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## Women In Utah History

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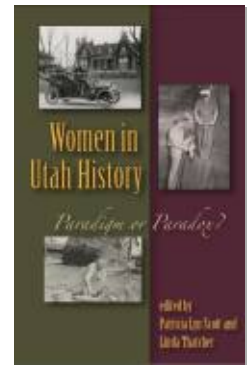
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## Women's Life Cycles

1850 to 1940

Jessie L. Embry

In the twentieth-first century, Utah women can see many examples that they can “have it all.” In public life, such examples include a woman governor, women who have served in the state and federal legislature, and women judges. Women are also successful business leaders, educators, entrepreneurs, and blue-collar workers. Professions that belong exclusively to women or men have apparently disappeared. As the chapters in this book have pointed out, there have always been outstanding women in many fields; but until recently, there was a pattern, or life script, that women were expected to follow and many Utah women accepted it. As historian Gerda Lerner explained, historically women's development

was dependent on her relationship to others and was often determined by them; it moved in wavelike circuitous motion. . . . For the girls such rises were . . . closely connected to distinct stages in the biological life transitions from childhood to adolescence to marriage. . . . [This resulted in] a shifting of domesticity from one household to another and the onset of her serious responsibilities: childbirth, childbearing and the nurture of the family. Finally came the crisis of widowhood and bereavement which could mean, depending on her economic circumstances, increasing freedom or autonomy or a difficult struggle for economic survival.<sup>1</sup>

While other chapters in this book focus on characteristics distinctive to Utah women, this essay makes the point that Utah women were not greatly different from their sisters across the nation. Their lives also followed the expected life cycle. Although it focuses on Mormon women as the dominant majority and makes no effort to duplicate the information in Helen Papanikolas's chapter on ethnic women (see chap. 4), nothing in my research indicates that women of other faiths (see chap. 3) experienced their life stages or life cycles in ways that were dramatically different.

The first part of this chapter surveys the literature of life patterns over time as a vital and important part of understanding women's experience; then I show how the pattern for Utah women remained essentially the same from the frontier period until World War II. The "wavelike circuitous motion" Lerner described—birth, marriage, maternity, widowhood, and death—was the same for all of these generations to a striking degree. World War II gave women more employment options; and significant psychological and social changes developed from the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Although many, perhaps most, Utah women still follow the same basic pattern, they must now do so as a conscious choice instead of growing up and into a script that had not fundamentally changed since their grandmothers' day. For this reason, the chapter focuses on the lifespan experiences of Utah women before World War II, and argues that they were more like other American women than they were different.

### WHY STUDY LIFE CYCLES?

Studies like Lerner's consider that the life elements shared by most women are of greatest importance and seek to identify those patterns and their strengths, rather than writing from an assumption of uniqueness. There are advantages in viewing similarities in life patterns over time. As sociologist Tamara K. Hareven explained, "Because of the emphasis on social classes in a narrow, structural approach, more subtle relationships [have] escaped attention. Generations were treated as chronological sequences, rather than as stages in the life cycles."<sup>2</sup> By looking at cycles over several generations rather than seeking isolated patterns within a limited time frame, the historian can ask questions about how daughters used information from their mothers and grandmothers to adjust to new circumstances. As a second advantage, life cycle studies shift "the focus of study of human development from stages and ages to transitions and timing of life events."<sup>3</sup>

Does such an approach ignore individual lives? No, studying life cycles requires studying individual lives—many of them—to find the patterns held in common. The question of how many lives need to be studied to find genuine trends is important, yet social scientists have found that basic patterns become clear with a relatively small number of cases. In a study of bakers and their apprentices, Daniel Bertaux discovered that fifteen life stories gave him a fairly clear picture of the basic life structure. He learned a great deal from the first life story, and the second and third and fourth stressed new information that might have been lost in the first narrative. However, although "each new life brought something new, the proportion of the new versus the already known was getting smaller all the time."<sup>4</sup>

After reading over three hundred oral histories and approximately one hundred published life sketches, I agree with Bertaux about the pervasive power of the life-cycle pattern. The first stories I read provided a great deal of

information. As I read the lives of more women, I found differences in each one, but the common pattern became more apparent. Although a significant percentage of these women were Mormons, their religious beliefs seem to have had little direct effect on their life cycles. Being female was more determinant than being Mormon.

Some critics of the life-cycle approach point out that, while women repeat the same patterns, timing of crucial events varies greatly from family to family and time period to time period.<sup>5</sup> Hareven agrees that such variation was especially true during the late nineteenth century when “pressing economic needs and familial obligations took precedence over established norms of timing.” But only the timing changed, not the “set of sequences.”<sup>6</sup>

### WOMEN’S LIFE STAGES AND FRONTIER CHALLENGES

During the early frontier period of Utah’s settlement—about the first ten or fifteen years of each community—women often stepped out of their traditional roles to do what needed to be done. In 1854, Brigham Young encouraged the women at a conference to help harvest the crops rather than let them rot in the fields, but in 1864 Young told women in another conference that “plowing, raking, and making hay . . . this hard laborious work belongs to men.”<sup>7</sup> By the 1870s and 1880s, federal census takers recorded that most women in Utah were “keeping house.”<sup>8</sup>

According to Brigham Young, “It is the calling of the wife and mother to know what to do with everything that is brought into the house, laboring to make her home desirable to her husband and children, making herself an Eve in the midst of a little paradise of her creation.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Terrence Heaton, whose mother raised her children in Orderville in the early 1900s, explained that she “never did do any work outside of the home. She was a real homemaker.”<sup>10</sup>

The typical pattern of a nineteenth-century woman’s life was learning her female identity largely in terms of her future duties as a wife and mother from her own mother at home, receiving some education, and possibly—if school were abbreviated or marriage postponed—working at whatever job or trade her skill level could command. Such employment was almost always relatively unskilled and seen as temporary, even if it continued beyond marriage. Marriage, whatever its timing, came for nearly all women, followed by children, whatever their numbers. A woman trained her own daughters, grew old, contributed aid to her children as they began raising their own children, experienced widowhood, became increasingly dependent on her children for material and emotional support, and died while the cycle repeated itself.

Of course, there were exceptions to this pattern. Some girls died before maturity. Some never married. Some led lives disrupted by criminality (including prostitution), illness, or addiction. Some were widowed when they were young, others when they were older. Some predeceased their husbands, leaving their

children to be incorporated into another woman's cycle. The discussion below, however, follows the traditional pattern.

### FEMALE CHILDHOOD

Girls and boys in the nineteenth century learned their responsibilities from their mothers; and from childhood, their talents and drives were channeled in different directions. "For boys, the family was the place from which one sprang and to which one returned for comfort and support, but the field of action was the larger world," observed Gerda Lerner. "For girls, the family was to be the world, their field of action, the domestic circle."<sup>11</sup> Mothers were expected to teach "those traits that would ensure success in the domestic sphere—submissiveness, loyalty, gentleness and social grace."<sup>12</sup> Girls of good families learned from their mothers how to manage homemaking duties so that home became a shelter from worldly pressures for the men of the family.

Young girls imitated their mothers, role-playing their future. Reta Bartell, who grew up around the turn of the century in Cedar City, Utah, remembered:

We imitated adults in our play. We played "mamas" and "daddy's" and at "keeping house." We dressed the cats in doll clothes and wheeled them around in the doll buggy because they were alive like babies were. . . . We used to cook dinner "for the men." We would set the play table with doll dishes and cut potatoes or apples for all the different foods. Then we would ask the boys to come and eat. They always behaved perfectly until all the food was gone; then they would tip the table over and run. We would vow that we would never ask them to eat again, but we always did.<sup>13</sup>

This example may reveal more about men and women's roles than Bartell meant it to.

In their study of nineteenth-century Mormon girls, Leonard J. Arrington and Susan Arrington Madsen asked: "What did these pioneer girls do? Mostly it would seem, they worked. They helped their mothers; they helped their fathers; they helped their grandparents, if one or more were near; they helped their neighbors; they helped their brothers and sisters. The specific tasks of the girl, in most instances, were to help with the housework and gardenwork."<sup>14</sup> As these girls worked with their mothers, they learned what would be expected of them when they became housekeepers in their own homes.

Much of this learning was the transfer of specific skills. Laura Clark Cook, who was born in the 1880s, remembered, "I would help Mother make soap and candles, churn butter, and do other household chores," including the Saturday duty of filling the kerosene lamps, trimming the wicks, and cleaning their chimneys. Yet "with all the work we had making candles, churning butter, making bread, filling the lamps . . . we had time to sit down and sew."<sup>15</sup> Ellis Reynolds Shipp of Pleasant Grove, who later became a physician, also learned



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Young girl playing with her doll and buggy, role-playing her future.

to sew from her mother. “I was handy with my needle. I could sew and knit and do anything (I thought) that any woman could do, thanks to a wise mother’s early training.”<sup>16</sup>

Housekeeping frequently included caring for chickens or milking cows, and almost always meant gardening. Although all the work was necessary, much of it was monotonously routine. Mary Jane Mount Tanner complained in 1878, “I am neglectful of my diary, but there seems so little to write. One day comes and goes, and the next follows; the same routine of work is gone through, and the same remains to be done.”<sup>17</sup>

Rhea Hart Grandy recalled that her mother, who lived in Preston, Idaho, just across the Utah state line, “had the garden mostly to herself. She didn’t have much help with it. That is the way it is on a farm. The men would do the major work, and the women would take care of the garden.”<sup>18</sup> Rhea’s brother, Marcus Hart, recalled that his mother took great pride in her chickens.

Woman performing the domestic chore of peeling potatoes, Elfie Huntington, photographer, ca. 1904.



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“In fact, we used to think that the chickens came first with mother. But we felt we were sort of a close second.”<sup>19</sup> Jonathon S. Cannon explained, “We had cows that were problems, that were hard for anyone to handle and my mother could always handle them.”<sup>20</sup>

Maurine Eyring Boyd of Thatcher, Arizona, the daughter of settlers from Utah, remembered milking as “very, very unpleasant . . . getting up early, rain or shine, when it was very cold. When it was warm, we had to contend with flies. I didn’t know which was worse, the cold or the flies.”<sup>21</sup> Daughters also helped with the extra work of harvest time. Zina Patterson Dunford of Bloomington, Idaho, also on the Utah-Idaho border, reported that, for each of their two crops of hay, “the men folks would do the mowing and raking. When it was time to haul it or stack it, then the rest of the kids would help. The girls would . . . drive the horses to unload [and] . . . help tromp the hay down on the load so that we could get more in.”<sup>22</sup> Seneth Hayer Thomson learned how to thin, hoe, and top sugar beets. During World War I, when her brothers went to war, she and her sisters “did things that the boys used to do like pitch hay and shock grain.”<sup>23</sup>

But the spheres of men’s and women’s activities were sharply differentiated; and after the temporary need or emergency was over, girls returned to house-related activities. Furthermore, women helped outside when there was an emergency, but



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“Harvest time.” The whole family unit was involved in the harvest, ca 1900.

men rarely helped in the home, even when the need was acute, although boys could sometimes be pressed into service. According to Howard Charles Woodfield, who grew up in North Ogden in the 1920s, “On a farm it is necessary for the whole family to work together to make it work. My mother’s job was caring for the house. My father or any of us boys very seldom ever helped in the house. I had a sister, and she worked in the house part of the time and then out part of the time. The cleaning, preparing meals and actually drying of fruit and food was done by my mother with what help she could get from the boys.”<sup>24</sup>

Mothers also taught their children values. For example, Amy Brown Lyman, later general president of the Mormon women’s organization, the Relief Society, identified “loyalty to church leaders, industrious living, and church and community services” as central values” she had learned from her mother.<sup>25</sup> Dorthea F. Parent, also a Mormon, understood that “the main thing our parents wanted for us, especially daughters was to have testimonies of the gospel. They were really staunch in the Church.”<sup>26</sup>

Some families stressed education more than others, depending on personal values and also the time period. To some parents, daughters needed only to read and write; others felt they should have some type of vocation, in case they needed to support themselves. According to Dorthea Parent, who lived in Benson, Salt Lake City, and Kamas, between 1900 and 1910, “My folks really wanted us kids to get an education. They tried to help us and encourage us all they could.”<sup>27</sup>



## YOUNG ADULTHOOD

The typical age at which Utah young women married depended, to some extent, on the decade and community. When a girl married in her teens and moved directly from her parents' home to her husband's home, she usually did the same domestic work, with the differences that it was a beginning household, rather than an established one, and that she now controlled the work rather than helping her mother. Others, however, worked outside the home before they married, although it is not possible to determine which proportion of women followed which pattern.

A study of age at marriage shows an unvarying pattern for Utah women who married between 1870 and 1915: the largest group were married by nineteen, the next largest were married by age twenty-four, and the next largest group married by age twenty-nine.<sup>29</sup> Or, to look at it a different way, 56.7 percent of the Utah women born between 1850–54 were married by age twenty, while 48.6 percent of the women born thirty years later did not marry until they were between twenty and twenty-four.<sup>30</sup> Their work did not, however, generate independence. Rather, according to one scholar, it was “only an extension of traditional values which regarded the family as the fundamental economic unit.”<sup>30</sup> All family members were expected to contribute their labor to the family income, including daughters.

Wage-earning Utah girls frequently hired out as mother's helpers or “hired girls” to do housework, thus applying the skills they had learned at home from their mothers. In 1873, twelve-year-old Sarah Endiaette Young Vance of Fairview, Utah, hired out to work in the homes of other families. She “did everything from washing clothes and ironing to fixing meals and general housekeeping.” When she was fifteen, she took care of a family in her hometown while the parents went to Salt Lake. “I did all the work and took care of the milk and made butter,” she reported, “When they returned at the end of twelve days I had make enough butter to pay my wages.”<sup>31</sup>

Other girls expanded their work experience from the home to the office. Loretta M. Rigby, at age nineteen, began work at the Sego Milk Products Company in Richmond in 1910, to help with family finances after her father died.<sup>32</sup> During the 1920s, after Violet Bird Alexander graduated from the eighth grade and attended high school for a part of a year, she worked at the beet dump of the Amalgamated Sugar Company in Mendon. She also clerked at the Mendon Post Office, helped cook for threshing crews, and did housework. She attended one more year of high school in Logan, then began working in the county treasurer's office in 1927. She married in 1931 and continued working until 1935 when the family moved shortly after the birth of her first child.<sup>33</sup>

Most young women chose traditional female jobs such as teaching, nursing, and office work when they had a choice of training. Two Parent sisters, Dorthea and Leonta, attended the LDS Business College during the 1910s.



Roy Winchester and Effie May Miller married at Mill Creek (Salt Lake County) March 25, 1896.

*Courtesy Marjorie Winchester Scott.*

Myrtle, a third sister, went to the University of Utah and became a teacher. Dortha ultimately chose that profession as well. Two more sisters, Aurelia and Geneva, became nurses, while the youngest, Vesta, became a stenographer.<sup>34</sup>

Because of her childhood of “economic deprivation and poverty,” Mary Jane Mount Tanner of Salt Lake City was determined to have a vocation that would bring her some financial security. She became a teacher in the 1850s.<sup>35</sup> Ada Palmer of Sandy taught in Grand County after she finished her normal education at the University of Utah in 1925. She had decided to become a teacher because “it only took one year to be certified,” but while she was in school, the state changed its requirements to two years, thus doubling her projected training time.<sup>36</sup>

Lucile Barlow Clark of Bountiful decided to become a nurse and, in 1916, took a course in Salt Lake City offered by the Relief Society. She supported herself during that time by keeping house for a widower and his family. She graduated in 1918 during the flu epidemic so she had plenty of employment in people’s homes. She also worked with Dr. Jane Scofield, one of

her instructors, on obstetric cases in Salt Lake City.<sup>37</sup>

Even trained professions like teaching or nursing were seen as temporary, premarriage employment, however. Until World War II shortages forced reappraisal of policy, many school districts in Utah required women to quit teaching once they married, and nearly all of them required women teachers to resign when they became pregnant. Helen Peterson Redd, whom grew up in Wyoming and who was a teacher in San Juan County in the late 1920s, reported, "In our contract it said if we married during the year we forfeited our last month of wages and would not be rehired." Teachers who planned on marrying were also expected not to sign contracts.<sup>38</sup> She taught one year and did not sign a second contract since she planned to marry John Redd whom she had met in Utah. This contractual stipulation did not single out teachers for discrimination. It rather reflected the middle-class assumption that a woman, by choice, nature, and nurture would devote her full time to her husband and future children.

Some husbands felt uneasy about employed wives. Diantha Cox Sherratt worked in hotels and homes in Cedar City; but when she married in 1919, "my husband wouldn't allow me to work."<sup>39</sup> Thressa Lewis Frost, of Monticello, described her work experience "until I got married when I was twenty one."<sup>40</sup>

#### COURTSHIP AND MARRIED LIFE

Western historian John Mack Faragher in his book on the Overland Trail reminds us, "It is important to remember how dependent rural women were upon marriage. The public world was closed to respectable women; alternative careers to that of housewife and mother were almost inconceivable."<sup>41</sup> Mary Jane Mount's description of her marriage to Myron Tanner probably mirrored the feeling of other women: "I had a strong manly arm to lean on for comfort and support; and his wisdom and good natural intelligence gained him a position of trust and honor in the Church and in society."<sup>42</sup>

Girls under age twenty who married during the 1870s through the 1890s nearly always married men significantly older than themselves. According to Geraldine Mineau, a researcher at the University of Utah, in almost 40 percent of Utah marriages during these three decades, the husband was more than six years older. Only 1 percent of women under twenty married younger men. In contrast, women who married after age twenty-five, married men who were either the same age or younger in 55 percent of the cases.<sup>43</sup>

In 1880, thirteen-year-old Catherine Heggie of Clarkston was clerking in a store when she met sixteen-year-old William Griffiths. They attended sleigh-riding parties and circuses, and eventually she married him in the Logan Temple in 1886.<sup>44</sup> Pearl Bliss met Herm Butt at stake conference in Monticello and saw him occasionally when he came to Moab to celebrations. After a couple of years of courtship, they married in 1932.<sup>45</sup> No women among the 400 that

I looked at for this chapter left a specific record of adjustment to marriage—sexual initiation, decision-making patterns, or discussions (if any) of fertility and child-rearing philosophies.

#### CHILDBEARING YEARS

After marriage came “the dictatorial rule of a two-and-a-half-year cycle of childbirth, of which nineteen or twenty months were spent in advanced pregnancy, infant care, and nursing. Until her late thirties, a woman could expect little respite from the physical and emotional wear and tear of nearly constant pregnancy or breastfeeding.<sup>46</sup> This pattern, according to Colleen Whitley, “attracted little attention, even when it carries enormous social import, like the raising of the next generation of human beings.”<sup>47</sup>

Geraldine Mineau’s study shows that Utah women born in 1840, who would have been raising families during the 1860s, had 9.1 children. By the time women born during 1885–89 had families during the first decade of the twentieth century, they were having, on the average, 6.56 children.<sup>48</sup> For nearly all women born before 1859, the birth of the last child came at age forty, meaning that she had spent at least twenty years of her life had having children. That mother of nine had experienced eighty-one months of pregnancy at about two and a half year intervals, the first baby coming within the first eighteen months.<sup>49</sup> A nineteenth-century Utah woman would be, on average, sixty-two or sixty-three when her last child left home. She would die herself within the next two to seven years.<sup>50</sup> By the end of the century, childbearing was being completed at about the age of thirty-nine, a barely perceptible drop, then thirty-eight.

Although it is probable that some mothers felt overburdened by this cycle and faced a new pregnancy with dismay, most of those who left records reflected the convention that children were a blessing. Mary Jane Mount Tanner, who had nine children in sixteen years, wrote in her journal about the last: “The baby grows nicely and we all think him very sweet.” Two years later, she recorded his birthday and called him “a pet with all the family.”<sup>51</sup>

Many women had little medical assistance in childbirth. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, often one midwife would deliver all the babies in the community. Ann Amelia Chamberlain remembered that Aunt Harriet Bowers was called by a Mormon official to be a midwife in Orderville with the promise that, if she went when she was asked, no mother she cared for would die. She delivered over a thousand babies and this promise was fulfilled.<sup>52</sup>

Marie Ekins Redd recalled that the midwife attending her first child’s birth in Blanding in 1919 arrived, “just immaculate, hair done up nicely, dressed all in white.” Marie was in labor all night with a complicated birth. “The cord was wrapped around the baby’s neck, which kept her from being born. I was so exhausted. I had to be urged not to give up. Sister Palmer kept saying, ‘Don’t you want your baby?’ ‘Oh, yes,’ I would answer but I was too exhausted to stay conscious. The midwife left with her hair all down. The poor dear, she looked

like she was the one she had been in the hard labor." The second child was born with only a neighbor's help.<sup>53</sup>

In rural areas, midwives continued to provide almost all the obstetrical care into the late 1920s and 1930s. However, in urban areas, doctors began to take over obstetrical duties by the early 1900s. Mary Elizabeth Lindsay Bennion gave birth to eleven children in three communities, all delivered by physicians: a Dr. Fairbee in Granger, a Dr. Sharp in Salt Lake City, and a Dr. Budge of Logan between 1893 and 1913.<sup>54</sup>

### CHILD-REARING

Mothers were responsible for child-care during a youngster's first five or six years virtually alone except for help from a neighbor, a sister, a mother, or a hired girl. When the boys were old enough to help with the fieldwork, the fathers took over responsibility for them. This division of emotional responsibility also meant that women bore the primary burden in illness and death of young children, not only of nursing them during illness, but of grieving when they died. Although the deaths of children are underreported, genealogy records available for Utah families indicate that more than 18,000 children died between 1879 and 1899, a mortality rate of 60.5 per thousand.<sup>55</sup> In 1917, the year before the influenza pandemic, the mortality rate was even higher—69.4 per thousand.<sup>56</sup>

Aurelia Spencer Rogers of Farmington had five of her twelve children die in infancy between 1860 and 1871. When Howard, the fourth child and the first to go, died, she recorded, "I have been so happy previous to this; the trials of poverty and sickness that we had passed through were nothing compared to this great sorrow that had overtaken me; and I mourned for my baby incessantly." As four more children died, Rogers almost lost faith in God but reconciled herself to this suffering with the explanation: "Perhaps all the people of God would have to pass through certain ordeals to prove whether they would trust in Him to the end."<sup>57</sup>

Erma Valentine Jacobs recalled a run of scarlet fever in Brigham City when she was eight or nine years old in 1912. All one summer the family was quarantined with the disease. Although none of her family died, others were not as fortunate.<sup>58</sup> Pearl Bliss Butt remembered an epidemic of diphtheria in Moab about 1902. "Several children died that winter; three from one family and two from another. In several families, one child died."<sup>58</sup>

Measles, chicken pox, and polio were other diseases which quarantined and killed children. During the flu epidemic of 1918, children were among the first victims. Many quarantined families had to depend on neighbors to leave food on their doorsteps. When a child or an adult died, the body had to be buried immediately without a funeral for fear of infection. The women consistently provided most of the actual nursing and neighborly care.

In such vulnerability and risk of emotional pain, many women, no doubt, found ways of distancing themselves emotionally from their children

while others, like Aurelia Rogers, developed faith in the consolations of religion with its promised reunions. Still others developed especially tender ties with their children, particularly those between mother and daughter. The separate spheres of traditional gender relations fostered such closeness. LaRue Cox Jefferies felt that “Mother was my good friend. I was very close to her. We did many things together in the home like the sewing, the housework and everything. She was my friend and my counselor and helped through all my illnesses. She was just a tremendous help to me all that I did.”<sup>60</sup>

### WOMEN’S WORK

Besides caring for children, there was work after marriage and plenty of it, but seldom employment. Between 1870 and 1920, the percentage of women in the Utah labor force was lower than the national average—5.2 percent in 1870 compared to the national average of 14 percent. By 1920, the rates stood at 15.7 percent for Utah and 20.4 percent nationally, a smaller gap.<sup>61</sup> Women could extend their household work into the marketplace in a minor way by selling milk, butter, cheese, poultry, eggs, and/or garden vegetables. Others took in boarders or laundry.<sup>62</sup> When Meda Lucille Jenkins was growing up in Newton during the 1880s through 1910s, the family “had cows to milk, and we separated the milk. [Mother] sold the cream, and that is what she ran the house on.”<sup>63</sup> Elna Jonsson Merrill of Richmond, in Cache County, during the 1890s and 1900s, sold fruit from the family orchard and traded eggs at the local mercantile to buy matches, coal oil, and occasionally candy for the children.<sup>64</sup> Outside employment for mothers, as for daughters, was usually seen as temporary and usually required no training. LaRue Cox Jefferies’s mother clerked in her husband’s store in St. George. Lula Rigby Larsen’s mother took over supporting the family financially when her father served a proselytizing mission for the LDS Church in the 1880s. “Those were hard times for my mother,” Larsen recalled. By keeping a cow and chickens, she was able to sell eggs and make and sell “a little butter.”<sup>65</sup>

For many women of this period, community service or church service supplied much of the sense of connectedness and contribution that employment now provides for some of their daughters. Zora Kay Hansen explained that her mother, raising her family in Mona during the 1900s and 1910s, didn’t work outside the home, “but bless her! If there was ever anyone sick in the ward, she was right there with something to eat for them.”<sup>66</sup> Pearl Butt’s mother worked in the Relief Society in Moab during the 1890s and 1900s. “It seemed to me like she was gone fully half the time taking care of the sick and the dying, helping deliver babies, assisting in emergencies and helping out when there was illnesses.”<sup>67</sup>

Even when the exceptional circumstances interrupted the cycle of generation-centered domesticity, it was seldom completely broken. After about 1880, the number of single women increased simultaneously with a gradual

decline of polygamy and expanded economic opportunities for women. In 1870, there were 102.4 men for every 100 women; by 1890 the gender ratio had risen to 112.3 men for every 100 women. The balance continued to decline, but Utah women would not outnumber men until 1960.<sup>68</sup> Only 13 percent of Utah's women between ages twenty-five and twenty-eight were single in 1890, compared to the national average of 25.4 percent; by 1910, the figure stood at 17.5 percent for Utah and 24.9 percent nationally.<sup>69</sup>

Still, single women worked at "traditional" jobs as secretaries, and clerks. When they had no means of support, they were often dependent on their relatives.<sup>70</sup> Some postponed marriage to take care of aging parents, thus prolonging the daughter role. Ione Naegle Moss, who married in 1936 at age twenty-nine, described herself as "an old maid schoolteacher. . . . I couldn't get married before because Mother and the family needed my financial help."<sup>71</sup>

English professor Alice Louise Reynolds (1873–1938) never married but probably never described herself as "an old maid schoolteacher." She was proud of being Brigham Young University's first woman professor in a field other than the domestic sciences, achieved a remarkable record of study and travel, oriented her life toward serving others, and balanced her activities around people, profession, country, and church. She wrote to her sister Polly in her declining years: "I am not afraid to die. I have lived the best I could, and I am sure no girl or woman ever had a more wonderful life, with more opportunities, more privileges, more friends."<sup>72</sup>

Stena Scorup of Salina (1888–1950), also centered her single life around service to school and community. She taught school most of her life, served as Salina's mayor, and was a missionary for the Mormon Church. In contrast to Alice, she viewed her life as very ordinary and full of missed opportunities. She wrote:

to my nieces and nephews and to all the previous and younger generation whom I adore and in whom I am so much interested. Do not follow my example. Get married and make a home of your very own and have as many children as you can educate as they should be. Do not get lost in your profession and work or allow home responsibilities, however urgent and necessary, deprive you of having a family and making a real home of your own for them.<sup>73</sup>

## WIDOWHOOD

Another major interruption came when a mother died young and could not complete the cycle. In most cases, the father did not try to take on her tasks but simply "replaced" her, either by remarrying or by assigning the mother's duties to the oldest daughter. In 1861, when Ellis Reynolds Shipp was fourteen, her mother died. Ellis wrote, "I had never known grief. It was my first real sorrow. I became sorrowful and moody. I was no more the gay and lighthearted girl I had been." She

became the homemaker for her father, two sisters, and two brothers, responsible for cooking, cleaning, and washing while her brothers took care of the farm.<sup>74</sup>

When Katherine Cannon Thomas's mother died in 1930 in Salt Lake City, Katherine was twenty-eight, the oldest of three children at home. Her father, a polygamist, left Katherine with full responsibility for her seventeen-year-old brother, who had polio, and her twenty-two-year-old sister, Sally, who was attending school. Katherine, a teacher, gave up their house because she didn't think she could keep paying on the mortgage, and rented an apartment for them. She said, "If I were going to pay for the food and rent for the kids, I would do what I could, but I couldn't do the impossible." Later a couple who ran an art store where Sally worked took Sally in.<sup>75</sup>

Widowhood, though a natural, and to some extent, inevitable part of the cycle, was seen as the ultimate disruption. Emmeline B. Wells married three times, twice as a plural wife. Her first husband, James Harris, deserted her in Nauvoo when she was sixteen, and she married Newel K. Whitney in 1845. He died in 1850, and she married Daniel H. Wells in 1852 as his seventh wife. She did not live with the rest of Wells's wives and longed for more attention from him. In 1874, twenty-four years after Whitney's death and while she was married to Wells, she recorded in her diary: "I was very low-spirited, every time anyone spoke to me I was crying. . . . I longed to see my husband who was dead. Why can we not call them to us in our grief and sorrow, why cannot our dead come back to us if only for one sweet hour?"<sup>76</sup>

When Lula Rigby Larsen's father died in 1906 after twenty-five years of marriage, leaving his wife with twelve children, she recounted, "Mother took it hard. She had been president of the Primary and president of the Relief Society and had been very active in the Church. I suppose it was because of the sorrow, strain and all. After that I don't remember her going out too much. Then her health began to fail."<sup>77</sup>

The emotional shock was exacerbated by economic uncertainty for most widows, especially if there were young children. Bernitta Frandsen Bartley's husband died of a heart attack in 1937 when he was thirty-three, leaving her with two preschoolers. When she was interviewed in 1982, she had been a widow for forty-five years. She explained that, despite the problems, "I raised two wonderful U.S. citizens and bought three homes. I did it with a sewing machine."<sup>78</sup> Other young widows received help from other family members. Dorothy Redd Jameson remembered that, after her father died in 1928, leaving ten children, Charles Redd, an uncle and the administrator of her father's estate, provided clothing and treats and gave the children jobs at his ranch as they got older.<sup>79</sup>

Older women who became widows often moved in with a daughter or son, "helping" as they were able. Zina Patterson Dunford remembered her Grandmother Patterson helping with the weaving during the early 1900s by winding the shuttles. Grandmother Patterson "was a dear old soul. She used to



always have peppermints in her pocket . . . to reward us for any little thing we would do for her."<sup>80</sup>

Widows also relied heavily on their children for care when they became ill. Lucile Barlow Clark's grandmother moved in with her daughter after a stroke. "My mother was taking care of her in our home [in Bountiful] where she could be with her little family. I can still see her just as plain as I did then sitting in a black wicker chair by the north window in the kitchen."<sup>81</sup>

Sometimes, when timing, opportunity, and personality coincided, widowhood marked the beginning of a new phase. Some women launched into a second marriage. Others developed personal or professional interests. Emmeline B. Wells, after her shattering grief of 1874, editorialized in the *Woman's Exponent*, "Happy the woman who had the foresight to see that through forty years of experience she had matured the ability to commence a grand, useful second half of her life."<sup>82</sup> Sarah Melissa Granger Kimball was such a woman. After her mother and husband passed away in the 1860s, she adopted a daughter, became president of her ward Relief Society in Salt Lake City, and became active in the women's rights movement in the 1880s and 1890s. As her biographer summarized: "The last thirty years of her life would be public rather than private years, during which time her work with the Fifteenth Ward Relief Society would make her realize the value of her strong opinions and her administrative talents."<sup>83</sup>

## DIVORCE

Divorce, though comparatively rare during this period and more a function of divorce laws than of marriage quality, also interrupted the traditional life stages for women. Divorce was always an option in Utah, though for the most part an unwelcome one. Between 1867 and 1909, more women than men sought divorces. The most frequent reasons were, in order of numbers, neglect, desertion, cruelty, and adultery.<sup>84</sup> Susa Young Gates, married at sixteen in 1872, gave birth to two children, and divorced after five years of marriage. She did not plan to remarry but instead decided she had a "destiny in this Church to fulfill" and became a faculty member at Brigham Young Academy. Her resolution lasted only five years. She remarried in 1880 and had eleven more children, only four of whom survived to adulthood, maintained an active life of participation in various LDS and public organizations, and became a voluminous writer.<sup>85</sup>

## SUMMARY

Although the economic, linguistic, and cultural settings of ethnic women in Utah meant that they experienced their life stages in different settings (see chap. 4), their major life events were very similar to those of Caucasian women in Utah. They were "dutiful daughters, wives, mothers, and homemakers. They



Four generations of one family visually represent the stages and cycles of women's lives. Martha J. Perkins Howell, Mary Lucille Perkins Bankhead, Ruth H. Jackson, and baby Juanita Spillman, now the mother of a new generation.

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nurtured, sustained, and consoled. They maintained order and tranquility and were the fixed point of reference in a chaotic and uncertain world.”<sup>86</sup> The women described in this chapter could have lived almost anywhere in the United States. They grew up in homes where their mothers taught them their future responsibilities. While some went to school or found paid employment, at some point most married, had children, and kept house. Very few women in Utah were of a social class that freed them from the physical labor of maintaining a home, and even those affluent few, such as Jennie Judge Kearns, kept amply busy with charities. Mrs. Kearns funded and took an active interest in St. Ann's orphanage and school and also St. Mark's Hospital, both of them Salt Lake City landmarks. Death, divorce, and ill health modified these patterns, but they did not change what was seen as the ideal.

Historian Anne M. Butler and storyteller/editor Ona Siporin captured the similarities in women's life in their study *Uncommon Common Women: Ordinary Lives of the West*. Their summary of western women in general also fits Utah women: “The joys and griefs that enveloped western women transcended

Susa Young Dunford Gates  
with her daughters Emma Lucy  
Gates and Leah Dunford and  
an unidentified granddaughter.



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cultural boundaries and brought together as one the common women of the American West. All women exalted [sic] at the first cry of a newborn child, all wept at the last death rattle of a beloved.” They saw as a potential tragedy that these universal experiences for “women of all cultures” did not bring them “together in the unity of laughter and tears.” Yet they held up the “universal truth—that all women, despite their uncommon lives, are bound together in the commonality of womanhood” and saw in this hope “the threads of unity for modern women of every class and race.”<sup>87</sup>

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