Were Women Able to Impact Their Community with Vocational, Political, Religious, and Social Knowledge and Ability?

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During the nineteenth century women were expected to stay home, take care of the children and so the work around the farm or house. However, beyond the commonplace domestic responsibilities, women of the late nineteenth century in Eastern Idaho significantly influenced education and community development. These women constituted a sector of Eastern Idaho society in their communities to a degree that may not be fully measures. “Traditional sex roles tend to emphasize the more aggressive aspects of male personality and the nurturing side of the female.”¹ The role of woman was opposite of a man, and the thought of being on the “same page” as a man was unfathomable. The encyclopedia states that the “traits traditionally attributed to men include[d] ambition, independence, competitiveness, and strength; women are conceived as emotional, dependent, uncompetitive, and weak…while sex roles determine[d] socially acceptable limits of behavior at a given time with cultural and social changes.”² Although women were perceived to have the "weaker" qualities, they reached out for an equal atmosphere for their rights, and in a way tried to show their capabilities of amounting to the same as the opposite sex.

Women's suffrage was a topic spoken about and debated everywhere. The women's liberation movement "seeks equal rights for women, giving them equal status with men and freedom to decide their own careers and life patterns."³ Word of women's emancipation is documented in the eighteenth century, by philosopher Condorcet. He "spoke in favor" of women. In England, in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote A Vindication of the Rights of Women. The content of the book "challenged the idea that women exist only to please men and proposed that women receive the same treatment as
men in education, work, and politics and be judged by the same moral standards."  

Nothing really took place until the Married Women's Property Act of 1870, which allowed British wives to the right to secure and own property. In 1848, in the United States, the feminist movement was well underway, but nothing was even close to being resolved for another 72 years. The movement spread throughout the whole world; women everywhere started to speak for the rights that they needed and deserved. The movement of women's rights was not just about the voting rights of women, it was about the equality for all people. Journals and magazines were great sources to find information and build on the fight for equality.

The *Woman's Exponent*, a magazine from Salt Lake City, was a mainstay for information. At the age of 20, Louisa Lula Greene was approached by a publisher about the creation of a magazine for and by women. Greene not quite sure what to do wrote her aunt, Eliza Snow, for advice. Eliza Snow was one of the wives of Brigham Young, the LDS president at that time. Greene was given approval from both Eliza and Brigham. Brigham Young even gave her his blessing to fulfill the job. Eliza advised that "it was more important to teach mothers how to bring up children properly than simply to have children which may or may not be brought up properly."  

In 1872, Greene became founding editor of the *Woman's Exponent*, a biweekly magazine. The magazine was published "for the benefit, education, and development for thought of all the sisters in the Church." Although the magazine was an independent journal it constituted the perspective from the LDS woman's view. It addressed women's suffrage, as well as many other topics. This was intriguing to most women, so women
throughout the nation, as well as Europe, read the magazine. The motto carried on the masthead for many years was: ‘The Rights of the Women of Zion, and the Rights of the Women of all Nations.’ Each issue discussed topics which ranged from women's education to write-ups on General Conference. This was a well known magazine at the time and several women in South-Eastern Idaho received the issue regularly.

Brigham Young was known for support of women and education. "As far as Brigham was concerned, women were free to pursue activities "suited to their sex." His view of what was suited for their sex included fields as diverse as banking, medicine, journalism, education, and business." Brigham Young also said:

"We believe that women are useful, not only to sweep houses, wash dishes, make beds, and raise babies, but that they should stand behind the counter, study law or physics [medicine], or become good bookkeepers and be able to do the business in any counting house, and all this to enlarge their sphere of usefulness for the benefit of society at large. In following these things they but answer the design of their creation." Young made a stand that enhanced the ambition of women throughout the west and in the LDS church. Young was somewhat diplomatic in what he said with his 27 wives, and 32 daughters, but he was an honest and well-loved person. He respected women for who they were, and had a great deal of respect for their talents and abilities.

Women went to work as accomplished college graduates. Education at this time was limited to some of the women. However, in the West, women had greater opportunities. Young believed that women needed to be educated as much as men so that they could properly raise their families. He understood that women had a powerful impact on children and the knowledge that would be gained by them. In the 1890 edition
of the *Woman's Exponent*, Eliza R. Snow wrote this article about women and their education:

"In our past, how limited has been the educational advantages of woman! Book-learning was supposed to have very little to do with the requisite requirements of the ideal housekeeper; the masses really believing that woman should understand only sufficient Geography to know the different apartments in her house, and enough Chemistry to keep the kettle boiling. How absurd! If knowledge is power why should not women possess her full quota as well as her sterner sex?"16

It was a common perception that women only needed to have the knowledge to run a household rather than be accomplished in business. Men held the "sole" responsibility to bring in money and the assets for the household. This was a desolate and hard time, and most imagined a woman slaving over a hot stove, while taking care of five children (or more), and getting all the housework done. This was not all she did.

Phebe C. Young, a daughter of Brigham Young, wrote the following statement in the *Woman's Exponent* concerning woman's work, "for she must play her part as a helpmeet for man, she shares his sorrows and helps him bear his burdens, often taking a double portion, not only raising her family but also assisting to provide for them. "17

Eliza R. Snow's article continued to say,

"She who is entrusted with the sacred responsibility of bearing the souls of men, of ministering to the wants and necessities of her household. Is it not she who must furnish their nutriment not only to the new-born infant, but 'tis she who must supply the ever-recurring demands of the older and stronger members of the family. Truly the most thorough housekeepers—the best wives and mothers, are those who are best educated. The true and correct idea of education, is obtaining practical knowledge, knowledge that will enhance our usefulness, and that will give to ourselves the greatest degree of satisfaction...let our wives and daughters study, think, and reflect seriously, endeavor to restrain this increasing love of adornment and pleasure, wean our attention from the artifices of dress and vanity to more solid and practical ideas of a true life, a genuine, true
womanhood. Study the beautiful principles of chemistry, physiology and anatomy, that our lives may become more practically and intellectually useful."

Educated women enhanced their ability to perform the sacred responsibility of raising a family. Also, through their education, they helped establish the growing community.

Women held important careers such as: physicians, midwives, writers, teachers and mothers. Being mothers, women were able to fulfill all of the above without extended education, but some went to school to obtain a career. Sarah Ann Anderson Barnes exemplified all of the above. As a wife, mother, teacher, and citizen, Barnes, in one way or another, fulfilled her divine calling. For her education, she attended the Brigham Young College in Logan and received her Second Grade Certificate to teach. During her vacation time she worked for two women who taught dressmaking and tailoring. She learned these skills and more while working for them. From Logan, Barnes taught school in Smithfield, Utah. Later, she went to teach at Lewiston, Idaho. She passed the state examination and received her First Grade Certificate. On 22 December 1881, she married John Wilson Barnes. Soon after, John moved to the Snake River Valley. Later, she followed him in September.

Barnes began teaching in the school district on 1 October 1883. In 1885, after the birth of her second son, she continued to teach until "the anti-Mormon feeling was getting intolerable and finally the District School was taken away from me and the Mormon children could not go there."

Soon after, President Thomas E. Ricks asked Barnes to
teach at a tuition school until a church school was established. She worked for Ricks Academy for six years at twenty dollars a month. Her dressmaking and other fine art skills came in handy as she taught girls and women these techniques in her classes.\textsuperscript{24} Sarah Barnes was a very intelligent, and hard working woman. She and her husband almost lost the farm they had filed to own "because of the unfriendly attitudes of neighbors."\textsuperscript{25} Barnes was able to pay off the mortgage on the farm from money she had saved from teaching.\textsuperscript{26}

In 1896, she took on the responsibility of the land and the family. Her husband contracted typhoid fever, and was unable to work. She cared for not only her husband, but also three of her sons who also came down with the fever, thus exhibiting the ability to nurse her family back to health.\textsuperscript{27} Along with her family responsibilities, she was deeply committed to church. She was born into the faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints. She was very involved with the church and held many positions which kept her busy. She served in the Stake Relief Society Board for thirty-five years. While holding office in the Relief Society, she also fulfilled callings in the Rexburg Second Ward, which she attended. She served as primary president for eighteen years, and then served as president of the Y. W. M. I. A. (Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association). She served only a short time as president of the YWMIA, and was dearly loved by the young women. In fact, they even petitioned that she remain in her calling.\textsuperscript{28} Of course, the petition was not successful. However, the love that the young women had for her, was shared by many others. Barnes served in her callings faithfully, and full heartedly. Barnes continued to serve as a charter member for the Business and
Professional Women's Organization of Rexburg, as the chairman of the Community Service Committee. One project, in particular, consisted of the "establishment of a rest room in the shopping district," for convenience for all shoppers. Another was the 'improvement and care of the Rexburg Cemetery.'

Barnes was a full supporter to the women's rights at this time. "She was instrumental in…working for woman suffrage in the nation.' There is limited information about the movement in Eastern Idaho, but the influence of the hard working, charitable women were a great source of appreciation and pride held by community members, male and female.

There were numerous ways that women influenced the community. Alcohol had been a problem throughout the U.S. for many years. As a result, prohibition was a regular topic discussed by members of the community. The Encyclopedia Britannica states that prohibition was the "legal prevention of the manufacture, sale, or transportation of alcoholic beverages with the aim of obtaining partial or total abstinence through legal means." The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Anti-Saloon League were extremely active at that time. Mrs. L. L. Shepard, a member of the WCTU, delivered a lecture at Flamm's Opera House, in Rexburg, on 30 June 1908. "Mrs. Shepard reviewed the temperance movement in United States history and the amount of money spent on alcohol rather than on food, clothes, and shelter. She pointed out that because of her agitation, several towns in Utah and Idaho had adopted ordinances abolishing saloons." Her audience, although small, consisted both of women and men.
In 1918, World War I was going strong. "In mid-February the local Woman's Committee of Council of National Defence was organized to aid the war effort." Leaders of the organization consisted of: Mrs. James R. Sahne, Mrs. H. M. Sundberg and Mrs. G. G. Lupe. The women's organization aided in Red Cross drives and projects. According to the *Rexburg Standard journal*, the women shipped to the Red Cross headquarters in Seattle:

"Eighteen boxes of knitted goods and hospital supplies, consisting of 496 pairs of socks, 181 sweaters, 21 mufflers, 32 pairs of wristlets, 14 helmets, 322 pairs of pajamas, 52 bath robes, 64 bed sheets and a large quantity of bandages and other articles used in the hospitals." Young women were influenced by their mothers and other women of the community through their examples of service and work. As a result, the young women of the community were just as involved as the older women. Involvement in community development introduced young women into society. Arthur Porter, Jr., in 1918, was chairman of Madison County's "Smileage" campaign. "Smileage was a 'plan of entertainment for soldiers in all cantonments and training camps in the United States.'" The *Rexburg Journal* stated that the purpose of this campaign was to make it possible for a soldier to attend any theater for the "absolute cost; that is, a soldier can go to this Liberty Theater and see the very highest class entertainment at a cost ranging from ten to twenty-five cents." The Smileage campaign was under the direction of the national Military Entertainment Council. The plan for this campaign included:

"local people to buy coupon books containing either twenty or one hundred coupons and send the books to the soldiers from their area. Soldiers used the coupons to gain admittance to Liberty Theaters. Money raised from sale of books went to the Military Entertainment council to pay expenses of the theaters. Porter appointed a committee of young
ladies to conduct the county campaign. They were Fay Abbott, Lillian Austin, Mary Bassett, Mae Darley, Hannah Flamm, Helena Flamm, Juanita George, Sarah Gillespie, Sarah Hibbert, Ruby Johnson, Sarah Klingler, Hazel Lloyd, Mildred Oldham, Jane Poole, Dora Porter, Edna Ricks, Harriet Ricks, Grace Taylor, Rhea Winter, Ruth Winter, and Alice Zollinger. Due to efforts of these ladies, the campaign was very successful."\(^{40}\)

The young ladies that were involved in this endeavor learned early and without hesitation that service to those in their immediate community was important, but involvement in society on a national level and as a whole was as important. Their influence on husbands, sons and brothers would be embraced and felt in future generations. The *Woman's Exponent* states: "I believe in the future of the race as the bright consummation of the Eternal Plan; therefore, I must and do believe in the equality of sex in every vital relation of the race. In birth; in life-its woe, and its happiness; in death, and in the Hereafter."\(^{41}\)

Phebe C. Young, author in the *Woman's Exponent*, expressed,

"This is an age of the world when all brave, true-hearted women are needed to work as reformers, to assist in solving some of these social problems that agitate the minds of thinking men and women today; one thing is certain, if every woman was standing in her proper place and doing her proper portion of the world's work there would be no social problems to solve."\(^{42}\)

Phebe was, obviously, more than a proponent of women's fights; she was a voice needing to be heard in this country, and in far off countries, that encouraged individualism and equality to all people. She felt that women were on this earth to make a difference and proclaim intelligence during a time of confusion and uncertainty.

Though women have been traditionally perceived as the weaker sex with their roles defined by society or by men, they have diligently found ways to impact the world
community and society. They have been able to be educated and to educate those around them and those who are not around them. Women, even those in the Upper Snake River Valley have consistently sought equality and compassion for all people. Women have used their wits, their religion and their beliefs to encourage and sustain themselves and their families. They have served their fellow man (and women) to improve their communities and the world. Women like Sarah Barnes, and Mrs. Shepard set powerful examples of the traditional and new age woman, they positively influenced people around them. The women, both old and young, were involved in the establishment of a strong community in which to raise families for the good of the world. An unknown author in the *Woman's Exponent* proclaimed, "True womanhood defined, implies- virtue and purity, love and friendship, truth and sympathy grace and refinement, modesty and intelligence. Though her sphere may seem humble, yet she can make it noble and queenly. She must live for those around her, and not for self alone."\(^43\)
Notes


2. Ibid, p. 675.


5. Ibid, p. 675.


20. Ibid, pp.1-5.
22. Ibid, pp.1-5.
23. Ibid, pp.1-5.
27. Ibid, pp.1-5.
29. Ibid, pp.1-5.
30. Ibid, pp.1-5.
31. Ibid, pp.1-5.
34. Ibid, p.191.
35. Ibid, pp. 190-191.
37. Ibid, pp. 190-191.
38. Ibid, pp. 190-191.
40. Ibid, pp. 190-191.
42. Young, Phebe C., p. 9.

Works Cited


“What Constitutes A True Woman.” Woman’s Exponent. Salt Lake City, UT, 1 July 1888, p. 5.