UT, Brigham Young University, 1971); Walker, *Wayward Saints*, chap. 6.

²³ Peterson, “The Mormon Reformation of 1856-1857.”

Buchanan appointed a non-Mormon governor to replace Young and sent 2,500 troops to Utah Territory to ensure the transition.²⁴ What became known as the Utah War coincided with the tragic killing of 120 members of an emigrant party at the hands of Mormon settlers and southern Paiute Indians in southern Utah Territory.²⁵ The federal government ultimately installed a permanent federal military base in Salt Lake City to restore order, but chaos continued. The presence of newly arrived soldiers stoked anxieties about Mormon women's sexual purity.²⁶ Brigham Young emerged from these conflicts with a deep distrust of the non-Mormon businessmen who did not directly intervene.²⁷ These tensions shaped Mormon mercantile policy for the next four decades.²⁸ They also inspired increasingly vehement demands from church leaders that Latter-day Saints remain financially independent from outsiders.²⁹

Concerns about dress took on a new urgency during the transcontinental railroad's construction. Church leaders belittled women for impulsive consumption, supposedly at the expense of their religious and familial obligations. "What do men care about fashion?" Brigham Young asked one congregation in April 1869. "It is the ladies who care," he said.³⁰ From the pulpit, Young identified the "fashions of the world" as the root cause of undesirable character traits. Long dress trains, for example, did not connote "modesty, gentility, or good taste." Only an "ignorant, extravagant, or vain-minded person" would adopt this "disgusting"

²⁴ David L. Bigler and Will Bagley, *The Mormon Rebellion: America's First Civil War, 1857–1858* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014); Rogers, *Unpopular Sovereignty*, chap. 5.

²⁵ Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁶ William P. MacKinnon, "Sex, Subalterns, and Steptoe: Army Behavior, Mormon Rage, and Utah War Anxieties," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 227–46; Rogers, *Unpopular Sovereignty*, chap. 2.

²⁷ Quoted in Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 173.

²⁸ Arrington, 173.

²⁹ Clayton, "Clothing and the Temporal Kingdom," 117–32.

³⁰ Brigham Young, April 8, 1869, *Journal of Discourses* 13:36.

style.”³¹ In the minds of male church authorities, investment in fashionable clothing endangered the church’s sacred kingdom-building project. “We can have scores of thousands [of dollars] annually” to “advance the kingdom of God on the earth,” Young predicted, if only women would give up the “useless and needless.”³² Religious gatherings offered opportunities to publicly shame bad behavior. In May 1870, for example, Young complained that “too many of this people follow after the foolish, giddy, vain fashions of the world.” The “bonnets, hats or headdresses” worn by “fashionable ladies” at the meeting offered proof.³³ Young believed in the power of steadily applied labor, instead. It “will bring to us the food and the clothing we want, and every facility we need for comfort, for refinement, for excellence, for beauty, and for adornment,” he said in April 1868.³⁴

These anxieties amplified the political significance of Mormon women’s consumption, intensified their work schedules, and spread investment in sericulture. Brigham Young anticipated that integration into the national economy would force Latter-day Saints into a dependent position as raw material suppliers who would have to purchase expensive manufactured goods from the eastern United States.³⁵ The specter of easy, uninhibited commercial contact with non-Mormons spurred church investment in home industries.³⁶ Women would be responsible for planting mulberry trees, raising silkworms, reeling thread, and weaving cloth at home and using their influence to make this aesthetic fashionable. In a show of support, Young promised to literally embrace women who wore these and other homemade goods. “If you happen to be in a party where I am and wearing dresses made with

³¹ Brigham Young, October 9, 1872, *Journal of Discourses* 15:162.

³² Brigham Young, May 6, 1870, *Journal of Discourses* 14:19.

³³ Brigham Young, May 6, 1870, *Journal of Discourses* 14:16.

³⁴ “Remarks,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 14 (May 13, 1868): 106.

³⁵ Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, 82.

³⁶ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 245–51.

your own hands,” he said, “I shall take pleasure in dancing with you.”³⁷ Young recognized the power of his blessing but believed that women enjoyed more control over matters of taste. “I wear my homemade a great deal,” he said, but would wear it more often “If I could only get my wives to say, ‘Brother Brigham, your homemade is very nice.’”³⁸

These testimonies about women and fashion paralleled ideas already coursing through mainstream political, religious, and economic circles. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, a newly emerging American middle class began to adopt the clothing, décor, architectural trends, and rituals previously associated with European gentility. Etiquette books, sentimental fiction, and magazines taught them to cultivate good manners, dress in smooth fabrics, introduce “conversation pieces” into their homes, and make room for parlors. This diffusion of gentility enlarged consumer markets, entrenched the cultural clout of the middle class, and judged people who failed to adopt this system. Refined behaviors and environments became necessary to securing power and influence. As the managers of the household and arbiters of good taste, white women played a leading role in regulating the performance of gentility.³⁹

Success in these efforts required expenditures of income, but also self-moderation and policing from family and community members. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, various intellectual traditions cast “luxurious” goods as a source of dislocation and corruption. Religious figures worried that the pursuit of luxury kept people from the Bible, and political elites viewed fashion as the purview of a corrupt aristocracy and a distraction

³⁷ “Remarks,” *Deseret News* 11, no. 37 (March 12, 1862): 289.

³⁸ Brigham Young, April 8, 1869, *Journal of Discourses* 13:36.

³⁹ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*.

from republican values of hard work and economic independence.⁴⁰ Critics also concerned themselves with how increased access to mass-produced consumer goods threatened racial and class boundaries. They attacked women and other household “dependents” for perceived overspending. Husbands, fathers, and religious leaders criticized women for pursuing “frills” at great expense to their families and the nation. Moments of economic uncertainty, including financial panics and the American Revolution, exaggerated these anxieties and increased the popularity of boycotts and spinning circles. Women who failed to participate endured intense scrutiny and, on occasion, threats of violence.⁴¹ Middle-class gentility and condescending restrictions on women’s activities in the marketplace served a similar purpose in nineteenth-century Utah Territory. Brigham Young insisted that women must not foster the ambition to “be in the fashion.” Instead, “ladies of the kingdom of God” “know how to keep their houses, furniture and beds pure and clean,” and “cook food for their husbands and children in a way that it will be clean, tasteful and wholesome. The woman that can do this I call a lady.”⁴²

Mormon Women’s Consumption in Anti-Mormon Discourse

While church leaders leveled these criticisms and imposed these expectations, an informal coalition of “apostates,” local non-Mormons, politicians, and journalists weighed in on the implications of Mormon women’s respectable display and consumer desires. In his testimony before a US Senate committee, for example, Reverend Norman McLeod railed

⁴⁰ Seminal studies of anti-fashion rhetoric include Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), chap. 1; Joyce Oldham Appleby, “Consumption in Early Modern Social Thought,” in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 130–43; T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 187–89, 438–43; Cohen, *Luxurious Citizens*, 37–38, 133–38.

⁴² Brigham Young, October 9, 1865, *Journal of Discourses* 11:138.

against a society where church leaders “discountenanced” “social and business intercourse between Mormons and ‘Gentiles.’” In this context, “young Mormon ladies of respectability” had to endure public rebukes “in language too vile for utterance” for shopping where they pleased.⁴³ People reacted to the church’s nonintercourse policies with varying degrees of surprise, animosity, and rejection. Some local merchants, for example, pled for relief and understanding from Brigham Young.⁴⁴ Other contemporaries circulated images of overburdened plural wives living in overcrowded households. Plural marriage, in their eyes, contravened the ideals of free contract and companionate marriage.⁴⁵ These anti-Mormon images also gained traction because nineteenth-century Americans valorized free trade, uninhibited consumption, and the respectable household. A church in the business of curbing women’s consumer impulses and distorting the genteel qualities of middle-class life appeared to be fundamentally unfree and un-American.

In newspapers, travel writing, and speeches, critics incorporated images of degraded white womanhood as a disturbing byproduct of the church economy. Proponents of the New Movement, a splinter group of Latter-day Saints led by British Mormons William S. Godbe and E. L. T. Harrison, used this trope in support of their cause. Godbe and Harrison’s followers—also known as the Godbeites—did not want to destroy Mormonism but did resist Brigham Young’s power over commerce. They viewed the church’s emphasis on cooperation as anachronistic in a nation committed to capitalist industrial development.⁴⁶ The

⁴³ James M. Ashley, “The Condition of Utah,” US Congress, House (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, July 23, 1866), 15–16.

⁴⁴ See, for example, C. Prag letter to Brigham Young, December 28, 1866, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Box 31, Folder 11.

⁴⁵ Talbot, *A Foreign Kingdom*, 42–43, 112–13, chap. 5. For more on the freedom of contract in the postbellum period, see Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ For accounts of the Godbeite movement, see Walker, *Wayward Saints* and Walker, *Railroading Religion*, chap. 3.

movement's manifesto, published in November 1869, argued that "men's professions, their employment, and the entire control of their talents and means" should be left "to themselves."⁴⁷ The Godbeite vision of freedom rested on the right of the individual to work and buy freely, without limitations imposed from above.⁴⁸ Perhaps for these reasons, one *New York Herald* journalist called the Godbeites "reconstructed" Mormons.⁴⁹

New Movement proponents emphasized the ill effects of commercial prohibitions on women. One article in the *Utah Magazine*, the New Movement's news outlet, argued that policing the woman consumer violated her natural "passion for personal adornment." All too often, church leaders lectured "on the sinfulness of finery and show in woman." They failed to appreciate that "Every instinct of woman's being leads her to desire to appear beautiful." Policies compelling a woman "to wear poor, ill-shaped or wretched clothing, are depressing to her spirits and destructive of her vitality." Instead of imposing restraints, the author recommended that a husband "cultivate in his wife the love of beauty and variety." A woman can "exist" on basic food, clothing, and shelter, "but she does not live."⁵⁰

Fanny and Thomas Stenhouse, prominent New Movement activists, offered similar reflections. After the Stenhouses resigned from the church in 1870, they put pen to paper, with the hopes of recruiting others to their cause.⁵¹ In her accounts, *Exposé of Polygamy* (1872) and "Tell It All" (1874), Fanny Stenhouse focused on the suffering of Mormon

⁴⁷ W. S. Godbe, "Manifesto from W. S. Godbe and E. L. T. Harrison," *Utah Magazine* (November 27, 1869): 1-4.

⁴⁸ See, for example, E. W. Tullidge, "The Era of Isolation," *Utah Magazine* 2, no. 35 (November 14, 1868): 102 and "Our Workmen's Wages," *Utah Magazine* 3, no. 17 (August 28, 1869): 263.

⁴⁹ "Mormonism," *New York Herald*, February 6, 1870, 4.

⁵⁰ "Women and Their 'Vanities,'" *Utah Magazine* 3, no. 19 (September 11, 1869): 294-5.

⁵¹ Ronald W. Walker, "The Stenhouses and the Making of a Mormon Image," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 51-72; Linda Wilcox DeSimone, "Introduction: Reckoning with Fanny Stenhouse," in *Exposé of Polygamy: A Lady's Life among the Mormons* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2008), 1-21; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 383.

women.⁵² Nerve-wracking intrafamilial politics and shocking deprivation inevitably occurred in polygamous households, she argued. Jealousy—what she called “the green-eyed monster”—enjoyed free reign. While affluence could supply “the wants of numerous wives and children,” a wife free from wage work “is more at liberty to . . . note the more delicate shade of the last silk dress, or the rich shawl, which she did *not* get.”⁵³ Older wives felt this sting of neglect more frequently. A husband often showered time and money on the new, young wife and relegated the others to a dull and sparse existence.⁵⁴ Women in plural marriages had “little opportunity” to cultivate “their taste for dress.” Instead, wrote Stenhouse, Mormon men went to great lengths to annihilate “this love of the beautiful,” a supposedly fundamental “part of women’s nature.”⁵⁵

In a flagrant act of hypocrisy, however, church leaders refused to halt their own spending. In *Rocky Mountain Saints* (1873), Thomas Stenhouse explained how Brigham Young’s self-serving, “shrewd manipulation” of the markets earned him a popular nickname: “the Profit.”⁵⁶ Fanny Stenhouse accused Brigham Young and others of “aping every Gentile who comes within sight.”⁵⁷ The same prominent men who advocated restraint were “very scrupulous” about their own clothing.⁵⁸ According to her, during a meeting with well-respected church apostles in England, she noticed that the men wore “gold chains, and

⁵² The latter was an expanded version of the former and included a forward by Harriet Beecher Stowe. See Linda Wilcox DeSimone, “Epilogue: The 1872 Exposé of Polygamy Compared with the 1874 ‘Tell It All,’” in *Exposé of Polygamy: A Lady’s Life among the Mormons* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2008), 171.

⁵³ Fanny Stenhouse, *Exposé of Polygamy: A Lady’s Life among the Mormons*, ed. Linda Wilcox DeSimone (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2008), 143, 144.

⁵⁴ Stenhouse, 101. Quote on p. 87.

⁵⁵ Stenhouse, 154.

⁵⁶ T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873), 628.

⁵⁷ Fanny Stenhouse, *“Tell It All”: The Story of a Life’s Experience in Mormonism* (Hartford: A. D. Worthington & Co., 1875), 505.

⁵⁸ Stenhouse, *Exposé of Polygamy*, 154. This duplicity had a long history. In the eighteenth century, for example, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and other statesmen vehemently criticized luxury but adopted cosmopolitan European styles themselves. See Cohen, *Luxurious Citizens*, 20.

charms, and signet-rings, and other personal adornments.”⁵⁹ In another instance, Stenhouse witnessed Heber C. Kimball accuse a woman of wasting time on clothing. She retorted, “You, Brother Kimball, look a great deal better since you have worn a coat of broadcloth, cut in the fashionable style.”⁶⁰ Within Mormonism, claimed the Stenhouses, it was men who engaged in excessive consumption. At the same time, markers of gentility became a source of pain and competition among Mormon women.

Travel writers, boosters, and novelists made visible polygamy’s abuses with stories about Mormon women condemned to a decidedly ungentle existence. Alfreda Eva Bell’s *Bodicea* (1855) accused Mormon men of treating their wives as “superior beast[s] of burden.”⁶¹ In 1866, Thomas Alfred Creigh, a freighter on the Bozeman Trail, wrote in his diary about the “misery” he encountered in a Mormon community. He described the residents as “filthy and dirty,” “especially the females.”⁶² In *Life in Utah* (1870), John Hanson Beadle—a booster for Corinne, a northern Utah town envisioned as an anti-Mormon stronghold—reported that women suffered from a “rude and coarse” lifestyle.⁶³ To the surveyors, naturalists, artists, journalists, and anthropologists who visited and observed Latter-day Saints in this period, this and other evidence suggested that the Mormons were “a backward peasantry, a periphery more ‘other’ than many native peoples,” according to sociologist Howard M. Bahr.⁶⁴ These descriptions located the Latter-day Saints outside of the

⁵⁹ Stenhouse, *Tell It All*, 91.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Stenhouse, *Exposé of Polygamy*, 154–55.

⁶¹ Alfreda Eva Bell, *Bodicea; The Mormon Wife* (Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Buffalo: Arthur R. Orton, 1855), 54.

⁶² Susan Badger Doyle, ed., “Thomas Alfred Creigh Diary, 1866,” in *Journeys to the Land of Gold: Emigrant Diaries from the Bozeman Trail, 1863-1866*, vol. 2 (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2000), 702.

⁶³ J. H. Beadle, *Life in Utah, or, The Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1870), 294, 304. For more on J. H. Beadle and Corinne, see Walker, *Railroading Religion*, 2, 34–39.

⁶⁴ Howard M. Bahr, *Saints Observed: Studies of Mormon Village Life, 1850-2005* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014), 8.

bounds of whiteness, cast the church as a “foreign” institution, and fueled the criminalization of Mormon belief and practice.⁶⁵ They also dovetailed nicely with one solution to the “Mormon problem.” In the words of one *San Francisco Bulletin* journalist, the transcontinental railroad could be the “instrument for the reconstruction of Mormon society.”⁶⁶

Mormons and Consumer Citizenship in the Post-Civil War Era

In 1872, the first issue of the *Woman’s Exponent* reported that Reverend Gustavus M. Peirce, superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal missions in Utah Territory, “proposed the extinction of polygamy by the introduction of vast quantities of expensive millinery goods.” Peirce suggested that women would adopt these fashions and “run up such heavy dry goods bills that it would be impossible for a man to support more than one wife.”⁶⁷ Peirce did not stand alone in his belief that commercial contact would bring about polygamy’s destruction. From 1847 to 1877, a period that historian Elliott West has termed Greater Reconstruction, government officials attempted to quell “savagery” in western territories and incorporate (or eliminate) Mexicans, Chinese immigrants, Catholics, and American Indians.⁶⁸ Mormonism and the practice of polygamy, referred to as Utah Territory’s “peculiar institution,” also became a target, especially after the abandonment of Reconstruction in the South. In the second half of the nineteenth century, federal politicians from both parties sent troops to Utah

⁶⁵ Bitton and Bunker, “Double Jeopardy,” 193; Talbot, *A Foreign Kingdom*, 113, 116; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 48.

⁶⁶ “Reconstruction by Rail,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, May 30, 1868, 2.

⁶⁷ “News and Views,” *Woman’s Exponent* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 1872): 1; Harvey Kimball Hines, *An Illustrated History of the State of Oregon* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1893), 416–17. This same Reverend Peirce was an active Godbeite supporter. See Walker, *Wayward Saints*, 275, 326.

⁶⁸ West, “Reconstructing Race.” For more on the Reconstruction era in the American West, see Richardson, *West from Appomattox*; Paddison, *American Heathens*; Bottoms, *An Aristocracy of Color*.

Territory, installed a military fort in Salt Lake City, denied Utah statehood applications, and passed anti-polygamy legislation. Historian Sarah Barringer Gordon refers to this period as a “second reconstruction.”⁶⁹ Officials, businessowners, and religious figures also envisioned railroad agents as a tool of the anti-polygamy movement and potential peacemakers between Mormons and the federal government.⁷⁰ This confidence turned on the belief that Mormon women desired and deserved fashionable clothing. A newly developing ideal of consumer citizenship underpinned this feature of anti-Mormonism.

Coverage from inside and outside the Utah Territory imbued the railroad with the power to erode Mormon women’s spiritual commitments. As early as the 1850s, *Punch*, the British weekly magazine, quipped that expensive hoop skirts would abolish plural marriage.⁷¹ According to a *Chicago Tribune* article from 1872, congressmen assumed that the railroad’s delivery of fashion magazines and new styles would bring Utah Territory into the fold. A comparison of their “plain, inexpensive, and incomplete wardrobes” with “those of their Gentile sisters” would strike Mormon women with the realization that a “husband can supply one wife with all that she needs in the way of dress much more readily than he can two.”⁷² Hepworth Dixon, an English historian who traveled to Utah Territory in 1866, agreed. “Whatever might have been possible in an isolated community,” Dixon wrote,

⁶⁹ Gordon, *The Mormon Question*, 14. For more on federal attempts to “reconstruct” the Mormons, see, for example, Poll, “The Political Reconstruction of Utah Territory, 1866-1890”; Cresswell, *Mormons and Cowboys, Moonshiners and Klansmen*; Prior, “Civilization, Republic, Nation”; Milner II and Cannon, *Reconstruction and Mormon America*.

⁷⁰ Walker, *Railroading Religion*, chap. 1.

⁷¹ Hill, “Hoop Mania,” 129.

⁷² “Fashion and Morals,” *Chicago Tribune* 25, no. 260 (April 30, 1872): 4. For similar coverage from this newspaper, see A.A., “Utah: Glimpses at Mormon Life in Salt Lake City,” *Chicago Tribune* 25, no. 311 (June 20, 1872): 4; and GOB, “Utah: Statistics of Progress—Polygamy Declining,” *Chicago Tribune* 28, no. 82 (November 13, 1874): 5.

“plural marriage could not exist in company with fashion journals which set wives dressing against each other.”⁷³



Figure 10: "The Only Solution of the Mormon Problem" (1871) by Hal Collins, *Washington Post* cartoonist. In Collins's rendition, market integration and Mormon women's consumer desires would destroy polygamy. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

Often, anti-polygamist politicians presented a boost in consumer traffic as a more reliable alternative to legislation. Debates over anti-polygamy legislation introduced in the 1860s and 1870s included suggestions that the transcontinental railroad made other action unnecessary.⁷⁴ Representative Clarkson N. Potter (D-New York) insisted that “If polygamy

⁷³ Quoted in Bitton and Bunker, “Double Jeopardy,” 197.

⁷⁴ Stephen Eliot Smith, “Barbarians within the Gates: Congressional Debates on Mormon Polygamy, 1850-1879,” *Journal of Church and State* 51, no. 4 (Autumn 2009): 614; Walker, *Railroading Religion*, 16–19, 102–11.

could be broke[n] up by mere law it would have been done before this.” Instead, politicians should trust the line connecting the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, which injected “new ideas and new wants” into Utah Territory. The influences of the hat maker and shopkeeper “will have more effect in destroying and rooting out polygamy than any legislation,” said Potter.⁷⁵ Confidence in the railroad crystallized to the point that politicians relegated legislation to the back burner, and anti-Mormons began rolling back their public hostilities.⁷⁶

Emerging ideas about consumer citizenship sharpened the salience of this anti-Mormon discourse. Moralistic views about the problems of unbridled consumption never completely disappeared. Americans continued to harbor profound anxieties about the impact of consumption on individual character, community integrity, and political stability.⁷⁷ But these concerns began to fade in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The American Civil War helped legitimize consumer desires as a public good. During the conflict, Republican tariff policy called on Americans to support the Union cause by spending their money on luxury goods. Also, authors like Frederick Law Olmstead described bleak, uncivilized shacks with dirt floors and crude cookware to argue that slavery could not cultivate middle-class homes or respectable citizens. By the late nineteenth century, argues historian Joanna Cohen, many Americans had embraced the liberated consumer as an asset. In some political circles, attempts to impose restrictions on consumption and desire became un-American.⁷⁸ When

⁷⁵ “Speech of Mr. Potter,” *Deseret News* 23, no. 22 (July 1, 1874): 338-9.

⁷⁶ Arrington, “The Transcontinental Railroad and Mormon Economic Policy,” 156; Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land*, 64; Walker, *Railroading Religion*, 108-9.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 189-90; Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending*; Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁷⁸ Cohen, *Luxurious Citizens*.

anti-Mormons predicted that the railroad would “reconstruct” Utah Territory and that fashion served this public good, they mobilized and entrenched these principles.⁷⁹

Church authorities responded to the railroad with ambivalence. This technology could bring Latter-day Saint converts to the American West more efficiently. Mormons would also have a chance to represent their beliefs and practices to curious visitors.⁸⁰ Brigham Young optimistically dedicated church resources to railroad construction. Church leaders still worried about the railroad’s potentially deleterious effects, however.⁸¹ Non-Mormon railroad workers and travelers provoked concern, so much so that their presence amplified policing of Mormon men’s sexual impropriety.⁸² Leaders also formed institutions dedicated to economic self-sufficiency. The School of the Prophets, for example, brought together local and general male church leaders to discuss and implement economic, political, and ecclesiastical plans.⁸³ Church leadership also launched Zion’s Cooperative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI), a consumer cooperative legally organized as a joint-stock company.⁸⁴ At the same time, according to historian Anne Firor Scott, Mormon women took on “vital tasks” in business and manufacturing.⁸⁵ The restoration of the Relief Society, a church auxiliary organization, in 1868 mobilized women in support of cooperative stores and home industries, including

⁷⁹ This finding runs contrary to historian Rachel St. John’s assertion that nineteenth-century Americans did not apply the term “Reconstruction” to Mormons. See Rachel St. John, “The Case for Containing Reconstruction: Rethinking and Remeasuring,” in *Reconstruction and Mormon America*, ed. Clyde A. Milner II and Brian Q. Cannon (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 181–91.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Brigham Young, May 26, 1867, *Journal of Discourses* 12:54 and Orson Pratt, February 24, 1869, *Journal of Discourses* 12:353.

⁸¹ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 236–44.

⁸² Brigham Young, October 8, 1872, *Journal of Discourses* 15:194; Russell Stevenson, “Manly Virtue: Defining Male Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 72.

⁸³ Arrington, “The Transcontinental Railroad and Mormon Economic Policy,” 148–54; Anderson, *Salt Lake School of the Prophets*.

⁸⁴ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 298–302.

⁸⁵ Anne Firor Scott, “Mormon Women, Other Women: Paradoxes and Challenges,” *Journal of Mormon History* 13 (1987): 9–10.

silk production and grain storage.⁸⁶ Not long after, women assembled for the first official gathering of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

“The Outside is an Index to the Character”: The Retrenchment Movement

In 1911, Susa Young Gates articulated the origin story of the retrenchment movement. “With the near approach of the steam horse,” she wrote, the Mormons began to worry. The railroad brought saloons, cheap goods, fashion magazines, and a problematic “spirit of folly and fashion.”⁸⁷ The Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association assumed responsibility for managing the railroad’s real and imagined consequences. The group’s activities reflected the elite status of the women involved. By the time the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association began to assemble in the late 1860s, the church’s membership included immigrants from Europe and the Pacific Islands, Native Americans, and Black people.⁸⁸ The women who oversaw the retrenchment movement in Mormon-dominated Utah Territory did not embody this diversity. Organization leaders came from a layer of society that historian Maureen Beecher has called the “leading sisters.” These women lived in the relatively cosmopolitan Salt Lake City. They were plural wives of church authorities and, in some cases, were related to one another through marriage.⁸⁹ This cohort functioned as

⁸⁶ Cannon, Derr, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, chap. 3; Haggard, “In Union Is Strength”; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, pt. 3. For more on the Relief Society, see chapter 4 of this dissertation.

⁸⁷ Gates, *History of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, 7–11.

⁸⁸ For demographic information about the Utah Territory, see Pamela S. Perlich, “Utah Minorities: The Story Told by 150 Years of Census Data,” *Bureau of Economic and Business Research*, October 2002, 2–23. and Helen Z. Papanikolas, ed., *The Peoples of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1976).

⁸⁹ While the church restricted women from the patriarchal line of religious authority, these women created extensive, close-knit kinship networks that afforded them power as spiritual heads and community tastemakers. Beecher, “The ‘Leading Sisters.’” Quote on p. 26.

standard-setters for Mormon womanhood.⁹⁰ It fell on the shoulders of these “leading sisters” to respond to anti-polygamy discourse and legislation, economic integration, and increasing community heterogeneity. In this context, retrenchment members used dress to carve out a space in between Mormon exceptionalism and middle-class respectability.

Newly arrived strangers occupied much of their attention. In December 1871, for example, Sarah M. Kimball complained about seeing prostitutes “stalking” the streets for the first time since she came to Salt Lake City twenty years earlier.⁹¹ Eliza R. Snow expressed concerns about “vile and corrupt” men aping a gentlemanly appearance.⁹² This changing landscape made these Latter-day Saints uneasy. “A few years ago when we met any body we greeted them as a brother and a friend,” said Mary Isabella Hales Horne. Now, the Latter-day Saints “mingle[d] with the people of the world.”⁹³ Organizers identified young people as the most vulnerable. Mercy R. Thompson—recognized in her obituary as a “widely known and highly esteemed” Latter-day Saint—asked her listeners to “pray that [the youth] may not be led astray by the evil and seductive spirits that are now in our midst.”⁹⁴ Like other nineteenth-century Americans, Mormon women worried about how impersonal marketplaces and anonymous urban spaces seemed to reward insincere displays as opposed to real inner qualities and “good character.” This concern manifested itself in the specters of the “confidence man” and “painted woman” who passed as genteel, secured young people’s confidence, and then lured them into a life of luxury and sin.⁹⁵ As literal and figurative

⁹⁰ Carol Cornwall Madsen, “Creating Female Community: Relief Society in Cache Valley, Utah, 1868-1900,” *Journal of Mormon History* 21, no. 2 (1995): 144.

⁹¹ December 9, 1871, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

⁹² January 6, 1871, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

⁹³ May 25, 1872, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

⁹⁴ September 15, 1872, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association; “Sister Mercy R. Thompson,” *Deseret Evening News* 26, no. 212 (September 16, 1893): 1.

⁹⁵ Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*.

mothers of the next generation, retrenchment women committed themselves to careful vigilance over Mormon youth.⁹⁶

Young people needed good advice and proactive safety measures to counter the supposedly romantic lure and violent tendencies of strangers. “Guard our daughters” against “the smooth talk and flattery” of non-Mormon men, Zina D. H. Young said.⁹⁷ “Always know where your daughters are [and] do not have them out late at nights,” Mary Isabella Hales Horne advised.⁹⁸ Retrenchment women expressed equivalent, even heightened, anxieties about the moral weaknesses of boys and men.⁹⁹ The presence and accessibility of Gentile people and amusements in the community threatened to erode the pillars of Mormon masculinity, including piety, self-control, and stable family life.¹⁰⁰ Church leaders expected Mormon men to cultivate “simple, plain, innocent, and genteel manners,” in the words of church apostle George A. Smith.¹⁰¹ But Mormon women assumed responsibility for preserving this value system. A virtuous education at home would guarantee that young boys “will make kind husbands,” said Mary Ann Pratt, wife of a church apostle.¹⁰² Young ladies possessed the “power” to “reform the young men of their evil habits,” said former ward-level Relief Society president Phoebe Woodruff.¹⁰³ They could keep men from getting “drunk on the streets” and smoking tobacco and encourage them to volunteer for church construction

⁹⁶ Madsen, “Creating Female Community,” 140.

⁹⁷ June 12, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

⁹⁸ December 12, 1874, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

⁹⁹ January 6, 1871, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹⁰⁰ Amy Hoyt and Sara M. Patterson, “Mormon Masculinity: Changing Gender Expectations in the Era of Transition from Polygamy to Monogamy, 1890–1920,” *Gender & History* 23, no. 1 (2011): 74–76.

¹⁰¹ George A. Smith, October 9, 1867, *Journal of Discourses* 12:139.

¹⁰² April 14, 1872, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association; “Death of M.A. Pratt,” *Deseret Weekly* 43, no. 11 (September 5, 1891): 346.

¹⁰³ March 12, 1874, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association. For more on Phoebe Woodruff, see Augusta Joyce Crocheron, *Representative Women of Deseret* (Salt Lake City: J.C. Graham and Co., 1884), 35–39.

projects.¹⁰⁴ Retrenchment participants believed that their organizational experience would be their greatest gift to floundering male Mormons.¹⁰⁵ The creation of a similar retrenchment group for Mormon men, in Pratt's opinion, would "improve their minds."¹⁰⁶

Responding to the threat that expensive clothing posed to the coherence of Mormon communities and the well-being of individual Latter-day Saints constituted another plank of the retrenchment movement. Eliza R. Snow reminded attendees to dress differently from non-Mormons. Otherwise, she asked, "If the angels were to come in our midst, how would they be able to distinguish us from the Gentiles?"¹⁰⁷ After years of suffering "from our enemies," said Zina D. H. Young, it pained her to see the Saints "following after their fashions."¹⁰⁸ A focus on dress wore away at community boundaries but also diminished bodily integrity, religious obligations, and household stability. The "constant excitement" over fashion, said one participant, "injures the health" and "enfeebles the mind." A wife's or daughter's "unlimited extravagance" had likely driven "many a good man...to a premature grave."¹⁰⁹ Mormons supposedly ignored their families, failed to attend meetings, and gave away money that could have been spent on critical church initiatives, all in the name of fashion.¹¹⁰ The "leading sisters" seemed to agree with male church leaders that individual consumer choices required careful monitoring.

¹⁰⁴ April 3, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association; "R.S. Reports," *Woman's Exponent* 6, no. 10 (October 15, 1877): 74.

¹⁰⁵ Wilmarth East hoped that "young men would follow in the footsteps of our young girls." May 29, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association. For other examples, see minutes from September 15, 1872, and February 20, 1875.

¹⁰⁶ March 12, 1874, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹⁰⁷ Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, 34–35.

¹⁰⁸ September 28, 1872, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹⁰⁹ Mary Stuart, "An Essay Written for and Read before the Richmond Retrenchment Society, February 1st, 1875," *Woman's Exponent* 4, no. 15 (January 1, 1876): 114.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, January 6, 1871; May 25, 1872; September 15, 1872; and November 9, 1872, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

While worrisome indeed, these threats of deterioration and discord did not justify complete withdrawal from the marketplace. These women believed in the power of dress to reveal valued inner qualities, entrench their “superior” status as Latter-day Saints, and contribute to the kingdom-building project. “The outside is an index to the Character,” Eliza R. Snow once remarked.¹¹¹ Zina D. H. Young explained how the goal of retrenchment was not “to make [girls] old nor to strip them of their beauty” but to encourage them to dress “richly” and “neatly.”¹¹² Mary Isabella Hales Horne argued that the exercise of “taste” comprised part of the Lord’s mission “to improve and beautify the earth.”¹¹³ At the same time, women and girls must avoid indulgence. Elvira Stevens Barney, formerly a university medical student, concluded that any women “tricked out in finery” “are not prepared to do their part in the Kingdom of God.”¹¹⁴ Here, retrenchment women attempted to occupy a position between poverty and luxury. In this respect, they replicated the approach taken by members of the newly forming middle class, who aspired to distinguish themselves from “the masses” as well as the perceived lethargy and extravagance associated with elites. Moralists alleviated these tensions by ridiculing thoughtless mimicry and specific aristocratic trends. These discourses recast finery as a sincere expression of good character.¹¹⁵

In their discussions, retrenchment women located themselves in this productive in-between space, but their church membership framed their pursuit of this middle ground.

¹¹¹ May 25, 1872, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹¹² March 16, 1872, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association. This language paralleled that of black Baptist women who expected women to be “stylish, yet modest.” Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 200.

¹¹³ October 11, 1873, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹¹⁴ October 3, 1874, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association; Crocheron, *Representative Women of Deseret*, 76–81.

¹¹⁵ Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 61–91, 122, 153–89; Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 273–79; Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850–1930* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010).

Retrenchment participants were painfully aware of Mormonism's bad reputation. Presendia Kimball, Zina D. H. Young's older sister, once remarked that people viewed the church as "the most filthy community on earth."¹¹⁶ Beautiful, yet modest dress could bring about a new vision of individual Mormon women and, by association, the church as a whole. This achievement, explained suffragist and Relief Society secretary Elizabeth Howard, would set the Latter-day Saints apart. "Many nations have been ruined by extravagance," said Howard in May 1873. "Nothing will save this nation from total destruction," she said, "but the Latter-day Saints."¹¹⁷

In addition to articulating a specific type of display, retrenchment participants promoted the production and consumption of homemade goods. "Sustain Home Industry," Eliza R. Snow told one gathering, "and Zion will be established and we will then be an independent people."¹¹⁸ Failing to build up this economic infrastructure and sever ties with "Babylon" would result in serious consequences. Mary Isabella Hales Horne painted an ominous portrait. If "the judgments came" soon, she said, the Latter-day Saints "were not [yet] prepared to sustain themselves."¹¹⁹ Horne urged women to do their part to ensure that "the saints might have some resources when Babylon should fall."¹²⁰ For these reasons, Horne hoped that every ward would open "some particular branch of business."¹²¹ Snow assured meeting attendees that if they adequately prepared themselves for the moment that

¹¹⁶ May 25, 1872, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association. For more on Presendia Kimball, see "In Memoriam," *Woman's Exponent* 20, no. 15 (February 15, 1892): 116-7.

¹¹⁷ May 10, 1873, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association. Elizabeth Howard's biographical information can be found in Crocheron, *Representative Women of Deseret*, 46-47. These statements echoed those of black Baptist women who used respectability politics to communicate "moral superiority over whites" and claim that they were building the "real" America. See Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 193, 209-10.

¹¹⁸ July 10, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹¹⁹ "R.S. Reports," *Woman's Exponent* 5, no. 19 (March 1, 1877): 146.

¹²⁰ "R.S. Reports," *Woman's Exponent* 5, no. 22 (April 15, 1877): 170.

¹²¹ May 1, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

“the gate is shut down and we can not get what we need from Babylon,” then the Mormons would not have “to resort to anything ordinary.” Instead, they would enjoy “the best,” made by their own hands.¹²²

When not physically in attendance, male church leaders exerted a powerful presence in retrenchment meetings. Mary Isabella Hales Horne often reminded her coreligionists to accommodate Brigham Young’s requests and scolded them when they failed to do so.¹²³ Retrenchment women also invoked the words of Joseph Smith to argue that home industries would expand the market power and territorial presence of the church. Eliza R. Snow shared Smith’s prediction that Zion would become an international hub of clothing production for consumers “from all parts of the world,” because “the fabrics that were made in Zion would be finer than those made any place.”¹²⁴ While retrenchment participants embraced the home industry directives of church leaders, they also generated and enacted goals that reflected their gendered roles in a patriarchal church. On May 1, 1875, Horne repeated a comment from Snow that “we can do a greater work in the Home Industries than if we were Elders preaching the gospel.”¹²⁵

¹²² May 29, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹²³ March 20, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹²⁴ March 20, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹²⁵ May 1, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.



Figure 11: Eliza R. Snow seated in front of palm trees
Bathsheba W. Bigler Smith photograph collection, circa 1865-1900
Courtesy of the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

Retrenchment leaders focused on directing women’s capital and purchasing power toward church-friendly establishments. Eliza R. Snow shared that she “had spoken with one young lady who said she saw no more harm in buying from the Gentile Stores than our own.” Snow reminded the audience that this behavior “was not proper.” These businessmen “could not and would not” remain in Utah Territory if the Saints “did not patronize them.”¹²⁶

¹²⁶ April 3, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

Instead, Mormons should rely on stores owned by other Mormons like James P. Freeze, who offered “to sell all the home made that is brought to his store for one year free of charge.”¹²⁷ Women must also “sustain” cooperative stores managed by Mormon women. These institutions were “established expressly for the sale of home-manufactures, and to aid in the development of the different branches of home industries, useful and ornamental,” according to one retrenchment report.¹²⁸ The profits could support other aspects of the economic independence movement, in turn. Retrenchment participants unanimously agreed that profits from the women’s stores would be used to “purchase wheat to store for Zion.”¹²⁹ An 1877 report from Snow suggested that business at the woman’s store “was all the time on the increase.”¹³⁰ In pursuit of market conditions beneficial to the Latter-day Saints, women made a conscious effort to concentrate their dollars.

Before these goods could make their way onto store shelves, however, Mormon women needed to manufacture them. Retrenchment participants discussed strategies and best practices, shared and redistributed resources, and formed distinct home industry groups. For example, on April 17, 1875, one woman asked for “a little information” about sericulture.¹³¹ Meeting minutes frequently mention attendees sharing silkworms with each other, discussing how to keep the worms and mulberry trees alive, making plans to import weaving machinery, and encouraging mothers to enlist the help of their sons and daughters.¹³² Eliza R. Snow also

¹²⁷ June 12, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹²⁸ “R.S. Reports,” *Woman’s Exponent* 6, no.12 (November 15, 1877): 90.

¹²⁹ “R.S. Reports,” *Woman’s Exponent* 6, no. 16 (January 15, 1878): 122.

¹³⁰ “R.S. Reports,” *Woman’s Exponent* 6, no.12 (November 15, 1877): 90.

¹³¹ April 17, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹³² March 20, 1875; April 3, 1875; April 17, 1875; May 1, 1875; May 29, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

offered women access to rye straw and mulberry tree cuttings from Brigham Young's property.¹³³

To illustrate the progress being made in home industries, women Latter-day Saints filled meetings with reports from the field and the fruits of their labors. After a visit to northern Mormon settlements, Mary Isabella Hales Horne reported "there are many energetic and earnest sisters in the country places, desirous of working in unison with the sisters in Salt Lake" to "promote home industries and all good works."¹³⁴ Elvira Stevens Barney tried to sell some straw hats that, in her opinion, "compared pretty well" to imports.¹³⁵ Barney also described an encouraging visit to Alexander C. Pyper's cocoonery. She predicted that silk would soon undercut "woolen or cotton fabrics in cost."¹³⁶ "Black straw flowers...made by a sister in Provo" and articles presented at a fair in Bountiful, Utah, offered support for Zina D. H. Young's claim about the "energy and magnanimity manifested by the sisters to progress and develop in all the different departments of home manufacture."¹³⁷ Notably, the "first silk dress" ever manufactured in the territory made an appearance at a May 1877 meeting "long to be remembered by all present." The maker—Lucy Clark—received "a Testimonial certificate" to commemorate her effort.¹³⁸ These moments confirmed the possibility of success in home industries. They likely functioned to support, inspire, and police the consumer practices of this community.

¹³³ March 20, 1875; May 1, 1875; May 15, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹³⁴ "R.S. Reports," *Woman's Exponent* 7, no. 8 (September 15, 1878): 58.

¹³⁵ April 3, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹³⁶ July 10, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹³⁷ "R.S. Reports," *Woman's Exponent* 5, no. 5 (August 1, 1876): 34; April 17, 1875; June 26, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹³⁸ "R.S. Reports," *Woman's Exponent* 5, no. 23 (May 1, 1877): 178.

Women Latter-day Saints found the retrenchment project enriching, but also challenging. The movement yielded mixed results. Organization leaders celebrated the great strides they made. Mary Isabella Hales Horne felt pleased with the “large” assembly at one meeting.¹³⁹ Just as often, however, meeting minutes indicate that women felt burdened, overwhelmed, and underprepared. Leaders often complained about unimpressive attendance and demanded that women adhere to retrenchment directives.¹⁴⁰ Historian Ruth Vickers Clayton’s analysis of photographs, advertisements, and material culture reveals that nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints adorned themselves in popular styles, despite invectives from church leaders to avoid these silhouettes. Mormons living in smaller, rural locales tended to wear simpler, sometimes homemade, versions of the genteel, readymade clothing that wealthy urban Mormons had easier access to.¹⁴¹

Reflections from the time provide some insight into how and why retrenchment did not take hold. When it came to the silk industry, women struggled to raise money for machinery and plant enough mulberry trees.¹⁴² In May 1875, Mary Isabella Hales Horne explained another challenge with maintaining momentum behind home industries. “No doubt,” she said, the topic “has to some, become monotonous.”¹⁴³ These responsibilities added to women’s labor schedules. “Many sisters would like to attend” retrenchment meetings, said Wilmirth East in November 1874, but their “domestic duties” kept them at home.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ March 12, 1874, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹⁴⁰ December 9, 1871; September 15, 1872; January 3, 1874; June 27, 1874; and October 17, 1874, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹⁴¹ Clayton, “Clothing and the Temporal Kingdom.”

¹⁴² April 17, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹⁴³ May 15, 1875, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

¹⁴⁴ November 28, 1874, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.



Figure 12: Clarissa Young Spencer, 1884
Clarissa Young Spencer photograph collection, circa 1868-1897
Courtesy of the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

The movement also groaned under the weight of generational tensions. Take, for example, the reminiscences of Brigham Young’s daughter, Clarissa Young Spencer. During retrenchment meetings, Eliza R. Snow pled with the “young sisters” to “remain faithful” and avoid the “fashions of the world.”¹⁴⁵ Spencer reacted to Snow’s urgings with contempt. Snow—known colloquially as “Aunt Eliza”—“could not bear to see a like extravagance in the younger generation” and pushed the retrenchment agenda with a vigor “amounting almost to fanaticism.” At the same time, according to Spencer, Snow “was very extravagant in her

¹⁴⁵ July 19, 1873, Minutes of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association.

own mode of dress.”¹⁴⁶ These vacillations illustrate how some Latter-day Saints could not or did not want to embrace a vision promoted by older, more distinguished Mormon women.

These intracommunity fissures did not prevent Mormon women from sustaining the organization, however. In response to booming church membership and irregularities in local management, church leaders reorganized and standardized church governance. In 1877, Brigham Young and other authorities assembled individual wards, or community congregations, into stakes, or county-wide governing units, and also selected, ordained, and clarified the duties of ward- and stake-level male officers.¹⁴⁷ That same year, Eliza R. Snow rechristened the young ladies’ department the Young Ladies’ National Mutual Improvement Association (YLMIA).¹⁴⁸ In 1880, church president John Taylor severed the governing structures of YLMIA, Relief Society, and Primary Association by appointing distinct churchwide and stake-level presidencies for each organization. He simultaneously clarified that the “ordination” of women to these offices did not confer upon them the privileges of the priesthood. These formalized hierarchies rendered meetings of the Senior and Junior Cooperative Retrenchment Association unnecessary. They also formally subordinated women’s decision-making power to that of male priesthood-holders.¹⁴⁹ But the YLMIA continued to offer programming and lessons that, according to one organization history, help

¹⁴⁶ Spencer and Harmer, *Brigham Young at Home*, 84.

¹⁴⁷ William G. Hartley, “The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877: Brigham Young’s Last Achievement,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 20, no. 1 (1979): 3–36.

¹⁴⁸ Gates, *History of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, 83–84; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 355.

¹⁴⁹ For more on this transition, see Derr and Derr, “Outside the Mormon Hierarchy,” 22–25; Jessie L. Embry, “Grain Storage: The Balance of Power Between Priesthood Authority and Relief Society Autonomy,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 4 (1982): 59–66; Peggy Pascoe, “A History of Two Stories,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 237–45; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, xxxi–xxxiv.

young women “to improve themselves, to develop their talents, to serve others, and to strengthen their testimonies of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁰

Mormon Women in the Railroad Age

In April 1903, Richard T. Ely, a progressive-era professor of political economy, published a piece titled “Economic Aspects of Mormonism” in *Harper’s Magazine*. “It is frequently said that fashion itself must have killed polygamy, apart from any action of the United States government,” Ely wrote. A Mormon man struggled to support even one wife and their children “as soon as the desire to lead a fashionable life” entered the household. Ely reproduced the once-popular death knell thesis, only to cast it aside. Early twentieth-century sources indicated that “plural marriages are still contracted.”¹⁵¹ Nineteenth-century visionaries of the death knell thesis were ultimately disappointed. The transcontinental railroad and its cargoes did not end polygamy or break Mormonism apart. Brigham Young and other male Latter-day Saints found ways to “bend railroads to their benefit” and “flourish in their increasingly networked world,” in the words of David Walker.¹⁵² Mormon women also worked to secure the church’s future.

The Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association undertook a broad agenda to manage their politicized bodies. Before, during, and after workers feverishly fastened together railroad tracks to produce a transcontinental line, church authorities criticized

¹⁵⁰ Janet Peterson and LaRene Gaunt, *Keepers of the Flame: Presidents of the Young Women* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1993), xiii. For more on YLMIA after 1878, see Elaine Anderson Cannon, “Young Women,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1618–19; Janet Peterson, “Young Women of Zion: An Organizational History,” in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, ed. David J. Whittaker and Arnold K. Garr (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Deseret Book, 2011), 277–94.

¹⁵¹ Richard T. Ely, “Economic Aspects of Mormonism,” *Harper’s Magazine* 106, no. 635 (April 1903): 674.

¹⁵² Walker, *Railroading Religion*, 247.

expensive, imported fashions and publicly embarrassed the women who wore them. In the same period, church “apostates,” journalists, travel writers, politicians, and other commentators criticized Brigham Young’s trade restrictions and demonized plural marriage with images of women isolated from genteel expression and the citizenship right to consume. These stereotypes cast Mormonism as unsavory and un-American. They also inspired hopes that the transcontinental railroad had the power to “reconstruct” Mormonism more quickly than military intervention or federal legislation. In other words, respectability and consumer citizenship infused contests over Mormonism, and religion infused debates over fashion, in turn.

In this contentious context, Mormon women used dress to negotiate multiple loyalties. Latter-day Saints have always struggled under the pressure of assimilating into the American mainstream while simultaneously setting themselves apart as a distinct religious group.¹⁵³ The retrenchment movement illustrates how Mormon women managed the weight of this paradox, often with fewer options and less freedom of movement than Mormon men. Divergent interactions with local silk production and the transcontinental railroad lay bare this difference. Louis Alphonse Bertrand and George D. Watt attempted to exert their visions of a steam-powered transnational silk industry. Meanwhile, Mormon women fostered sericulture in their homes; managed the fluctuating, at times conflicting expectations of white, middle-class respectability; and maintained the spiritual, economic, and cultural boundaries of their communities.

¹⁵³ Terryl Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), chap. 4; Fluhman, *A Peculiar People*.

Chapter 4—“This Barren Country”: Relief Society, Silk, and Survival in St. George, Utah, 1870s-1880s

Lydia McLellan had some bad news to share on February 7, 1878. That day, she and a handful of other Mormon women assembled for a Relief Society meeting in St. George, a Latter-day Saint-dominated settlement on the southern edge of Utah Territory. McLellan declared that she “had good success in silk raising” for three years but “had not done well since then.” Her “own neglect” may have been to blame. An abrupt departure for “the City”—Salt Lake City, located roughly three hundred miles away—took her away from her silkworm eggs. In fact, she “forgot to take care of them.” McLellan’s struggles did not end there. Another crop of worms “had not done well.” Her mulberry trees suffered, too. She told the women that “the plants looked well for a season and then looked yellow as tho it was too hot for them or the soil not right.”¹ Silk’s success would not come easily in what St. George Relief Society leader Minerva White Snow described as “this barren country.”²

Lydia McLellan was most likely trying to cultivate the white mulberry tree, or *Morus alba*. Out of the many different species in the *Morus* genus of the Moraceae family, *Morus alba* was and is the most popular food source for silkworms. This deciduous perennial plant has gray or brownish bark, green leaves with a yellow tinge, white flower buds, and a blackberry-like fruit that can be white as well as shades of pink, black, or purple. Indigenous to eastern Asia, the white mulberry tree first arrived on the eastern shores of North America

¹ February 7, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes and records, 1868-1973, LR 7836 14, Church History Library.

² Quote from May 3, 1883, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes. Minerva White Snow served as the stake-level president of St. George Relief Society from 1875 to 1885. For more on Snow, see “Biographical Sketch of the Life and Labors of Minerva White Snow,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 4, no. 7 (April, 1893): 302 and Jill Mulvay Derr, “Mrs. Smith Goes to Washington: Eliza R. Snow Smith’s Visit to Southern Utah, 1880-81,” in *Honoring Juanita Brooks: A Compilation of 30 Annual Presentations from the Juanita Brooks Lecture Series, 1984-2014* (St. George, UT: Dixie State University, 2014), 475–510.

in the 1600s, as part of English colonial ambitions to foster a silk industry.³ Since then, it has spread to almost every US state, except for Nevada and Alaska. While silkworms seem to wither and die in response to even the slightest disturbance, members of the *Morus* genus are “hardy evolutionary athletes,” in the words of historian Ben Marsh.⁴ Mulberry trees can be found in low-lying river bottoms, woods, and orchards and along fences, streams, and city streets all over the world. Their far-reaching presence can be explained by their ability to withstand many climates, from temperate to dry to tropical, as well as droughts, flooding, harsh winds, and salty soils.⁵

Mulberry trees are resilient. They are not invincible. Harriet Louise Keller, a Gilded Age botanical expert and author, explained in 1900 that the *Morus alba* “succumbs to excessive heat and extreme cold.”⁶ Young plants cannot survive shocks to their system nearly as well as mature plants can. In addition, while tolerant of extreme conditions, mulberry trees prefer humidity and well-draining soil.⁷ Lydia McLellan’s fledgling, yellowing mulberry trees probably needed more water than they got. According to a soil report published by the US Department of Agriculture in 1977, St. George, Utah, receives from eight to eleven inches of annual rainfall. Also, most of the town’s soil is silt loam, or a combination of silt, clay, and sand. Silt loam has “moderately slow” permeability, which

³ Marsh, *Unravelling Dreams*, 123.

⁴ Marsh, 26.

⁵ Nathaniel Lord Britton, *North American Trees* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1908); Charles Sprague Sargent, *Manual of the Trees of North America*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1965), 328–30; Michael Albert Dirr, *Photographic Manual of Woody Landscape Plants: Form and Function in the Landscape* (Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing Company, 1978), 203–4; John Laird Farrar, *Trees of the Northern United States and Canada* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1995), 238–40; Gil Nelson et al., *Trees of Eastern North America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 406–8.

⁶ Harriet Louise Keeler, *Our Native Trees and How to Identify Them: A Popular Study of Their Habits and Their Peculiarities* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1900), 258.

⁷ Marsh, *Unravelling Dreams*, 27.

means that water does not move through silt loam easily or quickly.⁸ In her remarks in February 1878, McLellan lamented the soil and heat, as well as her flightiness and lack of horticultural knowledge. But she believed that these challenges should not dissuade other women in southern Utah Territory from committing themselves to the silk enterprise. At that meeting, she told Relief Society members to “persevere and carry out the counsel that had been given us.”⁹

For generations, Relief Society had brought Mormon women together to care for themselves and their communities. First in Nauvoo, Illinois, in the 1840s and then in settlements throughout the Great Basin region in the 1850s, Relief Society women pursued a broad agenda that supplied women with a source of community, authority, and self-confidence. During meetings, they practiced and nurtured spiritual gifts, shared advice about medicine and childrearing, sewed clothing and made quilts, redistributed cash and goods, and advanced home industries.¹⁰ Historians have determined that these activities ensured the viability of western Mormon settlements while also bringing women into non-traditional areas of influence.¹¹ Carol Cornwall Madsen writes that Relief Society gave women “a broader range of social experience than domesticity offered.”¹² Nineteenth-century Mormon women said as much. In an article about Relief Society’s reemergence and resurgence in

⁸ Vear L. Mortensen et al., “Soil Survey of Washington County Area, Utah” (United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service and United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service, in cooperation with Utah Agricultural Experiment Station, 1977), 3, 44–46.

⁹ February 7, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁰ Studies of Relief Society include Richard L. Jensen, “Forgotten Relief Societies, 1844–67,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 1 (1983): 105–25; Derr, “Strength in Our Union”; Cannon, Derr, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*; Susanna Morrill, “Relief Society Birth and Death Rituals: Women at the Gates of Mortality,” *Journal of Mormon History* 36, no. 2 (2010): 128–59; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*.

¹¹ Arrington, “The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women”; Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 251–54; Haggard, “In Union Is Strength,” 68; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 382.

¹² Madsen, “Creating Female Community,” 128–29.

Utah Territory in the 1860s, Eliza R. Snow wrote, “It would require volumes in which to define the duties, privileges and responsibilities that come within the purview of the Society. President Young has turned the key to a wide and extensive sphere of action and usefulness.”¹³ According to historians, Mormon women emerged from these experiences with greater capabilities in organization, leadership, and political maneuvering.¹⁴

Lydia McClellan’s experience with mulberry trees and silkworms in Utah Territory’s southwestern corner—a world far away from the Mormon metropole but also right at the center of southern Paiute Indian lifeways—speaks to another, less well-known legacy of the Relief Society. Much like white women reformers elsewhere, Relief Society members naturalized and expanded white settlement in the American West.¹⁵ Meetings of the St. George branch became a clearinghouse for managing an unrelenting environment characterized by rapid weather changes, disease, and a glutted labor market. In this context, silk had value. Women viewed sericulture as a source of employment for women and children, a signal of religious obedience, and an agent of “civilization.” They planted mulberry trees, circulated silkworm eggs, and took instruction from the “leading sisters” of Salt Lake City in pursuit of a self-sufficient silk industry. They failed. Even so, by taking stock of available working hours and funding mulberry tree orchards, Mormon women incorporated land, resources, and Native peoples into the economic infrastructure of St. George. The Relief Society provided an outlet for Mormon women’s public activism. A

¹³ Eliza R. Snow, “Female Relief Society,” *Deseret News* 17, no. 10 (April 22, 1868): 81.

¹⁴ McDannell, *Sister Saints*, 12.

¹⁵ The classic studies of white women as “civilizers” of the American West include Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*.

focus on silk reveals how this organization also helped entrench white dominance in the Great Basin region.

A Brief History of Relief Society

Relief Society's role in spiritual sisterhood and resource organizing has a long history. Relief Society first took root in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1842. Sarah Granger Kimball, wife to local merchant Hiram Kimball, and Margaret A. Cook, Kimball's seamstress, decided to help with a sacred temple-building project by sewing shirts for the male construction workers. They asked other women to join them in forming an official organization. The founding meeting of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo took place on March 17, 1842, when twenty women, including Eliza R. Snow, assembled and presented their constitution and bylaws to Joseph Smith. The church president affirmed their mission, and attendees tapped Joseph's first wife, Emma Smith, to lead the organization.¹⁶

Over the next few years, members worked to support the temple, save souls, and relieve the poor. Relief Society women taught and celebrated the gospel, received and administered sacred ordinances, and performed other important rituals.¹⁷ They also redistributed donations in the form of cash, goods, and working hours. They mended clothes when sick mothers could not, delivered food to the hungry, sheltered recent immigrants, and found employment for the jobless. In many respects, Relief Society activities drew on and tapped into the labors that Mormon women already did—knitting, dyeing, tailoring, weaving, doing laundry, and making pottery and jewelry, for example—to earn money and support

¹⁶ Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 24–25.

¹⁷ Derr et al., xxii–xxv, 9–10.

their families.¹⁸ The organization helped women replace networks disrupted or destroyed by their decision to convert to Mormonism and relocate to Latter-day Saint communities. Relief Society offered them a new, working sisterhood, rendered even more salient (and economically necessary) by the missions and public works projects that drew their male family members away.¹⁹

Relief Society looked familiar to other nineteenth-century women's groups dedicated to reform. The organization operated on the essentialist assumption that women were more charitable, and prioritized piety.²⁰ At the same time, distinctly Mormon institutions, beliefs, and desires infused Relief Society. The group's leadership structure—a president and two counselors—modeled that of the church's governing body, the First Presidency, which is composed of the prophet and two counselors. Members operated interdependently with male authority figures as a part church government. Joseph Smith gave Relief Society the authority to oversee the temporal and spiritual well-being of women Latter-day Saints. He hoped to use the organization's networks to secure conversions, familiarize members with church policies, and gather support for more controversial ones, namely plural marriage.²¹ In fact, Relief Society women played an instrumental role in defending themselves, their coreligionists, and the church president against claims of sexual impropriety.²² In this and other ways, their mission departed from that of contemporary women's groups. By fulfilling God's plan, they would, in the words of founding member Eliza R. Snow, “set an example for all the world.”²³

¹⁸ Derr, “Strength in Our Union,” 158–60; Cannon, Derr, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, chap. 1; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, chaps. 3, 4, 5; Benjamin E. Park, *Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier* (New York: Liveright, 2020), 98–104.

¹⁹ Derr, “Strength in Our Union,” 155; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 11–14, 47.

²⁰ Derr, “Strength in Our Union,” 159; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 6–7.

²¹ Scott, “Mormon Women, Other Women,” 7; Madsen, “Creating Female Community,” 130; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 67–68.

²² Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 12–13.

²³ Cannon, Derr, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 27.

The shape of the organization shifted along with the community's needs. The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo abruptly ceased operations in 1844, in part due to controversies over plural marriage. Emma Smith protested polygamy and tried to use her position in the organization to taper its spread. In response to this direct challenge to the authority of male church leaders, Brigham Young disbanded the Relief Society.²⁴ But Mormon women continued to assemble, perform relief work, and practice spiritual gifts in and after Nauvoo. At Winter Quarters—a jumble of settlements along the Missouri River that served as a staging area for the Mormon exodus westward—women's labors caring for the sick, cooking food, and managing children ensured survival in a "wilderness" plagued with disease and populated by Indians.²⁵ Potawatomi, Saux and Fox, Wyandotte, Illinois, Omaha, Stockbridge, and Delaware peoples who made their homes in the area engaged in acts of resistance, like begging, kidnapping, and stealing of goods and livestock, in response to this intrusion.²⁶

Migration to land known as "Utah country" in the 1840s created distance from these Mormon-Indian conflicts but catalyzed other, more violent ones. "Utah country" originated from "Yuta," a Spanish word used to refer to the Southern Numic speakers known now as Utes. They called themselves *Nuche*.²⁷ Trading, gift-giving, and promise-making, most famously between Brigham Young and Walkara, a Ute leader, stifled some but not all

²⁴ Derr, "Strength in Our Union," 162–63; Cannon, Derr, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 59–68; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 14–15; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 127–28. When the Latter-day Saints began their colonization efforts in the Great Basin region, Emma Smith remained in Nauvoo. For more on Mormon women's responses to the introduction of polygamy, see Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, chap. 8.

²⁵ Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, chaps. 5, 6, 7.

²⁶ Angela Pulley Hudson, *Real Native Genius: How an Ex-Slave and a White Mormon Became Famous Indians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 76.

²⁷ Farmer, *On Zion's Mount*, 259.

hostilities.²⁸ Mormons delivered diseases to the Utes, deprived them of the valleys and rivers that they relied on for subsistence, and attempted to curb slave trading, a lynchpin of the region's economy. This chaos catalyzed a violent cycle of raids and reprisals.²⁹ Mormon prophecies about "Lamanites" felt increasingly remote. While Mormon historical memory casts Latter-day Saint treatment of Native Americans as exceptionally peaceful and welfare-driven, historian Ned Blackhawk persuasively argues that the Mormons were the tip of the sword of Indian dispossession and removal.³⁰

The Relief Society facilitated this process. The need to ameliorate conflicts with Great Basin Indians inspired the organization's rebirth in 1854.³¹ Mormon women organized themselves into more than twenty "Indian Relief Societies" with the intent of, in the words of the organizers, making "clothing by a donation of labor and Property for the benefit of those Indians deserving our sympathy and assistance." At meetings, women "worked diligently and rapidly" at their task.³² Twenty-two Indian Relief Societies took shape in Salt Lake City and other settlements in 1854.³³ During that first year, members produced almost nine hundred items, including shirts, pants, slippers, chemises, aprons, and handkerchiefs. Brigham Young instructed Mormon settlers and missionaries to give these items away, but not for free. Latter-day Saints wanted labor, skins, or other trade goods in return. In this and other ways, white women incorporated Native peoples into the gendered work schedules of white households and the religious rites of Mormonism.³⁴ During a trip to Parowan, a settlement in

²⁸ Juanita Brooks, "Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 12, no. 1-2 (1944): 3.

²⁹ Farmer, *On Zion's Mount*, chap. 2; Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land*, chap. 7.

³⁰ Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land*, 230.

³¹ Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 179-82.

³² Thirteenth Ward Relief Society Records, 1854-1857, LR 6133 21, Church History Library.

³³ Derr, "Strength in Our Union," 171.

³⁴ Jensen, "Forgotten Relief Societies"; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 288, 297-304.

southern Utah, Brigham Young called on women to “go among the Lamanites & instruct them to sew to knit to wash & perform all domestic works.”³⁵

White Mormons were the primary benefactors of the Indian Relief Societies.³⁶ Low conversion rates combined with ambivalence and hostility from Native peoples eroded faith in the missionary project.³⁷ Relief Societies began to pivot toward alleviating poverty among white settlers and producing furnishings for Latter-day Saint temples, instead. New Relief Society groups sprang up in Mormon settlements in and beyond the Salt Lake Valley. As members, women responded to poor harvests, sharp winters, grasshopper infestations, the arrival of worn-out immigrant converts, and other crises with food, clothing, and other supplies. But the Utah War of 1857 and 1858, and the accompanying evacuations and anxieties provoked by the US military presence, dealt a serious blow to the organization. Most Relief Society organizations took a hiatus, perhaps because Mormon women had more immediate demands on their time. They did not attend formal Relief Society meetings, but they did continue to support the economic and spiritual health of their homes and communities. Brigham Young did not use his presidential platform to reignite the organization until 1867, when he asked his wife, Eliza R. Snow, to organize local Relief Society branches.³⁸

As discussed in chapter 3, Brigham Young believed that the completion of the transcontinental railroad and increased commercial traffic with outsiders created problems

³⁵ Quoted in Jensen, “Forgotten Relief Societies,” 110.

³⁶ Jensen, 118. Resource-strained white Mormon settlers in southern Utah Territory “looked with envy on the clothing arriving from the north” and “probably” took items for themselves, writes Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 303.

³⁷ John Charles Duffy, “The Use of ‘Lamanite’ in Official LDS Discourse,” *Journal of Mormon History*. 34, no. 1 (2008): 129; Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 177–78.

³⁸ Jensen, “Forgotten Relief Societies,” 120–21; Derr, “Strength in Our Union,” 171–72; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 182–87; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, chap. 15.

that only women could solve. They needed to do their part to care for the impoverished as well as keep hard-earned cash in Mormon hands and manufacture homemade goods.³⁹ To meet these goals, Relief Society members expanded and standardized their organizational infrastructure. They solicited donations and held fundraising events, purchased stock in local businesses, and funded education initiatives. They made clothing, hats, and other goods and established and ran cooperative stores with their homemade wares. They collected and stored grain and built Relief Society halls.⁴⁰ They also assumed responsibility for economic projects that men ignored or failed to accomplish.⁴¹ In their work, Relief Society women largely subscribed to projects that “fell into patterns of an eastern cut,” according to Maureen Ursenbach Beecher.⁴² But they blended these traditional temporal activities with spiritual nourishment. These groups inspired, in the words of historian Jill Mulvay Derr, a “sense of sacred female collectivity.”⁴³ By the end of 1868, around one hundred Relief Society groups operated in Latter-day Saint colonies in the American West.⁴⁴ That number increased to almost four hundred by 1888.⁴⁵

Relief Society and St. George’s Labor Landscape

On August 24, 1868, the St. George Relief Society emerged in the deserts of southern Utah Territory. Attendees elected a leadership core that included President Anna L. Ivins,

³⁹ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 252; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 240–42.

⁴⁰ Embry, “Grain Storage”; Derr, “Strength in Our Union,” 174; Madsen, “Creating Female Community,” 152; Haggard, “In Union Is Strength.”

⁴¹ Arrington, “The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women,” 163; Haggard, “In Union Is Strength,” 51–52; McDannell, *Sister Saints*, 13.

⁴² Beecher, “Women’s Work on the Mormon Frontier,” 289.

⁴³ Derr, “Strength in Our Union,” 193.

⁴⁴ Arrington, “The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women,” 147.

⁴⁵ McDannell, *Sister Saints*, 11.

Emily C. Branch and Hannah Crosby as her counselors, Secretary Augusta Jackson, and Treasurer Caroline A. Jackson. Initially, this cohort ran and recorded meetings and kept tabs on the finances for four local wards. In the summer of 1877, the St. George Relief Society underwent a split. Members divided preexisting property equally among the four wards, and each ward elected a distinct leadership cohort. Larger joint meetings of these ward-level presidencies continued in the St. George Tabernacle and then the Lyceum, a building paid for by the Relief Society.⁴⁶ Minutes from these meetings expose how women managed the promises and pressures of life on the margins. On June 4, 1885, Hannah Crosby—by that point the president of the Relief Society in St. George’s First Ward—remarked that she “had heard President Young speak of St. George as a place of refuge.”⁴⁷ Isolation had its benefits. It was less of a luxury for the town’s year-round residents, including Relief Society women. They attempted to negotiate competing demands on their time through heat and cold, pregnancy and childcare, and disease and death. In the process, they helped to sustain white settlement.

The land beyond the Salt Lake Valley offered many strategic advantages. Control of this area would facilitate Brigham Young’s vision of a cohesive “Mormon corridor,” or a string of settlements from the northern Great Basin to the Pacific Ocean capable of escorting converts and goods to Zion in less time and at a lower cost.⁴⁸ Church leaders also found the area heavily trafficked with potential converts; rich in minerals, like iron; and conducive to semitropical crops, including tobacco, grapes, olives, sugar cane, peaches, almonds, figs, and, most famously, cotton. Latter-day Saints began to colonize the region in the 1850s. The iron

⁴⁶ December 6, 1883, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes; Haggard, “In Union Is Strength,” 7–8.

⁴⁷ June 4, 1885, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁴⁸ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 86–88; Arrington, “Inland to Zion.”

extractors of Parowan and Cedar City and the missionaries of the Southern Indian Mission, established in Harmony and colonies along the Santa Clara River, made up the vanguard.⁴⁹ Church leaders issued “callings,” or official invitations, to these and other Mormons to make sure that outposts had essential workers, including farmers, horticulturists, blacksmiths, carpenters, butchers, schoolteachers, tanners, and textile manufacturers. Not everyone wanted to relocate. Some even invented reasons, like disease or lack of resources, to avoid answering the call.⁵⁰

Word had gotten out about the land’s “formidable character.”⁵¹ Church apostle George A. Smith, the superintendent of Latter-day Saint colonization of southern Utah and the namesake of the St. George settlement, has been quoted as saying, “If I had a lot here and one in Hell, I’d sell the one in St. George.”⁵² This desert region’s low altitude made for relatively mild winters but also harsh, unrelenting summers. Daily temperatures exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit. This heat was a force to be reckoned with. It could fry an egg, boil water, and disinfect dishes, according to nineteenth-century observers. It could also kill crops. The Santa Clara and Virgin Rivers and their tributaries supplied water to the area, but not with a consistency or predictability that made agriculture easy. Floods and cloudbursts destroyed canals and dams. These rapid weather changes, plus frequent attacks from grasshoppers, created food crises. Shipments of life-saving supplies provided a temporary salve, but they took ages to arrive. For most of the nineteenth century, there was no railroad

⁴⁹ Brooks, “Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier,” 10; W. Paul Reeve, *Making Space on the Western Frontier: Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 15.

⁵⁰ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 215–23.

⁵¹ Leonard J. Arrington, “The Mormon Cotton Mission in Southern Utah,” *Pacific Historical Review* 25, no. 3 (1956): 228.

⁵² Melvin T. Smith, “Forces That Shaped Utah’s Dixie: Another Look,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (1979): 112.

or waterway, just miles and miles of unforgiving road—Smith called it the “most desperate piece of road I have ever traveled in my life”—that connected St. George and the surrounding area to more well-established colonies in the north.⁵³ Despite this reluctance, in 1860s and 1870s, thousands of US- and European-born Latter-day Saints founded and resided in Harmony, Santa Clara, Washington, Heberville, and St. George, the eventual county seat of cotton country, known colloquially as Utah’s Dixie.⁵⁴

Relief Society women recognized and tried to exert control over these circumstances. Southern Utah was, in Lucy B. Young’s words, “a trying place to live.”⁵⁵ Women spoke in general terms about the hunger, sickness, and death that plagued the town. Likely because of widespread assumptions about the medicinal qualities of dry air, some nineteenth-century Mormons in St. George believed that they lived in a healthy environment.⁵⁶ But historian Larry Logue has found that parasites and bacteria flourished in the region’s warm weather and delivered tuberculosis, scarlet fever, and other diseases to children. Also, a vicious cycle of food shortage and malaria infections made it difficult for women to carry pregnancies to term, survive delivery, and then sustain their children. In this period, one quarter of women living in St. George died during childbirth. At the same time, children suffered a higher mortality rate than Latter-day Saints elsewhere.⁵⁷ These circumstances were all too real for

⁵³ Arrington, “The Mormon Cotton Mission in Southern Utah,” 223, 228; Smith, “Forces That Shaped Utah’s Dixie,” 112–14; Larry M. Logue, *A Sermon in the Desert: Belief and Behavior in Early St. George, Utah* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 2–3, 8–9; Haggard, “In Union Is Strength,” 51. George A. Smith quote from Arrington, “The Mormon Cotton Mission in Southern Utah,” 223. It could take a month to travel the road from Cedar City to Salt Lake City and back again. See Palmer, “Early Merchandising in Utah,” 40.

⁵⁴ Arrington, “The Mormon Cotton Mission in Southern Utah,” 226–27.

⁵⁵ September 6, 1883, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁵⁶ July 2, 1891, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁵⁷ Logue, *A Sermon in the Desert*, chap. 5.

Relief Society members. During one bout of “sickness” in 1881, according to Minerva White Snow, her community “buried five little ones.”⁵⁸

Mormon women negotiated these and other strains of living and believing in southern Utah. They administered to the sick, promoted women’s health education, and shared tested remedies, including cold baths to cure disease and a root to improve stomach troubles.⁵⁹ They collected resources—everything from cash and stock to shoes, fabric, molasses, brooms, paper, peaches, and wine, for example—and redistributed goods to those in need. They provided help to someone in St. George who “suffered by fire,” offered support to local women enduring the loss of family members, and raised money for poor Latter-day Saints in England.⁶⁰ During meetings, they patched textiles, made carpets and quilts, and taught each other how to crochet and braid straw.⁶¹ One meeting attendee would occasionally read from a book while the rest worked.⁶²

Raising the next generation of observant Latter-day Saints occupied much of their attention. Parents needed to intervene in their children’s spiritual and social lives. Some members believed that southern settlements enjoyed a healthy distance from the “danger” and “adverse influences” flooding Salt Lake City.⁶³ “We have more peace than they do in the north,” said Anna L. Ivins in January 1889.⁶⁴ But Mormons in St. George still worried.

⁵⁸ July 7, 1881, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁵⁹ August 26, 1873; September 5, 1878; April 7, 1881; October 4, 1888; March 15, 1889, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁶⁰ September 19, 1871; September 4, 1879; February 7, 1880; May 5, 1881, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁶¹ April 2, 1872; July 6, 1872; February 7, 1878; December 4, 1879, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes. For more on Mormon women’s textile work in this period, see Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 364.

⁶² December 6, 1877, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁶³ July 7, 1881; June 7, 1883; October 2, 1884; July 1, 1886; September 14, 1889, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁶⁴ January 3, 1889, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes. Relief Society women in Cache Valley, Utah, shared similar sentiments. Madsen, “Creating Female Community,” 140.

Women discussed keeping boys from starting trouble in the streets and taking up bad habits, namely smoking.⁶⁵ According to them, girls and young women also needed protection, primarily from non-Mormons. These anxieties reared their head in September 1881, when St. George stake president John T. McAllister warned against Mormon girls visiting nearby mining camps and bringing a “bad influence” back with them.⁶⁶ This was not the only time that McAllister complained about a “bad influence.” He, Brigham Young, and other church leaders resented the presence of gold and silver miners in the Utah-Nevada border region. Here, Latter-day Saints and non-Mormons fought over land, resources, and religion.⁶⁷ Mormon women played their part in holding the line.

Contests over Mormonism’s moral fiber included defense of plural marriage. During St. George Relief Society meetings, women endorsed polygamy as a sacred, superior institution.⁶⁸ Hannah H. Romney, for example, described plural marriage as “a command from God” that “would bring comfort and happiness to those who embraced it.”⁶⁹ Not everyone in St. George agreed. In April 1885, Margaret E. Snow discouraged mothers from “speaking disrespectfully of plural marriage before their daughters.”⁷⁰ Personal feelings about plural marriage ranged from disgust to wholehearted acceptance. Even so, Relief Society used its official platform to support the practice.⁷¹ For some, military and legislative interference nurtured the unity of their religious community and confirmed the truth of their faith.⁷² Hannah Crosby remarked in April 1888 that “we know this is the true Religion of

⁶⁵ October 4, 1877, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁶⁶ September 8, 1881, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁶⁷ Reeve, *Making Space on the Western Frontier*, 86–92.

⁶⁸ March 24, 1874 and January 2, 1879, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁶⁹ February 7, 1879, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁷⁰ April 2, 1885, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁷¹ Derr, “Strength in Our Union,” 165; Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 242–45.

⁷² September 7, 1882 and December 10, 1886, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

Jesus Christ for we are persecuted as the former day Saints were.”⁷³ Confidence in their religious mission enriched Relief Society work. As Crosby explained, “our everyday labors were a part of our religion.”⁷⁴

Ties to the spiritual did not erase the intensity of Mormon women’s labors in their homes and communities. The religious valences of their day-to-day work weighed heavily on them. In March 1884, Third Ward resident Joanna Nixon commented on how “we have a good many responsibilities upon us” but “more and more seems to arise for us to do.”⁷⁵ Women struggled to prioritize the many demands on their time. Seasonal weather changes and a spectrum of responsibilities stood in the way of consistent attendance at Relief Society meetings. The winter months brought disease, and Mormon women carried much of the responsibility for easing this suffering. In January 1883, Anna L. Ivins explained how “there had been so much sickness and death and so many funerals” in the Fourth Ward that “they had felt as if they could not work.”⁷⁶

Melting ice and snow resolved some issues. Warmer temperatures created others. During the summer, some St. George Mormons fled to cooler northern climes. It was not uncommon for women to entirely suspended Relief Society meetings during July and August.⁷⁷ Stifling meeting halls was one reason. The local fruit season, which began during the summer and extended into the fall, was another. People in St. George grew and dried fruit that they consumed and traded for supplies. Mormon women participated in fruit gathering and drying, often at Relief Society’s expense. When Hannah Crosby reported on attendance

⁷³ April 5, 1888, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁷⁴ November 1, 1888, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁷⁵ March 6, 1884, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁷⁶ January 4, 1883, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁷⁷ August 4, 1881; July 5, 1883; July 1, 1886; August 4, 1887, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

at First Ward Relief Society gatherings in fall 1879, for example, she said that meetings went as “well as could be expected during the busy season of fruit gathering.”⁷⁸

In addition to illness, agricultural cycles, and inclement weather, childcare and temple work kept women away. Sarah A. Church articulated how “some of the younger sisters who have large families cannot attend [Relief Society meetings] very often.”⁷⁹ Anna Wells felt that it was not possible to regularly participate in Relief Society while also caring for her own family and working in the St. George Temple. “Therefore she has to stay away from some of [the meetings],” Wells told a gathering in June 1879.⁸⁰

It took the Mormons six years and an estimated \$500,000 to build this temple, the very first in the Great Basin region.⁸¹ After construction ended in 1877, Latter-day Saints from all over traveled to the St. George Temple to perform baptisms for the dead, sealings, and other sacred ordinances. These rituals provided women with spiritual comfort.⁸² They also created work. Temple cleaning occupied women in St. George as early as 1881, when one member shared that five or six women from her ward performed this task each week.⁸³ On occasion, women found this responsibility difficult to meet. In December 1884, for example, Barbara Mattis explained how “there are not many in the Ward” available to clean the temple, because “some are too old and some of the young girls are out to work.”⁸⁴

⁷⁸ October 2, 1879, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁷⁹ April 1, 1880, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁸⁰ June 5, 1879, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁸¹ Arrington, “The Mormon Cotton Mission in Southern Utah,” 234–35.

⁸² Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, xxix, xxxi.

⁸³ October 6, 1881, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

⁸⁴ December 4, 1884, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

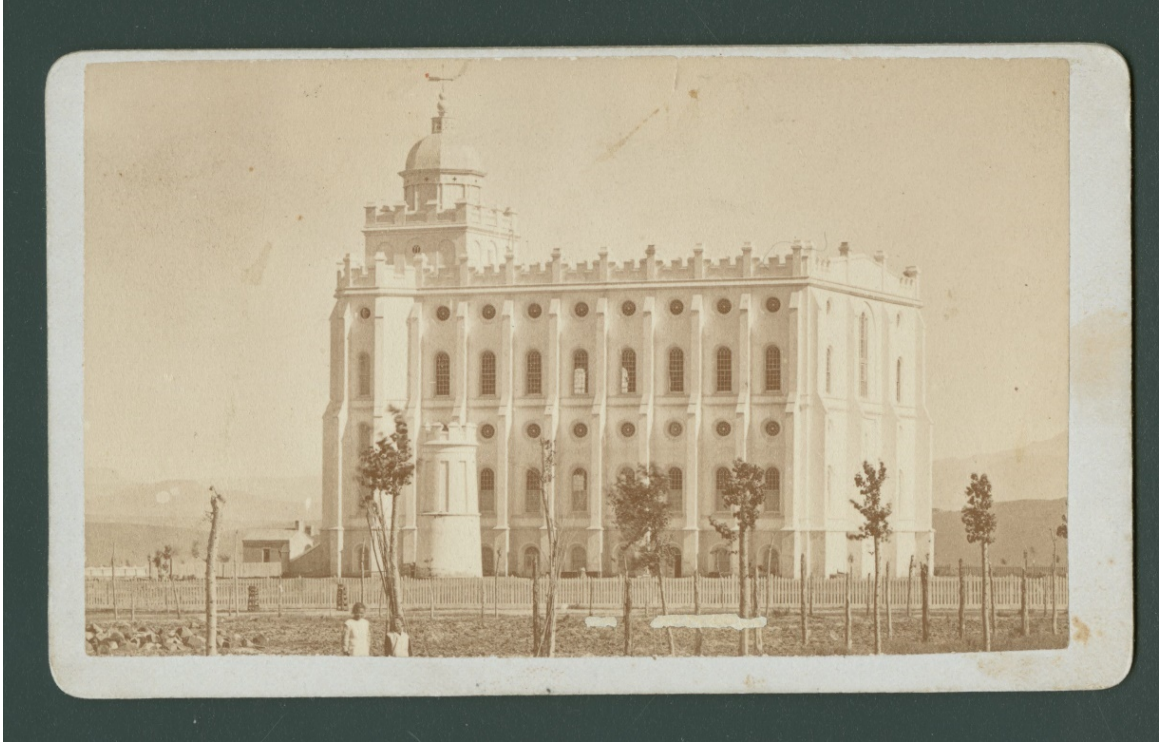


Figure 13: St. George Temple, 1877
Photographed by James J. Booth
Courtesy of the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

Other comments testify to how labor shortages and an aging population made Relief Society operations difficult. In a letter to the *Woman's Exponent*, a St. George resident said that the local wheat-raising and grain storage initiative had stalled because “we cannot raise enough to eat” and “and much time and strength is consumed by our brethren in going north for our supplies.”⁸⁵ In June 1884, Sarah A. Church remarked that she and the other Latter-day Saints “were all getting older.” At that point, she said, “a little hard work makes us feel it.”⁸⁶ Relief Society women likely did not see St. George as a refuge. They lived in a swirling

⁸⁵ Quoted in Haggard, “In Union Is Strength,” 62.

⁸⁶ June 5, 1884, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

current of childcare, disaster relief, temple work, disease, and death. These are the circumstances that shaped their silk project.

Silk Work and the Relief Society Agenda

From the start of Relief Society's resurgence in the late 1860s, church leaders yoked the organization together with sericulture. "I wish you, under the direction of your bishops and wise men, to establish your relief societies," Brigham Young said in April 1868. He continued, "Go to and raise silk. You can do it."⁸⁷ Relief Society women had the unique authority to influence each other's consumption and production patterns. As discussed in chapter 3, church leaders understood, even respected, the symbolic power of adornment but railed against the expense of imported clothing. Brigham Young told one assembly, "I do not care how beautifully you are adorned, ladies, if you will only raise the silk and adorn yourselves with your own hands."⁸⁸ Wilford Woodruff shared these sentiments. In September 1875, Woodruff expressed that he had "no objection" to women attending to their appearance, but he did not understand "import[ing] these things at the expense of the means we have in the Territory." "Set out your mulberry trees and make your own silk," he said.⁸⁹ Woodruff told Relief Society members that they could "do a good deal in regard to maintaining the independence of Zion, by going to and carrying out the counsel of President Young in raising your own silk for dresses, bonnets and trimmings, so that your adorning may be the workmanship of your own hands."⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Brigham Young, April 8, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:201, 202.

⁸⁸ Brigham Young, May 8, 1870, *Journal of Discourses* 14:44.

⁸⁹ Wilford Woodruff, September 12, 1875, *Journal of Discourses* 18:121.

⁹⁰ Wilford Woodruff, October 8, 1875, *Journal of Discourses* 18:129.

Silk work fit comfortably with Relief Society's program in other respects, as well. Mormon men had a role to play in setting aside land for orchards, planting mulberry trees, and collecting silkworm eggs, said church leaders.⁹¹ But women were always the centerpiece of silk work. Much like other nineteenth-century silk boosters, church leaders cast women as physically well-suited for the task. For example, George A. Smith argued that women could raise worms and manufacture thread with their "nimble fingers."⁹²

A second rationale had to do with wages. In Brigham Young's mind, silk's success depended on women and children cultivating silkworms on their own time and without pay from an employer. The alternative model of hiring and compensating workers "would prevent us from raising silk profitably," he argued.⁹³ Instead, a woman and her children should operate on their own. By doing so, they assumed industry risks and rewards. Young argued that these workers could "make twice the amount of money by raising silk that the man can make with the farm." He went as far as to say that "there is no other work the women can do that will yield the same amount of profit."⁹⁴ As an influential community organization for women, Relief Society could mobilize and motivate this labor force.

Silk work also corresponded with the organization's charity initiative. Brigham Young believed that the Relief Society could use earnings from sales of cocoons, silk thread, and clothing to fund their "works of benevolence and mercy."⁹⁵ At the same time, Relief Society women provided access to another source of cheap labor: poor people. In Young's words, the production of silk thread "will do much towards feeding and clothing poor

⁹¹ George A. Smith, April 6, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:200; Brigham Young, April 8, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:202.

⁹² George A. Smith, April 6, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:199.

⁹³ Brigham Young, April 8, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:202.

⁹⁴ Brigham Young, July 19, 1877, *Journal of Discourses* 19:74, 75.

⁹⁵ Brigham Young, April 6, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:196.

persons that would otherwise be entirely dependent.”⁹⁶ This and other comments reflected the anti-“handout” principle of Relief Society and Mormon economic policy more generally. Charity meant supplying resources to the “worthy” poor temporarily, infrequently, and often in exchange for something.⁹⁷ “Idleness and wastefulness are not according to the rules of heaven,” Young proclaimed in May 1870.⁹⁸ Apparently, there were many rewards in store for silk producers. Relief Society women living in southern Paiute homelands heard the call to invest in sericulture. They envisioned an industry that converted “dependents” into earners and the “wilderness” into a blessed land. Just how much time, energy, and labor they could afford to give to silk remained to be seen.

Sericulture in Southern Paiute Country

A calamitous event ignited a united push for silk in southern Utah. On August 29, 1877, Brigham Young died, likely from appendicitis or an abdominal infection.⁹⁹ The church president was gone. His home industry boosterism lingered. At a St. George Relief Society meeting on September 5, 1877, John T. McAllister promoted Young’s economic projects. “Our beloved President Brigham Young” believed that women must avoid “foolish and ridiculous fashions” and make their own clothing, said McAllister.¹⁰⁰ Mormon women in St. George and beyond were already hard at work raising silkworms.¹⁰¹ St. George Relief

⁹⁶ Brigham Young, April 8, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:202.

⁹⁷ Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, 58–59; Jensen, “Forgotten Relief Societies,” 115.

⁹⁸ Brigham Young, May 8, 1870, *Journal of Discourses* 14:44.

⁹⁹ Lester E. Bush, “Brigham Young in Life and Death: A Medical Overview,” *Journal of Mormon History* 5 (1978): 79–103.

¹⁰⁰ September 5, 1877, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes. Sarah A. Church agreed that the prophet’s economic agenda, and silk production more specifically, must continue. “The silk culture was about the last counsel of our Beloved President Brigham Young,” she said in April 1878. She promised to “do all she could to carry it out.” April 4, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁰¹ Leonard Arrington estimates that five million silkworms wriggled in Utah Territory in the late 1870s. See Arrington, “The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women,” 153.

Society leaders Ann C. Woodbury and Caroline Jackson displayed homemade silk at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876.¹⁰² But Young's death opened a new, more organized chapter for St. George silk sponsored by Relief Society. So did the fact that in March 1878, presidents of ward-level Relief Society and retrenchment groups "were sustained as local presidents of the silk culture in their respective districts," according to the *Woman's Exponent*.¹⁰³ Women carefully evaluated the industry's costs and benefits. Frequently, silk came up short.

In the late 1870s, Relief Society women threw their weight behind securing industry inputs. In October 1877, Marietta Calkin suggested that the church give "a plot of ground" to the Relief Society that was large enough to build a cocoonery. One woman identified in the minutes as Sister Godfrey De'Friez chimed in that she "was used to the silkworm when in England." While De'Friez "might have forgotten some things," she believed that she "could soon pick it up again." According to Hannah Crosby, a third raw material—a supply of silkworm eggs—was on its way to southern Utah.¹⁰⁴ Experienced sericulturists offered to make themselves available for consultation.¹⁰⁵ Over the next several months, women reported on their attempts to "make a start in the silk business."¹⁰⁶ Mulberry-tree planting was a top priority. Small groves began to emerge as early as January 1878.¹⁰⁷ Producers needed many more strong and hardy trees, however. Only then could they nourish their voracious silkworm crops.¹⁰⁸ One attendee passed along a tip from "a brother [who] told her

¹⁰² Potter, "The History of Sericulture in Utah," 34–35.

¹⁰³ "R.S. Reports," *Woman's Exponent* 6, no. 19 (March 1, 1878): 146.

¹⁰⁴ October 4, 1877, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁰⁵ January 3, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁰⁶ May 2, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁰⁷ January 3, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁰⁸ June 6, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

to take the ripe mulberry and cut the seed out and plant them directly.”¹⁰⁹ Another asked Mormon men to assume responsibility for planting.¹¹⁰

Trees need time to grow. Meeting attendees recognized that profits would not come immediately or easily. In June 1878, Mary Eyring told an assembly that they “must not expect to make money at present.”¹¹¹ In addition to raw materials and labor input, the industry needed reeling machinery.¹¹² That would help them reach their long-term goal of, in Anna L. Ivins’s words, “mak[ing] our own fine apparel.”¹¹³ Until then, they faced a manufacturing bottleneck.¹¹⁴ While they could not immediately earn cash, they could convey their religious obedience. Eyring shared her belief that by handling silkworms and planting mulberry trees, “we are making that much progress in the kingdom and are doing our duty.”¹¹⁵

Occasional visits from Eliza R. Snow and Zina D. H. Young confirmed the sacred quality of their mission. In this period, Snow and Young lived in the Lion House, the part of Brigham Young’s residential complex in downtown Salt Lake City that hosted many of his wives and children. According to one scholar, the Lion House functioned as “an incubator of female activism.”¹¹⁶ Snow and Young used it as a home base from which to lead public lives. After the resurgence of Relief Society in the late 1860s, they visited settlements throughout Utah Territory to expand the organization’s presence, establish local chapters of the Young

¹⁰⁹ May 1, 1879, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹¹⁰ June 29, 1882, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹¹¹ June 6, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹¹² October 4, 1877, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹¹³ May 2, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹¹⁴ June 29, 1882, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹¹⁵ May 1, 1879, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹¹⁶ Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, xvii.

Ladies Mutual Improvement Association and Primary Association, and offer words of encouragement.¹¹⁷



Figure 14: The Lion House, Salt Lake City
Courtesy of the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

In 1880 and 1881, Eliza R. Snow and Zina D.H. Young spent a total of five months in southern Utah. By that point, they had both joined the Relief Society General Presidency.¹¹⁸ During their trip, they asked St. George Relief Society members to, in Eliza R. Snow's words, "do the will of God" and organize a stake-level silk association. That year, Mary Eyring, Ann C. Woodbury, and Emeline B. Winsor became this organization's

¹¹⁷ Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, xxxiv–xxxv; Ulrich, *A House Full of Females*, 369–72.

¹¹⁸ Derr, "Mrs. Smith Goes to Washington."

leadership core.¹¹⁹ These visits could be energizing and reassuring. For example, the topic of a formal association as a fund-raising mechanism for the silk industry came up long before the previously mentioned encounter, but women in St. George decided to form their organization in the presence of these church leaders.¹²⁰ In these respects, Snow and Young's travels throughout Utah Territory created coherence for all Relief Society groups, inspired commitments to the organization's projects, and intensified personal relationships between Mormon women.¹²¹

But the Relief Society did not function in far-flung, rural settlements the way that it did in urban locales. In places like Salt Lake City, members enjoyed frequent contact with church leaders, had access to more developed transportation and communication infrastructure, and, because of their more diversified economies, collected many more cash donations.¹²² Contact with the metropole reminded women that life in St. George was different. After Mary Whitehead returned from a trip to Salt Lake City in 1889, she reported, "the Relief societies were differently managed to ours." Instead of dedicating meeting time to working on projects, women there tended to "go around and gather what is needed for the poor and meet once a month to give an account and distribute."¹²³ When they compared themselves to Latter-day Saints elsewhere, St. George women occasionally felt inadequate. Anna L. Ivins once lamented "living in this country" because, unlike Relief Society women

¹¹⁹ February 1881 and May 17, 1881, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹²⁰ June 1880, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹²¹ Madsen, "Creating Female Community," 151; Haggard, "In Union Is Strength," 43; Derr, "Mrs. Smith Goes to Washington."

¹²² Madsen, "Creating Female Community"; Haggard, "In Union Is Strength."

¹²³ May 9, 1889, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

in other settlements, southern Utah's climate prevented them from raising and saving grain.¹²⁴

The local silk industry ran up against this harsh weather, a general lack of experience, and competing interests. In June 1878, Elizabeth Morse reported that "her mulberry seed had not come up." On top of that, she "thought silk worms were not fit to have in the house, where we have to eat and sleep." Margaret E. Snow disagreed. She described silkworms as "the cleanest and hardiest things she ever did anything with in a house."¹²⁵ But even she encountered problems. In July 1879 she announced that she "made a mistake and came near loosing them and all her work."¹²⁶ Mormon women struggled to master the mulberry trees and silkworms.

During an extended discussion in May 1880, Mormon men and women debated the best way to resolve a litany of silk industry problems. John T. McAllister suggested that Relief Society women abandon carpet-making to better manage the intense silkworm-feeding season. For many in attendance, a consistent supply of mulberry tree leaves was the most pressing issue. Margaret East reported that she had "great may worms hatched but not much to feed them." Mary Eyring had to abandon a crop of eggs, because her trees needed time to recover from a comprehensive leaf stripping the year before. In Anna L. Ivins's opinion, men needed to assume the responsibility for mulberry trees, because "the sisters have not time" to plant and care for them, she said. Local bishop David Henry Cannon agreed that others should assume responsibility for the trees. He resented the fact that his own sister had to trudge through town with "bundles of mulberry boughs" on her back. "I think we can do

¹²⁴ February 7, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹²⁵ June 6, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹²⁶ July 3, 1879, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

better than that,” he said, by establishing a central tree-growing location and leaning on child labor.¹²⁷ This statement likely reflected anxieties about white women slipping into the stereotypical conditions of the overworked Native American “squaw.”¹²⁸

In addition to saving women from a difficult job and preserving their claims to whiteness, silk could resolve St. George’s labor surplus problem. Some male household members worked on church-directed construction projects, but St. George had a much lower employment rate than other settlements. Mormon pronatalism and plural marriage encouraged large families and intensified the issue.¹²⁹ Some proposed that the silk industry would keep children from becoming an economic burden. In June 1884, Mary Eyring pointed out that while manufacturers typically imported raw silk from China and France, this material “is now being raised in America.” Cocoons could fetch one dollar per pound. “Our children could easily make ten dollars, and would be less trouble to us when usefully employed than when doing nothing,” she said.¹³⁰ As mothers and industry managers, Relief Society women stood poised to incorporate children into the silk initiative.

Mormon Women and Native American Labor

Mormon-Indian relations also occupied their attention. For generations, southern Paiute Indians made their home on roughly thirty million acres of territory extending from what is now south-central Utah to southeastern California, northern Arizona, and southern Nevada. These groups regularly migrated through different ecological zones to exploit

¹²⁷ May 6, 1880, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹²⁸ Anti-Mormon crusaders often depicted plural wives as drudges to convey the supposed degradation and degeneration that polygamy wrought. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, chap. 3.

¹²⁹ Logue, *A Sermon in the Desert*, chap. 4.

¹³⁰ June 5, 1884, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

seasonal harvests and migrations. While mobile, Paiute bands typically maintained and returned to wintering base camps. Other groups remained close to and cultivated crops along water sources. The Santa Clara and Virgin Rivers constituted the “riverine core of the Paiute homeland and its center of densest population,” in the words of Gary Tom and Ronald Holt. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, explorers, traders, and Spanish padres commented on the impressive botanical knowledge and irrigated fields of the Paiutes.¹³¹

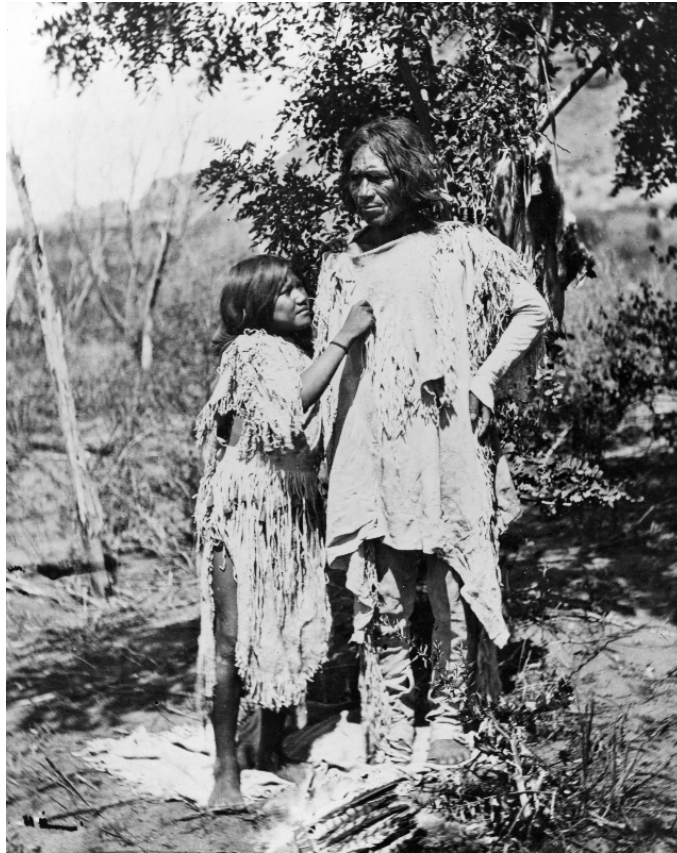


Figure 15: Mo-kwi-uk and his daughter, two Paiute Indians from the vicinity of St. George
Photo taken by J.K. Hillers of the Powel Expeditions, 1871-1875
Smithsonian Office of Anthropology, negative number 1629
Courtesy of Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah

¹³¹ Gary Tom and Ronald Holt, “The Paiute Tribe of Utah,” in *A History of Utah’s American Indians*, ed. Forrest S. Cuch (Salt Lake City: Utah State Division of Indian Affairs/Utah State Division of History, 2003), 123–65. Quote from p. 141. See also Ronald L. Holt, *Beneath These Red Cliffs: An Ethnohistory of the Utah Paiutes* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2006), chap. 1.

In the Mormon ethnic mythos, Native peoples enjoyed a privileged status as fellow Israelites who descended from a “darkened,” cursed people. The Book of Mormon recounts how the ancient prophet Lehi led a colony of fellow Israelites from Jerusalem to a site in the Western Hemisphere. This colony subsequently broke into two factions led by Lehi’s sons, Laman and Nephi. Laman defected from the piety of his family traditions. His descendants, the Lamanites, rebelled against Nephi and his descendants, the Nephites. As punishment for their rebellion, God “did cause a skin of blackness to come upon” the Lamanites (2 Nephi 5:21). Nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints understood American Indians as modern descendants of the Lamanites and inheritors of their sinful legacy. In Mormon consciousness, Indigenous peoples carried a racial and moral marker of the Lamanite insurgence. White Mormons saw Indians a cursed people in need of spiritual cultivation and guidance.¹³² They also saw them as a chosen people instrumental to building the Kingdom of God on earth and bringing about the Second Coming.¹³³ According to Latter-day Saint prophecy, once they accepted the gospel, present-day Lamanites would experience a physical transformation into “a white and a delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:6). This belief motivated nineteenth-century Mormons to convert, buy into freedom, take into service, and marry Native peoples.¹³⁴

In the nineteenth century, southern Paiutes became a part of Mormon settlements as spouses, refugees, laborers, and purchased captives. After the Utes acquired horses from Spanish colonizers in the 1600s, they began raiding Paiute villages for goods and slaves to trade in California and New Mexico. Ute slavers offered Paiute women and children to the

¹³² Armaund L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 49.

¹³³ Ronald W. Walker, “Seeking the ‘Remnant’: The Native American During the Joseph Smith Period,” *Journal of Mormon History* 19, no. 1 (1993): 4–5.

¹³⁴ Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 159.

Mormons and used torturing and executions of captives to draw out and secure these sales.¹³⁵ In some cases, Latter-day Saints used Indian Relief Society clothing as a form of payment.¹³⁶ In southern Utah, Paiutes functioned as useful agents in Mormon-Indian conflicts and as a critical source of domestic and manual labor. They married missionaries, cleared land, planted crops, built irrigation infrastructure, cared for animals, and did chores. The Paiutes defended their homelands, traditions, and autonomy, but these “Lamanites” suffered great losses.¹³⁷ According to one estimate, twenty-five years of contact with the Mormons reduced the Paiute population by ninety percent.¹³⁸

Relief Society women in St. George made no explicit mention of Native peoples raising mulberry trees and silkworms. But these white women did apply condescending assumptions about work and wages to the Indigenous people they interacted with. As mentioned earlier, in the 1850s, Indian Relief Societies provided clothing to Native peoples, typically in exchange for goods or working hours. St. George’s Relief Society continued to do so as late as August 1875, when the minute book lists “clothing given to Indians.”¹³⁹ Members tried to encourage the conversion, in both spiritual and economic terms, of local Indians. On at least one occasion, they reported progress.¹⁴⁰

In general, however, these women viewed the “Lamanites” as a financial and emotional drain. Southern Utah Territory saw an uptick in white Mormon migration in the

¹³⁵ For a more extensive treatment of Native captives, see Michael K. Bennion, “Captivity, Adoption, Marriage and Identity: Native American Children in Mormon Homes, 1847-1900” (MA Thesis, Las Vegas, NV, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2012), chaps. 2–3.

¹³⁶ Jensen, “Forgotten Relief Societies,” 117.

¹³⁷ Brooks, “Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier,” 13–14, 28–33; Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land*, 230–31, 239–40; Martha C. Knack, *Boundaries Between: The Southern Paiutes, 1775-1995* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), chaps. 4–5; Reeve, *Making Space on the Western Frontier*, 68, 72, 162.

¹³⁸ Holt, *Beneath These Red Cliffs*, 8.

¹³⁹ August 1875, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁴⁰ September 4, 1879 and May 3, 1888, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

1870s. This demographic shift rendered Paiute labor less essential to white Mormon communities. Southern Paiutes took to begging and stealing. As a result, Latter-day Saints viewed them as a nuisance.¹⁴¹ Take, for example, statements from Relief Society members in April 1878. Mary Eyring said that, “so far as the Indians are concerned the second ward does not feel to do a great deal toward lifting the burden.” Another woman addressed a recent struggle to, in her words, “lift the Indians out of their degradation [sic] and to teach them.” She asked some Native peoples to cut straw, possibly to furnish raw material for Relief Society’s straw-braiding initiative. Bread as payment did not satisfy them. They wanted molasses, too. In other ways that she did not explicitly mention, this interaction “cost her considerable.” The experience taught her that “You have to feed [the Indians], for they will not do anything, not even learn to read without pay.”¹⁴² St. George Relief Society women did not always think it worth the outlay of cash, commodities, and working hours to instruct Native peoples in domesticity, frugality, and self-sufficiency. By the same token, southern Paiutes understood their labor to be worth more than “uplift,” literacy, or a slice of bread. These types of on-the-ground realities eroded the romantic view that white Mormons had of the “Lamanites.”¹⁴³

The Silk “Mission” and White Settlement

Silk in St. George ran into a similar problem. When evaluating the value of their time, some Mormon women determined that home industries were not worth it. In May 1878, for example, Margaret White Snow blamed the lackluster response to straw braiding on the “low price given” for finished goods. Snow explained that “girls do not like to work for

¹⁴¹ Brooks, “Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier,” 25; Tom and Holt, “The Paiute Tribe of Utah,” 140.

¹⁴² April 4, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁴³ Duffy, “The Use of ‘Lamanite’ in Official LDS Discourse,” 129; Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 69.

nothing.”¹⁴⁴ Silk did not come with many benefits, either. As a stake-level Relief Society leader, Anna L. Ivins traveled to southern Utah settlements, visited local Relief Societies, and brought back reports of their progress. In June 1880, Ivins returned from a trip along the Virgin River. She discovered little investment in silk production. The Latter-day Saints “could not see the reward for their labor.”¹⁴⁵

Commitment to the industry rose to the level to support some manufacturing.¹⁴⁶ Overall, however, the St. George Silk Association gained little traction. In June 1882 Mary B. Eyring, the organization’s leader, explained that the association “is doing very well but lacks encouragement.”¹⁴⁷ Limited manufacturing capabilities stymied the industry’s growth. In April 1889, one attendee explained that “they could not manufacture the silk here now for the want of means.” Their only option was to sell cocoons to better-equipped manufacturers with more expertise and experience.¹⁴⁸ Repeated urgings in the late 1880s and early 1890s to plant mulberry trees and organize a silk association indicate a lack of interest in the enterprise.¹⁴⁹

This held true for Mormon men, as well. Church leaders expected male household heads to set aside funds, land, and time to mulberry tree cultivation, but a consistent, robust supply of leaves eluded Relief Society women in St. George. A lukewarm response from Mormon men may be to blame.¹⁵⁰ Histories of Relief Society indicate that men often did not

¹⁴⁴ May 2, 1878, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁴⁵ June 1880, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁴⁶ By September 1883, St. George residents raised enough money, likely through the silk association, to purchase a reel. September 13, 1883, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes. See also Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah,” 34.

¹⁴⁷ June 29, 1882, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁴⁸ April 4, 1889, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁴⁹ June 14, 1889; June 4, 1891; June 14, 1890, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁵⁰ As early as 1858, church leaders criticized men for failing to “organize certain elements into silk,” in the words of John Taylor. Quoted in Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah,” 5.

respect Mormon women's economic projects or financial independence. Male disapproval and encroachment made it difficult for women to fulfill church callings.¹⁵¹ Men in St. George did not attempt to seize the silk industry from Mormon women. They also did not do enough to ensure a steady supply of mulberry tree leaves. Southern Utah's challenging environment could explain this result. So could the realization that the silk industry would not pay the way that some had hoped or promised.



Figure 16: Ann C. Woodbury (top left) pictured with her siblings
Classified Photograph Collection
Courtesy of Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah

This outcome no doubt disappointed Ann C. Woodbury, resident of St. George since 1861 and the “mother” of southern Utah's silk industry.¹⁵² For more than a decade, Relief

¹⁵¹ Embry, “Grain Storage,” 61; Derr, “Strength in Our Union,” 175–76; Madsen, “Creating Female Community,” 149; Haggard, “In Union Is Strength,” 26.

¹⁵² “Honored Pioneer is Called by Death,” *Washington County News* 14, no. 34 (July 28, 1921): 1. Quote from Gates, “Chapter on Sericulture,” 6, Church History Library.

Society women heard Woodbury's voice ring out in support of silk.¹⁵³ In June 1884, for example, she shared her belief in the silk "mission."¹⁵⁴ Woodbury tried to alleviate concerns about silk's viability, but this was an uphill battle. According to her recollections, "when the people were advised to raise and manufacture silk, I entered into it with my whole soul, determined to make a success of it." But "the folks quit raising silkworms because they could not raise enough to make it pay," she explained.¹⁵⁵

Ann C. Woodbury's experience paralleled that of other Relief Society women. A handful of industry boosters forged ahead, often without the support of the organization.¹⁵⁶ To most members, the industry did not make financial sense. They found the work unsavory, uninspiring, and intrusive. The worms consumed valuable space, time, and money. Homemade cloth could not compete with that produced in the eastern United States, so Mormon women invested in projects that cost less and paid more. In Manti, Utah, for example, members sold off their mulberry tree lot and purchased wheat with the proceeds.¹⁵⁷ Brigham Young and other church leaders missed the mark when they assumed that all Relief Societies could seamlessly incorporate silk production into their activities.

Women's efforts to introduce sericulture in southern Utah Territory had a different kind of impact. Members of the Relief Society played an instrumental role in metabolizing the economic needs of St. George. They responded to crises, collected and redistributed resources, and reconciled competing demands on their time. Mormon women did not secure the St. George silk industry's viability, but they did make Mormon settlement possible. In

¹⁵³ July 3, 1879; April 4, 1889; May 9, 1889; November 7, 1889; March 15, 1890, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁵⁴ June 5, 1884, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁵⁵ Evans and Cannon, "Ann Cannon Woodbury," 181–82.

¹⁵⁶ Haggard, "In Union Is Strength," 49.

¹⁵⁷ Haggard, 43–44, 48, 54; Beecher, "Women's Work on the Mormon Frontier," 287.

this respect, sericulture should not be seen as a tool women's liberation but as an element of white westward expansion.

Chapter 5—Silk Bureaucracies, Factory Work, and the Many Lives of Cooperation, 1875-1890

It took some convincing to enlist factory worker Margaret Cullen in the silk cause. Born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1864, she spent much of her childhood in the Congregationalist Church. She encountered Mormonism for the first time as a teenager. After two years of attending Latter-day Saint services, she “felt that Joseph Smith was a prophet” and converted.¹ She also became an “experienced” power loom weaver. In 1882, she received a letter from an aunt in Utah Territory who told her that “a revival of the silk industry was contemplated.” Nothing could be done without skilled weavers, however.² Perhaps Margaret could fill that void.

In 1884, at the age of nineteen, she relocated to Salt Lake City. She also became William S. Geddes’s second wife. Soon after, according to her recollections, “my services were sought to weave a cut of Brocaded Satin on the Jacquard power loom.” Geddes initially refused. She knew how to do the work, but the prospect of weaving “a cut” of silk—typically sixty yards long—did not appeal to her. She “was an expectant mother,” after all.³ She did not have much time or energy to spare. A conversation with Amos Milton Musser, a church leader and secretary of the recently established Utah Silk Association, seems to have changed her mind. Musser told Geddes, in her words, “The church was anxious to have me do the weaving; there was no one else that they knew who could manipulate the power loom but me.” Geddes ultimately agreed. When Musser asked her to name her price, Geddes made

¹ Reminiscence of Margaret Cullen Geddes Eccles, April 3, 1945, *FamilySearch*, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/K2WM-QVK>.

² Quoted in Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah,” 41–42.

³ Reminiscence of Margaret Cullen Geddes Eccles.

clear that she wanted the fruits of her own labor—fabric—instead of wages. She then went to work the loom at the Salt Lake City silk factory, powered by the rushing waters of City Creek. At the factory, she produced enough silk yardage “of excellent quality and black in color” for six dress patterns. One went to a sister of Brigham Young’s successor, church president and prophet, John Taylor.⁴ She took another as payment for wages. The silk factory’s account book lists an “M Cullen” receiving seven yards of satin brocade fabric.⁵

Margaret Cullen Geddes’s life became more complicated after that. She entered a plural marriage during the nadir of Mormon-federal government relations. In the 1880s, Congress embarked on an ambitious campaign to criminalize polygamy, disenfranchise believing Mormons, and erode the economic power of the church. Perhaps to prevent her husband’s imprisonment for “cohabitation,” or living with more than one wife, Geddes and her children lived in Salt Lake City only briefly before moving on to smaller towns in the Utah and Idaho territories and the state of Oregon.⁶ In this period, plural wives often relocated to a different home, community, state, or even country to avoid confrontations with federal marshals and protect their families. That made Geddes’s time at the silk factory brief but impactful. “Words are inadequate to express the joy I experienced at having the opportunity of working at my beloved trade,” she remembered. After completing her stint in the factory, she “never saw that wonderful loom again.”⁷

The Mormon silk project was well underway by the time Margaret Cullen Geddes arrived on the scene, but her journey in and out of the factory took place during a critical

⁴ Quoted in Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah,” 42–43.

⁵ Salt Lake Silk Factory account book, 1884-1887, MS 8795, Church History Library.

⁶ Reminiscence of Margaret Cullen Geddes Eccles, *FamilySearch*.

⁷ Quoted in Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah,” 42–43.

moment for silk in Utah Territory and in the United States more generally. Several economic shifts in postbellum America made investments in sericulture and locally produced raw silk—defined as the filament reeled from several silk cocoons—look like a safe bet.⁸ This period saw swelling demand for silk from a growing middle class, protectionist trade policies friendly to silk manufacturers, and massive unemployment in the wake of the Panic of 1873. In other words, workers needed jobs, manufacturers needed cocoons and thread, and consumers needed hats, dresses, and other goods. Boosters reasoned that Americans could make and save money by producing raw silk at home instead of importing it from abroad. But communities needed the right expertise and expensive technologies to compete. Local organizations, state legislatures, and the federal government provided the stimulus. These institutions funded research, disseminated pamphlets and treatises, hired experts, sponsored bounties for mulberry trees and cocoons, and built and staffed reeling stations. Men and women worked together on these initiatives, but women’s labors in the home, factory, and meeting hall made the postbellum silk surge possible.⁹

The same held true for Latter-day Saints in Utah Territory. Beginning in the 1870s, Mormon men and women formed at least three silk-centered organizations: the Deseret Silk Association (DSA), the Utah Silk Association (USA), and the Utah Stake Silk Association (USSA). Politicians, business owners, high-level church bureaucrats, Relief Society presidents, and other prominent Latter-day Saints joined with bricklayers, farmers, and other average folks to foster healthy cocoon-raising and efficient silk manufacturing. Much like other US silk organizations operating at the time, these groups generated and circulated

⁸ Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, 296.

⁹ Klose, “Sericulture in the United States,” 228–30; Federico, *An Economic History of the Silk Industry*, chap. 4; Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, 101, 113, 124.

mulberry trees, silkworm eggs, and other industry resources; consumed and disseminated information about horticulture and entomology; instituted bounties for cocoons; lobbied legislators for funding; invested in machinery and skilled workers; and produced thread and fabric. Novice and experienced sericulturists benefitted from these centralized, bureaucratized operations. At a DSA meeting in April 1876, David Adams shared that he “had thrown a large quantity of eggs away for want of better use, but was glad that there was an effort made to revive the silk business once more.”¹⁰ For Adams, DSA represented a refreshing new chapter in Utah Territory silk’s story.

As much these silk groups looked familiar to contemporaneous organizations, Margaret Geddes Eccles’s experience as a mother and plural wife working in a church-sponsored factory sheds light on the distinct religious and economic circumstances that shaped their activities and goals. The church intervened in the circulation and distribution of labor, capital, and resources in this period to protect Mormon settlements from outsiders, provide employment to newly arrived immigrants, place all Latter-day Saints on relatively equal economic footing, and usher in the Second Coming of Christ.¹¹ While successful in tracking the idea and actions of church leaders and a variety of church-sponsored initiatives in the 1870s and 1880s, preceding literature has not fully captured the diverse ways that Latter-day Saints conceived of and worked toward self-sufficiency. Leaders and members of Mormon silk organizations grappled with unique challenges in their attempts to raise healthy cocoons and manufacture silk within Utah Territory’s borders. A lack of local expertise, limited funding, unfavorable market conditions, and anti-polygamy legislation put pressure

¹⁰ R. Simpson, “Deseret Silk Association,” *Deseret Evening News* 9, no. 118 (April 11, 1876): 3.

¹¹ See, for example, Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, chaps. 10, 11; Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, chaps. 5–7; Ethan R. Yorgason, *Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), chap. 3.

on workers, created tensions within silk organizations, and catalyzed a range of solutions, including collecting donations, hiring skilled workers, selling stock and handkerchiefs, and exchanging eggs and cocoons with the federal government. In other words, Latter-day Saints brought a range of perspectives, tools, rationales, and paths to the silk industry and to Mormon economic cooperation. As leaders of silk-centered organizations, women played an instrumental role in making these elements work in concert.

The Deseret Silk Association

The Deseret Silk Association kicked off its operations on June 7, 1875, in Salt Lake City. Latter-day Saints from a range of backgrounds filled city hall with their hopes, success stories, and warnings. Keep the worms “clean and well ventilated,” advised Mary Carter, an experienced silk raiser and resident of Bountiful, a small town north of Salt Lake City. Zina D. H. Young recounted how she raised “two crops” of silkworms in one year at Forest Farm. “Orval Atwood”—possibly the same Orville Atwood listed as a local farmer in the 1880 census—defined the Great Basin as the “finest country in the world for raising silk.”¹² On June 14, 1875, DSA gained an officer core of influential Latter-day Saints. Some, like Zina D.H. Young and Salt Lake City judge Alexander C. Pyper, already had silk experience. So did Paul A. Schettler, the very same German-born Latter-day Saint who transported cocoons from Utah to Europe in the early 1870s. Leila “Lillie” Tuckett Freeze, DSA’s first secretary, likely knew about silk’s demands because of her involvement in the retrenchment

¹² June 7, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes; “Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 8, no. 167 (June 8, 1875): 3; “United States Census, 1880,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>; accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication T9.

movement.¹³ Over the next few years, DSA provided Latter-day Saints with justifications, affirmations, and resources.

A combination of spiritual commitments, community solidarities, and economic needs undergirded DSA's activities. At the most basic level, Latter-day Saints aspired to follow the directives of their president and prophet, Brigham Young, who they believed communicated with and received instructions directly from God. One DSA member called silk work "a revelation from the Lord."¹⁴ On multiple occasions, Paul A. Schettler reminded DSA participants that Brigham Young wanted the silk experiment to succeed.¹⁵ In some ways, Young's death on August 29, 1877, added intensity to the initiative. Late that year, Mary Isabella Hales Horne "advised the brethren to plant out trees, and the sisters to raise silk, as they had been called to that mission by our late beloved President Brigham Young."¹⁶

In addition to obeying the prophet, DSA members strove to perfect their earthly surroundings and prepare themselves for the Lord's return. In March 1877, Mary Isabella Hales Horne warned her listeners that "The time was near when we would be shut out from Babylon." Horne believed that the Mormons could protect themselves by building a self-sustaining economy.¹⁷ These efforts had the added effect of preparing the earth for and bringing about Christ's return. "In the Manufacture of silk," said Paul A. Schettler, Latter-day Saints were "helping build up the Kingdom of God."¹⁸ This commentary is indicative of how nineteenth-century Mormons experienced the spiritual and temporal as overlapping, co-

¹³ June 14, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

¹⁴ January 4, 1878, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

¹⁵ June 21, 1875 and September 7, 1877, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

¹⁶ "Silk," *Deseret Evening News* 10, no. 269 (October 6, 1877): 3.

¹⁷ March 7, 1877, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

¹⁸ September 7, 1877, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

constructed spheres. Economic activities—building homes, constructing irrigation canals, raising cattle, and cultivating crops, for example—constituted acts of worship.¹⁹



Figure 17: Deseret Silk Association building
Classified Photograph Collection
Courtesy of Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah

DSA members also conveyed their concerns about the local labor landscape. By the late 1870s, natural increase and heavy immigration flows led to underemployment, poverty, and a dramatic decrease in the supply of “free” land in the Mormon-dominated Great Basin. In response, the church colonized more land, cancelled some debts, and further developed cooperative iron, wool, and cotton industries.²⁰ Silk also had something to offer in this regard. William Smith shared in one DSA meeting that sericulture would keep children from “wander[ing] the streets in idleness” and teach them how to “earn their own living.”²¹

George B. Wallace offered similar reflections, likely rooted in his experience managing a

¹⁹ Shipps, *Mormonism*, 125.

²⁰ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 354–56.

²¹ April 6, 1877, Deseret Silk Association minutes; R. Simpson, “Silk Association,” *Deseret Evening News* 10, no. 115 (April 7, 1877): 3.

nursery and supporting a family of three wives and twenty-five children.²² He said that by giving children something to do in and near the home, sericulture would made the Mormons “a happier and blessed people.”²³ In addition to offering support to the “rising generation,” in Zina D. H. Young’s words, silk work could employ Mormon emigrants “coming to Zion every year.”²⁴

First, they needed silkworm eggs and mulberry trees. During meetings, DSA participants bought, sold, and bequeathed these raw materials. Ann K. Dunyon, then-manager of Brigham Young’s Forest Farm cocoonery, offered to sell her silkworm eggs and give the proceeds to the organization.²⁵ At a different meeting, Paul A. Schettler announced that he would sell his silkworm eggs at \$4 per ounce and also distribute them to “children and beginners” for free.²⁶ In addition to eggs, attendees exchanged mulberry trees, leaves, and “cuttings,” or branches. In July 1876, Amos Milton Musser, a historian and traveling bishop, offered members access to the leaves of his four thousand mulberry trees, apparently at no cost.²⁷ John Reading, a nurseryman in Salt Lake City, did not give away his crop for free. In November 1876, he said that he had mulberry trees and cuttings to offer at “reasonable” prices.²⁸

²² “United States Census, 1860,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>: accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication M653; “United States Census, 1870,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>: accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication M593.

²³ “Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 11, no. 15 (December 8, 1877): 3.

²⁴ September 7, 1877, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

²⁵ “The Deseret Silk Association,” *Deseret News* 24, no. 45 (December 8, 1875): 705; Geo. D. Pyper, “Silk Culture in Utah,” *The Contributor* 2, no. 4 (January 1881): 1115.

²⁶ February 7, 1877, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

²⁷ “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 25, no. 25 (July 19, 1876): 385; “United States Census, 1880,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>: accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication T9. For more on Musser, see Karl Brooks, “The Life of Amos Milton Musser” (MS Thesis, Provo, UT, Brigham Young University, 1961).

²⁸ “Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 9, no. 291 (November 2, 1876): 3; “United States Census, 1870,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>: accessed February 27, 2021),

Disseminating information occupied DSA's attention, as well. Members of the officer core collected and published data on preexisting silk projects and industry best practices.²⁹ Later on, the organization sponsored an official publication, *Treatise on Silk Raising* (1877), that interested parties could purchase from DSA's secretary or the local cooperative store for ten cents.³⁰ In the pamphlet's pages, aspiring and veteran silk producers alike could learn about how to plant and cultivate mulberry trees; keep silkworm-raising areas clean and functional; care for the worms through the hatching, molting, and spinning stages; kill the chrysalis inside the cocoon; successfully pair male and female moths to produce healthy eggs; and prevent harm to the silkworm from a wide variety of enemies. "Electricity, sultry weather, cold, rats, mice, ants, mosquitoes, fowls, tobacco, sun and wind, late Spring showers," and "chilly weather" all posed grave threats to the worms. Even so, the treatise optimistically declared that "Utah is well adapted to the culture of silk." Local producers could expect one ounce of eggs to yield forty thousand silkworms, which would eventually produce 150 pounds of cocoons, in turn.³¹

Once the worms transformed themselves into cocoons, DSA intended to purchase them. Zina D. H. Young announced in December 1875 that she "would like to see means enough to buy all the cocoons in the Territory into the society."³² Official sponsorship of a

National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication M593; *Utah Directory and Gazetteer for 1879-80*, 180.

²⁹ June 7, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes; "Sericulture," *Deseret Evening News* 8, no. 167 (June 8, 1875): 3; Lelia [Lillie] Freeze, "Deseret Silk Association," *Deseret Evening News* 8, no. 195 (July 12, 1875): 3.

³⁰ R. Simpson, "Sericulture," *Deseret News* 26, no. 6 (March 14, 1877): 82; April 6, 1877, Deseret Silk Association minutes; R. Simpson, "Silk Association," *Deseret Evening News* 10, no. 115 (April 7, 1877): 3.

³¹ *Treatise on Silk Raising, by the Deseret Silk Association of Utah Territory* (1877), 638.2 D451t, Church History Library. Estimates from other sericulturists were less optimistic. American entomologist Charles V. Riley estimated that forty thousand silkworms would result in 100 pounds of cocoons. Charles V. Riley, *The Silkworm; Being a Brief Manual of Instructions for the Production of Silk* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 6.

³² "The Deseret Silk Association," *Deseret News* 24, no. 45 (December 8, 1875): 705.

cocoon bounty began in July 1876, when the *Deseret News* asked any person “having cocoons to sell” to report to DSA.³³ The organization ultimately settled on a price of two dollars per pound for cocoons deemed “good and fresh, and well dried.” Alexander C. Pyper believed that the funding would “encourage and remunerate those who had raised the cocoons for their labor.”³⁴

DSA relied on donations from individuals, Relief Societies, and wards from nine Utah Territory counties to create this artificial market. In total, around \$600 in donations of cash, eggs, cocoons, and other materials materialized. Relief Societies in large and small settlements made an average contribution of \$7, while than 180 individuals donated an average of \$1.60. The largest infusions came to DSA came from its leaders. Alexander C. Pyper and Paul A. Schettler submitted \$34 and \$10, respectively, and Zina D. H. Young provided \$12 in cash and \$10 in silkworm eggs. While DSA received more than 70 pounds of silk cocoons as donations, the organization needed this funding to compensate 25 people for almost 160 pounds of cocoons. In June 1876, on the one-year anniversary of the organization’s formation, Young announced that “the society had been able to pay for nearly all the cocoons that were offered for sale in the Territory.” She credited “the blessing of God,” “the diligence and perseverance of those who had labored,” and “the means obtained by donation from different persons in the community” for DSA’s success.³⁵

Only by ensuring a steady supply of cocoons could DSA achieve the more ambitious part of its agenda: Mormon-made raw silk (or reeled silk) of a good-enough quality to withstand the weaving process. Early on, DSA members tasked a committee with raising

³³ “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 25, no. 25 (July 19, 1876): 1.

³⁴ R. Simpson, “Deseret Silk Association,” *Deseret Evening News* 9, no. 243 (September 7, 1876): 3.

³⁵ “Sericulture,” *Deseret News* 25, no. 21 (June 21, 1876): 8.

funds for reeling technologies. In a matter of two weeks, a stock subscription drive yielded \$133.³⁶ In late 1876, Paul A. Schettler purchased and imported a reel for \$25.³⁷ Once the reel arrived, an unidentified Italian woman in Logan, Utah, began to work it.³⁸ This reeler was likely Susanna Cardon, who emigrated from Italy to the Utah Territory in the 1850s and then married Philippe (or Phillip) Cardon, a laborer.³⁹ In the late 1870s, Susanna Cardon produced more than eight pounds of reeled silk for DSA and made herself available to give lessons to young women.⁴⁰ She spent three months delivering reeling classes, primarily to young women in Relief Society, without compensation.⁴¹ Mary A. Rockwood also offered to teach classes after getting the necessary reeling training herself.⁴² DSA ended up paying Rockwood \$80 for more than 26 pounds of reeled silk thread, a large-enough quantity for Zina D. H. Young to confirm that “the Society was in a prosperous condition” in September 1877.⁴³

Selling cocoons was an option, but Latter-day Saints recognized that reeled thread would bring in more money. Ann K. Dunyon explained how placing silk “in that condition” would “greatly enhance the value of the result.”⁴⁴ William Smith shared his belief that “it was worth more to manufacture [silk] here, and save our profits.”⁴⁵ Alexander C. Pyper

³⁶ June 7, 1875 and June 14, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

³⁷ R. Simpson, “Deseret Silk Association,” *Deseret Evening News* 9, no. 243 (September 7, 1876): 3.

³⁸ “Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 9, no. 291 (November 2, 1876): 3.

³⁹ “United States Census, 1880,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>; accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication T9; Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah,” 28; Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics,” 379; Madsen, “Creating Female Community,” 146.

⁴⁰ R. Simpson, “Sericulture,” *Deseret News* 25, no. 50 (January 10, 1877): 792; “Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 11, no. 15 (December 8, 1877): 3.

⁴¹ Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah,” 28; Arrington, “The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women,” 154.

⁴² “Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 9, no. 291 (November 2, 1876): 3.

⁴³ Deseret Silk Association minutes; R. Simpson, “Silk,” *Deseret News* 26, no. 32 (September 12, 1877): 508.

⁴⁴ “Silk Cocoonery,” *Deseret Evening News* 8, no. 195 (July 12, 1875): 3.

⁴⁵ June 28, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

agreed. During one DSA meeting, he offered cold, hard estimates to support this conclusion. Pyper said that reeled silk earned from \$9 to \$10 per pound, a rate around 500% higher than that guaranteed for cocoons.⁴⁶ But turning this profit would not be simple. They needed skilled labor and improvements in manufacturing. Reeled silk did materialize in the 1870s. DSA members felt pleased with this progress. In December 1876, Elvira Stevens Barney shared that “all those who might have felt discouraged by not finding a market for their cocoons” to “take new courage,” because “we could now reel out silk at home.” Paul A. Schettler announced that silk manufacturers in Patterson, New Jersey, who would pay \$12 per pound for reeled silk from Utah Territory.⁴⁷

Weaving cloth was another matter, entirely. Zina D. H. Young announced in October 1875 that DSA did not yet enjoy the membership numbers or financial means to purchase looms. She advised attendees to “reel the silk and send it out to market and get our immediate returns.”⁴⁸ The ability to manufacture textiles still evaded DSA one year later, when Young said that she “did not think that the time was far off” when they would be able to weave silk goods.⁴⁹ Industry enthusiasts did experience some success in 1877. Lorinda Robinson—a resident of Farmington, Utah, with sericulture experience—presented handkerchiefs for sale.⁵⁰ That same year, two of her neighbors produced a silk dress that they made from start to finish. At a DSA meeting, Mary Isabella Hales Horne announced that Nancy A. Clark “raised, reeled, and twisted” the silk and that Joseph Hadfield, a brickmaker and weaver from

⁴⁶ January 3, 1876, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

⁴⁷ “Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 10, no. 15 (December 8, 1876): 3. For more on Barney, see Crocheron, *Representative Women of Deseret*, 76–81; Thomas W. Simpson, *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism, 1867–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 11–12, 167.

⁴⁸ October 1, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

⁴⁹ August 15, 1876, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

⁵⁰ R. Simpson, “Deseret Silk Association,” *Deseret Evening News* 9, no. 118 (April 11, 1876): 3; R. Simpson, “D.S.A. Meeting,” *Deseret News* 26, no. 18 (June 6, 1877): 284.

England, did the weaving.⁵¹ Clark managed her end of this process while keeping house with her sister wife, Mary A. Clark, for their husband and four sons, according to the 1880 census.⁵²

These developments served as tangible proof of silk's possibilities. When Mary Isabella Hales Horne reflected on the significance of Nancy A. Clark's dress during a meeting in 1877, she shared that "people used to laugh and make sport at the idea of raising and manufacturing silk in Utah." Now, "that time was past."⁵³ But DSA continued to advocate for more widespread advancements in manufacturing. In June 1877, Horne lamented continued reliance on eastern manufacturers for silk cloth and clothing. "What was most needed now," she said, "was machinery" to "keep our labor and capital at home."⁵⁴ Comments about beautiful homemade dresses, satisfactory employment for young people, and economic self-sufficiency likely inspired hope and confidence among DSA members.

Optimism did not automatically secure allegiances or participation, however. When Latter-day Saints weighed costs and benefits, they found silk wanting. In July 1875, for example, Mary Isabella Hales Horne complained that "so few" Mormons attended a DSA meeting. In her opinion, "to establish any thing among the latter day Saints" was an "uphill business."⁵⁵ Many factors explain silk's struggles. For one, individuals wanted tangible returns on their investments. On September 1, 1875, for example, Charlotte Marcroft donated \$262 worth of cocoons to the organization. She made it clear, however, that "if the Society

⁵¹ R. Simpson, "Sericulture," *Deseret News* 26, no. 14 (May 9, 1877): 216; "Obituary Notes," *Deseret Weekly* 48, no. 7 (February 3, 1894): 224; Potter, "The History of Sericulture in Utah," 27.

⁵² "United States Census, 1880," database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>; accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication T9.

⁵³ R. Simpson, "Sericulture," *Deseret News* 26, no. 14 (May 9, 1877): 216.

⁵⁴ R. Simpson, "D.S.A. Meeting," *Deseret News* 26, no. 18 (June 6, 1877): 284.

⁵⁵ July 21, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

[is] able to remunerate for the same in the future it will be expected.”⁵⁶ Marcroft—listed in the 1870 census as “keeping house” for her husband, a laborer, and two children in Salt Lake City—perhaps could not afford to produce cocoons for free.⁵⁷ Support for DSA did not come easily. In June 1876, Zina D. H. Young shared that “the road to success was sure” if local farmers “could only see the benefits.”⁵⁸ By that point, apparently, they were not convinced. Other reports indicate lukewarm interest in a yet-unproven industry. When Eliza R. Snow attempted to raise money for the organization in 1875, she reported the “majority” of people “enquire[d] whether the enterprise would pay.”⁵⁹

Prominent DSA members likely read skepticism, reluctance, and outright rejection of silk as problematic self-interest. In this period, church leaders blamed the limited breadth and depth of home industries on an unwillingness to make sacrifices for the greater good. “I have sought for the last six or eight years to start cooperative institutions,” explained Erastus Snow, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, in June 1877. In his words, “the great difficulty I have had to fight against has been the ignorance of the laborers, their inability to make their labor pay for itself, and their unwillingness to be put to the test. They prefer someone to raise the capital to be invested in the enterprises, and employ them and pay them big wages.”⁶⁰ A similar tone infused a circular that the church’s First Presidency released in 1877. Asking the question “Will it pay?” could indicate a person’s “narrow, contracted, self-defeating selfishness.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ September 1, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

⁵⁷“United States Census, 1870,” database and digital images, *FamilySearch.org* (<http://www.familysearch.org>; accessed February 27, 2021), National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication M593.

⁵⁸ R. Simpson, “Deseret Silk Association,” *Deseret Evening News* 9, no. 168 (June 9, 1876): 3.

⁵⁹ June 14, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

⁶⁰ Erastus Snow, June 3, 1877, *Journal of Discourses* 19:184.

⁶¹ James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1833-1964*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 292. For an analysis of this circular, see Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 338–39.

When it came to silk, Zina D. H. Young believed that Mormons should not concern themselves with wages or profits. In August 1876, she told DSA attendees they could not expect to “get full price” for their labor while “experimenting” with sericulture.⁶² On another occasion, she felt inclined to remind members that DSA “was not for any personal benefit, but for the benefit of the community of Utah.”⁶³ More than anything else, church leaders hoped that individuals would make choices that advanced community self-sufficiency. But boosters could not ease everyone’s anxieties, eliminate the need to make a living, or ensure good-quality products.

Limited experience with sericulture stymied progress. Mary A. Rockwood, the skilled reeler mentioned earlier, determined in July 1876 that “there were a great many cocoons that were not good” and could not be reeled. In other words, these “spoiled” cocoons were not worth anything.⁶⁴ DSA found it difficult to recover. In December 1877, Elvira Stevens Barney explained that the organization still felt the effects of “buying so many cocoons of a poor quality” the year before.⁶⁵ In addition, DSA received reports of substandard raw silk. In one instance, an outside observer called reeled silk from Utah “coarse.”⁶⁶ Joseph Neumann, an experienced silk manufacturer based in San Francisco, California, concluded in February 1876 that DSA members “could not compete” with eastern merchants or manufacturers who enjoyed access to “improved machinery.”⁶⁷ Utah Territory Mormons could only had a chance if they could bring those technologies home.

⁶² August 15, 1876, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

⁶³ “Deseret Silk Association,” *Deseret News* 25, no. 37 (October 11, 1876): 592.

⁶⁴ “Correspondence,” *Deseret News* 25, no. 25 (July 19, 1876): 385.

⁶⁵ “Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 11, no. 15 (December 8, 1877): 3.

⁶⁶ February 7, 1877, Deseret Silk Association minutes; “Sericulture,” *Deseret News* 26, no. 2 (February 14, 1877): 17.

⁶⁷ February 7, 1876, Deseret Silk Association minutes. Neumann was speaking from experience. He promoted silk raising in California, but his own operation depended on imported reeled silk. Klose, “California’s Experimentation in Sericulture,” 218–19; Klose, “Louis Prevost and the Silk Industry at San Jose,” 314–16.

The Utah Silk Association Builds a Factory

To accomplish this goal, they dissolved the Deseret Silk Association and replaced it with something new: a more “permanent” organization that would eventually become known as the Utah Silk Association (USA).⁶⁸ On February 22, 1878, Utah’s territorial legislature dispersed \$1500 to the group to “purchase Machinery.”⁶⁹ While similar to DSA in its goals (namely, to collect cocoons and establish manufacturing), USA’s governance and operation structures had a more corporate character. In January 1880, USA became an officially chartered joint-stock corporation with a constitution, bylaws, board of directors, and shareholders. The company offered investors 1,000 shares of stock at \$10 per share. The first list of investors included several prominent Latter-day Saints, including John Taylor, Eliza R. Snow, Zina D. H. Young, Mary Isabella Hales Horne, Emmeline B. Wells, and Amos Milton Musser, as well as a handful of well-known sericulturists, like Paul A. Schettler and George D. Pyper.⁷⁰ In February 1880, church president John Taylor announced in a *Deseret Evening News* his hope that “the people will take hold of this industry and work it up with renewed determination.”⁷¹

While murmurs of a local factory appeared as early as 1869, USA made its most significant, enduring contribution to the local industry when they funded and built it.⁷² In February 1880, the corporation announced its intent to break ground on a building at the

⁶⁸ R. Simpson, “Deseret Silk Association,” *Deseret News* 26, no. 49 (January 9, 1878): 776-777.

⁶⁹ *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah, Twenty-Fourth Session for the Year 1880* (Salt Lake City: T. E. Taylor, 1880), 25.

⁷⁰ R. Simpson, “Utah Silk Association,” *Deseret News* 28, no. 50 (January 14, 1880): 797; “Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 13, no. 66 (February 9, 1880): 2.

⁷¹ “Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 13, no. 66 (February 9, 1880): 2.

⁷² “Correspondence on Sericulture,” *Deseret Evening News* 2, no. 168 (June 8, 1869): 4.

mouth of City Creek Canyon, just a few blocks from the city center, likely to take advantage of the water source, there. To one onlooker, this action proved that USA “means business.”⁷³ Over the summer, construction progressed on a building with a room large enough for two reels and four workers. USA secretary Amos Milton Musser began advertising for a “competent silk reeler” in the *Deseret Evening News*.⁷⁴ Plans also included planting the factory’s surrounding grounds with mulberry trees. In the days leading up to the factory’s completion, USA had collected cocoons for processing but still publicized the offer to purchase “all” crops offered to them.⁷⁵ By August 1880, women workers could be found inside the building, soaking cocoons in warm water, coaxing out “tiny,” “spider like” threads, and using machines to spin and twist two, three, or four reeled threads together into a final product of any “thickness or strength.”⁷⁶

Over the next few years, the factory successfully incorporated weaving into its operations. In April 1883, James L. Chalmers—described as an “expert silk weaver” by the *Deseret News*—emigrated from the East to oversee the factory with Amos Milton Musser’s assistance. The newspaper forecasted that the “manufacture of silk fabrics will no doubt act as an additional impetus to the pioneer band who have been struggling for years.”⁷⁷ By January 1884, an article in the *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* announced that “silk-weaving is at last a success in this city.” Under Chalmers’s oversight, the factory produced handkerchiefs “as beautiful in appearance and as excellent in quality as any that are

⁷³ “Home Silk Manufactory,” *Deseret Evening News* 13, no. 81 (February 27, 1880): 3; “Home Affairs,” *Woman's Exponent* 8, no. 22 (April 15, 1880): 172.

⁷⁴ *Deseret Evening News* 13, no. 154 (May 22, 1880): 2; “Home Affairs,” *Woman's Exponent* 9, no. 1 (June 1, 1880): 4; *Deseret Evening News* 13, no. 203 (July 21, 1880): 2.

⁷⁵ “Silk Factory,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 10, no. 291 (May 14, 1880): 3.

⁷⁶ “The Silk Factory,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 11, no. 65 (August 22, 1880): 3.

⁷⁷ “Silk Weaving,” *Deseret News* 32, no. 14 (April 25, 1883): 217.

imported.”⁷⁸ The *Deseret News* heaped admiration on these “pure white” handkerchiefs, decorated with butterflies, bees, and a beehive.⁷⁹ The factory also churned out handkerchiefs emblazoned with a picture of the not-yet-completed Salt Lake Temple. According to the reminiscences of Clarissa Young Spencer, daughter of Brigham Young, these “found a ready sale with the tourists.”⁸⁰ Internal financial records indicate that in 1883 and 1884, factory workers produced forty-two dozen handkerchiefs, as well as 196 yards of satin and organza fabric and several boxes of spooled silk at a combined value of over \$1,000.⁸¹

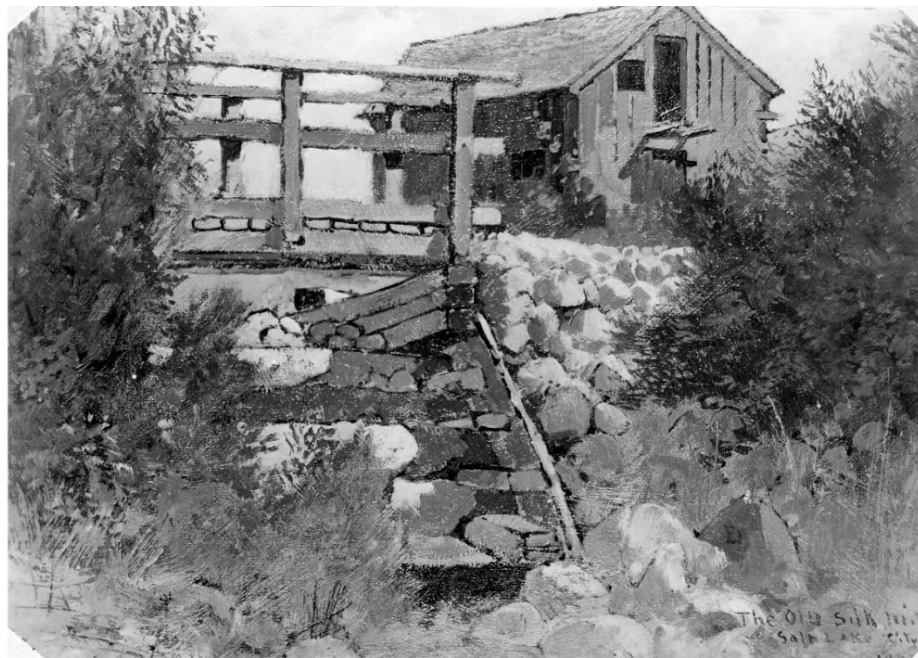


Figure 18: Painting of the “Old Silk Mill” by Ed Deakin
Classified Photograph Collection
Courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah

⁷⁸ “City Chaff,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 14, no. 175 (January 1, 1884): 10.

⁷⁹ “Fine Silk Work,” *Deseret News* 32, no. 51 (January 9, 1884): 801.

⁸⁰ Spencer and Harmer, *Brigham Young at Home*, 252.

⁸¹ Salt Lake Silk Factory account book.

From late 1883 to early 1886, as many as twenty-seven people labored in this factory. They typically came to work during the summer and fall months, after the cessation of the cocoon-raising season. The factory used cash, merchandise, and tithing orders to pay men and women workers piece-rates for goods and daily wages from \$0.50 to \$3, depending on the sex and skill of the operator. Annie Clark, for example, reeled for \$0.75 or \$1 per day in exchange for cash and fabric. Likely because of her limited experience, a woman named Louisa reeled for only \$0.25 per day.⁸²

While women performed most if not all tasks associated with thread production, both women and men wove fabric. Sarah Spencer wove handkerchiefs at a piece rate of \$0.50 per dozen. Jeannie Chalmers made twice as much. Male weavers earned even more. Thomas Jenings could count on \$1.25 for a dozen handkerchiefs. James L. Chalmers brought in the single highest wage, \$3 per day in cash, coal, and/or fabric, to manage operations and weave silk goods. Beyond reeling and weaving, the factory depended on other types of laborers to run. Machinist John Olsen, for example, performed repairs. Emma Maubin and Mary Pratt hemmed silk handkerchiefs at the rate of \$0.20 per dozen. An unnamed “picker” removed inconsistencies from the silk thread for \$0.03 per yard. Fanny Steel and Margaret Frost preparing the warp for the loom for \$0.75 and \$1 per day, respectively.⁸³

In many ways, Salt Lake City’s silk factory mirrored the compensation patterns, policies, and procedures of contemporaneous silk manufacturing enterprises. While more expensive and extensive in its operations, the Haskell Silk Company in Maine offers a useful point of comparison. Established in 1874, full-time workers at the mill spent sixty hours per

⁸² Salt Lake Silk Factory account book.

⁸³ Salt Lake Silk Factory account book.

week churning out various grades and types of silk thread suited for hand-sewing and sewing machines. Depending on experience, women earned from \$0.50 to \$0.85 per day, while men averaged a daily rate of \$1 to \$1.25. Clients included dry goods stores, milliners, tailors, dress makers, and clothing manufacturers in New England, New York, and Chicago. After several years of financial success, the firm decided to pivot away from thread production. Beginning in 1882, a combination of forces, including high tariffs on manufactured silk goods and the arrival of high-quality raw silk from Japan, catalyzed the company's transformation into a fully integrated silk fabric manufacturer. Weavers in the Haskell mill made slightly less than the national average rates for weaving, reported to be \$2 per day for men and \$1.40 per day for women in 1880. Workers accepted cash and silk fabric as compensation, an arrangement that permitted working-class women to gain access to a highly sought-after fabric that they could not otherwise afford. By 1885, the mill employed more than one-hundred people and boasted fifty looms.⁸⁴

While similar to the Haskell Silk Company, the much smaller operation in Salt Lake City made use of a tithing system unique to the Latter-day Saint economy with roots in the church's early years. In July 1838, church president Joseph Smith received a revelation that the Mormons must contribute, or tithe, one-tenth of their "surplus property" at the time of conversion and one-tenth of "their interest annually" to the church (Doctrine and Covenants 119). After many the Saints relocated from Missouri to Illinois in late 1838, the tithing system replaced the substantially more ambitious Law of Consecration and Stewardship. As discussed in chapter 1, under this arrangement, Mormons deeded their total property to the church, which local bishops then redistributed according to each family's "wants and

⁸⁴ Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, chaps. 7–9.

needs.”⁸⁵ While deeds of consecration experienced a short revival in the 1850s, the one-tenth tithing system came to dominate Mormon economic life and continues to be a centerpiece of the church’s finances.

Latter-day Saints tithed (or aspired to tithe) one-tenth of their working hours and wages, one-tenth of their agricultural yield, and one-tenth of the production and time of their livestock to the church. One scholar has found that this tithing system was “the key to harnessing ecological variation” in the western “Mormon corridor.”⁸⁶ Bishops at local tithing offices and storehouses received and stored payments, typically made in kind. Some of these resources went to Salt Lake City’s General Tithing Office, which transferred goods from one Latter-day Saint settlement to another based on need and also funneled resources from individual communities into church projects. Some went to local “dependents.” The rest could be purchased by local Latter-day Saints in exchange for cash or goods. Local tithing offices functioned like general stores and banks. They extended and allowed the accumulation of credit. They also printed and issued tithing orders, called scrip. Much like checks, this medium of exchange entitled the holder to a certain value of commodities at the tithing office. The church relied on these orders to pay suppliers, fund charities, and compensate workers.⁸⁷

The silk factory used this economic infrastructure to do business. Financial records indicate that the factory sold silk goods valued at \$73.75 to the tithing office.⁸⁸

Unfortunately, the archival trail ends at this point of sale. It is still possible to estimate,

⁸⁵ Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*, chap. 2.

⁸⁶ Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*, 53.

⁸⁷ Leonard J. Arrington, “The Mormon Tithing House: A Frontier Business Institution,” *Business History Review* 28, no. 1 (1954): 24–58; Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 139–44; Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*, chap. 3.

⁸⁸ Salt Lake Silk Factory account book.

however, that a Latter-day Saint used cash and/or any number of goods—livestock, hay, molasses, or oats, for example—to purchase this silk from a tithing office clerk, or that a merchant bought and then re-sold the silk at a different establishment.⁸⁹ Use of the tithing system extended to worker compensation, as well. Men and women factory workers could expect at least part of their wages to come in tithing orders. Weaver and factory manager James L. Chalmers, for example, received \$30 of tithing scrip as wages.⁹⁰ To pay Alexander Steel’s \$1-per-day wage for 33 days of work in late 1884 and early 1885, the factory provided him with cash, merchandise, and \$20 in tithing scrip. Margaret Frost, who worked \$1 per day for 22 and a half days in December 1884 and 100 days in 1885, received cash as well as a \$10 tithing order.⁹¹ These workers could have used these orders at a tithing office or at other businesses not owned by the church. Private sellers tended to accept tithing scrip at a ten to twenty percent discount.⁹²

Despite USA’s efforts to support silk production, the factory struggled. Experience proved that silk reeling did not pay. In January 1884, the *Deseret News* reported that “it cost more to manufacture silk in this way than it was worth in value in the market.”⁹³ The factory did not abandon reeling, though, and continued to purchase and process local cocoons.⁹⁴ In 1885, Amos Milton Musser told raisers that they could count on \$3 for each pound of reeled silk that factory operators generated from their cocoon crops. Raisers should expect to be paid not in cash or tithing orders but in silk goods and handkerchiefs “at wholesale prices.”

⁸⁹ The General Tithing Office also functioned as a bulk supplier in this period. Arrington, “The Mormon Tithing House,” 48.

⁹⁰ Salt Lake Silk Factory account book.

⁹¹ Salt Lake Silk Factory account book.

⁹² Arrington, “The Mormon Tithing House,” 54.

⁹³ “Silk Manufacture,” *Deseret News* 32, no. 51 (January 9, 1884): 806.

⁹⁴ Salt Lake Silk Factory account book.

This same arrangement applied to reeled silk suppliers, who would be credited \$4 to \$5 per pound “according to quality.”⁹⁵ That year, the factory’s weavers made more than 200 dozen handkerchiefs—blue, white, gold, cardinal, and wine-colored.⁹⁶

A lack of a steady cocoon supply clouded any positive results. The factory’s manager needed to import raw silk from the eastern United States just “to keep the business going,” announced one journalist in September 1885.⁹⁷ This was the case as early as 1883. Financial records show that the factory spent \$950.89 on raw silk imports from May 1883 to July 1884. This consumption continued from October to December 1885. In that span of time, the factory purchased as much as 30 pounds of cocoons from the New York Silk Exchange; sixty spools of gold machine twist from the Solomon Brothers; and almost \$500 worth of organzine and Japanese tram from S. Strauss, a New York merchant.⁹⁸ When the factory did receive local cocoons, explained James L. Chalmers in October 1885, a great majority were “old” and “partially destroyed,” which severely contracted production capacity. Chalmers estimated that out of the 200 of cocoons recently processed at the factory, only one lot of 20 pounds produced “proper” yields—about 1 pound of reeled silk from 3 pounds of cocoons. Even so, Chalmers forecasted that local merchants would “become exporters instead of importers of silk merchandise” in two years.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ “To the Silk Growers of Utah,” *Deseret Evening News* 18, no. 130 (April 25, 1885): 3. The factory account book makes occasional mention of these exchanges. In April 1885, Louisa Harris submitted over 25 pounds of cocoons. Even though 3 pounds were “not reelable,” factory workers generated 6 pounds, 2 ounces of reeled silk, and Harris received \$18.35. Later that year, sericulturists in Provo earned \$18.75 for 65 pounds of cocoons that resulted in 6 pounds of reeled silk, and the factory paid a supplier from St. George \$2.20 for 6 pounds of cocoons that yielded slightly more than 1 pound of reeled silk. See Salt Lake Silk Factory account book.

⁹⁶ Salt Lake Silk Factory account book.

⁹⁷ “Silk Manufacture,” *Deseret Evening News* 18, no. 248 (September 15, 1885): 3.

⁹⁸ Salt Lake Silk Factory account book.

⁹⁹ James L. Chalmers, “Our Silk Industry,” *Woman's Exponent* 14, no. 9 (October 1, 1885): 69.

This prophecy did not come to pass. Salt Lake City's silk factory never became a prominent exporter on the national stage. For a handful of years, the factory supplied local stores, Utah Territory residents, and Salt Lake City tourists with silk goods.¹⁰⁰ In November 1885, for example, the factory released an "attractive" new design that included eagles and beehives in the corners and "bees with spread wings" across the fabric.¹⁰¹ The next month, James L. Chalmers placed a notice in the *Deseret Evening News* listing the places—ZCMI, R.K. Thomas, and "all respectable stores in the city," for that matter—where interested parties could find and purchase these handkerchiefs and "help in establishing an industry which will give employment to hundreds in the Territory," in turn.¹⁰² It is likely that factory workers fashioned these items out imported raw silk, not silk raised and reeled in Utah Territory. An 1886 report from Territorial Governor Caleb Walton West confirmed that "Much of the [factory's] raw silk is imported from New York City."¹⁰³

Over the next few years, the factory at the mouth of City Creek Canyon changed hands multiple times before ultimately being razed. At some point in the 1880s, the city acquired the building.¹⁰⁴ But by 1889, James L. Chalmers had relocated his weaving enterprise to 54 South West Temple Street, less than a block away from Salt Lake City's Temple Square. There, he continued to produce "elegant" souvenirs, including a book mark adorned with a portrait of Brigham Young.¹⁰⁵ For a few years, the Salt Lake City Council

¹⁰⁰ *Deseret Evening News* 18, no. 42 (January 12, 1885): 2; "Silk Manufacture," *Deseret News* 34, no. 41 (October 28, 1885): 649.

¹⁰¹ "A New Design," *Deseret Evening News* 19, no. 6 (November 28, 1885): 2.

¹⁰² *Deseret Evening News* 19, no. 15 (December 9, 1885): 2.

¹⁰³ "Governor West's Report," *Deseret Evening News* 19, no. 279 (October 19, 1886): 1.

¹⁰⁴ "Silk Manufacture," *Deseret News* 32, no. 51 (January 9, 1884): 806; "City Council," *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 16, no. 296 (May 26, 1886): 8; *Deseret Evening News* 19, no. 270 (October 9, 1886): 3.

¹⁰⁵ "Surplus Reducers," *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 20, no. 110 (October 8, 1889): 8; "An Elegant Souvenir," *Deseret Evening News* 23, no. 150 (May 17, 1890): 9; *Utah Gazetteer 1892-93* (Salt Lake City: Stenhouse & Co., 1892), 204, 468, 662.

offered temporary leases for the “old silk factory.”¹⁰⁶ Then, local residents began to issue requests for the building to be removed, because of its reputation as a neighborhood “menace” and a rendezvous point for “thieves and hard characters.”¹⁰⁷ In February 1892, a group of frolicking children found the dead body of an infant in the building’s vicinity.¹⁰⁸ A few months later, the city began the demolition project, with an eye toward installing a public park.¹⁰⁹ In 1935, George D. Pyper, Alexander D. Pyper’s son and one of the workers in Brigham Young’s cocoonery, reported that “a beautiful flower garden” stood in the spot “where silk enthusiasts made such a rare gesture.”¹¹⁰

The Utah Stake Silk Association Looks for a Market

When Daniel Graves visited the Salt Lake City silk factory in December 1887, he did not like what he found. A quick inspection of the machinery revealed that “there was none there with which to prepare the silk from the cocoons.” Even worse, “the silk used in the pocket handkerchiefs now being made and sold for Utah silk is being imported from the East, and is, no doubt, of foreign importation.” Graves planned to petition the territorial legislature for an appropriation. It would be up to the politicians to decide whether to support an industry capable of stopping “the expenditure of millions of dollars annually” on silk goods

¹⁰⁶ “The City Council,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 19, no. 230 (February 27, 1889): 8; “The City Council,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 20, no. 19 (June 26, 1889): 8; “City Council Meeting,” *Salt Lake Tribune* 37, no. 60 (June 26, 1889): 4; “City Council,” *Deseret Evening News* 23, no. 82 (February 26, 1890): 3; “City Council Meeting,” *Deseret Evening News* 23, no. 88 (March 5, 1890): 3; “City Council,” *Deseret Evening News* 23, no. 136 (April 30, 1890): 3; “A Public Building,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 20, no. 286 (April 30, 1890): 6; “City Council Meeting,” *Deseret Evening News* 23, no. 139 (May 3, 1890): 3.

¹⁰⁷ “In the City Council,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 20, no. 93 (September 18, 1889): 8; “City Council,” *Deseret Weekly* 43, no. 23 (November 28, 1891): 749; “The Old Silk Factory,” *Deseret Evening News* 25, no. 103 (March 24, 1892): 8.

¹⁰⁸ “Horrible Discovery,” *Deseret Evening News* 25, no. 78 (February 24, 1892): 8.

¹⁰⁹ “The Fire Writers Unite,” *Salt Lake Tribune* 90, no. 360 (April 10, 1892): 6; “Chief Stanton’s Annual Report,” *Deseret Weekly* 46, no. 2 (December 31, 1892): 59.

¹¹⁰ George D. Pyper, “The Story of a Silkworm,” *Improvement Era* 38, no. 11 (November 1935): 666-668.

from Europe and Asia.¹¹¹ This was not the first time that Graves felt frustrated about local silk. It was also not the first time that he traveled the roughly forty miles from his home in Provo to observe and participate in Salt Lake City's silk activities.¹¹² In December 1877, for example, he explained to Deseret Silk Association members that "There was not a place in Utah County but had raised some silk."¹¹³ For Graves, these small-scale efforts south of Salt Lake City were just the beginning. He and his colleagues in the Provo-based Utah Stake Silk Association tried to induce every stage of local silk, from tree and worm to thread and cloth. As the prospects of a self-sustaining industry wavered, however, external funding sources began to look much more favorable.

USSA began as an official branch of the Deseret Silk Association in the late 1870s.¹¹⁴ On June 9, 1877, Alexander C. Pyper and Samuel Cornaby—experienced silk producers and DSA officers—joined with Daniel Graves and representatives from almost all the settlements in Utah County to elect a board and set out organization goals.¹¹⁵ After the Utah Silk Association replaced DSA in 1878, Utah stake presidency members dissolved the Utah County DSA branch, installed the Utah Stake Silk Association in its place, and split the county into three geographic districts: Southern, Northern, and Central. On August 1, 1879, USSA members elected a new central leadership cohort, with Margaret Smoot, leader of the stake's retrenchment association, as president, William Paxman as treasurer, and Daniel

¹¹¹ Quoted in "Silk Culture," *Territorial Enquirer* 11, no. 102 (December 30, 1887): 3. Perhaps recent developments in California inspired Graves to seek legislative support. In the early 1880s, the state legislature there dedicated several thousand dollars to the enterprise and also created the California State Board of Silk Culture to distribute mulberry trees, silkworm eggs, and information. Klose, "California's Experimentation in Sericulture," 221–22.

¹¹² December 4, 1877, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

¹¹³ "Sericulture," *Deseret Evening News* 11, no. 15 (December 8, 1877): 3.

¹¹⁴ Constitution of the Utah County Branch of the Deseret Silk Association, BX 8608 .A1 no.25, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

¹¹⁵ W.M. Greenwood, "Correspondence; Organization of Utah County Silk Association," *Deseret Evening News*, June 14, 1877, 2.

Graves as the traveling agent.¹¹⁶ In this role, Graves assumed responsibility for evaluating, reporting on, and encouraging the “progress of sericulture” in individual settlements and conducting business on the board’s behalf.¹¹⁷ By January 1879, he had hosted fifteen meetings in towns throughout Juab, Sevier, and Sanpete counties and inspired the formation of silk committees modeled after USSA. Graves reported witnessing “a willingness and anxiety among the people to engage in the business.”¹¹⁸



Figure 19: Portrait of Daniel Graves and Mary Newman Graves, his spouse
Courtesy of the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

¹¹⁶ August 1, 1879, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes, 1879-1906, LR 9629 36, Folder 1, Church History Library.

¹¹⁷ Constitution of the Utah Stake Silk Association, 638.2 Ut12 1878, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

¹¹⁸ “Local and Other Matters,” *Deseret News* 27, no. 51 (January 22, 1879): 809.

From the 1870s to the 1890s, USSA members created momentum behind the Mormon silk experiment. People with experience in the industry advised lining fences, filling orchards, and populating property corners with trees in advance of the silkworm egg hatching season in the spring.¹¹⁹ For Daniel Graves, a ready supply silkworm feed constituted the first step in “getting ready for a business which is sure to become a source of wealth to those who engage in it.”¹²⁰ USSA and its affiliates acquired land and mulberry trees, either via sales or donation. In August 1879, for example, Zina Williams, daughter of Zina D. H. Young and Brigham Young, gifted USSA five-hundred mulberry trees from her property in Salt Lake County.¹²¹ In 1880, Santaquin residents bought 100 trees from Paul A. Schettler for \$10, received 36 as a donation, and secured the labor of 35 men to prepare the ground for planting.¹²² Not all settlements made positive gains. Workers in Goshen shared how they “tried to get Mulberry Trees to make a beginning” during the 1880 season “but have not succeeded.”¹²³ Any number of factors—drought, heat, frost, or unsuitable soil, for example—could have been to blame.

Much like with mulberry trees, Latter-day Saints used USSA to acquaint themselves with, circulate, and properly raise silkworm eggs. In 1880, for example, Daniel Graves and Samuel Cornaby offered sell eggs to interested parties.¹²⁴ USSA officers encouraged members to learn from and adopt the methods of successful raisers like Mrs. Collins of West Provo. Her hatchery boasted healthy, well-fed worms. “Some had commenced to spin,”

¹¹⁹ WM Greenwood, “Correspondence; Organization of Utah County Silk Association,” *Deseret Evening News* 10, no. 173 (June 14, 1877): 2; November 8, 1879, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹²⁰ “Local and Other Matters,” *Deseret News* 27, no. 51 (January 22, 1879): 809.

¹²¹ August 1, 1879, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹²² May 28, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹²³ May 28, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹²⁴ February 14, 1880 and May 28, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

announced Margaret A. Till, USSA president beginning in 1887.¹²⁵ USSA also kept tabs on the egg reserves of participating towns. By August 1880, Salem reported one ounce of eggs on hand.¹²⁶ Two years later, the organization's Southern District estimated a cache of three and a half ounces.¹²⁷ Experienced sericulturists offered advice about how to care for this unique livestock. Samuel Cornaby dictated that worms be "fed plentifully" right before they began the spinning process.¹²⁸

Interested parties could also find information in Daniel Graves's *Treatise on Sericulture* (1880). In this publication, Graves delivered instructions on how to plant trees and strip them of their leaves, feed a silkworm through its five "ages," provide adequate space and comfortable temperatures for the worms, identify and prevent diseases, and collect cocoons. He also defined and expounded on the benefits of "cottage culture," or a domestic, family-based silk production system. In France, Italy, Turkey, and Persia, he wrote, horticulturists cultivated mulberry trees on the outskirts of town and sold leaves to women and children raising silkworms in the cities. In Utah Territory, on the other hand, "nearly every family" had access to a "small piece of ground by their dwellings" suitable for mulberry trees. Children could easily "pick the leaves and feed the worms." Graves argued that this approach would permit "every family of four or five children" to earn a portion of the millions of dollars that the United States currently spent on raw silk imports per year.¹²⁹ This treatise on best practices, dependent labor, and household profits quickly became a

¹²⁵ July 16, 1897, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹²⁶ August 24, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹²⁷ January 6, 1882, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹²⁸ Nov 26, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹²⁹ Graves, *A Treatise on Sericulture*, 130.

foundational resource for local sericulturists and likely entrenched Graves's position as the preeminent authority on the subject.

Cottage culture appealed to many other nineteenth-century silk experts, who drew on longstanding gendered arguments about economic dependency and domestic work. Charles V. Riley, the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Chief Entomologist in the 1880s and 1890s, argued that raising "small broods" in the domestic sphere had the upper hand over "large rearing establishments," estimated to decrease cocoon yields by 75%.¹³⁰ In addition to protecting the health of silkworms, cottage culture had the potential to transform "dependents" into productive workers. Industry expert Benjamin Franklin Peixotto believed that silk work offered families a financial "Godsend," he wrote in 1882. Recent transformations in the economy brought textile production out of the home and into the factory. This evolution "condemned" women "to idleness." By embracing sericulture, women could once again "contribute to the family income."¹³¹ William G. LeDuc, USDA commissioner from 1881 to 1887, made a similar statement about how raising worms offered "profitable employment" to "persons whose time would otherwise be of little or no value."¹³² Suppositions about women's unique capacity for the job justified this approach. A treatise published by the California Silk Culture Association in 1881 compared silkworms to "tender babes" requiring "motherly care" and defined silk work as "an employment so light, cleanly and healthful that women and children will gladly betake themselves to it."¹³³ In other words,

¹³⁰ "Silk-Raising," *Chicago Daily Tribune* 39 (May 10, 1879): 10; Riley, *The Silkworm*, 8, 17; Charles V. Riley, "Report of the Entomologist," in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Years 1881 and 1882* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1882), 74.

¹³¹ Consul Peixotto, "The Future of Silk Culture in the United States," *Scientific American* 13, no. 324 (March 1882): 5172-3.

¹³² William G. LeDuc, "Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture," in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1880* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 25.

¹³³ Mrs. T. H. Hittell, *The California Silk Growers' Instructor* (San Francisco: California Silk Culture Association, 1881), 6, 15; Klose, "California's Experimentation in Sericulture," 221.

by keeping household “dependents” in the home, cottage culture offered to resolve the pressures of an industrializing economy.

Daniel Graves and other Utah-based boosters made similar assumptions. Based on her experiences in Brigham Young’s cocoonery, DSA participant Ann K. Dunyon “found that the worms do better where they are not crowded.”¹³⁴ Turning to “family efforts” instead of “large establishments” and “salaried labor” also saved money, announced the *Deseret News* in 1881.¹³⁵ A reliance on “juvenile and other cheap labor” would make silk production “one of Utah’s permanent industries,” the paper declared a few years later.¹³⁶ USSA members shared these sentiments. In May 1880, William Paxman conveyed his excitement at the “opportunity afforded in Sericulture for the employment of small children.”¹³⁷ Young Latter-day Saints could pick leaves from mulberry trees and feed the silkworms. Farmers received the advice to plant mulberry trees “as near the house as possible” and strategically cut them so that children could more easily harvest the leaves.¹³⁸ While silk work was not necessarily complicated or strenuous, boosters recommended the careful observation of young workers. Alexander C. Pyper, for example, said that children “could help attend to” the worms but added that “some person of mature mind and discretion”—most likely the mother—should oversee the operation.¹³⁹ Pyper likely based this reflection on his own experience keeping silkworms in his barn with the help of his son, George.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ July 21, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

¹³⁵ “Cocoons,” *Deseret News* 30, no. 19 (June 8, 1881): 296.

¹³⁶ “Silk Manufacture,” *Deseret News* 32, no. 51 (January 9, 1884): 806.

¹³⁷ May 28, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹³⁸ “Utah County Silk Association,” *Woman’s Exponent* 7, no. 21 (April 1, 1879): 219.

¹³⁹ June 28, 1875, Deseret Silk Association minutes.

¹⁴⁰ “Silk Raising,” *Deseret Evening News* 8, no. 189 (July 3, 1875): 3.

USSA spent time and money encouraging Mormons to install sericulture in their homes. From the outset, the organization sponsored a cocoon-purchasing operation. The organization provided district-level purchasing agents with cash and the authority to buy cocoons on USSA's behalf.¹⁴¹ In November 1880, for example, Southern District agent Ann Douglas spent \$23.12 on cocoons.¹⁴² While these specialized agents traveled throughout districts in search of cocoons, the central leadership also did what they could to "bring in" the stock.¹⁴³ USSA members shared information about how to convert this material into raw silk. Daniel Graves presented a "specimen" of clean, reeled silk, for example, and USSA shared a soap recipe that would strip the silk of sericin and ensure a good result.¹⁴⁴

Members also formed a committee tasked with purchasing a loom.¹⁴⁵ In May 1881, this contingent, headed by Central District president Hester A. Beebe, recognized the "urgent necessity of getting a loom without further delay." They secured cotton yarn for warp, requested that plans for the "inner works of the Loom" be secured from Patterson, New Jersey, and commissioned the Provo Lumber and Manufacturing Company to build the frame. The committee predicted that supplying "suitable machinery" would help local producers make better-quality goods.¹⁴⁶

In addition, the organization tried to hire skilled workers on a long-term basis. In May 1880, USSA employed an experienced reeler, "Sister Clark." At that point, Clark had already

¹⁴¹ Constitution of the Utah Stake Silk Association, 638.2 Ut12 1878, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

¹⁴² Utah Stake Southern District Silk Association minutes, LR 9629 36, Folder 2, Church History Library.

¹⁴³ November 26, 1880; January 5, 1888; May 3, 1897, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁴⁴ August 24, 1880 and November 24, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁴⁵ August 24, 1880 and November 26, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁴⁶ Report of the Silk Manufacturing Committee, May 3, 1881, Provo Utah Central Stake Relief Society minutes and records, LR 9629 14, Church History Library. This link to Patterson, New Jersey, was not new. In 1870, two Mormon elders—Richard Tilt and William Parr—went there "to see and obtain information respecting the machinery" required for manufacturing. See "Local and Other Matters," *Deseret Evening News* 3, no. 86 (March 4, 1870): 3.

reeled cocoons for USSA, and Sarah Saunders offered to weave this thread into handkerchiefs.¹⁴⁷ She produced thirty handkerchiefs priced at \$1.50.¹⁴⁸ USSA also put these handkerchiefs to work. USSA exchanged one for the labor of moving silk machinery into a barn in 1887.¹⁴⁹ These handkerchiefs operated as currency. They also signaled local silk's legitimacy. Organization officers sent one to church president John Taylor, who responded "with thanks and prayers for a successful business."¹⁵⁰ Daniel Graves brought one with him as a sample to help secure funding from Salt Lake City's Chamber of Commerce and other "prominent gentlemen" in the city.¹⁵¹ In 1886, the organization reported \$6.25 in handkerchief sales. At this point, USSA also had one loom, one reel, almost one pound of reeled silk, eight pounds of spun silk, and several yards of poplin silk fabric.¹⁵²

USSA saw themselves participating in both an economic and religious mission. Susan Fairbanks, a member of USSA's Southern District, explained in May 1883 that "It was as much a necessity to observe the culture of silk as any other principal of the gospel."¹⁵³ The belief that God would ultimately destroy "Babylon" before the Second Coming heightened the spiritual intensity and economic necessity of the silk industry. At a meeting in May 1880, for example, William Paxman said that silk production was "useful" because "Babylon will fall and we will be entirely upon our own resources."¹⁵⁴

But labor shortages and infrastructural problems halted USSA's progress. The leadership found it difficult to entice and retain skilled workers, who tended to remain

¹⁴⁷ May 28, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁴⁸ November 24, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes; Report of the Silk Manufacturing Committee, May 3, 1881, Provo Utah Central Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹⁴⁹ December 9, 1887, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁵⁰ May 24, 1881, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁵¹ December 1887, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁵² June 25, 1886, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁵³ May 14, 1883, Utah Stake Southern District Silk Association minutes.

¹⁵⁴ May 28, 1880, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

employed for only a short time or dismiss initial requests to join the enterprise. In August 1881, Daniel Graves contacted two Latter-day Saints—Brother Haddingham and Brother Hartburt—and inquired about their terms for working with raw silk.¹⁵⁵ Both men declined the request. In December of that year, Graves offered a job to Brother Davis, who “together with his family had a thorough knowledge of silk manufacture.” At this same meeting, Margaret Smoot shared that James Dunn, Superintendent of the Provo Woolen Factory, “would take the material on hand and make it into cloth.”¹⁵⁶ None of these possibilities came to fruition.¹⁵⁷ Neither did the attempt to hire the Hoffs, a husband-wife pair in St. George, Utah. According to prominent southern Utah sericulturist Ann C. Woodbury, Mr. Hoff wove 100 yards of fabric for her and other local producers.¹⁵⁸ He could not do the same for USSA, because he and his wife already had jobs at the Rio Virgin Mills.¹⁵⁹

Issues with looms and reels worsened the situation. After the organization loaned a reel to Salt Lake City resident Elma Williams in 1882, Williams reported that USSA’s reel “needed repairing.”¹⁶⁰ In November 1883, USSA participant Sister Chadwick addressed a similar problem. Not long before, according to a *Deseret News* report, this “experienced” European silk weaver “was emigrated by the Utah Stake Silk Association, and brought with her a full stock of implements for use in her business.”¹⁶¹ These tools and her expertise were not enough on their own. Her twenty-five years of silk-weaving experience would not produce good results “unless she had proper looms to weave in.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ August 26, 1881, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁵⁶ Dec 2, 1881, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁵⁷ March 3, 1882, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁵⁸ Evans and Cannon, “Ann Cannon Woodbury,” 181–82.

¹⁵⁹ June 27, 1891 and July 9, 1891, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁶⁰ September 12, 1892, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁶¹ “The Silk Industry,” *Deseret News* 32, no. 39 (October 17, 1883): 609.

¹⁶² June 1, 1884, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

Utah Territory Silk Goes to Washington

In the face of poor-quality reeled silk, broken or non-existent machinery, and a lack of skilled labor, Latter-day Saint sericulturists took a hard look at their options. Daniel Graves turned to local sources, including the Utah County court, the territorial legislature, and Salt Lake City's Chamber of Commerce, for support. None of them came through.¹⁶³ The Utah Legislature did not, either. In response to Graves's petition for government funds, the Utah Territory's Committee on Agriculture determined in 1882 that "the Legislature has no right to appropriate money in support of private associations."¹⁶⁴ On occasion, USSA's treasury enjoyed a cash balance that members used to pay for labor, stationary, travel, trees, and cocoons.¹⁶⁵ But the organization's consistently limited financial capacity discouraged producers and curtailed manufacturing. When explaining a lackluster performance during the 1882 season, the Southern District blamed the "lack of a market for Cocoons."¹⁶⁶

That same year, Daniel Graves decided to write "east for the prices paid on Cocoons with a view of making [a] sale."¹⁶⁷ Other USSA participants supported the move to export cocoons. M. J. Tanner argued that this path was preferable to abandoning the business entirely.¹⁶⁸ USSA board members considered this option as early as 1878. Shipping cocoons to France, Italy, and elsewhere could offer a source of income "if means were not

¹⁶³ "Utah County Silk Meeting," *Woman's Exponent* 6, no. 24 (May 1878): 190-191; February 14, 1880, December 9, 1887; May 31, 1888; November 13, 1891, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes; "Sericulture," *Deseret Evening News* 11, no. 246 (September 13, 1878): 3.

¹⁶⁴ *House Journal of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah* (Salt Lake City, 1882), 247.

¹⁶⁵ Utah County Silk Association," *Woman's Exponent* 7, no. 21 (April 1, 1879): 219; May 28, 1880; June 25, 1886; and April 4, 1889, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁶⁶ March 3, 1882, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁶⁷ January 2, 1882, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁶⁸ March 3, 1882, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

forthcoming to buy Machinery to work up the silk,” the meeting minutes recounted.¹⁶⁹ A lack of skilled labor had a similar effect. In January 1882, William Paxman lamented the inability to locate a worker “able to prepare the Silk for the Loom after it is reeled.” He suggested selling Utah Territory’s reeled silk to interested parties in the East, instead.¹⁷⁰

One scheme to create an export market stoked controversy within the organization. Silk producers began exchanging worms, cocoons, cash, and correspondence with the federal government, the same entity responsible for the criminalization of Latter-day Saint belief and practice. The bureaucratization of silk production in Utah Territory took shape at a critical moment for federal investment in sericulture and silk manufacturing. In antebellum America, Congress appropriated funding for soliciting and distributing information about sericulture, and state legislatures in Maryland, Massachusetts, Delaware, Kentucky, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New York, and New Hampshire committed resources to cocoon bounties. Rampant speculation in mulberry tree crops and the subsequent collapse in the market during the late 1830s and early 1840s—the *Morus multicaulis* craze—convinced many that sericulture was an ill-fated enterprise.¹⁷¹

Federal debates about and interest in silk resumed in the late nineteenth century, thanks in large part to USDA agents. In his annual report for 1878, then-Commissioner of Agriculture William G. LeDuc shared that the department received “many letters...asking for information on the subject of silk-culture.” This widespread interest, combined with purportedly successful silk-raising experiments, indicated to him that silk was a worthwhile

¹⁶⁹ Utah Stake Silk Association loose documents, LR 9629 36, Folder 3, Church History Library.

¹⁷⁰ January 2, 1882, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁷¹ Marsh, “The Republic’s New Clothes”; Marsh, *Unravelling Dreams*, 451–52.

investment.¹⁷² In 1878, LeDuc appointed Charles V. Riley—described by one biography as “America’s most prominent advocate of silk culture”—as chief entomologist for the USDA.¹⁷³ Born in London in 1840, Riley trained in art and natural history in France as a young man, emigrated to the United States in 1860, and spent the next several years researching and writing articles about insects.¹⁷⁴ After joining the USDA, Charles V. Riley published *The Silkworm* (1879). The current issue at hand, he argued in this treatise, was the lack of a “home market” for cocoons.¹⁷⁵ He proposed that Congress create one by funding a filature, or reeling factory, authorized to purchase and process American-raised cocoon crops.¹⁷⁶ Riley believed that only sophisticated steam-reeling technologies and skilled workers could produce reeled silk of a high-enough quality and at a low-enough cost to entice American manufacturers.¹⁷⁷

Throughout the 1880s, Charles V. Riley and other USDA officials researched and incentivized cocoon-raising and reeling in America. To prevent the spread of destructive diseases and ensure the quality and consistency of cocoon crops, the Entomology Division imported silkworm eggs from reliable sources in Asia and Europe and then distributed them to interested parties “inhabiting almost every state in the Union.”¹⁷⁸ Officers disseminated

¹⁷² William G. LeDuc, “Report of the Commissioner,” in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1878* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 19.

¹⁷³ Charles V. Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1878* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 207; W. Conner Sorensen et al., *Charles Valentine Riley: Founder of Modern Entomology* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019), 198.

¹⁷⁴ Willis Conner Sorensen, *Brethren of the Net: American Entomology, 1840-1880* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 75–77.

¹⁷⁵ Riley, *The Silkworm*, 1.

¹⁷⁶ Riley, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Riley, 6, 24.

¹⁷⁸ Charles V. Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1884* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 359; Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” 1885, 214–16; Philip Walker, “Silk Culture-Report of the Year’s Operations,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture 1887* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1888), 115. Quote from 1885 report, p. 214.

thousands of mulberry trees and performed experiments with silkworm races and food varieties.¹⁷⁹ The department re-printed and sent out hundreds of copies of Riley's *The Silkworm*.¹⁸⁰ Most importantly, officials did what they could to justify and secure government aid.¹⁸¹ Finally, in the winter 1883-1884 session, Congress appropriated \$15,000 to the silk effort.¹⁸² This money went toward forming a silk division and hiring an agent—Philip Walker—deployed to study silk production at home and abroad.¹⁸³

While interested in resources for research and supplies of eggs and trees, department officials directed most of their attention toward modern reeling technologies and federal protections for the nascent raw silk industry. In 1884, Congress delivered a second appropriation of \$15,000 that the Department of Agriculture put toward the construction and staffing of reeling stations in Washington, DC, Philadelphia, and New Orleans.¹⁸⁴ Yet another appropriation of \$10,000 in 1886 secured automatic reels and a cocoon-brushing machine for the Washington, DC, location.¹⁸⁵ To ensure the positive impacts of modern filatures, however, the industry needed protective legislation. Charles V. Riley argued it would not “be profitable to reel silk in this country without some protection against the cheaper labor of foreign countries.”¹⁸⁶ Tariffs offered a solution. Tariffs on imported silk

¹⁷⁹ Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” 1882, 72–73; Charles V. Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1883* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 106; Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” 1885, 214.

¹⁸⁰ Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” 1882, 74; Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” 1884, 359; Norman J. Colman, “Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture 1887* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1888), 49; Charles V. Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture 1888* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 56.

¹⁸¹ Charles V. Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture 1886* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 550; Walker, “Silk Culture-Report of the Year's Operations,” 1888, 118–19.

¹⁸² George B. Loring, “Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1884* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 13–14.

¹⁸³ Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” 1884, 286.

¹⁸⁴ Riley, 359; Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” 1885, 217.

¹⁸⁵ Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” 1887, 546.

¹⁸⁶ Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” 1889, 44.

goods had been a boon to American manufacturers, Riley pointed out. Protections for reeled silk would have a similar impact.¹⁸⁷

Utah-based sericulturists took an interest in the Department of Agriculture's activities as early as the 1870s, when soon-to-be DSA member Samuel Cornaby struck up a correspondence with Charles V. Riley, who at that point worked as Missouri's State Entomologist. According to a letter published in the *Deseret News*, Cornaby sent Riley a sample of locally raised silkworm eggs. Riley reported back in summer 1871 that Cornaby's worms "were spinning, having thriven under every kind of treatment, not one having died."¹⁸⁸ One year later, Cornaby asked for and received a card of silkworm eggs from Frederick Watts, Commissioner of Agriculture from 1871 to 1877.¹⁸⁹

Exchanges between Latter-day Saint sericulturists and government officials continued in the 1880s. In a July 1888 letter to USDA, Daniel Graves indicated the "adaptability of Utah for the raising of silk" and requested assistance with reeling machinery.¹⁹⁰ Norman J. Colman, then-Commissioner of Agriculture, told Graves that the federal government's recent appropriation limited machinery expenditures to the Washington, DC, area. Colman could not delegate funds to a filature in Utah Territory, but he could send silkworm eggs and pamphlets. Colman also pledged that the department would pay "market price" for "any cocoons" produced and shipped by Utahns.¹⁹¹

Mormons took advantage of the federal government's silk program. Daniel Graves and other USSA officers collected data on the territory's mulberry tree population, so that

¹⁸⁷ Riley, "Report of the Entomologist," 1882, 75; Riley, "Report of the Entomologist," 1884, 286.

¹⁸⁸ "Editorials," *Deseret News* 20, no. 30 (August 30, 1871): 342.

¹⁸⁹ "Correspondence," *Deseret News* 21, no. 14 (May 8, 1872): 198.

¹⁹⁰ July 18, 1888, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁹¹ "Silk in Utah," *Utah Enquirer*, September 14, 1888, 2.

Graves could request an appropriate number of eggs from the Department of Agriculture.¹⁹² Margaret A. Till, USSA president in this period, alerted Southern District president Agnes Douglas to this initiative in September 1888.¹⁹³ Surviving correspondence indicates that Douglas immediately began collecting this information. For example, Goshen resident James H. Jenkins wrote to Douglas, “I have received your letter asking me how many mulberry trees I have got...I have got one dozen of large trees over 20 feet high and as many more 223 maller ones.”¹⁹⁴ In 1889, Provo’s *Utah Enquirer* printed a circular from the desk of USDA Commissioner Jeremiah McLain Rusk, Norman J. Colman’s successor, offering producers across the United States \$1.15 per pound for “cocoon of first quality.” He told interested parties to send a sample of twenty cocoons to help his office approximate the crop’s worth.¹⁹⁵ To USSA members, these and other communications with federal officials served as evidence of “the interest which was manifested in Washington for the silk industry in Utah” and proof that Utah cocoons enjoyed a “reliable” market.¹⁹⁶

This relationship produced tangible results. Annual reports show that in 1888, USSA received mulberry trees and less than one ounce of eggs from the department.¹⁹⁷ In 1889, the Department of Agriculture distributed around 46 ounces of silkworm eggs to Utahns, who sent the office around 390 pounds of silk cocoons.¹⁹⁸ The next year, the office provided

¹⁹² Utah Stake Silk Association loose documents; March 1, 1889, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁹³ Letter to Agnes Douglas from MA Till, September 18, 1888, Utah Stake Southern District Silk Association minutes.

¹⁹⁴ Letter to Agnes Douglas from James H. Jenkins, September 21, 1888, Utah Stake Southern District Silk Association minutes.

¹⁹⁵ “The Silk Industry,” *Utah Enquirer* 13, no. 57 (July 19, 1889): supplement.

¹⁹⁶ June 5, 1889 and May 30, 1889, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹⁹⁷ Utah Stake Silk Association loose documents, Church History Library; Philip Walker, “Silk Culture-Report of the Year’s Operations,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture 1888* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 112, 115.

¹⁹⁸ Philip Walker, “Report of the Silk Section,” in *First Report of the Secretary of Agriculture 1889* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 454, 456.

fewer eggs—34 ounces—and Utah producers shipped just over 890 pounds of cocoons back.¹⁹⁹

While fruitful, these exchanges created tensions within the organization. Some Mormons found economic intercourse with the federal government unsavory. On September 1, 1889, Utah stake Relief Society presidents met with USSA officers to determine how “to raise means to buy in the Cocoons and have them worked up.” These members wanted to generate a local source of financial support, because they “were dubious about sending [cocoons] to Washington.”²⁰⁰ Daniel Graves also had his doubts. As late as 1892, Graves continued to send letters to Secretary Jeremiah McLain Rusk that contained reports about the local industry and requests for silkworm eggs.²⁰¹ Even so, Graves recognized the possible conflict inherent in these interactions. In April 1891, Graves sent a letter to church leader George Q. Cannon seeking counsel about “apply[ing] to the mammon of unrighteousness”—referring to direct contact with and reliance on the church’s enemies—“for means to carry out the silk industry.” Graves was “anxious” to follow the mission that Brigham Young “placed” on him and felt disturbed by the choices he made.²⁰²

It is no surprise that some Latter-day Saints recoiled from doing business with the federal government. For decades, the church regulated marriage practices in the Utah Territory without too much interference or severe punishment. That changed in the 1880s.²⁰³ The Edmunds Anti-Polygamy Act of 1882 restricted any person participating in plural marriage from serving on juries, holding public office, or voting in elections. In addition, the

¹⁹⁹ Philip Walker, “Report of the Chief of the Silk Section,” in *Report of the Secretary of Agriculture 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1890), 269, 273.

²⁰⁰ September 1, 1889, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

²⁰¹ May 1892 and October 14, 1892, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

²⁰² April 1891, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

²⁰³ Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 56–58.

Edmunds Act deemed “cohabitation” with more than woman a misdemeanor punishable by fines and imprisonment. This new legislation sharpened the effectiveness of the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act of 1862, which required that prosecutors prove the existence of a formal marriage. The Edmunds Act only asked for proof of cohabiting couples.²⁰⁴ With the power of the Edmunds Act on their side, federal officials pursued an enthusiastic, systematic program of locating and prosecuting polygamists that became known as “the Raid.” Ultimately, around one thousand Mormon men ended up in the United States Penitentiary in Salt Lake City for “unlawful cohabitation.”²⁰⁵ Local silk production suffered. Amos Milton Musser—a Deseret Silk Association member, Utah Silk Association stockholder, and Salt Lake City silk factory proponent—was arrested in April 1885 and eventually sentenced to six months in prison.²⁰⁶

The presence of federal marshals and their vigorous pursuit of “cohabs” sent shockwaves through local communities and the church’s economic infrastructure. Male Latter-day Saints went “underground” to evade capture. So did Mormon women, but at a much higher rate. They hid in fields and closets when marshals came looking and relocated to other towns, states, or countries. For the six years that she was underground, Annie Clark Tanner moved every few months. All told, during “the Raid,” she lived in fourteen different homes.²⁰⁷ Plural wives also concealed pregnancies, births, and marriages; kept the whereabouts of their family members secret; took on pseudonyms to protect their husbands

²⁰⁴ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 359–60; Larson, *The “Americanization” of Utah for Statehood*, 95–99; Gordon, *The Mormon Question*, chaps. 5 and 6.

²⁰⁵ Larson, *The “Americanization” of Utah for Statehood*, chaps. 5, 7, 9; Rosa Evans, “Judicial Prosecution of Prisoners for LDS Plural Marriage: Prison Sentences, 1884-1895” (MA Thesis, Provo, UT, Brigham Young University, 1986).

²⁰⁶ Brooks, “The Life of Amos Milton Musser,” 110–14.

²⁰⁷ Derr, “Strength in Our Union,” 165.

from imprisonment; and instructed their children in the importance of secrecy. Women suffered from these severed connections. They found it difficult to carry on their work routines or achieve financial security with the sudden absence of their husbands and/or sister wives. Some tried to run the farm or family business on their own or looked for work washing clothes, teaching at school, or taking in boarders.²⁰⁸ The Raid also forced the church presidency to stop directing and bankrolling the local economy. While in exile, absentee leaders and members struggled to keep lines of communication open, oversee trade, or invest in enterprises.²⁰⁹

The passage of the Edmunds-Tucker Act in 1887 eroded the church's power in other ways, too. This law abolished woman suffrage in Utah and repealed the spousal privilege law for polygamists. Edmunds-Tucker also "corroded economic equity within plural marriages," writes historian Kathryn M. Daynes, by nullifying the right of Mormon women and children to inherit from their husbands and fathers.²¹⁰ Edmunds-Tucker simultaneously legally disincorporated the church and the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company and required the forfeiture of any church property over \$50,000. The church tried to forestall property seizure by transferring cash, land, farms, companies, stock, banks, and other assets to individuals and nonprofit associations. Ultimately, the receiver appointed to the case secured more than \$800,000 worth of property.²¹¹ "The temporal Kingdom, for all practical purposes, was dead-slain by the dragon of Edmunds-Tucker," according to historian Leonard J. Arrington.²¹² In

²⁰⁸ Kimberly Jensen, "'Between Two Fires': Women on the 'Underground' of Mormon Polygamy," *Journal of Mormon History*, 8 (1981): 49–61.

²⁰⁹ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 360.

²¹⁰ Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 83–87, 175–82. Quote on p. 175.

²¹¹ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 360–79; Larson, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood*, 210–11.

²¹² Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 379.

this context, Mormon silk producers debated whether a relationship with the federal government was the right path forward.

A New Life for Mormon-Made Silk

This question remained relevant for only a short time, however. The federal government ended appropriations for silk culture in 1891.²¹³ Officials confronted issues at each stage of production. Cocoon crops submitted to the filatures left much to be desired.²¹⁴ The department also found it difficult to train reelers, import and use “foreign-built machinery,” and turn a profit at the filatures.²¹⁵ By 1886, officials abandoned all reeling stations except the Washington, DC, location, which operated at a loss of an estimated \$2.79 per day.²¹⁶ The filature was “not by any means paying expenses” the next year, either.²¹⁷ Congress’s failure to pass any tariffs on raw silk imports added insult to injury. In the Department of Agriculture’s report for 1892, Secretary Jeremiah McLain Rusk announced the discontinuation of the silk division “owing to the refusal of Congress to make the necessary appropriations.”²¹⁸ This was a disappointing end to the USDA division that had the most contact, in terms of correspondence, with the American public.²¹⁹

The book did not close on exchanges between Great Basin sericulturists and the federal government, however. The 1893 Chicago World’s Fair provided new opportunities

²¹³ Sorensen et al., *Charles Valentine Riley*, 208.

²¹⁴ Norman J. Colman, “Report of the Commissioner,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture 1886* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 21.

²¹⁵ Norman J. Colman, “Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture 1888* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 21–22.

²¹⁶ Colman, “Report of the Commissioner,” 21; Riley, “Report of the Entomologist,” 1887, 546.

²¹⁷ Colman, “Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture,” 1888, 20.

²¹⁸ *Report of the Secretary of Agriculture 1892* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 24.

²¹⁹ Sorensen et al., *Charles Valentine Riley*, 208.

for Latter-day Saints to collaborate with government officials, attract attention to Utah Territory's resources, and broadcast themselves as respectable, law-abiding Christians. Both Mormon and non-Mormon women in Utah Territory worked together to put their productive endeavors on display. In September 1891, a contributor to the *Woman's Exponent* explained, "This Fair is a mammoth enterprise...and what little such a small Territory can do, may seem insignificant but, if a united effort is made by the ladies here something creditable can surely be accomplished." This article predicted that "The silk culture and manufacture might be one of the important branches of development in the Utah exhibit."²²⁰ In some venues, Mormon women imbued their silk work and goods with spiritual significance that reified their separation from US society. Meanwhile, at the fair, silk communicated Utah Territory's alignment with American reverence for white westward expansion, middle-class respectability, and capitalist development.

²²⁰ "Women in the World's Fair," *Woman's Exponent* 20, no. 5 (September 1, 1891): 36.

Chapter 6—Silk Upholstery, Cocoon Bounties, and Mormon Women’s Americanization at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

In June 1894, not long after Chicago’s famed World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 closed its doors, the church-owned *Millennial Star* announced, “Utah visitors to the World’s Fair will remember seeing a handsome suite of furniture on exhibition there from Utah. It was a home production in the most complete sense, both as to material, including the silk used in upholstering, and workmanship.” These locally made items captured some of the natural wonders of Utah Territory. The likeness of sego lilies, “the floral emblem of the Territory,” had been carved into the wood, and onlookers could find “native sagebrush” symbols sewn into the silk. The furniture created quite a stir in Chicago. After an impressive tenure on the world stage, these items made their way back to the American West. Then, the “ladies” responsible for raising and manufacturing the silk conveyed the furniture to the recently completed Salt Lake Temple. According to the *Millennial Star*, these goods earned a place in the building’s “principal room.”¹

Homemade silk from Utah Territory (and, beginning in 1896, the state of Utah) appeared in familiar and new venues at the turn of the twentieth century. Members of Relief Society, for example, continued advancing the silk cause in their communities. In addition, a coalition of Mormon and non-Mormon women sent and brought Utah-made silk goods to the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, identified by one historian as “the most dramatic contact of Utah silk with the outside world.”² This event brought visitors from all over the world to bear witness to the triumphs of Gilded-Age industrial America. The elite businessowners and

¹ “Utah News,” *Millennial Star* 56, no. 26 (June 26, 1894): 415. Another account suggests that John Lyle, a weaver in Salt Lake City, wove this silk. See “For the World’s Fair,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 47, no. 218 (February 12, 1893): 5.

² Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics,” 392.

politicians responsible papered over racial antagonisms, economic depression, and class conflict and proclaimed the superiority of white people and Christian ideals with exhibits of enormous manufacturing capacity, rapid technological and scientific advancement, “backwards” non-Western societies, and “primitive” people.³ In Chicago, Latter-day Saints were not invited to participate in the World’s Parliament of Religion, but they still had something to gain. Historian Konden Smith Hansen has argued that the World’s Fair provided “a secular back door by which the LDS Church entered upon the stage of national legitimacy.”⁴ Mormon women also put themselves on display. In speeches, interviews, and exhibits, they made the case that they were “moral, progressive, patriotic,” and “on the cutting edge of suffrage activism,” writes historian Andrea Radke-Moss.⁵ In other words, Latter-day Saints used the fair to convince outsiders of their modern religious, economic, political, and cultural character.

The favorable impression Mormons made at the fair was not enough to save the Mormon silk industry, which struggled to compete in the global marketplace. Even so, the range of activities on silk’s behalf from the 1890s until the early 1900s provide new insights into what scholars have called the “Americanization” of Mormonism. In order to prevent further conflict with the federal government and other church critics, Latter-day Saints started to abandon or downplay some of their most controversial activities, including plural marriage, voting in a unified bloc, and formal church involvement in the local economy.

³ Robert W. Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), chap. 2; John P. Burris, *Exhibiting Religion: Colonialism and Spectacle at International Expositions, 1851–1893* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), chaps. 4, 5.

⁴ Konden Smith Hansen, *Frontier Religion: Mormons and America, 1857-1907* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019), 173.

⁵ Andrea Radke-Moss, “Mormon Women, Suffrage, and Citizenship at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair,” in *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World’s Fairs*, ed. Abigail M. Markwyn and Tracey Jean Boisseau (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 98.

They also undertook a vigorous public relations project to convince outsiders of their patriotism, productivity, and Christian virtue. As they shed some practices, Mormons created and revived others, like abstinence from alcohol, to maintain community cohesion.⁶ This transformation did not always bode well for Mormon women. In the process of the church's "modernization" from the 1890s to the 1920s, their auxiliary organizations—Relief Society, the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association, and the Primary Association—lost some autonomy. Women's spiritual gifts lost sanction, and, in some cases, their marital and familial ties lost legitimacy. Historians have argued that this transition eroded women's intracommunity ties and severely narrowed the scope of their religious and economic power.⁷

A focus on silk clarifies that women Latter-day Saints also had something to gain from this process. The silk that they raised, reeled, and wove checked many boxes for the church's public relations campaign. At the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, visitors encountered a Utah Territory economy untethered from church control and open for business. Exhibits of male-dominated agricultural and mineral industries redefined the region as friendly to manufacturers, investors, and capitalist economic development. So did women's silk goods. Alongside the material and human remains from "primitive" populations, homemade silk in the Utah Building and Woman's Building signaled middle-class respectability, consensual wage work, entrepreneurial sophistication, and market integration. Mormon and non-

⁶ The foremost study of this process is Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*. See also Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*; Edward Leo Lyman, *Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, *A Kingdom Transformed: Early Mormonism and the Modern LDS Church*, reprint ed. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2015); Simpson, *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism*; Hansen, *Frontier Religion*.

⁷ Derr and Derr, "Outside the Mormon Hierarchy," 32; Iversen, "Feminist Implications of Mormon Polygyny," 519; Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 125–27, 292–94; Derr, "Strength in Our Union," 191; Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 208; Cannon, Derr, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 150–61.

Mormon women fair organizers used silk from Utah Territory as proof of American-made silk's possibilities and a solution to a national trade deficit with China and Japan. A revised version of Great Basin silk history—one that papered over the church's direct involvement in economic development—served as proof.

The Utah Silk Commission (USC), established in 1896 to support local producers, performed similar ideological work. During its ten-year existence, USC connected producers to necessary resources, built bridges between Mormons and non-Mormons, and articulated a place for the new state in the nation's economy. The organization's reports indicated that if other locales followed Utah Territory's example, American manufacturers could avoid expensive silk imports from abroad. In these and other public renderings, women's labors and achievements in silk signified a territorial economy not only in compliance with but at the forefront of American industrial development.

These new venues provided a forum for smoothing over antagonisms and inserting Latter-day Saints into the national economic imagination. They did not erase all the agendas that Mormon women brought to silk, however. USC representatives and the Utah Territory fair organizers represented only one segment of the Mormon silk landscape. Women Latter-day Saints in the Great Basin region used these new events and institutions to make money, not to make a point in front of a broad public audience. They consigned homemade silk goods to the fair committee and collected the state bounty on cocoons, for example. Meanwhile, in Relief Society meetings, silk continued to inspire proclamations about obedience to the prophet, building God's kingdom on earth, and enveloping new converts into a Mormon "way of life." The transfer of silk-upholstered furniture from the fair in Chicago to the Salt Lake Temple is indicative of the old and new stories in the Mormon silk

project's final chapter. As scholars have noted, Mormon women's "Americanization" did not proceed without conflict or controversy.⁸ This chapter brings to light the economic features of Mormon women's experiences.

Mormonism, Tourism, and Public Relations

The "handsome" lawn and large windows of the Utah Building at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair made it "one of the most attractive on the grounds," reported Josephine Spencer, a Mormon woman and accomplished journalist from Utah Territory. The building's central hall featured specimens of women's work, including a "beautiful scarf of white silk, embroidered with a charming design of yellow roses" and "a handsome silk crocheted bedspread." Spencer celebrated this opportunity to introduce audiences from the US and abroad to a favorable image of a thoroughly "modern Zion." "No such opportunity has ever been or ever will be again offered for advertising the resources of our Territory and the talents and industry of her people," she wrote.⁹ Spencer knew that Latter-day Saints had a lot to prove. For years, journalists, novelists, reformers, and other anti-Mormons demonized the church as fake, unfree, and fundamentally un-American.¹⁰ Meanwhile, people debated the quality and sovereignty of Mormon women's bodies, minds, and households. Church critics circulated images of disfigured, debauched, and ignorant Mormon women subjected to

⁸ For more recent studies on Mormon women and the church's "Americanization," see Lisa Olsen Tait, "Between Two Economies: The Business Development of the Young Woman's Journal, 1889-1900," *Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 4 (2012): 1-54; Josh E. Probert, "Leah Dunford Witsdoe, Alice Merrill Horne, and the Sacralization of Artistic Taste in Mormon Homes, circa 1900," in *Mormon Women's History: Beyond Biography*, ed. Rachel Cope et al. (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017), 167-84.

⁹ Josephine Spencer, "Some of the State Buildings at the Exposition," *Juvenile Instructor* 28, no. 21 (November 1, 1893): 657-661.

¹⁰ Fluhman, *A Peculiar People*.

domestic strife, poverty, and unrelenting toil.¹¹ To 1893 Chicago World's Fair visitors, silk raised, reeled, and woven in Utah Territory signaled a region in sync with the national economy and religion in alignment with modernity and respectability.



Figure 20: The Utah Building at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair
Classified Photograph Collection
Courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah

This epic global event to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of the "New World" arrived at an opportune time. During the church's early years, Latter-day Saints concerned themselves with winning converts, not friends, so they accentuated the church's departure from mainstream Christianity. This emphasis on Mormonism's distinctive qualities created a public relations nightmare,

¹¹ David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (September 1960): 205–24; Bitton and Bunker, "Double Jeopardy"; Talbot, *A Foreign Kingdom*.

exacerbated by relative isolation in the Great Basin region.¹² Most people had never met a Mormon in-person. They only heard or read about them. Advertisements and travel literature contrasted images of the splendor, biblical quality, and healing properties of Great Basin landscapes with tales of strange rituals, tyrannical leaders, and immoral plural marriages. Eager tourists came in droves to witness Mormonism's peculiarities first-hand. Boosters and businessowners cashed in on the church's mysterious, exotic reputation.¹³

Latter-day Saints realized that they could benefit from tapping into and directly shaping this fascination with Mormonism's inner workings. Federal anti-polygamy legislation passed in the 1870s and 1880s threatened to erode property values, stymie trade, and put a stop on free-flowing tourist traffic. To prevent these and other economic ruptures, Mormon men petitioned, forged alliances with, and bribed businessmen, politicians, railroad lobbyists, and newspapermen. In exchange, these figures lessened their public attacks on and criticisms of the church.¹⁴ Latter-day Saints based in Utah Territory also tried to build common ground with visitors by performing in public. Brigham Young and other Mormons recognized that various sites of interest in Salt Lake City, including the theater and the tabernacle, and tours to other settlements could be stages on which to portray themselves and their church as productive, moral, and tasteful.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Emmeline B. Wells, Emily S. Richards, and other Mormon women established official and personally meaningful relationships with women's organizations, including the National Council of Women and the

¹² Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 239; Reid Larkin Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism: The Latter-Day Saints and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20–22, 46–47.

¹³ Thomas K. Hafen, "City of Saints, City of Sinners: The Development of Salt Lake City as a Tourist Attraction 1869–1900," *Western Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (August 1997): 342–78; Walker, *Railroading Religion*, chap. 4.

¹⁴ Lyman, *Political Deliverance*, chaps. 3, 4, 5; Walker, *Railroading Religion*, chap. 6.

¹⁵ Hafen, "City of Saints, City of Sinners"; Walker, *Railroading Religion*, chap. 5.

National Woman Suffrage Association. Mormon women used these interactions to represent themselves as respectable Christians and build solidarities with politically powerful, progressive women.¹⁶

Church president and prophet Wilford Woodruff's 1890 Manifesto ushered in a more sophisticated chapter in Latter-day Saint self-representation.¹⁷ Woodruff received a vision that polygamy must end so that the Mormons could maintain control over their temples and continue practicing sacred rituals. In September 1890, Woodruff issued a statement—the Manifesto—that withdrew official support from the practice.¹⁸ This news provoked a range of reactions. To some, the Manifesto was a sham designed to placate concerned non-Mormons.¹⁹ One commentator compared it to a possum playing dead.²⁰ Others viewed the Manifesto as a heartening move in the right direction. An obituary for Woodruff published in *Harper's Weekly* credited the prophet with “most of the events which have brought the Mormon Church into consonance with American ideas.”²¹ The Manifesto made it easier for Latter-day Saints to reconcile with and represent themselves as part of the Protestant, monogamous majority.

Individuals and institutions continued to disagree about whether Latter-day Saints had the capacity to pledge allegiance to the nation, however. In 1885, Idaho's state legislature instituted a test oath system that prohibited Mormons from voting, serving on a jury, or

¹⁶ Carol Cornwall Madsen, “‘The Power of Combination’: Emmeline B. Wells and the National and International Councils of Women,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (October 1993): 646–73.

¹⁷ Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 60; Hafen, “City of Saints, City of Sinners,” 374–75; Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism*, 7.

¹⁸ B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), chap. 4; Shippo, *Sojourner in the Promised Land*, 308–11.

¹⁹ Lyman, *Political Deliverance*, 88–92, 98, 176.

²⁰ Ira Pfoutz, “Policy of the Mormons,” *Galveston Daily News*, September 10, 1893, 10.

²¹ “Wilford Woodruff,” *Harper's Weekly* 89 (September 24, 1898): 932.

running for office.²² When the US Supreme Court upheld the policy in 1890, a journalist for the *Rocky Mountain News* described the ruling as “an affirmation of the fact that a man cannot be a Mormon and an American citizen.”²³ Similar discussions emerged in coverage about the completion of the Salt Lake City Temple in April 1893. Commentators appreciated the structure’s architectural and design qualities.²⁴ But others saw the temple and the ceremonies performed within as proof that Latter-day Saints would not fall in line with mainstream Christianity and that the church would not fade away into obscurity. “The man who imagines for a moment that Mormonism is dead or even moribund is simply mistaken,” said one contributor to *Literary Digest*.²⁵ As much as Latter-day Saints took action to align themselves with nineteenth-century American ideals, by the time the Chicago World’s Fair commenced in May 1893, Mormonism’s reputation was very much still up for debate.

Women, Labor, and Capital at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair

Mormons and non-Mormons joined forces to put Utah Territory’s industries and industrious people on display. Fair organizers prohibited Latter-day Saints from representing Mormonism at the inaugural World’s Parliament of Religions.²⁶ But other fair venues remained open to them. Stakeholders chose a diverse slate of leaders to signal the plurality of interests and the thawing of religious, political, and economic tensions in Utah Territory. The

²² Merle W. Wells, “The Idaho Anti-Mormon Test Oath, 1884-1892,” *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 3 (August 1955): 235–52.

²³ “Multiple News Items,” *Rocky Mountain News*, February 4, 1890, 4.

²⁴ See, for example, H. C. Goodspeed, “The New Mormon Temple,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, April 11, 1893, 7. One historian has described Salt Lake City’s Temple Block as the “center of Mormon refinement.” See Hafen, “City of Saints, City of Sinners,” 372.

²⁵ “The Mormon Temple,” *Literary Digest* 6, no. 24 (April 15, 1893): 23.

²⁶ According to historian Reid Neilson, “Protestant delegates were loath to admit the ‘heretical’ Mormons to their gathering.” Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism*, 143. For more on Mormonism’s exclusion from the World’s Parliament of Religions, see Neilson, chap. 5.

Utah World's Fair Commission—composed of local mining magnates Robert Craig Chambers and Richard Mackintosh as well as Nelson Empey, a former captain of the territorial militia, and Heber M. Wells, son of a prominent Mormon church leader—oversaw construction of a Utah Territory building and managed contributions to other fair departments.²⁷

Meanwhile, women raised money, planned exhibits, and prepared speeches. Emily S. Richards—a Latter-day Saint, suffrage advocate, and the only wife of church attorney Franklin S. Richards—presided over the Utah Board of Lady Managers, while Margaret Salisbury, a prominent local non-Mormon, served as chair of Utah's Lady Commissioners.²⁸ All representatives had something to gain from a strong showing at the fair. Statehood was perhaps the most highly sought-after prize.²⁹ But Mormon women had something special to prove to a curious and skeptical international audience. One illustrated advertisement for the fair reported that “the Mormon women have found in the Exposition an eagerly sought-for opportunity to disabuse the World's mind of many errors regarding them. The work will speak for their culture and attainments.”³⁰

In this context, silk communicated Mormon women's middle-class values, modern entrepreneurial abilities, and contributions to national economic prosperity. In the Utah Building, paintings, photographs, books, minerals, and other images and items inspired appreciation for the territory's wealth.³¹ In his catalog of the World's Columbian Exposition,

²⁷ *The World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated (March 1892 to March 1893)*, vol. 2 (Chicago: James B. Campbell, 1893), 277–78.

²⁸ Radke-Moss, “Mormon Women, Suffrage, and Citizenship at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair,” 98–100. For more on Emily S. Richards, see Beverly Beeton, “Woman Suffrage in Territorial Utah,” in *Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870-1896*, ed. Carol Cornwall Madsen (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1997), 116–35.

²⁹ Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism*, 52.

³⁰ *The World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated*, 2:5.

³¹ Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism*, 63–74.

Hubert Howe Bancroft explained how “Utah’s participation in the Fair is largely due to the enterprise of her Mormon population.” Bancroft admired the Utah Building’s “oaken cases” filled with gold, silver, and Sulphur as well as cotton, sugar beets, and silk. Bancroft appreciated all exhibits of the territory’s “industries and resources,” but he reserved his highest praise for “the industries of women.” In his opinion, “A feature is the collection of woman’s work.”³² The Utah Board of Lady Managers collected laces, linens, leather goods, and other homemade handicrafts from throughout the territory for the Utah Building.³³ Visitors could see silk scarfs, handkerchiefs, and thread, as well as the previously mentioned pieces of furniture upholstered with homemade, sage-green silk.³⁴

Visitors could also find a “fine exhibit of silk in the form of flags, shawls, laces, etc.” in the Woman’s Building, overseen by the fair’s Board of Lady Managers.³⁵ A year after the fair’s conclusion, Edwin A. McDaniel, secretary of Utah World’s Fair Commission, recounted the origins of these displays. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) rejected the request to create its own silk exhibit because, “as claimed by the Department, there was no possibility of silk culture ever becoming a remunerative industry in this country.”³⁶ USDA officials likely based this claim on a recently extinguished multiyear effort to inspire a self-sustaining American silk industry. Not much had come from spending thousands of dollars in government appropriations on cocoons, reeling stations, and skilled workers.³⁷ In

³² Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair*, vol. 5 (Chicago: The Bancroft Co., 1893), 831–32.

³³ Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism*, 64.

³⁴ Margaret Caine, “Silk Culture in Utah,” *Woman’s Exponent* 22, no. 12 (February 1, 1894): 89-90; *House Journal of the Thirty-First Session of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Star Printing Company, 1894), 171.

³⁵ *The World’s Columbian Exposition Illustrated*, 2:285.

³⁶ E. A. McDaniel, *Utah at the World’s Columbian Exposition* (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Lithographing Company, 1894), 38–39.

³⁷ *Report of the Secretary of Agriculture 1892*, 24.

the report published by the fair's Committee of Awards in 1901, the author quipped that "the raising of silkworms has no economic importance whatever in the United states at present."³⁸

While some government and fair officials did not see the value in sponsoring an American-made silk exhibit, Bertha Honoré Palmer did. Palmer, wife of a Chicago real estate tycoon and President of the Board of Lady Managers, ensured that silk would be represented the Woman's Building. According to Edwin A. McDaniel, when Palmer heard about Utah Territory's proposed silk displays, "she set to work perfecting plans for a silk exhibit for the United States."³⁹ Visitors to the Woman's Building could ultimately view Utah-made pale cream silk portieres, or curtains, embroidered with sego lilies.⁴⁰ They could also see a map of the United States that Utah Territory resident Kate D. Barron Buck created out of silk "from the dresses of the wives of the respective Governors of the several states and territories," said an article in the *Woman's Exponent*.⁴¹ These goods and the medals that they earned proved "the ability and intelligence of our ladies," in the words of McDaniel.⁴² They also indicated a knitting together of the Utah Territory with the national economy. According to one Mormon woman involved, the exhibit's purpose was to "lead to the encouragement of sericulture in the United States, if an appropriation were obtained from Congress."⁴³

Mormon women conveyed silk goods to Chicago. They also brought silk production to life. As much as fair attendees enjoyed static representations of Utah Territory, the

³⁸ *Report of the Committee on Awards of the World's Columbian Commission*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 314.

³⁹ McDaniel, *Utah at the World's Columbian Exposition*, 39.

⁴⁰ "World's Fair and Silk Industry," *Woman's Exponent* 21, no. 12 (December 15, 1892): 93; Camelia, "The Utah Room," *Woman's Exponent* 21, no. 19 (April 1, 1893): 148.

⁴¹ "Editorial Notes," *Woman's Exponent* 22, no. 11 (January 15, 1894): 87.

⁴² McDaniel, *Utah at the World's Columbian Exposition*, 88. According to one report, Utah-made silk won three medals. See "Utah News," *Millennial Star* 55, no. 48 (November 27, 1893): 779.

⁴³ Margaret A. Caine, "Silk Culture in Utah," in *The Resources and Attractions of Utah as They Exist Today: Set Forth for the Enquiring Public, Especially for the Midwinter Fair, California, 1894*, ed. Henry L. A. Culmer (Salt Lake City: G.Q. Cannon & Sons Co., 1894), 43.

Chicago Tribune reported that they possessed “a natural and overwhelming curiosity to know what manner of creature a real live and flesh and blood Mormon is.”⁴⁴ They got their chance in the Woman’s Building. Ella Pyper and Eliza Fosgreen traveled to Chicago with a reel and loom to illustrate each stage of the silk manufacturing process.⁴⁵ A *Chicago Dispatch* article quoted in the church-sponsored *Millennial Star* explained how “Utah, to the astonishment of some people who thought they were well informed, has been making silk for thirty years.” Visitors could see “real, live Mormon girls” feeding mulberry tree leaves to silkworms, reeling silk thread from cocoons, and operating a hand loom.⁴⁶

Some commentators cast the Latter-day Saints as odd specimens or curiosities worthy of anthropological observation. But representations of “savagery” and the “prehistoric” helped entrench Latter-day Saints as respectable and Utah Territory as modern. Bertha Honoré Palmer and the other elite, politically progressive white women responsible for the Woman’s Building aspired to, in Palmer’s words, bring attention to women’s “increased usefulness in the arts, sciences, manufactures, and industries of the world during the past four hundred years.”⁴⁷ Exhibits in the Woman’s Building made this point by mobilizing popular nineteenth-century ideas about race. African, Native American, and Polynesian women and their “primitive” wares appeared in a Smithsonian-sponsored exhibit titled “Woman’s Work in Savagery.” Meanwhile, the nature and products of white women’s work evidenced their more advanced status.⁴⁸ Many other fair displays instructed visitors in the supposedly

⁴⁴ “Music by Mormons,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 3, 1893, 26.

⁴⁵ “Editorial Notes,” *Woman’s Exponent* 22, no. 1 (July 1, 1893): 188.

⁴⁶ “Editorials,” *Millennial Star* 55, no. 39 (September 25, 1893): 631.

⁴⁷ Bertha Honoré Palmer, *Addresses and Reports of Mrs. Potter Palmer* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1894), 32.

⁴⁸ Gayle Gullett, “‘Our Great Opportunity’: Organized Women Advance Women’s Work at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893,” *Illinois Historical Journal* 87, no. 4 (1994): 259–76.

superior qualities of white people and Western nations. At the Midway Plaisance, visitors encountered representations of African, Asian, and Middle Eastern peoples and cultures that provided “ethnological, scientific sanction for the American view of the nonwhite world as barbaric and childlike,” writes historian Robert Rydell. In a similar vein, the Smithsonian Institution designed its exhibits to illustrate “the inevitable triumph of white civilization over the Indian nations.”⁴⁹

Exhibits in the Utah Building performed the same ideological work. The territory’s fair committee sanctioned roughshod excavations of Native burial grounds throughout Utah Territory. These “discoveries” yielded pottery, arrowheads, bones, and, most famously, a 1500-year-old corpse.⁵⁰ These artifacts and human remains provoked fascination among visitors to the Utah Building. A piece in the *Boston Investigator* described the Utah Building’s “collection of relics of the cliff dwellers, the strange people who once...lodged above the canyons.”⁵¹ An article for the *Daily Inter Ocean* commented on the “mummified Indian” “repos[ing] at full length in a glass case.” “He is not a cheerful looking savage,” the author concluded. This and other Utah Building exhibits, including the “products of the cotton and silk culture,” convinced this commentator that “the people of the United States are beginning to consider Utah as a part of, instead of a part from, the civilization of the country.”⁵² These constructions of a less evolved people from a distant past and a productive, commercially viable present worked in tandem. Together, they inspired confidence in Utah Territory’s assimilation.

⁴⁹ Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 40, 63.

⁵⁰ Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism*, 61–62, 66–67.

⁵¹ Mrs. M. A. Freeman, “Competitors at the Fair,” *Boston Investigator*, July 12, 1893, 3.

⁵² “Utah at the Fair,” *Daily Inter Ocean* 22, no 206 (October 18, 1893): 2.

Discussions of religion, capital, and women's work in other fair venues confirmed positive changes within Mormonism and Utah Territory's unity with the national economy. Mormon men did not get the chance to speak publicly at the fair, but event organizers granted Mormon women a platform at the 1893 World's Congress of Representative Women. Leaders of Relief Society and the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association, including Zina D. H. Young and Sarah M. Kimball, delivered remarks at two half-day sessions.⁵³ These speeches established common ground with progressive political movements at home and abroad.⁵⁴ They also celebrated the modern character of women's economic contributions and access. Electa Bullock credited the "industrial mothers of the land" and the "refining touch and gilded finish of their labors" with the emergence of the "marvelous industrial institutions of the civilized world."⁵⁵ While Bullock captured the condition of women in general, Emily S. Richards addressed the status of women in Utah Territory in particular. "All women of legal age, whether married or single, have the same right as men to acquire, hold, and dispose of all kinds of property," said Richards. Women could also secure employment in factories, stores, and other businesses "without opposition or prejudice."⁵⁶ It is not surprising that Latter-day Saint women spoke in terms of the economy. These and other Congress of Women delegates had been tasked with featuring women's work and their professional skills.⁵⁷ But the use of economic metrics meant something specific for Latter-day Saint women working under the shadow of the degraded wife stereotype.

⁵³ Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism*, 93–100.

⁵⁴ Radke-Moss, "Mormon Women, Suffrage, and Citizenship at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair," 102–4.

⁵⁵ Electa Bullock, "Industrial Women," in *The Congress of Women Held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, U.S.A., 1893*, ed. Mary Kavanaugh Oldham Eagle (Chicago and Philadelphia: International Publishing Co., 1895), 510–11.

⁵⁶ Emily S. Richards, "The Legal and Political Status of Woman in Utah," in *The World's Congress of Representative Women*, ed. Mary Wright Sewall, vol. 2 (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Company, 1894), 913–15.

⁵⁷ Gullett, "Our Great Opportunity," 264.

In publications by and about Mormon women, silk exemplified their productive, sophisticated working lives. In a pamphlet on charity and philanthropy, for example, journalist and suffragist Emmeline B. Wells emphasized Relief Society's economic growth and influence. The "struggles of pioneer life" and a lack of "capital in the days of adversity" could not prevent the organization from accruing "real estate, buildings, granaries and grain, stock and dividends in various business enterprises."⁵⁸ For example, Davis County's Relief Society owned "considerable valuable property," including several lots of land with mulberry trees. Members managed to raise "quite a large quantity of cocoons" since the branch's inception in 1878.⁵⁹ To Chicago-based journalist Augusta Prescott, advancements in the silk industry served as a measure of positive changes for Mormonism. According to Prescott, before the "non-polygamist wave struck Utah," women "had to work from morning until night, scrubbing, sweeping, baking and sewing" without access to labor-saving devices. But a new program from the mind of Electa Bullock, the person in charge of the Woman's Department in the Utah Building, suggested that times had changed. Bullock established a "society of working girls to experiment upon the cultivation of silkworms." Prescott explained how Utah Territory could be counted on to supply high-quality silk.⁶⁰ Triumphs in the spheres of capital and labor boded well for their reputation.

⁵⁸ Emmeline B. Wells, *Charities and Philanthropies: Woman's Work in Utah* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons Co., 1893), 11.

⁵⁹ Wells, 19–20.

⁶⁰ Augusta Prescott, "Mormon Women Who Will Take Part in Congress are Not Polygamists," *Daily Inter Ocean* 22, no. 86 (June 18, 1893): 25.



Figure 21: Emmeline B. Wells seated at her desk, January 1879
Courtesy of the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

When reflecting on the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, some Latter-day Saints felt confident that they had disabused the world of warped assumptions about Mormonism. In August 1893, the church-sponsored *Millennial Star* reported that fair attendees paid "special attention" to "dresses from home-grown silk, spun and woven in Utah." This and other showings led this commentator to conclude that "long rooted prejudices will have been torn up by the close of the Fair. The Latter-day Saints will be better understood," and "their labors, toils, and sufferings, in assisting in the development of the grandest nation on earth,

will be appreciated.”⁶¹ Mormon women’s participation in progressive organizations and friendships with women’s rights activists opened the door for a successful pro-Mormon campaign at the fair.⁶² Displays at the fair confirmed that Latter-day Saints could change people’s minds. In response, church leaders invested in other public relations projects, including a visitors’ center in Salt Lake City’s Temple Square and exhibits at subsequent fairs.⁶³ By the same token, the persistent need to engage in calculated acts of self-representation indicated the lingering presence and effectiveness of anti-Mormonism.⁶⁴ For Mormon women, silk-centered discourse and action proved useful to securing Utah Territory’s status as an industrial center and fully Americanized economic contributor.

These public engagements had mixed results for producers in Utah Territory. Lucy A. Clark and Margaret A. Caine, Emily S. Richards’s assistant, asked locals to contribute raw materials and goods to fair exhibits. In some instances, all parties got what they wanted. The fair provided members of the Utah Stake Silk Association (USSA) with a new money-making outlet. They sold almost ten pounds of cocoons and consigned several yards of fabric and a loom to fair organizers.⁶⁵ According to Margaret A. Till, USSA’s president beginning in 1887, “we should use our best efforts to make a creditable showing at Worlds’ Fair,” so as to secure the “means to carry on this industry.”⁶⁶ On other occasions, however, the planning and implementation of this event created tensions and strained resources. When Clark first

⁶¹ J.V.B., “Utah at the Exposition,” *Millennial Star* 55, no. 32 (August 7, 1893): 517.

⁶² Madsen, “The Power of Combination,” 650–54; Radke-Moss, “Mormon Women, Suffrage, and Citizenship at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair,” 108–9; Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism*, 102–4.

⁶³ Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 239–41; Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism*, chap. 6.

⁶⁴ Criticism did not go away. Women’s groups like the National Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union continued to agitate against Mormonism, and writers continued to describe the church as domineering, dangerous, and un-Christian. See Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 241; Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land*, 66–68; Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism*, 124–25.

⁶⁵ April 1893, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

⁶⁶ January 13, 1893, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

asked USSA for help creating silk exhibits, members replied that they needed all they silk they had and “referred her to other parties.”⁶⁷ Also, after the fair’s conclusion, USSA supporters struggled to get an answer about where their silk goods were and when they would be getting them back. They wrote to Caine, Emmeline B. Wells, and Zina D. H. Young for answers.⁶⁸ In February 1894, a few items finally reappeared.⁶⁹ As much as USSA members appreciated the significance of silk presentations to large audiences, they paid more attention to local needs and concerns.

Margaret A. Caine and the Utah Silk Commission, 1896-1906

Margaret A. Caine believed in local silk’s potential. She saw Utah Territory’s performance at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair first-hand and helped collect silk goods for exhibits in the Utah Building.⁷⁰ Caine assumed a more prominent role in silk promotion after the fair. In 1896, she became secretary of the Utah Silk Commission, a state-funded organization that sponsored local production. Caine used this platform to expand the industry’s presence and improve its reputation. In a *Los Angeles Times* article from 1901, for example, she argued that “for many hundred years the silkworm has been inextricably associated among the industrial types of highly-refined people attaining the upper strata of culture and civilization.” Silk signaled a community’s elevation into modernity. It would also help the United States “throw off a dependence which annually costs our country more than

⁶⁷ October 14, 1892, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

⁶⁸ October 1893; December 20, 1893; January 1894; March 16, 1894, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

⁶⁹ February 9, 1894, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

⁷⁰ “Silk Culture,” *Woman’s Exponent* 21, no. 23 (June 1, 1893): 171; “Editorial Notes,” *Woman’s Exponent* 22, no. 1 (July 1, 1893): 188.

eighty millions of dollars.”⁷¹ In the 1890s, Caine and her USC colleagues set to work expanding Utah silk’s presence and reputation.



Figure 22: Margaret A. Caine with John T. Caine, her husband
Classified Photograph Collection
Courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah

Almost immediately after the sun set on Chicago’s White City, Margaret A. Caine found opportunities to explore and explain local silk’s possibilities. Take, for example, her entry in Henry L. A. Culmer’s *The Resources and Attractions of Utah as They Exist Today*

⁷¹ Margaret A. Caine, “Silk Industry in Utah,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1901, B6.

(1894). Culmer, a Latter-day Saint landscape painter and civic leader involved with Salt Lake City's Chamber of Commerce, prepared this publication for the 1894 California Midwinter International Exposition. He and the other contributors put Utah Territory's lush orchards, irrigation systems, mining deposits, spring water, and other bounties on display. "Probably no other state in the Union contains within its borders such a variety of resources," said the tract.⁷² This publication cataloged and celebrated the territory's economic capacity, but the origins of these goods and services remained vague. For example, the section on "Industries" recounted how "necessity" and "adverse circumstances" drove the non-specific "people of Utah" to invest in home manufactures.⁷³

A chapter about Salt Lake City suggested that local economic development began with but did not belong to the Latter-day Saints. According to the publication, "During the past few years [Salt Lake City] has attracted less attention as the Zion of the Mormons than as the active, prosperous, business center of the western commonwealth."⁷⁴ These statements reflected the directives and ideological position of one of the publication's sponsors: Salt Lake City's Chamber of Commerce. Beginning in April 1887, this institution brought together Mormon and non-Mormon community members who believed that anti-Mormon rhetoric and action threatened local trade, property values, and investment opportunities. Much to the chagrin of the church's more virulent critics, the Chamber of Commerce prioritized economic and political collaboration.⁷⁵

⁷² Henry L. A. Culmer, ed., *The Resources and Attractions of Utah as They Exist Today: Set Forth for the Enquiring Public, Especially for the Midwinter Fair, California, 1894* (Salt Lake City: G.Q. Cannon & Sons Co., 1894), 3.

⁷³ Culmer, 37.

⁷⁴ Culmer, 72.

⁷⁵ Lyman, *Political Deliverance*, 96–97.

Margaret A. Caine's section in Culmer's book engaged in the same bridge-building. Caine assured readers that the nation would benefit from Utah Territory's silk-raising capabilities. "Today the annual importation of unprepared silk alone in the United States amounts to over \$35,000,000," she wrote.⁷⁶ Displays at the recently concluded fair in Chicago, including silk curtains from her own community, indicated that this was an unnecessary expense. While she applauded the efforts of women across the country who engaged in silk work, Caine believed that "in America, Utah will be the home of the silk worm." She asserted that 28,000 pounds of cocoons had been produced in the territory since the industry's inception.⁷⁷ According to Caine, experimentation began in individual homes in the 1850s. To help the industry along, territorial governor Brigham Young imported mulberry tree seeds from France, and Zina D. H. Young presided over the Deseret Silk Association beginning in 1876. Local producers ran up against limited experience and technological limitations, but Utah still enjoyed a disease-free, "well adapted" climate and "hundreds of women anxious to engage." These workers just needed "some assistance." While not explicit about what kind, Caine likely meant government funding. Caine predicted that this approach would create "profitable" work for "many of our women"; generate "wealth and revenue" for Utah Territory; and keep American dollars in American hands.⁷⁸ Caine's silk section made no mention of church sponsorship. Instead, she emphasized widespread employment and national economic prosperity.

In this and other ways, women silk boosters in Utah Territory rode the wave of the displays in Chicago. According to the *Woman's Exponent*, the "gratifying success" of the silk

⁷⁶ Caine, "Silk Culture in Utah," 41.

⁷⁷ Caine, 42.

⁷⁸ Caine, 43–44.

exhibit at the Woman's Building helped the bill reach the territory's House of Representatives in early 1894. The fair gave some people the impression that "inducements to the people who raise cocoons, would be the best method of fostering this important industry."⁷⁹ Territorial governor and Democrat Caleb Walton West vetoed the measure because, according to him, the bounty violated his party's principle of "equality for all, special privileges for none."⁸⁰ To keep interest in the industry alive and deliver "all the assistance possible to those anxious to take hold of this branch of home industry," announced the *Woman's Exponent*, a small group decided to organize the Utah Woman's Silk Association.⁸¹ The leadership cohort included Margaret Salisbury, Emmeline B. Wells, Zina D. H. Young, and Margaret A. Caine, among others.⁸² These women petitioned the territorial legislature to pass a bounty on silk cocoons in late 1894 and tried to secure a federally sponsored experiment station for the territory in spring 1895.⁸³

Government support came in 1896, the year that Utah achieved statehood. George M. Cannon, the very first president of the Utah State Senate, introduced silk industry legislation in March 1896.⁸⁴ This bill called for the creation of the Utah Silk Commission, an explicitly bipartisan, uncompensated board of five people responsible for distributing information about best practices, providing eggs and seeds to interested parties, hosting reeling courses, and recording relevant data. The bill also installed a twenty-five-cent bounty on each pound of cocoons, set to expire on April 4, 1906, and tasked commission members with inspecting

⁷⁹ "Editorial Notes," *Woman's Exponent* 22, no. 12 (February 1, 1894): 92.

⁸⁰ Zina D. H. Young and E. B. Wells, "Editorial Notes," *Woman's Exponent* 22, no. 14 (March 15, 1894): 109.

⁸¹ "Editorial Notes," *Woman's Exponent* 22, no. 16 (April 15 and May 1, 1894): 124.

⁸² "Utah Silk Association," *Woman's Exponent* 22, no. 17 (May 15, 1894): 136.

⁸³ Emmeline B. Wells, "Utah," *Woman's Exponent* 23, no. 12 (December 15, 1894): 221; "Utah Woman's Silk Association," *Woman's Exponent* 23, no. 15-16 (February 1 and 15, 1895): 237-238; Corinne M. Allen, "Silk Association Meeting," *Woman's Exponent* 23, no. 18 (April 15, 1895): 255; "Utah News," *Millennial Star* 56, no. 35 (August 27, 1894): 559.

⁸⁴ "Finished at Last," *Salt Lake Herald* 26, no. 106 (March 14, 1896): 5.

the cocoon crops, collecting information about weight and quality, and withholding payment from producers who did not feed their worms “entirely upon the leaves of the mulberry tree.”⁸⁵ The senate passed the bill and appointed the first group of commissioners in early April 1896.⁸⁶ This cohort included Zina D. H. Young, Margaret A. Caine, and Ann C. Woodbury.⁸⁷ For the entire tenure of the organization, women filled all five board positions. Utah Stake Silk Association president Margaret A. Till celebrated these developments. She hoped that the bounty and reeling classes would “prove quite an incentive to many to engage in the enterprise.”⁸⁸

Economic realities and political realignments in the late nineteenth century can help explain USC’s emergence and the popularity of home industry sponsorship more generally. For decades, the Democratic party’s state’s rights position resonated with Latter-day Saints. Much like slavery’s defenders in the South, Mormons in the American West did not want the federal government interfering in their affairs. But a combination of internal and external factors caused Latter-day Saint ranks in the Republican party to grow. In the 1890s, church leaders desirous of easing tensions with “Gentiles” orchestrated the dissolution of local and explicitly pro-Mormon People’s party and asked Latter-day Saints to join nationally recognized political parties, instead. Also, some church leaders and members started to see the Republican party as a superior ally. The tremendous economic collapse of the early 1890s eroded the Democratic party’s popularity. In addition, Democrats generally did not support subsidies or other public support for local agriculture and manufacturing, but Utahns wanted

⁸⁵ *Laws of the State of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Company, 1896), 313–15.

⁸⁶ “Adjourned Sine Die,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 26, no. 129 (April 9, 1896): 5.

⁸⁷ “Thing of the Past,” *Logan Journal* 15, no. 44 (April 11, 1896): 1.

⁸⁸ July 16, 1897, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

government intervention on behalf of home industries and preferred Republican protectionist policies.⁸⁹ It is in this context that women brought pro-silk legislation to the table.

USC officers tried to spread interest and investment in Utah-made silk. They used tactics that Latter-day Saint silk boosters and organizations had long relied on. For example, almost immediately after the bill passed, Margaret A. Caine announced the availability of silkworm eggs in local newspapers.⁹⁰ She continued to do so at the beginning of the silk-raising season each April.⁹¹ Caine prepared silk exhibits for the Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition of 1897 and traveled throughout Utah to examine cocoon crops and approve bounty claims.⁹² Also, as early as April 1897, USC hosted reeling classes.⁹³

That same year, USC released a pamphlet titled *Sericulture: Instruction in the Art of Producing Silk*. This publication, likely authored by Margaret A. Caine, delivered a standard set of tips about and justifications for local silk production. One section urged the preservation of the mulberry tree because of its capacity for ornamenting dwellings, shading sidewalks, providing the raw materials for cabinets, and nourishing the silkworm. Readers could also view diagrams of holding shelves; sketches of cocoons, chrysalises, and moths; and graphs capturing the growth “ages” of the silkworm. USC warned producers of the many antagonists—ants, cats, birds, rats, thunder, lightning, dampness, disease, and rapid shifts in temperature—that could, in a split second, decimate the crop. The worms that survived grew at an astonishing rate. Their “incessant eating” created a sound likened to “rain upon the

⁸⁹ Lyman, *Political Deliverance*, 188–89, 273–75; Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 7–8.

⁹⁰ Margaret A. Caine, “Promoting Silk Culture,” *Salt Lake Tribune* 45, no. 336 (April 26, 1896): 4; Margaret A. Caine, “An Important Industry,” *Woman’s Exponent* 24, no. 23 (May 1, 1896): 146.

⁹¹ See, for example, “Notice to All Who Are Interested in Silk Culture in the State of Utah,” *Salt Lake Tribune* 53, no. 8 (April 22, 1897): 7.

⁹² “Advice to Silk-Growers,” *Salt Lake Tribune* 53, no. 30 (May 4, 1897): 6; “Device of Hunters,” *Salt Lake Herald* 29, no. 110 (September 21, 1899): 5.

⁹³ Margaret E. Caine, “Special Notice,” *Ogden Daily Standard* 10, no. 79 (April 10, 1897): 4.

trees.”⁹⁴ After a few weeks, the pamphlet said, the creatures would spin hundreds of yards of thread in tight, white cocoons. The cycle ended with the destruction of the chrysalis—by smoke or sun or oven—and the reeling of thread.⁹⁵ Despite all the challenges, the pamphlet urged raisers to “not let the difficulties you meet discourage you in the prosecution of your work.”⁹⁶

When discussing the economic possibilities of this intimate affair with the silkworm, USC did not mention local silk’s Mormon origins. Instead, the publication emphasized benefits for women in Utah and for the United States of America. In the first few paragraphs of the pamphlet, the author explained that “we may well say, ‘a nation’s wealth surrounds a worm.’”⁹⁷ Male-dominated manufacturing required brute strength, professional training, and expensive infrastructure. Sericulture, on the other hand, allowed women to produce “one of the most valuable commodities of commerce and manufacture” from the safety and comfort of their homes. USC promised that women would find raising worms “extremely interesting”; easily apply their “acute and gentle touch” to reeling thread; and enjoy the artistic quality of weaving designs.⁹⁸ While women had specific gains to make, other “dependents”—children, the elderly, the “infirm,” and poor people—would also find the employment satisfying.⁹⁹ Local raisers could be confident in the industry’s potential. According to USC, Utah’s silk enjoyed “the same lustre [sic], elasticity, and durability as any that can be produced in any country in the world” and, for that reason, just one acre of land

⁹⁴ Utah Silk Commission, *Sericulture: Instruction in the Art of Producing Silk* (Salt Lake City: Geo. Q. Cannon & Sons Company, 1897), 24.

⁹⁵ Commission, 26–28.

⁹⁶ Commission, 15.

⁹⁷ Commission, 3.

⁹⁸ Commission, 5.

⁹⁹ Commission, 4, 10.

translated to \$2,105 in product.¹⁰⁰ To attract converts to silk production, USC promoted Utah silk as a state-level and national endeavor.

USC aligned the industry with national markets and goals in other settings, as well. In addition to injecting information, resources, and a sense of confidence into local communities, USC operated as a clearinghouse for Utah-based raisers, other American sericulturists, and the federal government. By the later decades of the nineteenth century, the United States boasted an impressive silk manufacturing sector. To generate revenue during the American Civil War, the federal government installed an import duty of 60 percent ad valorem on silk goods. Entrepreneurs quickly mechanized silk production. Dependency on raw silk imports grew. From 1890 to 1897, for example, US imports averaged around five to six million pounds of raw silk annually. This figure increased to more than thirteen million pounds in 1900. Manufacturers preferred this arrangement to investing in silkworm cultivation and reeling machines at home. Friendly tariffs, high labor costs, and a lack of skilled workers all but guaranteed a reliance on imported raw silk from Italy, China, and Japan.¹⁰¹

United States Department of Agriculture officials continued to believe in silk raising and reeling, however. In 1901, Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson managed an eight-year plan and \$80,000 of federal monies for silk-centered studies and programs, including a cocoon bounty.¹⁰² The Utah Silk Commission became a part of this attempt to understand and advocate for US-made raw silk. In the USDA yearbook for 1903, assistant entomologist

¹⁰⁰ Commission, 4–5, 30.

¹⁰¹ Frank R. Mason, “The American Silk Industry and the Tariff,” *American Economic Association Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (December 1910): 1–182; Federico, *An Economic History of the Silk Industry*, 74–75; Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, xxii.

¹⁰² Federico, *An Economic History of the Silk Industry*, 178.

Leland Ossian Howard published a report in which he explained the origins and present-day status of American silk. As described in chapter 5, the federal government ceased making appropriations for USDA silk experiments in 1891. “From that time on,” Howard reported, “little was done in the United States in the way of raising silkworms,” aside from Utah’s five-member “ladies’ silk association”: the Utah Silk Commission. Howard explained how Latter-day Saints originally brought mulberry trees to the region. More recently, USC leaders distributed eggs “in small lots among the Mormon settlers,” and the “more skilled” women among local growers taught silk reeling to children.¹⁰³ USDA officials took an interest in Utah’s silk experiments. This investigation also brought to their attention the extreme poverty of some people in “the Southern States, and particularly of the colored races.”¹⁰⁴ Their material wealth, and that of the nation more generally, could be improved with federally sponsored cocoon bounties and reeling stations, according to Howard’s report.¹⁰⁵ In their attempts to generate funding, USDA officials took note of Mormon women’s commercial activities.

Meanwhile, USC officials established a working relationship with the federal government. The organization’s biennial reports, all authored by Secretary Margaret A. Caine, recorded these interactions while also tracking Utah silk producers’ progress. For example, in 1899 and 1900, USC distributed five hundred pamphlets, held nine instruction classes to improve the quality of cocoons, and found an encouraging rise in production levels. They also hosted a USDA official who was, according to the report, “extremely interested in our work, and very profuse in congratulations for the work thus far

¹⁰³ Leland Ossian Howard, “The United States Department of Agriculture and Silk Culture,” in *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture 1903* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 143.

¹⁰⁴ Howard, 144.

¹⁰⁵ Howard, 146.

accomplished.”¹⁰⁶ Utah silk continued to draw attention in 1901 and 1902, when Margaret A. Caine received 176 letters “asking for information and an outline of the work we are doing.”¹⁰⁷ This report also reproduced testimonials from experts like Henrietta Aiken Kelly, a South Carolinian named a USDA Special Field Agent in Silk Investigation in 1901. The point was to illustrate that USC aligned with other silk programs in America and deserved USDA’s attention.¹⁰⁸ In 1903, USC sent its own emissary to Washington, DC, to encourage the USDA to renew its “experimental work in sericulture.” After this “highly successful” encounter, government officials visited Utah and delighted in the organization’s accomplishments with “so small an appropriation.”¹⁰⁹ In addition to collecting accolades, Utah raisers “took advantage” of USDA’s supply of mulberry trees and cocoon bounty in 1903 and 1904.¹¹⁰ In the minds of USC delegates, these exchanges boded well for women in Utah and for silk manufacturers in the United States.

This organization performed many vital tasks for its roughly decade-long existence. Perhaps most importantly, USC distributed the Utah legislature’s cocoon bounty. Surviving bounty applications confirm that Utah’s silk industry continued to be managed mostly by women. From 1896 to 1904, the state of Utah paid bounties on a total of just over 25,000 pounds of silk cocoons, collectively worth almost \$6,300. Individual women and

¹⁰⁶ Margaret A. Caine, *First Biennial Report of the Utah Silk Commission of the State of Utah for the Years 1899-1900* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1901), 7. Series 5880, Utah State Archives and Records Service, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁰⁷ Margaret A. Caine, *Second Biennial Report of the Utah Silk Commission of the State of Utah for the Years 1901-1902* (Salt Lake City: Star Printing Company, 1903), 8. Series 5880, Utah State Archives and Records Service.

¹⁰⁸ Caine, 5. In this role, Kelly went on nationwide silk promotion tour, published a silk production manual, and distributed mulberry tree seed packets. Debra Bloom, “Henrietta Aiken Kelly and the Post-Civil War Silk Industry,” *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, May 2014, 13–24.

¹⁰⁹ Margaret A. Caine, *Third Biennial Report of the Utah Silk Commission of the State of Utah for the Years 1903 and 1904* (Salt Lake City: Star Printing Company, 1905), 4. Series 5880, Utah State Archives and Records Service.

¹¹⁰ Caine, 5.

representatives of women's organizations submitted 94 percent of these bounty applications. Ann C. Woodbury, Eliza Fosgreen, and other well-established sericulturists applied for bounties.¹¹¹ So did Utahns who may not have considered silk production, were it not for this state-level incentive.

Margaret A. Caine served as an emissary of the state when spreading interest and investment in sericulture. She also invoked recent success in Chicago and the silk industry's many benefits as a Latter-day Saint and Relief Society member. According to a June 1899 report in the *Woman's Exponent*, Caine traveled to Iosepa, a community established by and for Latter-day Saint converts from Hawaii ten years earlier.¹¹² During her visit in 1899, Caine intended to get "the Hawaiian sisters started in raising cocoons." To generate interest, she displayed "some native silk fabric made in Utah" and, with the help of a translator, "gave such information as would induce the sisters to go into the enterprise." The *Woman's Exponent* report explained how "the progress in the first effort of the Hawaiian sisters in raising silk will be reported in due time. We already have quite a number of mulberry trees to start with."¹¹³ In this context, Caine used silk to establish common ground with new converts.

Commission activities, including silkworm egg distribution and mulberry tree planting, could not overcome the many longstanding challenges to raising and reeling silk in the Great Basin region, however. According to USC's report for 1901 and 1902, for example, "several places" in Utah contended with smallpox outbreaks. Mandatory fumigation "instantly destroyed" many silkworms.¹¹⁴ The third biennial report explained how raisers

¹¹¹ Silk Commission Bounty Applications, Series 1205, Folders 1-29, Utah State Archives and Records Service.

¹¹² Kester, *Remembering Iosepa*, 130.

¹¹³ Emily G. Cluff and Ellen Halemanu, "R.S. Reports," *Woman's Exponent* 28, no. 2 (June 15, 1899): 15.

¹¹⁴ Caine, *Second Biennial Report of the Utah Silk Commission of the State of Utah for the Years 1901-1902*, 4.

could not find enough mulberry trees to feed their worms. “The growth of this industry will necessarily be a slow one until the trees that have been planted since the institution of the commission can attain good size,” said the report.¹¹⁵

USC confronted other problems, as well. The needs and goals of local silk raisers did not necessarily align with those of USC leaders. USSC members, for example complained that USC took possession of their loom and never returned it. After eight years and no loom in sight, USSC agreed to sell the loom to USC for \$35.¹¹⁶ It was also difficult to attract new silk raisers. Many could not believe that the silk business “would prove profitable,” said one *Salt Lake Tribune* contributor in January 1900. USC needed to educate people in “the value of silk culture from a monetary standpoint.” The organization also needed to grapple with a general feeling of “impatience.” “No great industry springs up in a day,” said the author, but locals expected quick and steady profits.¹¹⁷ These and other skeptical views may explain why USC pushed for more thorough government support. “It is a demonstrated fact,” wrote Margaret A. Caine in 1905, “that capital will not be invested except where profits are reasonably assured, and for this reason we do not hesitate to urge that the government rather than individuals should do the educational and experimental work necessary to more rapidly develop such important industries.”¹¹⁸ But the organization failed on this account. In early 1905, legislators voted to repeal the law that created the USC.¹¹⁹ In the eyes of government officials, a local silk industry was not worth the investment. Local leaders elsewhere felt the

¹¹⁵ Caine, *Third Biennial Report of the Utah Silk Commission of the State of Utah for the Years 1903 and 1904*, 6.

¹¹⁶ December 23, 1901, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹¹⁷ “Utah’s Silk Production,” *Salt Lake Tribune* 40, no. 78 (January 1, 1900): 13.

¹¹⁸ Caine, *Third Biennial Report of the Utah Silk Commission of the State of Utah for the Years 1903 and 1904*, 6–7.

¹¹⁹ “Utah Abandons Silk Culture,” *Deseret Evening News*, March 1, 1905, 5; “Senate Kills Batch of Bills,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, March 1, 1905, 3.

same way. In 1906, the president of the Provo stake, David John, “proposed the Silk Association in this stake be dissolved, as silk could be purchased from China and Japan.”¹²⁰

The Many Lives of the Mormon Silk Project

In the years leading up to bounty cancellation and organization dissolution, Mormon women engaged in many direct actions on silk’s behalf. They sent goods and workers to the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair and pushed for state and federal support for the industry. They also attended meetings of Relief Society and the Utah Stake Silk Association. In these forums, women communicated the economic and religious weight of the endeavor. At a St. George Relief Society meeting in June 1903, for example, Ann C. Woodbury “spoke of her labors in raising silk” before reminding her listeners that “We are preparing now for the Millen[n]ium.”¹²¹ Woodbury, a longtime advocate for sericulture in southern Utah Territory and a representative of the Utah Silk Commission, believed in silk’s many possibilities. “There is probably no industry that we could have established among us that would be more beneficial to the poorer classes of people than silk culture,” she wrote in a *Woman’s Exponent* article in 1897. The “light, and pleasant, and profitable” work suited women and children and could bring much-needed money into the household. Woodbury asserted that “with a little instruction and experience we can make reeling a success, and we can put our silk in a shape that will place it in the market.” In her mind, large local supplies of cocoons represented “a blessing and a profit to us.”¹²² For Woodbury, the incentives underpinning homemade silk did not transform, even as many aspects of the church’s infrastructure did.

¹²⁰ 1906, Utah Stake Silk Association minutes.

¹²¹ June 12, 1903, St. George Utah Stake Relief Society minutes.

¹²² Ann C. Woodbury, “The Silk Industry,” *Woman’s Exponent* 25, no. 20 (April 15, 1897): 129.

Without a doubt, the 1890s marked a turning point for the Mormon silk experiment. At the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Latter-day Saints gained an unprecedented opportunity to revise their reputation in front of a skeptical audience. Local silk goods and workers became symbols of economic advancement, middle-class sophistication, and national belonging. Silk's success on this international stage came in handy back at home. Industry boosters convinced the legislature to form and sponsor the Utah Silk Commission, which spent several years funneling money and expertise to local producers. In these contexts, Utah's silk became a commodity for and by American citizens.

Silk helped the church turn a corner, but many Mormon women producers remained on the same path. They aspired to forge a silk industry that at once employed household "dependents," brought cash into communities, and advanced the kingdom-building project. In many respects, not much had changed since the 1850s. Renewed attention to American-made silk at the state and national level supplied Mormon women with new ways to achieve longstanding goals. This window remained open for only a short time, however. Reports of silk made in Utah after 1906 are sparse. Some people continued to incorporate sericulture into their households. Without government support, it did not make much financial sense to continue. Local producers could not overcome the realities of the global silk market. American thread and cloth manufacturers preferred the cheap, higher-quality raw silk from China and Japan. Silk production fell out of favor but did not disappear. Mulberry trees, homemade handkerchiefs and dresses, and other mementos of the Mormon silk project remained. Susan B. Anthony's black silk dress, gifted to her in 1900 by the Utah Silk Commission, is just one of many remnants dotting the landscape of pioneer memory.

Epilogue—“For Themselves by Themselves”: Silk and Mormon Pioneer Memory

Susa Young Gates, born to Brigham Young and Lucy Bigelow in 1856, grew up in the Lion House surrounded by half siblings and sister wives.¹ For a time, silkworms also lived nearby. Gates likely spent time picking mulberry tree leaves and tending to silkworms in an on-property cocoonery as a child, the same way other children in her household did. As an adult, Gates became a prolific writer, women’s education advocate, and pro-suffrage activist. She enjoyed a close acquaintance with Susan B. Anthony. Like other women involved in the suffrage movement, Gates called Anthony “Aunt Susan.”²

At the time of her death in 1933, Susa Young Gates was working on a history of women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In her notes and drafts for the project, Gates took stock of local silk’s history and legacies. “Utah and Utah’s Mormon women have demonstrated their ability [to] foster and develop an industry which has been measurably a failure in most parts of the United States,” Gates wrote. Unlike other attempts at sericulture, Gates concluded that the Latter-day Saint experiment “was founded largely on a religious impulse and grew out of loyalty to counsel and obedience to ethical values in civic life.” But the experiment had just recently come to a disappointing end. By the turn of the twentieth century, A. Milton Musser, Alexander C. Pyper, and other outspoken industry proponents had died. The federal government ceased its silk investments in 1894, and the legislature eliminated Utah’s cocoon bounty roughly ten years later. Gates also pointed a

¹ W. Randall Dixon, “The Beehive and Lion Houses,” in *Brigham Young’s Homes*, ed. Colleen Whitley (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2002), 124–31.

² Patricia A. Lynott, “Susa Young Gates 1856-1933: Educator, Suffragist, Mormon” (PhD Diss., Chicago, Loyola University, 1996), 3.

finger at shifting economic values. The incorporation of Utah into the rest of the nation worked to “deaden ideals and refuse encouragement to any enterprise that is not financially successful and immediate.” At the time of her writing, only “pathetic remnants and relics” of homemade silk remained. The industry still had value, however. Gates explained how “Sericulture provided a fruitful field in which the powe[r] of women could be discovered for themselves by themselves.” This “had a vivifying effect upon the characters of the pioneer mothers” that had since been passed down to subsequent generations.³

This was not the first or the only time that silk infused mythologies about the exceptional quality of Latter-day Saint pioneers. As the potential for a lucrative Utah-based silk industry faded into the background in the early 1900s, silk began to take up more and more space in the realm of memory. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mormon women shared silk industry history and put curtains, cocoons, and other goods on display at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair to confirm the modern character of their working lives and the economic cosmopolitanism of Utah Territory. In the twentieth century, silk mementos continued to communicate lessons about Mormon settlement in the past and Latter-day Saint identity in the present.

These meanings took shape within a much larger memory landscape that celebrated the contributions of nineteenth-century Mormon settlers. It is clear to scholars and observers alike that pioneer memory plays a prominent role in defining what it means to be Mormon. For Latter-day Saints, “pioneer worship is a civic religion,” writes historian Jared Farmer.⁴ Multiple studies have examined how Mormons use historic sites, monuments, pageants,

³ Gates, “Chapter on Sericulture,” 16-17.

⁴ Farmer, *On Zion’s Mount*, 371.

parades, and other activities to recall and insert themselves into the pioneer experience.⁵ For example, each July 24, Latter-day Saints around the world celebrate the anniversary of church members colonizing the Salt Lake Valley in 1847.⁶ It is also common for Mormons to participate in annual “treks,” or reenactments of the Mormon migration westward. During these events, young people don pioneer clothing, assemble into “families,” and pull handcarts.⁷ These and other activities serve an important identity-forming function. Migration memories permit Latter-day Saints to relive the trials of the ancient Israelites and solidify their place as the one true church.⁸ Also, by closing the gap between present-day Latter-day Saints and their literal and/or spiritual ancestors, these remembrances inculcate new converts in an agreed-upon set of values and create a shared sacred history and geography for an increasingly diverse, international church.⁹

These activities simultaneously build bridges between Latter-day Saints and the outside world. Pioneer commemoration tends to erase controversial elements of Mormon belief and practice and emphasize widespread American mentalities and experiences, instead. More specifically, since the late nineteenth century, Latter-day Saints have inserted themselves into popular mythologies about settlers bringing “civilization” to supposedly

⁵ Davis Bitton, “The Ritualization of Mormon History,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 67–85.

⁶ Eric A. Eliason, “The Cultural Dynamics of Historical Self-Fashioning: Mormon Pioneer Nostalgia, American Culture, and the International Church,” *Journal of Mormon History* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 139–73.

⁷ Sara M. Patterson, *Pioneers in the Attic: Place and Memory Along the Mormon Trail* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), chaps. 6, 7.

⁸ Melodie Moench, “Nineteenth-Century Mormons: The New Israel,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 1 (1979): 42–54; Shipps, *Mormonism*, 52.

⁹ Bitton, “The Ritualization of Mormon History,” 83–84; Michael H. Madsen, “The Sanctification of Mormonism’s Historical Geography,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 230, 239; Barry Laga, “In Lieu of History: Mormon Monuments and the Shaping of Memory,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 146.

“empty” western lands in order to appear as patriotic, loyal American citizens.¹⁰

Commentary at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair and debates over Mormon apostle Reed Smoot’s election to the US Senate in the early 1900s depicted white Mormons as efficient colonizers who brought modern political institutions and economic prosperity to the American West.¹¹ Monuments designed and built from the 1890s to the 1970s fell into a similar pattern. Images of male patriarchs, sun-bonneted mothers, and their children celebrated the “traditional” family values of the Mormon pioneer generation and their role in enveloping the “frontier” into the nation.¹² Harmful stereotypes about the “backwards” lifeways of Great Basin Native Americans played a central role in making Mormons at home in American pioneer myths. By positioning themselves as more “advanced” than “primitive” people in the region, Latter-day Saints could leave behind their racially ambiguous status and assume the mantle of whiteness.¹³ In sum, Mormons have spent decades wielding historical reproductions to express solidarities with each other as well as a set of shared American values.

This epilogue on silk in the nineteenth century and commemorative activities in the twentieth provides new insights into the components and significance of this manufactured pioneer past. As this dissertation has shown, many obstacles—disease, predators, unpredictable environmental conditions, superior transnational imports, and a lack of capital,

¹⁰ Sarah K. Nytroe, “Taming the Past to Conquer the Future: The Pioneer Jubilee of 1897,” *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 4 (October 2016): 125–46; Clyde A. Milner II, “Why Don’t Mormons Have a Lost Cause?,” *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 2 (April 2018): 37–54.

¹¹ Hansen, *Frontier Religion*, chaps. 5, 6.

¹² Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Pioneer Mother Monuments: Constructing Cultural Memory* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), chap. 4.

¹³ For the most thorough account of the fraught relationship between Latter-day Saints and whiteness, see Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*. For accounts of the racial components and colonial legacies of Mormon pioneer nostalgia, see Boxer, “This Is the Place”; Hudson, “There Is No Mormon Trail of Tears: Roots, Removals, and Reconstructions,” 35.

machinery, and labor hours—kept the Latter-day Saints from generating a self-sustaining silk enterprise. As movement toward this goal deteriorated, parade floats, monuments, museum exhibits, historical accounts, and still-growing mulberry trees reworked this past, a past characterized by uncertainty, disagreement, and failure, into a source of pride. As the primary narrators of silk history in the 1900s, Mormon women gave the industry this new life. Their silk mementos highlighted the religious obedience, political influence, and economic contributions of their foremothers. In Susa Young Gates’s retelling, women Latter-day Saints accomplished something that remained out of reach all other Americans, elsewhere. Many decades later, the Church History Museum’s reproduction of Susan B. Anthony’s black silk dress in the *Sisters for Suffrage* exhibit placed Mormon women on the front lines of a progressive political cause. In multiple venues in between, women stretched silk far beyond the patriarchal constraints that silk workers experienced as well as the small economic footprint that industry enthusiasts lamented. They used silk to draw a direct line between women’s work in and out of the home in the nineteenth century and a modern Utah in the twentieth. In the process, they remade themselves and their ancestors into economic agents and entrenched colonial attitudes about Great Basin Native peoples.

In silk, commentators also found a useful story about religion, economic exceptionalism, environmental transformation, and Native “savagery.” Much like other Mormon pioneer memories, silk mementos insisted on the Great Basin’s conversion from a desert wasteland into a well-irrigated, cosmopolitan paradise. Publications about silk commended Brigham Young for bringing this and other industries to the region; mulberry trees for beautifying orchards and avenues; and a communal economic philosophy for watering “barren” terrain. This commentary captured the colonial aspirations of nineteenth-

century industry boosters, who believed in the efficiency of economic cooperation and the sophistication of the mulberry tree. Interestingly, local mulberry trees had largely lost their luster by the early twentieth century. Dropping fruit and sticky sidewalks frustrated Utahns, so much so that they embarked on tree removal and restriction campaigns. Still, Mormon and non-Mormon authors found room to celebrate the contributions of silk industry raw materials and locate Latter-day Saints at the vanguard of white, westward settlement.

Casting Mormons in this role depended on erasing the long history of Native peoples in the region and obscuring a past tarnished by plural marriage, theocracy, and other controversies. Pioneer memory also elided the environmental challenges that nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints confronted as well as the complex interplay between cooperation and capitalism in their economic lives. In fact, twentieth-century arguments about white Mormon trail-blazing turned on simplified descriptions of community-minded resource management and a God-sanctioned, inevitable environmental transformation.

“The Redeemed Desert”: Economic Exceptionalism and Environmental Transformation

In her history of women in the church, Susa Young Gates offered a clear explanation for the silk industry’s origins, trajectory, and remarkable longevity. Church leaders asked members to invest. Religious duty, pride, a commitment to the greater good kept Mormons on the silk path for decades. Eroding government support and the superior quality of imported silk threatened the experiment. So did an increasingly pervasive desire to make

money. For Gates, a community-centered, spiritually inflected economic ethos kept the industry alive. By the early twentieth century, that moment had passed.¹⁴

In the years after Gates's death, historical treatments of nineteenth-century Mormon economic ideas and experiences tended to follow this same analytical path. According to these accounts, silk and other home industries supported the church's isolated, self-sufficient economy in the Great Basin region as well as a religious kingdom-building project prophesized by church leaders. In pursuit of these goals, church members prioritized cooperation over speculation and individual accumulation.¹⁵ But, as more recent scholarship has noted, Latter-day Saints worked with the ideas and technologies underpinning nineteenth-century capitalism.¹⁶

This study of the Mormon silk project adds new dimensions to our understanding of how Mormons balanced the demands and opportunities of cooperation and competition. Silk relied on church investment and deepened community cohesion. As managers of spiritual and temporal affairs in western Latter-day Saint settlements, church leaders used their influence to create favorable conditions for the enterprise. They "called" individuals and families to cultivate mulberry trees, raise silkworms, and work in textile factories. They instituted boycotts of non-Mormon merchants and demanded that Latter-day Saints buy homemade silk goods in church-friendly stores, instead. Church sponsorship came in other forms, too. Tithing and donation systems directed surplus labor, land, and capital toward production. Missionaries brought industry raw materials, manufacturing technologies, and skilled labor to

¹⁴ Gates, "Chapter on Sericulture," 16-17.

¹⁵ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*; Arrington, Fox, and May, *Building the City of God*; Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*; May, *Three Frontiers*.

¹⁶ Carter, *Building Zion*; Bowman, "Liberty and Order"; Walker, *Railroading Religion*; McCarraher, *The Enchantments of Mammon*, chap. 5.

the American West. Representatives of Relief Society and the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association generated interest among settlers. Latter-day Saints also imbued sericulture with spiritual significance. In their minds, silk could keep “unsavory” influences at bay, foster intergenerational bonds, and communicate religious values. This was an industry by and for Mormons.

Not all Latter-day Saints reacted to the silk industry the same way, however. While some made long-term commitments, others needed to be convinced that silk would pay. Incentives beyond religious duty and communal values shaped the economic decisions that Mormons made. Much like silk entrepreneurs elsewhere, industry boosters made grand promises about unmatched climates, “idle” hands, “pleasant” household work, and individual prosperity. Also, Mormons used joint stock corporations, bounty payments, fairs, and other familiar forms to raise money and create interest.

Local sericulturists became embedded in commercial networks stretching far beyond the American West, as well. Developments in steam-powered transportation inspired ideas about Mormons assuming a central position in the global silk trade. Ideas about silk production in Utah Territory came from experts, cocoonery managers, and manufacturers in the United States as well as Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Other external events, like congressional debates over tariffs, a silkworm disease in Europe and Asia, and scientific experiments in France, shaped their activities. In sum, silk operations reflected and created capitalist and communitarian economic worlds. But this range of influences did not appear in Susa Young Gates’s history lesson about an especially ethical, religiously motivated industry with notable durability.

By locating the place of the environment and economics in Mormon pioneer memory, this epilogue seeks to explain how this simplification took root. Take the mulberry tree, for example. This organism is not indigenous to the Great Basin region. Mulberry trees first arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, in the pockets and parcels of Latter-day Saint settlers from the US and abroad. Then, church leaders, Relief Society members, and other interested parties introduced these trees to settlements throughout Utah Territory. According to one estimate, Mormons planted around 100,000 mulberry trees—mostly of the *Morus alba*, or white mulberry, variety—by the late 1860s.¹⁷ The trees became familiar to residents of several Mormon-dominated communities. For the most part, Latter-day Saints had to go to great lengths to generate enough fodder for silkworms. Mulberry trees can only provide a robust-enough leaf supply once they reach a certain age. Several years needed to pass before the silk project could gain momentum. Droughts, frosts, floods, and impenetrable soils made matters worse. Silkworms went hungry, even in Brigham Young's own cocoonery at Forest Farm in Salt Lake City. Some sericulturists experimented with alternative food sources, like lettuce or the leaves of the Osage orange tree (*Maclura pomifera*), often with disappointing results.

Other essential resources remained out of reach. Some Mormons raised enough trees to satiate their own silkworms and share leaves, cuttings, and information with others, but Latter-day Saints could not seamlessly incorporate the mulberry tree into their lives. Repeated requests from men and women church leaders to invest in the mulberry tree suggest that not all bishops, businessmen, and male household heads jumped at the chance to dedicate time, land, or money to orchards. Meanwhile, women and children did not always

¹⁷ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 227.

enjoy the experience, energy, or climate necessary to plant, water, prune, and harvest. In Lydia McLellan's case, hot St. George weather and dense soil resulted in yellowing mulberry trees. For many Latter-day Saints, a consistent silkworm food supply was hard to come by.

Mulberry trees managed to gain a foothold and even endure long after Latter-day Saints extricated themselves from the silk endeavor. Still-living trees left a mixed legacy. For some, mulberry trees had utility. They could provide shade, screen homes from curious neighbors, or be used as windbreaks on the farm.¹⁸ Residents could save money by making pies, soups, preserves, and wine from the berries, or using them to feed birds and farm animals.¹⁹ Other locals wished for their eradication. In 1914, one commentator in St. George wrote, "The mulberry trees are a nuisance. The fruit falls on the sidewalks attracting swarms of flies and are disagreeable to walk upon."²⁰ People in Ogden, Utah, complained about the decomposing, pest-enticing fruit, too. The silk industry brought the trees to the town, recalled one newspaper contributor in 1915. "Up to a few years ago nearly every street in Ogden had one or more mulberry trees," but the "fly-attracting smear" drove locals to cut them down.²¹ As early as the 1930s, city councils and commissions in Utah started regulating and proactively removing mulberry trees in the name of "beautification."²² Individual property

¹⁸ "Suggestive List of Trees for Arbor Day Planting," *Gunnison Gazette* 15, no. 24 (April 10, 1914): 4; "Little Things Picked Up in Orchard," *Wasatch Wave* 26, no. 45 (January 8, 1915): 2; N. Byhower, "Ornamental Gardens Add to Home Beauty," *Salt Lake Telegram* 14, no. 39 (March 14, 1915): 6; "Old 'Dixie' Land is Admired by Visitors," *Richfield Reaper* 28, no. 45 (September 16, 1916): 1; "To Beautify Logan and Cache County," *Logan Republican* 18 (February 24, 1920): 1; "Trees and Shrubs Arrive to be Planted in County," *Garfield County News* 22, no. 12 (March 4, 1943): 1.

¹⁹ "How to Fight the High Cost of Living," *Logan Republican* 11 (July 19, 1913): 6; "Let Woods Help Sweet Store," *Salt Lake Telegram* 17, no. 172 (July 30, 1918): 13; "Soups of Summer Fruits," *Roosevelt Standard* no. 52 (August 20, 1919): 6; D. Laney, "Provide Birds with Fruits," *News Advocate* 9, no. 26 (October 29, 1915): 5 [Price]; "Many Nutritious Foods Found in the American Forests," *Ogden Daily Standard* 48, no. 17 (January 19, 1918): 28; George C. Fraser, *Journeys in the Canyon Lands of Utah and Arizona, 1914-1916*, ed. Frederick H. Swanson (University of Arizona Press, 2005), 11.

²⁰ "Plant Better Trees," *Washington County News* 7, no. 16 (May 14, 1914): 1.

²¹ "Mulberry Tree Here and in Germany," *Ogden Daily Standard* 45, no. 306 (November 27, 1915): 4.

²² City Tree Commission, "Plans Made for City Beautiful," *Washington County News* 24, no. 11 (March 19, 1931): 5; "Tree Planting Regulations Announced," *Washington County News* 24, no. 12 (March 26, 1931): 1;

owners and community leaders also uprooted them to make way for businesses, housing, and other construction projects.²³

Even so, mulberry trees managed to attract attention as symbols and makers of a history that everyone could appreciate. When Utah observed Arbor Day for the first time in April 1919, for example, one resident celebrated the long-term impacts of tree-planting in Salt Lake City. According to this account, when the Latter-day Saints arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, they found “several hundred thousand acres of dry land covered with sagebrush.” Brigham Young and his followers imported and planted mulberry trees and many other fruit and shade trees. “By the time [Brigham Young] died,” wrote this commentator, “his love for trees and gardening had become the ardent desire of the community.”²⁴ The tree’s historical significance spurred at least one person to lend a voice to their protection. In a letter to the editor of the *Salt Lake Telegram* published in 1930, a contributor identified only as a Salt Lake City homeowner explained how “the Mulberry predominates” in certain areas, “due to the fact that years ago mulberry trees were planted to aid the silk industry of the state.” This author argued that these and other “beautiful trees” of Salt Lake City deserved protection, because they “attract the attention of visitors.”²⁵ Decaying fruit aside, the mulberry tree made many contributions. Silkworms needed them. The land benefitted from them. Tourists and locals valued them.

Other commentary incorporated the tree more explicitly into Mormon pioneer nostalgia. In a 1934 article for the *Improvement Era* titled “Trees of Modern Zion,” George

“Mayor Sets Special Tree Planting Days,” *Washington County News* 25, no. 2 (January 14, 1932): 1, 2; “Tree Committee Makes Report to Council,” *Parowan Times* 17, no. 21 (March 18, 1932): 1; “Council Grants DUP Use of Old Schoolhouse As Meeting Place, Museum,” *Pleasant Grove Review* 29, no. 7 (April 26, 1940): 5.

²³ Monson, “Mulberry Trees,” 134, 136.

²⁴ Joe Fehr, “Utah’s First Arbor Day Present,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* 186, no. 71 (April 15, 1919): 12.

²⁵ “Indorses Move to Preserve Our Trees,” *Salt Lake Telegram* 29, no. 207 (August 24, 1930): 4.

M. Cannon described how “The attitude of the Pioneers of Utah toward tree planting was one of deep interest from the beginning.” Brigham Young and other Latter-day Saints raised walnut, white ash, elm, and mulberry trees on farms, in nurseries, along streets, and around church buildings. Cannon—a descendant of two of the first Mormon settlers of St. George, Utah—saturated the resulting “abundance” of trees in Salt Lake City with religious significance. This article reproduced the ancient prophet Isaiah’s statement that “the Lord shall comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and he will make her wilderness Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord” (Isaiah 51:3). In Cannon’s mind, this forecast had come to pass. He recounted how Latter-day Saint settlers delivered “fruitful fields” and fruit and shade trees to the Great Basin region. As a result, “Utah became noted as an oasis in the great American Desert.”²⁶ Here, Mormons received credit for making a bone-dry wasteland into orderly plots, attractive avenues, and well-cultivated farmland. God also had a hand in reworking the region.

By the time this piece appeared in the *Improvement Era*, Latter-day Saints and “Gentiles” had been celebrating this environmental transformation for decades. The scaffolding of this narrative—what historian Jared Farmer has called the “desertification of Zion”—emerged in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Native peoples had long found sustenance in the Great Basin region. Also, the first wave of white Mormon settlers in the Salt Lake Valley expressed satisfaction with the area’s available natural resources and relied on basic, not heroic, irrigation techniques. But church members and outside observers claimed that the pioneer generation confronted a water-starved, game-depleted, pest-ridden

²⁶ George M. Cannon, “Trees of Modern Zion,” *Improvement Era* 37, no. 4 (April 1934): 198-199, 223.

place and, miraculously and heroically, rendered it productive.²⁷ Advocates for the Mormon silk project experimented with these mythologies. In 1868 French Mormon convert Louis Alphonse Bertrand predicted that the church's "peculiar system of irrigation" would "transform thousands of barren spots into magnificent mulberry plantations" and bring the land into the light of "humanity."²⁸ Other pro-silk propaganda thanked God for blessing the Mormons with an already "healthy" country that could easily support the cultivation of mulberry trees and silkworms.²⁹ In one moment, the environment could be a sterile desert in need of conversion. In another, it was a place set aside for a "chosen" religious group.

Both lines of reasoning gained traction in the twentieth century. Mormon and non-Mormon authors credited the church's community-oriented resource management program with animating a lifeless place. In the *Popular History of Utah* (1916), for example, church apostle and historian Orson F. Whitney described Mormon colonizers as "the vanguard of progress, the builders of empire in the barren heart of the West." According to Whitney, the Mormons "planted civilization in the midst of savagery, and to them, more than to any other people, owing to their unity, communal spirit, and systematic methods, is due the redemption of 'Arid America.'"³⁰ Well into the twentieth century, writers and professional historians like Wallace Stegner, Herbert E. Bolton, and Leonard J. Arrington continued to make the case that Mormons leveraged a communal economic ethos to make the region livable.³¹

²⁷ Farmer, *On Zion's Mount*, chap. 3.

²⁸ Louis A. Bertrand, "Silk Culture-the Soil," *Deseret News* 17, no. 47 (December 30, 1868): 375.

²⁹ "Continuation of President Young's Trip to Sanpete," *Deseret News* 14, no. 42 (July 19, 1865): 330; "Summary of Instructions," *Deseret News* 14, no. 45 (August 9, 1865): 354; Brigham Young, June and July, 1865, *Journal of Discourses* 11:114; George A. Smith, April 6, 1868, *Journal of Discourses* 12:199-200.

³⁰ Orson Ferguson Whitney, *Popular History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1916), 18-19.

³¹ Jedediah S. Rogers, "History, Nature, and Mormon Historiography," in *The Earth Will Appear as the Garden of Eden: Essays on Mormon Environmental History*, ed. Jedediah S. Rogers and Matthew C. Godfrey (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019), 10-20.

Silkworms and mulberry trees made the occasional appearance in these conversations about Mormonism, the economy, and environmental change.³²

This infrastructure of folktales, novels, and academic analyses worked on many levels to synthesize Mormonism with American citizenship. Stories about ambitious tree-planting tethered many value systems together. Pride for the prophet, a religious kingdom-building effort, and communitarian economics coexisted with an appreciation for “civilization” and American pioneering. These celebrations engaged in dramatic acts of erasure. Gone were the riots, massacres, murders, and ostracization that catalyzed the Mormon migration westward, as well as the nation-wide controversies over plural marriage, church intervention into political affairs, and the racial ambiguity of church members. Great Basin Native peoples also disappeared. Arguments about a place made habitable by Mormon settlers relegated the complex communities, agricultural foundations, hunting traditions, and trade networks of Indigenous groups to the margins or wrote them out entirely. Pioneer memory also turned on a narrow understanding of how these colonists related to the environment and the economy. By the early twentieth century, mulberry trees did not feed many silkworms. Still, commentators described the trees as agents and emblems of a benevolent, communitarian, God-sanctioned settlement pattern that supplanted “savagery” and brought the region into the nation. Mormons supposedly accomplished something that no one else could. Placing Latter-day Saints in this light depended on concealing a complex spectrum of experiences with work, markets, and the natural world.

³² See Whitney, *Popular History of Utah*, 94; Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 108.

“Far More than a Great Commercial Need”: Opportunity Out of Patriarchy

Other mementos located Mormon women at the center of the silk industry in the past and economic modernity in the present. In the mind of Susa Young Gates, “pioneer mothers” found energy, self-confidence, and widespread influence in the silk industry that they then shared with the generation that came after.³³ To Gates, silk meant much more than the profits it could generate. Subsequent scholarly literature has taken a similar tack with evaluating the origins and impacts of the silk industry. In these accounts, silk represents both a source and symbol of Mormon women’s networking, business acumen, and activism.³⁴ As this dissertation has shown, women did manage to mobilize silk to satisfy multiple agendas, but the industry was not intended to boost their entrepreneurial skills or public influence.

In fact, the silk experiment had roots in conservative ideas about work, family, and domesticity. The movement of textile production out of households and into factories in the early nineteenth-century United States provoked anxieties about the economic role of women, children, and other household “dependents.” A wave of young women moved away from the farm and from their parents’ supervision to accept wage work in textile mills. Family members back home continued to perform tasks essential to the economic viability of the household. Even so, commentators insisted that these dependents had become a financial burden and needed even *more* responsibilities to occupy their time.³⁵ For some nineteenth-century Americans, mulberry tree cultivation and silkworm-raising offered the perfect solution to eroding parental authority and a sense of decreased productivity.³⁶

³³ Gates, “Chapter on Sericulture,” 16-17.

³⁴ Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah”; Arrington, “The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women,” 152–57; Arrington, “The Finest of Fabrics”; Daurette, “Produce What You Consume”; Haggard, “In Union Is Strength,” 27–51.

³⁵ Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*; Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism*, chap. 4; Boydston, *Home and Work*.

³⁶ See, for example, Rossell, “The Culture of Silk,” 85–102.

Brigham Young and other Latter-day Saint leaders had similar aspirations for sericulture in Utah Territory. Industry boosterism emphasized the supposedly “idle” hands of a dependent class of workers, which included women and children as well as the elderly, poor people, and people with disabilities. According to them, raising mulberry trees and silkworms at home, selling cocoons on the market, reeling thread, and weaving cloth resolved many economic pressures at once. Instead of relying on charity and placing a financial burden on the community, for example, poor people could become self-reliant. Old people and people with disabilities could make contributions to a family’s income. And, perhaps most importantly, women and children could become earners instead of spending hard-earned cash on factory-made fabrics. In many respects, male household heads had the most to gain from domestic silk production. The industry would bring new sources of capital under their control and reinstate their authority over their wives and children. These arguments infused conversations about silk during the experiment’s tenure. In public discourses and during church meetings, Latter-day Saints spoke about sericulture as a complement to the hierarchies and work arrangements of the patriarchal household.

These patterns governed the activities of silk-producing families. Men like George D. Watt and Louis A. Bertrand promoted the silk businesses in public and managed the land, capital, and paid and un-paid workers. Meanwhile, women and children in monogamous and polygamous households handled the mundane, labor-intensive tasks required to make silk work. As this study has shown, many factors shaped the way that individuals and families experienced the silk industry. Class status determined how much distance a family could put between themselves and the silkworms and how long it took to gather enough mulberry tree leaves to feed them. Disability, expertise in horticulture and textile manufacturing, business

networks, proximity to transportation and communication infrastructure, and environmental conditions also framed why and how Latter-day Saints incorporated sericulture into their work routines. Amid this diversity, however, the oversight of husbands, fathers, and male church leaders remained consistent. In public, men received credit for cocoons and thread made at home. In the home, they directed the labors of women, children, and other “dependents.” The Mormon silk project had roots in male domination, not women’s liberation.

But, as this study has shown, Mormon women managed to expand silk far beyond these constraints and keep the industry alive for decades. In the 1850s and 1860s, early adopters like Agnes Oliphant, Elizabeth Whitaker, and Josephine and Eliza Ursenbach leveraged mulberry trees and silkworms to foster far-flung business networks, earn respect for their skills, and turn a profit. Homemade silk also resolved some of the anxieties that accompanied swelling anti-polygamy sentiments and the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Members of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment Association committed to curtailing elaborate dinner parties, avoiding expensive clothing, and directing their capital toward church-friendly stores. They also examined silk industry best practices and commended one another for generating respectable silk goods at home. It made sense for silk to become a part of a movement centered on Mormon women’s consumer choices. Silk fit comfortably into Relief Society’s textile production and poverty mediation agenda, as well. Relief Society general board representatives and local leaders spread interest in mulberry tree cultivation and silkworm raising to many corners of Utah Territory. Women further expanded silk’s presence by forming joint-stock corporations in the 1870s, funding a silk factory in the 1880s, and presenting their wares at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. Silk

producers also benefited from the cocoon bounty program that accompanied Utah statehood in 1896. From the 1850s to the early 1900s, Mormon women conveyed silk goods to cooperative stores, social gatherings, and local and national fairs. They reserved one of their most high-quality pieces for Aunt Susan.

They never managed to produce a completely self-sustaining silk industry. Repeated failures stymied success. Mulberry trees withered. Silkworms perished. Looms broke. Legislation failed. Anti-polygamy raids imprisoned boosters and workers. From the very beginning, the local industry struggled to compete with low labor costs in Asia. Latter-day Saints met these conditions with lukewarm interest, frustration, and outright dissension. Still, there is much to learn from this history of failure. Enthusiastic elites like Eliza R. Snow, Zina D. H. Young, and Ann Cannon Woodbury managed the many economic expectations percolating in Mormon communities. Also, in assemblies and in their individual households, women sericulturists from diverse backgrounds attended to changes in wages, prices, subsidies, and transportation technologies as well as the ebbs and flows of church programs, government legislation, and local climates and labor markets. In other words, Mormon women did not passively receive economic policy from church leaders. They used silk work and goods to satisfy many monetary needs, political agendas, and cultural desires. Depending on the venue, silk goods communicated religious obedience and intracommunity solidarities as well as the qualities of white, middle-class respectability and American citizenship.³⁷

The aura of the nineteenth-century industry performed ideological work well into the twentieth century. More specifically, silk-centered mementos had a role to play in gendering

³⁷ As historian Jennifer Reeder has shown, Mormon women used hair wreaths, buildings, poetry, posters, and quilts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to showcase their skills, confront harmful stereotypes, and construct a spiritual sisterhood. Reeder, "To Do Something Extraordinary."

Mormon pioneer memory. Even before the industry took its last breath in the early 1900s, commemorations emphasized Mormon women's contributions to rescuing the wilderness. Take, for example, silk's appearance at the Pioneer Jubilee of 1897, a week-long celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Latter-day Saint settlement in the Great Basin region. Event activities credited Latter-day Saints with bringing profitable, investment-worthy industries to the Salt Lake Valley. Two parades in Salt Lake City celebrated the state's agricultural and mineral resources. Floats in these processions featured tramways carrying ore, a literal cornucopia overflowing with fruits and vegetables, and advancements in communication, transportation, and industrial manufacturing.³⁸ Parade-watchers could also enjoy a silk industry float, which featured a spinning wheel, larger-than-life silkworms and mulberry tree leaves, and two women holding onto reins that looked like silk thread. Ruth May Fox, a well-known Latter-day Saint poet and suffrage activist, described this particular float as "unique and instructive."³⁹ She likely learned a lesson about how Mormon women supported economic growth and environmental reclamation.

When this display made its way down a Salt Lake City thoroughfare in 1897, Utahns were still raising silkworms. It was not until 1905 that state legislators decided to cancel a bounty on locally raised cocoons, which significantly curtailed local production. Over the next several decades, silk remained relevant in the realm of pioneer memory. Accounts located Utah's transformation in Mormon women's work in and out of the home. A 1937 *Salt Lake Telegram* article, for example, argued that Mormon women "are entitled to a major share of the credit given the 'builders' of Utah." Some of these settlers lamented the

³⁸ Nytroe, "Taming the Past to Conquer the Future."

³⁹ Ruth May Fox, "Our Jubilee," *Woman's Exponent* 6, no. 26 (August 15, 1897): 177.

“desolate” terrain, but they wiped their tears and did “everything possible to help their men conquer the wilderness.” They scared off unfriendly Indians, cooked food, cleaned the house, and made candles, brooms, shoes, vests, rugs, and shawls. They also supported women’s health initiatives, circulated a newspaper, advocated for suffrage, and presided over a local silk organization. “Yes, truly, Utah has come far from its beginnings in 1847, and much of the credit belongs to women,” this contributor said.⁴⁰



Figure 23: Silkworm Float, Pioneer Semi-Centennial, July 1897
Classified Photograph Collection
Courtesy of Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah

Mormon women advanced similar arguments in *Relief Society Magazine*, a church-sponsored publication. In 1944, Alice Merrill Horne described how the Latter-day Saints—“history’s most intrepid pioneers”—made an otherwise “inaccessible, remote,” and

⁴⁰ “Work of Utah Women Merits Hearty Praise,” *Salt Lake Telegram* 36, no. 146 (July 19, 1937): 16.

“dormant” desert “habitable.” While interested in men’s contributions, Horne also credited women with manufacturing “the redeemed desert.” She used the conversion of silk cocoons into elegant evening gowns as evidence.⁴¹ Julia A. F. Lund made the same case in 1947, the centennial anniversary of western Mormon settlement. “The story of the pioneer textile industries is a most important page in the history of Utah’s development” she wrote. Mormon women believed in Brigham Young’s guarantee that “this country was the finest in the world for silk raising.” “The longing for beauty and the fine things of life, coupled with the pride in home industry” sustained these silk workers. For Lund, silk offered just one example of how textile production met “far more than a great commercial need.”⁴² Activities seen as simple, easy, and not worth very much in the nineteenth century became symbols of respect in the twentieth.

In addition to publishing articles, Mormon women engaged in symbolic acts of silk appreciation. In 1942 Relief Society members in St. George, Utah, decided to plant non-fruit-bearing mulberry trees to celebrate the organization’s centennial anniversary and provide a living illustration of “the silk industry of this section.” According to newspaper coverage, these women viewed tree-planting as “symbolic of the women’s Relief Society movement the world over.”⁴³ The Daughters of Utah Pioneers (DUP), established in 1901 to remember men, women, and children who came to Utah Territory before 1869, also found meaning in the trees.⁴⁴ In the 1930s, members of two DUP camps (or neighborhood-based groups)

⁴¹ Alice Merrill Horne, “Mormon Pioneer Culture,” *Relief Society Magazine* 31, no. 8 (August 1944): 419-22.

⁴² Julia A. F. Lund, “Silk, Cotton, and Wool Produced in Utah,” *Relief Society Magazine* 34, no. 9 (September 1947): 589-594.

⁴³ “Tree Planting Ceremony Well Attended Here on Wednesday Afternoon,” *Washington County News* 37, no. 9 (March 19, 1942): 1.

⁴⁴ Derr, “Strength in Our Union,” 183.

memorialized industry history in Salt Lake City's Yalecrest community.⁴⁵ Gertrude S. Romney, president of DUP's Yale Camp, set this project into motion when she sent a letter to Ida M. Kirkham, president of Yale Crest Camp, in September 1935. Romney asked for permission to mark several "places of historical interest" on land that "was originally Yale Camp" but, due to the neighborhood's explosive growth and a recent division of Yalecrest into two DUP groups, was now under Kirkham's jurisdiction. "One of these places...is where the silk industry was first fostered in this western country," Romney wrote. Margaret Cullen Geddes Eccles, a charter member of Yale Camp, "figured prominently in the manufacture of the first silk made," she told Kirkham.⁴⁶

Gertrude S. Romney sought support from Leona Holbrook, then-president of DUP, as well. The Yale Camp wanted to place a "suitable marker" on the land where "the pioneers planted many acres of mulberry trees for the purpose of helping along the silk industry." Romney took care to clarify silk's historical significance. "Since the venture was successful and beautiful silk was made here in the early days, it seems that a marker on this location should be much desired by us all," she wrote.⁴⁷

Ultimately, both DUP groups came together to sponsor a monument, designed by prominent Mormon artist Avard Fairbanks.⁴⁸ The monument, nestled next to a Latter-day

⁴⁵ Known today as Harvard-Yale, this affluent neighborhood sits on Salt Lake City's eastern edge, not far from the University of Utah. This district grew to twenty-two subdivisions from 1910 to 1938. Yalecrest's turn-of-the-century architectural styles and "mature" foliage earned it a spot on the National Register of Historic Places in 2007. Mary DeLaMare-Schaefer, "Petition PLNHLC2014-00111: Historic Designation for Yalecrest Neighborhood, Salt Lake City," December 2, 2014.

⁴⁶ Gertrude S. Romney letter to Ida M. Kirkham, September 6, 1935, Pioneer Memorial Museum, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁴⁷ Gertrude S. Romney letter to Leona Holbrook, September 23, 1938, Pioneer Memorial Museum.

⁴⁸ "Salt Lake City News in Brief," *Salt Lake Telegram* 40, no. 142 (July 14, 1941): 8. Fairbanks had attractive "artistic and LDS pedigrees," in the words of historian Cynthia Culver Prescott. He received an art education in Paris and at Yale University. During his career, he completed several commissions for the church. Prescott, *Pioneer Mother Monuments*, 130–31, 153.

Saint ward building, or meeting house, features Margaret Cullen Geddes Eccles in bas-relief working a loom. Mulberry tree branches surround and slightly obscure her image. The inscription on the bronze plaque affixed to the bottom of the monument reads:

In 1867 Paul A. Schettler, an ardent supporter of the silk industry in Utah, acquired this land and planted five acres in mulberry trees, the leaves of which were used to feed silk worms. He built two cocooneries near this location. Elizabeth Von Bergen (Beck) a Swiss weaver, came from France to operate the looms installed by Schettler. Several types of looms were used.⁴⁹

DUP members and two “pioneer” sericulturists—George D. Pyper and his sister, Jane Pyper Andersen—attended the monument unveiling on July 13, 1941. The inscription names another woman, Elizabeth Von Bergen, as the silk weaver. Newspaper coverage clarified that Margaret Cullen Geddes Eccles “is honored as the predominating figure on the monument.” She was a member of DUP’s Yale Crest Camp and “the first weaver of brocaded silk in Utah.”⁵⁰ In pioneer memory, Mormon women found an opportunity to elevate the textile work of their ancestors. Economic growth in Utah depended on a supposedly “dependent” class of worker.

Not all aspects of women’s lives in the past fit comfortably into the image Latter-day Saints created in the present, however. While Margaret Cullen Geddes Eccles’s body is on the monument, her name is not. Her tumultuous years as a polygamist after Wilford Woodruff’s 1890 Manifesto may be to blame. As discussed in chapter 5, not long after Margaret’s first husband, William Geddes, died in 1891, she became wealthy industrialist David Eccles’s third wife. She gave birth to their son, Albert, in 1899. But both mother and child used “Geddes” as their last name. She lied about the marriage, even after threats of excommunication and imprisonment. When David Eccles suddenly died from a heart attack

⁴⁹ Quoted in Potter, “The History of Sericulture in Utah,” 7.

⁵⁰ “Monument Commemorates Pioneer Silk Industry,” *Improvement Era* 44, no. 9 (September 1941): 542.

in 1912, however, their relationship became public, because Margaret asserted her and Albert's claims to their portion of the Eccles estate. She received no sympathy from the "legitimate" family. A well-publicized lawsuit settled the matter. The court awarded Albert and Margaret \$150,000, and the two began to publicly use the Eccles name. They may have directed some of these winnings toward the purchase of a residence in the Yalecrest neighborhood in 1915. They sold the property during the Great Depression years. Even so, the Yale and Yale Crest DUP camps, in Margaret's words, "selected me to pose for the marker of the camp as I represented the silk weaving."⁵¹ Monument planners wanted to honor Margaret's contributions to silk manufacturing. They may have left her name out her name, entirely, due to a fear of controversy. Available sources do not say.

A Part of, Not a Part From: Silk, State Power, and Indigenous Dispossession

By honoring the silk industry, these twentieth-century mementos participated in a long tradition of cultivating Mormon identity. Complex systems of meaning surrounded Mormon-made silk from the very beginning. In the nineteenth century, silk represented obedience to ancient and living prophets, solidarity in the face of persecution, and a commitment to constructing God's earthly kingdom. Silk also created links to the mystery of the "Orient," middle-class refinement, and economic cosmopolitanism. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the politics of settler nostalgia infused Mormon silk commemorations. As other historians have noted, an increasingly global church membership used pioneer memory to reassert the prophetic authority of Brigham Young, see and feel the material sacrifice of

⁵¹ Cleo G. Geddes, "A Study in Propaganda and the Eccles Case" (MS Thesis, Logan, UT, Utah State University, 1969); Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 184–85. Quote from DeLaMare-Schaefer, "Petition PLNHLC2014-00111." By 1941, Margaret Eccles lived in downtown Salt Lake City. See "Farmington," *Davis County Clipper* 51, no. 41 (November 14, 1941): 8.

early church members, and recommit to their spiritual traditions. These activities simultaneously remodeled Latter-day Saints into a palatable shape for public audiences. Representations of church members' efficient colonizing in the past helped Mormons gain respect in the present.⁵² Monuments, histories, and other recollections of the silk industry reveal how Mormon beliefs and practices coexisted American belonging. According to these mementos, mulberry trees, silkworms, and looms proved that patriotic settlers applied a cooperative spirit to a barren wilderness and blazed the trail for industrial modernity. This supposedly inevitable process was at once sanctioned by God and beneficial to the nation.

In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Mormon women conjured this in-between space into being. As this dissertation has shown, Latter-day Saints wanted silk to support a range of aspirations. Depending on the location and the moment in time, everything from environmental control, middle-class status, employment for children, and quick individual profit to charity for the community, economic development for the state, and a competitive place in the global silk trade motivated silk industry activities. Polygamous and monogamous Mormon women from the US and abroad tried to make these economic ideas and incentives work in concert. During church assemblies and committee meetings and in individual households, fair exhibits, and a local factory, women used silk work and goods to accommodate diverse, sometimes conflicting agendas.

They often struggled. Unsuccessful attempts to find the time, keep silkworms alive, cultivate enough mulberry trees, secure expensive manufacturing technologies, and convince politicians to pass friendly legislation resulted in disappointment, frustration, and pain. So

⁵² Prescott, *Pioneer Mother Monuments*, chap. 4; Hansen, *Frontier Religion*, chaps. 4–6; Patterson, *Pioneers in the Attic*.

did the anti-polygamy movement, which imprisoned some enthusiastic industry supporters and forced others into hiding. Silk also had the potential to reveal and exacerbate fault lines within Mormon womanhood. Elite women with political influence, extra space, and access to a paid labor force enjoyed more flexibility and decision-making power. The industry activities of rural women living in outlying settlements with little expendable income looked very different. Mormon women of all backgrounds still tried to deliver. A sense of religious duty, an interest in making money, and a desire to find common ground with non-Mormons combined to retain their commitments to silk. By centering women in a study of Mormon economic life, this dissertation reveals the economic terrain on which Mormon identity took shape.

We also gain a more complete picture of how economic ideas and exchanges animated debates over religion, sovereignty, and citizenship in the American West. Historians have already explored how consumer politics determined who “belonged” throughout American history.⁵³ This study brings to light the place of markets in anti-polygamy politics, pioneer nostalgia, and Mormon assimilation. In the second half of the nineteenth century, journalists, novelists, government officials, and other critics located Mormonism outside of the boundaries of “Americanness” by valorizing free trade and women’s inherent desires for fashionable clothing. Some commentators hoped that the transcontinental railroad and accompanying cargoes of imported hats, dresses, and shoes would “reconstruct” Mormonism by bankrupting polygamous families. Economic activities became a tool of Latter-day Saint marginalization during the Reconstruction era.

⁵³ See, for example, Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage*; Glickman, *Buying Power*; Cohen, *Luxurious Citizens*.

They also offered a venue for Mormons to align with American ideals. During the 1890s, homemade silk represented Utah's economy as a national asset and Mormon women as loyal, politically advanced citizens. Silk continued to exert a similar influence throughout the twentieth century. As this epilogue has shown, silk mementos combined stories about Mormon economic communitarianism, prophetic authority, and environmental change with popular assumptions about the "civilizing" qualities of white, westward expansion. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then, acts of production and consumption—and invented memories of them—had the potential to elevate or quell suspicions about Mormonism.

The silk industry made space for Mormons in the American West in other ways, too. Latter-day Saints became targets of state power. They also intruded into Indigenous lifeways, dispossessed Native peoples of their homelands, and defining themselves in opposition to "savagery." White Mormons brought familiar colonial attitudes to the silk industry. They approached silkworms and mulberry trees as hardy tools of environmental conversion, capable of bringing order, beauty, and productivity to the region. At the same time, because Latter-day Saints needed to better understand rainfall and soil density to raise silkworms and mulberry trees, sericulture made Mormons more familiar with their environmental surrounding and expanded their presence throughout the Great Basin region. In addition, Mormons used displays of fine silk cocoons, thread, curtains, and dresses, sharing the same space as arrowheads, pottery, and even the human remains of a "backwards" Native society, to market themselves as fully white American citizens. This trend continued into the twentieth century. Despite a long history of Native peoples living in and moving through the Salt Lake Valley, silk mementos marked the beginning of "real" history with Mormon

settlement. In these respects, the political, economic, and cultural influence Mormon women enjoyed depended on the exclusion and marginalization of Native peoples.

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