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History of Utah  
Orson Ferguson Whitney  
Volume 4  
page 602

### **Ellen Brooke Ferguson**

Dr. Ferguson was born in Cambridge, England, where her father, William Lombe Brooke, was a lawyer of considerable reputation and social prominence. She received her education principally from private tutors and professors in the University... In 1857, she was married to Dr. William Ferguson of London...

In 1860, they came to America... Having bought the "Eaton Democrat" (Eaton, Ohio), a weekly newspaper, they launched into journalism... The question of suffrage for women was a very interesting one for her, and knowing that it would probably be years before women would be recognized as the political equals of men, she felt that every opportunity of extending woman's influence into politics should be used to the utmost,... At the close of the war the Fergusons sold the paper and went back East.

The next ten years were occupied in public lecturing, principally on woman suffrage; in educational, literary and medical work, in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois; until in 1875 Mrs. Ferguson went to England for her health, and traveled for some months in France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland. On her return home to Illinois in 1876, she found her husband preparing to remove to Utah, having become interested in the affairs of this Territory through acquaintance with Elder John Morgan and correspondence with President Brigham Young and others.

In company with her husband Mrs. Ferguson arrived at Salt Lake City in June, 1876, and went direct to St. George, where on the 1st of July they were baptized as Latter-day Saints by Elder Alexander F. McDonald. In October of the same year they removed to Provo, and the year following to Salt Lake City, where Mrs. Ferguson again became engaged in educational work, in connection with Miss Mary Cook, and also continued the practice of medicine. In 1878, she opened the Utah Conservatory of Music, in co-operation with the musical establishment of David O. Calder, and for over two years it was the leading music school of the Territory. In 1880, her husband died at Salt Lake City.

Having decided to devote herself exclusively to the practice of medicine, Mrs. Ferguson went to New York in the fall of 1881 to attend the hospital clinics and perfect herself in certain special departments, such as gynecology, obstetrics, minor surgery, etc. She spent the winter of 1881-2 in this work, visiting and examining the various hospitals with a view to specially qualifying herself for hospital work in Utah. In pursuance of this purpose, on her return home in 1882 she drew up a plan for the establishment and maintenance of a Mormon hospital in Salt Lake City, an institution then greatly needed in the community. The plan provided for a full staff of physicians, surgeons, nurses and assistants, and when presented to President John Taylor and counselors it was approved by them, and all possible aid given to help put it into practical operation. The active co-operation of the Relief Society and Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association, with generous cash donations from the Presidency and others, supplied sufficient means to furnish the new institution with all necessary medical and sanitary appliances, as well as everything requisite for the nursing and care of the sick. In July the

**Deseret Hospital** was dedicated to the service of humanity and opened for the reception of patients. For three months Dr. Ferguson had charge of the hospital as house physician and surgeon, devoting all her time, energy and thought to the interests of the institution. (Eliza R. Snow Smith was president of the institution.) In 1886, she was sent with other ladies to Washington D. C., to present to President Cleveland the protest of the Mormon women against the indignities heaped upon them in the enforcement of the Edmunds law.

Having always been a Democrat from principle, when the people of Utah, in preparing for Statehood, divided on national party lines, she joined the Democratic party and worked early and late for its success. The women of Utah having formerly exercised the suffrage, the large majority of them favored its re-establishment, and labored hard to have the constitution of the new State recognize the political equality of women by an equal suffrage clause in that instrument. None were more zealous in this direction than Mrs. Ferguson. The equal suffrage clause was incorporated in the Constitution.

The Doctor took a very active part in the politics of the State, and during the campaign of 1896 spoke at hundreds of meetings for Democracy, Bryan and Free Silver. She was elected an alternate to the National Democratic Convention in Chicago, and had the honor of being the only woman who occupied a seat in the Convention. At the close of the campaign, she organized the Woman's Democratic Club of Salt Lake City, and was elected president of the same for two successive years, during which time the club was an important factor in politics and contributed largely to the success of the party.

About this time her religious views underwent a change, and her connection with the Latter-day Church was severed. She now gave her adherence to the system known as Theosophy. Mrs. Ferguson had four children.

from

Pioneer, Polygamist, Politician: The Life of Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon  
Mari Grana, 2009

During the late 1870's another woman doctor, Ellen Ferguson, arrived in Utah with her physician husband. Apparently, Ellen did not actually have a medical degree, but she had studied medicine in England and had learned from her husband sufficiently to practice in Europe and the United States. This seemed in her mind to justify advertising for her services as Dr. Ellen Ferguson. Converted to Mormonism, Ellen started a practice in Utah and in 1878 organized classes for women in obstetrics and the diseases of women and children. Having been given an extensive private education by her father, a Cambridge professor, she also taught classes in French, Latin, German, drawing, elocution, drama, and music. In addition to these, varied talents, she was an avid feminist, and she became the first woman deputy sheriff in the United States.

...

In 1882 Holy Cross Hospital purchased a large ten-acre tract at the edge of the city, and the Deseret women were able to take over the vacated Catholic barn with a twelve-bed hospital. Two years later they were able to move to a much larger building vacated by the University of Deseret. Calling again on the Relief Society, the Young Ladies Mutual

Improvement Association, and general church funds, the Saints raised money to travel to New York to buy the latest medical equipment for their project. The resident physician -- the only paid position -- was Dr. Ellen Ferguson, and the visiting physicians were Brigham Young's early friend, Dr. Washington Anderson; Brigham's nephew, Dr. Seymour Young; eye and ear specialist Romania Pratt and Dr. Ellis Shipp. (Dr. Ferguson was replaced by Mattie, Martha Hughes Cannon. Dr. Ferguson left to continue her private practice. At this time)... the hospital was charging \$3 per day for care, a charge that soon rose to \$6 -- a dollar in the 1880's would be worth about \$21 today.

At Deseret Hospital the priesthood could carry out their religious ministrations for the patients and could hold their group prayer sessions.

[http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Maternity\\_and\\_Child\\_Health\\_Care](http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Maternity_and_Child_Health_Care)

Ward Relief Societies began coordinated health programs in the late 1860s after President Brigham Young assigned two of his plural wives, Eliza R. Snow and Zina D. H. Young, to promote health-care education among the Saints and to train midwives. In 1873 he asked each ward Relief Society to appoint three women to study nursing and midwifery, and a nursing school was opened for their training.

In the same year, President Young said that the time had come for women to study at medical schools in the East. At least six women responded, earning medical degrees in the 1870s. Most influential among these early doctors were Romania Pratt, Ellis Shipp, and Ellen Ferguson, who set up Utah's earliest professional training programs. Dr. Pratt wrote many articles on health. Dr. Shipp opened the School of Obstetrics and Nursing in Salt Lake City in 1878 and taught two six-month long courses each year, from which more than five hundred students eventually graduated. In 1888 she helped found Utah's first medical journal, the *Salt Lake Sanitarian*. Dr. Ferguson helped initiate plans for the Church-sponsored Deseret hospital, which opened in 1882 and shortly thereafter became the center for the School of Obstetrics and Nursing.

[http://historytogo.utah.gov/utah\\_chapters/statehood\\_and\\_the\\_progressive\\_era/hospitalsandhealthcrasesinthelate1800s.html](http://historytogo.utah.gov/utah_chapters/statehood_and_the_progressive_era/hospitalsandhealthcrasesinthelate1800s.html)

The Deseret Hospital ran into financial trouble, however, because of its payment policy. The Relief Society had relied on donations to the hospital fund to allow patients to receive care regardless of their ability to pay. Learning that care was free, even patients able to pay for treatment often refused to do so. Financial instability finally toppled the institution.

The Anomaly of Polygamous Suffragists, Joan Iversen, 1990

The women of Utah presented the National Woman's Suffrage Association with a perplexing political anomaly: polygamous suffragists. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) had announced plural marriage as a religious tenet in 1852, shortly after the Mormon migration to Utah. Even before the Civil War, polygamy had been linked by reform Republicans with slavery as the "twin relic(s) of barbarism." After the war, opposition to the practice grew increasingly intense, manifesting itself in punitive federal laws and opposition to Utah statehood. Woman suffrage, originally proposed in the East as a means to rid the territory of the scourge of polygamy, was unexpectedly adopted in 1870 by the Mormon-dominated territorial legislature, which anticipated -- correctly -- that Mormon women would demonstrate their loyalty to their religion by upholding the principle of plural marriage.

While the franchise was not used to end polygamy, it did develop political activism among leading Mormon women, who founded their own woman's paper, the *Women's Exponent*, held mass protest meetings, and undertook a militant defense of their religious marital practices. Faced with this undesired outcome, anti-Mormon and anti-suffrage forces in Congress launched repeated attempts to disfranchise Utah's women. The leaders of the National Woman's Suffrage Association protested these attempts, and in 1879 invited two Mormon women to attend their Washington convention. From this point on, Utah's Mormon women (one of whom was Ellen Ferguson) were affiliated with the National Women's Suffrage Association. This connection brought the National benefits of a strong western link, but also associated it with the despised practice of polygamy and with the patriarchal LDS church.

The Mormon alliance immediately exacerbated the rift between the National and its rival organization, the American Woman Suffrage Association, and would become even more controversial in the coming decade as the social purity agenda expanded to include an anti-polygamy crusade that also became embedded with the suffrage movement. For the Mormons, there were clear advantages in recruiting women's rights advocates to their side of the battle; for example the Mormon women attending the 1879 convention had the opportunity to deliver a memorial from the women of their church to Congress and the President. But as the anti-Mormon crusade accelerated, Mormon women endured hurtful snubs, and the defense of polygamy became increasingly untenable. For both suffrage and Mormon women leaders, the relationship engendered enduring friendships as well as opportunities for growth but it was not to be tranquil.

[www.ldswomenofgod.com/?p=2777](http://www.ldswomenofgod.com/?p=2777)

**The Investigation of Dr. Ellen Ferguson**

Have you ever felt hurt by those you serve with in your callings? Have misunderstandings stirred a resentful heart, culminating in an output of gossip and blackened reputation? This is a sad, but true, example of the damage that is caused by petty female jealousies. We must be watchful, and learn from this lesson.

In 1882, the Deseret Hospital opened its doors to LDS patients. The Priesthood set each of the Board members, and doctors, apart. The purpose of this hospital was to allow members of the Church to heal in a comfortable environment and receive priesthood blessings as was necessary.

These women were exemplary women, having worked on many projects together. Eliza Snow, Romania Pratt, Margaret Roberts, and others worked together and enjoyed one another's company in many venues. But as is fairly common, those who get along well on a social level, don't always get along well at a business level, which appears to be the case here.

As the Resident Surgeon in charge, Dr. Ellen B. Ferguson demanded a certain level of professionalism and obedience. Other doctors saw things differently, and trouble ensued. Accusations were made, both exaggerated and false, and eventually a Church Council was held to view the charges.

This council was held in the Salt Lake Stake in 1884. The question arose: How could such good women allow such injury. It proved to be such a difficult case that the stake president, Angus M. Cannon, asked the prophet, Pres. John Taylor, to be present.

Pres. Taylor had the opportunity to interview the lady officers of the hospital, but his questions were answered "with such a diversity of opinion, with so much commotion in existence, with so many severe charges being made, how it is possible for all to be right, and yet all acted upon principles that they conceived to be right; but which were in many respects incorrect."

There were several accusations, first one being that Dr. Ferguson was "austere and dictatorial in her intercourse with [three of the officers]. She, on the other hand, charged them with "insubordination and plotting against her." The Board sided with their fellow officers and requested Dr. Ferguson to resign. At this point, the Board, upon hearing the officers' side of the story, stated as reasons for this discharge her "incompetence as an opium eater, a drunkard, and a thief."

The ladies apparently gossiped, and Dr. Ferguson's name was dragged through the mud, which added to all the hurt and anger. Pres. Taylor stated that "this was a serious injury (the gossiping) against the law of the Gospel, or the celestial law, or the law of equity. People on their part occasionally claim things that they have no right to claim, and those who govern sometimes go beyond the bounds allotted to them. And hence arises difficulty and trouble." Courts are then appointed to "decide correctly, justly and equitably."

Following are some of Pres. Taylor's thoughts that he wished to make public to show the actions pertaining to "government, rule, authority, dominion, the conflict of opinion, the necessity of being prepared to act wisely, prudently and intelligently, and to discriminate between right and wrong." He felt it necessary to get to the very bottom of the case, to show how the law of the Gospel can work with the law of the land.

"In this case we have a hospital. There is a Board of Directors. Then there is a resident surgeon, and it becomes her duty to attend to certain rules and principles that are laid down to use medical talent and ability for the benefit of the patients and the hospital, and to manipulate certain things committed to her charge. Sister Ferguson, it would seem, got up a set of rules. They might be very good, but it would seem they were not adopted by the Board, and it would also seem that the Board held the power in its own hands to manipulate these affairs. So that, although the rules drawn up by Sister Ferguson might have been very good and very advantageous if adopted, it appears they were not." Sister Ferguson came from hospitals, from back east, where the resident surgeon makes final decisions of which the Board is to comply. When confronted, her feathers got a little ruffled and she assumed a dictatorial air according to the Board members.

"Being members of the Church, we have covenanted to live the law of the Gospel, where we must demonstrate forbearance, kindness, and harmony. This law is preparatory to the celestial law. We have not got it yet quite, and we are not prepared for it quite; but we are trying to introduce those things, and the Gospel has been restored for that purpose, and revelation has been given for that purpose, and the heavens have been opened for that purpose, and the Priesthood of God has been organized for that purpose in all its various forms and ramifications, and predicated upon that principle."

"The Executive Board of the hospital was desirous to be set apart by the Priesthood that they might act under the blessing of God. The difficulty arose amongst some of the Board members, and while Sis. Eliza Snow tried to bring things back to harmony; it was not obeyed, so they now appear in this council."

"Bitter feelings led to character defamation. Sis. Ferguson was accused of taking opium. She does take this as a medicine to ease her neuralgia of the heart and sometimes it can overcome her." Instead of accusations, those sisters of the Board should have been compassionate. He lamented that she had to stand before the fire of her accusers against her moral conduct, her actions, and her reputation.

"Now, I suppose that these sisters were mistaken in their ideas. I do not think that they have bad hearts; but sometimes when people allow their prejudices to run against a person, they carry these things too far. While we are desirous to put down iniquity, we must not go to work and act a cruel part toward anybody. God does not do it. He pours blessings upon all, and He has to be merciful to us all, otherwise we would not be as we are today, surrounded with the blessings we enjoy."

“Some things were said to be strangely disappearing, so that she was accused of being a thief; but when we came to inquire into these things we find there was no foundation for the charges. They seem to have arisen from unworthy jealousies. “

“Joseph Smith taught that even though we may have the gift of discernment, and be able to see into the hearts of men, we have no business bringing charges against any person without evidence and witnesses. As Latter-day Saints we ought to be under the law of love, of kindness, and of mercy. Yet, it is appropriate to ferret out evil and search for evidence when necessary. Both are necessary. If, in fact, there is a guilty party, the law stands ready to condemn. It is not for us to condone the sin, but we must let the law of God do its deed.”

“Sister Ferguson, I give you my right hand of fellowship and say God bless you, and try and be a little more humble. And I will do the same to those other sisters. God bless you all in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Sister Ferguson admitted to perhaps appearing to be arbitrary, commanding in her desire to have respect and obedience from those under her charge; but a good deal of this kind of feeling appeared to have arisen from jealousy and from watching for faults, and when found, magnifying them to a great extent.

Pres. Angus Cannon announced the decision of the council: That Sis. Ferguson resign, considering the injured feelings involved. However, everyone was encouraged to apologize, extend the hand of fellowship, build the good doctor up, and let everything pass; all for the purpose of increasing a good feeling of influence.

How many of us get our feelings hurt? How many of us have considered leaving the Church over these hurt feelings? How can we live the law of the Gospel to prevent any part in similar circumstances?

Found in the Journal of Discourses 26:346, Remarks by President John Taylor before the High Council of Salt Lake Stake of Zion, Feb 20, 1884.

from Chapter 10

**Audacious Women: Early British Mormon Immigrants**, 1995, by Rebecca Bartholomew

Dr. Ellen Brooke Ferguson, after spending twenty years defending Mormonism and polygamy at international women’s conferences and before Congress, retired into Theosophy in 1897, was eventually excommunicated, and died in New York City.