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LOUISA BARNES PRATT: SELF-RELIANT MISSIONARY WIFE

WHEN her husband, Addison Pratt, was called to serve as a Latter-day Saint missionary in the islands of Polynesia in 1843, Louisa¹ Barnes Pratt became what would later be known in the Church as a “missionary wife.” Louisa and her husband had joined the LDS Church but five years earlier, and when the call came from the Prophet Joseph Smith for Addison to preach to the “isles of the sea,” dedication to their new faith dictated that Louisa carry on at home in his absence. The term *missionary wives* designates those faithful Latter-day Saint women in the early days of the Church who, like Louisa, were left alone to support their families while their husbands were called to preach the message of the restored gospel.

No one exemplifies the term *missionary wife* better than Louisa. She cared for four daughters during her husband’s absence of over five years, during which time she took her family across the plains to the Salt Lake Valley on her own. She was also later called and set apart to serve a mission

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to Polynesia, whose culture was vastly different from her own, largely in the absence of her husband. Louisa never referred to herself as a missionary wife. Instead, she used a far stronger term, a bittersweet moniker that reflected how she perceived herself through the course of these missionary experiences—Louisa often called herself a widow.² Louisa was able to carry on throughout all her challenges in this lonely life in large part due to her firm testimony of the restored gospel, her unusual self-reliance, and the support of her sisters by blood and her sisters in the gospel.

BEGINNINGS

Born on November 10, 1802, in Warwick County, Massachusetts, Louisa was the fifth of ten children.³ Perhaps foreshadowing things to come later in her life, Louisa was separated from her family at the age of seven, being sent to live with a nearby aunt. This arrangement ended only when the Barnes family determined to move to Canada in 1810.⁴ In her teenage years, Louisa again went to live with relatives on two additional occasions, was employed as a teacher far from home, and was sent to Vermont to study to be a seamstress.⁵ Though it was not uncommon at the time for children to be sent from their homes for various reasons, Louisa felt things deeply as a child and was often lonely and homesick.⁶

Louisa was religious even as a young girl, choosing to spend her Sabbath singing hymns and studying the scriptures to the point that she knew the New Testament “almost by heart.”⁷ She was frequently put in charge of the younger children and had great compassion and “unconquerable patience” for them,⁸ which would serve her well in the future. In her later life, while reflecting upon her childhood, Louisa wrote: “Had I known in my youthful days what I had to pass through how faint and feeble my heart would have been when the trials assailed me. They were wisely hidden from me. Often in my youth did a presentment of a fearful future come before me, and bade me beware of taking steps to hasten my doom. But it was written in the book of fate, and therein ’twas written that I had much to suffer for the Gospel’s sake.”⁹

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YOUNG WOMANHOOD, MARRIAGE,
AND A NEW RELIGION

Being a self-reliant woman in a nineteenth-century marriage—meaning not being economically reliant upon her husband or on other men—was unusual, but being emotionally supported by other women was not. In a treatise about female friendship in the nineteenth century, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, professor emerita of history from the University of Michigan, writes, “Female friendships served a number of emotional functions. Within this secure and empathetic world women could share sorrows, anxieties, and joys, confident that other women had experienced similar emotions.”¹⁰ Louisa’s experiences with female friendships were very typical of the period in which she lived.

As an independent young woman, Louisa traveled much, visiting her many relatives in her native Warwick and other places.¹¹ Beginning in 1827, she attended the Female Academy in Winchester, Massachusetts where she met Rebekah J. Pratt. The two became intimate friends, and Louisa spent much time at the Pratt family’s home.¹² Rebekah regaled Louisa with the adventures of a brother at sea, and in the winter of 1828 Louisa was introduced to Addison Pratt. She found him “rough and unpolished, but . . . frank and ingenuous . . . mirthful in the extreme, fond of singing and telling wonders.” Her acquaintances did not seem to think it wise to attach herself to a sailor, “a roving man,” and Louisa was unsettled by these thoughts and the prospect of leaving her friends.¹³ All doubts aside, Louisa married Addison Pratt on April 3, 1831.

After they married, the Pratts spent some time in Buffalo. Then Addison purchased land with Louisa’s brother Horace on the shore of Lake Erie in Ripley, New York, where the couple settled and began farming. Louisa gave birth to her first daughter, Ellen, in 1832, and after much trial and loneliness there, her sister Lois came to live with her. The arrival of her sister gave Louisa “joy too great for utterance.”¹⁴ A happy year was spent with Lois in their home. Louisa then took Ellen home to Canada for a summer and was buoyed up by being with her family, including her two sisters Caroline and Catharine.¹⁵ Of

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this time Louisa said, "I believe I lived more real life during that period . . . than some persons of a less happy temperament do in a lifetime." This pleasant respite enabled her to return home to Ripley in high spirits.¹⁶

Her good spirits would not last long, however, even though in 1834 a second daughter, Frances, was born. Lois became ill, diagnosed with consumption, which cast a shadow over the next several months as her health continually declined. At Lois's death, a letter from Louisa's youngest sister, Catharine, provided much-needed balm for Louisa's depressed spirits.¹⁷ However, two years later Catharine also died of consumption. Adding further heartbreak, Rebekah, Addison's sister and Louisa's dear friend, also passed away, and then Addison and Louisa's brother Horace dissolved their partnership. A third daughter, Lois, was born in 1837, and Louisa found herself both lonely and overwhelmingly busy. It was at this low point that the Pratts were visited by Louisa's sister Caroline and her husband, Jonathan Crosby. The Crosbys had embraced a new religion and were on their way to join the Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio. They shared the Book of Mormon with Louisa and Addison, neither of whom accepted the new teachings at first. Nevertheless, both Louisa and Addison were later converted and were baptized in June of 1838. According to Louisa, "from that time [she] had never a doubt."¹⁸

In November 1838 the Pratts sold their farm, intending to follow the Crosbys to Jackson County, Missouri. However, they received word that the Saints had been driven out of Missouri and that they should take temporary asylum until another gathering place was designated. Consequently, both the Pratts and Crosbys settled in Indiana, where the Pratts purchased farmland and where the fourth and last Pratt child, another daughter, Louise, was born.¹⁹ It was Louisa's deepest desire to be with the body of the Church. She finally convinced Addison, who was greatly attached to their farm in Indiana, to join the Saints, who had transformed the swampy town of Commerce on the banks of the Mississippi. The Pratts arrived in Nauvoo in the fall of 1841. Whereas Louisa had followed her sister into the Church, Caroline now followed Louisa's footsteps: the Crosbys reached Nauvoo in June 1842.

THE “WIDOWHOOD” BEGINS

Addison obtained employment constructing the Nauvoo Temple for a dollar a day and board and became known for his sea experiences. Family tradition has it that while working on the temple Addison mentioned to Joseph Smith how the Hawaiians reminded him of the American Indians, which may have planted the seed for his mission call. On May 11, 1843, the Twelve met in Joseph Smith’s office, and it was “voted that Addison Pratt and Knowlton F. Hanks, Noah Rogers, Benjamin F. Grouard go on a mission to the Sandwich Islands.”²⁰ On June 1, 1843, Addison and his three companions left Nauvoo without purse or scrip.

Thus began Louisa’s life as a missionary wife, or widow. Throughout this time in Nauvoo, Louisa was extremely lonely but busied herself with the care of her family. Addison had purchased a lot in Nauvoo, and Louisa used her bartering skills and worked as a seamstress to purchase lumber and have a home built. At that time in the United States, it was highly unusual to have a married woman responsible for her family’s support. According to esteemed women’s historian Nancy Cott, “the norm for an adult woman remained household occupation, which implied dependence on a man’s initiating economic activity.”²¹ Early Latter-day Saint women, like Louisa, who had husbands on missions were fast becoming exceptions to that norm. Several men had promised Addison they would look after Louisa’s needs, but none fulfilled their promises, so Louisa undertook the home building and economic support of her children by herself. She wrote: “I had much business to perform in carrying my building forward. Men were continually disappointing me in doing the work. . . . Father Cutler (Committee on the Temple) was accustomed to remark, ‘If all the sisters were enterprising like Sister Pratt we should not see so many ragged men about the streets.’”²²

In the spring of 1844, Louisa opened a school in her home, but her pupils’ families were so poor that it brought in little income. She attempted to brighten her life by seeking out cheerful female companions.²³ “I was subject to severe fits of melancholy,” she wrote. “I felt a loneliness indescribable. . . . My belief in the gospel was a secret joy. . . . Thus was my life made up

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of a mixture of joys and sorrows. Notwithstanding the appearances I kept up I sometimes felt very helpless and inadequate to the burden that was laid upon me. I felt like an orphan child.”²⁴

With the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith in June of 1844, circumstances only got worse for the Saints. Nonetheless, work on the temple continued at an unprecedented rate, and Louisa’s “widowhood” did not exempt her from contributing. She recorded: “The sisters even resolved to pay fifty cents each towards buying the nails and glass. By strict economy I obtained the amount. I started in good faith to go to the Temple office to bestow my offering. . . . A temptation came over me. I paused. I turned over in my mind, how many things I needed for family use, and that money would relieve my present necessities. In an instant more I resisted. Said I, ‘if I have no more than a crust of bread each day for a week, I will pay this money into the treasury.’”²⁵ Louisa was blessed for this sacrifice: she received her endowment, in the absence of her husband, at the Nauvoo Temple before the Saints were forced to leave the city.

In spite of the courage this gave her, she faced the tremendous task of taking her family to a new place on her own. She wrote: “What could I do, thought I, with my little means, and my helpless family in launching out into the howling wilderness. I had no male relative to take charge of my affairs. My brother-in-law and family were not prepared to go at the time, were struggling hard to make preparations. I was almost in despair, when I reflected on the burden I had to bear, and my companion on the opposite side of the globe!”²⁶ Although her faith sustained her, Louisa nonetheless questioned a friend, Almon Babbit, as to why those who had sent her husband to the other side of the globe failed to call upon her to ascertain her needs before the exodus. Babbit replied, “They expect you to be smart enough to go yourself without help, and even to assist others.”²⁷ This reply renewed Louisa’s spirit of self-reliance, and she determined to show the Brethren what she was capable of doing.

Louisa finally received funds from the sale of their farm in Indiana, which allowed her to purchase supplies and a wagon, but for her property

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in Nauvoo she received almost nothing. Overwhelmed by the prospects of a journey into the unknown without help, she wrote to Brigham Young, who had left Nauvoo, telling him she had decided to return to her parents. Via a messenger he sent his reply: "Tell sister Pratt to come on. . . . Brother Pratt will meet us in the wilderness where we locate, [and] will be sorely disappointed if his family is not with us."²⁸ As she was leaving Nauvoo to follow the Saints in May 1846, Louisa made a final stop at the post office and to her astonishment found a letter from her husband, from whom she had received no news for many months. Addison informed her that he would never again leave his family for so long and that if he were ever sent back to Tahiti he would insist on taking his family with him.

With a company of Saints, Louisa traveled over intolerable roads across Iowa during the summer of 1846. She and the other women in the group organized themselves and voted Louisa as counselor and scribe. They resolved, "If the men wish to hold control over women let them be on the alert. We believe in equal rights."²⁹ Although Louisa and her children avoided the illness rampant in Mount Pisgah, "cholera morbus" finally hit them at Winter Quarters. Louisa wrote of the female support she received, not atypical of Mormon society in those times: "The sisters thronged about my wagon, all anxious to do something to relieve me. . . . The shaking ague fastened deathless fangs upon me, from which there was no escape! . . . The sisters were moved with sympathy. They assembled at my tent, prayed, anointed me with oil, and laid their hands upon me."³⁰

Louisa paid five dollars for a sod hut and later eleven dollars for a log cabin. She and her eldest daughter, Ellen, established a "juvenile school" of twenty-five pupils, which brought in a few extra dollars. However, a general lack of food, particularly of fresh vegetables and fruit, in Winter Quarters resulted in scurvy and severe malnutrition.³¹ For eight months Louisa's ill health prevented her from attending public worship services, and when she was finally permitted to attend a female prayer meeting, it was again the sisters of the Church who brought her comfort. "The sisters laid their hands upon my head and blessed me in a strange language. It was a song; a

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prophetic song! Mrs. E. B. Whitney . . . sang in our tongue. That I should have health, and go to the vallies [*sic*] of the mountains, and there meet my companion and be joyful!”³²

Louisa held onto this promise. Brigham Young, who had led the vanguard company into the Salt Lake Valley, returned to help the group of nearly two thousand Saints preparing to make the 1848 trek west. For the first time, she received his help: “President Young said I must go, that I must do what I could, and he would assist me. . . . The President ordered my wagon made ready, a thousand pounds of flour was allotted me, a yoke of oxen in addition to what I owned, a man hired to drive my team. Fifty dollars worth of store goods was appropriated to clothe myself and children, this with what I obtained by my own economy made me very comfortable.”³³ Each time Louisa managed to make a home for herself and her children, she was required to leave its security to follow the Saints. As she took the step of faith by leaving Winter Quarters, her spirits not only gradually improved, but she actually found joy in the beauties of nature. Her greatest joy came, though, when, a week after entering the Salt Lake Valley, Addison Pratt arrived by way of California. She and Addison had been separated for five years and four months.

LOUISA RECEIVES A MISSION CALL

The reunited family did all they could to heal the wounds of separation.³⁴ The Pratts purchased a house in the fort, and three weeks later the Crosbys arrived in the valley. Almost immediately, however, Elder Pratt contemplated his return to Tahiti. He had promised Benjamin Grouard, the only LDS missionary remaining in the Tahitian Islands,³⁵ that he would return with reinforcements. At the October 1848 conference in the Salt Lake Valley, Addison gave a report of his mission and solicited additional support. The conference voted unanimously “that Elder Pratt return to the islands, accompanied by such elders as should be designated hereafter.”³⁶ The time of Addison’s departure and that of his companions were not immediately

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decided upon, and Brigham Young vacillated about these issues. It is certain, though, that a discussion took place early about the Pratt and Crosby families joining Addison because Caroline Crosby recorded in her journal right after that conference, “It is determined that we accompany Br Pratt and family to the Islands of the Pacific. We therefore feel ourselves still in an unsettled state. After laboring and toiling so long to get to a place where we could feel ourselves at home, we have now got to take another and even more tedious journey. . . . But it is all for the gospels sake. . . . We do not wish to murmur.”³⁷ It is unknown if the suggestion for the Crosbys to join the Pratts originated with Louisa, but it is probable. Louisa drew strength from Caroline.³⁸ During the winter, while awaiting further instruction, Addison Pratt taught Tahitian classes to the Saints, including the Crosbys, constituting the first mission language training in the Salt Lake Valley. In 1849, Elder Pratt joined the Hunt party bound for California and then went on to Tahiti alone.

Louisa was again overcome with sadness. She found a listening ear in Brigham Young’s wife Mary Ann, to whom she related her fears—first, the fear of having to move her family to an unknown island, and then the fear that she would again be left alone. When the call came on April 6, 1850, for the family to join Addison Pratt in Tahiti, the Crosbys were not included in the call. Louisa felt that she could join her husband only if Caroline were also to go: “At intermission I went to President Young’s. I talked with Sister Y. and urged the promise I once had, that if I went my sister should go with me. She promised to use her influence, and the succeeding day my brother-in-law was appointed on the mission. I had thought if that was done my mind would be relieved. I found I was mistaken. I now felt to blame myself for my solicitations. She has a pleasant home, and was comfortable. Her home must be sold to make the necessary preparations. She was tranquil and unmoved.”³⁹

Caroline’s calmness alleviated Louisa’s sense of guilt, and she was further comforted and assisted by other female friends, including Sister John Taylor, in preparing for her departure.⁴⁰ These women offered both physical

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and emotional assistance as she disposed of her belongings, sold her small adobe dwelling, and prepared her children to accompany her. Before leaving, Louisa was blessed by President Young: “He said I was called, set apart, and ordained, to go to the Islands of the sea, to aid my husband in teaching the people. That . . . I should lack nothing. I should have power to rebuke the destroyer from my house, that he should not have power to remove any of my family, that I should do a good work, and return in peace.”⁴¹

THE ISLANDS

The group of twenty-one missionaries bound for the South Seas included Louisa, her four daughters, Hiram E. W. Clark, a fourteen-year-old orphan boy in Louisa’s care, Caroline Crosby and her son Alma, the wife and two daughters of Thomas Tompkins, and the wife of Joseph Busby. Never before had such a group of women and children accompanied elders charged with preaching the gospel. After setting sail from San Francisco on September 15, 1850, Louisa became seasick and longed for Addison: “I complained in my heart of my fate which seemed to be that of always traveling about the world without my companion.”⁴²

The missionary group disembarked at the island of Tubuai on October 21, 1850.⁴³ Louisa and her daughters, who had been separated from Addison for over a year, expected him to meet them and were sorely disappointed when they learned he was on the island of Tahiti trying to resolve misunderstandings with the government. It took him another three months to join them. However, Benjamin Grouard and a group of Tahitians greeted them enthusiastically.⁴⁴ Their first week was spent in getting settled and in conversation with Elder Grouard, who had been physically separated from the Church for seven years and had many questions. The generous members of Tubuai offered homes for the missionaries—white, low cottages plastered with coral-rock lime inside and out. The islanders also offered the Pratts and Crosbys land for cultivation, and in her usual self-sufficient fashion Louisa planted a garden. Caroline Crosby wrote of their first Sabbath day on

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Tubuai: "Sabbath morning arrived. . . . The bell rang for church at 7 o'clock, we all repaired to the Fare bure ra [*fare pureraa*], or house of worship. . . . We were highly pleased to see the decency and order which prevailed among them, almost all of them with bibles under their arms ready to follow the speaker where ever he might appoint them. They have 3 meetings and a school in the course of the day."⁴⁵

Louisa found that Elder Pratt, whose name was pronounced "Paraita" in the islands, had created a warm relationship with the royal family of Tubuai. Though King Tamatoa was not a member, his wife, daughter, and several sons-in-law were. Louisa found the devotion of the islanders sincere. They took great pleasure in prayer and the scriptures, although they had only the Bible and a few small Christian pamphlets written in Tahitian. The members flocked to their American sisters. "The house," Louisa wrote, "for the two first months was nearly always thronged at night with the people talking, reading and singing; many of the people had never seen European females before."⁴⁶

Elder Grouard was building a ship for interisland travel, and the newly arrived elders set about helping. In January 1851, Addison Pratt was finally permitted to travel to Tubuai, where he was reunited with his family. Caroline noted that Elder Pratt also brought from the French government "a long list of written restrictions for us to walk by, so that we shall be compelled to walk in a straight and narrow path whether our hearts incline us to do so or not. But if in the end it leads us to everlasting life I suppose we must thank the French Governor."⁴⁷ These restrictions imposed on the Americans made it illegal for them to live off the islanders or to ask for any sustenance. Elder Pratt presented the restrictions to the island chiefs, who called a council and determined that the missionaries were welcome to stay.⁴⁸ Of this, Louisa wrote, "We are placed here with no salary and forbidden by government to ask any thing of the natives but the Lord provides for us in a way we little expect before hand. The natives give us food and that is all they have to give."⁴⁹

The mission schooner, christened *Ravaai* (the Fisherman), was completed and launched in May 1851, with Benjamin Grouard as her captain.

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The missionaries and families who had traveled with the Pratts and Crosbys were assigned to other islands, and both Addison Pratt and Jonathan Crosby often sailed on the ship, leaving Louisa and Caroline alone on the island with their children. Louisa was once again a missionary widow.

MISSIONARY SERVICE

The two sisters rendered a tremendous variety of service while on Tubuai. Louisa's teaching experience was put to good use. The children of Tubuai attended school taught by Louisa and Caroline until noon, and in the afternoon the sisters held classes for their own children. They also taught the island women music, nursing, gardening, childcare, cleaning, etiquette, and homemaking skills and introduced such handicrafts as quilting,⁵⁰ sewing, and knitting—all domestic and devotional practices common among American and Latter-day Saint women at the time. Caroline wrote, "Our teaching has been mostly by example thus far, being unable to use precepts to their understanding."⁵¹ The Pratt daughters also participated in the work. The three eldest had children placed under their private tutelage for whom they served as surrogate mothers. The girls also helped with the daily school lessons, where reading, English, mathematics, music, and religious topics were on the curriculum.

Louisa and Caroline developed a close relationship with Queen Pitomai. Louisa found her to be intelligent and greatly concerned with her own and her people's ignorance of certain temporal and spiritual matters, and Louisa counseled with her frequently. Caroline was even given charge of Queen Pitomai's eldest son, Darius. The queen "requested that he might be constantly with Alma, and be an assistant to him in his manual services and he in return is to assist in learning him to speak english."⁵² In exchange for her help, the queen gave Caroline gifts of food and even European goods.

It was not an uncommon thing for both Caroline and Louisa to be called upon to take children into their homes, often when those children were fathered by a Caucasian. Elder Grouard's children from his Polynesian wives

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were often looked after by Caroline or Louisa. Eventually, in fact, his son Ephraim became a permanent member of the Pratt family. In 1851, Caroline Crosby took in a mixed-race child, Luna Williams, who stayed with her until the missionaries left,⁵³ and in 1852 Louisa became the tutor of a four-year-old girl named Sarah. As the daughter of the French governor of the protectorate by a Polynesian woman, the child had been banished to Tubuai by the governor's European wife. Louisa volunteered to care for her, and the two became extremely attached. Had it not been against French laws, Louisa would have gladly taken the girl home to Utah as her own. She wrote, "Hope has inspired me to believe her father would keep a watchful eye over her, and that she grew up a brilliant woman, there is little room to doubt. Never does my mind revert to the scenes enacted on that 'isolated world' but I remember the patter of those little feet, and can see the golden child."⁵⁴

The sisters also became the *de facto* island doctors. They nursed and cared for adults and children alike and even administered to them in the absence of the elders:

They have great faith in the ordinances of the Gospel such as baptism and the laying on hands for recovering the sick to health. I brought with me a bottle of consecrated [*sic*] oil which was blessed by brother Brigham Young. . . . The females had great faith in the oil, when I told them from whence I had brought it, and by whom it had been blessed. They would frequently bring their young children to me when they were sick to have me anoint them, give them oil inwardly, and lay my hands upon them in the name of the Lord; if I told them they would soon be better, they seemed to have no doubt about it, and so it was to them according to their faith.⁵⁵

In addition to secular and homemaking instruction, and true to the promise given by Brigham Young mentioned earlier, Louisa "aided her husband in teaching the people." This was a novel role for a Christian missionary woman of the time. In the Protestant movement, women were encouraged

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and even expected to assist in advancing the cause of Christianity, but as expressed by Reverend Walter Harris, a nineteenth-century Congregationalist pastor in New Hampshire, “God has made known, that it is his will that females should not be public teachers of religion, nor take an active part in the government of his church on earth.”⁵⁶

The sisters established a routine with daily morning Bible study before breakfast for all Church members and a weekly prayer meeting just for the women. Louisa spoke at these prayer meetings, and until she became more versed in Tahitian, her eldest daughter, Ellen, who quickly became proficient in the language, interpreted. Ellen also regularly expounded the scriptures to the adults, teaching from both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. She even called the people to repentance and warned them “that if now they turn a deaf ear to the call to repent and forsake their sins, the time would come when they would call on God, and he would not answer.”⁵⁷

Louisa was often called upon to preach and answer gospel questions. She delved into such diverse topics as God’s corporeal form, baptism for the dead, and Daniel’s vision. To a group of visiting women, Louisa spoke of the Book of Mormon, which had not yet been translated into Tahitian. “They inquired if the ancient Nephites were Europeans. I told them they were the ancient fathers of the Tahitians. At this they appeared greatly interested, and wished to learn more about the book.”⁵⁸ There were regular baptisms during Louisa’s time of service, although some were rebaptisms “for the remission of sins.”⁵⁹ Whether this view was spoken or not, Louisa was seen as the missionary leader in the absence of the elders, and her residence was referred to as the mission home.

In short, Louisa’s missionary service was unique for her time. Like her London Missionary Society female counterparts, who were also spreading Christianity throughout the islands, Louisa was involved in educating the islanders, ministering to their physical needs, and instructing women in the art of homemaking. Unlike these women, however, she accepted the Tahitians as true brothers and sisters from the house of Israel. She developed

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deeply personal bonds and true friendships with the islanders. Furthermore, her role as a gospel teacher and leader was unparalleled, and she may have been the first Latter-day Saint woman actually called and set apart to preach the gospel. As Laurie F. Maffley-Kipp wrote, “Louisa Pratt was well ahead of both her time and Church authorities.”⁶⁰

CHALLENGES

Louisa and Caroline also faced many challenges. It was not unusual for the Polynesians, including men, to enter the sisters’ homes without so much as knocking because it was customary. Louisa cherished President Young’s promise that she would have the power to rebuke the destroyer from her house. However, the women were also armed. Ellen Pratt, who resided with Caroline, slept with a pistol and knife under her pillow.⁶¹ On nights of frenzied dancing or whenever intoxicating drink made it to shore, the women were uneasy. Caroline recorded:

Yesterday they had the greatest dance and powwow that I ever heard. . . . I was a little startled just as I was going to bed. I had fastened my doors, and the children were all in bed. . . . I observed my window curtain near the head of my bed gently move to one side; . . . I then walked directly to the window, raised the curtain, and met a man face to face. I confess I was a little surprised and vexed for a moment. I told him to go away, and that he was a bad man, as plain as I could in his own language. He was very soon missing so that I had no need to call for my pistol. . . . I might as well mention, that this is not the first time we have caught them looking into our windows (or trying to) just as we were going to bed, and have warned them against it.⁶²

In spite of security issues, Louisa found solace in walking along the beach alone in the evenings, and when Addison was in residence, she could not understand his reprimands at such a practice, as she had been so often

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left by him to her own devices. She was, of necessity, entirely capable of taking care of herself.

Louisa was less able, though, to deal with loneliness and boredom. Although her home was constantly filled with island visitors, she often felt lonely, and the monotony of island life was at times a heavy burden. Caroline endured the monotony with somewhat better spirits, occasionally finding their routine “dull,” but Louisa craved the companionship of stimulating company, longed for intelligent conversation, and desired to witness more industry among the islanders. She felt isolated from the world at large and also worried about the seclusion being harmful to her children. Louisa was particularly concerned for Frances, who suffered from homesickness and longed to be back in Salt Lake City. After one bout of melancholy, she wrote:

I thought of the dear sisters in the valley of the mountains, and longed to commune with them. I thought of, and loved those most who like me have had sorrows; so clings the heart to objects assimilated with it. . . . A calm came over me, it was sweet and silent. . . . It seemed a foretaste of happier days. . . . Then I thought how the bright star of the gospel had arisen in my hemisphere, with what enthusiasm I had followed it, what dangers I had encountered and what deliverance I had found; how my life had been preserved, and how many dear friends I had in the church who I believed sincerely love me. A holy calm came over me, such as I seldom feel.⁶³

Louisa expressed her feelings honestly and with great frankness. Some of her comments would not be viewed today as politically correct.⁶⁴ She was troubled at the continued level of pagan superstition among Church members and was disappointed that the Polynesian culture did not embrace moral purity, but she was more troubled by “the conduct of white men who having had a Christian training come to these islands and corrupt themselves.”⁶⁵ She was angry that passing ships brought alcohol to trade for goods because it resulted in undesirable behavior. She felt the sorrow missionaries

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feel for those they've taught who "have turned from their idolatry, broken away from their corrupt and abominable practices . . . [and] suddenly as though the adversary of all good was lurking in secret laying snares for them, they turn from the holy commandments."⁶⁶

Judging by the standards of her own cultural environment, Louisa was at times discouraged that the island children seemed so "indifferent about learning; . . . [and could] bear no rigid discipline."⁶⁷ Used to running and playing outdoors, the children had a difficult time sitting still in a classroom setting, and Louisa did not have the energy to deal with a mutinous classroom. Other challenges came from the missionaries' basic lack of supplies. Called upon regularly to nurse the sick and afflicted, Louisa wrote: "They want me to nurse them and I have nothing to do it with; . . . they call on me for medicine, and I feel aggravated to tell them I have none; it is really important that persons sent to reside among them should be provided with little necessities, and especially with simple medicines to nurse the sick."⁶⁸

Louisa's testimony sustained her through challenges and disappointments. She wrote:

My soul has seen travail, and dark waters have murmured around me, and flood of sorrow have arisen mountains high and burst upon my head. Hunger, cold and nakedness have stared me in the face. Pain of body and agony of mind, false friends have beset me, and secret griefs have fastened their venom on my heart, and threatened to untie the cords of life. But the glorious gospel came, and the light of truth dawned upon my saddened heart, and caused me to sing for joy. Then all my sorrows were forgotten. Strong confidence in God has enabled me to triumph in a great measure over every calamity, and this day I thank Him that I have lived to see a glorious work commenced on the earth. . . . I look for joy in the future to equalize all I have suffered since the fullness of the everlasting gospel has made me a pilgrim and stranger, far away from my kindred and country.⁶⁹

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BLESSINGS

Although there were challenges for Louisa and Caroline on Tubuai, one of their great blessings was an abundance of food. When Addison was residing with them, he hunted for wild hens, ducks, and goats. The women honed their gardening skills, which was easy to do with no dormant season and the easily cultivated, loamy soil.⁷⁰ Furthermore, in spite of the French government's requirement that the missionaries not ask the Tahitians for sustenance, the local members were generous in regularly bringing food and fish to the American missionaries.

Although in the dry season the fleas were as thick as one of Egypt's plagues and Caroline suffered from their bites, the Pratt and Crosby families generally enjoyed good health while on Tubuai.⁷¹ Louisa even found her health improved. She wrote about walking a distance of nine miles for a morning walk but not being in the least fatigued: "The delightful sea air invigorates my nerves. I do not remember any period of my life when I could perform as much with more ease."⁷² She also concluded that "no food was ever more congenial to health, than that of the Islands."⁷³ Unlike most Latter-day Saints in the islands or in America, the Pratts and Crosbys were blessed not to have lost a child or spouse to illness or accident.

SAYING GOOD-BYE

Continued problems with the French government resulted in the LDS missionaries being forced to leave the islands in 1852. Louisa, who had wondered how long her "imprisonment" would last, had mixed feelings when actually faced with the reality of leaving. "My mind is disturbed," she wrote. "The people seem troubled about our going away. . . . They say to us, 'If Paraita leaves what shall we do for a missionary?'"⁷⁴ Louisa's greatest fear was that the work the missionaries had accomplished would be undone in a matter of months. She wrote, "I hope much good will arise from my coming here though it may not be realized at present. I have endeavored to sew [*sic*] good seed, the fruit may be gathered up after many days. My daughters

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have set an example of industry and sobriety before the native females; it may result in good.”⁷⁵

On April 1, the American women met with the island sisters for the last time. Louisa wrote, “I felt the spirit to bless them. Sister C. and I, also Ellen, laid our hands upon their heads and gave them our parting blessing. . . . I said many things with a view to console them. It grieves me to the heart to leave the children we have taught so long. To think how soon they will retrograde, if not cared for, and watched over. . . . Oh! That I could take them with me to the Church!”⁷⁶

Louisa had championed the cause of the Saints of Tubuai being brought to Utah, but both the Americans and Polynesians knew realistically they would probably never see each other again. And they didn’t. The departure of the American missionaries not only marked the end of the mission service of Louisa Barnes Pratt and Caroline Crosby, but it also marked the close of the first period of LDS missionary work in what is now known as French Polynesia.

Unfortunately, Louisa’s self-adopted title of “widow” did not end with the Pratts’ departure. Her years as a missionary widow had perhaps taken too deep a toll on her marital relationship: she and Addison would find it difficult to readapt to the realities of their postmission life as a couple. After they returned to America, they lived for five years in San Bernardino with a colony of Saints until Brigham Young called those Saints to return to Utah in preparation for the approaching Johnston’s army.⁷⁷ The breakup of the LDS San Bernardino settlement was also the catalyst for the breaking apart of the Pratt family. Not having understood the depths of Louisa’s struggles, particularly during the trek west, Addison did not comprehend her absolute compulsion to live with the body of the Saints. For her part, Louisa found Addison “not sufficiently fortified with a brave heart”⁷⁸ to make yet another journey to find a home in an area that had no attraction for him. Addison remained in California, and Louisa returned to Utah.⁷⁹ The two never divorced, and in spite of maintaining a family relationship through visits and correspondence, they spent the last fifteen years of their

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married lives apart. After writing his family a farewell letter, Addison Pratt passed away on October 14, 1872,⁸⁰ finally leaving Louisa the widow she already felt she had been. Following his death, Louisa summarized her bittersweet feelings:

More than half the years of my married life I have stood alone. Created the means to sustain myself and children: 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. My firm reliance on the Almighty arm for protecting power kept me from desponding when dark clouds seemed gathering, and ready to burst on my defenceless head. There has been seasons in my life when had I not believed that the angels above knew and pitied me, I should have sunk down in despair!⁸¹

LOUISA'S LEGACY

In spite of Louisa Pratt's fears that her missionary service had been in vain, her legacy, along with that of her husband, Paraita, has endured on Tubuai and, indeed, throughout the South Pacific. Their initial success in Polynesia led to missions being opened in Hawaii, Samoa, Tonga, New Zealand, and Australia. When missionaries returned to French Polynesia in 1892, they found groups of Saints still believing in Joseph Smith. Over the next decades, the seeds planted so early were recultivated and harvested.

In October 1991, mission president Yves R. Perrin dedicated the newly completed chapel in Taahueia, the district center for Tubuai's six hundred members. "I truly felt the spirit of Addison and Louisa Pratt," he said of that event. "I felt they were watching us and were pleased to see the progress the Church has made here."⁸² Realizing Tubuai's importance as a significant site in the history of the Church in the South Pacific, a group of Brigham Young University Church history professors made the trip to the island in 2008, and in December 2010 Church historian Elder Marlin K. Jensen, assistant Church

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historian Richard E. Turley, and other Church leaders visited the island. “Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the island of Tubuai are a living legacy of the Pacific’s first Mormons,” Elder Jensen stated.⁸³

Today there are four branches and three chapels on Tubuai. As of January 1, 2011, Church membership in French Polynesia was 21,245, constituting 7.1 percent of the total population.⁸⁴ A plaque on the island of Tubuai, one of the oldest LDS Church history markers, pays homage to the Pratts, and a new marker is being prepared to honor them. The influence of Louisa Barnes Pratt does not stop there. Her experiences and writings have not only enriched the study of early missionary work and of the role of women in Latter-day Saint history, but also have personally enhanced the lives of modern-day Latter-day Saint women as well, including the author of this paper.⁸⁵ The legacy of Louisa Barnes Pratt, who was sustained by her testimony of the gospel, by her unusual self-reliance, and by other Mormon women, is one that continues to grow and spread throughout the Church.

NOTES

1. Louisa is pronounced “Low-eye-za.”
2. On her twenty-first wedding anniversary, Louisa wrote, “More than one third of that time I have lived a widow.” *The History of Louisa Barnes Pratt: Being the Autobiography of a Mormon Missionary Widow and Pioneer*, S. George Ellsworth (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1998), 177. Dr. Ellsworth, whose wife Maria Smith Ellsworth was a direct descendent of Addison and Louisa Pratt through Lois Pratt Hunt, consequently used the term *widow* in the title of his publication of her journal, cited earlier in this note. He also wrote, “Of Mormon pioneer women known to me, there is not another that had quite the variety of experiences that Louisa Barnes Pratt had.” Ellsworth, in *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, xiii.
3. Louisa had five sisters, but she was particularly close to her younger sisters, Caroline, Lois, and Catharine. Caroline would be a lifelong support, but the premature deaths of Lois (d. 1834) and Catharine (d. 1836) had a profound impact on Louisa.
4. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 5–6.

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5. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 17–18.
6. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains, “These school years ordinarily marked a girl’s first separation from home. They served to wean the daughter from her home, to train her in the essential social graces, and ultimately, to help introduce her into the marriage market. It was not infrequently a trying emotional experience for both mother and daughter.” Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 18.
7. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 10.
8. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 11.
9. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 149.
10. Smith-Rosenberg, “Female World of Love and Ritual,” 14.
11. Smith-Rosenberg writes, “In this process of leaving one home and adjusting to another, the mother’s friends and relatives played a key transitional role. Such older women routinely accepted the role of foster mother; they supervised the young girl’s deportment . . . and introduced her to their own network of female friends and kin.” Smith-Rosenberg, “Female World of Love and Ritual,” 18.
12. “Even more important to this process of maturation than their mother’s friends were the female friends young women made at school. Young girls helped each other overcome homesickness and endure the crises of adolescence.” Smith-Rosenberg, “Female World of Love and Ritual,” 19.
13. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 28, 29, 34.
14. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 41.
15. “Most . . . nineteenth-century women lived within a world bounded by home, church, and the institution of visiting. . . . Rural women developed a pattern of more extended visits that lasted weeks and sometimes months.” Smith-Rosenberg, “Female World of Love and Ritual,” 10.
16. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 44–46.
17. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 47–53.
18. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 54–57.
19. Louise (also called Ann or Anna Louise) was born on April 6, 1840, in Pleasant Garden, Indiana.

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20. *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, ed. S. George Ellsworth (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 115. In spite of the call to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), when in New Bedford, Massachusetts, the missionaries chose to sail aboard the only ship leaving for the South Seas, the whaler *Timoleon*, which was headed for the Society Islands in what is now French Polynesia.
21. Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 21.
22. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 67.
23. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 73.
24. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 67–68.
25. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 72–73.
26. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 76.
27. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 78.
28. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 78–79.
29. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 82.
30. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 87. It was not unusual for women to participate in anointing blessings in the early days of the Church, and initially it was even officially sanctioned. Linda King Newell, the coauthor of *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, wrote an in-depth treatise about this titled "A Gift Given, a Gift Taken: Washing, Anointing, and Blessing the Sick among Mormon Women," which first appeared in the September–October 1981 issue of *Sunstone Magazine*, 30–43. A more complete version was later published in a book of essays about Mormon women titled *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992).
31. Although Louisa never mentions it, both Caroline Crosby and Addison Pratt note in their journals that Louisa's health challenges in Winter Quarters resulted in her losing her front teeth. See *No Place to Call Home: The 1807–1857 Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby, Chronicler of Outlying Mormon Communities*, ed. Edward Leo Lyman, Susan Ward Payne, and S. George Ellsworth, (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2005), 87; *Journals of Addison Pratt*, 359.
32. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 90.

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33. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 90.
34. Louisa wrote, "So much did we seem like strangers we scarcely knew what to say to each other. Ellen turned a little pale. The youngest put her hand behind her, would not reach it forth to receive her father's." Ellsworth, *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 98. Addison's description of the reunion in his journal is just as heart wrenching: "[Ellen] jumped up . . . and caught hold of my hand, with an expression that was as wild as a hawk. . . . The next two, Frances and Lois, were soon on hand and look'd equally surprised. The youngest, Ann, was out to play. She was soon called and when she came in, she stood and eyed me a while with a verry [*sic*] suspicious look, when one of her sisters tried to force her up to me, to shake hands, saying 'that is pa,' when she jerked her hand away and said, 'it is not,' and left the room." *Journals of Addison Pratt*, 358–59.
35. Knowlton Hanks died at sea on the way to the Society Islands. Noah Rogers, discouraged from a lack of success and news of trouble in Illinois, returned to Nauvoo in December 1845.
36. Quoted in S. George Ellsworth and Kathleen C. Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in French Polynesia, a Sesquicentennial History, 1843–1993* (Sandy, UT: Yves R. Perrin, 1994), 18.
37. *Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby*, 87.
38. Smith-Rosenberg emphasizes the power of the relationship between sisters: "Although most of the women . . . would appear to be living within isolated nuclear families, the emotional ties between nonresidential kin were deep and binding and provided one of the fundamental existential realities of women's lives. . . . Sisters helped each other with housework, shopped and sewed for each other. Geographic separation was borne with difficulty. A sister's absence for even a week or two could cause loneliness and depression. . . . Sisterly bonds continued across a lifetime." Smith-Rosenberg, "Female World of Love and Ritual," 11–13.
39. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 107.
40. Louisa felt great despair at being obliged to leave her home and friends. She wrote: "I told my grief to Sister John Taylor; she tried to soothe me, and heal my wound, but Oh, my heart was sore! The dear woman had discerned my anguish and

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- entreated me to confide my secret to her. I loved her from that hour." Ellsworth, *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 108.
41. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 108–9.
 42. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 123.
 43. The island of Tubuai in the Austral Island group of present-day French Polynesia is located about four hundred miles south of Tahiti.
 44. Benjamin Grouard concluded from an 1845 letter from Wilford Woodruff that his wife had left him and the Church. See Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 17. He then took a Polynesian wife, with whom he had a daughter. At her death, he married a second islander and fathered two sons. This second Polynesian wife was with him on Tubuai.
 45. *Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby*, 122.
 46. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 128.
 47. *Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby*, 125.
 48. See Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 19–22.
 49. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 138.
 50. When Louisa and Caroline left Tubuai, they gave the gift of a bed quilt in the "Rising Sun" pattern to the queen. See *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 175.
 51. *Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby*, 135.
 52. *Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby*, 133.
 53. Caroline wrote of their parting, "My little girl which I have kept so long, and taken unwearied pains to instruct, came with her grandmother . . . to say goodbye. . . . I shall have no hopes of her being gathered with us at present, if ever." *Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby*, 157.
 54. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 165.
 55. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 128.
 56. Quoted in Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 21.
 57. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 172.
 58. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 149.
 59. In the early days of the Church it was not uncommon for members who had committed a transgression to ask for rebaptism. Many islanders took advantage of this

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practice to “repent of their sins,” which usually involved inappropriate dancing, alcohol, or immorality.

60. Laurie F. Maffley-Kipp, “Looking West: Mormonism and the Pacific World,” *Journal of Mormon History* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 59. Refer to this article for a detailed discussion of the differences between the various Christian proselytizing groups and the Mormon missionaries.
61. Because Caroline had no daughter, Louisa felt her sister should have female company in her home. In the Salt Lake Valley, Louisa had sent Lois to live with Caroline. See *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 99.
62. *Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby*, 144.
63. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 139–40.
64. There was a generally accepted notion among Western Caucasians at that time that colored skin and a lack of “accepted” behavioral patterns indicated that the colored race was inferior. Although on occasion Louisa’s remarks to a modern reader are shockingly insensitive (particularly in her censure of Caucasian men for marrying Polynesian wives), she was nonetheless a champion of the Polynesians. When speaking with a Caucasian “phrenologist” who had stopped at Tubuai, she wrote, “He argued that in their organization they were wholly deficient. I contended in their favor, from observation. That it was for lack of culture. That almost all brought under religious influences developed conscientiousness and moral principles; they are readily made to discern between right and wrong. Ignorance and superstitions are a legacy bequeathed to them from time immemorial and I can discern innate qualities of mind which shine forth as I teach them; and a love for the good and beautiful. Kindness and benevolence are among their more prominent traits.” *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 176.
65. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 167.
66. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 169.
67. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 145.
68. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 143.
69. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 149–50.
70. The Mormon missionaries brought melon and corn seeds to Tubuai, which were planted and grown successfully. Louisa believed these crops to be the first grown

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on the island. See *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 152. Tubuai (in the Austral Archipelago) has a more temperate climate than the Society, Tuamotu, or Marquesas archipelagoes and is known throughout French Polynesia for its delicious non-tropical vegetables.

71. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 152.
72. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 160.
73. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 181.
74. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 173.
75. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 146.
76. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 177. This event was confirmed by Caroline Crosby. See *Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby*, 150.
77. In 1857 the Mormon Reformation Movement and rumors that President Buchanan had sent an army to exterminate the Mormons resulted in the Saints being called to return to Utah.
78. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 271.
79. S. George Ellsworth writes, "A Mormon who remained in California came to be regarded as weak in the faith, and this attitude cast a shadow on Addison Pratt. . . . To the last he was active in religious service. He administered to the sick and he himself requested the administration for his own health. While a man of great faith, he was preeminently a man of reason, in contrast to his wife who rejoiced in the faith of a zealot and demeaned him for lack of faith." *Journals of Addison Pratt*, 514.
80. See *Journals of Addison Pratt*, 522–23.
81. *History of Louisa Barnes Pratt*, 360.
82. Quote from personal interview. See also Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith*, 312.
83. "Church Historian Honours First Pacific Mormons," LDS Newsroom, December 17, 2010, accessed January 9, 2012, <http://www.lds.org.au/index.php/news/local-news/general-news/235-church-historian-honours-first-pacific-mormons>.
84. "French Polynesia," *Deseret News 2012 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2012), 478.

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85. I not only appreciate Louisa Barnes Pratt's legacy of missionary work, having served with my husband as he presided over the Tahiti Papeete Mission, but I can relate to the challenges she faced as an American woman living on Tubuai. My husband and I lived on the island in 1977 with our premature four-month-old daughter in a small cottage in the jungle—without indoor plumbing or electricity, just like Louisa—while he completed doctoral research. At the time, there were no doctors, telephones, automobiles, or modern grocery stores on the island, and I did not speak Tahitian. Like Louisa, I felt lonely and isolated, but I was overwhelmed by the generosity of the Latter-day Saints of Tubuai who provided for our physical needs. Louisa's legacy of faith and self-reliance helped me weather the adversities of moving from Manhattan to the comparatively primitive conditions of Tubuai in the 1970s, and I feel blessed to have a kinship with Louisa Barnes Pratt that few women have been able to experience firsthand.