

# Cuppa Joe | Women of the Restoration | Ruth Smith

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

ruth, women

## SPEAKERS

Wendy Eaton, Karin Peter

### **Karin Peter** 00:30

Welcome to *Project Zion Podcast*. This is “Cuppa Joe”, where we explore Restoration history, and I am your host, Karin Peter. Today's episode is part of a series that we've been recording, not on a real regular basis, but we've been trying to make sure we get them in periodically, and that is our series about women in Community of Christ history, where we tell the stories of women, and how they shaped, led, offered ministry, and had profound impact in the history of Community of Christ. Now, we've talked before that often, historically, we look through the lens of men, and this was a male led institution, and our history, our tale of our story has been told through the lens of men, but our guest, Wendy Eaton, who is our guest for all of these episodes, has been diligent at making sure that we have an opportunity to hear the stories of women with as much of, much content as we can through the lens of women and not through the lens of men. And we are so happy to have her with us again. Wendy works at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois, and she is the administrative assistant as well to the Historic Sites Foundation, and we are recording in late May when the traffic in Nauvoo is on an uptick. So, thanks, Wendy, for working us in to make sure we got an opportunity today to record, and we are going to talk about a woman who, her name may be a bit unfamiliar, not just in Community of Christ history, but in the tale of the church generally, and her name is Ruth Smith, and that's who we'll be talking about today. So, Wendy, tell us who Ruth Smith was and why you decided to tell her story.

### **Wendy Eaton** 02:38

I wanted to tell Ruth's story partly as a natural continuation. We started with Joseph Smith III and the women he was married to, Emmeline, Bertha and Ada, and we've talked about Emma Hale Smith Bidamon, so we've kind of gotten on this theme of what authors have termed the First Ladies of the Restoration, the women who were married to the presidents of the Community of Christ or RLDS church. And so, the next president to follow Joseph Smith III was his son, Frederick Madison Smith, and he was married to Ruth. And as I had a chance to dive into Ruth's story, I just became captivated by her and her passions, and pretty excited to share this with you today.

### **Karin Peter** 03:29

Okay, well, I'm pretty excited to hear about it. So, this has been a fascinating series. So, let's dive in and talk about Ruth and her story.

**Wendy Eaton** 03:40

So, Ruth was a student for her whole life. She was a teacher. She was an author. To her husband, she was an intellectual contender. She was his travelling companion, and his co-parent to two daughters. And as the church would say, she was a woman of rare charm and grace. And so, a quick three-minute biography. Ruth was born December 9, 1872. She was the fourth of five daughters born to Alice and Elijah Lyman. She was raised in Little Sioux, Iowa, graduated high school in Woodbine, Iowa. She went to college in Acadia, in, which is in Louisiana, and then the National School of Elocution and Oratory in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was one of the earliest teachers at Graceland College. She taught from 1896, before the school even really got its start, and stopped teaching in 1898, which is interesting because her husband was the first and only class member to graduate in 1898. So, they overlapped a little bit. Their *[inaudible]* I don't have...

**Karin Peter** 05:00

They did.

**Wendy Eaton** 05:01

...possibly overlapped. She was married to Frederick Madison Smith, August 3, 1897. They had two daughters, Alice in 1899 and Lois in 1906. They were a close family and they weathered many of the difficulties of Fred being, in air quotes, "heir apparent" for the Church. In May 1926, Fred records in his journal, "Ruth died today, a terrible blow." To me personally, Ruth is the author of one of the best books I've read in a long time. She wrote the book *Concerning the Prophet Frederick Madison Smith*. And in spite of that title, this book gave me a lot of insight to Ruth. So, I have the wonderful opportunity for, I think, the first time in these women of Community of Christ history, nearly everything I have to share comes directly from Ruth. And her...

**Karin Peter** 06:02

Okay, that does not happen in these.

**Wendy Eaton** 06:05

It's not. It's, and I think, and I have a copy of the book right here. Was pretty excited, I was able to get a hold of one. This is now my own personal copy. It's will be 100 years old next year, so I'm pretty careful with it. But it's really exciting to actually have this. And the other source material that I'm using, it's other women authors. So, this, I think, is the first time we don't directly have a man's voice. Now, having the title, first, ... *The president Frederick Madison Smith*, yeah, it's focused on him, but like I said, I got so much about Ruth from this, and I was pretty exciting. So, Ruth was a few months older than Fred. They first met at a social, held at Marietta Walker's Lamoni, Iowa home. Marietta is another woman we've studied in the past. One of the party games that Marietta had planned was for the guests to match quotations from classic literature, which I think I would fail miserably at, but Ruth and Fred tied for first place. So, they, immediately, this compatible intellect drew them together. At the close of the party, Fred asked if he could walk Ruth home. She was hesitant because, as she put it, she was not out in society, which was just her formal introduction to public, and she didn't know what her mother would

think about this. But in the end, she said, "It'll be all right, I'm sure, Fred, because you're Brother Joseph's boy." So, it's not like her mother didn't know who Fred was. And so, with his tuba in one hand, Fred walked Ruth home.

**Karin Peter 07:56**

Okay now, that's, that's just a picture as I'm thinking about Graceland University and the old building, and I'm thinking about the place, and the, the time period, right, which is kind of the "Meet Me in St. Louis" movie time period there, and walking home with his tuba, and the two of them is just absolutely precious.

**Wendy Eaton 08:18**

It is. I couldn't leave that little bit of his tuba out. But the thing is, they were 14 years old. So, they were quite, it just leaves you with this whole feeling of first love, and he's got his tuba, and it's just, it's just adorable. So, education's incredibly important to both of them. And so, they are separated at this time by their pursuits of higher education. They wrote lengthy letters to one another. And at one point, they were arguing over who was writing the longer letters, and since they saved their letters, they each counted up the words and found that Ruth had 10 words more that she had written to Fred. And so, in concession to her being the better letter writer, he sent her a book of Lord Byron's poems, which she kept the rest of her life. As happens with long distance friendships, the letters slowed, and eventually stopped. When Ruth graduated from school in Philadelphia, she returned to her mother's home in Lamoni, and she's out running an errand to the post office, and there's Fred. They're both now 21 years old. They're both invited to a party, and Fred shows up with a date, and this date refuses to speak to Fred after the date hears Fred ask Ruth if Ruth is going to be home on Sunday. So, he completely scorns his date that he brought to this party, but that begins the courtship of Fred and Ruth. They spend as much time together that winter with all the typical hallmarks of what you would expect at this time period: ice skating, sleigh rides, prayer meetings, because they were both good church kids, and a Shakespeare Club that was very active in Lamoni. As winter rolled into spring, the baseball season began and Ruth started attending Fred's game. Ruth wrote, "It has been difficult for me to say just when I began to love Fred Smith, in spite of the fact that our friends claimed they knew it from the first. You would presume, of course, that it was because of his great brain and his masterful attitude, but I've always maintained that I fell in love with my husband because of his baseball suit." So, like I said, I've loved this book. This was one of the best things I've read in a long time.

**Karin Peter 10:51**

Oh, my goodness, how delightful.

**Wendy Eaton 10:54**

So, Ruth holds on to that red baseball suit, keeping it with her wedding dress, their children's christening dresses. She writes of their engagement that it was simply understood. There were no words exchanged. They just knew that this is what was going to be their life together. She says, "We had not meant to fall in love with each other. Each of us had other ideas and purposes, but it seems simply as if there was no other way." They spent their engagement walking home from baseball games, reading in her mother's library. I think it's important to note at this time, Fred's mother, Bertha Madison Smith, had died during their engagement, I believe, and Ruth's father had died long ago, so both of

them had that similar experience to share as well. So, it's summer now. They know that the Church reunion in Woodbine, Iowa's coming up. Ruth's mother, sister, her sister's husband and their child are planning to go to the Woodbine, Iowa, and Ruth expresses a wish to go. And her sister, Bess, teases that Ruth and Fred could make it a honeymoon trip. And after Bess heads out, the two of them decide why don't we do that? Again, this might seem weird to us today to spend your honeymoon at a church function, but this was pretty typical at the time.

**Karin Peter** 12:22

Oh, my God, Wendy, I did that. So, some people do that.

**Wendy Eaton** 12:25

Okay, so maybe not, so maybe it's not so typical, but they, they both know that what's expected of them, and you're gonna see this over and over again, this expectation because of who Fred is, they know that it's expected that they would have a big church wedding, and they just kind of, okay, fine, whether they wanted that or not, they know that that's what is meant to be. But fortunately for them, Fred's injured on the job and he's on crutches before they can make hardly any plans for this big church wedding. And so, Ruth writes in her book, Fred's comment to her. "Now you can't have your big church wedding, Ruth. 'No', I answered. But I tell you what will be more fun than a church wedding. No one is expecting us to be married now until your leg is better, but we'll just ask my family and yours to come in and have ice cream with us some night, the way we do, and your father can marry us, and then we could go on that trip with my sister to the reunion, only no one will know about it beforehand except your father and my mother. Won't that be fun?" Fred agrees. Joseph Smith III, as ever the one to love a good joke, he's quite on board with it. Ruth's mother is a little more hesitant. She tells her daughter that there are many more men out there who could provide Ruth with an easier, more comfortable and happier life. She assures her mother that both she and Fred understood what they were getting into and she definitely understood what was going to be expected of her, and her mother gives her blessing to the wedding. So, the invitations are sent out to this family ice cream party, to the family who live right there in Lamoni. Ruth decorates her mother's home with ferns and roses. She pulls out her favorite moss-rose colored evening gown. Fred's younger siblings are convinced to dress nicely for this family party, being told that Ruth had baked a cake. And on the appointed day the family began to arrive. When Joseph III arrives, Ruth pulls him aside to make sure that he will not put into the ceremony that she must obey Fred. He assures her that he won't do that, and at nine o'clock that evening, Joseph stood in the doorway between the living room and the library and said he's been giving away daughters and receiving sons for several years, but now was pleased to give away a son and receive a daughter. He invited Fred and Ruth to the doorway, and the family erupted into comments. Ruth wrote, "Brother Joseph stood to one side, smiling serenely, his eyes twinkling with amusement. Fred's face was quite passive, I, glorying in this, my greatest dramatic role." Fred calls for quiet, and Ruth and Fred prepared to say their vows to one another, and one of Ruth, Ruth's brother-in-law's demands to see the marriage license. This was the one thing Ruth had not thought of. She looked at Fred who assured her, "Well, that's all right, Pet. What do you suppose father and I drove all the way to the county seat for this morning?" So, they had everything in place, and this simple ceremony was held that August 3, 1897. So, Ruth and her sister Bess seemed to have a pretty close relationship and their husbands were good friends as well. There was a recent *Project Zion Podcast* that Lachlan Mackay, and I think it was one with Tony Chvala-Smith, when they were talking about theology and history, he shares part of this

story, and he speculates, we're not quite sure why Fred is referred as Fred M. his whole life. I think I might have an answer to that one. So, for Ruth's mother, Ruth and Bess were both married to men named Fred. And so, her mother-in-law needed a way to distinguish between the two Freds, and she would always say, Fred M. for Ruth's husband, and Fred B. for Bess's husband. So, I think that might be the answer to that issue.

**Karin Peter** 16:53

Oh, my goodness, yeah. So that's episode 550. I think we talked about that before we started recording, that that's 550 on *Project Zion*, yeah.

**Wendy Eaton** 17:06

So, it's now time, the wedding's passed, let's go on this honeymoon to the Woodbine reunion, and it's Ruth's sister, Bess, who is the other family member. So, it's Ruth, her Fred, Bess, her Fred, their son, who I believe was named Wayne, and then their mother, who are making this large party to head off to the Woodbine, Iowa. And what's interesting, and this is where it really ties in with that *Project Zion* episode, Lach talks about this first sermon that Fred M. and Fred B. give. And so, Ruth and Bess have this experience of getting to hear their husbands learn into ministry, and in particular with these first sermons. And so, both were really concerned about this, Ruth because her Fred could not quote Scripture correctly, and Bess because her Fred couldn't preach. And so, I just picture the two of them sitting there in the crowd, nervously waiting for the two Freds to get up and talk. Fred M. goes first, he concludes in about 11 minutes. He looks to his wife who smiles in reassurance but she wrote, "Personally, I should have enjoyed a chance to quietly go into hysterics." She was thankful he hadn't spoken long enough to misquote Scripture. And now it was her sister's turn to fret and Ruth wrote that, "Fred B. had been going for nearly 45 minutes," and Bess is sitting there, Ruth says practically wailing, "Will this never stop?" And Ruth turns to her sister. "Well, don't you know that they had the hour between them, and your Fred is only taking the time my Fred didn't use," so. They had the chance during the reunion to hear their husbands give a couple more sermons, but then getting to experience, especially for Ruth and Fred M., watching him grow into his ministerial role. So, the reunion ends and Bess's husband has to catch a train to get back to Lamoni quickly, and so it's Fred M. with his wife, sister-in-law, nephew and mother-in-law making the trip back and it's a little too eventful for Ruth's taste. She says they wake up one morning and she finds that Fred had chosen a camping place right next door to a cemetery and she scolds him that thank goodness the other women hadn't realized it or they would not have let him live it down. Another night a storm blows in causing them to set up camp quickly, and one of the horses takes sick right about the same time the storm finally settles down. So, Fred has to take it to a livery nearby. The next morning Ruth wakes up with her nephew shrieking in delight to see Uncle Fred has come back leading the horse. The horse is better, but has delivered a colt overnight. And so, they have the addition of a baby horse to make this trip back. Ruth insist on naming the colt Fred B., after her brother-in-law because she says, "It's bad luck to come back from a journey without the same people you went out with." So, they make their way back to Lamoni, finally. Ruth and Fred make their first home in her mother's house there in Lamoni. Ruth moves in to, again talking some about these expectations that she knew was going to happen coming into this, she knew it was expected, her and Fred, to have a son. After all, the church had already seen leadership pass from father to son, and everybody anticipated that when Joseph III died or stepped down, Fred M. would again, father to son. She and her sisters are sitting around chatting and sewing, and they're discussing

baby names, and one of her sisters says, "And you, Ruth, of course, will have to have a Frederick Madison Smith Jr. That would only be proper as the church is expecting it of you." And Ruth's response, I think is great. She says, "I'm sorry, but I did not agree to furnish a grandson for the president of the church. I know that Fred M. wants a little girl, just as I have always dreamed of having one, with brown hair and eyes, just like her father, and her name will be Alice." And they are soon expecting their firstborn. Fred goes back east for work and Ruth remains in Lamoni with her mother. When time gets close, she sends a telegraph off to Fred and he hurries home, and is there for the arrival of baby Alice, who does indeed look a lot like Fred. And it's interesting, Ruth turns, in this portion of the chapter, to talking about Alice in great detail. Since we're not an Alice episode, I'm not going to get into that, but she talks about how her insight of what her daughter's experience, how different it would have been if it had been a son rather than a daughter, and she talks about seeing her daughter going about her little childish activities there on the streets of Lamoni, and being stopped by church leaders. And they'd look at her round happy face and say, "So this is Fred M.'s little girl. How much you look like your father, my dear." But Ruth adds, "But there was none who ever added, 'And you must remember, little lady, that you will someday be expected to take over your father's position.'" And Ruth concludes, "For once I can rejoice in the limitations of my sex, for while I think of what my husband's life has been since his childhood, of what trials and sacrifices and responsibilities he has had to overcast the joy of service with the knowledge that his failures have been ever present. I thank God that though a man child of mine might have been born into greatness, this little woman, her daughter, by a curious combination of ancient custom and modern usage, is still permitted to fight her way outward and upward." So though Ruth acknowledges the limitations of women at this time, even though the fight for equal rights is going on, she is happy her daughter will not have to grow up with the same pressures that Fred had to. And Alice did fight her way upward and outward. She grew to be a remarkable woman. Her son, Paul Edwards, this was the other podcast I mentioned, he recorded twice about his mother, once for *Project Zion Podcast*. The, the title was "When Will the Little Woman Come Out of the House". I think it was maybe 400 or 401. And the other time was for Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, one of our lectures, and that lecture can be found on the Foundation's YouTube channel, if anyone's interested. So, one of Ruth's pleasures in life was helping develop the community of Lamoni and this is another theme that just kind of continues on with her life and her activities as soon-to-be wife of president of the Church. She puts in her quotations that she and Fred are, "Helping with city planning, the beautification of Lamoni, laying out parks and playgrounds." And during these early years of marriage and parenthood, they begin to take on some of the duties that Joseph Smith III and his now wife, Ada, would have been expected to do, but with his help and her need to take care of them, Ruth and Fred just kind of stepped in and took care of. It's not too long after this that the Church is beginning its migration back to Independence and their second daughter is born. And of Lois, born in 1907, Ruth describes, "As Alice is Ruth's sweetheart and companion, Lois is Fred's daddy's little girl." And so, they each had a very special child, very special parent relationship going on there. But before Lois comes, is one of their greatest adventures, I think, that Ruth writes about in this book. And this is the family's trip to Utah. So, it's expected at this time, as custom for Fred and other church leaders, to spend some time with the ecclesiastical cousins out in the Salt Lake area, the other states out west. And so, Ruth, Alice and Fred go out to Salt Lake and other areas for about 10 months. And the stories she shares in here are fascinating. And I think I could have just read the entire chapter, but then we would be sitting on multiple episodes for Ruth. She's very complimentary when she starts out in her chapter to the cousin church, who, she uses that term "cousin church" when she's describing them, very complimentary to

Brigham Young. But within a couple pages, she talks about the difficulties, in particular the stress and strain on Fred, and probably everything that he's just learning about Church history at this time, and what his cousins out west, what their church is all about. He, at one point, self-diagnoses himself with appendicitis. He never goes to a doctor, but the symptoms, the gut pains and so forth, he decides, well, you know, I'm not going to go to a doctor for this, but in the Church, we do bless people with olive oil, so he starts drinking olive oil. Now, as a disclaimer, yes, Community of Christ uses olive oil in these sacraments, but it is not a healing agent. It's the symbol of Jesus [*inaudible*].

**Karin Peter** 27:34

Nobody drinks it.

**Wendy Eaton** 27:37

But Fred starts drinking all this olive oil, and he believes it makes him better. Ruth writes about this illness because he didn't want to alarm her. So, he never really told her what was going on, but she figured things out. She writes, "But if he thought he was keeping his new treatment from me, he was mistaken, for in looking through a high cupboard one day in our kitchen, I discovered an array of bottles that reminded me of the salad section at a fancy grocers. I have never since been able to keep him from recommending very seriously to any of our friends who were threatened with appendicitis, that olive oil is an excellent remedy." So, Ruth, she's incredibly protective, and I think this is why he was skeptical of sharing too much with her, but she's very intelligent, and she figures out an awful lot going on. The stories take an alarming turn, though. She's very protective of him during this time out west and she's often worried about disgruntled individuals' reaction to Fred's lectures and classes and talks that he's giving out there. They're in Malad City, Idaho, and I hope I'm pronouncing that right, I might not be, and Fred is speaking to a crowd so large that there were a lot of people standing in the streets around the lecture hall. And Ruth says that Fred is speaking with his usual vigor. He's doing a great job, but she's sitting through the entire address, excited and shivering and expecting at any moment to hear a shot ring out from the crowd. So, she's scared for his life. Even in her fear, he is always wanting to learn, so most evenings he spends at the city library studying late into the night. He would stay there until Ruth showed up to escort him home. "He used to ask me sometimes just how it was I expected my presence to prevent a murder in some dark corner. Even if one were attempted, I hadn't figured it out that far." Fred laughingly called her his bodyguard. Ruth did write of one occasion where someone did follow them home. Thankfully it turned out it was a neighbor who was also concerned about their safety. She said she also tried making Fred wear a padded chest protector, but he complained that it let the cold air in so he only wore it the one time. Ruth wrote, "My tendency to coddle a big healthy and self-sufficient man has always amused and sometimes a little annoyed him." So, if listeners are interested in more of Ruth and Fred's adventures out in Utah, Kristen Mackay, who's the site director here in Nauvoo, she wrote an article for the 50th anniversary *John Whitmer Journal*, and it's about this time period. And so, like I said, I could share all sorts of stories but if you can't find Ruth's book, you should be able to find that journal pretty easily. I believe it's just now being available to individuals. So, when the Church headquarters, as I said, begins moving to Independence, Ruth and Fred make the trip there as well. But there's this persistent desire for both of them to continue education, even as Fred's responsibilities with Church activities is picking up. He enrolls in the State University of Kansas, which is in Lawrence, and I think that's about an hour, maybe two hours west of the Kansas City area. There's a satellite University in Kansas City and he's able to take the train from Independence into Kansas City

for his classes. He's pursuing a master's degree in sociology and psychology, and Ruth is home with the children, but she studies over his shoulder. Ruth wrote that, "Fred never had the kind of ambition which resented the advancement of others, and he was glad to have me get all of the modern social sciences with the idea that I would, no doubt, be of great assistance to him in his work with the women of the Church." It took two years for Fred, with Ruth learning over his shoulder, to earn his master degree and I would argue she earned it as well by studying over his side. The evening of his graduation, the two of them took his diploma to his father's home. Joseph III was almost completely blind by this time. Fred places his diploma in his father's hands, but the proud father wouldn't live long enough to see his son achieve his doctoral degree. With Joseph Smith III in his declining years, Fred and Ruth step up even more with taking on, especially the hosting and socializing responsibilities that was expected of the Church president. Ruth describes a typical Sunday as "The family rising around seven in the morning, with people waiting on their front porch to see them. They did their best to get to Sunday services in the morning because their afternoons were filled with committee gatherings, school activities, and often the rush to get home to visitors who expected dinner, and then Sunday evenings more church activities." They did what they could to make these hosting activities easier on the family, but they have some criticism by their choices. Ruth writes that once they received an anonymous letter from a neighbor, complaining of the Smith's extravagant lifestyle. This complaint was due to the neighbor witnessing the ice cream wagons stopping at the Smith home for three Sundays in a row. Ruth wrote, "We could only laugh. Had we known or cared who our accuser was, we might have easily defended our case, I think, by asking that person to spend a season in our home. From earliest morning to latest night, we were busy with the duties of church, school and home." Fred desperately wanted to finish his university education even facing his father's death on the imminent horizon. Ruth and Fred and their daughters moved to Worcester, Massachusetts so that Fred could work on his PhD, again, psychology and sociology being his focus, and as ever Ruth studying over his shoulder with the addition of the daughters joining in in the study, though they're working on their, their education as far as children level education, but Ruth writes about Fred taking up one end of the table and the girls on the other end of the table all working on their classwork at the same time. They enjoy the society around them in that field of psychology, especially Monday nights, which were seminars for the doctoral students to talk about their theses with one another. Ruth often accompanied Fred, and with the encouragement of his supervisors, they began taking their daughters to these events as well. So, their older daughter, she's a teenager by this point, but Lois the younger, she's still probably about eight or nine at this time. My, that might even be generous though. She might have been a little younger. Ruth wrote that, "They were sufficiently silent during the reading and discussion and sufficiently ladylike during the refreshments." So, I think the two girls managed themselves pretty well during those very adult events going on in the educational field there in Massachusetts. And to me, this pursuit of education, especially this focus on sociology, and psychology, reflect a lot on what they understood their roles to the Church to be. And when I look back at the programs of the Church that were emerging at this time, and in Fred's time of leadership, you definitely see a connection with psychology and sociology, and all the different, what I would label as social justice projects happening at this time, the beginnings of the Church hospital, the Independence Sanitarium, the Church sponsored homes for the elderly and orphans, and eventually when the orphanages shut down, finding those orphans permanent homes. During that last year of school, Fred was called to Independence when his father's long life was drawing to a close. Emptying, Ruth writes of, emptying her secret reserves of money as well as the children's banks to scrounge up enough money to get Fred as far as Chicago where family meet them



and are able to get him on to Independence so that he's by his father's side when Joseph III dies. Ruth, back home in Massachusetts, and especially the older daughter, Alice, have the unexpected experience of reporters showing up at the house wanting interviews about this president of one of the Mormon churches, and Alice is alone at home when the first interviewer shows up. And again, she's 15, and this interviewer shows up with very insistent questions about her grandfather. And Ruth says that Alice was courteous and intelligent in her answers, but a little overwhelmed by seeing herself quoted in newspapers of the time period. Dealing with the press was never something Ruth enjoyed, and so, these very flattering words about how her daughter handled herself, they're pretty telling of the intelligence that Ruth and Fred were able to encourage with their daughters. So, Joseph died December, 1914. The following April, the Church Conference convened without Fred. He was recovering from pneumonia, so Ruth kept him home as per doctor's orders, wired back and forth by telegraph with the Church activities and Independence keeping Fred up to date on the Conference and the Conference up to date on Fred's health. The delegates unanimously vote their support for Fred taking the role his father had designated for him. So even though Fred had been designated as president successor of the Church, it still had to be approved by the Conference. When Ruth relayed the news that the Conference had voted unanimously, Fred smiled and said, "That's the first time I ever remember getting a unanimous vote, and I presume it will be the last until they vote me out." He slowly recovers and eventually the doctor says that so long as Ruth goes with him, he can travel to Independence for his ordination. Ruth's book has one last chapter and it's almost entirely Fred's words, so I'm going to turn to two other books for a synopsis of Ruth's final years. One of them is *First Ladies of the Restoration* by Francis Hartman Milliken, which I bet many congregations have a copy of, and the other is *Bonds of Sisterhood: A History of the RLDS Women's Organization*, which is by Madeline Brunson, which is a really good book but might not be so easily available. For Ruth, in 1917, she spoke at the dedication of a women's building sponsored by the Church that was located at the corner of River and Walnut Streets. And so, Walnut Street is where a lot of Church headquarters are today and this is again in Independence. The home served as a base of operations for many outreach programs, including young women who traveled to Independence for work but didn't have family to live with. They were given space to live in this women's home so that they would have a safe, secure place while they were going about their work lives. The home also was a launching place for meals to, for school children in the area. And during World War I, because of course that is happening at this point, women would gather on the lawns of the home to knit for soldiers serving in Europe. Ruth encouraged the women around her, as she's moving into these leadership roles with the church with women's work, to continue studying throughout their lives as she had. She encouraged them to look to those around her who were in need and to do everything they could to improve the lives, particularly orphans and elderly, which were really Ruth's passions. She worked with organizations outside the Church as well, including the Board of Welfare in Kansas City. Throughout her last decade, Ruth often left Missouri for the milder climates of California. She was typically a frail woman and often struggled with her health and, was common at this time, hoped that those milder California climates would help her get better. They may have done so because the last couple years of her life, she is able to return back to Independence. In late April, 1926, Ruth is out doing errands and she's struck by a car and severely injured. Her last week is spent at the Church hospital. Alice, who's now married, and Lois, who's a student at Graceland, are able to travel to Independence to be with their father, by the time Ruth dies on May 5. She's 54 years old, so fairly young, so. Her funeral was held the following day at the Stone church and she's buried in Mound Grove Cemetery in Independence. The following year, 1927, Fred, Alice and Ruth established

the Ruth Lyman Smith Memorial Library with 670 books centered on Ruth's passion: parenthood, psychology, science, history and education. After a year, the collection grew to 936 books. As this is a big time of transition with the Church, it's uncertain just what happened to this library over the coming decades. Like other memorial libraries that were common at this time, Ruth's probably merged with other collections over the past few decades, especially when the Auditorium is completed in the 1950s, and then the Temple in the 1990s. I wish Ruth had continued to document her life with Fred through her later years, but I also understand it was probably a combination of let's keep private what we can, and she was just too busy, and with her health coming in and out. There's a trail of little clues that really piques my interest in some of these other biographies, but the biographies are so brief, like just a couple pages long for her whole life, that they just don't give a lot of information. She's such an intelligent, humorous and opinionated woman and looking at some of the big things that happened during this time period, the 1920s, with Fred M. stepping into his role, and knowing how close the two of them were and what their passions were with psychology and sociology, I think Ruth must have had an awful big influence on Fred and some of the choices that he made in Church leadership. The clues are there. Hopefully I'll have a chance to pick them up in the future, and pursue a little bit more to see if I can unearth more of the stories of Ruth during this time period. Like I said, it was a joy to read this book. I'd like to carry on more and more, but I'm going to close with her conclusion. And so, it's just, it's a short page, so bear with me, but I think this is really telling about why she wrote this book, and where she was at this time in her life. So, this is the early 1920s, he's been president for about six years at this point, and though she doesn't know it, her life is drawing to an end. Ruth writes, "This book is not a history, the writing of such task for historians. It's not a biography for various reasons, one of which is having reached the point in my story where to continue would have necessitated another volume I did not wish to continue to tail. This is not an official statement of the doctrines and belief of the Church which Frederick Madison Smith is a president. These beliefs have been ably set forth in other places by other pens than mine. I have only tried, as I have said, because the writing of these things has been pleasant to me, to create a picture of the president and prophet of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, as it has been my privilege to know him. Therefore, there, if there be anyone who care to question or comment upon what I have said, I ask only that my husband not be burdened with its communication, for it is I alone who am responsible for what has been said." So, in the very end of her book, she is still defending and protecting her husband, telling critics to come to her and not him.

**Karin Peter** 45:40

An amazing woman. And I love the fact that you were able to find these little insights into the humor, the mischievousness, the, the intellect that she showed as she wrote about her husband and about their life together. Just fascinating things. My favorite being she didn't want "obey" in her marriage vows, which that was a period of time where that would have been common to have it in there. And so, for her to not want it in there was very, very fascinating. So...

**Wendy Eaton** 46:13

Well, and I think it was pretty good that Joseph's response to her, we don't do that in our church. Now, that's me paraphrasing him.

**Karin Peter** 46:22

Right, I would never do that. Yeah.

**Wendy Eaton** 46:24

That was not something that was overly common within our Church at this time. So, I think that's pretty impressive for us as well at this time.

**Karin Peter** 46:34

So, what is your, like, favorite thing about Ruth Smith, as you've done all of this research? What's, what's the thing that really stays with you?

**Wendy Eaton** 46:44

I think the thing that has really struck me the most is really Fred. This isn't an era of history that I've particularly focused on, because I'm at the historic sites, and those are the stories that I need to tell regularly, I don't get into the early 1900s. What I know of the 1900s is largely what I grew up with and what have picked up over the last few years, and that terrible Supreme Directional Controls stuff that Fred M. is mostly known for, and her book humanizes him. And so, he, he's no longer this person that made some terrible decisions for the Church. I'm now getting a little bit more of a glimpse as to maybe why he was making some of these choices and it makes me want to go and study this, even though it's not something that I'm going to use on my day to day, giving tours out here in Nauvoo. Ruth was just, incredible to pick up everything about her in this book that broke a lot of preconceptions I had about women at this time period. You were either all about women's lib, or you were completely docile woman at home, and she landed squarely in the middle. I think she must have been very passionate about women having equal rights, but she also was very happy in her role raising her daughters, even though one of the stories she shares, she definitely is using her psychology skills on raising her daughters. So, she's using her intellect there in her parenthood as well.

**Karin Peter** 48:23

So, her intellect, when you began this episode, you, I don't know if you were quoting someone, or, or multiple ones, but you listed her as "Fred's intellectual contender". This kind of matched pair of a book ends of people who could really relate to one another, from shared interests, and also from well-developed sense of intellect and passion for education. And that shows.

**Wendy Eaton** 48:54

I think that's what made them so suited for one another.

**Karin Peter** 48:57

Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you, Wendy, for introducing us to Ruth Lyman Smith. Who is our next "Women in Community of Christ History" episode going to talk about?

**Wendy Eaton** 49:13

Well, if we continue on with the trajectory of the first ladies, that would be Nina Grenawalt Smith, who is Israel A. Smith's wife. And so, when Fred M. passed, he left his brother as successor. And so, he, and Nina were quite a bit older than any other prophet and first lady would have been when they stepped into those roles.

**Karin Peter** 49:40

Okay, well, we'll look forward to hearing her story. And I want to thank you again, for this. I know it takes a great deal of time to research and develop these, but gosh, we love hearing the stories, especially when, like today, it can be in the voice of the woman we're learning about. So, thank you. I look forward to our next episode. And if you, listener, have any questions for Wendy, or perhaps suggestions of women from Community of Christ history whom you'd like to hear their story, you can reach out to her at [w\\_eaton,w\\_e\\_a\\_t\\_o\\_n@cofchrist.org](mailto:w_eaton,w_e_a_t_o_n@cofchrist.org). In the meantime, this is "Cuppa Joe" part of *Project Zion Podcast*. I'm Karin Peter. Thanks for being with us.