

430 | Cuppa Joe | Women of Kirtland

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 part of our series about "Women in Community of Christ History", where we've been telling the stories of women and how they shaped, led, offered ministry, and had profound impact in the history of Community of Christ. So, our guest, as we've shared these stories, is Wendy Eaton. Wendy is a favorite here at *Project Zion Podcast* and we're so happy to have her visit with us again. Wendy works at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois. So, if any of you have traveled there, you probably have met her, and if you have not, but are planning to, when Historic Sites reopens after COVID, then you can look for Wendy in the visitors' center. So, let's see, she is also the administrative assistant to the Historic Sites Foundation and participates in all kinds of fun things with the Church History Department. So, a lot of research, a lot of wonderful stories to uncover, which is what we're going to do today. So, hi, Wendy.

Wendy Eaton 01:51

Hello, Karin.

Karin Peter 01:52

It's nice to be with you again. Thanks for joining us from Nauvoo, which, I think, is the perfect setting to talk about some of our church history stories that we've done. So, in some of our previous episodes, when you have begun to tell the story of an historic woman in Community of Christ, you have shared that you really try to find pieces to share from that individual, from that woman herself, from her perspective, and if not from her in her own words, then at least from the writings of other women. So, I'm wondering, were you able to do that for this episode?

Wendy Eaton 02:36

It was a mixture this time because a number of these women were living a very different life than we would recognize today as where a woman's role is, and so you would, there are not a lot of prominent voices writing about current events. However, there are quite a few of the letters from these women that are in church archives. And so, I have their voices, even if they're talking to a husband or the President of the church. But they are sharing, even if they're not talking about themselves in particular. It was also interesting, there are quite a few resources from newspapers, not church publications, about a couple of these women. And so, these are male voices from outside of the church, who were interested in the Kirtland Temple, which these women were taking care of. And so, that was a fun spin on this as well. As much as I like the woman's voice, it's nice to have these completely outside the church voices talking about the women's roles there. And I also have a little bit of a shout out to make. I'm so glad I reached out to Ron Romig, the former church archivist, and he's part of the Sacred Stories Extended Team. He really helped me out with a lot of the resources in this. I sent one simple email off to him and

the next morning, I think I had 30 emails from him in my inbox of all these different resources he had, so that was pretty wonderful, saved me a lot of legwork. As much as I like doing that work on my own, really helped me out with this one.

Karin Peter 04:21

So, thank you to Ron Romig. If you're listening to *Project Zion*, Ron, we give you a big heads-up. Thank you. So, you did mention, you gave us a clue what we're talking about today, and what era, if you will, that we're talking about, because we're going to be talking about women from the Kirtland era of the church. And so, da da da da. Who are the women that we're talking about today?

Wendy Eaton 04:45

Okay, so, the Kirtland era, we're looking at, basically 1833-ish, to right up about 1900. So, this is a long span of time but a couple of these areas I'm going to just very quickly highlight. So, as I already mentioned, oh, the women had very supportive roles to their spouses in this time, and what we might think of as very background roles. They were stuck at home with the kids, kind of, thing. A lot of the women at the time were quite happy in that role. They knew that's what their life was going to be and they were completely happy to be in that spectrum. And that's, I think of Emma Smith Bidamon and all the incredible things she did, but when you really step back, her primary focus, her children and her home, which could rub some of us feminists a little bit of the wrong way. But that was the world she knew, and that was a world she loved, and she thrived in it. And we really enjoy her and her story within that spectrum. So, we have women in Kirtland, who very much fit that mold. But you also have, in the broader United States, I would say, west, or east of the Mississippi, you have an expansion of women's rights. That's really getting started with, I think, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the others like that. And so, you start to see some trailblazers within our little church who are content in this role of domestic, and home, and family, but they're also really starting to stretch out their feelers a little bit. And some of the women that we're going to talk about today, very much fit that mold. And it's pretty exciting, especially when I take into consideration the two earliest women. When they're really active in Kirtland, they are both in their 70s, so, they're not happy little housewives in their 20s and 30s. They're at the end of their lives, and one of them is constantly bringing up, "I'm at the end of my days." It's, kind of, funny how she keeps doing this.

Karin Peter 07:13

Since I'm at the end of my days, I can do what I want now?

Wendy Eaton 07:16

Exactly, I think maybe that's what it was. But you see this expansion of the spectrum of what a woman's world was, really growing, and that's pretty exciting to put that within the Kirtland Temple. So, backing up just a little bit to that very earliest era, along with Emma, those earliest women were taking care of the Temple workers. They were clothing them. They were feeding them, in some cases housing them. We hear about how the women were given the task of sewing the enormous veils that once hung in the Kirtland Temple to be used as room partitions. And that's really about the most we hear about women in that 1833 to about '38 time period. Things start to fall apart in Kirtland in 1837, and many of the church members are starting to leave early in the next year. Not everyone leaves right away. Some stay behind, but eventually do join the church as they settle into Illinois where I'm at today in Nauvoo.

And some just never leave Kirtland, and a lot of this has to do with some of this falling apart that happens in that time period. There's one of the local newspapers that I found that puts it, "These people who stayed behind, loved the church, and they respected Joseph Smith and the ideas that had brought them into the church at first, but they didn't like it enough to follow him west." And those of you who might not be as familiar with Kirtland history, the biggest thing that happens is the church tries to start a bank, and it causes all sorts of problems. And this is what leads to the church leaders having to leave, but not all those leaders. Some of those leaders stuck behind. One in particular, Ira Bond, who was the president of the deacons' quorum there in Kirtland, he stays. He doesn't go west with the church. You don't see any more activity with him, except that his wife Charlotte is supportive of the church in her later years. There's really not much about Charlotte and I think it has something to do with, they have a daughter named Mary, who has some major health concerns and is not able to take care of herself in her adult years. So, I think Charlotte is preoccupied taking care of her daughter. So, maybe that's why I don't find as much about her as I did for the two ladies that I have just fallen in love with, Rebecca Dayton and Electa Stratton. So, Rebecca and Electa were both some of those early converts. They joined with their husbands in the 1830s. They moved to Kirtland, got very much involved in the church, and they were pretty happy with the way things were going, until things fell apart. They were some of the families that stayed behind and they raised their children there. Both women were widowed in the Kirtland vicinity, and both just, kind of, stuck around. Kirtland between about 1844, so with the death of Joseph Smith, Jr. and into the 1870s, was, kind of, a stopping place for many different Latter-Day Saint groups. So, you have various people that are stepping into the role of successor to Joseph Smith, Jr., that stop in Kirtland for a time, or visit Kirtland for a time, but they don't stay there for very long. And this would be people like Sidney Rigdon and James Strang. They come through, they're there for a little bit. Rebecca Dayton, Electa Stratton and others, they meet with these individuals. They let them into the Temple. They worship with them, but they don't join any of them. It's not until the Reorganization is started that you really start to see these two women take off in wanting to, basically that they are becoming seventies. Women are not ordained at this point in time, but they are eager to share the church and they really want a branch or a congregation established there in Kirtland where they live. So, these two women, like I said, they're both in their 70s, at this point in the 1870s. They both are widowed. Their children have launched and are out on lives of their own. And Rebecca and Electa are taking it on themselves to take care of the Kirtland Temple, but also to become really two of the first tour guides within the Reorganization because the individual who's in charge of the Temple, he doesn't live there in town, so he's not there to receive visitors. He's not there to unlock the doors. So, it's Rebecca and Electa who have the keys to the Temple and they are the ones meeting guests who are coming in. But jump ahead just a bit. The 1950s, there's this great RLDS writer named Pearl Wilcox, who was really taking it upon herself to write church history. It's a bit of a narrative history, maybe a little bit fanciful, but they're great stories that she shares, and in 1958, she runs a series in the *Saints Herald*, the church newspaper, that is titled "Reminiscing in Kirtland," and she visits Kirtland and talks about what she sees there, what's going on there. And she talks about, let's see if I can find my quote. She writes in one of these articles, "Near the corner of the driveway, entering the Joseph Smith Sr. home, I could see the gaping foundation of grandma Dayton's home. Rebecca Dayton, with her friend, Electa Stratton, did much to preserve the Temple property after the saints left Kirtland. In the years before the reclaiming of the Temple, they took possession of the keys and kept it locked from strangers. Only with their presence could people enter the Temple." And so, they're really taking this job very responsibly, very personally. They're the ones taking care of this building, and this is before the

Reorganization is really invested in the Kirtland Temple. I don't want to get too much into the lawsuit that covers Kirtland Temple ownership and the legal successors of Joseph Smith Jr. Partly, I find it dull, and partly I find it very confusing, but mostly because I don't want to take away from the lives of these two women, because while all of that is starting to go on, these two are keeping things running on the ground. So, I think that's pretty important. But one of the fun things with this description that Pearl gives about Grandma Rebecca's home, that Apostle Gomer Griffiths, who I talk about a little bit later on, he also writes about Rebecca's home. And one of the fun things for me is Rebecca Dayton. If you've been to Kirtland, you know that just to the north is a cemetery, and Rebecca Dayton lives in the cemetery, not in the active part when she's living there. She's in what today we recognize as the newer part of the cemetery. But it's interesting that she does live so close to the Temple. And though she's not buried in that cemetery, Electa is, and so you have these two women that are right there in that cemetery. We're close to Halloween at the time of recording this, and I love cemetery tours, so that's a fun little bit for me. But, so, for these two, while they're living, they're, like I said, they're taking on the work to take care of Kirtland, to share the building with the many visitors that are starting to come through at this time. So, that guy who I talked about who's in charge of the Temple, his name is Joseph McDowell. He's officially in charge and he's not there very often. But he and Rebecca kind of butt heads a little bit about how the Temple is being taken care of. And the great thing about this is Rebecca goes straight to President Joseph Smith III and writes to him all her grievances. And so, you get this great series of letters where she's talking about the things that are happening, tourists that are coming through, what she's telling them, what she's giving them, and the things that she doesn't think Elder McDowell is doing so great. So, it's a fun little mixture of information coming from Rebecca. One of these letters, she's starting to drop hints that we really need a good elder in town to establish a congregation because, you know, there are a lot of people that would be very interested. The people that are coming through, that take tours, they're very interested to hear about us. We could really do with an elder here. And that just, kind of, re-emphasizing again, women don't hold the priesthood yet at this point. They're living in a world that they, a man needs to come in and take charge of this. But for the time being, she's perfectly happy to keep going as much as she can, with this seventies type role that she's living here. One of these tourist encounters that she writes about, it's a letter from 1877. She writes to Joseph III that she's given tours to 13 people on that particular day. And I feel like this is, kind of, a lot for this time period, that American tourism from what I remember, is not really taking off just yet at this time, but 13 people come through to take a tour. And at the end of the tour, she's selling church publications, missionary tracts, Bibles, other books, things like that, which makes me happy that we're still doing that kind of thing at the Historic Site. So, it seems like it's okay that we're running gift shops at the Historic Sights because Rebecca was doing it way back when.

Karin Peter 18:21

Way back at the Kirtland Temple. Come on.

Wendy Eaton 18:26

But she talks in particular about a Cleveland businessman who, as she's wrapping up the tour and answering some questions, he's reading one of these missionary tracts, and he just says, how does she put it, "Why, that ain't the Mormon doctrine." So, you have these people coming in with these

expectations, which still happens today, about who they are, and Rebecca turns around and starts going right into doctrine about the Reorganization and who they are and how they differ. And by the end of her talk, the guy buys three more of these tracts so he can hang them up in his office and share them with people. So, it, remarkable little bit of information. Again, she seems like a bit of a seventy to me.

Karin Peter 19:14

It does. She does. She does.

Wendy Eaton 19:17

In another letter, she's talking, she says she, "...talked with them, the tourists, concerning our doctrines, all I could while I was there. I rejoice in the truth and I love to tell people concerning the faith. I am almost at my journeys end and I desire to spread the truth. I feel firm and my pathways grow brighter and brighter. I long to see the saints rise in the strength of God of heaven and roll on the glorious work of the last days." So, a little bit of a Pentecostal seventy.

Karin Peter 19:50

Which fits with the whole Kirtland experience.

Wendy Eaton 19:54

Exactly.

Karin Peter 19:55

We're good there, yeah.

Wendy Eaton 19:58

So, we're jumping around a little bit in the timeline here, but 1883, Apostle Gomer Griffiths is in Kirtland at this point, and he wrote to President Smith about an inspection he did of the Kirtland Temple. He was up on the third floor. So, if you have visited Kirtland, the third floor is where there is that series of small classrooms that are up in this attic, kind of, space there. And in one of the front rooms, there's an eight-foot hole burned into the ceiling. And so, Gomer goes to Rebecca, because she's basically the caretaker even though there, there's this McDowell guy who's supposedly in charge, and he asked her about it. She says, "Well, yeah. That happened about 10 years ago." So, you start to get an idea of how much repair is needed and delayed in Kirtland, that you have this gaping hole for 10 years. And she continued to tell Gomer that she had no idea there was a fire in the temple. She had just climbed up those stairs one day, and there was this hole. And everybody that she brought in to take a look at it, were amazed that a fire had burned so long to make a big enough hole, but had extinguished itself so that there wasn't more damage than had happened. So, as I mentioned, there's a little bit of head butting between Rebecca and Elder McDowell about how things are being run. And...

Karin Peter 21:34

Well, yeah, there's a hole that's been there for 10 years. I'd be a little head butting somebody too.

Wendy Eaton 21:40

This one takes place down at the bottom though, not like the basement, the first floor, the lower court, as it's called. And so, this is the large assembly room. This is the one that, if you have visited Kirtland, is the more elaborate of the two large rooms. This is the one that has the pew boxes in it that you sit in and they close you in there. And if you really paid attention while you've been on a tour, you'll notice that, in what you think of as the back, the east end of the temple, where the Aaronic priesthood pulpits are, there's really not much space between the back pew boxes and those the deacons, which the deacons sat there on the lowest level. It was the same case on the west end with the Melchizedek pulpits. But Elder McDowell didn't really like this. He thought it wasn't very conducive to running meetings and worship services, so he took out the part of the elders' pulpit that had the drop leaf table, which was the communion, or the sacrament table. He took them out and he stuffed them down in the basement. Rebecca did not like this, and in one of her letters that she's writing to Joseph, she's talking about all the different things that she has planned coming up for the Temple, groups that are wanting to rent the space. And oh, there, there are some windows that need to be replaced. And oh, there, there's a Temperance Society that really wants to rent the Temple and use the space. I love the building, but there's some repairs that need to be done. And by the way, the pulpits need to be fixed. Brother McDowell took them away, and they really need to be put back in place. And so, Joseph, to this long letter about all these different little things, writes back. "Okay, Rebecca, go ahead, get them fixed." So, she hires a carpenter and gets all these things fixed that she wants fixed. She's a conservationist after my own heart, getting things done that she thought needed to be done. That problem of space doesn't go away. So, when you visit Kirtland today, you will notice that there is quite a bit of space between the front pew boxes, and the Melchizedek pulpits. And that's because some of the pew boxes were taken out so that there's a little space to move around in there. So, I don't know if Rebecca would like that too much, but I can say from the side of giving tours, it makes things a little easier. So, maybe they both had some right about them and their arguments of how to take care of the building. But one of the other things that they did butt heads against was money. And so, as I mentioned, Rebecca's selling missionary tracts and things like that, and most of the money, if not all of it, she's sending to the bishop. There's an account in 1881 of the bishop reports early in the year that Rebecca has sent \$4.12 to the bishop and it was from people who had come to visit Kirtland and gave it to her for the upkeep of the building. So, she turns around and she sends the whole thing to the bishop. Well, McDowell, kind of, thought, eh, I'm in charge here. I really should get a cut of this money because I need some funds to take care of myself. And this, so, they just don't agree on this matter of money. And not too long after these two incidences, Elder McDowell takes the keys from Rebecca and gives them to Electa. And Rebecca is not too happy about this. And as she is good at doing, she lets President Smith know that she's not too happy about this. But she doesn't seem to fight it too hard. She steps back and Electa steps in, and is really the go-getter for a few years. I just, Electa is a little bit of a different personality than Rebecca is. Rebecca is really out there and meeting the people, and doing lots of things, and trying to put the elders in their place. Electa's a little more, I think, of a quieter personality, even though I don't have a lot of email-, or *emails*. How stuck am I am in the modern era? A lot of *letters* about Electa. And in fact, most of the information I have from her are from newspaper writers who come to visit Kirtland to hear about who this church is, and what are they doing here in northeast Ohio? And why are they repairing this great big, old church? And so, you get a little bit of a different feel with Electa. Now, like Rebecca, she had been a resident of Kirtland since the 1830s, and again, stayed behind after the main body went west, and she's taking care of the Temple. She doesn't live directly

close to the temple, but she's in the community as, like, Rebecca was. One of the newspaper men who comes is what, from a local newspaper, last name Johnson. He sought her out for an interview, which she happily gave. And she includes in her tour, which I love this little tidbit, she includes in her tour of the Temple, a photograph of President Joseph Smith. She calls him "a dear old man", and he's sending funds to fix up the temple, and he's sending elders to reestablish the worship space. So, she's got a similar mindset as Rebecca does; fix up this building, get a congregation or a branch re-established here. In 1882 newspaper, this one's from Chicago, so we're at a little bit more of a distance than a local paper, he comes to take a tour with Electa, and in this article, there's a lot of information about the building itself. This is one of the earlier writings I've seen explaining the letters on the pulpits and what they mean. And then they go into some description about what the building looks like, and what the beliefs are of the church at the time. So, there's a lot of great little tidbits of information in this article.

Karin Peter 28:08

This is Chicago.

Wendy Eaton 28:09

This is a Chicago newspaper.

Karin Peter 28:10

This is a much greater distance.

Wendy Eaton 28:13

Yeah, and so Electa, in this is describing those veils that I mentioned, and she tells the newspaper man how elaborate and highly decorative they were, which is interesting, because I always thought they were very simple. So, either we don't have quite the right understanding of what the veils looked like, or they were both embellishing the story, which is entirely possible. But the author also writes, I want to read this quote for you. He writes, "The old lady who holds the keys to the Temple," so this isn't too insulting. She's in her 80s by this time.

Karin Peter 28:51

Okay.

Wendy Eaton 28:52

So, don't get too hung up on ...

Karin Peter 28:53

So, "old lady" is appropriate, yeah.

Wendy Eaton 28:56

So, "The old lady who holds the keys of the Temple was very talkative, and exceedingly anxious to proselyte and correct all abused and wrong impressions that had gone abroad in regard to the sect," so in regard to the Reorganized Church. The two spoke of scripture, Brigham Young, James Strang, and succession. They talked about plural marriage. They talked about the recent lawsuit, and the succession, and ownership of the Temple, and the Reorganization.

Karin Peter 29:25

Okay, that's where Chicago got interested, okay, yeah.

Wendy Eaton 29:27

Probably. That's probably where they got interested. And, as he said, she was very eager to talk to him. The following year, we have another local newspaper. This one takes a very different spin on things. So, 1883, the Reorganized Church held their first General Conference in Kirtland Temple. And they, I think they held it three or four different general conferences. This was the first one at that time. For people who might not be aware, the General Conference traveled, and so, at the conference, they voted on the location for the next one. So, it moved around a little bit. Not surprising that it ended up in Kirtland at a time, at this particular time. And so, this local newspaper has an article, and they title it, "The Mad Mormon Conference". So, you might already understand that this is going to be a very different idea, maybe not an entirely positive or friendly spin on the Reorganization. And, in fact, the author of this particular article includes in there, "Several papers spoke of old Mother Stratton, the keeper of the Temple, as a witch. The anti-polygamists..." meaning the Reorganized Church, "...were exceedingly hot at this and felt like fighting the man who called their dear good sister, a witch." So, you, it's not all rosy in Kirtland?

Karin Peter 31:00

No, to get called a witch in 1883?

Wendy Eaton 31:06

Which, it's fascinating that this newspaper would have the nerve to call her a witch because, not long after, another local newspaper writes about this conference and gives us a very different impression of Electa. So, in this particular article, it again, I want to find my quote so I get these words right. So, this was one that I found in Roger Launius' book, *Kirtland Temple: A Historical Narrative*, which is usually pretty easy to find and does a good job telling the Kirtland Temple story. But he talks about a Cleveland newspaper at the same time for the 1830- '83 conference, as writing, "Electa sat on the stairs leading up to the Melchizedek pulpits during the opening service so that she wouldn't miss a single word that was said." Electa is 82 and she's choosing to sit on the stairs to the pulpit, which are rather narrow and not very comfortable. But she was so excited that this dream that both she and Rebecca had been working towards, had been realized. Here was Joseph Smith III preaching from the pulpits in the Kirtland Temple with the church body gathered here for a conference. Also, maybe the cushions weren't on the pew boxes, so that would, kind of, put the comfort at about the same level, between stairs and pew boxes can be about the same. So, it's a fascinating story with Electa. Things quiet down about her activities in Kirtland Temple, at least I haven't found too much else after that. She dies in 1891, so about, a little less than 10 years after this conference and, as I mentioned, is buried right there next to the Temple that she loved so much. So, after this era with Electa and Rebecca, we see a shift in a lot more male involvement in Kirtland. The church has now had at least one conference here. The people are starting to get excited about remembering what this building was for the movement at one point in time. So, you're getting a lot more devoted male leadership happening here. So, the story takes a little bit of a shift, but there are still some very prominent women happening here. So, given, share next about Catherine, Cassie Kelly, who, people who have really been listening to *Project Zion Podcast*

for a long time might recall that episode 118, Barbara Walden spoke about Cassie Kelly and Emma Burton, another leader at this time period, but not in Kirtland. And, oh, along with this podcast, there's an article in the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal which can be found on their website. It's volume 24 that was put out in 2004. So, people can find Barb's work about Cassie if they want more of a biography. But I want to share some of my favorite stories with her. And so, as I started with talking, you have these two types of women who are here, Rebecca and Electa, who basically retire into Kirtland. They're living out their widowhood here and wanting something else to do with their lives. Cassie comes in, in the term that I love that I found, Vida Smith, I think maybe coining "missionary widow". So, her husband, Edmund, is a bishop with the church, and he's appointed to be in charge of Kirtland, overseeing the repairs. This is just before this 1883 conference, but overseeing initial repairs and worship services, and giving tours and all those kinds of things. But his responsibilities as a bishop require him to travel, so, his wife, Cassie, ends up stepping up and taking on his job, really stepping into the shoes that Rebecca and Electa had been wearing, giving tours, selling the books and missionary tracts and such, coordinating worship services and social gatherings in Kirtland Temple, and really being involved in the community. So, again, Barb Waldon's article does a great job getting into some of the details of that, but some of my favorite stories from this. So again, Cassie is 29 when they move into Kirtland. She's just starting to have her family. They eventually have six children together. So, while she is in this process of taking care of a home, which is also one of the hotels in Kirtland, it's just across, or was just across the street from the Kirtland Temple, she's raising her family, running her home, running the hotel and running Kirtland Temple, because her husband is traveling. And she does a great job writing back and forth with him so that we have a lot of information about the things that are happening. And so, as Rebecca discovered, fires are a problem in Kirtland Temple, especially ones going on with connection to the repairs. And Cassie has at least three fires that she encounters with Kirtland Temple, and at least on one occasion, is the one organizing the bucket brigade to get that fire put out. Makes you really happy we have modern things like fire engines and fire hydrants so that we don't have to lug buckets up and down hills as they would have probably done there in Kirtland. And I mentioned social activities. One of the things Barb shares in her podcast, is that a local individual really wants to turn the upstairs of the Temple into a roller-skating rink. Cassie doesn't like this idea, and she writes to her husband about it, but basically, she doesn't allow it to happen. And it's interesting that right around the same time period, she does allow a social gathering in there. It's 1889. It's a weekly social, Monday and Tuesday nights in November, and it's called, "An Illustrated Lecture, Regarding a Trip Around the World in 80 Days." So, that's all I know about this lecture series, is this title. I would hazard a guess it has something to do with the Jules Verne novel that had been published 15 years earlier, and I think it's really interesting with, within the United States, you have this recognition of looking around the world, and things around the world that we're not familiar with, and in the church itself, you're starting to get some hints at this globalization. It's still a little bit early for the church at this time, but this interest in exploring the world as best we can, and here she gets this set up in the Kirtland Temple through the month of November in that year. So, I've mentioned a couple times, Apostle Gomer Griffiths. He's one of my favorite people, mostly because of his name. He's also, incidentally, buried in the Kirtland Temple, the cemetery next to the Kirtland Temple. He's not too far from where Electa's grave is. He comes into the story, and he's pretty significant. So, I know this is a women's history, but you're going to get some Gomer Griffith history in here too. So, before he settles in Kirtland, he's traveling in the New England and northern Ohio area, and he arrives in Kirtland right before Thanksgiving. And so, if you remember all those letters that Rebecca had kept sending to Joseph

Smith III, about needing an elder, we need to get a branch established here, that's part of what Gomer is doing. So, Edmond Kelley is still in charge, but he's gone so much, this is, kind of, the, we really do need somebody here to get something established and Gomer's gonna be that figure to understand how much the need is there. So, he arrives just before Thanksgiving, and he's there to give a three-night sermon series in the Kirtland Temple that would be open to the public to come and explore. Well, he arrives, and as I mentioned, the Kelly's have a hotel that they're running, so they host Gomer and his traveling companions. And she and her sister-in-law, Ellen, who is also a missionary elder, her husband, William, was traveling just as much as his brother Edmund, though I don't know as much about Ellen's life as I do Cassie, but the two of them prepare a Thanksgiving dinner for a party of about 21 people. And I don't know...

Karin Peter 40:27

Big dinner.

Wendy Eaton 40:28

...if that includes their children or not, or if that's just the adults who are there. And then, as I mentioned, the three-night preaching series takes place the, starting the next evening. And I like this story because even though I'm not aware of a direct connection, this is something that still happens in Kirtland to this day. Well, sort of. We're in a pandemic. They're probably not doing it right now. But the Kirtland congregation for many, many years, has been sponsoring a community Thanksgiving dinner, and their church and fellowship hall is where this Kirtland hotel once stood where Cassie lived, so it's just across the street from the Temple, and hundreds of people from the community come to the congregation for this great big Thanksgiving dinner. And right around the same time period, for probably about as many years, has been a community Thanksgiving worship service in the Temple, that the couple years that I was there in Kirtland for this, the high school choir would prepare music for and would come and sit in the pew box-, the corner choir loft pew boxes there in the lower court, and a lot of local individuals. It was the tradition for a long time that the newest ordained minister, or pastor in town, was the one who gave the sermon. So, it was, kind of, your welcome to Kirtland. Here's a historic building for you to give a sermon in. And, oh, like, the police commissioner and the chief of the fire department, all these different community individuals, would come in and join in this Thanksgiving service. And I think it's incredible that, like I said, even though I don't know of a direct connection, something that Cassie and her sister-in-law were doing in 1880s is, kind of, still going on today. And it's really neat to see those connections spanning across the eras. So, eventually, Gomer does move into Kirtland, and he would establish a pretty good-sized congregation, but it would still take some time. The problem is, within the Reorganization, this is about 1890 time period, Lamoni is the hot place to move to, and not too long after this, Independence is the place where everybody wants to gather to. So, as much as the church loves Kirtland, it's not their focus just yet. They're not really looking too much at it as a gathering place. Eventually, they would get quite a large congregation there, and I think it still is a pretty good-sized group that meets there. Gomer, as I said, he's moved in 1891. He brings along his wife, Hattie, who comes into our next individuals that I have just a little bit of information on, that, if I have the time ever to dig into some of the detailed archives that are probably branch records at this point, I wonder if Hattie would be able to tell us more stories, because when the congregation is officially organized in 1886, she is the branch secretary. I don't know if this is very unusual for this time period. It seemed unusual to

me when I first saw that. I don't know how many women were stepping into that kind of leadership role in a congregation.

Karin Peter 44:03

In a church officer role.

Wendy Eaton 44:04

Yeah. It could simply be a matter of, they were a tiny branch at that time, and she had the skills necessary to serve in that function, so nobody batted an eye at her doing it. But it'd be interesting, one of these days, to maybe try to figure this out. But there's this great little story that Gomer tells about Hattie, it, when he writes his memoirs, and it's all about when they're moving into Kirtland. They're looking for a house and Gomer's got this grand plan that the Temple block, the neighborhood directly around the Kirtland, the church really needs to get a hold of some of that property so we could kind of make this really nice, formal, kind of, space around the Temple itself. So, they're looking specifically for a home right by the temple, and they find such a place and they put the money down to buy it, but then they find out with all these wonderful complicated property stuff, that I really don't comprehend, but they find out that there's an individual in the community that has claim on the mortgage of this particular house, and they hear that this man does not like the Reorganization. He does not like that the Mormons are coming back into our community. But Hattie tells him, tells Gomer, just go talk to the guy. Explain to him what we're doing. Explain to him why it's important that we take this house. And he's nervous, he writes, but he does as his wife counsels and goes and talks to this guy. Come to find out, the guy is enthusiastic about the building up and caring of the Kirtland Temple. And he is more than happy to give the Griffiths as much time as they need to pay off that mortgage, and eventually the mortgage is paid off. The Griffiths formally own this property and when they're ready to leave that home, they deed it to the church, and it becomes part of the broader Kirtland Temple property.

Karin Peter 46:16

All thanks to Hattie.

Wendy Eaton 46:17

All thanks to Hattie, stepping in and telling her husband, just go do this.

Karin Peter 46:22

Just go talk to them.

Wendy Eaton 46:22

Even [inaudible] There's another similar story that, it's a church member named Martha Brockway, and this is the only thing that I know about Martha Brockway. This is another one of those things, if I ever get into Hattie's minutes, maybe I'll find out more, but Martha Brockway is a church member in the area, and she doesn't live directly near the Kirtland Temple, but she's in the vicinity. She's taking care of an older woman who does live right by the temple. And she takes such great care of this woman that when the older woman dies, she deeds her property to Martha. And Martha communicates with the church and Gomer saying, "Look, I'm more than happy to deed this property over to you. I have a stipulation though. You'll give me somewhere to live when I'm in my old age." And so, they are happy to do that,

because it's helping out building this little area around the Kirtland Temple. So, when it comes time, Martha is given a place to stay in the Sidney Rigdon house, which is still standing there across the street. And that home that she had helped, but helped this older woman in, becomes a part of the Kirtland property today. So, it's really interesting. It's, kind of, a strange story when you think about it, but I think it's pretty significant that this little thing, this, maybe just an act of compassion, maybe Martha was working for the woman, I don't know, but in taking care of her, she helps in the long-term development of what Kirtland has become to this day. So, it's a little story, but a lot of fun. And again, maybe one of these days I'll be able to find more about it. So, there are others like this, that other women who I just have very bear mentions of, that I have a feeling did quite a bit, but it's gonna take a lot more work. And that's part of the fun of this job, is just digging up some of those stories that have been hidden for so many years. I don't want anybody to get me wrong. The men who are in Kirtland and working in Kirtland are incredibly important, and there are a lot of them that have some great stories behind them, but I am so glad I've had a chance to, not only shine the light on some of these women, but find out for myself more about them than I knew beforehand.

Karin Peter 49:01

Absolutely.

Wendy Eaton 49:01

I don't think, yeah, I really don't think the Historic Site there would be what it is today if it hadn't been, especially when I think about how much Rebecca Dayton did there in the community in the 1870s, just, kind of, on her own whim, because she had her own passion.

Karin Peter 49:21

Feisty.

Wendy Eaton 49:22

Yeah. Feisty strong woman doing what she was passionate about.

Karin Peter 49:27

Well, and it's wonderful. We are recording this right before Halloween, which makes it also right before All Saints Day, which is when we remember the saints of our tradition. And sometimes we only think of those big names. Of course, in the Reorganization, it's going to be Smith names, or it's going to be a, names that were important in Lamoni and Independence. But here we have the names of women who are in our, kind of, All Saints tradition that preserved something that has become, not just an important historic site, but it's where the spiritual formation facility is. There's lots of other aspects to what's happening at Kirtland and the Kirtland property. So, between Charlotte and Rebecca and Electa, and Cassie and Ellen and Hattie and Martha, you know, all of these women, who we don't normally speak their names. It's the appropriate time to talk about them.

Wendy Eaton 50:24

Yeah.

Karin Peter 50:27

Having it be at the time of remembrance and All Saints. So, I love when you find these stories to bring to us, Wendy, because they just help bring these different parts of our history alive. I'm hoping you can send us a good photograph, either of one of these women or simply of the Kirtland Temple, that we can put up on the website when this episode posts. But before we close, any last comment, stories, anything that you'd like to share about the women of this era of our history?

Wendy Eaton 51:04

Yeah, these stories only really take us up to 1900s. There is 121 years of history that I did not get into, of women tending the gardens. I think of Glenna Van Buskirk, who is one of my favorite people ever, that has been, she's one of those feisty, older ladies who's really dedicated to volunteering with the Historic Sites and how much work she's done over the years. And I think of Barbara Walden. She might not be happy that I'm bringing her up, but she was the director of Kirtland Temple. She's one that really helped bring me into this world of, not only church history, but women's history within the church. There's 121 years of history of women's stories that have not been talked about. And I really hope that efforts will be made in the future to continue to keep track of all these women, because really, the only ones that I can think of, are the women that I've encountered in the last 15 years. So, that still leaves a good 100 years of history, of women's stories, that can easily be shared about Kirtland Temple. So hopefully, this is just the start of these stories being shared. Hopefully, more work will be done in the years to come to unearth and discover some of these gems of history that I've had so much fun uncovering.

Karin Peter 52:33

Well, and to go back to where you began, as we started this episode, Wendy, in talking about how our impression of women of this era is, just women, the partners of the important men, who were just in the background, raising kids, but in reality, they were building stewards. They were feisty protectors of history. They were putting out fires, literally and figuratively, in what happened in the life of the church in Kirtland, and advocating for a continued church presence there.

Wendy Eaton 53:07

Yeah,

Karin Peter 52:08

So, absolutely wonderful.

Wendy Eaton 53:10

It's a powerful place. If our listeners have not been to Kirtland, once we're able to open back up, I would encourage them to go and find a way to spend more than just a tour there, because it truly is one of the more remarkable places of our church heritage, and, kind of, feels like I'm playing favoritism. I live in Nauvoo. Nauvoo is great. It's got some wonderful stories, but Kirtland will always have a very special place in my heart, simply because of the power of place. I've never felt it anywhere like I have with Kirtland Temple.

Karin Peter 53:52

Ah, so you're continuing on in the legacy of hospitality and invitation to the Kirtland area. Good for you,

Wendy Eaton 54:02

Now, stop in Nauvoo on your way to Kirtland. [inaudible]

Karin Peter 54:05

Do the whole tour. All right. Well, with that invitation to explore the Kirtland site, I want to thank you again for joining us. And I look forward to our next installment of this "Cuppa Joe" series, "Women in Community of Christ History". And if you have any questions for Wendy, or perhaps suggestions of stories of "Women From the History of Community of Christ," you can reach her at w_eaton@cofchrist.org, or you can find her on the Historic Sites Foundation website, if you scroll all the way down to the bottom, I think, is where their "Contact Us" is. In the meantime, this is "Cuppa Joe", part of *Project Zion Podcast*. This is Karin Peter. I've been here with Wendy Eaton. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 55:07

Thanks for listening to Project Zion Podcast, subscribe to our podcast on Apple podcast, Stitcher, or whatever podcast streaming service you use. And while you're there, give us a five star rating. Project Zion Podcast is sponsored by Latter-day Seeker Ministries of Community of Christ. The views and opinions expressed in this episode are of those speaking and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Latter-day Seeker Ministries, or Community of Christ. Music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze