

**NAUVOO REMEMBERED:
HELEN MAR WHITNEY REMINISCENCES
(PART ONE)**

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel

The Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reported on 15 November 1896:

Sister Helen Mar Whitney died at 2 P.M. today at her residence in Salt Lake City. She was born in Mendon, Monroe County, N.Y., Aug. 22, 1828. Her parents were among the first to receive the Gospel in the State of New York, being baptized in April, 1832, removing to Kirtland in the fall of 1833. She was baptized when a child, and passed through the terrible persecutions in Missouri, removing with the Saints to Commerce. She was associated with Joseph Smith and Brigham Young and the leaders of the Church; was married to Horace K. Whitney, eldest son of Bishop Newell K. Whitney, in the Nauvoo Temple, Feb. 3, 1846. Her husband was called to go with the Pioneers in 1847. She came to Utah the following year, leaving Winter Quarters May 24th and arriving in October, 1848. Sister Whitney was the mother of 11 children, her eldest son being Bishop Orson F. Whitney.¹

The death notice continued:

She was a prominent woman in the Relief Society, was prophetic and patriotic in spirit, wrote many articles for publication on the Church and its doctrines, and was the author of two works on the subject of plural marriage. Under all circumstances she was true, devoted and faith-

ful, and a strong advocate of the principles of the Gospel, in which she trained her children, and of which she bore a constant testimony. She was surrounded by a number of members of her family at the time of her decease, and at her last moments appeared to recognize a number of persons who were not visible to those around her in the flesh. Her husband proceeded [sic] her into the spirit world, having departed this life Nov. 22, 1884.²

Helen Mar Whitney's obituary is a brief one for a woman who lived in an extraordinary time. Fortunately for us, Helen Mar took pen and paper in hand before she died to vividly describe her times in a series of articles published in the *Woman's Exponent*. One of the most impressive achievements of Utah women in the late nineteenth century was the publication of the *Woman's Exponent*.³ Although it was not an official publication of the LDS Church, it served as the major voice of Mormon women between 1872 and 1914. Among the many types of items published in the paper, personal reminiscences of those who witnessed and participated in the story of Nauvoo played a significant role.

Helen Mar Whitney not only recounts the experiences of her immediate family in this incredible series, including her father and mother (Heber C. and Vilate Kimball), but she also paints a panoramic picture of life among the early Saints in Kirtland, Far West, Nauvoo, and Winter Quarters.

Autobiographical works were rare in antiquity before the Roman and Christian eras, beginning about

RICHARD NEITZEL HOLZAPFEL is an Assistant Professor of Church History at Brigham Young University. He attended Brigham Young University for undergraduate and graduate studies and Hebrew Union College and California State University, Fullerton, for graduate studies. He is the author or coauthor of many books of Church history: *Old Mormon Nauvoo and Southeastern Iowa: Historic Photographs and Guide*; *Old Mormon Kirtland and Missouri: Historic Photographs and Guide*; *Old Mormon Palmyra and New England: Historic Photographs and Guide*; *Women of Nauvoo*; and *Every Stone a Sermon*, a centennial commemoration of the Salt Lake Temple. Richard is also a noted lecturer in his field and has published many articles in academic and Church-related publications.

