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INTERVIEW BY SHEREE MAXWELL BENCH

CAROL CORNWALL MADSEN is a professor emerita of history and former research historian with the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at Brigham Young University. She was one of the pioneering scholars in the emerging field of Mormon women's history. Along with award-winning articles, she has published *Journey to Zion: Voices from the Mormon Trail; Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870–1896; Advocate for Women: The Public Life of Emmeline B. Wells,* winner of three best book awards; and the forthcoming *Woman Triumphant: The Life Story of Emmeline B. Wells.*

SHEREE MAXWELL BENCH teaches courses in writing, women's studies, and Mormon women's history at Utah Valley University. A former researcher and instructor with the Joseph

Fielding Smith Institute and the BYU Women's Research Institute, her research interests include the lives and writings of nineteenth-century Mormon women, including Lucinda Lee Dalton and Emmeline B. Wells. She is the coeditor of *Discoveries: Two Centuries of Poems by Mormon Women* and the forthcoming Emmeline B. Wells diaries.

THE INTERVIEW

BENCH: Let's start at the beginning. Where were you born and raised? And how would you describe your early family life?

MADSEN: I'm a Salt Laker. I was born and raised in Salt Lake City and have spent most of my life in Utah. I am the youngest of seven children, and music defined our lives. My father had been superintendent of music in the Granite and then the Salt Lake City School Districts before being tapped to be conductor of the Tabernacle Choir in 1935. I was just four at that time. Thursdays, the rehearsal day, and Sundays, the broadcast day, were sacrosanct in our home, and those were days not to bring up any difficult issues with our parents or do anything untoward. Since I was the youngest in the family, I often went to Sunday-afternoon rehearsals, which the choir had for a number of years. My mother had an aisle seat in the soprano section, and I sat by her on the stairway with a coloring book or something else to keep myself occupied. Whether by osmosis or by actual attention to the music, I began very early to develop a love for choral and organ music. Even now I can hear numbers that are familiar to me, although I can't always put the name of the piece with the music, and I've always been surprised at how familiar so much of the major choral or organ music is to me even at this point in my life.

We also knew that every Saturday afternoon the radio would be tuned to the Texaco Hour, which presented the Metropolitan Opera broadcast. Again, I listened to it without paying a lot of attention, but many of the arias and music from those operas still resonate with me when I hear them today. For years I tried to hit a high C like Lily Pons,

but unfortunately to no avail. She was my idol during those years. Oh, how much I wanted to be an opera singer like her! Sundays were also music days, besides the choir, since we always listened to the radio broadcast of the New York Philharmonic.

All of my siblings were musical, and two brothers at different times had dance bands, which practiced in a downstairs family room. I often went to bed hearing the bands playing the popular songs of the day. That was my growing-up life, and I loved it and fully intended to keep music a part of my life. We all learned an instrument, and I played the piano. But the real talent went to an older sister who studied at the University of Utah and under the private tutelage of a number of fine pianists in the community. Her gift certainly overshadowed any talent the rest of us had for the piano, so we didn't pursue lessons quite as diligently.

I sang in all the musical organizations in middle and high school and for several years sang with a girls' quartet. We sang the popular songs of the period, all arranged by my talented sister, who played jazz as well as classical music. Quartets were very popular at the time, and we sang at nearly every assembly in high school and even exchanged musical programs with other high schools. Our quartet continued singing at the University of Utah, where we all joined the same sorority and represented it at the Homecoming Quartet Festivals. When local television programs were first scheduled in Salt Lake City, our quartet sang on the weekly *Eugene Jelesnik Talent Showcase* for one summer, earning a little spending money. Jelesnik was a pop conductor and presented local musical programs for various holidays, especially the Twenty-Fourth of July. I have continued my interest in music performance by singing in ward choirs and directing them in various wards for many years. I am an avid fan of the BYU performing groups and of the Tabernacle Choir and Utah Symphony. My children are also all musical, with one of them, like my sister, inheriting that special "edge," as they say in sports, that puts her well above the rest in ability.

BENCH: That's a great legacy from your father. You said your mother was a vocalist. How did she influence you?

MADSEN: My mother performed locally before and for years after her marriage, but by the time I came along she performed mainly as a member of the Tabernacle Choir. I never really heard her sing as a soloist. Every time we sing a hymn by Hugh Dougall in church, I think of my mother because he was her vocal teacher. My parents met when Brother Dougall asked my dad to accompany my mother at a concert she was scheduled to perform. With both parents trained in music, it would have been hard for any of their children to escape the love of music.

BENCH: What other kinds of activities did you enjoy when you were young?

MADSEN: A favorite pastime of mine for several years was what we called dress-ups. Putting on adult dresses, shoes, hats, and bags transported me into a different world where I could be anyone and anything I wanted. My tricycle took me anywhere I wanted to go, and I would often find a place in the neighborhood where I could pretend I was Lily Pons or even Jeanette MacDonald singing the popular Victor Herbert song "Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life." I saw all of the Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald movies with my oldest sister and happened to learn this song from one of their movies. More often I preferred to imagine myself as a foreign correspondent, no doubt influenced by my favorite movie of the time, *Foreign Correspondent*, with Joel MacRae and Laraine Day. I gave myself the name Winifred Wilson in that role. Ironically, when Gordon (my husband) and I needed to get official birth certificates when applying for our first passports some years ago, no official record of birth existed for either of us. My mother had complications after my birth, and Gordon's mother died shortly after his birth, so the lack of records is probably understandable. But when a new one was issued and I was asked what

name should be applied, for an instant I thought I could actually be Winifred Wilson.

Strangely, it was not until I became a historian that I fully realized that I was a child of the Great Depression. My childhood seemed idyllic to me. I knew that my father taught piano lessons to supplement the family income, that my brothers all had paper routes or other part-time jobs, and that my mother was extremely frugal in planning meals, but those activities seemed quite unexceptional to me. All of us children put ourselves through college by means of jobs or scholarships, even more essential for the older ones who were in college during those Depression years. So supporting ourselves, as I did from age sixteen, did not seem extraordinary. I think that because my mother received a small legacy when her parents died—with which my parents built a duplex next door to our house and a small cabin on the Smith and Morehouse River, and even did some remodeling of our home—we didn't seem to be struggling during those difficult years. We all, however, learned self-reliance and frugality at a very early age.

BENCH: Can you tell me a little about your schooling?

MADSEN: When I was about four or five years old, all of my friends, who were a year older than I was, started kindergarten. I was left alone in the neighborhood without friends to play with. My oldest sister, Marian, had just begun teaching kindergarten at the Lafayette School, so she took me to school with her. I would stay for the morning and the afternoon kindergartens and absolutely loved it. Of course the teacher was my sister, so everything she did I enjoyed. Occasionally after school she took me out for dinner and a movie. She virtually raised me while my mother was recuperating from her illness after I was born. After going to kindergarten under the most favorable circumstances, I rebelled when it came time for me to go to school. My mother had to walk halfway to school with me to get me to go. Miss Holt was the kindergarten teacher, but as nice as she was,

she couldn't match my sister. So my parents took me to be tested to see if I could move into first grade. I was given an examination book with readings and questions, which I managed to answer. I was very excited when the decision was in favor of my moving up to the first grade and skipping kindergarten. So I was with my friends. I adored the teacher, Miss Briggs, and life was beautiful for me again.

I have always loved school and always loved writing but never knew quite how to utilize this desire or how to determine if I had any talent to write. I joined the school newspaper staffs in both junior high and high school, wrote "orations" for various occasions, and won an award sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution for writing a paper on a patriotic subject. I was one of several students whose papers were chosen to be read at high school graduation. I majored in English at the University of Utah and enjoyed the study of literature and even liked writing the required papers. After marriage, the shift from student to wife and then mother was not easy for me. I felt at home in a schoolroom, and it took some years to feel just as comfortable in the kitchen. I continued to take classes periodically through the University of Utah's adult education program, and when my children were in school I organized my time sufficiently to acquire a master's degree and finally a PhD.

BENCH: So you were enthusiastic about education. What about your parents? How did they feel about education for their daughters? I know it was an earlier time when education was not emphasized quite as much for young women, and I wonder how they felt about it.

MADSEN: My parents were always supportive of and even enthusiastic about anything their children accomplished or set their hearts on achieving—and our goals were varied. There was no distinction made between their expectations for their sons and their daughters. I was surprised to learn how many women had been conditioned to follow more traditional subjects in school, such as

education, nursing, and home economics. This had never been an issue with me or my sisters, and I always felt, as did all of my siblings, that we could pursue any course for which we were suited. Any accomplishments I acquired in school were always heralded, especially by my father, and I felt he was supportive in everything I did. Both my parents had at least two years of college, and all of their children completed a college education. When I met women who did not have that same kind of freedom of choice, I was all the more grateful for the free and affirming ambience that existed in our home. A memory I cherish is my father's ritual of giving me a penny for anything I did that pleased him. It began with something as simple as bringing something to him from another room, helping my mother in some special way, learning to ride a bike, and achieving any kind of award or performing in some presentation at school. I was grateful that he lived long enough to see me get my master's degree and was able to attend the commencement exercises. We were fortunate that year because the honorary degree was awarded to Grant Johannesen, world-renowned Utah pianist and a family friend, who gave as his commencement "address" five musical numbers. It couldn't have been a more appropriate graduation program for our family. When it was over, Dad gave me the proverbial penny. And that was a plain and quiet symbol of the constant and immense support and encouragement he had given me throughout my life. By the time I was married I had boxes of pennies—still have them. And I'm sure if he had lived to see me get a PhD, a culminating symbol of my love of schooling, he might have even given me two pennies. My husband gave me one in his place.

BENCH: That's a wonderful story! Then did you finish your bachelor's before you married?

MADSEN: Yes, I graduated from the University of Utah in 1951. I had wonderful teachers at the university. I majored in English literature and hoped that writing would somehow fit into my future,

although I had no idea how. I was just barely sixteen when I graduated from high school. When I got to college, World War II had been over for some time, and we had all the returning veterans who were taking advantage of the GI Bill. So in my classes were men ten years older than I was, married with families. It was quite an experience to be thrown into classwork with these experienced older men. We young ones had to really work to keep up with them. I fortunately did well enough to achieve a Phi Beta Kappa key, which gave me another penny from my father.

I worked to support myself in college, the first two years in the registrar's office and the last two as secretary of the music department. That was a particularly interesting experience because the head of the music department was the composer LeRoy Robertson, and the dean of fine arts was Avard Fairbanks, the renowned sculptor. Their offices were in the same temporary building, one of a number left over from the expansion of Fort Douglas during World War II, which the university appropriated. The two excelled in teaching their art but were less experienced or talented in administrative details, so Lowell Durham, a PhD in music and an able administrator, took over their administrative responsibilities. I was his secretary. It was a great job; it paid better than the registrar's office did and paid my way through the last two years of college. I worked full-time in the department for two more years after graduation. I took one summer off to attend UCLA in order to have an experience at a different university. When I returned I became engaged to Gordon Madsen, and we were married the next year in 1953.

BENCH: Let's talk a little bit about married life. How many children do you have?

MADSEN: We have six children—five daughters and one son—and we now have twelve grandchildren. We lived first in Washington, DC, where Gordon went to law school, and then returned to Salt Lake City when he was offered a job as assistant district attorney.

We decided to make our home in Salt Lake City. With a family primarily of daughters, it behooved me to become a seamstress. Since girls were not permitted to wear pants while my girls were in grade and middle school, I sewed many, many dresses—indeed, all of their clothes, as well as mine. My sewing days began to diminish, however, when girls were finally allowed to wear pants to school, and I was unexpectedly invited to add another dimension to my academic life. In the seven-year gap between my fourth and fifth child, I was asked by the English Department at the University of Utah, along with Emma Lou Thayne and Barbara Williams, to teach freshman English as an adjunct instructor. I was very pleased to return to university life. I taught in the evening twice a week, and later during the afternoon, until my fifth child was born. Then I was hired to read the freshman English papers in the correspondence office, a task I stayed with for nearly ten years. Though I missed meeting the students personally, I enjoyed meeting them through their writing.

BENCH: Didn't you work at the Women's Resource Center as well? As I recall, it was at a particularly interesting time.

MADSEN: Yes. In 1971, a few years after we built a home close to the University of Utah, I decided to look for a part-time job at the university to help with new home expenses. Noncredentialed teachers were no longer on staff in the English department, but I thought I might find something else that fit into my schedule. The job I found was at the Women's Resource Center. Its director, Shauna Adix, had been a friend of mine from my youth, and fortunately there was a part-time opening at the center. I shared a position with another woman, and we became fast friends. We found ourselves in the middle of the wave of feminism, which had finally reached Utah and which the center represented. In the spirit of feminist "equality," the director included us in everything that involved the center, which meant attending retreats, consciousness-raising sessions (which were the rage on college campuses), and women's conferences. She never treated us

as underlings but as essential members of the center. She was very inclusive, and we had many opportunities to become exposed to the women's movement and its impact on campus. Many of the well-known figures in the movement visited the university. Most were from various academic disciplines, but we also hosted the most well-known star of the movement, Gloria Steinem. I had the opportunity at one dinner to sit by her. Politely, but directly, she wondered aloud to me how a woman could be committed to a religion, any religion, knowing that it was so thoroughly male-dominated. Even the deity at the head of all Christian religions was a male, she reminded me.

BENCH: How did you respond to her?

MADSEN: I could only answer that it was a matter of faith and one's own personal religious belief and that the sex of God was less important to a believer than was the fact of his existence. I probably mumbled some other answers, but I knew they were all irrelevant to her mindset.

It was a valuable time of learning for me as I was exposed to every facet of the women's movement during the three years I worked at the center. I was no longer a neutral observer. I was pleased to see the growth of the center's library and checked out books, particularly those relating to the discovery of women in history. My reading provided a foundation for the two-week seminar at the center presented by a feminist historian, Joan Hoff-Wilson. The director arranged for me to attend the seminar, held daily for the two weeks Joan was on campus, and I received a concentrated course in American women's history. College courses in the subject were becoming ever more popular on campuses across the nation, and my interest in the subject was immediately heightened. Among the fourteen or so women who took the course were Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, who later became a colleague of mine; Emma Lou Thayne, who had taught in the English Department with me; and several others whom I knew. I was very excited about what I learned, and I began to see how all of

the theories and data she was giving us could be applied to the history of Mormon women. Finally, I knew where I wanted to apply my interest in writing. I would research and write about the past. I would be a historian. The next year, 1976, I registered for a graduate course in history. It was providential that the center encouraged a return to school for women whose education had been interrupted by marriage or family, and thus it was easy for me to work out a schedule that would accommodate the seminars I needed to take and the hours that I had committed to working. Within two years I was able to achieve a master's degree in history.

BENCH: You said that what you learned in this seminar would be applicable to Mormon women's history. Could you explain your motivation for moving into that field?

MADSEN: I had been fortunate enough, after marrying Gordon, to be surrounded with history books at home, particularly those relating to Mormon history, such as the *Millennial Star*, the *Improvement Era*, *Journal of Discourses*, and other early Church books. It was an excellent reference library, which he used in his own studies in Mormon history. He was the one who first introduced me to the *Woman's Exponent*. I'd never heard of it until he mentioned it to me.

BENCH: How had he heard about it?

MADSEN: Gordon had come across references to the *Woman's Exponent* in his own reading and knew that his grandmother had subscribed to it. I had just completed a correspondence course in magazine-article writing, and the *Exponent* seemed like a good thesis subject. I was also eager to apply what I had learned in the women's history seminar to the study of LDS women's history. I made up my mind then to return to school. I liked the idea of research and really liked the fact that this was an enterprise at which I could work on my own, quietly in a corner of a library somewhere. So I embarked on a master's program with my thesis subject well in mind. Brigham

Madsen (no relation) was chair of my graduate committee, with Everett Cooley and Davis Bitton as members. All were well versed in Mormon history and were a great support to me.

When I decided to pursue a PhD, my committee expanded to include Phil Sturgess of the history department and his wife, Irene Sturgess of the English Department, since one of my minors was lesser-known nineteenth-century US female writers. I discovered that even the brief introduction into academic feminism which I had had at the center and during my master's program had provided me with a different slant on the writing of the lesser-known female writers, most of whom had been classified as "local colorists." As I read some of the more recent feminist critiques of this literature, I discovered that applying a feminist perspective to it gave it a different reading and understanding, and I was intrigued with this kind of approach to literature as well as to history. These little-known "local colorists" were hardly peripheral writers if critiqued within a feminist framework. They had much to say about women's lives that had been ignored in more traditional frames of interpretation. Irene Sturgess and I clearly had a different take on these writers, since she had trained in a more traditional approach. This difference did not help me much on my written exam, since I interpreted the various works I had to analyze from this newly acquired interpretive tool. In my orals, however, I could explain the position I was taking on these readings—and I passed. I felt that I could understand the lives of LDS women of the past more comprehensively if I applied this kind of conceptual framework to their personal writings.

BENCH: It is clear that the women's movement of the 1970s had an impact on your education. Did it have an impact on you personally?

MADSEN: It definitely had an impact on me. The more I learned and the more I had an association with some of the movers and shakers in this movement and the more I read, the more excited

I became about rediscovering women's lives. Also, the principle of equality between men and women in marriage and in public life was very much an issue of personal interest to me as I watched my daughters grow up in a feminist environment at the University of Utah. One of my daughters became an attorney during the period that the Equal Rights Amendment was debated, and she and I viewed it quite differently from most of our peers and even from our husbands, also attorneys. She viewed it from her legal training, and I viewed it from my historical background, and we, along with many others, were very surprised when the Church came out against the ERA. If nothing more, we reasoned, it carried a terrific symbolic message. For me, the discussion about it replicated the debate over woman suffrage in the nineteenth century, and I knew how supportive the Church had been about women's political equality. However, today most of the issues that would have been handled with one constitutional brushstroke are being decided in the courts in a piecemeal fashion. To a large extent, the rights promised by the amendment have been obtained at this point.

During the time that I was working in the Women's Resource Center and confronting all these new ideas and debating these issues, I felt more and more estranged from many of the women in my ward. First of all, I was working and going to school, nonconventional actions themselves. Moreover, I was learning and internalizing new and different attitudes from those I had entertained before. I was studying history and meeting new individuals who were broadening the narrow view I had of life and its choices and directions. I had come to work at the Women's Resource Center as a very naive woman, fresh from an all-encompassing domestic cocoon, and was now facing issues that challenged many assumptions that had been so basic to me. Most of what I was learning was truly "liberating" to me, but I also saw the downside of this new feminist freedom and its perspective on women's "place." What were the parameters of equality in marriage? How had the feminist movement accommodated the

sexual revolution of the sixties? Can a woman successfully have a career and raise a family? These were questions I had never had need to think about before, and I began to think more seriously of what this new feminism might mean to a woman as a daughter, a wife, or a mother. I wondered how it would affect my own life and my relationship with others. How would it affect my daughters? Few of my immediate associates were acquainted with or even interested in the dramatic changes taking place around them. Where did I fit? I knew I could never be the same uninformed woman I once was, but I didn't subscribe to all that women were demanding for themselves. In time I came to terms with the movement in my own life—what I could accept and what I could reject and be true to my own convictions.

BENCH: Would you say your daughters' lives are different because of the women's movement?

MADSEN: My daughters are products of the newfound freedom to choose their own futures based on their skills and interests and not just on "propriety" or custom. All are educated women who were trained in a variety of fields. All five of them graduated from the University of Utah. All are actively involved in their careers. They are all sure of themselves—confident of their place as women and secure in their own identities. Their marriages show a respect for shared responsibility and partnership. They seem to me to have absorbed the best of the movement. And I have long since come to terms with the differing viewpoints over the ERA, a major feminist issue of the 1970s and 1980s.

Feminism also alerted me to the fact that it required a rethinking of male-female relationships in work-related situations, including my own when I became employed. Women made up small percentages of university faculty in all institutions and even less as department heads or deans. The pool of PhD women, particularly LDS women, was small but growing, and women were seeking full-time professorships and integration in heretofore all-male disciplines. Men

in academic situations, as well as in other workplaces, had to recognize that women carried credentials that entitled them to equal pay, equal opportunity for advancement, equal decision-making positions, and equal respect. It was an absorbing experience to see how these challenges were met at the university where I received my graduate degrees and at the university where I worked for twenty-five years. Changes were slow but steady.

Throughout this amazing period of change, I admit to being influenced by Emmeline B. Wells, the woman I have studied for many years, because she was a major agent for change. She had much regard for those women who tried to advance women in her era, the nineteenth century, and were willing to sacrifice their reputations, their means, their private lives, and their time in behalf of their cause. And she was one of them. My own experience with the twentieth-century women's movement has given me tremendous insight into her life as a women's rights advocate, just as her activism and convictions have influenced me. I have felt this kinship with her. The strength of her convictions affected my own as I have met women of other religious and philosophical persuasions, either in person or through their writings. Having come to terms with my own confrontations with feminism, I am not offended nor do I feel apologetic when confronting their ridicule or subtle derision of Mormonism.

BENCH: That is a powerful statement. So was it after you graduated with your master's degree that you became involved with the Church Historical Department?

MADSEN: Yes. The year that I graduated with my master's, 1977, was the International Women's Year (IWY). I had been involved in finishing my thesis and had not really read much about the IWY and was surprised when I was invited to speak on a panel in one of the sessions relating to history at the forthcoming Utah IWY conference held in Salt Lake City. I knew that caucuses were held in neighborhoods for women to discuss what they felt was most important to

them as women. They discussed ways in which government could effect some beneficial changes through laws or national policies and noted ways in which women could influence local agencies that might have a beneficial influence on their lives.

BENCH: In preparation for the conference?

MADSEN: Yes. Ideas, suggestions, and concerns enunciated at these caucuses were correlated, and from them a broad agenda for the statewide conference was developed. During the conference there were breakout sessions to discuss the issues devised at the caucuses. The Task Force on Women's History session included short papers and a discussion of the importance of women keeping their own history and the value of women's writings for literary, sociological, psychological, and especially historical research. Maureen Beecher and Kathryn McKay, both friends and colleagues, were participants with me. This task force was my primary involvement at the conference. I did not attend any other sessions. I became aware through some friends on the steering committee of what happened later in the conference when Mormon women flooded the audience and voted negatively on most of the issues raised for discussion. I was involved in many of the intense discussions afterwards when small groups of us met to review the events and discuss what their impact would be on the women of the Church, who were already divided over the ERA.

We had many, many conversations, and out of that came a book that a number of us decided to write, which we titled *Sisters in Spirit*, edited by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson. We tried to take some of these issues that were divisive or misunderstood and research them, write about them, and put them together for Mormon readers. We wanted them to know about our past as LDS women and about the changes that had taken place as the Church grew beyond the borders of Utah and the West. In many ways this writing exercise was to help explain ourselves to ourselves, in view of all we had so recently experienced. Our meetings were

instructive and bonding. It was an exciting venture, and it was good for us to put into writing what we felt and to be able to present something positive out of that experience. We were saddened to see some women leave the Church or be excommunicated, burned by the fire of their indignation. But we also saw, and felt within ourselves, that it would be better and that more could be accomplished if we worked within the institution to effect changes that might assist women in feeling more essential to the structure of the Church.

Another good thing that came out of this experience besides the book was the organization of a Utah Women's History Association. It was the brainchild of Kathryn McKay, who now teaches at Weber State University. It involved women from several of the state's universities who would meet several times a year to plan events for those interested in Utah women's history. With a grant from the Utah Endowment for the Arts, we designed a lecture tour throughout the state with members speaking on their particular fields of study. From that came a book—many years in the making but finally published as *Women in Utah History: Paradigm or Paradox?*, edited by Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher. We had annual conferences with guest speakers, one of the most prominent being Esther Peterson, who had served as assistant secretary of labor and director of the Women's Bureau under President Kennedy and special assistant for consumer affairs under Presidents Johnson and Carter. A Provo native, she was active all her life as a labor leader. One year we managed to publish a collection of conference talks entitled *From Cottage to Market*. We functioned on a shoestring. Without dues, we depended on grants to present our public offerings, all of which were well received. We hobbled along for close to ten years but discovered to our dismay that we were not followed by younger scholars interested in women's issues. As we dispersed and became involved in our own various careers, we had no new blood to carry on for us, and so the association dissolved. We discovered that after the flurry of activity generated by the first generation of women activists, the

next generation seemed to rest on our laurels. Fortunately, there has been a revival of interest in recent years.

BENCH: That does seem to be a trend through history. Let's backtrack just for a second. We kind of glossed over the years you were with the History Division of the Church. Would you talk a little about how it was to work there? I have this vision in my mind of how exciting it must have been to have access to documents that had lain undiscovered for years, and to be able to use them to reclaim and illuminate the lives of so many unknown Mormon women.

MADSEN: When I finished my master's degree in 1977, I decided I wanted to go on for a PhD. So I had made arrangements to begin studies that fall with opportunity to be a research assistant with Everett Cooley in the university library. Before beginning, I was invited to speak to the Andrew Jenson lunch group, a gathering sponsored by the History Division of the Church's Historical Department every Friday at noon for its members. Members of the division, as well as others researching in Church history, were invited to speak, and Leonard Arrington invited me to be the luncheon speaker at one of the meetings. He had heard me speak in the history session at the IWY conference in June, but otherwise we had had no contact. These weekly meetings were a stimulating and interesting way of keeping up with current research in Church history. I was invited to speak on Emmeline Wells. When it was over, Leonard Arrington asked me if I would come up to his office. When I did, to my surprise, he offered me a job in the History Division. I was totally taken aback; I had *no* idea that anything like that was in the offing. I hadn't even thought about it. He explained that Jill Mulvay, soon to be Derr, who had come onboard a year or two before to assist Maureen in her research, was getting married and wanted to go half time. He wanted me to fill the other half of the position. I can't believe I actually said I'd have to think about it.

I admit that I had looked forward to becoming a research assistant to Everett Cooley, and I was also concerned about whether or

not I would be able to complete a PhD program if I took on the responsibilities involved as a historian with the History Division. I had not really given much thought to what I might do when completing my studies, and certainly I did not anticipate a job with the Church. But I finally came to my senses and realized that this was an opportunity I couldn't miss. Whatever the future might hold, I felt this position would only enhance my personal interest in history, and I could associate with the historians I had come to admire. I did not know Jill, but I had met Maureen before when I was doing some work on Eliza R. Snow. I also knew Leonard's secretary, Christine Waters, who had attended some of the seminars I had recently taken. Otherwise, I did not personally know anyone else in the department. I found it amusing that in doing the paperwork for my employment, the information clerk assumed that I was being hired as a secretary, and each of her questions was directed toward that position. Finally, I said, "No, that isn't my job description." "Well, what is it?" she asked me. "I have been hired as one of the historians in the Department of History." My interrogator was visibly perplexed. She really did not know how to categorize me. This proved to be my first exposure to how traditional notions of women's employment trumped any deviance from customary expectations.

My first assignment was to take Jill's place in completing the history of the Primary Association in time for the organization's centennial celebration the following year, 1978. I collaborated on that assignment with Susan Oman, who had been working as a research assistant in the History Division. She was an excellent researcher and had already done much work on the project, which was a great help to me. We were given complete access to documents necessary for our research, and I often had several valuable original documents on my desk at once as I worked on the history. In other words, I could request anything, and it would be accessed for me. My small office was graced with the portraits of two distinguished early Mormon women, borrowed from the Church Museum of Arts

and Sites: Phoebe Woodruff (Wilford Woodruff's wife) and Zina D. H. Young. They were always an inspiration to me. Frequently I had on my desk their diaries and other papers as I prepared information about the early Relief Society and other related subjects. It was quite wonderful to have all those documents literally in hand, with a Xerox machine nearby to copy what we needed to keep. Edith Romney was the transcriber of these early documents, and what a wonderful eye she had for reading and interpreting illegible or faint handwriting. She transcribed the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes under Maureen's direction, and we had copies of the original, as well as her transcription, for as long as I worked with the department. Everything had to be typed because we didn't have computers until we moved to BYU.

We three women, Maureen, Jill, and I, became very close in our mutual interest in LDS women's history, and we shared not only our research with one another but our hopes for the future to make women's history a vital part of Church history. We also worked very closely with the committees that planned the BYU Women's Conferences and often participated in some of the sessions. At that time we were probably the only "professional" (that is, paid) historians expressly assigned to work in the field of Mormon women's history, so we were called upon to present our research on many occasions and in many settings. This was a new and exciting discipline, and we were among the first to represent the kind of research that was so sorely needed in Church historical accounts. These opportunities, as well as my association with Maureen and Jill, along with the other members of the staff, were even more than I could have imagined when Leonard invited me to join his staff.

Shortly after my association with the History Division, we learned that some changes were going to be made, and we were not sure what lay ahead for us. Evidently there was to be a downsizing of the division; and after private interviews with Homer Durham, the member of the Seventy who oversaw the Historical Department,

some of our staff left to pursue other fields. Glen Leonard became an assistant and later director of the Church History Museum, and Bruce Blummell moved back to Canada to attend law school. I was the last one employed, so I thought my job would definitely be on the line. In my interview with Elder Durham, several options were suggested to me for other employment outside the field of history, but I held firmly to my desire to remain with the division. The interview naturally left me quite disconcerted. I talked to Leonard about it, and he immediately went to bat for me. The result of their discussion was in my favor, and I was able to stay with the division. We became the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History and moved to BYU. Although it meant more travel, I loved the academic setting and the contact we were now able to have with other professional historians through scholarly conferences around the country. I also enjoyed meeting BYU colleagues. Everything that the Y offered enriched my life and my work immensely, as well as my family's. The impetus to complete the PhD was much stronger for me now that we were associated with an academic institution, and I finally completed it in 1986, four years after our move.

BENCH: How long were you part of Smith Institute? What were your responsibilities there?

MADSEN: I was still in a part-time position and continued with the research projects in which I had been involved with the History Division. After completion of the PhD, however, I moved into a three-quarter position, and by 1988 I was a full-time member of the institute. I initiated a course in US women's history, which I taught for twenty-five years, along with various other courses for the History Department. I continued working on my research projects, all of them focusing on some aspect of the experience of early Mormon women, which included their involvement in the Relief Society, their legal status, their relationship with non-Mormon women, their political activities, and their conversion and relationship to the Church. I

was a member of the History Division for three years and the Smith Institute for twenty-three years.

BENCH: I think creating the first course in US women's history at BYU has been one of your most significant contributions to the university. How did that come about?

MADSEN: Although most campuses had several women's studies courses already functioning, there was some trepidation in establishing a course at BYU. The emotions and problems relating to the ERA were still very fresh in everyone's mind and were associated with women's history and indeed feminism itself, all of which became red-flag issues. So I didn't call the course "Women's History," but rather "Women and the American Experience," which was the title of the text I used. During that sensitive time it was very difficult to talk about women's struggle for political, legal, educational, and employment opportunities over the years and particularly the contemporary women's movement because I didn't have any idea what kind of mindset my students brought to the course or how those in authority would feel about it. I wanted to get this course established, so I was very circumspect in the way I taught it. I recall how very *carefully* I discussed the ERA during the first few years of teaching the course. Interestingly, the students in the last class I taught hadn't even been born when the ERA was an issue and didn't have any idea to what it referred. Of course, the method of teaching I used changed over the years to accommodate the social changes that were taking place around us and the students' awareness of women's social issues, still being very cognizant of the conservative stance of BYU and the Church toward the women's movement. I loved teaching the course, because the students who registered for it did so because they wanted to take the course. I was pleased when it was included among the courses available for the women's studies minor. This inclusion gave a kind of legitimacy to the course, since the history department always scheduled it as an elective. There had never been any attempt to

employ a full-time women's studies scholar in the history department, and when I retired I was afraid it would cease to exist. I was happy to learn that after a short time one of my former students and research assistants, who had received a PhD in history at the University of Virginia, had been hired to teach the course. And there is now an award given through the history department for the best undergraduate article in women's history—certainly an encouragement for more research in this field.

BENCH: So during the time you were teaching you were still at the Smith Institute?

MADSEN: Yes. All of the members of the Smith Institute received our professorships from a department, several of us in history, one in English, and the others in Church history. I always considered my primary assignment, however, to be with the Smith Institute, to which we were primarily attached and accountable, though we were obliged to teach one course a year for the department of our specific disciplines.

BENCH: And were you working simultaneously at the Women's Research Institute?

MADSEN: Just for two years. I was an assistant to Mary Stovall Richards, director of the WRI, mainly when she was chair of the BYU Women's Conferences. The arrangement was for me to work one-quarter time with the Research Institute and three-quarters time with the Smith Institute. My work at the Women's Research Institute was to assist Mary with the Women's Conferences and coedit the compilation of selected talks from the conference into a volume published by Deseret Book. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, then president of BYU, envisioned the conference as an opportunity for a university experience for women who wanted to get back on campus or who had never had a university experience. Thus, at his suggestion, we set a five-track series of topics which covered many of the issues of

interest to women: the spiritual, historical, familial, cultural, and a variety of other areas, determined by the comments made in the evaluation forms submitted by women at each conference.

BENCH: This sounds like an extremely busy time for you. How were you able to coordinate everything?

MADSEN: By the time I started working at BYU, all of my children were in school, the older ones at the university and in high school and the younger two in elementary school. I arranged my classes, meetings, and student consultations on two days of the week at BYU and worked on my writing and class presentations at home on my computer. Of course there were other occasions that drew me to the Y, but I always managed to be home by dinnertime. My older girls watched the younger ones until I returned. They also helped prepare dinner when they had time. Crock pots were a major help in that regard. My own experience taught me that women can be very elastic, if they want to be, and can stretch themselves to accomplish more than they might originally think. Eliza R. Snow promised the sisters of her era that if they were good stewards of their time they would be surprised at what they could accomplish. I believe that to be true. I have tried to organize my time around my three primary priorities: family, work, and church. With a cooperative husband and family, who also have taken a marked interest in my work, and limited social activities, my life has fit into a workable and enjoyable pattern.

BENCH: I wonder if you could talk a little about something that was organized in the later years of the Smith Institute—the Mormon Women's History Initiative. Could you explain what it is and how it originated?

MADSEN: When Jill became director of the Smith Institute in 2003, she was involved in a number of meetings at the Church Archives in Salt Lake City that were then being held with Smith Institute representatives who were participants in an emerging project

initiated by the institute. It has since come to be known as the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Ron Esplin, who followed Leonard Arrington as director of the institute and preceded Jill, had encouraged Dean Jessee, a member of the institute, to expand the work he was doing on collecting and editing the papers of Joseph Smith for publication. It was seen very early on that this was more than one individual could do, and Dean was ready to retire at this time. So Jill attended the meetings with the members of the Church Archives about associating with them on the project. As I understand it, when those involved in the project realized that the six sermons Joseph Smith gave to the Nauvoo Relief Society would necessarily be part of the larger project, it seemed advisable to print as a separate publication the annotated minutes. Rick Turley, who was associated with the archives, had suggested that publication of the minutes, as well as some other projects in which Jill and I were involved then underway, could be part of what he called a women's history initiative. It was hoped that this emphasis would initiate more studies in Mormon women's history. Jill was struck by the possibilities that such an "initiative" held for the future and presented the idea to me. We talked about how it could be implemented and what exactly it would mean in terms of furthering the work on Mormon women's history. We both decided that the Nauvoo minutes should be the first publication to come under this rubric. I agreed that this was the opportunity we had been waiting for to get the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes published, and we began almost at once to work on the project. We were very excited about what lay ahead with such an initiative. But we needed help to implement it. We had met earlier on various occasions with some faculty and community women who acted as a quasiadvisory committee to develop and gain support for the field, but we needed a regular on-campus working committee. It seemed natural to invite you [Sheree Bench] and Cherry Silver to serve on the committee, since you both had been hired by the Smith Institute to work on publishing the diaries of Emmeline B. Wells. Jenny Reeder, my research assistant whom I

had lent to the Nauvoo minutes project, was on campus and working closely with Jill and me. She was invited to serve on the committee. And finally, we felt we needed a representative from the library, and Connie Lamb was a natural, since she was then in charge of Mormon women's collections.

In the course of our meetings we decided on additional projects that would fit the parameters of the initiative. The Emmeline Wells diaries; the volume on Eliza R. Snow's poetry, then being completed by Jill Derr and Karen Davidson; my book on the public life of Emmeline Wells, which was even then at press; and the biography of Eliza R. Snow would all serve the initiative very well. Since most of these projects were in the "forthcoming" stage, we decided we needed something concrete to launch the initiative and acquaint the public with what it was and what we considered was its potential.

The committee began regular meetings in 2003 with rather grandiose plans. We were quite surprised at our energy and ambition that first year. We decided our first event would be a lecture in January 2004 to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of Eliza R. Snow's birth. It would be the initial lecture of five, to be held monthly in the BYU library. Under Jenny's and Connie's direction, a fabulous exhibit, and what turned out to be one of the most popular exhibits, was set up in the library, utilizing documents and pictures and other library holdings relating to Mormon women's history. We organized a one-day seminar focusing on studies of twentieth-century LDS women, and Cherry Silver and I collected and edited a selection of papers from the seminar, which was published under the title *New Scholarship on Latter-day Saint Women in the Twentieth Century*. You and Susan Howe collected poems by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mormon women for a dramatic production of poetry reading accompanied by original music by Harriet Bushman and for a book, *Discoveries: Two Centuries of Poems by Mormon Women*. Two publications, a lecture series, a program of original poetry and music, a major exhibit, and a day-long conference, all within a year, did indeed compose a major

launching of this new program. We were ourselves overwhelmed by what we had accomplished and wondered what we would do next. We had all put our other projects on hold while preparing these events, but the response to them all made the effort worthwhile.

In the meantime, changes in the administration of the Smith Institute were taking place. In 2005 the Smith Institute was dissolved, its members either moving their work to Salt Lake City, where work on the Joseph Smith Papers Project would continue, or remaining in Provo to fulfill teaching responsibilities. Jill chose to work in Salt Lake City, where she was immediately absorbed into an administrative position with the Smith Papers Project. The home base for the Women's History Initiative no longer existed. With Cherry's and your hard work, the Women's History Initiative found a new home at BYU's Women's Research Institute with the help and support of its director, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill. It continued to flourish until recently, with faculty and community members as part of its steering committee. It launched several new initiatives and proved of immense value to women's studies, the students, and the university.

BENCH: Yes, it has been great to be a part of it. How do you feel about the current state of Mormon women's history? Do you feel there's still a need for a Mormon Women's History Initiative? Do you think scholars still need to be encouraged?

MADSEN: Yes, I do. History is a dynamic subject, constantly generating new theoretical applications, areas of study, and approaches. Recently there has been more emphasis on historical theory and discrete subjects than on broader narrative histories, which formed the basis of my studies. For a period there seemed to be little interest among women scholars to pursue Mormon women's history, but of late there has been a resurgence of interest among both LDS and non-LDS scholars. However, Mormon women's history still lacks the scholarly biographies that are essential to a full understanding of those who made history in the past, and except for *Women of Covenant*,

which is an organizational history of the Relief Society, there is no general history of Mormon women. We do have collected studies which deal with individual aspects of the Mormon female past, such as women in medicine, in politics, in family life, etc., or article-length biographical sketches, which have been very useful, but we are in need of a survey of Mormon women's history from the founding of the Church to the present. The twentieth century is another area that has only recently been tapped as a topic of study, and few studies in theoretical approaches to Mormon women's history have been attempted. So the discipline beckons scholars to these unploughed fields, and the Women's History Initiative has an essential role in promoting continued study in this rich area.

An encouraging sign is the number of papers submitted to the *Journal of Mormon History* from both seasoned and new scholars on an ever-greater variety of subjects, many of them in the twentieth century. As a member of the advisory board I have been excited about this increased interest. The number of papers dealing with women, however, still lags behind other general topics. I think the Women's History Initiative breakfasts held in conjunction with the annual MHA conferences is a great way to inspire interest and recognize scholarship in this field. Topics rich with primary materials could be suggested and current research acknowledged at these breakfasts. The Women's History Initiative has also supported sessions on Mormon women at Mormon History Association conferences. Interestingly, when I left BYU in 2006, we had more non-LDS women, or LDS women outside of Utah studying at other universities, doing work in Mormon history than local LDS women, so I think students at our local universities need to be encouraged to contribute to this field.

BENCH: I think you are right about that. You mentioned MHA, and I wanted to ask about your time as MHA president.

MADSEN: I served as MHA president in 1990. The conference during my time was held in Laie, Hawaii. It was about the first

time MHA had been scheduled outside the continental United States. MHA at that time was still modest in membership and funds and produced only one journal a year. The conferences usually attracted about three hundred or so attendees, most of them long-time members, along with newcomers from the area in which the conference was held. Our primary concern was how to attract newer scholars and history buffs and particularly graduate students. We used the newsletter as a source of information and sent conference information and MHA brochures to history departments in numerous universities to inform students about the association. We did not at that time have the means to provide financial aid for students to attend MHA conferences, but the interest in doing so continued, and at this time, through increased registration fees and dues, money has been appropriated for such scholarships.

A great boost to the association was the donation from the O. C. Tanner Foundation to subsidize the presence of a noted non-Mormon historian to attend our conferences as the keynote speaker, now called the Tanner lecturer. The theme for the Hawaiian conference was Mormonism in the South Pacific. My hope was to obtain for the Tanner lecturer that year a historian who lived in that area and could bring a non-Mormon perspective to the missionary effort of the Church in that part of the world. I had contacts in Australia and New Zealand and asked them for suggestions. In reviewing their recommendations I found one name which appeared on nearly every list, Dr. Peter Lineham. He was then a senior lecturer in the Department of History at Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand. He had published numerous book-length studies of religion in New Zealand. So I wrote to him, explained what MHA represented, what our expectations were for his participation at the conference, and promised him a handsome honorarium, thanks to the Tanner fund. He was pleased with the invitation and chose to write about the relationship of Mormons and Maoris in nineteenth-century New Zealand, a perfect topic for the conference. We were thrilled with

his enthusiasm about the conference and his thorough preparation for his lecture, making contact with David Whittaker at the Y, Ron Barney at the Church Archives, and Lanier Britsch of the History Department of BYU for applicable Mormon documents. His lecture reflected the immense amount of research he had done and was very well received by the conference participants. Dr. Lineham was also very approachable, attended many of the sessions as well as the socials, and in every way made his presence useful and meaningful to everyone in attendance. He was truly one of the most gracious and giving of our Tanner lecturers, and we were pleased to have been instrumental in bringing him to the conference.

BENCH: The last topic I would like you to cover is Emmeline B. Wells. You have had a wonderful response to your first volume of her biography, *An Advocate for Women*, winning best book awards from MHA and the Utah State Historical Society, and best biography award from the Association for Mormon Letters. And now you are working on her personal biography. After all the time and research, what is your relationship with Emmeline? What has she taught you? Do you feel you understand her? And what do you think she would want people to understand about her?

MADSEN: After nearly thirty years of research and writing about Emmeline Wells, I am beginning to feel that I do know her now and that we have a special kind of relationship. As I write, I often seem to feel her looking over my shoulder, and I always want to ask her if I am getting it right. When you are permitted to read the personal writings of an individual over and over again, there is a sense that you not only know this person very well but, in my case, you are almost one with her. So much of what she expresses reflects my own thinking and my own response to many of the situations in which she was placed. As women there are many things we experience similarly and often respond to in the same way. I think I know how and why she feels the way she does in each instance, and I think

that I am glad to be at this point in my life while writing about her life. The book I would have written if I had done so right after writing the dissertation, which also centered on her life, would have been an entirely different book from the one I'm writing now. Experience counts for much. Whereas the *Advocate for Women* was meant to be an academic enterprise, written for my scholarly friends and other people interested in her public activities, this time I'm hoping to show the personal Emmeline that was behind all of the dramatic, significant, and historic activities in which she was involved that made such a difference in women's lives. I think she would want people to know these two sides of her life experience.

Through her own experiences, and particularly her responses to them, I have learned something about "enduring to the end," accepting decisions and situations that can't be changed, and rising above personal disappointments and tragedies. She repeatedly noted in her diary words to the effect that she had to retire to her room or go walking by herself because she did not want anyone to know what she was feeling inside. She kept the personal and the public very much distinct from one another and worked diligently at her writing or speaking, though her heart ached from want of love, loss of loved ones, or deep disappointment. Only in her poetry are these emotions revealed. We can describe her as a "romantic" in the literary sense because her life bore all the elements of the tragic novel or dramatic story. She brooded over things for a long time, and romanticized experiences not necessarily unique to her but somehow more intense because of the way she wrote about them. Her diary was her confidante. I will call the book I am now writing *Woman Triumphant* because that description so well represents her attitude toward her own life. She was almost defiant in not letting all the setbacks, the tragic events, and the difficulties that beset her defeat her. Most of all, I believe, she triumphed over her own vulnerability to them and to their effects on her. She rose above all that life threw in her way and accomplished more than most people, especially women in her day, could imagine doing.

I hope I have come to understand how she would want to be remembered. Yet I find myself saying, "Emmeline, do you want me to let the world know this? Should I put this in? Is this something you confided only to your diary and not the rest of us? How much should I tell the world about you?" Her diary was at once her catharsis and the nurturer of her losses and long-lasting emotional malaise. She had to express her feelings in writing, but they seemed to feed on each other and take residence in her mind and soul. In some ways I feel that in writing this book about her, using so many of her own words, I am her alter ego, and I've got to be true to the responsibility that role places on me.

I think she would also want others to know that she struggled all of her life. But the struggle gave her the strength and self-reliance that made her the charismatic and impressive person she became. I think she would also want this generation to know what her generation did for them, as women, in providing opportunities unheard of before her own time. She felt that she had a destiny, and she had the ambition to fulfill it. She wanted to make her life count for something, so she made the most of every opportunity that came her way and let it be a stepping stone for something different and more challenging. She wanted to make a contribution of worth, and she was willing to give the time and hard work to make it happen. She was never afraid of hard work. Moreover, she never backed down on who she was and what she represented. She almost seemed to say, "Here I am. Take me as I am. I have something to say to you that is of some value." And I think people responded, "Yes, she's a real leader, and she's a thinker, and she's a doer. We need her." People had to take her on her terms, and no one could deny her the fact that she got things done. She was also a bridge builder. She had almost as many non-Mormon friends as Mormon. Unlike some of her Mormon associates, she believed that it was necessary for LDS women to reach out, to be part of the larger community of women, to engage in conversation with them, and to be part of the world's work with them in order to remove prejudice.

Such contacts, she believed, would enlarge their own perspective and enable them to take the place that she felt they deserved to have in the world. I think I understand that of her, and I know the hurdles she had to leap over both at home and abroad in order to foster that connection.

BENCH: Are there any other topics that you would have liked to explore but have had to forgo because of a lack of time?

MADSEN: Yes, indeed. I had begun a project while still at BYU which had to be sidetracked when some other assignments came along, and that was to explore the role of women in the settlement process. I have collected numerous diary accounts and organizational minutes of women as they assisted in settling and building communities throughout the Mormon West, but I have not had time to complete that project. There are numerous yet unwritten biographies that I would like to write, including that of Isabella Horne, Emily S. Richards, Jane S. Richards, Mercy Fielding Thompson, Sarah Kimball, and Emmeline's daughter, Melvina Woods. I have also thought about writing the broad historical overview of LDS women, from the beginning of the Church to the present. The research would help me link together the stages of women's experience within Mormonism and their responses to the secular changes during the times in which they lived. Those are professional desires, but I would also like to write up my own personal history within the context of a family history. And I would like to complete some genealogical projects that are waiting to be done. I am happy that the volume on the foundational documents of the Relief Society, 1842–92, which Jill Derr and I worked on for many years, has finally come to fruition. Though it is no longer designed for a general readership, as once envisioned, it will be a welcomed resource for scholarly research.