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History Of Louisa Barnes Pratt

S. George Ellsworth

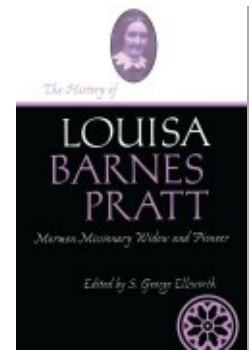
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INTRODUCTION

Of Mormon pioneer women known to me, there is not another that had quite the variety of experiences that Louisa Barnes Pratt had. A typical Mormon at first, she headed for Missouri after her conversion; built a cottage in Nauvoo after sending her husband on a mission to the other side of the earth, which left her without support and to rear four daughters; rode horseback across Iowa; lived in a cave at Winter Quarters, Nebraska, where she developed scurvy and lost her front teeth; and got her family to Utah in the 1848 Brigham Young Company. In this she is quite standard, except she did it all alone, without husband. Thereafter her experiences were unique. She answered a missionary call to join her husband in the Society Islands, hauled her wagon west from Salt Lake across the desert and the Sierra Nevada to San Francisco, and spent nineteen months on the small island of Tubuai teaching native women and children. Back in Gold Rush California, the family, penniless from years of mission service, recouped some losses by mining the miners. She lived through the experience of the Mormon colony at San Bernardino and the Mormon church's Big Move, under the threat of approaching federal troops, to the central valleys of Utah, and she spent the last twenty-two years of her life, without husband, in effect if not actually a widow, as a leader among the women of Beaver, Utah. She did it all without the help of any man: reared four daughters, provided for her family, and constantly demonstrated her faith and devotion, having built and left, at last, seven homes for the sake of the Latter-day Saints gospel. All this, and more, she narrates in her journal-memoir published here.

Creating the Text

In July 1850, as Louisa Barnes Pratt was leaving California to meet her husband on Tubuai, Society Islands, she commenced a diary, not her first such record, of her mission adventures. And no wonder, for her adventures, then and previously, were even more unusual for her time than

they would be now. She would later revise her personal record as a memoir, drawing from memory to supplement and fill out the daily entries. In doing so, she recounted her life not only for her descendants but also in the hope of publication. A century later, that hope is here realized.

In keeping a diary of her mission and beginning when she took ship, she was imitating her husband, Addison Pratt, for he began his mission diary when, on 10 September 1843, he took ship from New Bedford.¹ When Louisa reached her husband on Tubuai, she learned that while he had recently been under house arrest, he had been writing a memoir of his early life. Similarly situated, Louisa again followed his example, and started work on her autobiography.

Being now in my fiftieth year [she began] and having passed a life of deep experience in the changes and fortunes to which life's nature is always liable; and being in circumstances that afford me much leisure, I have resolved to make a record of the leading incidents of a career in a world where good and ill have been always contained.²

Reading over the “old letters which my mother and sisters sent me many years ago,” and consulting her diary and journal, Louisa prodded her memory to create a comprehensive life story. Soon she would write, “I spent the entire day in Prayer House teaching the children and writing in my history.” The exercise obviously pleased her: “I am surprised at the accuracy with which I call to mind the scenes in my early life. Almost every circumstance seems as vivid as the day it transpired.”³

Over the next twenty years, Louisa completed the memoir of her youth and continued adding to and preserving her “notes, diary, and journal.” In 1874 (she was seventy-two), she decided to compile these materials into one unified history of her life with the intent to publish it and the hope it would be widely read. She had tasted the pleasure of reading her words in print: extracts of her life on Tubuai and the Pratts’ missionary labors there had appeared in the *Woman’s Exponent*, a bi-monthly tabloid newspaper edited in Salt Lake City by and for LDS women. She described her process of revision, undertaken during the winter of 1874–75:

I commenced revising my lengthy journal of fifty years standing. [Since] there were abridgements and alterations to be made . . . the task must devolve wholly [*sic*] upon myself. Since then I have continued to write at intervals; having 9 quires of paper written fine on both sides to review, besides manuscripts of considerable amount.⁴

Ultimately Louisa produced a manuscript of eleven quires (signatures) of paper. She used the same stock of paper throughout, two kinds of ink, and wrote in her usually fine penmanship. Like many of her contemporaries who followed the same process, using their diaries as source for an autobiography, she abridged and altered the *Urtext* to create the unified flow of the memoir. It is an artful union of memoir and journal. Comparison of her two surviving journals (“A” and “B”) and this later “history” verify that there were “abridgments and alterations,” although the changes constituted more of a revised draft than a wholly new work.

The Story Told

Despite a very ordinary beginning, Louisa Barnes (pronounced Low-eye-za) led an extraordinary life. Born 10 November 1802 in Warwick County, Massachusetts, the fifth of ten children, Louisa lived with her extended family there and in Canada. On 3 April 1831 she married seaman Addison Pratt and set up farming on the shore of Lake Erie at Ripley, New York. Here in 1838 the Pratts were visited by Louisa’s sister Caroline and her husband Jonathan Crosby, who introduced them to the new Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, founded eight years earlier by Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet. Their conversion was immediate, and their commitment lasting.

The two families followed their co-religionists, driven from Missouri where they had hoped to settle, to newly founded Nauvoo on the Illinois banks of the Mississippi River. From that place Addison was called on a proselyting mission to the Society Islands—Tahiti. Leaving Louisa and their four daughters to fend for themselves, he sailed halfway around the world, not to meet his family again for five years and four months, half a continent away. How Louisa and the children managed not only to support themselves but to move their household from Nauvoo to the Mormon refuge of Winter Quarters on the Missouri and then to settle in the valley of the Great Salt Lake is recounted in the following pages.

When the family reunited in Salt Lake City in 1848, Addison was given but a brief respite before he was called once again to take up his mission in Tahiti. This time Louisa followed, bringing their girls and her sister and brother-in-law Caroline and Jonathan Crosby and their son. Louisa’s journal and memoir detail her teaching among the Tahitians: women and children, language and numbers, health and sanitation, cleanliness and handcrafts, ethics and morality, music and religion.

The life story of Louisa Barnes Pratt partakes of the spirit of nineteenth century America. Unusual as they were among easterners for their Mormon conversion, and for their travels to the South Pacific, the Pratts were part of the great westering movement of the century. Halfway across

the continent when Addison left on his first mission, Louisa and her girls finished the trek alone, a venture not unique to pioneers. In the Old Fort in Salt Lake City, they set up housekeeping, continuing Louisa's teaching and the girls' schooling before following Addison to the Society Islands. The mission there was cut short because the French Protectorate government no longer permitted foreign missionaries to live and labor among the Tahitians.

The families reached San Francisco penniless and without tools or appropriate clothing but capitalized on the Gold Rush demand for labor. They settled in the newly established Mormon colony of San Bernardino, in southern California. The girls were now grown to maturity, the three oldest married.

Between husband and wife, however, tensions mounted as they took up the life of a Mormon family in a settled community. Addison, accustomed to preside in church matters, was largely ignored by already existing authorities in San Bernardino. He found time to hunt and fish, usually at the neglect of household matters. Noted Louisa: "O how have I involved myself, by taking upon me the support of my family and my husband [who] by being separated from us for seven years in fourteen has nearly lost all the ability he once had." Louisa could not relinquish leadership; Addison could not assume it. Two more times, in 1854 and 1856, he was called to return to the islands, but failed again to win out over French religious policy.

Meanwhile United States military threats against the Mormons in their headquarters city caused Brigham Young to call home the settlers remote from Utah. The San Bernardino Saints were to sell out and return. Or not. There was some freedom, it was said, to go or to stay. Debate followed. Addison and Louisa argued. To remain would be a sign of being "weak in the faith," or worse. Entrenched in her established pattern of obedience to ecclesiastical authority, Louisa would go at all costs. Addison equivocated. He had many reasons against residing in Utah. Disputes resurrected past disagreements and precipitated their separation. Addison stayed with daughter Frances and her husband Jones Dyer in California, and Louisa, accompanied by her daughters Ellen and husband William McGary, Lois and husband John Hunt, and Ann Louise and the adopted island boy Ephraim, returned to Utah.

The separation was not intended to be permanent, but the result was conclusive. Louisa, Ann Louise, and Ephraim settled in Beaver, in the center of the territory. Ellen and William lived sometimes nearby, sometimes in Ogden, north of Salt Lake City. Lois and John later returned to San Bernardino, stayed for five years, returned to Beaver, then went on to settle the town of Joseph, not far away, in southern Sevier County. They moved next to New Mexico, then settled finally in the Mormon outpost of

Snowflake, Arizona. Considering that her husband, a freighter, was gone for long periods, Frances pressured her father to stay with her in California. With her he lived, and there he died on 14 October 1872.

The most persistent question in the Addison Pratt family over the years has been the cause and occasion of their separation. In her life writings Louisa skims the surface of the problems, and little documentation on the matter is extant.

From all that does bear on the question, however, it is clear that the separation was rooted deep in their early life together; it brewed throughout the marriage. In the stress of the move occasioned by the Utah War in 1857–58 the final rift occurred.

The Pratt family was headquartered then in San Bernardino, where Addison felt unneeded and insignificant. His long periods of absence from home provoked talk both there and in Salt Lake City, where friends wondered why he eventually lived with Frances in San Francisco rather than with Louisa in San Bernardino. At the time of his going on his fourth mission, rumor had it that “Mr. Pratt did not intend returning to that country, that his intention was to spend his days on the islands.” As Louisa bid him goodbye she confided to her diary “not knowing when the ‘father’ would return, or whether he would come at all.”⁵ He did return on 1 April 1857, just as his daughter, Ellen answered the query of her dear friend Ellen Clawson in Salt Lake City. He remained in the Bay area long enough to pay off debt incurred in connection with his last mission, his daughter explained, and because he “has an aversion to a cold climate, now he is getting in years, and has spent all his means for so many years, he dreads the thought of making another beginning in such a hard place.”

Ellen then outlined the more probable causes of discord:

[M]other has never seemed to feel at home since she left the Valley, and she thinks she shall never be satisfied till she gets back. She tries every way to encourage father about going there. Says she will uphold him to the last in any move he may see fit to make; but thinks he cannot go; he loves the Sea air, and wants to live where he can feel it; it makes him look so vigorous and youthful; he is scarcely like the same man. Mother has better courage to live in a hard place. She has had a deeper experience, and does not dread hardness so much. [H]er five years widowhood taught her great lessons of economy; and she has great zeal for this cause.⁶

Family tradition accepted the “geographic” explanation for the separation of the couple, as Louisa undoubtedly intended in her histories. Addison was expected, but “the time is not yet.” Certainly there was reason for both father and Frances to remain in the pleasant coastal climate.

The lingering suspicion, disavowed by descendants, that he had become disaffected from the Latter-day Saints, seems more consistent with evidence now available. His and Louisa's relations to the church were nearly opposite: He spent but two years at church headquarters; she spent all *but* two years in a Mormon community. He was always away, she was always home. She had gone through the martyrdom and the expulsion from Nauvoo, sludging across Iowa, surviving Winter Quarters, and crossing the plains. All this had schooled her for the hard life of self-discipline, self-reliance, and obedience to counsel and for the support that came from being with the mass of gathered Saints. He, on the contrary, was far from that support. His work was not without discomfort, but through his various missions he became accustomed to leadership and to keeping his own counsel. He lived more by reason than by faith; she more by faith than by reason. Obedience to the dictates of faith came easily to her; to him independence of thought and action seemed more appropriate guides.

There were years of happy marriage, as happy as marriages need to be, but from the beginning their relations were strained. Each had been self-supporting, and habituated to certain patterns of life. From courtship days there persisted her intent to subdue him and bring him to her desires. She would effect "the destiny" conveyed in the dream she had after first meeting Addison: there came before her a "great wild fowl" which she enticed to come near her that she might "tame him." But when he settled on her lap and she attempted to smooth his feathers, he bit her, whereupon she "beat him with great severity until he appeared tame and perfectly harmless."⁷

The happiest and most prosperous years for the Pratts were spent at Ripley, New York, before they joined the Mormons; for two decades thereafter they were uprooted most of the time, enduring long periods of separation. Addison spent half his life in the church on mission; Louisa spent his absences feeding, clothing, and nurturing their four daughters, and crossing the continent with them. She was a single parent: provider, manager, father, and mother. Through a life closer to widowhood than to wifehood, she was teacher, comforter, doctor, and nurse to her own and to others. Louisa supported herself enough not to need Addison even when he was home. And when he was home, he was of little help. He failed to pick up the reins of leadership or assume the roles of provider, father, and husband, and she failed to relinquish them to him.

For his part, Addison bore his own burdens away from the family. At the outset of his mission he was instructed by Brigham to go and stay until he was released or replaced. He went, but there came no release, nor replacement, not even any correspondence, for three years. On 5 March 1846 he rejoiced: "This is the first letter from the Twelve [the Mormon Church Authorities]. I have received 2 previous letters from my wife, and

these 3 are all the letters we have received from American in these 3 long years' absence from my family."⁸ In Salt Lake City he reported his mission and obtained a company of replacements, but otherwise he received neither recognition nor calling. In San Bernardino, following his second mission, he had friends among the authorities, but also heard from dissenters criticism of the conduct of church business.⁹ He was offended by the Saints' failure to observe the Word of Wisdom, the LDS Church health code which he had strictly enforced in the islands. And he objected to church courts which tried people on political issues, and "could not sanction for a moment anything like a rebellion against a 'republican government.'"

These differences, however, were minor compared with the turmoil induced in all Mormondom by the announcement of the practice of plural marriage. Prior to the public announcement in August 1852, secrecy and denial precluded discussion of the subject, but with the announcement church members had to take a position. On that subject Addison and Louisa differed emphatically. Louisa wrote, "Differences of opinion sometimes rose between us in regard to certain principles which had been revealed in his absence."¹⁰ She would follow church leaders. Addison, denying the doctrine, refused to countenance the practice. He held firm to the teachings he had promoted in the islands which made chastity prerequisite to membership in the church. Family tradition has it that Louisa threatened Addison that if he did not comply, she would have herself sealed to the prophet Joseph Smith or Hyrum Smith. He didn't, and she did. Louisa had had years to acquire the attitude of compliance, gleaned mainly from her association with the plural wives of church leaders.

During the San Bernardino years frustrations and disappointments multiplied for Louisa. "Of domestic sorrows I forbear to mention. I carry them in my bosom, and bear my injuries in silence." Addison arrived in San Bernardino from his fourth mission on 1 April 1857, "looking very pale and fleshy, said he weighed 200 lbs.," recorded Louisa's sister Caroline. A week later the Pratts entertained the McIntyre family, together with Jonathan Crosby and Caroline. During the evening Dr. McIntyre took Jonathan outside privately and "informed Jonathan that he had been conversing with Brother Pratt" and found "to his great astonishment that he was not a true believer in the principles of our religion. That he actually denied the faith in some important points and spoke lightly of others. Said he was greatly disappointed in him . . . as he had been expecting to receive strength and encouragement from him, as he has been a traveling elder just returned from a mission. He did not wish to cultivate the society of such persons."¹¹

Louisa's concerns mounted; she shared her concerns with Caroline, who wrote, on 13 September: "Sister [Louisa] and I took a walk around the lots. She told me some of her trials, with her husband, his hard

speeches, and the disunion that existed between them. I felt sorry, to know their great unhappiness.”¹²

The call to sell out their San Bernardino property and return to Utah as quickly and quietly as possible came to Jonathan on Monday, 2 November 1857. He was “to warn the brethren in his ward, that they might have timely notice.” Louisa and Addison hedged and argued. They debated doctrine, the importance of following counsel, obedience to leaders, the Big Move, armed resistance to federal troops, and polygamy. Reconciliation seemed out of the question, but resolution was approaching the last week of December, when Pratt took his wagon to the shop to fix for the journey. “Said he was preparing it for his wife Louisa, but thought he should go another way.”¹³

Addison and Louisa procrastinated while their children made ready and left. Caroline saw them off: Ellen and her husband William “both seemed very sad, could hardly smile,” she wrote. “I tried to cheer them, but it seemed in vain. John and Lois set off first, and seemed in better spirits.” Three days later she and Jonathan finished loading their wagon and set off. Louisa and others saw them off. Louisa “felt bad to see us come away and leave her,” Caroline wrote.¹⁴

During November and December San Bernardino was emptied of Latter-day Saints. Lopsided trades had been made at great losses. Families retained only what wagons could hold. All the while Louisa and Addison debated and delayed the final decision. Louisa employed “entreaties” and “persuasions” in vain. Addison considered that he “made every humiliating and condescending proposition,” that the case demanded. But “she only disdained” him and treated him with contempt.” He made preparations to go to Utah but would not go without a reconciliation first. When he thought that impossible, they parted on the Mojave Desert. Addison looked after her and thought they had parted forever.¹⁵

In her memoirs Louisa presents the view that Addison was to stay, then go to San Francisco, get daughter Frances and her husband Jones and bring them to Utah the following year. In fact the separation was complete: Louisa returned to Utah and remained among the Mormons, while Addison remained in California with his daughter Frances.

It is understandable that Addison Pratt could feel angry with the church for breaking up the community and leading his wife and daughters away. He was bitter and hate-filled. He admitted saying things he ought not have, but he could have said more. Some Saints remained in San Bernardino or chose to move elsewhere, but the spirit of the times led to referring to any of those who remained as “apostate.” Even though his only articulated objection to Mormon doctrine was over polygamy, Addison Pratt’s name was included among those who stayed. Final judgment lies in other hands than ours.

But the story is not ended. Between the break-up in 1858 and Addison's death in 1872, family relations continued. The reader is encouraged to carefully examine the following developments in the pages of the journal-memoir.

Correspondence between Louisa, Frances, and Ellen in particular continued throughout Addison's life. Lois Pratt Hunt, another daughter, returned to California with her husband, John, and contacts developed, especially from July 1862 until the spring of 1863, when Louisa went to California on a visit to Lois and family. When she returned to Utah, Louisa managed to bring Addison back to Beaver with her. While in Utah, Addison Pratt visited friends and relatives, and left his mission diary in the LDS Church Historian's Office. He then returned to the family in Beaver and lived for over a year. A cold early winter set in in November 1864, and Frances's husband, Jones Dyer, came through Beaver enroute to California and induced Addison to accompany him. For the remainder of his life, Louisa and Addison corresponded. On his deathbed, Addison dictated a letter to "My dear Family." The letter is printed in *Journals of Addison Pratt*, 521-23, and when Addison died, Louisa wrote an "Obituary of a Mormon Elder" and got it published in the *Phrenological Journal* in March 1873. All of this indicates a continual family commitment which is both admirable and historically confusing. However, for most of the last fifteen years of Addison Pratt's life, he did not live with Louisa.

With the separation, Louisa, often a "missionary widow," was again without a husband. Still married, there was no man in her life, so she was again widowed "or worse." From 1858 to her death in 1880 she lived on in Beaver. She had a small house, large enough to entertain a few guests or to permit her to take a few pupils for classwork. Next door were the Crosbys, Caroline and Jonathan, and their son Alma. Between them, one imagines, were the necessary cow, sheep, pig, and chickens, a garden, and probably fruit trees. Like many another woman alone, Louisa could still barter, make and repair clothing, and sell books and subscriptions. In her own words:

More than half the years of my married life I have stood alone. Created the means to sustain myself and children: and although I had kind friends around me I had no one immediately interested to supply my daily wants. My cares often weighed heavily upon me, yet for the most part I have been cheerful.¹⁶

Her enforced self-sufficiency developed in Louisa a woman's rights philosophy: "I am not amenable to man neither will I suffer man to judge me," she wrote. She had succeeded without the aid of a man; she concluded that women have natural rights that should be recognized.

A woman for all the seasons of her varied life, Louisa possessed qualities of character appropriate to the roles she played. In youth she had developed a sense of independence, financial and other; she learned resourcefulness, self-reliance, and personal initiative. She had trained as a seamstress and became a school teacher. Her chosen path was hard; it is not surprising that the sorrow and depression she felt lie as an unintentional undercurrent through her life writings. "My domestic sorrows I forbear to mention," she wrote. "I carry them in my own bosom, and bear my injuries in silence."¹⁷

In Louisa's memoir and diaries is to be discovered a multi-layered narrative. She wrote herself as she perceived herself and as she intended to be perceived. She told the truth, as much of it as she could bear to reveal. It remains for the reader to mine Louisa's words for the unwritten, the implied, the unacknowledged realities of her life. For here was a woman of depth and feeling, of faith and obedience, of courage and persistence. There is much to be learned from her story.

Editorial Procedures

The complete extant diaries and memoirs of Louisa Barnes Pratt are here published for the first time. The handwritten text has been rendered according to rigid documentary editing standards, so the printed form may be trusted by readers and scholars alike as an accurate transmission of the originals.

The manuscript consists of eleven signatures, written on both sides of each page, the pages numbered from 1 to 550. The same stock is used throughout, each signature measuring 19.5 cm. by 31.7 cm. The front page of each signature shows signs of wear. The ink in the first part of the manuscript is light purple, and that in the latter part black. At the outset Louisa divided her memoir into short chapters, heading each with a Roman numeral, but she discontinued that practice after chapter 13.

The aim of the editor has been to reproduce Louisa Barnes Pratt's words in type exactly as she wrote them by hand. Word order, syntax, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization have been scrupulously retained. Even so, some editorial liberties seemed appropriate to the translation from text to printed page. Often the writing flows from page to page without consideration of paragraph form. The first line on each page is indented, often without consideration to thought or topic. Accordingly the editor has often divided the text into logical paragraphs and subdivided chapters into smaller sections according to the author's thought.

Punctuation marks are irregular in the original text. Though Pratt generally avoided using commas, apostrophes, and periods, a comma often appears between subject and predicate. She overused colons and

semi-colons, occasionally stringing sentences together with semi-colons. These marks have been retained. Cross-outs have been retained throughout, but superscriptions have been brought to the line in the printed form. Any repeated word has been silently eliminated. A word or phrase inadvertently omitted is added in roman type and enclosed in brackets. Editorial explanations are likewise enclosed within brackets, but in italics. Louisa abhors dates and the use of personal names. Occasionally these have been supplied. Generally her spelling is correct—be it remembered she was a school teacher—but any misspellings have been retained. Capitalization, however, has proven difficult to render with certainty—Pratt’s upper and lower case a, o, c, s, u, n, m, e, u, and r are very similar. Context has provided clues, and the editor has chosen accordingly. In every case where her preference might prove indicative of some idiosyncrasy of Louisa’s personality, or of her circumstances—entries sometimes lose or gain a day when she is at sea—the error has been retained. Ellipses have been used to indicate missing words due to illegible, torn, or otherwise damaged portions of the manuscript.

Overall, the editorial policy has been guided by an attempt to present the author as she presented herself, with as much convenience as the printed page allows but as little interference as possible. That each reader might spend long sessions with the original notebooks might be preferable, but impractical. We trust this will prove a reliable and enjoyable second-best.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used throughout the work.

Names of persons:

AP	Addison Pratt
LBP	Louisa Barnes Pratt
EPMc	Ellen Pratt (Mrs. William) McGary
FPD	Frances Pratt (Mrs. Jones) Dyer
LPH	Lois Pratt (Mrs. John) Hunt
ALPW	Ann Louise Pratt (Mrs. Thomas) Willis
JC	Jonathan Crosby
CBC	Caroline Barnes (Mrs. Jonathan) Crosby
BFG	Benjamin F. Grouard
JSB	James S. Brown

Descriptive of manuscript materials:

A.	Autograph; in handwriting of author of piece.
Ms.	Manuscript.

S. Signed with signature.

L. or Ltr. Letter.

Collected manuscripts:

APFP Addison Pratt Family Papers, S. George Ellsworth
Collection, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill
Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.