

WOMEN'S LIB, ALAMODE 1868-1883

Often when Clem took time to look through the family journals, he'd reminisce out loud. "Back in the days when Father was managing the co-op store and I was helping out I remember going to a conference where there was considerable excitement about the women and their lot. The gentile press had been stirring up bad feelings about the plight of Mormon women and especially plural wives; how they were but little more than captive slaves and chattel with no rights or tolerable station in life. President Snow took issue with such claims and said he had prayerfully selected his wives with the help of the Lord, and they had all turned out to be good and noble minded women. It was true, he said, that they had suffered deprivation and poverty in the days of persecution, when the saints were driven from their homes. They had lived in tents and wagons, but had proven themselves capable of rising above the hardships. Now they were living in common surrounding and were as well treated as any similarly situated women in the world.

Brother Snow's sister, Eliza, got up and really roasted them to a fare-thee-well. She called those rubbish writers "foul-mouthed calumniators of Mormon women." I didn't know what that meant at the time but it sounded mighty powerful so I remembered it.

Pshaw, if a person will take the trouble to look at the record, it will show that our women have has a pretty good voice in things since the earliest days. They haven't been downtrodden doormats by any means. Sometimes they've been pretty independent and perspickity."

Family records show that Clem's Grandfather Welsh and Lorenzo Snow among others wrote to Brigham Young with reference to the attitude and conduct of the women in matters of fashion and dress in the very year that Clem was born. It seems that in their attempt to fully rely on home manufacture for cloth in the settlement, they needed the cooperation of the women. Frugality and thrift were the watchwords of the day, and much material was being wasted by the ladies' wearing their skirts too full and too long.

The Profit commiserated with his brethren and promised to expound on the matter at the next conference. The minutes showed he made a valiant effort to fulfill his duty:

I have borne it. and so have my brethren, until duty demands that we put a stop to it. I have politely expostulated with my wives and daughters on this subject. I have asked them if they think it looks nice, and have been told that it did, their reason for thinking so being that somebody else wore it so. That is all the argument that can be brought in its favor. There is no reason in the world why a dress looks well trailing through the streets. On the other hand, I will say, ladies if we ask you to make your dresses shorter, do not be extravagant and cut them so short that we can see the tops of your stockings ●● and do not expose your persons. Have your dresses neat and comely, and conduct yourselves, in the strictest sense of the word, in chastity."

Apparently the dictates of fashion continued to be more compelling than the council of the brethren, since the journals contain subsequent references to such things at a later date.

The High Priests and Seventies Quorums of Box Elder Stake of Zion met at the Public Hall, Brigham City, March 9, 1881 at 6.30 P.M. President Jensen gave the time over to the brethren. Hoped they would occupy it as the spirit might dictate.

Brother William L. Watkins said that we are called upon to comfort and instruct, strengthen the weak, and encourage the feeble. He advocated the propriety of allowing the Priesthood to dictate in matters as well as spiritual.

Brother Samuel Smith spoke on the necessity of heads of families to rule and govern their families in righteousness, instructing each member to honor the priestly and municipal authority in their midst; if everyone would do this there would soon be a reformation amongst us, which was very much needed at the present time.

James Hansen fully endorsed the remarks of the brethren preceding him. Believed that the laws of God and man ought to be honored and carried out at all hazards. It was better to do this than listen to the whims and notions of silly women. The meeting was dismissed with singing, and benediction by Peter Baird.

It would be something less than equitable not to give the last word to the women at this point. Eliza R. Snow comes admirably to the defense of her sex in recounting in her journal the various ways in which the wives and women of Brigham City were indeed fulfilling the role of the whole woman.

And now, instead of merely fulfilling their very important duties as wives and mothers of children, they step forth into the broad arena of public life and officiate in the wider sphere, and with increasing responsibilities, as mothers in Israel; thus, in connection with the faithful discharge of home duties, they are actively engaged in various organizations as presidents, counselors, secretaries, teachers, etc.; and some of them have the pleasing satisfaction, even now, of seeing their daughters following in this direction, in their footsteps, occupying important positions...