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Worth Their Salt Too

Colleen Whitley

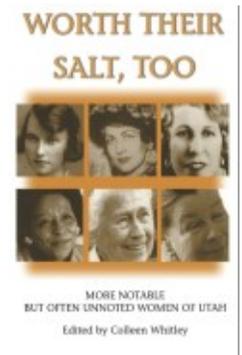
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Preface

Several years ago I visited with a woman who had immigrated to the United States with her husband and their children shortly after World War II. When she mentioned her husband had worked for the telephone company in Denmark, I flippantly asked, “Did he ever bug anyone’s telephone?”

She replied matter of factly, “Only the Nazis.”

I was stunned. When I asked for details, she explained that on the day the Nazi occupation of Denmark began, her husband went directly to their headquarters, slipped into the basement, attached a tap line to their phones, and then left. For the rest of the occupation, whenever the Germans counted the number of phone lines to see if an extra had been added, none was found, because the tap he had put on was simply counted in with the original number. Meanwhile, the Danish underground listened in on every call. With a little prompting, she went on to recount dozens of stories about the occupation, the underground, and the tactics of survival. Finally I asked her, “Have you written all of this down?”

“Oh,” she said, “who would be interested?”

I stifled the impulse to respond, “Steven Spielberg.” Instead I simply assured her that I was interested, and I was sure that others would be, too.¹ Fortunately, some of her descendants eventually convinced her that they were also interested and persuaded her to tape-record her experiences. When she saw that they really did care about what she had done in her life, she opened up, not only about the war, but also about growing up in Denmark, being courted, marrying, and raising children, immigrating to a new country, and learning its language and customs. Now her family has a heritage of tape recordings and transcriptions which can be shared with the rest of us. In far too

many cases, however, no one takes the time and effort to make such a record of themselves or of their family members.

That woman's initial assumption that no one would care about her life reflects one of the problems we face as we assemble a book like this: in order for a person's biography to be written, information must be available about that person. Obvious as that statement is, most people believe exactly what that remarkable woman did, that their ordinary lives are not interesting to anyone else and hence, not worth recording. As a result, many people whose lives should be noted never will be. Ronald McCook, nephew of Chipeta, "Queen of the Utes," summed up the problem well: "Of all the Ute women who have ever lived, she is the only one we know anything about."² We could substitute the names of a great many other groups for "Ute" and the statement would be equally true.

This anonymity is particularly acute for women because women's work traditionally has attracted very little attention, even when it carries enormous social import, like the raising of the next generation of human beings. Consequently, when a group of volunteers from the Utah State Historical Society called me a few years ago saying each wanted to write a chapter about a favorite woman from Utah history, one of my first questions was, "Can you really get enough information?" They could, and so could several others who eventually joined the project. The result was *Worth Their Salt: Notable but Often Unnoted Women of Utah*. All of us connected with that book have been very pleased (and quite frankly amazed) at the enormously favorable response it has received, and we are delighted to be able to present a second volume.

As in the first book, these biographies are arranged chronologically, beginning with the earliest, Sarah Ann Cooke, widow, actress, and suffragist, who arrived in Utah in 1852, and ending with Emma Lou Thayne, a writer, lecturer, and teacher, who is still around, making life more humane and cheerful for the rest of us. Because this book, like *Salt I*, is a labor of passion as much as intellect, each article is prefaced with a statement about the author, giving his or her biases, interests, obsessions, or other reasons for choosing a particular subject. And once again, everyone involved has chosen to donate all royalties to the Utah State Historical Society.

The fundamental premise of both books is that many Utah women have made contributions to the state, the nation, and the world

but either were not given adequate credit in the first place or have since been forgotten—and there are obviously a lot of them. When some of us involved with the first book casually suggested that we might consider a second, we were flooded with suggestions of women to include. Among the first people to call was Mary Bradford, asking if she could contribute a biography of author Virginia Sorensen, who may be better known outside Utah than she is in her native state. Another early candidate was Sorensen's cousin, Esther Peterson, consumer advocate, labor organizer, and advisor to presidents who became well known, not just in Utah but around the world. However, her sister, Algie Ballif, is hardly known outside her family despite her immense contributions in dance, state government, and a dozen other areas. (The serendipitous inclusion of three such amazing members of one family in a book of this kind raises questions about the genetic components and family values intrinsic in high achievement and public service—obviously far beyond the scope of this volume, but good questions nonetheless.)

Whatever the motivations for their remarkable achievements, women who have contributed to society have frequently been overlooked. One reason for this neglect may be that historically a woman's role has been to assist her husband in whatever job he might have, usually receiving neither recognition nor remuneration. Two of the women in this book did exactly that, in two very different ways. Lola Atiya followed her husband from one university to another as he taught Middle Eastern studies. In each of those places Lola volunteered or worked for only a token wage cataloging items for museums, translating and transliterating Arabic scrolls, preserving invaluable artifacts—work on the highest levels of academia. Marion Clegg also aided her husband, but in a very different field, literally a field: she spent every summer for forty years camping out, while he maintained the reservoirs on the upper Provo River. In the process, she established a Utah landmark, Trial Lake Lodge.

But if those women followed a common road to uncommon ends, others established new trails altogether. Romania Pratt went to the East Coast to study and returned to Utah Territory as its first woman doctor, and Gean FarmanFarmaian left her home in Smithfield to marry a Persian prince.

Still other women applied their talents to organizations and causes that impacted the entire region: Ora Bailey Harding directed musical productions that led to permanent institutions in Carbon

County. Kitty Kimball followed the tradition of her Mormon pioneer ancestors and changed religions, introducing Christian Science to the state. Ada Duhigg came to Utah as a Methodist missionary and helped three generations of immigrant children acculturate to America.

In addition to showing a broad range of women's contributions, this volume also contains a variety of approaches to presenting biography: an autobiography by educator Alta Miller, an annotated interview with painter Ella Peacock, an oral history of social activist Alberta Henry, and a critical examination of Camilla Cobb's contributions to education in the state.

Whatever their occupations or activities, and in whatever form their lives are presented, all of these women affected their communities, the state, and even the nation and the world. They changed the way we live today. There are, of course, still many more women who have contributed to our state, and by extension, to our individual lives—Edith Melendez, Hispanic linchpin in the state Democratic party; Jane Johnston Black, pioneer midwife; Ione Bennion, social activist in Cache County; Enid Cosgriff, supporter of activities from baseball to ballet; Juanita Brooks, historian and author. . . . The list could go on and on.

For the reader's convenience, the notes are again "securely kenneled in the rear,"³ arranged by chapters and containing both sources and additional information. A single bibliography covers all chapters but includes only readily accessible books, articles, and items on file in archives and libraries; unpublished papers, interviews, diaries, e-mails, or personal letters are noted in individual chapters but are not included in the bibliography.

Recognizing how difficult it is to trace an individual's life, I am grateful for the diligent work of the authors who have completed the biographies we have in this volume and for several other people whose contributions made this work possible. Those volunteers from the Utah State Historical Society who initially proposed *Salt I* obviously recognized a real need for such histories and deserve great praise for doing something about it. One of those volunteers, Judy Dykman, has offered invaluable suggestions as well as chapters for both volumes. My husband, Tom (still the resident user-friendly liveware), has provided badly needed assistance with assorted electronic aspects of the project. And John Alley of USU Press has once again supplied his excellent and gracious guidance.