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## Review Panel: *A House Full of Females*

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1830–1870*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017.

*Reviewed by Ann M. Little, W. Paul Reeve, and Sarah Carter*  
*Response by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich*

**ANN M. LITTLE:** *A House Full of Females* has all of the signature flourishes we've come to expect from the Bancroft and Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich: sensitive readings of textual sources; lavish attention to material culture, especially anything that women had their hands in creating; and very gentle nudges for readers to appreciate the ironies of history. They all add up to create a messy and ambitious portrait of the founding generation of Latter-day Saints, especially of the women whose faith and labor Ulrich argues were crucial to the survival and success of the Mormons. Perhaps more importantly, Ulrich shows her flair for that slipperiest of historians' skills: the knack for showing her readers that the past is indeed a foreign country, or as she slyly suggests, "a different planet" entirely (p. xxv).

Ulrich has taken on a challenging task in attempting to bridge LDS history and American women's history in order to write a book that speaks convincingly to both audiences. Ulrich betrays no little irritation that "the word 'paradox' appears again and again in books and articles dealing with" Mormon women's history, not just because Mormon

history—like most institutional or denominational histories—has written women’s labor and spiritual and intellectual contributions out of the official record, but because of the apparently sharply opposed values and goals of American feminism and plural marriage. As Ulrich puts it, many Americans wonder “how could women simultaneously support a national campaign for political and economic rights while defending marital practices that to most people seemed relentlessly patriarchal” (p. xiii). This “paradox” lives on in the minds of Americans, male and female, scholars and nonscholars, feminists and anti-feminists alike. Every time I mentioned that I was reading this book to review it, the responses were some variety of “Good luck with *that*.”

Addressing the challenge head on, Ulrich reaches for not just early Mormon texts but also symbolically laden textiles. In the justly celebrated *A Midwife’s Tale*, Ulrich asked readers to see a piece of common fabric—a blue and white checked linen cloth—as a metaphor for understanding the gendered patterns of daily life in Hallowell, Maine, at the turn of the nineteenth century. “Think of the white threads as women’s activities, the blue as men’s, then imagine the resulting social web,” with some squares all white, some all blue, and others mixed, warp and weft intermingling.<sup>1</sup> Once again, Ulrich reaches to fabric worked by women’s hands as a central metaphor in this book, seizing upon the remarkable discovery and reunification of an 1857 Mormon album quilt (pp. 336–54, 367–68, and color insert 2, pp. 2–3) made of squares appliquéd or embroidered by the girls and women of the Fourteenth Ward. Ruffled off to raise money for a pipe organ, it was crudely severed in a later generation, but both halves survived in two different families until it was providentially reunited in 2004—much as feminism and Mormon history have been rent for much of the past 150 years.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 75–76.

2. See Carol Holindrake Nielson, *The Salt Lake City 14th Ward Album Quilt, 1857: Stories of the Relief Society Women and Their Quilt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2004); and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “An American Album,” *American Historical Review* 115 (2010): 1–25.

From the beginning, Ulrich's early Mormon women are opinionated, active, and political. They were spiritually daring and sometimes sexually daring too; many of them courted scandal or disgrace by divorcing their husbands and leaving children behind in order to live their faith. Ulrich begins the book in the midst of an 1870 "indignation meeting" in Salt Lake City, in which Mormon women gathered to protest the Cullom Bill, and this meeting is also where the book will end four hundred pages later. In the intervening pages, Ulrich shows how women as well as men were caught up in the religious and sexual experimentation of the first half of the nineteenth century on a continuum with other communities that put sexuality at the center of their spiritual practice and community life: celibacy among the Shakers, "complex marriage" in the Oneida community (adults could have multiple sexual partners; children were reared communally), and "celestial marriage" among the Latter-day Saints.<sup>3</sup> All of these perfectionist Christian communities saw heterosexual monogamy and nuclear families as institutions that interfered with their spiritual goals. And which other Americans were as invested in reforming American family and sexual life in the nineteenth century? Feminists. So it's not surprising that Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony show up in Salt Lake in 1871 to spread the message of feminism and women's suffrage, because "polygamy and monogamy were *both* oppressive systems" (p. xiii), but it was Mormon Utah that recognized women's voting rights first.

Ulrich's instinct to hew to the daily realities of mid-nineteenth-century missionary life and westward imperial expansion serves her well. The Mormons she portrays lead complicated lives—emotionally and sexually messy as well as frequently (literally) clogged with mud, dirt, and dysentery from their various moves and migrations. She focuses on the details of early Mormon life as they were revealed in diaries rather than retrospective memoirs, which brings the immediacy of their experimentation to life. These are not modern Latter-day Saints:

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3. Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

they drink hot beverages like tea and coffee, pass the whiskey jug, and drink beer too. Many women resisted plural marriage besides Emma Smith, but plenty of men appear to have been reluctant polygamists too. One of Ulrich's main protagonists, the prolific diarist and member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles and future church president Wilford Woodruff, endured gossip and peer pressure because he remained married only to Phebe Carter Woodruff for so long. (He eventually gave in and married several younger women, but only after Phebe had reached the end of her childbearing years.) For a religious faith built around family life, early Mormonism was extremely hard on families because it demanded suffering and deprivation—of the husbands and children who were abandoned by their wives and mothers gripped by the zeal of conversion, and of the wives and children left to shift for themselves in Illinois, Missouri, and on the Overland Trail by missionary husbands and fathers. Early church members were also pioneers of divorce, which Ulrich says was a safety valve for the pressures of polygamous family life. And they wrote it all down in prolix diaries and albums decorated with hearts, arrows, and keys in ink and cut paper, and stitched or embroidered their histories into samplers and quilts with silk floss, cotton thread, and human hair.

Although Ulrich's book is a bid to bridge two different intellectual traditions in American history, she seems to pitch her argument more at convincing Mormons than feminists that both of these traditions were woven into the fabric of early Mormon life. "Women's voices trouble the old stories," and listening to those voices is what women's historians do (p. 32). Women's history has come a long way from its birth as a field of professional inquiry that focused on the white women's suffrage movement and other histories of feminist activism. Women's historians have always taken women's work and ideas seriously, and that means taking seriously the ideas and work of women whose politics or faith we may not share. For the past twenty years, politically conservative women's activism and religiously conservative women have been the subjects of some of the most celebrated books in the field, and they were written

by feminist scholars.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, historians of sexuality—most of whom were trained as women’s historians—have worked to provide context and detail for understanding the experimental sexual culture of the antebellum US. For historians familiar with this literature, celestial marriage is as American as the applejack passed around in Hosea Stout’s “police men’s” jug at Winter Quarters in 1847 (pp. 165–66).<sup>5</sup>

Ulrich reminds her readers throughout her book that Mormon polygamy operated in a very different marital and sexual landscape in the mid-nineteenth century. As feminists of the time argued, monogamous (in theory) marriage radically disempowered women too, so that if Mormons offered women “patriarchy with a soft voice, male dominance with a caress[,] there was nothing here to distinguish Latter-day Saints from other Christians” (p. 40). It was a sign of the times. A comparison Ulrich doesn’t develop is the fact that polygamy was practiced in many Great Plains and western communities among the people that Mormons called “Lamanites.” There is ample evidence that polygamy became even more prominent as a result of the stresses of colonization throughout Native North America. Indeed, the stresses of Mormon refugee life combined with the imperative of missionary work that Ulrich documents so carefully suggest that polygyny served similar purposes in Mormon and Native American communities alike. We know that the Comanche and Kiowa, for example, practiced a polygamy that bears a strong resemblance to Mormon polygamy: wives were a status symbol, so the distribution of female labor correlated strongly with a man’s wealth and standing in his community. Recent work by junior scholars—especially historians of gender and sexuality—on polygamy

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4. Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740–1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

5. Helen Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Knopf, 2002); Susan E. Klepp, *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, and Family Limitation in America, 1760–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

inside and beyond the Latter-day Saints offers another means by which we might bring Mormon history and women's history together.<sup>6</sup>

*A House Full of Females* entirely succeeds in its task of reuniting Mormon history and women's history to tell a story fundamentally American: women and men of faith, moved by a vision of family and community unity with God, gathered to pray, work, and build something of lasting value for their descendants. (Secular historians would add that the journey was difficult and its outcome entirely uncertain.) Like the sundered Fourteenth Ward album quilt that serves as the book's central metaphor, we can see the seams, the individual stitches, and the wear and tear of 160 years, but it's a mantle large enough to tell many different stories.

**Ann M. Little** is professor of history at Colorado State University and the author of *The Many Captivities of Esther Wheelwright* (Yale University Press, 2016) and *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). She blogs at [Historiann.com](http://Historiann.com) and is on Twitter @Historiann.

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**W. PAUL REEVE:** Bancroft and Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has spent most of her academic career studying women, gender, and sexuality in early American history. In *A House Full of Females*, she now turns her attention toward the founding generation of Latter-day Saints, and the rewards are invigorating. How was it,

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6. See, for example, Christine Talbot, *A Foreign Kingdom: Mormons and Polygamy in American Political Culture, 1852–1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); Sarah M. S. Pearsall, "'Having Many Wives' in Two American Rebellions: The Politics of Households and the Radically Conservative," *American Historical Review* 118/4 (2013): 1001–28; Pearsall, "Native American Men—and Women—at Home in Plural Marriages in Seventeenth-Century New France," *Gender & History* 27/3 (2015): 591–610; Pearsall, "Respecting Marriage (Early and Often): Three Books on Mormon Polygamy," *Reviews in American History* 44/1 (2016): 90–98.

she wonders, that Mormon women came to champion women's rights and enjoy the political franchise fifty years ahead of female suffrage being granted nationwide? An 1870 indignation meeting on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, which witnessed masses of Mormon women speak out in opposition to the Cullom Bill, a piece of antipolygamy legislation then under consideration in Congress, is the starting and ending point of her study. What was it that led Mormon women to protest congressional legislation, to defend polygamy, and to speak out in favor of female suffrage, a right they won later that same year?

Ulrich's central questions are all the more perplexing given the patriarchal nature of Mormon society and the fact that outsiders frequently described LDS polygamy as a version of "white slavery." Latter-day Saints rejected the notion that Mormon women were held captive in a repressive system and instead emphasized plural marriage as a religious sacrament and its liberating potential. Scholarly treatments of the subject have tended to align along a similar binary. Ulrich's solution is to let Mormon women speak for themselves. Their voices, she tells us, "trouble the old stories" (p. 32).

To fully answer her questions, Ulrich leads readers on a variety of journeys across time and space as well as into the religious lives of first-generation converts to an upstart and suspect faith. She first steps back in time to 1835 and in space to Ohio, Connecticut, and Maine, where she explores the conversions of women and men into "a faith that promised wonders on wonders" (p. 5). Britain, Nauvoo, Iowa, Winter Quarters, the Overland Trail, Salt Lake City, Hong Kong, Hindoostan (India), Liverpool, and San Bernardino are the geographic ranges of her story as she follows various women and men whose spiritual yearnings relegated them to the economic, political, social, geographic, and religious margins. Joseph Smith's unfolding cosmology and his promises of celestial glory captivated these early Saints, especially as both men and women spoke in tongues, interpreted tongues, healed the sick, presided and preached, dreamed and prophesied. They built new settlements, temples, and Relief Society halls; cared for Native Americans and for the poor; dressed and buried their dead; blessed and anointed women for

childbirth; delivered babies; served missions; sustained themselves and their families while their husbands were on missions; and ultimately built a church from scratch.

Ulrich's chronological trajectory is detailed up through 1858 and the end of the Utah War and then comparatively uneven through the 1860s, ending back at the 1870 indignation meeting in Salt Lake City, which opened her story. By that point her readers have traveled the globe with her subjects and experienced many of the intimate details of their lives. What emerges is much more than an answer to Ulrich's questions—it is a gripping revitalization of Mormon history with women claiming their rightful place as actors, agents, and agitators who shaped their own destinies.

The cycles of life are ever present in Ulrich's narrative as the vicissitudes of birth, marriage, divorce, and death compel her story along and steep it in a spirit of compassion and understanding that only a historian of her caliber could achieve. This is not a dry and detached analysis, but rather it reads as if Ulrich herself got mud on her hands as she struggled through the sodden dirt of Iowa alongside her nineteenth-century subjects. This is not to suggest that Ulrich abandoned her duty as historian to evaluate, organize, interpret, analyze, and ultimately make sense of the past. To the contrary, she does just that, but in a way that draws readers in and makes them trust her assessments because she has done the difficult work of getting to know her subjects—on their terms, not Ulrich's.

This level of intimacy and immediacy is achievable because of Ulrich's source base. She largely confines herself to the letters, journals, poetry, and diaries of her subjects and then lets the letter writers and diary keepers speak for themselves. It is a compelling methodology and one in which Ulrich is an expert. She relishes not only the words that her subjects left behind, but the diaries and letters themselves. She describes their sizes and shapes as well as the penmanship, spelling skills (or lack thereof), and grammar of the various writers, the drawings they made in their diaries, the things that seemed important to them to record, and the things that did not. Ulrich gets to know her

subjects through the material culture they left behind, and then she shares her discoveries with her readers as if she were alone with them and revealing a new find for the first time. She is at ease with her sources and fluid with her assessments in a way that captivates and engages.

She also captures the spectrum of Mormon lives in the writings she selects. Prominent Mormons such as Wilford and Phebe Woodruff, Eliza R. Snow, and William Clayton are balanced with less well-known Saints such as Augusta Adams Cobb, Caroline Barnes Crosby, and Patty B. Sessions. In this way, a cross section of experiences emerges to shape our understanding of the place of women in Mormon history and American culture.

While Ulrich's sources reveal so much of the day-to-day details of life and death, the various responses to plural marriage, the difficulties of separation resulting from missionary assignments, and the challenges of creating new settlements as religious refugees, they do not and cannot explain the overall shape of the Mormon community in relationship to its individual diary keepers. Ulrich does an adequate job of tapping into secondary sources to give form to the proverbial forest, but a broader perspective is sometimes missing. Death pervades the diaries, which begs a variety of questions: What were death rates in Nauvoo, and how did they compare to the national average? How many Saints died on the trail from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters, how many died the first year at Winter Quarters, and how many died in Utah? Historians of the Mormon past have done the difficult job of calculating much of this information, which might have better contextualized the relentless deaths the diaries reveal. Demographic information on polygamy also continues to emerge as researchers such as Kathryn Daynes and Ben Bennion calculate the number of polygamous versus monogamous households in a given Utah community in a given census year. Average age at marriage, average number of wives per husband, and other such evidence are also available in the secondary sources. Tapping into some of this research would have allowed readers to better evaluate how representative the diary keepers were of Mormonism as a whole.

Certainly *A House Full of Females* is more a cultural history of early Mormonism than it is a history of Mormon polygamy, yet polygamy is a key focus. Ulrich is attuned to the debates surrounding polygamy, especially its fraught introduction under Joseph Smith's tutelage in Nauvoo, yet she does not get bogged down in the disputes. Her measured assessments are seamlessly woven into her story—perhaps too seamlessly for some scholars who might have hoped for an appraisal of Joseph Smith's relationship with Fanny Alger or Helen Mar Kimball Whitney.

Was plural marriage a cover for the excesses of Joseph Smith's libido or an excuse to gain sexual access to young women? Ulrich does not think so even as she explores a variety of female responses to its introduction: from rage and despair to caution and rejoicing. In her words, "plural marriage did not drop out of the heavens fully formed," and there was not "a single path to its acceptance" (p. 85). Some women expressed repugnance while others conveyed curiosity and ambition. Those Nauvoo women who accepted "the principle" forged a "religious vocation" and found belonging and even status (p. 85). Polygamy also offered economic and spiritual security, a way of rejecting convention, and an escape route from troubled marriages. Ultimately Ulrich demonstrates that polygamy would never have worked without the consent of women, and it is their agency that she emphasizes. As she puts it, male leaders "wanted to attract, not command, female loyalty" (p. 107).

The strength of *A House Full of Females* is the women themselves. Ulrich privileges their estimation of their own lives over twenty-first-century indignation over plural marriage. The women she studies were indignant that outsiders so blithely dismissed the possibility that Mormon women could have chosen their own paths into Mormonism and, for some of them, into plural marriage. Perhaps Ulrich's assessment of Eleanor McLean Pratt's anger over her treatment in an Arkansas courthouse offers an apt evaluation of why Mormon women defended plural marriage in 1870 and spoke up for women's rights thereafter. Eleanor was angry at the "self-righteousness of those who claimed to be protecting Latter-day Saint women by assaulting their choices" (p. 352). Far from assaulting their choices, Ulrich honors their words and their lives.

**W. Paul Reeve** is Simmons Professor of Mormon Studies at the University of Utah. He is the author of *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford, 2015). He is currently coediting with LaJean Carruth and Christopher Rich a documentary history of race, slavery, and servitude at the 1852 Utah Territorial legislature and creating a digital database of all known black Latter-day Saints from 1830 to 1930.

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**SARAH CARTER:** In my classes on women's and gender history in Western Canada, I like to introduce students to Zina Young Card, founder, along with her husband Charles Ora Card, of the Mormon settlements of southern Alberta. She challenges assumptions about subservient Mormon plural wives. A daughter of Brigham Young, she was raised in a house full of females and had worked as theater performer, a teacher, and a homesteader before settling in Canada in the late 1880s. She was active in the cause of women's suffrage; in 1879 she was a delegate to the first Congress of Women's Suffrage in Washington, DC, and gained national attention for her suffrage work in Utah. She was a plural wife, a mother of two boys, and a widow at a young age, and in 1884 she became the plural wife of Charles Card. Describing Zina Card in his memoir, Mountie Sam Steele wrote that "brilliant lawyers and able financiers . . . had all they could do to hold their own in arguments with the leading lady of the settlement." Steele added that "strange to say I found the Mormon women-folk the strongest supporters of polygamy."

*A House Full of Females* provides fresh and deep understanding of LDS women such as Card. This is a fascinating analysis of the complex history of how Mormon women came to be supporters of plural marriage and, to a lesser extent, how they also became ardent supporters of suffrage. It begins and ends with an "indignation meeting" of women held in Salt Lake City in 1870 organized to express their support for plural marriage and their outrage over federal legislation that meant their husbands could be imprisoned and Mormon property confiscated. That year a bill granting settler women the vote was passed in the Utah

legislature, and in 1871, when powerful advocates for women's suffrage Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony visited Utah, Mormon women rallied to that cause. The emergence of Utah settler women as political actors was confounding to outsiders, who saw this as a "paradox": "How could women simultaneously support a national campaign for political and economic rights while defending marital practices that to most people seemed relentlessly patriarchal?" (p. xiii). This book addresses that question, rejecting simplistic answers such as they were doing what the male leaders of the church demanded of them. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich stresses that "nothing outraged Mormon women more than the notion that they were simply pawns of the patriarchy" (p. 385).

Ulrich notes, "There could have been no such thing as plural marriage if hundreds of women had not accepted 'the principle' and passed it on to new generations" (p. 387). For some it was a means of salvation, offering the hope of future exaltation. Plural marriage offered spiritual and economic security for some, and for others it was an alternative to a troubled marriage or a way of defying convention. But accepting plural marriage was a long and fraught process. Drawing on the diaries, letters, and life writing of ordinary women and men to understand early Mormonism from their perspective, Ulrich follows the Saints from upstate New York to the Ohio Valley and to Utah, while also tracing the gradual embrace of plural marriage. There was "not a single path to its acceptance" (p. 85). Plural marriage "generated conflict and gossip," and "emotions pivoted from rage to melancholy and from joy to despondency" (p. 99). Women struggled to grasp the inchoate implications of plurality when first introduced to the practice.

There was never universal acceptance. Two of the wives of Brigham Young illustrate the diversity of responses. Augusta Cobb felt neglected and was not happy to share her husband with so many others, while Zina Jacobs (mother of Zina Card) was content as a plural wife. Ulrich points out that the sources do not always provide clear insight into the innermost thoughts of plural wives. Phebe Woodruff's husband, Wilford, was one of the last of the apostles to take a plural wife, and she was opposed to plural marriage until after she gave birth to her last

child at age forty-six, until she became “sick and wretched,” and after a revelation from God convinced her to accept the principle. She thereafter defended polygamy, but it is difficult to interpret her letters to her husband when she urged him to take other wives and wrote sentences such as “Don’t let me stand in your way in regard to that” (p. 347). Ulrich writes, “It is impossible to know whether her comments were supportive or sardonic” (p. 347). Yet at the indignation meeting, Phebe Woodruff warned Congress that if they imprisoned Mormon men, they would need “to make their prisons large enough to hold their wives, for where they go we will go also” (p. xii).

Strong and independent women are featured throughout this book. Zina Card was far from alone. As Ulrich demonstrates, from the earliest days Mormon women were willing to “push against the grain,” sometimes abandoning homes, families, and legal husbands. Through the Female Relief Society—founded in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1842; disbanded by Brigham Young in 1845; and reconstituted in Utah—women acquired organizational, speaking, and leadership experience. Although these societies declined in the 1860s, they were revived in 1870 with the indignation meeting. Women leaders of the organization included Eliza Snow, a plural wife of first Joseph Smith and later Brigham Young. She is followed throughout the book through her diary, letters, album, memoir, poetry, song, drawings, and needlework. She preserved the minutes of the original Nauvoo society, helped revive the societies in Utah, and was an organizer of the indignation meeting.

As to be expected in a book by Ulrich, there is an emphasis on material culture as a source for understanding the past, particularly the history of women. There are beautiful illustrations but also analysis of their quilts, embroidery, needlework, and paintings. Phebe Woodruff was president of the Salt Lake Fourteenth Ward Female Relief Society in 1857 when they created an “album quilt” amid a series of crises and threats. The quilt “takes us beneath headlines to the symbolic language through which Phebe Woodruff and her sisters defended their faith, their civility and their patriotism” (p. 338). The book also contains an analysis and illustrations of the floor plans of houses designed to

accommodate plural wives, and insight is provided into objects such as keys, crucial symbols in Mormon thought employed by both women and men in their writing and art.

While this book provides insight into the complexities of Mormon women's defense of plural marriage, I hoped to understand more deeply why they wanted the right to vote. This issue seems to have been rarely mentioned in the diaries and letters of the women studied here, although the sources relied on for this book—the writing of ordinary people—dwindle after 1858, for reasons that Ulrich can only speculate on, and these would have been the years of growing interest in the cause of suffrage. One last chapter deals with the period 1858–1872. While it mentions that by 1900 in Utah there were more people affiliated with the national suffrage movement than in any other state or territory in the United States, I am not clear why that was so (p. 386). I would also like to know more about the dissenters, those who broke with the church, such as Fanny Stenhouse, who became an anti-Mormon lecturer condemning plural marriage. But these are topics for other books; this is a beautifully written study that brings the spiritual and material struggles of ordinary men and women to life. The book exposes the “peculiar values” of the Mormons but also reveals “the many things they shared with those who considered them aliens” (p. xxv). With this book my students will now have much richer understanding of the lives of settlers to Canada such as Zina Card, who challenged conventions and made history.

**Sarah Carter** is a professor of history and Henry Marshall Tory Chair in the Department of History and Classics and in the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta.

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**LAUREL TATCHER ULRICH:** For an author, nothing is more satisfying than discovering that people you admire not only like your work but understand it. I was pleased by the praise Sarah Carter, Ann Little,

and Paul Reeve offered *A House Full of Females*, even more so by their insights into what I was trying to do in what is, admittedly, a complicated and many-faceted work. As I have warned my friends, “This may not be an easy book to read.”

Each reviewer pointed not just to the overall problem posed in the book—how women could simultaneously embrace plural marriage and women’s rights—but to the underlying methodological issues that drove my inquiry. As Paul Reeve observed, my goal was not so much to explain the indignation meeting of 1870 as to revitalize Mormon history by exploring ways in which women served as “actors, agents, and agitators who shaped their own destinies.” I was not interested in creating heroines. I wanted to know what women wrote down or created in the heat of events and what men said about them or to them.

*A House Full of Females* is a source-centered work. It focuses on diaries and other written documents, but as all three reviewers observed, it is also, at least in part, a material cultural study. As Sarah Carter noted, “beautiful illustrations” allowed by my publisher are not just there for looks but are subjects of analysis. Because the *Mormon Studies Review* is inherently interdisciplinary, I was especially pleased to see that aspect of the book highlighted. Despite excellent work done by scholars like Thomas Carter, Paul Anderson, Emily Utt, Jenny Reeder, and others, the field of material culture is still relatively undeveloped in Mormon studies or, perhaps more accurately, remains bound by disciplinary boundaries that make it difficult to bring together detailed studies of artifacts with broader historical queries.

Ann Little’s review highlights my attempt to “bridge LDS history and American women’s history.” She acknowledges the difficulty in doing that. Many Americans still find Mormon feminism paradoxical with or without polygamy. Yet she astutely observes that readers conversant with recent scholarship on sexuality and gender will not be surprised by what I found. For them, she writes, “celestial marriage is as American as the applejack passed around in Hosea Stout’s . . . jug.” She also suggests that it might not be easy to convince Mormons that their religious predecessors were sexual revolutionaries and pioneers in divorce.

She may be right about that. Latter-day Saints of my generation may have rejected plural marriage as an ideal, but we accepted its reality in our history. Unfortunately, many LDS feminists today grew up in ignorance of the practice, not just because fewer of them are descended from early church members but because polygamy has been systematically removed from the church curriculum. It is still there in the Doctrine and Covenants, though mostly ignored. So I found myself in the strange position of making Mormonism less exotic to general readers and more so to its own practitioners.

There are many things missing from the book, as each reviewer has kindly noted. One of them is a detailed exploration of relationships between Mormons and American Indians, some of whom were polygamists. Despite the fact that for a brief period Latter-day Saint women were deeply engaged in shipping clothing to the Paiute mission, I found very little on cross-cultural encounters. Those who wish to fill this gap have an excellent model in Sarah Carter's comparative study of Canadian prosecution of Mormon and Blackfoot polygamists later in the nineteenth century. Last spring, while I was teaching Carter's book in one of my courses, I invited Blackfoot/Metis historian Rosalyn R. LaPier, who was a visitor scholar at Harvard, to speak to one of my classes. We both laughed when we found ourselves swapping stories about our polygamous great-grandmothers.

There are still many rooms to explore in our historical houses.

**Laurel Thatcher Ulrich**, a graduate of the University of Utah, Simmons College, and the University of New Hampshire is 300th Anniversary University Professor at Harvard University, where she has taught since 1995. She is the author of many books and articles on early American history, women's history, and the use of artifacts as sources in history. Although she has published personal essays in Mormon periodicals, *A House Full of Females* is her first full-length work of scholarship to address Mormon history. She is a past president of the American Historical Association and the Mormon History Association.