

CuppaJoe | Women of the Restoration | Nina Smith

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Israel A. Smith, women, Nina Smith, Joseph Smith, music, community, Donald Smith

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'm your host, Karen Peter. Today's episode is part of our series on women in Community of Christ history. And we tell the stories of women and how they shaped led, offered ministry and had profound impact in the history of Community of Christ. Our guest who shares these stories with us is Wendy Eaton. Wendy is a favorite at Project Zion Podcast. Well, she's my favorite at Project Zion Podcast. I hope she's one of your favorites, as well. And we're always happy to have her as our guest. Wendy works at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois, and is the administrative assistant to the Historic Sites Foundation. And she has written for let's see, was it John Whitmer that your article was in this past...?

Wendy Eaton 01:27

Yeah, this this most recent publication of John Whitmer? My... I published for the first time.

Karin Peter 01:34

Exciting, very exciting. Well, we're quite proud of you. Glad to have you here with us. So today, we're going to be talking about a woman who may be a little unfamiliar, as many of the women's stories are. And in this, in the past several episodes we have been featuring the spouses of the presidents of the church, we started that with the three... how did we put this ... concurrent wives of Joseph Smith III right? Concurrent? Yeah. And, and learned an awful lot about them. And those are lovely stories. And we've kind of continued that through the wife of Frederick Madison Smith. And so today we're going to talk about the wife of Israel A. Smith, and her name is Nina Smith. So Wendy, what do we what do we know about Nina Smith?

Wendy Eaton 02:36

I didn't find quite as much information on Nina as I have some of the other women, but I have found some really lovely stories, including words from Nina herself. So I'm always happy when I can pull in the words of the women that I'm talking about. So they you just get a gist of what they were like you get their personality. So Nina was the youngest of seven children born to Francis and John Grenawalt. They were not church members, and they started their family in Canada. But before Nina was born, which was August 16, 1886, the family moved to Harrison County, Missouri. So just to orientate you geographically, because I didn't know where Harrison County was until I looked it up.

Karin Peter 03:26

Wait a minute, you're from Missouri,

Wendy Eaton 03:28

It's up north. So Harrison County, Missouri is the county directly south of Decatur, County, Iowa, which is where Lamoni is.

Karin Peter 03:40

Oh, OK

Wendy Eaton 03:41

So they're not affiliated with the church. But John being a farmer is drawn to the very fertile land of northern Missouri. So that's why they settled there. So as I said, Nina is born August 16 1886. And her father, being a very successful farmer, had developed a pretty good income, which was fortunate for his wife, Francis, because John did die while Nina was still young. He had left enough of a legacy that Francis was well established to raise her children. To make it a little easier, she decided to move out of the isolation of the country and into a local community that was pretty well established. It had good schools and had a lot of good programs for just outreach and socializing and those sorts of activities. And that community was Lamoni.

Karin Peter 04:40

Which probably was one of the few really well-established, well-rounded communities in the area, don't you think?

Wendy Eaton 04:46

I think so. I don't think there were too many bigger towns in this area simply because it was such an agricultural region at that time, still is to this day. So suddenly into Lamoni, Francis has many people extend friendships to her that draw her and her children into the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and they would all end up baptized in the church. Nina's brother Robert was a friend of Israel A. Smith who was one of Joseph Smith III's children. In fact, there's this great photo in church archives of Israel, Robert and another friend playing billiards together during Israel's wild years. Lovely photograph, I just love it. Robert introduces his sister to Israel, and he begins to seek her company. And during this time, she graduates from Lamoni High School and begins attending Graceland College studying music and elocution. She graduates from Graceland in 1902. In 1904, several church families including the Grenawalts, and the Smiths traveled to St. Louis, Missouri to attend the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. So this is a World's Fair, similar to a state fair. And Joseph Smith III in fact writes about this, and I've talked about this particular World's Fair in the episode with him and Ada. But the families are there, they have lodging in the area, the young folks head out to the park early one day, Francis, Nina's mother taking a little longer to get ready, and she's suddenly taken quite ill. There's very, there's no attempt, or there are attempts to reach her children, but they're not successful. When the kids (young adults) finally do arrive home that evening, they find that Francis is in a really terrible condition. They call Joseph III over so that he can offer a prayer of administration to Francis. And, in his memoirs, he describes Francis being stricken with apoplexy, which we would understand today is

similar to a stroke. She doesn't recover. And the Smiths, including Israel, are with Nina and her siblings as their mother dies. Joseph wrote, Israel was with the family in this tragic sorrow, and was of great assistance and comfort in the trying days which followed. They all return to Lamoni, and Francis is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery, which is the church sponsored cemetery, located very close to the Smith home, Liberty Hall. So in all of this, Nina is continuing her education, and even through the grief of losing her mother, she continues on getting as much education as she can. She moves to Columbia, Missouri, which is kind of smack dab in the middle of the state if you're not familiar, and attends Christian College, focusing on music education. She later attends Kansas State College in Manhattan, Kansas, and studies domestic science. And she writes twice later on for the "Mother's Home Column" of *The Saints Herald*. So this was a column that ran for many, many years in the *Herald*, where it featured women focused on women's issues and ideas and their sphere of influence. And so the domestic science would fall squarely in that in this time period. And the two articles that Nina wrote are all about some of these domestic skills she picked up the first talks about a cheese souffle she learned to make in school that Israel was very fond of. And the second featured a cake recipe she got from one of her sisters-in-law, that was a favorite of Joseph Smith III. Sharing those Smith family treasured recipes with the church and world at that point. Several young men are expressing interest in Nina, but Israel keeps her favor. He proposes and they are married by his father in Lamoni March 14 1908. Israel is 32, Nina is 22. She taught private music lessons at Graceland college while Israel worked at Herald House and continued his studies in law. He passed the Iowa bar exams in 1912, the same year that they become parents. Their first son, Joseph Perrin, being born in September of that year. family still living in Lamoni, and Joseph Perrin is named for his two grandfathers, so Perrin is a family name on Nina's side. Joseph, of course, Joseph Smith III, he's pretty proud of this little grandson carrying the name, Joseph Smith, for another generation. Unfortunately, he's a very sickly child, he has a lot of terrible allergies that would affect him his whole life. Nina and Israel are very protective of this little boy. While he's still very small the family moves to Independence. Israel's father is aging very quickly, and he's in the midst of his work on recording his memoirs, and the family moved to be near Joseph so that Israel can assist in this great work. Nina wants him to return to practicing law, but this family devotion keeps Israel at his father's side until his death. So Nina continues to work on her own giving private music lessons to add to the family income. When Joseph III dies in 1914, and his wife Ada dies in 1915, Israel in Nina move into their home to care for Israel's three younger brothers, Richard, William and Reginald. Nina now has four boys in her care until the following year, 1916, when she and Israel have their second son, Donald Carlos, making a very full household. Ruth Lewis Holman wrote a series of articles for the *Herald* in the 1950s, about featuring different women of the Reorganization. And she wrote that the three younger Smith boys, Richard, Wallace, and Reginald saw Nina as a sister and a mother... someone they could always go to someone who would always understand and always help them out. In 1929, I helped organize the Independence Missouri or Independence Music Club, which is an organization that she served as Vice President of. In the March 1927 issue of the Autumn Leaves magazine Nina wrote that the purpose of this club was to encourage a broader knowledge of music and musical literature. They planned special concerts, inviting guest lecturers and performers. They provided a fund for music students, and they established their club in a way that it would be able to carry on after they had left the organization themselves. Nina and her skills in music and music education is how people would remember her. After her death, this Independence Music Club establishes the Nina G Smith Memorial Loan Fund, which is a specific music scholarship for students at Graceland College, Graceland University now. Nina was a soprano. She sang in various choirs

including the Stone Church choir, the Stone Church Ladies Quartet, and the Aeolian Ladies Chorus. She served in the general church music department, and for 24 years, she sang with the independence Messiah Choir. Yeah, at least nine times to sing solos for that performance. So those who might not be familiar with the Messiah chorus in the independence and Kansas City area, it has been a treasure tradition. I think they're getting close to or have just passed 100 years. This is a big deal and Nina was there in the beginning years of it. The church is pretty excited by advances in technology, particularly the potential of radio in ministry. And so the church establishes a radio station and Nina becomes a regular performer on the radio station. So church members across the United States are able to hear Nina sing on a pretty routine basis. I would say that she becomes part of the radio ministry team. They probably would have been a little hesitant to apply that to a woman at that time. But I think it's very appropriate to say that. Nina's sister-in-law, Audentia Smith Anderson wrote of Nina, she's an especial favorite over the radio and appears regularly upon the program's broadcast by KLDS, a pioneer station in the field of broadcasting. Nina also served in the women's department of the church and was made an honorary member of the General Church Women's Council, which was starting in her later years. At the time of her membership, her health prevented her active participation, but she did her best to attend the socials especially General Conference teas and other gatherings during General Conference times. She was a very active member of the Independence Mother's Cub as well, which was not connected to the church. After graduating from high school, Nina's elder son Joseph attended the University of Missouri in Columbia. He had taken ill early in 1936. Word reached nine and Israel and they rushed to his side. I had mentioned his life being so filled with illness because of these many allergies he had. This caused a lot of respiratory distress and unfortunately, this led to his death in early 1936. His parents returned him back to Independence and nine enters an intense grief. It's so overwhelming that she struggles to find any of the joy or comfort that she had long held in music. For two years, she never sang and never taught music. And then she wrote that one day she was dusting her piano and suddenly felt the need to play and sing. She wrote, I found I still had a voice and I must try to use it again. Her friends are pleased and rally around her. As she's sang again for church services. They plan a special Sunday school event where she is going to sing several songs. The first song goes great, but in the performance of a song called "A Mother's Lullaby." She stopped mid song, walked out of the room and never sang again. (Oh) It's heart wrenching to think of a woman who had devoted so much of her education and her life to music that ... you completely understand that this grief would take that away from her but to for her to lose that comfort that she had always had in music. It's heartbreaking. And though this grief stops her music ministry, she continues to find other ways to contribute to her community. When her younger son Donald graduates college, the world is on the brink of World War Two, and the attack on Pearl Harbor 1941 led Donald to enlist in the United States Navy, which he served for four years through the war. While Donald is enlisted, Nina joins the American Red Cross with the Gray Ladies at the church hospital, the Independence Sanitarium, working with the soldiers who are recovering from their service, and she served in that role until 1946. That's the year that her brother-in-law Fred M. dies and the year her husband Israel becomes president of the church. Nina is now 60 years old. Israel is 70. And as the church's new First Lady, she focuses on community outreach. She tries to be as active as possible, but unfortunately, she has a heart attack while at work one day. It altered her life to the point that she is incredibly frail and needs to be much quieter. Her son Donald had married by this time. He and his wife Darlene moved to Independence to be near their parents. And the home that Nina and Israel live in is remodeled because she can't make it up and down the stairs. Israel sets his work schedule. So he's now president of the church he sets his work schedule so that he can

be home with Nina as much as possible. He leaves early in the morning to go into the office to catch up on correspondence and leave instructions for his counselors. Then he heads home to make breakfast for Nina, almost always including on her breakfast tray, a small vase with fresh flowers. In 1950, everything falls into place so that Israel feels he can leave Nina for a time. He needs to make an extended church visit to French Polynesia, New Zealand and Australia. And their daughter-in-law, Darlene, has the opportunity to attend some advanced surgical nursing training in Denver, Colorado. So Donald decides I'm going to move in with my mom for the time being. And so while Israel is out in the Pacific and Darlene is out in the western US, Donald and Nina's new grandson Jody move into the home so that Don can take care of Nina, and Nina can enjoy her grandson. Israel is gone for about three weeks and during that time Nina's last illness sets in. He returns home for a short time and then leaves to go to a High Priest gathering at Kirtland Temple in Ohio. On Sunday, October 8 1950, Israel's presiding over a morning prayer service in the Temple. At the close of the service, he walked into the entryway and was told his brother William needed to see him. Israel crossed the street to the Rigden house and William broke the news that Nina had died peacefully in her sleep at home. Arrangement is made for the two of them to fly back to Independence. Her funeral was held at the Stone Church, and she's buried at Mount Grove Cemetery in Independence. Nina and Israel had been married for 40 years. Donald and his family moved permanently into the home so that Israel wouldn't be alone. He carries on as Church President for another eight years with the support of his son and daughter in law and grandson. When he died in 1958, William Smith stepped into the role of Church President. Nina had been daughter in law to President Joseph Smith III, sister-in-law to President Fred M. Smith, wife to President Israel, and sister/mother to President William. That's a pretty unique collection of titles that Nina can claim.

Karin Peter 21:27

Absolutely.

Wendy Eaton 21:30

So six months before her death, was the General Conference for the church that April, and Nina was strong enough that she was able to attend several of the General Conference women's activities, including which hit close home to me, a dramatic sketch of the life of five leading women in church history, which is the General Council of Women enjoyed doing ... something that Nina herself had participated in. And someone, we don't know who but, someone had the foresight to write down words that Nina shared to this gathering at this reenactment of the lives of five women. Nina spoke, "In the early years of our dramatic club, we dramatized the same things. I was chosen Emma Smith, and later mother, Lucy. Those were interesting days, but this morning, I have realized how rich my life has been. I was not able to enjoy some of the saints that were dramatized. But I remember Marietta Walker well. Ruth Smith was very dear and close to me. And one time she said 'Nina, we understand each other.' The life of Emma Smith was made more interesting to me by hearing her oldest granddaughter Emma Smith McCallum tell of the year she spent in her grandmother's home. The years have passed since Emma Smith was a girl and a noble woman, and we all wish to emulate her virtues. My greatest desire is to be faithful to my responsibility. I ask your prayers that the Lord will continue to bless me." Among Nina's keepsakes after her death was found a poem by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The family shared this poem with the *Saints Herald* to include with Nina's obituary. And so I'd like to close with this poem that was important enough to Nina that she kept it for many years, and then the family knew it was

important enough that they kept it going with her memory. So this poem again, Harriet Beecher Stowe is titled "The Other World." It lies around us like a cloud, a world we do not see. Yet the sweet closing of an eye may bring us there to be. Its gentle breezes fan our cheeks amid our worldly cares. It's gentle voices, whisper love, and mingle with our prayers. So still, so soft, so sweet, they glide so near to press, they seem, they lull us gently to our rest and melt into our dreams. Thus, in the hour of rest, it's easy now to see how easy and how sweet to pass the hour of death may be. To close the eye and close the ear wrapped in a dream of bliss, and gently drawn in loving arms to swoon from that to this. So Nina was a beautiful musical woman, and even after she lost the comfort that music brought to her, poetry is a very musical form of writing and in her last kit that you can look at in her last books and collections, they found this beautiful poem that the family was able to hold on to and share with the church to remember Nina.

Karin Peter 25:11

A lovely gentle poem. Yeah. Which sounds a lot like her personality. Thank you, Wendy, something really struck me when you were sharing about her and that is that that even though she was so involved with the church, she also managed to stay involved in your community and and community activities that weren't sponsored by the church, but that rather were efforts by the entire community. And I find that really commendable. A several times you talked about their focus, being one of outreach and looking outward and partnering with others, and not just inward and, and sticking with the same small group. So I love that. That was really interesting to know. So, Nina, and her journey, parts of it so tragic parts of it so lovely, and I think will touch many people's lives. Is there anything about the rest of her children? Did they participate in other ways? Or does the whole kind of focus of church history now transfer to William Wallace Smith.

Wendy Eaton 26:28

I haven't pursued Donald's life too much. I know that he and his wife did not stay married. But I think they stayed married through the rest of Israel's life. And culturally, amid the church members at that time, you kind of give a side eye to somebody who's divorced. So that could be why he didn't step into church leadership. I think it also could be that Israel understood who was to follow him, and that was his brother. And it does make a very interesting history for us to look at 90 years of three brothers following their grandfather, and then their father into church leadership. And then we have one more family member, and then we get big changes. And in light of everything the world church is sitting at right now with looking to another shift in leadership. I think it's interesting to see that we've never really stuck with one method of calling a leader. And I'm interested to see what happens next.

Karin Peter 27:37

Well, you and all the rest of us participating in this era of discerning. So, what a great way to end this little series that we've had. Now, we talked a bit before we started recording that we're going to take a little pause on spouses, because the next spouses of presidents of the church, as you said, all have people living who have living memory of those people. So W. Wallace Smith's spouse, Wallace B. Smith, and Grant McMurray. So we will take a little break and talk to family before we talk about how we might honor their memory in our episodes, as well. So any ideas where we might go from here Wednesday?

Wendy Eaton 28:23

I've got several different women that I've got my eye on that, personally have an interest for me to pursue, but I think have some pretty great stories that I think listeners would enjoy. So I haven't narrowed it down yet. But there's a few out there.

Karin Peter 28:38

Well, that's an excellent teaser. We'll end with that. Before we close up. Do you have any last comments you want to make about Nina's story?

Wendy Eaton 28:47

I think just to reiterate what you've said she was a gentle person. And she was very committed to her communities, whether that was church community, local community, or I think of her work with the American Red Cross that would essentially be a global community to see that outreach that she had and compassion she had for those around her.

Karin Peter 29:13

a good example for the rest of us as we participate in our faith journey as well. Well, thank you, as always for joining us, Wendy. And I look forward to our next installment as you narrow down your choices to who we're going to talk about. So we'll continue the cup of joe series women in Community of Christ history. If you have any questions for Wendy or perhaps suggestions of women from Community of Christ history. You can reach her at W Eaton, w e a t o n at sea of christ.org. This is Cup of Joe part of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter, thanks so much for listening.