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Mormon Midwife

Donna Smart

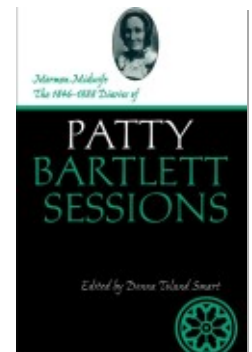
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PREFACE

On 4 February 1995 the descendants of Patty Bartlett Sessions noted the two hundredth birthday of their pioneer ancestress. They are well acquainted with her since fragments of her diaries have been quoted in books such as *Guardians of the Hearth* by Claire Noall; *Women's Voices*, compiled and edited by Kenneth W. and Audrey M. Godfrey and Jill Mulvay Derr; volume one of *Covered Wagon Women*, edited and compiled by Kenneth L. Holmes; and other works, including volumes published by the Daughters of Utah Pioneers. One of Patty's descendants, Leroy W. Brown, edited segments of Patty's diaries, as he said in his dedication, for his children, "for whom this history was primarily written." He titled his version *History of Patty Bartlett Sessions: Mother of Mormon Midwifery*. Susan Sessions Rugh, who wrote a chapter for the book *Sister Saints*, edited by Vickey Burgess-Olson, is a great-great-great-granddaughter of Patty. Her essay presents a significant core of Patty's life experiences. All these sources have helped me know who Patty Sessions was. However, this is the first version of her diaries that is published in its entirety and that attempts to be faithful to the text as she wrote it.

Patty's life is so rich in historical byways that the editor is tempted to digress constantly and interrupt the tale of her meanderings from Maine to Missouri to Nauvoo to Winter Quarters to the Rocky Mountains. Willpower such as Patty demonstrated necessarily becomes a vital aspect of editing her diary.

THE DIARIES

The Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints protects the originals of Patty's diaries. The Patty Sessions archival box contains five folders, each encasing one or more of her well-worn and fading diaries and a small book filled with her accounts. A sixth folder holds a few midwife records and other loose papers and scraps on which she wrote notes. She used a pen dipped in handmade ink on then-scarce paper and, for the most part, filled every fraction of every page. The first small leather diary, given to

her by her daughter Sylvia at the beginning of the February exodus from Nauvoo, includes the period from 1846 through 1848; the second, relating experiences from 1849 through 1850, is homemade, sewn together with broken thread and held together with a very long straight pin; the years 1851 and 1852 make up the third volume; 1853 through 1855, the fourth; 1856 through February 1862, the fifth; and February 1862 through 1866, the sixth. A separate sheet includes entries for July and August 1880. All the diaries from 1849 on are homemade. Another larger, leather-bound volume was donated in recent years to the Historical Department. It contains reminiscences, minutes of the Relief Society over which she presided, and her journal entries until 4 May 1888, when, without explanation, the writing ceased. She died on 14 December 1892, less than two months before her ninety-eighth birthday.

TRANSCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

Mary-Jo Kline, author of the classic reference book on editing *A Guide to Documentary Editing*, warned in a workshop at Brigham Young University that a person working on original manuscripts must have a “tolerance for tedium.” I can attest to the accuracy of that prophetic pronouncement.

The challenge was to prepare a manuscript faithful to the original, including spelling, punctuation, and grammar. That meant, first of all, enduring the eyestrain of typing all of the diaries from hard-to-read microfilm and then checking the transcription against the originals. It meant trying, often in vain, to identify the literally thousands of persons named in Patty’s entries, including the babies she delivered, the way they *really* spelled their names, when they were born and when they died, and their importance in her time. It meant investigating and footnoting events she barely mentioned because *she* knew to what she referred. It meant repeating the redundant recitations of a workaholic who time and time again watered her garden, dried her fruit, wove her cloth, made clothes, tore rags for rugs, crocheted, knitted, washed, cleaned, and worried. A reader may figuratively gasp for air while trying to follow her frenetic pace. But an editor must, and a reader should, try to understand the compulsion to record such mundane events and what they say not only about her life but about a particular time and society. She was compulsive about writing down everything, scribbling notes and figures on the inside covers of her diaries—sometimes even upside down.

The rewards of studying Patty’s diaries surpass her lists of wearisome, though informative, details about her daily activities that became, almost, rituals. Although she endured and recorded many significant personal and social transitions, the individuals who moved in and out of her world were more important to her. Although she was adept at hiding her feelings, occasionally her emotions spilled over onto the page, exposing her vulnerability. They surfaced, for example, when, instead of moving west with the pioneers, son David and daughter Sylvia opted to accompany her pharmacist husband to

Iowa City; when she dealt with her ambiguous feelings about polygamy; when she contemplated, and justified, her role during a medical emergency. In such instances a diary entry became almost a poetic prayer.

The next stage of editing involved comparing the corrected text against an enlarged photocopy of the microfilm that neither showed changes in ink color nor exposed penciled symbols and notes made by some hand other than her own. After necessary revisions, the thrice-corrected version was proofed again against the original diaries. At this crucial stage, some of Patty's descendants, great-granddaughters and great-great-granddaughters, checked the original text while I read aloud from my transcriptions.

The editing of Patty's diaries may never be finished. Every reading reveals new incidents that need research and explanation, dates and data that might be checked. It will be so with Patty Bartlett Sessions, I believe, as long as her journals are examined. There will always be corrections (despite human efforts to avoid errors) and additions.

Part of the research involved a trip to Patty's birthplace in Maine, cemeteries in the environs, and New England historical societies, all of which added variety and information to the project.

EDITORIAL METHODS

In an effort to help readers visualize Patty's additions and corrections to her writing or clarify references to individuals, the following methods have been employed:

1. To make reading the text easier, dates are highlighted, although Patty's entries were usually run together until her final diary, when she began using paper more generously.

2. Editorial insertions are enclosed in square brackets. Words in the editor's voice are italicized. Bracketed emendations, clarifications, and identifications, all extensions of Patty's text, are not.

3. Patty's insertions above lines are enclosed within carats: ^ ^. Her additions below lines are enclosed within angle brackets: < >.

4. The following procedures identify the numerous individuals who live on through Patty's diaries:

- a. Descendants of David and Patty Sessions through their children are listed in Appendix 2.

- b. The first time Patty names an individual, a full name (using the most common spelling) and the birth and death dates (when reasonably identifiable) are included within square brackets or footnotes, which provide further information about persons where the context indicates a need. At times even a reasonable guess at Patty's references was impossible. Such names remain unchanged. Toward the end of her diaries, as the population grew, duplications in names were common. Patty still often spelled phonetically, and checking adequately became impossible. Therefore, more persons are left without identification.

Attempting to pinpoint the scores of people whom Patty named has been time consuming and painstaking, sometimes painful. Trying is full of risks and opportunities for error. Nevertheless, in an effort to value individual persons, as Patty obviously did, I have dared to do so. Many of the works listed in the bibliography provided hints or specific information. Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, offered special insights. Perhaps the most useful source was the fifty-volume work of Susan Ward Easton Black, *Membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1830-1848*. Although the complexity of Easton's project guarantees mistakes, these books provide a wealth of information. I also consulted lists of members of emigration companies, although most of those are incomplete. Census records and city directories sometimes provided useful information. Of course, the voluminous records in the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were a valued source, as were genealogical records of the Sessions family, some of which Patty's own entries confirmed or corrected. As far as was humanly possible, names and dates were checked in more than one source. A conscientious reader will understand, however, that when Patty's own tombstone carries the wrong year of death, absolute certainty is elusive and, in some cases, unobtainable. In that spirit, I seek the reader's forbearance. The reader may also be frustrated trying to keep track of when, how, and if Patty had mentioned a certain individual before. I know the feeling from years of experience. At least you have an index to aid you.

5. Events and references requiring more explanation are discussed or cited in notes.

6. Patty's spelling and punctuation have been retained. No effort has been made to show her unusual line and word breaks, however. She depended entirely on available space. She punctuated dollars and cents differently at various places in her diaries (perhaps indicating how much she needed to hurry). Sometimes she separated dollars and cents with a colon, sometimes with a period, sometimes with a space, and sometimes not at all. The reader will experience no great problem in deciding what her intent was. One consistent habit of Patty's was to use a = when she abbreviated names, such as Wms= for Williams. A strikeout line through a word or passage represents Patty's scribbling over what she wrote. She did not neatly line through a passage. Patty often spelled phonetically, but her meaning is usually clear. Quite often—perhaps because of fatigue, or later, age—she confused days of the week and/or dates. But she always straightened herself out.

One symbol constantly used by Patty was a slanted line, like a slash with an attached curved line, which looks much like an italic leaning *h*. She especially employed the symbol to designate time or weight. Although several New England libraries and other historians were consulted, I could not find a definitive answer for its meaning. My best guess is that it stands for

one-fourth, but that is not certain. That it might represent hecto or one hundred seems unlikely since it often follows the time of day, such as 2 *h*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A number of persons deserve credit for this important contribution to pioneer history. I begin with John R. Alley, executive editor of Utah State University Press, who provided invaluable assistance during the stages of preparing the manuscript for publication. Without his keen eye, the final product would be much less polished.

I express gratitude to all in the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but especially to James L. Kimball, who shared his extensive information on the inhabitants of Nauvoo, their names and dates, their residences and occupations, and other pertinent information. Jim was “on call” for other answers about research as well and welcomed all inquiries. Ronald O. Barney and W. Randall Dixon, both of whom have been efficient and effective directors of the archives division, made the diaries and other valuable records available. They were sensitive about the fragile nature of the original manuscripts and stressed the responsibility of preserving the diaries’ material remains, as well as their internal integrity. Until the final stages of the project, Randy continued to make me aware of references to Patty that cropped up during his research. Ronald G. Watt was also encouraging and of great help. Veneese Nelson was always pleasant and helpful, as was Larry R. Skidmore who advised on the maps. Bill Slaughter’s guidance on the photos was invaluable. I must include April Williamsen and Linda Haslam and Matthew Heiss and Jay Burrup. To all, thank you.

Patty’s descendants were a delight. Her legacy courses through their veins, and they were pleased to participate and help in every possible way. The “Sessions” women who assisted with the final reading introduced me to other descendants. They clarified information about the family. They showed me artifacts I had not seen, some of which are reproduced in photos in this volume. We shared the profound realization that Patty’s personal record books had been kept by one whose birth took place two hundred years ago. We shared a realization of both the nearness and the remoteness of history. These women who trace their ancestry back to Patty and David Sessions include Irene Poulson, Doris Rigby, Patty Hartley, all from the lines of Perrigrine, Patty and David’s eldest son; Norma Earl, a descendant of Sylvia, who owns the medical book presumably used by Patty; Delilah Brown, who owns the sampler Patty began to embroider when she was a girl and was gracious in allowing us to photograph her treasured memento; and Ada Eddins, who provided family information and moral support. It was difficult to obtain exact information on David Sessions, Jr., but a chance encounter with Sarah Hale, who provided her records, was helpful. Two other brief acquaintances sent new information to the project: Clara H. Parry and Mary R Parry. A complete photocopy of Perrigrine’s diaries provided

by Irene Poulson proved an invaluable companion to the diaries of P.G.'s mother, Patty. All have my gratitude.

The following Sessions family members made financial contributions to support the publication of Patty's diaries: Marcella Allred and Arvella Beckley, Mrs. E. L. Ashton, LeRoy W. Brown, Truman H. Carver, Ada Eddins, Marcell Graham, Mrs. T. J. Green, Irena S. Hamilton, Nadine F. Harman, Kay Klaveano, Merrill Madsen, Vicki L. Martin, Marjorie S. Murdock, Marjorie A. Olsen, Irene S. Poulson, Sandra J. Preece, Robert A. Ramsey, Stephanie N. Stuart, Ila G. Winzenried, and Barry T. Wride. Thank you to all of them for their generosity and devotion to seeing their ancestor's writings in print.

With the concurrence of William W. Slaughter of the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, J M Heslop, a professional photographer, historian, and writer, photographed, developed, and printed the pictures of the diaries and the sampler. Other photos were provided by family members.

Others deserve a rousing "thank you!" for helping when no one else could—or would: my husband, William B. Smart, an avid historian, astute editor, and unfailing support for the seven years I have worked on these diaries; and our daughters, Melinda Graves and Kristen Rogers, who provided hours of research and helpful encouragement. Jean Sorensen, a neighbor, spent time digging out some details. Blanche Miles, conservator at the Church Museum of History and Art, helped ferret out information on some of Patty's numerous cottage industries. I am most appreciative to all of them.

And of course, this volume would be delayed many more years had not Maureen Ursenbach Beecher dreamed of a published series of pioneer women's diaries and offered me the privilege of editing those of Patty Sessions.

The careful copyediting of Barbara Bannon pointed out inconsistencies. I'm appreciative of her scrutiny, which demanded preciseness. In some cases, conflicting records and Patty's own inconsistencies made precision impossible. For example, records showed at least four spellings for Patty's grandson: Fabian, Fabyan, Fabyon, and Fayben. Patty wrote 4 and 7 in a very similar style. It is easy to misread those numbers, and often Patty spelled phonetically—or was in such a hurry that she omitted letters and committed other inconsistent errors.

Every effort was made to present the diaries as accurately and properly as possible. To do less would be an affront to Patty's numerous posterity, to historians who may enrich their research through her records, and, of course, to Patty herself. This may be, after all, only the beginning of discovering what a treasure trove of historical information she has left. Undoubtedly, there will be many who can and will correct mistakes and misconceptions. Such contributions will be appreciated by all who cherish these diaries.