



**Summer Seminar on Mormon Culture, Working Papers (2014) > “The Urgent Need of a Home: Rescuing Mormon Girls and Young Women from the City”**  
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For six weeks in the summer of 2014, student scholars met daily in the Maxwell Institute library to discuss and research the topic “The History of the Mormon Family.” This seminar was sponsored by the Mormon Scholars Foundation, hosted by the Maxwell Institute, and directed by Claudia and Richard Bushman.

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*“The Urgent Need of a Home:” Rescuing Mormon Girls and Young Women from the City”*

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In 1910, the president of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association (YLMIA) Martha H. Tingey wrote a letter to the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).<sup>2</sup> In this letter, she wrote that the Young Ladies MIA was

“Feeling the urgent need of a home on the order of Young Woman’s Christian Association, for many of our girls who come from this country, who emigrate from foreign countries, and for girls who need rest rooms and a place where they may receive instruction in economy, cleanliness, purity; where books and magazines may be acceptable and where they may gather under proper chaperonage.”<sup>3</sup>

The impetus behind the desire for this kind of home was rooted in perceived and actual dangers that young single Mormon women may encounter in the city.<sup>4</sup> The solution to this predicament for the leaders of the Young Ladies MIA and Relief Society was to provide young women with a proper Mormon home environment. Following the writing of this letter, both the Young Ladies MIA and Relief Society opened “homes” for young women. The first two homes only operated for a few years or less. By 1920, the Young Ladies MIA had gained the rights to the Beehive House in order to offer a larger and more effective home for young women. Out of all the homes, the Beehive House project was the most successful and lasted for nearly forty years.

I argue that the establishment of homes from the early 1900s to the 1920s served as a method for the Church’s leadership to “rescue” young women from the ill effects of the city while ensuring they were immersed in a proper environment that would attempt to fulfill the place of a proper LDS family. I also assert that the establishment of these homes demonstrates that the leadership knew that they had to adapt to greater trends that were beyond their control.<sup>5</sup> On the surface, this need to “rescue” young women was rooted in widespread fears about the status of young working women in urban environments. Historian Carolyn Strange uses the term “girl problem” to identify this issue. She writes:

Paradoxically, in her own time, the work girl’s political and economic marginality in urban life endowed her with enormous cultural relevance, for contemporary observers saw in her struggles the troubling side-effects of industrial capitalism. Her vulnerability to exploitation, her attraction to the material temptations of the city, and her imperiled journey towards marriage were all scrutinized and eventually elevated to the level of public debates.

All over Europe and North America, industrialization was hitting cities at a quickening pace, and causing young generations to step out on their own and work a variety of jobs. A side effect of increasing urbanization, industrialization, and migration was widespread concern amongst older generations and reformers about vice, including but not limited to alcohol consumption, forms of prostitution including white slavery, and gambling. Terms loaded with sexual meaning such as “Bowery girls,” charity girls” or “good times girls” were used to describe single woman in cities like New York, Chicago, London, and Toronto.<sup>6</sup>

Concerns about young single women living in cities were by no means specific to Mormonism or Utah. Nonetheless, Church leaders believed that “the working girl” problem could impose its own special kind of havoc on the future of Mormonism. For example, when leaders in the Young Ladies MIAs in Salt Lake City learned that some young women who moved to the city were not attending mutual meetings, they knew they had to act fast.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, the need to set up proper family home environments was tied to concerns that older Mormons held for young Church members after the remarkable events of the 1890s. This decade included the passage of the Manifesto and gaining of statehood for Utah. The existence of Mormon working girls in urban areas in Utah represented the possibilities of what could go wrong with the future of the religion: first, young women may be tempted to marry outside of Mormonism; they could enjoy their freedom too much and never marry; and, finally, they would lose their sexual innocence through improper circumstances such as a premarital sexual affair or, worse, prostitution.<sup>8</sup> Each of these outcomes held

potentially devastating consequences for the future of an authentic, religious Mormonism in both the temporal and eternal worlds. Church leaders were worried that due in part to urbanization and the loss of cultural touchstones like plural marriage that the youngest adherents could not maintain their Mormonness and "frontier values." Qualities they believed came more naturally to the older generations.<sup>9</sup>

The older generations of Mormons held an ambivalent attitude toward the changing nature of Salt Lake City. All at once the modernization of the city represented sophistication and progress but could also lead to corruption and materialism.<sup>10</sup> Concern over Mormon youth in the city during the rise of urbanization during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries corresponded and diverged from prevailing ideas regarding youth in the United States. The most striking development about youth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the invention of adolescence, the period between childhood and adulthood. Kent Baxter explains the category of adolescence: "This "invention of adolescence" was largely motivated by the need to define a new and quickly expanding segment of the population, but also, it became a vehicle for expressing many concerns associated with the movement into a new era."<sup>11</sup> The acceptance of adolescence as a recognizable period of one's life was perpetuated through three developing phenomena: social scientists writing about this new age categorization; wide sweeping changes in public educational programs; and a perceived rise in juvenile delinquency and the creation of a juvenile court program.<sup>12</sup>

Despite directives from the Church leadership urging young rural men and women to stay home, there was no doubt that young Mormons were still drawn to the city out of financial responsibility to support their families or just to explore their independence. Young women were employed either as domestic servants and clerical workers, and a sizeable minority worked in dressmaking, candy manufacturing, and canning. Some achieved professional status as nurses and teachers or attended at the LDS Business College. In 1910, there were 2,440 female workers officially counted in the US Census and ten years later the number had only grown by a couple hundred. Some women who worked in factories were not counted in these numbers, as were married women who had to work outside the home. The growth of urbanization in Utah also contributed to the presence of young women in the city: around the turn of the century, 61.9 percent of Utah's population was rural, and this number dropped to 53.7 percent in the next ten years.<sup>13</sup> It is not necessarily the number of women that worried older Church members, but the actual sight of young women in downtown Salt Lake, working outside of the home in increasing number.

So how and why did the leaders of the female associations envision that Mormon rooming houses would minimize the dangers of the city? A home would serve the purpose of keeping young women involved in the Church. It was a method to ensure that young women would attend their Mutual meetings, a necessary stepping-stone toward the formulating of their identities as proper Mormon women, who desired marriage, motherhood, and eternal membership in the Church. According to the *Young Woman's Journal* (YWJ), a publication for young women that began in 1889, a young woman's involvement in the Church auxiliary group the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association was a non-negotiable step toward their training as a proper Mormon woman. To reassert this point, an editorial from the October 1890 edition of the journal explained that service to the YLMIA was parallel to young men's missionary service.<sup>14</sup>

The second answer to this question of why leaders of women's group sought to open homes involves understanding the various threats that young women were susceptible to. The specter of prostitution and white slavery embodied the multiple dangers that could inflict young women because not only would she be selling her body for money but she would also likely be suffering from poverty, at risk of out of wedlock pregnancy, vulnerable to problems with alcohol, and would be the perpetual victim of immoral men who sought her services.

The threat of white slavery surely impelled Mormons to want to keep young women safe. Concern over white slavery escalated with stories from Europe in the 1890s and early 1900s, and resulted in the passage of the Mann Act in 1910. The Mann Act was also known as the White Slavery Act and criminalized the interstate or foreign transport of women for prostitution. It is probably not lost on the audience that the term "slavery" was regularly used to describe plural marriage by antipolygamists at the height of the antipolygamy campaign. Historian Ruth Rosen explains the difficulty of offering clear declinations between white slavery and "voluntary" prostitution. According to Rosen: "At one end was white slavery, in which a maximum amount of coercion was used to sell a woman's body for profits in which a woman possesses no avenue of escape." At the end of the spectrum were women who chose prostitution because "it appeared a better means of survival than other available choices." In between these end points of white slavery and "chosen: prostitution were varying degrees of coercion, choice, desperation, passivity, and agency."<sup>15</sup>

Illicit boarding and rooming houses served as gateways for women to intentionally or unwittingly enter prostitution. At the end of the nineteenth century, many North American cities had rooming house districts that were full of homes offering temporary and semi-permanent housing to single working men and women. These districts were also the areas known for prostitution.<sup>16</sup> A 1901 story from the Salt Lake Herald titled "LANDLADY IN TROUBLE" exemplified the issues with allowing working women to live in unsupervised boarding homes. The story reported that a young girl and young man were found in a "house of shady repute" on State Street and were immediately arrested. While the landlady of the home stood accused of keeping a house of prostitution, the article read, "the charge against the girl was dismissed, in view of the fact that she would testify in the charge against Mrs. Young. The girl said that she lived in the country, and promised the officers if they would allow her to go this time that she would return to the country and reform."<sup>17</sup> Though the article does not specify the religion of the young woman, this was the exact type of young woman that the Church members were concerned about: an innocent country girl away from home for the first time falling victim to the worst sin of the city through the accident of choosing to board in the wrong type of home.

## Organizing the Homes

The Church's resolution to establish suitable lodging by young working women was influenced by progressive era reformers establishing all sorts of "homes"—settlement houses, rescue homes, and residential clubs—that all shared the similar goal of offering a safe space for women in the city. For the purposes of this paper, I will give a brief and speculative explanation of how members of the Church perceived the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The YWCA was established in Britain and took off in the United States in the 1850s and 1860s. Soon the association became well known for their rooming quarters that the association described as "friendly and homelike atmosphere" and likened to a "Christian home."<sup>18</sup> The YWCA opened its doors in Salt Lake City in 1906. A 1909 article in the *Deseret News* about the YWCA, which then had between 800 and 900 members in Salt Lake City, cheerfully lauded the association's efforts toward helping the young women through the establishment of their own employment bureau, a Traveler's Aid Society that met young women at the train to bring them safely into the city, and providing them with a space for worship and recreation.<sup>19</sup> The absence of a discussion of religious difference in the article and the open praising of an association, whose national larger membership likely included Protestant reformers who were once involved in anti-Mormon campaigns, is a testament to a new level of cooperation between Mormons and non-Mormons in Utah. Mormon leaders and Church members were interested in maintaining Salt Lake City as a moral city and welcomed any productive and virtuous influences. Finally, and most importantly, it is likely that leaders in the Young Ladies MIA saw and read about the positive effects of the YWCA and thought such an endeavor—but one with distinctly Mormon values—would be a sensible compromise to Salt Lake's "working girl problem."

Members of the Young Ladies MIA leadership became increasingly convinced that offering a suitable home atmosphere would guarantee that young women would stay active in the Church. The first home, named the Lucy Mack Home for Girls and opened in 1913, proved to be somewhat of a disappointment. Part of reasoning for the short run of the home was that members of the General Authorities did not want the home announced in wards or to be advertised in local newspapers, as they would prefer for young women to remain at home. Marba Josephson, a leader in the Young Ladies MIA, reflected that "the home never quite measured up to the reasons for its establishment. It had become more or less a boarding house...there was no need for this kind of institution."<sup>20</sup>

While the Lucy Mack Home for Girls did not reach its potential, the Relief Society started its own well publicized home in late 1913. Even though both homes opened just within months of each other, I cannot find any overlap in shared leadership or funding. In 1912, Emmeline B. Wells urged the First Presidency to aid the Society in creating a home for incoming immigrants and women temporarily visiting the city. A six-page article in the second edition of the 1914 *Relief Society Bulletin* stated the intentions for the home: it was primarily intended for "Women, without relatives or friends, come to this city to do work in the Temple or to visit the conferences of the Church." But then, almost, reluctantly the article addressed the needs of young women: "Girls, who insist on coming to this city to get big wages, are too often allowed to drift about with no secure quarters where they may lodge until they can secure work."<sup>21</sup> Clearly, the Relief Society Home for Girls was caught between offering a safe space young girls and also dissuading others from moving to the city.

An integral aspect of the Relief Society's compromise for young women to live in the house was that they would take advantage of the Relief Society Employment Bureau, so they would obtain appropriate work in atmospheres that did not compromise their vulnerability.<sup>22</sup> Leaders in the Relief Society found it necessary to firmly outline the objectives and responsibilities of the Employment Bureau due to misunderstandings regarding earlier versions of the bureau. A 1905 article in the *Deseret News* aimed to clear up a "misunderstanding among people in our country settlements." The article resolutely stated that earlier announcements about the bureau were "not intended as an advertisement to induce young women in the country to this city for any purpose. On the contrary, the sisters of the Society believe it is to be far better for young women to stay at home...than to come to this or any other pother populous city, where would be liable to be exposed to temptation."<sup>23</sup> The Relief Society and General Authorities wanted to make the following message abundantly clear: in almost all circumstances it was best for young women to stay within their familial home and local community, and they should seek work in the city only out of absolute financial necessity.

For all intents and purposes, the Relief Society Home was a success. Many women "found it almost impossible to ever get rooms" in the house.<sup>24</sup> The lack of space at the Relief Society Home worried older members of the Young Ladies MIA especially after learning that sixteen LDS girls rented rooms at the YWCA. While the YWCA may have offered suitable housing, the preference was that young women should live within an environment that fit their particular religious needs. The problem was reaffirmed when two young women who traveled from Logan to work in Salt Lake City could not find adequate housing.<sup>25</sup> Anecdotes such as these reintroduced the idea of a home for girls. In 1919, the executive board of the Young Ladies MIA successfully gained permission to use the Beehive House, as it was no longer being used after President Heber J. Grant decided to remain in his own home after the death of Joseph F. Smith. It was understood that this home would serve as temporary accommodation until young women could find a permanent place to stay. On July 1, 1920, the Beehive House officially opened its doors to young women and the following guidelines were established:

- Charges for each girl was between \$6.00 and \$8.50 for room and board
- No one over twenty-five was allowed to live in the home
- Residents were allowed to stay in the home for one year

▼ RESIDENTS WERE ALLOWED TO STAY IN THE HOME FOR ONE YEAR

During their stay, young women were expected to gain knowledge of the city. Once their time in the home was over, the Beehive House Staff attempted to find them lodging with a Latter-day Saint family.<sup>26</sup>

Young residents of the Beehive House agreed to reside with the understanding that they were to refrain from vice and live up the standards of a proper Mormon girlhood set by the Church. The women had to abide by a nightly curfew and report to one of the house chaperones each evening. Despite their busy schedules, young women still found time to have fun. An account of time spent at the Beehive House recalls the fun young women had:

....it was something special to have a boyfriend arrange a date that would fill the evening at one of those resorts. It was often a foot-race to get off the last train from Lagoon, their station was on the corner of South Temple and West Temple...and get up the street, those two long blocks, say good-night, and be inside the Beehive House before the door was locked.

Of course, the goals of these outings were not merely to pass the time but for young Latter-day Saints to become acquainted and, hopefully, in the end, fall in love and marry. The remembrance continues those “after a romantic evening” those “last trains to the city were often the perfect setting for a girl to find a new diamond ring on her third finger left hand.”<sup>27</sup> This story coupled with the rules of the house reified the point that lodging at the Beehive House, and more explicitly a young women’s time spent working, was supposed to be a *temporary* stage in early adulthood before entering the covenant of marriage and motherhood.

Young women continuously received mixed messages pertaining to whether or not they should be engaged in outside employment. Throughout the late-nineteenth century due in part to decreasing marriage rates for young working women, the image of the “New Woman” arrived in American pop culture.<sup>28</sup> To contend with this image of the “New Woman” who put off marriage and child rearing, the Church developed a rhetoric that emphasized the necessity of motherhood. In the 1920s, J. Reuben Clark, who served on the board of the Young Men Mutual Improvement Association and would be called to serve as Second Counselor in the Church’s First Presidency later in the 1930s, claimed with alarm: “on all sides we see the apprehension, the failure, the unwillingness of your young daughters to become mothers. My brothers and sisters, I repeat to you that motherhood is a duty. That is why we are here.”<sup>29</sup> Of course, motherhood was supposed to only occur within the confines of marriage. In the same decade, the Relief Society released a lesson endeavoring that “every young girl” should have an interest and knowledge in the responsibilities of homemaking and earning a living if the unplanned need for additional finances occurred. The lesson continued to say that “an unmarried woman is always happier when following a vocation in which she can be socially serviceable and financially independent. In no case should she be constrained to accept an unworthy companion as a means of support.” The lesson was rooted in the practical concerns that some young women may never marry, could be widowed, or could just find themselves responsible to be the sole breadwinner for their family.<sup>30</sup>

Compared side-by-side, these statements appear to be directly at odds, but a closer read reveals some commonalities. The Relief Society’s encouragement and development of woman-centered jobs and programs, like nursing or teaching, arguably reasserted a bifurcation between women’s and men’s prescribed roles. Nonetheless, these programs did have a profound affect on some young women’s feelings of purpose outside motherhood and marriage, perhaps, leading some to even put off marriage. For example, from 1902 to 1913, the Relief Society ran a program called Relief Society Nurses. The program was reinstated in 1913 to improve access to obstetrics education and to attend to homes within Mormon communities. After finishing the program, young nurses were expected to give their time to charitable nursing and sustain a “spiritual component” in their work.<sup>31</sup> Upon her graduation from the program Mary Bennion wrote in her journal that she felt a new sense of “responsibility” when she graduated. It is clear that the completion of the nursing program signified a *professional* milestone in Mary Bennion’s life. Her status of a nurse and then teacher may have led her to delay marriage to her late twenties.<sup>32</sup> It is possible that programs such as the Relief Society Nurses program which were set up to provide a practical service also led to a new level of fulfillment for some single young women and changed the expected trajectory of their lives as Mormon women.

Despite the inconsistent messages espoused by Church leaders and lessons for women, the truth was that many women continued to work and seek out lodging at the Beehive House. From 1920 to its closure in 1959, the home hosted an average of eighty to eighty-three young women at a time. Unfortunately, for many of the young women living in the home toward the end, they received notice that they had to leave by February 1, 1959. The First Presidency decided to close the home in order to restore the house as it was during Brigham Young’s residency. This caused a great inconvenience to several of the young women living and hoping to live in the home—there was often a long wait list to gain a coveted spot.<sup>33</sup> The young women were not the only ones distressed by the closure of the house. Supposedly, “Aging grandmothers, only catching a phrase on television or radio news broadcasts, or seeing the headline in the newspaper, were irate, especially those that had had enjoyed Beehive residency during the decade of the ‘twenties.”<sup>34</sup>

The development of the homes for young women served two purposes: one pragmatic and another that was more idealistic. The homes provided a safe and nurturing space for young women who needed a roof over their head while they worked. For the leaders in the Church and auxiliary female associations, the home served as a method to maintain and strengthen young women’s religiosity in turn to guarantee the survival of Mormonism during a time of chaotic transformation. At the same time, the development of these homes also played a part in ushering the Church into the twentieth century. Despite official rhetoric that urged young members to stay at home and women to focus on motherhood, the establishment of these homes in addition to programs and lessons that

educated women about making a living wage asserts that leadership of Relief Society and Young Ladies MIA understood that this period of working would not always merely be a “phase” in some of these women’s life but fundamental to their livelihoods. These homes in Salt Lake City could and did not exacerbate the “working girl problem,” as they allowed some young women to flourish in their multifaceted roles as workers and Church members.

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## FOOTNOTES

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2. Throughout this paper, I will use *LDS*, *Mormon*, and *Latter-day Saint* interchangeably to refer to members of the LDS Church.

3. Martha H. Tingey to First Presidency quoted in Marba C. Josephson, *History of the YWYIA* (Salt Lake City: Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association, 1955), 157.

4. By *city*, I am mostly referring to Salt Lake City (SLC) unless otherwise noted. All of the homes I reference were located in SLC.

5. Unless otherwise specified I use the term "leadership" to refer to a network of prominent and influential individuals in male leadership and female auxiliary groups.

6. Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 3, 9.

7. Josephson, 156-157.

8. Historian Lisa Olsen Tait explores the fear that older generations of Mormons had that young women may be tempted to marry outside of Mormonism following the passage of the Manifesto. She examines fictional stories in the *Young Woman's Journal* that she aptly refers to as "post-manifesto marriage fiction" that warned young women about marrying outside of the religion. Lisa Olsen Tait, "The *Young Woman's Journal* and Its Stories: Gender and Generations in 1890s Mormondom" Thesis (Ph. D. diss., University of Houston, 2010), 149

9. Richard Kimball, *Sports in Zion: Mormon Recreation, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 3-4.

10. See Tait, chapter five.

11. Kent Baxter, *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 3.

12. See Stanley G. Hall *Adolescence; Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904)

The publishing of the two-volume *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime and Religion* by G. Stanley Hall, aptly referred to as the "father" of adolescence, in 1904 provided a biological explanation for the development of adolescence. Hall asserted that throughout adolescence, an individual recapitulates the history of the human species. See Baxter, 44 -72.

13. Miriam B. Murphy, "Gainfully Employed Women," in *Women in Utah History: Paradigm or Paradox?* edited by Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), 190-191.

14. "Missionary Work for Girls," *Young Woman's Journal* 2 (October 1890): 29 -30.

15. Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 113.

16. Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 108.

17. *Salt Lake Herald*, 13 April 1901.

18. Nancy M. Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 14.

19. *Deseret News*, 18 December 1909.

20. Josephson, 159.

21. *Relief Society Bulletin*, vol. 1 no. 2, 17.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Deseret News*, 9 September 1904.

24. Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co, 1992), 185.

25. Josephson, 160.

26. Ibid, 162-3.

27. "BEEHIVE HOUSE." MSS 10690. Folder 5. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

This is a typed four page documents with no legibly written author name.

28. Jane Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 387.

29. Linda P. Wilcox, "Mormon Motherhood: Official Images," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 213.

30. Derr, 246.

31. Ibid.

32. Mary Bennion, *Journal (1908-1909)*. Ms 0251. Bennion Family Papers, Box 4. Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

33. "Deseret News, 10 January 1959.

34. "BEEHIVE HOUSE." MSS 10690, Church History Library.