

401 | Cuppa Joe | Historic Sites Foundation Spring Lecture Series | "When Will the Little Woman Come Out of the House?" The Life and Legacy of Alice Smith Edwards with Paul Edwards
Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome. This is Cuppa Joe, where we explore restoration history. And I'm your host, Karin Peter. Our guest today is Dr. Paul Edwards. Paul is the author of 10 books ranging from philosophy to the Korean War. Paul earned a doctorate from St. Andrews University in Scotland, and has devoted much of his life to educational pursuits as student and instructor. He served as Professor of Philosophy at Park University in Kansas City, Vice President of Graceland University, the Community of Christ University in Lamoni, Iowa, and president of the John Whitmer Historical Association, and the Mormon History Association. In addition, Paul managed the Community of Christ Temple School, which is the educational wing of Community of Christ, and served as founder and director of the Center for the Study of the Korean War. Paul was also my first instructor when I began my Master of Arts in Christian Ministry at Community of Christ Seminary. So, it's a great privilege for me to be interviewing Paul today. He is one of the featured presenters in the Historic Sites Foundation's Spring Lecture Series. And his lecture is titled, When will the Little Woman Come Out of the House?--The life and Legacy of Alice Smith Edwards. So, with all that, hi, Paul.

Paul Edwards 02:05

Hi, there That's a great introduction.

Karin Peter 02:09

Well, it's a great introduction for a great person and I'm really pleased to be sharing with you today in this interview. I'm very interested in your lecture title: When will the Little Woman Come Out of the House? Is it tongue in cheek? Because as I remember your conversations and stories about your mother, the, quote, "little woman" stereotype hardly seems fitting. So, why did you choose this title?

Paul Edwards 02:38

She used to tell this story about a weather vane, a little house weather vane, where the man and woman would come out back and forth. But she lived in Los Angeles at the time. And so this little man was always out. And she kept asking her hostess, When does the woman come out? And the hostess told her, The woman will come out when there's a change in the weather. And mom used to use that as an example of the need to change the weather rather than just who got to come out. (Ah, so she) She, she is best known for being a feminist, I think. But that's not really accurate. She was a humanist. And, and what she pursued was what she called gender equality. She didn't want women in charge any more than she wanted men in charge. She wanted everybody to be equal. And so she used to use that story kind of as a beginning to her discussions with women about, How do you be a feminist without being anti-human? So, well

Karin Peter 03:55

Okay, well that gives us a little insight into her, Paul, and probably also into you.

Paul Edwards 04:01

Well, probably yes.

Karin Peter 04:07

Well, I'm just trying to remember some of the stories that you told about your mother that I can remember and I did interview you once for a paper in school about your mother. And so when you say she's remembered as a feminist, but she was really a humanist, feminist wasn't really a term that was kicked around at the time your mother was trying to really work for gender equality.

Paul Edwards 04:34

No, no, it was the term came much later.

Karin Peter 04:38

Okay. We'll claim her anyway.

Paul Edwards 04:42

Well, I think she would fit into that category if you were identifying her today. But she was very, very strong. That's interesting. It brings you back a memory. Once in a while when I'd get sassy, she'd say, Just because you have a spout on your tea kettle doesn't mean you're any better than anybody else. She made that point very clear.

Karin Peter 05:15

I'm hoping all the women, I'm hoping all the women hearing this podcast are chuckling and all the men are cringing. That's what I'm hoping.

Paul Edwards 05:22

Well, she made her point and, and while, you know, she raised us, my brother and I particularly, as, as respectful of women, not, we were not raised to be afraid of them. (Ah, excellent.) It was not a battle between us and women. It was you stood up when a woman came to the table because you respected her. But you didn't have to stand up and she didn't have to want you to. But you did something. You opened the door for people. You, you spoke quietly. You addressed women as, as ma'am or missus. You know, you, we, you had, uh, she, she taught us, I think in her own way, to be conscious of the power of women without letting it dominate us in any way. I'm not sure I'm saying that well, but

Karin Peter 06:20

Well, I think you're saying it quite well. Your mother lived at a period of time when women were not considered leaders. They did not serve in priesthood. And yet your mother very much was a leader, as a person and in the church. So I wanted to, to give us a little bit of background about her, for you to give us a bit of background. In your synopsis of your lecture, you indicate that your mother was many things. One, she was a reluctant hostess, and it says to the royal family, which I'm curious about. And she was a professor of English literature, and the mother of three wayward children, which I find apt, and she

was also married to F. Henry Edwards, a significant church leader of the 20th century. And our listeners may have downloaded our Cuppa Joe episode with Andrew Bolton where he discusses F. Henry Edwards and his relationship with F. M. Smith, who are both your relatives, and that episode posted in the summer of 2020. Now, each of these stories you indicate would be an interesting topic all on its own. But a good way to begin for us might be to hear a bit about your mother, kind of the basics-- Where was she born? Where'd she grew up? What was she like?--of the kind of basic information so we can kind of get a picture of her? Would you do that?

Paul Edwards 07:53

Well, I could do that, I think. She was a, a vivacious woman. She was a large woman. She weighed nearly 300 pounds. She was unrestricted in her mobility. I mean, nothing stopped her. She moved around. I think, just kind of taking those in the order that you raised them, I think people are not aware of the fact that when her mother was killed, her mother died in the trolley car accident in Kansas City. When her mother was killed, Alice became the de facto hostess to the church as the, as the oldest daughter of the President. And she held that position till his death in '46. And then partially held into my father's retirement in '66. So, she was, as she used to say, spent 40 years in hell as, as the person they looked to as, as the hostess, the cake cutter, the, the introducer, the jolly person in the corner. And so she spent, in some respects, a lifetime as the supporter of these men. At the same time, she was one of their harshest critics. And she had to manage that in such a way that she, she improved the relationship rather than creating harm or friction. You know, she went to World Conference, but she hated World Conference. She went to women's meetings, but she hated women's meetings. But by the same token, she branched outside of the church and, in many respects, had a respectable career of her own as professor of literature. She, she graduated from Stanford University in hali, California and, and studied, believe it or not, economic theory. (Really?) Yeah. Can you believe it? And changed when time, after she left Stanford, came back to Independence, met my dad and married him, she changed from economics to literature. And she went on to University Kansas City and got a master's in literature. And at the University of Missouri, got all but her dissertation in English literature. And she was, she was considered in this small pond as a fairly wise professor basically specializing in the poetry of John Donne. So, she had that great career. She taught for more than 20 years, rose to the rank of assistant professor without the PhD. And so in that, in that respect, I think was very much an independent person in her own right. You mentioned Andrew Bolton and I think one of the things that I wish Andrew had done was to pay more attention to Alice's influence on the church's decision about war. She, it was not all con, conflict between my father and Fred M. It was also a conflict between the two of them and Alice.

Karin Peter 11:41

So, let's talk a little bit about that, Paul. When you talk about your father, F. Henry Edwards, and Fred M. would be your grandfather. So, F. Henry Edwards is having this dispute, difference of opinion with his father-in-law and in what you're saying, it, it was a triad. So, let's talk about your mother's perspective and how she influenced that. Shed, share a little bit about that with us.

Paul Edwards 12:09

All right. Mom, mom was a mechanic for the Stanford University Ambulance Corps in World War I. She lost her favorite cousin, Lyman, in combat in World War I. She served, you won't find this possible, but, as an Air Warden in Independence when we were first frightened of the Japanese attack. She ran a

local racing board. And her dissertation primarily was an analysis of the trauma suffered by World War I veterans. She, she was romantic about war. She saw it as, as peace preservation or, as she used to call, holy crusade, that sometimes there is no option to the destruction of evil. And, and I, and she convinced my dad of that. She also convinced Fred M. at the time that this discussion was going on, Fred M. was the colonel in the Missouri militia. He was a grand Mason at the Masonic Lodge. He was 199% American patriot. And he wanted the church to voice that patriotism in a manner that my father didn't want him to. And what the compromise they reached was basically a compromise that equals keep their mouths shut, let us see what happened. So, you know, Andrew did a wonderful job of not complaining about that. I just think he may have missed some of the influences on her. But that's just one example of, you know, another example of the influence, this is kind of a silly one, but it's, it's important if you think about it. The appointees were given a car. And every day they would drive their cars to the auditorium and park them in the parking lot and their wives had no transportation. So, on one given day, Alice arranged among all the wives to ask that day for the family car. And when the men got ready to do lunch, they discovered there was no transportation. And the policy was changed. The, uh, that kind of influence, I think, is what I'm talking about.

Karin Peter 15:01

So she had a way of creating change or creating potential for change without being so confrontational that she was not heard.

Paul Edwards 15:14

Exactly. That's it in a nutshell. She, she had a lecture called The Seven Stages of Women that she used as kind of an introductory lecture to classes. And that became sort of a hallmark of a pushing for women's influence without pushing for women's power. Again, I'm not sure I'm saying that carefully.

Karin Peter 15:45

So let's give a time frame here. Your, your mother was born in what year? (1899.) 1899 and she passed away in? (1974.) So this gives our listeners a little bit of context for the amazing amount of change that went on from the time when she was young to the 1970s when we were struggling, and we are still struggling to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (Yes.) for women. So this, there was huge social and cultural and religious change during this time.

Paul Edwards 16:24

Well, I think the interesting point there, we lived on Delaware Street here in May, Independence. And our backyard was intersected by the old shortline railway and across the railway was what was known in those days is colored town. And the, the black people going from this town to their homes would walk across our lawn heading out to their homes. She would stop them many times and talk and chat with them. She didn't seem to have any sense of blackness. I mean, it wasn't a question of, Are you a black person, it was a question of, Are you a woman? And she, she never, as far as I know, my father was much more prejudiced, but as far as I know, she never indicated to me in any way a sense of prejudice. But it was, I mean, it just carries over 'cause it's another thought that, you know, one of the questions people asked me is, Well, what was, what did mom believe about, about women in the priesthood? And her idea was, Well, not really. Not because they're not qualified, not because they couldn't do God's

work. But because the church needs an independent force to counteract the unnecessary arrogance of priesthood. (Oooo.) Think of that for a minute.

Karin Peter 18:04

Yeah. Okay. So that's an independent, interesting perspective from her time.

Paul Edwards 18:10

Yes, I think so. I think so. Yeah.

Karin Peter 18:15

You've talked about her, her influence with how the church understood the discussion between pacifism and patriotism. I think that's how it would have been posed probably during the period we're talking about. How, how do you see some of the other contributions that she made to the life of the church through her, her influence on both her husband and her father?

Paul Edwards 18:45

Well, I think the primary influence, the one that is most, has been the most interesting in its outcome is her pursuit of education of the priesthood. She worked almost from the beginning to encourage Fred M., who started the academy, and then Floyd McDowell, who started the junior college, and then F. Henry, who worked on the Restoration, School of the Restoration. But she felt that the, the priesthood had to be of equal merit in their ap, in their standards as pastors of non-denominational churches. That they should have, her preference, a theology degree, but certainly some training in that, but that the people, the members needed to have their own educational system to prevent them from the following of what she called the, the overwatched, meaning by that the power makers, that education was the only real compensation for ignorance. Interestingly enough, she also warned us, the church members, leadership primarily, that education, if it was accomplished, would greatly change the church. And that it was, and this, you have to remember that she's a university professor,. (Right.) this was a danger that the educa, people could be educated out of membership. That it would be hard for them to believe the stories and the myths and the faith if they got too much education. But it was a danger we had to run.

Karin Peter 20:53

So what do you think about that? We have become a much more educated people. The, the beginning educational pursuits you mentioned as well as what developed into Temple School. We now have ministerial education and discipleship studies. We have the seminary. We have lots of different ways for membership and priesthood to be educated. Did her prediction come true? Did it change the church?

Paul Edwards 21:20

Yes. Yeah, we had over 20,000 people take Temple School courses. Many of those people met the scriptures for the first time. Many heard the myths of the beginnings of the church for the first time. And some of them simply said, We can't buy it. On the other hand, those who stayed and worked have worked toward producing a better denomination. So, I think she's, I think she's right, but she's, she's right not just for the church, but for any educational system.

Karin Peter 21:59

Right. So, now, what we, what we experience today, with a growing number of people participating in Community of Christ seminary, we can look back and trace some of that to her influence.

Paul Edwards 22:14

Yes. And she taught with the Restoration Studies program for 16 years, uh, without compensation, for whatever that's worth. The, uh, she, she put her, her money where her mouth was. You know, she, she did not say, We should educate them. She took part in their education. (Right.) And she thought that shou, should be true particularly for women. Rosie the Riveter, remember Rosie the Riveter (Yes.) from World War Two? She, she believed, mom believed that Rosie had freed women by showing their competence to do things they were seen to be incompetent of before, that the little lady that couldn't change the light bulb could build a bomber. (Right.) And what, what she's, what came out of that for her was a belief that wifery, if that's a word, that wifery was the primary default position for women and had to be abolished. And you abolish it, first of all, by getting rid of lipstick.

Karin Peter 22:14

So this wifery that needed to be abolished was awful close to the 40 years of hell that she experienced as playing hostess, the leading hostess for the church. However, she was forced into that particular role, even though she worked hard to help other women find avenues other than that. So, I'm wondering, she had this natural affinity to be able to help change what happened. She cared about people, particularly women and their wholeness, their potential. How did she manage to keep her own identity and calling when she was expected to be this, for lack of a better word, appendage to her husband, supportive role. I think it's handmaiden in Scripture or helpmate, that kind of role and yet, she was a fierce woman. How did she manage to do that?

Paul Edwards 24:51

Well, she never disagreed with daddy in public. But she sure as heavens gave him hell at home. They, they fought through many a battle in which he not, may not have changed his mind, but changed his attitude. (Oh.) And I think what she was able to do was to use his not, I don't know how else to say it, but incredible charismatic leadership to change those 12 Apostles and those three Presidents from, from images that were caught up in the myths of the church and not meeting the needs of the people. They argued those things, it is a miracle, in my mind, that they stayed married. He loved her dearly and they were close as could be until the day she died. But he must have grown tired of being told he was an idiot.

Karin Peter 26:02

Oh, I think most of us would grow tired of being told that. How long were they married, Paul?

Paul Edwards 26:07

Oh, gosh. Fifty-two years? Married in 1924. Yeah.

Karin Peter 26:16

In '24. Okay. So that would have been not too long after he came from England (Yes, just two years.) over to take his role in church leadership. Yeah.

Paul Edwards 26:29

Yeah. He came to, he came to go to Graceland (Oh, that's right.) to go back to England as a missionary. But then Fred M. tapped him for the Twelve in 1924. And, and he grabbed him as a son-in-law all at the same time.

Karin Peter 26:50

Very convenient. She had an interesting position as daughter of the President of the church and the wife of Counselor to the President of the church, wife of Apostle, and all the other roles that

Paul Edwards 27:04

You need to keep in mind, too, I don't, I don't want to insult anybody here, but, but Israel was not much of a President. And I say that about him personally, but he just didn't come to work. You know, he was old and tired and didn't really want the job. And so his counselors basically ran the church, her dad and Fred M., and John Garver. (Uh, huh.) So, it's, it's not just her influences it, that dad was in a position he would not normally have been in with, say, with Wallace (Right.) because they were stronger presidents. Yeah. Yeah, Israel was a fine man, he just was had, he'd had it. He was worn out.

Karin Peter 27:52

So, your mother was a mechanic in World War I. She was an economics major. She was a professor of English. She, as in your words, was vivacious and anti-wifery and all of these wonderful terms. What do you think she would say about the role of women in the church today?

Paul Edwards 28:19

She'd say women have given into being small men.

Karin Peter 28:25

Ooo. Say more about that. ,,

Paul Edwards 28:28

Well, I think she would say that instead of coming into the system, as, as powerful women they came into the system as assistant to men. And they, they have taken, taken on priesthood roles and done a marvelous job. But they're basically the same roles their husbands did. What do you need is your revolution?

Karin Peter 28:57

How, how do you think she would have seen the role differently had she seen it played out to her satisfaction?

Paul Edwards 29:07

I think she would have seen women in the organization in major jobs and assignments and the priesthood would be downplayed as a significant factor. You know, it's, it's hard to imagine that, you know, during the, during their retirement my dad would spend long hours talking about what was happening in the church. And she'd listened to those day after day after day. And he was ho, he was

very critical of the attempt to focus the church on the mystic. You know, when they told him they were going to build a temple, he said, Why don't you build a parking lot first, then you could tell how many will come. He was he was just not impressed. And so I, it's hard to know what her thoughts were in those days. She was a good person. She is a firm believer. You know, she went to church when she had to. She didn't think much of the Book of Mormon, but she was impressed with the Doctrine and Covenants, so.

Karin Peter 30:42

So, when you, when you tell stories about your mother, when you reminisce about your mother, what do you consider the most important lessons you learned from her as an individual? And maybe even what in, what about her influenced you the most?

Paul Edwards 31:02

The thing I learned the most was to listen. I think the prime quality, I, I mentioned this in my paper, she wasn't a very good mother. She was a wonderful friend. She'd listen. I mean, listen, to hear your words. and interpret what you were saying and respond to what you said. And she'd do it anytime you wanted. She, uh, and then she taught me the importance of listening to what people say. And I think probably in my teaching and, you know, I taught for 40 years, the thing I tried to do always was to listen to the students and, and in doing so I think was a reason, reasonable teacher. But I think in my, my general life, my church life, my professional life, the thing I always think about her is that everybody's got a story. And everybody's story makes them different than they look. And I guess it's, I think my brother, my older brother's 94 (...) nutty in the head, but you know, he's, he says that about her. What do you remember up mom? I remember her sitting in your lap, her lap, telling her something in great detail. So, I guess that would be the thing I noticed the most. But in the larger sense, I think the dedication to her profession, love of literature, desire to right choice was write, writing something. I'm always writing something. This is a matter of interest in your introductions. This is an ego trip. I've published 59 books. (55 books. All right, well,) 59, 59.

Karin Peter 33:12

Fifty-nine books. We'll have to update our biography section.

Paul Edwards 33:17

Yeah, well, I've been busy since you wrote it.

Karin Peter 33:18

You are a prolific writer, that is true. So, (Anyway.) I remember, I remember interviewing you one time. I was doing some research on the prefaces to each of the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants and you told me something about your mother's work with that. Do you remember that story about your mother helping to frame some of those sections?

Paul Edwards 33:51

Yes. I don't want to disappoint any of your, yes, I will. I don't want to disappoint any of your listeners. But, but one, one reason why I'm the less a cheerleader for what the church does all the time is that I saw it being born. F. Henry with, Fred M. and John Garver would come to our house. And while I was

there on the front room floor playing, they would rewrite regulation, regulations. To be sure their grammar was correct and their context clear. So, Fred M. would come to the house and say, You know, this is what has happened. This is what I've been thinking. You remember he never said I had, I talked to God. He said, I've been, it's been made known to me. (Okay.) And they would, he would say here it is and mom would say, Oh, heavens for, you know, (. . .) you've got the commas in the wrong place so totally misinterpret what you're saying. And they'd work on the context and the three or four of them would talk about and even on occasion to changing names. You know, somebody will be in there for consideration for an Apostle and they, after some discussion, would decide to take it out.

Karin Peter 35:21

So her influence wasn't just on ideas and theory and implication for priesthood. Her influence became more tangible in the life of the church.

Paul Edwards 35:37

I think so. See, one of the, one of the problems with historians these days is they don't, they're not smart. I mean so, so much history's being written about, on essential things and people. And you have, you know, I could think, without any hesitation, could make a list of 100 women who I know have had major influence on the church. And you never hear about any of them. I mean, the least influ, the least influential person was Emma Smith. I mean, she was his mother, she didn't teach him the theology. It was his aunts and his uncles and his cousins and his, his forbearers and his followers, who made the church what it is, and they, we had just cut ourselves off from 50% of the knowledge we could have about the movement. So, if you have any influence out there, get some people writing women's history.

Karin Peter 36:50

I'm looking forward to having some of those names from you, Paul, so we can do some of that work. (Well, any day you want.) All right. I'm going to email you after we're done here. (Okay, so I'll put together a list for you.) Thank you. So, (Alright are we, go ahead.) Just a couple, just a couple more questions, Paul, (That's alright.) and then we'll close. (This is fine.) What would you want us to remember about your mother as a church leader, as a person, as an educator? What, what would you want the church's lasting memory of Alice to be?

Paul Edwards 37:30

She was a participant. She was a, she was a good member in that she used all of her skills to help it work. But she also maintained its, its proper place in the secular world in which people lived and worked.

Karin Peter 37:54

She understood context, then.

Paul Edwards 37:56

Yeah. I mean, there were times when she would, you would know she was frustrated because she was supposed to speak to the Women's Club at 2 and class started at 3:30. And she wasn't ready for either one of them. You know, so she'd scramble to get this and then getting (. . .). So, she just like the rest of us. She has been, her life, living the very best life she could. And, and, you know, to be honest,

sometimes she is a pain in the rear (Yeah. Most mothers are, Paul.) because, you know, she used to say to my dad, he'd, you know, he'd say something like, Well, I'm an authority, you know? And she'd say, No, you have authority. I am authority. I speak for (. . .), while I know you speak from position granted to you. Real difference there.

Karin Peter 38:58

Very much so. Very much so. (Okay.) So, as we bring our conversation for today to a close, Paul, is there, are there any closing thoughts you'd like to share about your mother or last anecdote or comments before we end our talk?

Paul Edwards 39:13

Well, I, you know, I'm 88 and I'm falling apart like all 88's do. So, I'm not really sure I'll be writing anymore or doing any more lectures and so forth. So, I appreciate this opportunity to kind of go out with mom. You know, as you know, I called her Alice all of our lives and even now, it's hard to say it better-- she, uh, she was my friend and a very good one.

Karin Peter 39:48

Well, I want to thank you, Paul, for sharing about Alice Edwards today. And for being here on Project Zion Podcast where we do believe as Alice did that everybody does have a story. And so for our listeners, we encourage you to view Alice's story by watching Paul's lecture as well as the other lectures from the spring series at historicsitesfoundation.org. This is Cuppa Joe, part of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 40:34

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