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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 to Project Zion Podcast. This is Cuppa Joe, where we explore Restoration history, and I'm your host, Karin Peter. Today's episode is the first in what we hope to be a series of episodes to tell the stories of women in the history of Community of Christ. Now, our guest to share these stories with us is Wendy Eaton. Wendy's a favorite here at Project Zion Podcast, my favorite, so I'll go ahead and put that out there, and she has recently shared the stories of the three successive wives of Joseph Smith III, and we got good response to those three episodes, Wendy. I don't know if you got any emails, but I did, and...

Wendy Eaton 01:15

I got a few.

Karin Peter 01:16

...they were wonderful. So, Wendy works at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois, and she is the administrative assistant to the Historic Sites Foundation. So, hi, again, Wendy.

Wendy Eaton 01:28

Hello.

Karin Peter 01:30

It's so good to have you here. So, when I, when you and I first talked about doing some episodes about women, you sent me a list, and you obviously had done a bunch of research on women in church history. So first, tell us why that is.

Wendy Eaton 01:48

So, from the time I was a kid, I loved hearing stories. I liked to be told stories, not so much reading on my own, but I love to have stories told to me. And I also loved hearing history, particularly from a woman's perspective. And I think a lot of that has to do with, I grew up right at the beginning of the American Girl phenomena, and so, I was just...

Karin Peter 02:16

Okay, for those of you outside the USA, that's a series of dolls. So, yeah, let's get that out there, yeah.

Wendy Eaton 02:22

The series of dolls in various points of American history, and they have series of books that go along with them. And I was a little too old to get in on the doll side of it, which I think my parents were glad for.

They are expensive dolls, but I loved the books, and I read quite a few of them. And so, as I started getting into church history, I was first at our historic sites at Kirtland temple, and I was introduced to Cassie Kelly, who was a vibrant, sometimes snarky, strong woman in the late 1800s, who had a passion for life and the Kirtland Temple. And it could be argued that one of the big reasons why the temple was preserved, is because of Cassie's efforts with being the person on the ground while her bishop husband was off, getting money to fix up the temple. She was the one saying, "Well, we had a fire, but it's out and the tenors are showing up. Oh, there's another fire, but that one's out too." So, she has a great story. She's kind of like a real life, American Girl, if you want to think of it like that. And then fast forward to June of 2020, when I was first coming back into the office. Because of restrictions with the pandemic, I was the only one in the office, and I would find that I needed to fill my time with different things. And the realization was starting to become apparent that this pandemic was not going to be over soon. So, in needing to fill my time and try to keep myself going, I decided I had been in and out of some of our archive material, off and on, for a few years, but I'm just gonna start pulling them down, box by box, and just read through them. And I'm referring to *Autumn Leaves*, which was a series of magazines that ran from, oh, 1888, I believe, to the early 1930s. It was a monthly magazine that was geared at youth and young adults in the church. Predominantly, the editors were women until Elbert A. Smith took over. Many of the contributors were women and so, I was getting this perspective on church history from the women. And I would turn around and I would share quite a few of those stories. So, it was really nice to have this filling my time, keeping my mood up, to just read through all these magazines. And I just was really getting to enjoy the world of Marietta Walker, and Vida Smith, and Callie Stebbins and other women who were contributing at the time. And it just, as the pandemic just kept stretching and stretching, I found myself so grateful that we had nearly a fully complete set of these *Autumn Leaves* to just, kind of, keep turning back to and finding these stories, and just enjoying this perspective of history.

Karin Peter 05:55

So, we learned in the episodes that we record, or I learned, I should say, in the episodes of the three wives of Joseph Smith III, that when you are telling a story of a woman from church history, you really try to find pieces to share that are from that woman herself, and if you can't find that, you at least try to find writings about her that were written by other women, in other words, women's history through the voices of women. Why is that important?

Wendy Eaton 06:30

I have no problem being forthcoming with admitting that is a bias of mine. All historians have biases. And I think they all need to be very upfront with their listeners or readers what that bias is. And I just think it's important. For one thing, I think primary sources are important so that you're not getting that old game where you whisper into one person's ear, and then that person whispers and so the next person, and you lose things in the translation, and the goal is to see how crazy it gets. This, unfortunately the same thing happens with history too. So, I wanted to be able to read Vida Smith's life from Vida, not from some male historian from the 1960s speaking to me in 2021, not that I have a problem with our male historians from the 1960s. I relied heavily on Roy Chevelle, off and on, throughout this work and previous works that I've done, but I just think it's really important to capture that, the earliest voice possible. And if I'm telling a woman's story, we also have to admit life is very different for women in the 1800s, and especially the turn of the century. And it, they're going to give you

a better insight to their world, then a man who's trying to understand it, or even me trying to understand it. Their words are gonna mean more to me than me just trying to guess what life would have been like. Oh, they were stuck at home. Well, not really. You're gonna find some of the things that I found were a little surprising that, oh, she was raising children and she wasn't stuck at home. She was going to university. That was pretty surprising to me. So, I just think it's really important to try those earliest voices possible. And of course, my bias with, I want the woman's voice too.

Karin Peter 08:36

Absolutely, I'll go ahead and share that with you, that bias with you, Wendy, absolutely. Too much history has been told through the lens and the voice of men. So, it's good to have the women's voice. So, today, we're going to be talking about two women. And you had shared that you had sufficient information about these two, and they are linked, as we'll find out in our discussion, but they're two women from the Smith family, Audentia Smith Anderson, who was the daughter of Joseph III, we learned a little bit about her in our Wives of Joseph Smith III episodes, and Vida Elizabeth Smith, who was Joseph III's niece. And this is fun for Community of Christ folks because of their link, but I'll let you share that as we go forward, okay? So, let's go ahead and give it a start. What do we, what can we learn about Audentia Smith Anderson and Vida Elizabeth Smith.

Wendy Eaton 09:45

So, I'm going to step back just a couple generations, with section 24 of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, 25 in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint version, though I believe they do read identically just in case people are interested. That comes in 1830, and it's a section that Community of Christ listeners will readily identify as the "Elect Lady Revelation," and it's addressed to Emma Smith, who would be the grandmother of Vida and Audentia. And within this section, she's called to various tasks, what her role in the church is going to be. And part of that is finding hymns that would be suitable for the use of worship by this new church that's getting started. And she begins this incredible legacy within Community of Christ as being heavily involved with the development of our hymnals. She does so for the first several hymnals within the RLDS movement. And not only in her church world is she making music so important, it's critical in her family life too. So, she instills in her children so, Vida and Audentia's fathers, a love of music, a love of poetry, that they pass on to their families, and a number of Emma's grandchildren write about singing with Grandma Emma in the evenings, especially there in the Mansion House when many of the grandchildren are living right there around her in Nauvoo. So, you just have this incredible legacy of music within the Smith family, and in the church, that is very much connected with Emma. And this is something that Audentia and Vida, in particular, really grasp onto as part of their identities. And, in particular, a hymn that has been incredibly treasured throughout Community of Christ history, "There's An Old, Old Path". Before we get into that hymn specifically, I do want to share some about the lives of these two women simply because it helps set the stage for how this hymn did come about. So, we're going to start with Vida, simply because she's the older of the two. And she writes, one of her major works, that she writes in her adult years, is a biography of her father, Alexander Hale Smith. And in this biography, she writes, "In January 1865, I have the honor of being presented to Alexander H. Smith as his second child and first daughter." So, she has a, quite a way of, with words, as you'll see as we quote her, off and on, throughout today. Her mother was named Elizabeth and she's often called Lizzie by the family. And she's the daughter of a British convert who was widowed before she immigrated to Nauvoo with her three young children. So, she arrives here in

Nauvoo. She's living primarily amid the other widows in the community here, but she and Emma, Alexander's mother become pretty good friends. And unfortunately, Lizzie's mother was pretty frail, and she did die when Lizzie was still fairly young. And Emma brings Lizzy into the Mansion House and raises her as one of her own children. So, Lizzie and Alexander grow up together. They become pretty close, and eventually they married there in the Mansion House. Vida says it's in the parlor, I would assume the woman's parlor, not the other one that was typically an office space. Vida is Emma Smith's seventh grandchild. And at this time, Emma and her husband Lewis, because Emma Smith remarried a few years after the death of her first husband, Emma and Lewis are living in the Mansion House. So, you have a multigenerational family living together, which is really important for Lizzie and for David, who, he's also living there when he marries his wife, Clara. That becomes pretty important to her as well to have her mother-in-law right there to help with the children and dealing with the absence of the spouses traveling. So, you have this multigenerational family living together. They're supporting one another and Emma's sons are becoming heavily invested in the development of the Reorganization. And they're beginning some very long journeys for this. One journey that Vida records in this biography, it begins in May of 1866. At least that's the date that Alexander leaves. Six months later, her mother gives birth to a little girl. So, Vida's now a big sister, and she has an older brother at this point, so there are three of the children there at home. A year later, so we're 1867 now, they get word from Alexander that he is ready to leave his mission field. So, they've had a little bit of communication from him, but here, it's a year and a half later since they've seen him. They get this communication in November of '67, but they hadn't received word from him by mid-December. So, they had no idea where he was at in this journey. Did he get delayed in his journey? Did he get lost on his journey? They don't know what's going on. Vida writes that she and her brother Fred had been put to bed this evening. Grandma Emma had pulled up her rocking chair close to the fire because it was a pretty chilly night. Grandpa Lewis was doing some work in his office, and her mother was getting ready to put little Ina, the little baby, to bed, when suddenly they're all roused by a banging outside, because Alexander has suddenly turned up. And Vida, I'm going to read her words for this and I edited just a little bit so you have some clarity. "By the rights, Mother spring to the door. She knew that step. The baby laughed and held out her tiny hands and the wanderer gathered wife and baby into his arms. And through the dining room came another voice. Grandma Emma heard that step and also knew what Mother wanted. The two sleeping children were roused, Fred shouting 'Papa', and I, turning shyly away from the man. From the office, 'I know that voice,' comes Grandpa Lewis. There, until the first streak of dawn, they sat around him and looked and listened, too happy to sleep. Grandma and Father crying for joy, Mother laughing with joy, baby Ina acting as though she had known him always, rather than this being the first time she meets her father." Alex had been gone 19 months with just letters to communicate back home with his family." A lot of this has to do with the state of transportation in the United States at this time. Thankfully, that would improve by leaps and bounds, so these long journeys would become a little bit shorter just because the travel time was saved. And if you're interested more in Alexander's stories, I would suggest reading this biography because Vida quotes whole passages from Alexander's journals. And come to find out, part of what took this journey so long and why he hadn't been able to write is, he catches a boat from California down to Nicaragua, crosses the land and then catches another boat from the Caribbean up to New York City, and then travels back into Nauvoo. So, a little bit of a roundabout way.

Karin Peter 18:56

Oh, my goodness.

Wendy Eaton 18:57

But given the time of year, probably easier than trying to cross the Rocky Mountains in the winter. So, it was a long journey. And, like I said, these travels would get a little bit better. And Vida keeps track of them in this biography. It's just fascinating to read some of this. So, I think, in reading this biography, that this is what helped prepared Vida for her own adulthood, because when she grows, she marries somebody who also is incredibly involved in the church. Her husband's name is Heman C. Smith, not a relative, just the same last name, and he is an apostle, and he also becomes church historian. They move to California and that's where their four children are raised. And though I mentioned Heman as historian, he's the official historian. He writes the official volumes of church history, but Vida is just as much a church historian as he is, not only the articles that she's writing for *Autumn Leaves* that I've mentioned, and for *The Saints Herald* as well, but she writes a two-volume church history geared at youth and young adults. It's called *The Young People's History of the Church*. And it's a pretty exciting little volume. It's very much geared at children, so you're not getting the detail. But certainly, she knew the history just as well as her husband did because she lived a lot of it as a child growing up. So, as Vida and Heman's life continues, he, unfortunately, I believe it's a result that's due to something like asthma, he dies in 1919. This is just about 10 years after Vida loses her father, and it's one month before her mother's death. The following year, Vida begins serving as Dean of Women at Graceland College, and her home becomes a gathering place for many of the young adults attending the university there. She, in that time where she's serving Graceland, she meets a man named James Gates, who she marries in 1926. And her final decades are a quieter time, though she does keep writing, and I'm going to quote one of her writings later on. She dies in 1945, and it's reported that her last words were, "It's a long way through the valley." So now, let's turn to her cousin, Audentia. I've talked some about Audentia, as you mentioned, when I spoke about her mother, Bertha, because it's Audentia's writings that I got nearly all my information for that episode. So, Audentia is born March 23, 1872, in Plano, Illinois, which is where her family was living. She is the second child of her father Joseph and his second wife, Bertha, though she is Joseph's seventh child because of his previous marriage, and she is the 14th grandchild of Emma Smith. She's baptized at age eight, as many of us are, and by age nine, her family is preparing to move to Lamoni, Iowa. And I'm pretty sure I did quote that story for you in our previous interview, because it's one of my favorites that she tells. Her parents encouraged her musical abilities from a very young age, and in fact, at the age of 11, she's serving as one of the primary organists for the Lamoni Congregation. And her father is away on church business, of course, quite a bit, as president of the church. He's just as busy as his brother is. And often, on his travels, he would send home sheet music for her with things like, "See if you like this piece, and if not just throw it away." Or he would assign her a piece that he really liked, and wanted to hear her play it when he got home. And he would often comment that the people he was hearing playing piano and organ were nowhere near as talented as she was. Now maybe this is a little bit of fatherly indulgence, but I'm pretty confident that Audentia was pretty talented at the instruments that she practiced heavily in. She graduates high school in June of 1888 as part of the first graduating class of Lamoni High School. She enrolls in Western Normal College, which is in Shenandoah, Iowa, and she's a student in the music department. She only remains at college for about half a year. It's probably due to the cost but I've not found a specific answer in the letters. I just know that in the letters exchanged between herself and her father, there is a lot of very particular information shared about, "If you spend this \$5, make sure that you keep enough to feed yourself," kind of thing. So, I think cost may have had

something to do with it. So, she's only there for a short time before she leaves college, returns to Lamoni and she resumes her role as church organist, so music doesn't leave her. She also starts giving private music lessons. So, she's not only showing a skill in playing, but in teaching herself. So, in her article, that's simply titled, "My Father", written in *Autumn Leaves*, Audentia writes about a few years after this when she's being courted by her husband, whose name is Benjamin Anderson, and I love this story. She writes, "Liberty Hall..." which was the name of the family home, "...had three fireplaces. The library was a cozy room with its book-lined walls, it's easy chairs, desk and snapping fires. In the days when Prince Charming came a wooing, Father would start the library fire soon after dinner, on a Sunday, and later would usher the young cavalier in with a, 'Now you see, young man, I have built the fire. I will attend you to the sparks.'" So, Joseph very much approved of this courtship between Audentia and Benjamin, and they do marry. And...

Karin Peter 25:58

So, her writing reminds me of Joseph III's letters home. When he would write to his family, he was very clever. He had a lot of humor. He was very affectionate and, kind of, had a, just, open way of expressing himself in a fun way. And she seems to have that same flair...

Wendy Eaton 26:19

Yeah.

Karin Peter 26:20

...as she talks about Prince Charming and being cavalier. I think she might have gotten some of that from her father.

Wendy Eaton 26:28

It adds a lot of humor and charm to just family history.

Karin Peter 26:33

Yeah, charm. That's it. Thank you.

Wendy Eaton 26:37

So, marrying so young, it's February of 1891, that means she's a mother pretty young, before the age of 20, in fact, is when she and Benjamin have their first child. And she greatly takes comfort in her mother being around, her mother Bertha, being there to counsel her, to advise her, and to just enjoy the company of her grandchildren. But many of you who have listened to Bertha's story might be starting to put this into place. Bertha is killed as a result of a buggy accident, and this is not long after Audentia and Ben had had their third child. In fact, Audentia writes about how she had just been able to bring her infant, who was, I think, was about a month or two, for the first time to meet her Grandma Bertha before Bertha's death. And Ben and Audentia make the decision to move into Liberty Hall to help manage the house, because it's a big house, there are a lot of guests that stay there, but also Audentia has two young siblings, a brother and a sister, who are still living at home, so they're helping with taking care of the family. Altogether, Audentia and Ben have seven children, though three of them die, two as infants. One, a little girl, dies, who's about two or three years old. And sadly, it's between 1898 and 1901 that they lose those three, so a very short amount of time that they suffer the losses of these children. And

in that *Autumn Leave* article I mentioned, the one called "My Father", Audentia writes specifically about one of these losses. And I've tried to figure out which child this is, but I don't know an exact date because she doesn't include that in her account. But she writes of a family gathering at Liberty Hall not long after losing a child. She writes, "One such gathering, so dear in its associations and mingling, came soon after husband and I have lost a little lamb from our flock. Pressed into a custom service at the organ, I played one after another of the dear old songs we all loved, in the singing of which everyone joined, "Annie Laurie", "My Old Kentucky Home", "Last Rose of Summer", and finally, "Nearer My God to Thee Even Though it Be a Cross". How could I go on with it? I must not dim their joy. The music trembles to a close and I quietly slipped unnoticed through one darkened room into the deserted dining room. Putting my head down upon my arms on the table, I silently sobbed out my longing and my grief. Oh, how my empty arms ached for the touch of that soft little form. How hungry were my eyes for one sight of that bright little face. All at once I felt my father's dear hands on my hair, brushing it softly, gently, pityingly, while he pressed my head against his breast, which heaved as he sobbed in sympathy with my desolation. Not a word was said, and the minutes passed as he held me so, close to his tender heart, which was beating with that understanding love, that instinctively knew my sorrow. Thank God for such a father." The beautiful story of this incredible loss that she had to go through. And her father with his, with her mother, with Bertha, have lost children in very traumatic ways. And so, for them to be able to share that grief in the way that she puts it, it just, it chokes you up at times to think about this incredible bond. We hear about Joseph Smith III. We hear about the incredible work that he did with helping organize the church and getting them up off their feet, but to get this intense family moment, gives you a whole 'nother perspective of this man. And I think it just intensifies how much I admire the work that he did, and the work that she was doing as well, of course. So, from 1906 to 1908, this is at least, probably at least four or five years after this incident, Audentia attends Graceland College completing three different music courses. So, she has three children at home. I think the oldest is 12, and then the next is maybe 10 or 11, and then by, oh, when is it, 1908, she gives birth to another child. And this would be the first child that the two of them have after losing the three. So, here's a woman at the turn of the century with three children at home, managing a house, and she's going to college. This is not something that we naturally think of when we make assumptions about women in history. We don't think of this, what we today call a non-traditional student. I'm like, if 100 years ago, this was what a woman was doing to improve the life of her family, there's no reason we need to call it non-traditional student today.

Karin Peter 32:47

That's true.

Wendy Eaton 32:48

That's a whole tangent I could go off on. But not long after completing these three music courses at Graceland, the family moves to Independence, Missouri. Her father and his new family had just moved down there, and they attend the Stone Church with, residents in the Independence area will be very familiar with the Stone Church. It's right there by headquarters in Independence, Missouri. And there at Stone Church, she directs the choir, and she's also writing articles for Mother's Home column in the *Saints Herald*, for *Autumn Leaves*. And her father, in those last few years of his life, is starting to record his memoirs, and she's one of the primary editors of those memoirs. Eventually, she and Benjamin move to Omaha and they're there for a time. And after his death, she returns to the Independence area.

And she moves into Rest Haven, which again, other longtime Community of Christ members will recognize Rest Haven. This is a senior living facility that's not that far from headquarters. I couldn't tell you the exact mileage but it's not very far at all, and she's living there. And you would think, "Oh, she's going to quiet down by this point." Not Audentia. She enjoyed reading to the other residents. Whenever there was call for someone to play piano, she was right there at the instrument playing for all their gatherings. She enjoyed a very long, full life. She dies in 1963. So...

Karin Peter 34:33

Oh my.

Wendy Eaton 34:33

...not long ago, when you think about, I think she was right about 90 or 91. And so, to put these two women together is very easy. They're cousins. They share many of the same memories of their grandmother Emma. They shared similar upbringings with their fathers traveling so much for a church, but it's really music that unites these two very strongly. And, as I mentioned right at the beginning, with Emma, their grandmother, being involved with developing hymnals, in 1903, when a new hymnal is being asked for, these two women are included on the committee to develop this hymnal. It's called *Zion's Praises*, and they're not the only women involved in it. There is one man on the committee, Fred Pitt, but joining them is Viola Blair and Aletha Mae White. *Zion's Praises* was planned to be a hymnal for the youth. It was going to be able to be used in youth gatherings, at reunions, and so forth, but it, given to world circumstances, it's published in 1903. It is 30 years before another hymnal is put together for the church. And so, this becomes a pretty important book for covering that span of time. And just looking at some of the big points of youth ministry, since that's what *Zion's Praises* is geared at, some of the big things that happen in those first 30 years of the 1900s; I mentioned, reunions are really a big deal. A lot of them are starting to have specific activities for the youth and the young adults.

Karin Peter 36:25

But the reunions are fam-, are traditionally family camps.

Wendy Eaton 36:28

Yeah. Scouting is getting to be a big thing internationally, and church members are encouraged to send their sons to join Boy Scouts, as it was back at that point in time. Girl Scouts was around, but the church developed programs specifically for the girls, and so that became more where the girls went to. And this was a three-step group, an organization, for three different age groups. The youngest were called Skylarks, initially Bluebirds, but Skylarks, and then the next group was called Orioles. And the oldest girls, so, right at the edge of graduating high school and going into university, was called Temple Builders. And so, you have scouting, you have reunions, you have these girls' programs developing, and in 1928, the first official church sponsored youth camp takes place, and that happens here in Nauvoo. That's a great story to share some time in the future. But at all these different events, it's *Zion's Praises* that is being, as the encouraged hymnal for use in these because this is the youth hymnal. So, it's no surprise that for this 30 year time period, with 30 years of youth and young adults, that this becomes a very formative hymnal to their identity. And it's in this hymnal that we find "There's an Old, Old Path". And many of our RLDS/Community of Christ listeners will be familiar with this story, but it's such a great one that I have absolutely no problem sharing it. Vida is the primary storyteller of

how this hymn develops, and I have found, I believe, six different accounts of her recording it, which means she's telling this story an awful lot. And the one that I'm really going to focus on, I believe it's from a 1938 *Saints' Herald* article, and I need to make a specific mention because I was tasked by a certain someone who I interact with here at the historic sites, to include mention of one of his great, great, some odd grandmothers, because she's involved too. So, you've got Vida and Audentia, and a woman named Alice, whose daughter, Ruth, marries Fred M. Smith. So, you're getting a little, extra family dynamics because I was told to include it. So, Vida writes that she's attending church. This is in Lamoni, Iowa, at the old brick church, as it was often referred to as, and she had been teaching the primary class that morning, so the children's Sunday school class. It was a review of Jeremiah from the Old Testament, chapter six and how it connected with Jesus and Jesus's ministry. She remarked that the children had been quite responsive to the lesson. So, anyone who has ever led a children's class or activity will know that that is a mark of triumph, if the children are being pretty responsive to it.

Karin Peter 39:54

Indeed.

Wendy Eaton 39:55

And so, she carries with her after this, a sense of relief and satisfaction. I can imagine having this very successful Sunday school class and now I'm going into the morning worship. So, she writes in this article, and again, I'm gonna quote quite a bit of it, but I've edited just a little for clarity. Vida writes, "After Sunday school, I mounted the wide back stairs and sat down in one of the front seats, as it was cool and inviting there. Above me the window was open, and the birds were flitting about outside or just sitting quietly in the deep casements, while the branches of the green trees swayed in the summer breeze. I had joined in the songs, for song has ever been a happy part of my worship, and I listened to the invocation then settled myself in for the service. The minister read his text, which was the same I had used in my Sunday school class, and it was a favorite of all the members, "Ask for the old path and walk therein". Immediately, my mind went again to my Sunday school class. I saw the upturned faces and heard the replies, marveling at the keen perception of some of the children. From my seat, I could see the blue of the summer sky, and I thought on its beauty. How often, too, I had seen it dark and stormy. But following the old path was sweet, then, for I knew the blue would come. I reflected on the thought I had stressed in the class, that when Jesus came to earth, this old path was the one he walked in. And for ages and ages, it had been there and was still here. That made it easier for us to understand, for we all find the old path, understanding and kindness and the love of Christ. Sometimes the shadows are dark, and sometimes the mountains are steep, that we almost forget to follow. But there are the shining footprints of Jesus, and we reach for his hand and look up and find comfort there. I thought of the dear friends who had gone along this path with me, and always would, for in this path, we find our truest friends who are considerate and understanding. I take all these things with love, keeping these friends along this path, as we follow him. I seize my pencil and into my quarterly went the little verse, my expression of gratitude for that old path and for the story of Jesus that makes it so sweet and enjoyable. After the meeting closed, I walked away with sister Alice Cobb, a charming friend, who was the author of much lovely verse. She spoke of the sermon and asked my opinion. Reluctantly, I replied, with some embarrassment, that I had not heard it. And, as an excuse, I passed her the little verse. She read the stanzas, and with tear wet eyes, she said, 'You must show that to Audentia and get a tune.' I had not thought of such, but consented, and we came to the door of my cousin. I went in, she

met me there with a sick babe in her arms. After some discussion of the baby, I repeated what I had done and the proposal of Sister Cobb. Audentia and I had often cooperated in these things, and she, like myself, attached no great concern saying, 'All right, lay it on the piano.' After lunch, in my quiet hour, I sat down to the piano and the words of the verse came to me clearly. This was unusual, for my little verses often slip from my mind. But I strummed out the melody, and the telephone called me. It was Audentia, saying she had a melody, and she sang it to me. It was the same melody that we sing today, and the same one that had come to me. Still, it did not seem strange to me, just an ordinary incident in my busy life. Still, it was sweet with the thought of my expression of thankfulness for Jesus in the old, old path." In another place, she records the story, she records a little bit extra about what happens after the fact. As you get a sense in her writing that I just finished quoting, neither she or Audentia put a lot of thought as to the significance of this and it just got tucked away. But apparently somebody had pulled it out and had passed it to someone else because one of the other *Zion's Praises* hymnal committee members, Viola, she got a hold of a copy of this, and she brought it to the next meeting of the hymnal committee. She set it on the piano and Aletha Mae White was the one at the piano, so she has the experience of being the first one to play it in a gathered community, and the whole committee liked it so much that they're like, "This is going in the new hymnal." That church where Vida and Audentia attended, there in Lamoni, where Vida was inspired to write this hymn, it burned down in 1931, and due to ongoing financial constraints, it was a long time before a new church was built in the Lamoni community. Eventually, they were able to rebuild and it went up just slightly to the north of where the old church sat. And it became a tradition amongst the congregation members, that this wooded lot that just happened to be right in the same area, this was the direction that Vida was gazing during that sermon that she lost track of, that to this day, nobody has any idea who the minister was, but they remember this hymn. And this little wooded lot becomes this treasured space as the old, old path. So, it's, Vida never says, "This is where I was looking," but it becomes this treasured tradition amongst many members in the Lamoni community. And in the 1990s, the members are still so captivated by this wooded lot and this hymn that they've all grown up with and have memorized, that they fund the creation of a park in this location, that is, to this day, considered the old, old path. It's just a fairly small wooded lot. It has a little path winding through it. There's a little stone bridge that I don't think there, it even crosses any water. There's just a little stone bridge in his park, and it stands to this day as a tribute to Vida and Audentia, and this hymn, "There's an Old, Old Path", that has continued to be one of the most treasured hymns in Community of Christ. In fact, there was a survey taken, as the current hymnal, *Community of Christ Sings*, was being developed by a new hymnal committee. There was a survey taken about which hymns do you want to include? And "There's an Old, Old Path", someone could correct me, but I believe it was the number one hymn that was requested to be retained in *Community of Christ Sings*. So, it's, to this day, it is such a significant hymn for the Lamoni community, for anyone who's been born and raised within Community of Christ. I mean, I remember where I was as a child when I first heard it and remembered it. I'm sure I heard it at an earlier year, but I remember being seven and attending a brand new church, because my family had just moved, and the Sunday school teacher, this little old lady saying, "I'm going to play a song for you. And this is the most important song of our church."

Karin Peter 48:37

And it was "There's An Old, Old Path"

Wendy Eaton 48:40

Not “There’s a Spirit of God, Like a Fire is Burning”.

Karin Peter 48:42

No.

Wendy Eaton 48:43

It was, “There’s an Old, Old Path”.

Karin Peter 48:45

So, I remember, as a kid, we would, the Sunday school, at camp, they would walk us up this old path, up to what was called the Cedar Chapel, a grove up in the evergreen forest, near the, on the campground, and oftentimes, they would have everybody sing, “There’s an Old, Old Path” on the way up. And I’m sure that’s a tradition from many campgrounds, with many children learned that hymn that way.

Wendy Eaton 49:16

Yeah.

Karin Peter 49:17

Yeah. And you can find it in the current hymnal.

Wendy Eaton 49:20

Yeah.

Karin Peter 49:20

It’s number 244. So, if you have a *Community of Christ Sings* hymnal, you can find it there.

Wendy Eaton 49:28

And I find it interesting for *Community of Christ Sings*, included directly after that was a newly inspired version of “There’s an Old, Old Path”, and I happen to love the new version, but I’ve talked to people from age late 20s to late 90s, “Why’d they have to go and rewrite that?” It’s, like, they didn’t rewrite it. It’s inspired from the original. It’s a continuation of “The Old, Old Path”, with a slightly different take. So, it really is a treasured part of Community of Christ heritage.

Karin Peter 50:08

Absolutely, absolutely. So, folks that grew up in the time in the church where Wednesday night prayer meetings were a big deal, you have sung “There’s an Old, Old Path” hundreds of times, as I know I have. So, this is wonderful that we have the tradition of these two cousins that had endeavored to write jointly, to the extent that when they came up with “The Old, Old Path”, it was just no big deal. It was like, “Oh, yeah, we have done this so many times. Sure thing, we can put that to music,” and didn’t really think much of it until somebody else discovered it. I think that’s a delightful aspect of the story, because it shows that these two women participated together, not just as cousins, but as colleagues in what they did with their writing and their music, all in the tradition of their grandmother.

Wendy Eaton 51:04

Yup.

Karin Peter 51:06

Yeah. So, this has been great learning more about Audentia, and of course of Vida. Do you have any, like, last thoughts about either of these women that you want to share with us before we close our episode?

Wendy Eaton 51:21

I think it's so great that their writings have been preserved, and that many of the writings of women within the church have been preserved. Even if they may not have been at the forefront of research that's been done in the past and presentations that have been given in the past, the information's there. The stories are there. And yes, there's still some long-term preservation we need to do to help ensure that they continue on for generations to come, but I'm glad that the stories of these two women and other women are there. We just have to have the time and the inclination to go out and find it. And I'm just glad that I'm in the place, in a good place to be where I can find that information. *Autumn Leaves* is not readily available to a lot of people. There's a set at the Independence Temple Library. We have a set here at Joseph Smith Historic Site, but they've not been digitized yet, and I'm hoping not just for the sake of ease that digitizing them would do, but if they were digitized, and hopefully will be in the near future, that other people will have the chance to explore the writings and what was important to the church at the turn of the previous century. Full of good stuff.

Karin Peter 52:57

Absolutely. Well, and we appreciate that you do have access to these because then we have been the beneficiaries of your research and your wonderful storytelling ability, and we appreciate it very much. We look forward to our next installment of Women in Community of Christ History. It'll be a surprise who you come up with for us next time, and we'll look forward to that. And I want to thank you again, Wendy, for being willing to share these stories with us here at Cuppa Joe, part of Project Zion Podcast. If you have questions for Wendy or perhaps you have suggestions of Women from Community of Christ History that you would like to pass on to Wendy, you can reach her at w_eaton@cofchrist.org. I'm Karin Peter. This is Cuppa of Joe. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 53:57

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