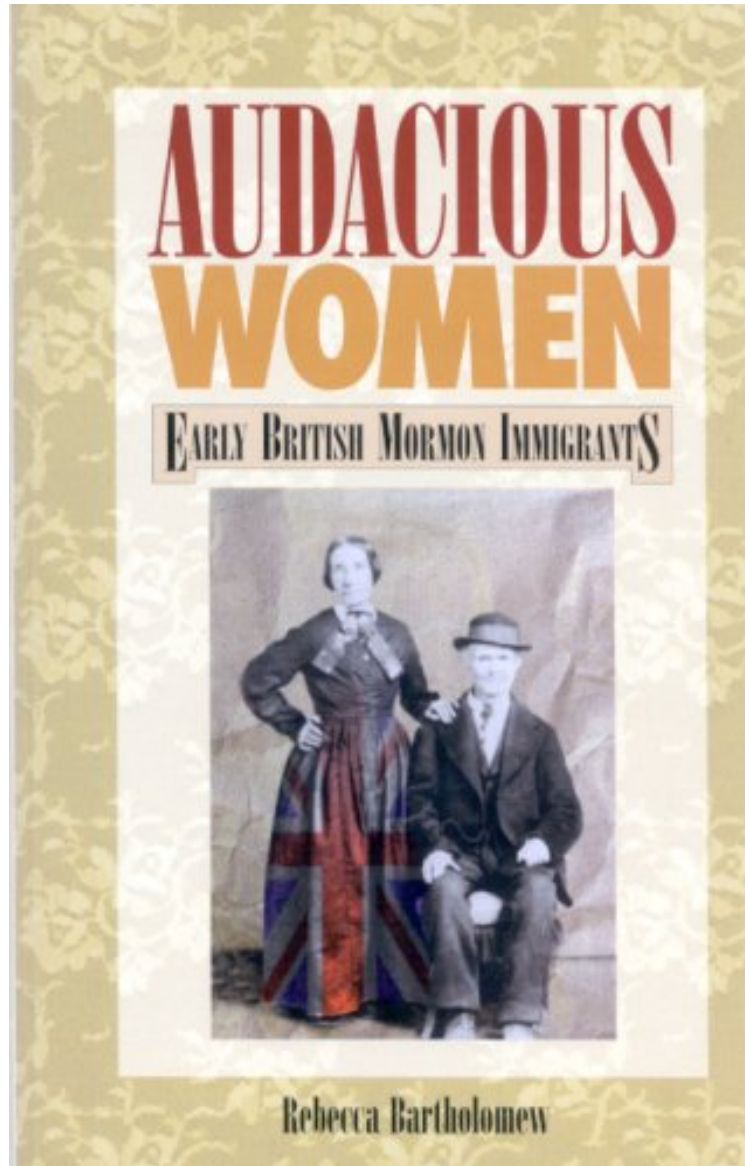


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Audacious Women: Early British Mormon Immigrants

Rebecca Bartholomew

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Rebecca Bartholomew : Audacious Women: Early British Mormon Immigrants before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Audacious Women: Early British Mormon Immigrants:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent dataBy History LoverThis is an ambitious work. The author attempted both detailed studies and a statistical overview of 100 pioneer emigrants from Great Britain to Utah. It must have been difficult finding accurate records on that many women. She organized the study by phase -- family

roots, conversion to Mormonism, emigration, first impressions of Zion, settling experience -- using all 100 women's stories to create a composite pioneering experience. Despite some minor errors and typos, this approach gives a fascinating, in-depth understanding of who, why, and how about 50,000 British women succumbed to Mormon proselyting and opted to reinvent themselves in the desert of the American West.³ of 6 people found the following review helpful. Interesting subject-matter-gaps in research. By A Customer An interesting account of British women's role in the Mormon settlement of Utah was somewhat spoiled for me, as a British reader, by the author's lack of knowledge regarding the basic geography of England. We are confidently informed, for example, that Birmingham is a city in Lancashire, close to Liverpool. Unfortunately it isn't--the author has evidently confused Birmingham (England's second-largest city) with Manchester (third-largest). Didn't the author look at a map during her research?

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 Liverpoolian 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."

Nineteenth-century Mormon women have been much written about, although coverage in the 1800s was usually disparaging. As Rebecca Bartholomew shows, they were portrayed as gullible, degraded foreigners with disagreeable countenances. Twentieth-century historians' work has dispelled this nineteenth-century view. Bartholomew's use of these old stereotypes as a foil is thus more an organizational device than a revisionist account. Her purpose is to explore the types of women who in fact joined the Mormon Church in Britain and what their experiences in this new religion were. The women she describes were audacious, whether in disregarding public opinion in Britain by joining an unpopular religion or in braving Mormon society in Utah by leaving the church. To explicate the experience of approximately twenty-five thousand British women who emigrated to Utah, Bartholomew located accounts of one hundred women, many teased from documents written by husbands or children. How representative these hundred women are is unclear. Of those whose accounts provide sufficient socioeconomic information, one-third belonged to the middle class, greater than the proportion in other studies. These hundred women, however, were predominantly from urban areas and emigrated with their families, as was typical generally of British Mormons. One-third of the women in her study entered plural marriage, again higher than the percentage found in most other studies. This may indicate, however, that a disproportionate number came during the first years of Utah's settlement, when plural marriage was at its peak. She also surmises that many of their daughters may have become plural wives, because 66 percent of daughters of polygamous marriages married into polygamy. My research is cited for that percentage (Sunstone Symposium, 1991), but it should read 23 percent a considerable difference. Although Bartholomew analyzes the one hundred women statistically, she correctly assesses her work when she states, "Numbers and facts often do not tell the story." In this book they do not, for its strength lies in using various individuals' experiences to convey the backgrounds of British emigrants, their motivations for becoming Mormons, their roles in the newly founded church, their reasons for emigrating, their trials in crossing the ocean and the plains, and their reactions to life in Utah. To explore these topics, Bartholomew effectively uses several women's experiences as harmony to support the melody of one or two longer, well-told narratives. While she critically assesses and draws meaning from these stories, she often accepts the women's own judgments rather than fitting her conclusions into an overarching interpretation. Her sympathies are clearly with the devoted women who supported their church in Britain and sacrificed to emigrate to Utah, but they are equally with the reluctant non-Mormon husband who followed his wife to Utah and the few disillusioned women who found the sacrifices greater than the rewards. But however compelling these individuals stories, they are subordinated to her larger purpose of explicating British women's overall experience in the nineteenth-century Mormon Church. This general story is also well told. --Kathryn M. Daynes, *Journal of American History* About the Author Rebecca Bartholomew is a graduate of the University of Utah and a former history instructor at Salt Lake Community College. She is the author of *Audacious Women: Early British Mormon Immigrants*, *Brigham Young's Forest Farm Home*, and *Lost Heroines: Little-Known Women Who Changed Their World*. She is the co-author of *Rescue of the 1856 Handcart Companies* and is a contributing author to *Sister Saints*. She has recently

launched her own imprint, Uintah Springs Press.