



Audacious Women: Early British Mormon Immigrants

Rebecca Bartholomew

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Victorians loved to hear stories about the secret lives of Mormon women. Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Joaquin Miller, A. Conan Doyle, and others fed the public's curiosity with tale after tale. Naive Manchester shopgirls seduced by lecherous missionaries, illiterate Liverpudlian fishwives shanghaied into domestic slavery in Utah--these were the stories that shaped public opinion. What was the truth behind such stereotypes? In fact, most female immigrants to Utah were former shopgirls, factory workers, and home pieceworkers in London and Manchester, and many were illiterate. Were they also naive adventuresses? Bartholomew fleshes out real-life profiles of these pioneering women through available letters, diaries, and public documents. They were by-and-large devout, and most of them approached their uncertain future with their eyes wide open. At minimum, they were least vaguely aware of what their religious commitment would entail. So if they did not fulfill Victorian fantasies of young concubines who had been abducted into desert harems, what about the romanticized icons of Mormon inspirational literature? Writes Rebecca Bartholomew: "These women made mistakes. But if they were not angels, neither were they fools. They are likable. Their lives had meaning. They demonstrated that virtue has unlikely habitats and could even sprout in that spiritual chamber of horrors, that Eden betrayed, that whited sepulchre, Mormondom."

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Brent Campbell:

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