

Cuppa Joe | Women of the Restoration | Estella Wight

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Karin Peter, Wendy Eaton

Karin Peter 00:29

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 continuing series. We don't know how long we're going to do this series. As long as long as Wendy is willing to research, I guess that's how long we'll do this. And it is our series on Women in Community of Christ History, and we tell their stories and how they shaped and led and offered ministry and had profound impact on the history of Community of Christ. As always, our guest is Wendy Eaton. She's one of our very favorite guests here at Project Zion Podcast, and we're always happy to have her. Wendy has worked at multiple Restoration historic sites, has served, and are you still the administrative assistant for Historic Sites Foundation Wendy?

Wendy Eaton 01:26

Yes, that is still part of my job.

Karin Peter 01:28

That still is and the archives, isn't it? Now?

Wendy Eaton 01:32

Yeah, I help out in the archives for part of the week, and then the rest of the week I'm with the Historic Sites Foundation. So I get to be in the temple and in the auditorium. So, it's kind of fun to have that that shared space.

Karin Peter 01:46

Oh, absolutely. That's great. Well, we're just so glad that you take some time to research some women from our shared history so that we can learn a little bit more here at Project Zion. So today, we're going to be talking about Estella Wight, and I don't know anything about Estella Wight, so I'm looking forward to hearing her story. So who is she, and why was she of interest? That you wanted to do this podcast Wendy, that you chose her as a topic.

Wendy Eaton 02:24

So I was over lunch one day, part of the fun of working in the library is I am surrounded by church resources. And over lunch one day, I was looking through the 1926 volume of *Autumn Leaves*. So again, this has been one of my favorite places to go, to find women in church history, because they were so vital to that magazine, and in the August issue, as I'm just looking through the pictures, this is one of the times when they're very heavy in photographs within the magazine. And one of the photos stood out to me, just a simple black and white, of course, image of two women relaxing together on a yard somewhere, and it was captioned, "Stella and Marcella, Dubbed by the Latter, Inspiration and Perspiration." And I, I read through, it was a very brief article. It was basically a who's who in the church and doing work for the church. And this was a series that they were running, and they featured these two women in it. So, the two of them were authors, and they were pretty feisty sounding women based off the things that were in the article. Marcella is quoted describing herself that she's on this side of 40, small, brown hair and muddy brown eyes, and she never quote answered yes to a man, so I'm free to follow my profession of teaching.

Karin Peter 04:07

Oh, my goodness. Marcella had attitude. We like her.

Wendy Eaton 04:12

Estella was also pretty, slight of build. She had gray eyes, and her hair was now quite gray, and she also never married. The two of them were friends for a time, they lived together, and they supported each other in their work, which was essentially children's publications. Both of them were published authors of children's books within the church Herald House Publication system. And at the time, I was able to find a lot more information on Estella. So, we're going to do her, and I'm going to put Marcella off to the side and keep an eye out for more information on her to see if we might circle around to her one day. Yeah.

Karin Peter 04:59

Marcella never said yes to a man Exactly. Welcome back to her.

Wendy Eaton 05:06

So, Sarah Estella Wight was born in late November in 1874 in Newtonia, Missouri, which I don't think exists anymore because I wasn't able to find it, but I think it must have been up in the northern part. She describes very vibrant farm grounds where she grew up, and that was a very fertile area at this point in time. She was the youngest of either six or eight children. The sources differ on that, but she was the youngest of Eliza and Lyman Wight. So her father, Lyman was the son of Lyman white, who's the man who led a colony from the pineries of Wisconsin down to Texas. So, he was a very active early church leader and led one of the separate groups after the death of Joseph Smith Jr. So, he was a pretty well known person, and Estella was a grandchild of his. So her mother, Eliza, also has a Nauvoo connection. She was one of the many English immigrant families that settled there in the 1840s. And so, with encouragement, Estella wrote her biography. Sort of, she her biography doesn't read as a typical biography would, but there was a lot of great information in it. So, I was able, again, to use her own words to tell her story for the most part. And so that encouragement came from President of the church, Fred M Smith. He had cornered the staff at Herald House, and he said, essentially to them, she has worked for you for a very long time. The people want to know who she is. And so, the staff asked

Stella to write her biography. And she said, No, she had no interest in that. And so, this is all coming out of a *Saints Herald* article, which is where her biography was published. And they well, you find the quote, "They begged, they pleaded and tried mild bribery, but she kept saying no." And finally, the editor of the *Herald* at that time, a man named Leonard Lee, he gave up, and that's when Estella said she would do it, because she didn't like that he was willing to give up. And so, I think that's a very interesting part of her personality. He would have been quite a bit younger than her and fairly new to publication. She had been working in it for 25 years at this point, and this was her way to keep him persistent in pursuing a story that he was told to go after. So, she tells her story and it's published in the *Herald*, and that's again where I was able to get a lot of my information. So, as I said, it's not told quite like a regular biography. She was a storyteller. She wrote children's stories, and there's a few points when you get into this rhythm of reading her story that she says, Oh, I'm sorry if this is too young for the readers of the *Herald*. Oh, I'm sorry that I'm writing for a much younger age, but this is who I write for. So she breaks her own narrative by apologizing to reiterate that she's a children's author, and she's sharing these beautifully told stories about her childhood and how she gets started working. And I just wanted to pull some of those out to share with you. So, I talked about growing up in Newtonia, Missouri, and it was this family farm on top of a hill that had a woods and orchards. They had livestock and, of course, grains and gardens. And she talked about what a cheerful man her father was, and how he had been very skilled at carpentry, made a lot of the furniture that filled the family home, and how her mother prized education above anything else, but coming from a very poor background herself and the family of a farmer with six to eight children, you don't have a lot of extra funds, and so she encouraged her children to read the church publications, which at this point predominantly would have been the *Saints Herald*. But just a few years before Estella is born, a children's newspaper is started within the church called, *Zion's Hope*, and this was a treasured part of the family household when the *Zion's Hope* would arrive and the children would have this newspaper just for them to read. And so, Stella grew up reading this newspaper and surrounded by this very fertile, vibrant farm life, and I think that really helped stimulate her imagination. Her older sister, one of her older sisters, named Sina, wrote a few stories that were submitted to *Zion's Hope*, and they were published. And Estella decided as a child to show one of her stories to her older sister, and her sister encouraged her to send it into Marietta Walker, which she did. And Marietta not only accepted this story to be published in *Zion's Hope*, but she encouraged Estella that whenever you have another story, send it in. We want to see this. Now, we don't have a date on this, but I'm guessing she was an older child, maybe what we would consider a young teenager, and she's becoming an established author because of the encouragement of her mother, her older sister and Marietta Walker. And, at one point, Sina and Estella travel to Lamoni, which makes me think this must be northern Missouri, probably fairly close to Lamoni, if two girls are traveling there on their own. And they meet Marietta, and Estella wrote that she wanted to help Marietta. She was desirous of serving the church in some way, and that became a driving force in her very young life. And so, as I said, she drew on nature for her writings. Her first stories were mostly about animals, both wild and tame, are on the farm. And in her biography, she wrote that, "I began writing during childhood, in my adolescent years, when I lived most of the time outdoors." And let me get to the quote she was inspired by the flowers, the chickens, the cats. "My first published stories were written about my favorite cat. My second about a wild flower. These were the things I knew and loved." So she's taking her inspiration as a child to create stories for other children within the church. And she later says, "I may be climbing rapidly towards 60, but I don't seem to feel so terribly far away from that little girl who used to love to lie in the grass and watch the ants on their winding trails." So, she just had

a very powerful way with words and a very creative outlook on life. After she graduated as much education as she could get in their little country school, she took a course in stenography and went to work at her brother in law's law office. So, stenography, for those who might not know, it's a form of shorthand note taking, and it's still used today. It takes some skill to be able to use it and to read it, but at that time, it was a skill that was very much in demand, especially within the church, and so word came out that they were looking for a stenographer to work for the church, who could travel to reunions, to take notes at business meetings and to sit with the evangelists as they were giving blessings, and record those blessings. Estella applied and was hired. She worked for the church for about a four-year period, traveling to reunions. And I really wish there was more information in her biography on this. I think it would be so fascinating to hear what it was like for her to sit right in the heart of the activity of these business meetings, and then to sit in the far more quiet setting of an evangelist blessing, and to be able to record these things, of course, evangelist blessings, that would be very confidential, so maybe that's why there's not a lot of recorded information about it. But it's fascinating that she spent four years of her 20s about age time, doing this job for the church that was very much necessary. Like I said, four years. By that time, there were a lot more stenographers in the church, so they didn't have to spend the money to help her travel to get to all these different reunions. And so, she starts to look for another job. She's now in her mid 30s. She's been writing for *Zion's Hope*, that children's magazine, for about 15 years.

Karin Peter 15:08

Oh my goodness.

Wendy Eaton 15:08

So, if you get a hold of these early copies of *Zion's Hope*, they're very fragile, but they can be found, and we have sets at the library. She doesn't write under her name. She writes under a pen name, which was pretty common, especially in *Zion's Hope*. she goes by the name Pebbles, which I think is adorable. That's a name she chose. And there's around 70 short stories that she wrote under the pen name Pebbles, and that's just what I was able to find going through the catalog system. There might be even more than that, and I did not go and find every single one of them. I just pulled open a couple to take a look and read through those short stories. And so here she is, she's in her 30s, she's out of her job with the church, but she desperately wants to serve the church in some way. She's applying to different jobs as a stenographer, and she has two possibilities, but the spring conference for the church of 1907 is coming up, and she decides to put off applying or accepting either of these stenography jobs, to go meet with Marietta Walker and to discuss with her, is there a place within the church for me to work? She might have been thinking as a stenographer, but as listeners have heard many stories of Marietta Walker, it was much bigger than that. So, Marietta is getting on in years. At this point, she's quite deaf. She's not able to do all the work that she had done for many years for the church, especially in publications. And so she offers to Estella to become her personal assistant and to help with her editorial work for Herald House, her Herald Publishing at that time. And Estella accepts it. She moves into Marietta's home, which was pretty common. Marietta had quite a few single ladies who were living with her in her home. It just made sense there in Lamoni. And a typical day for Estella would be leaving the house in the morning to go to the Herald Publishing House work, at first answering some of Elbert A Smith's correspondence, then going to work for editing, especially with *Zion's Hope*, and a few of the other publications of the church, but mostly *Hope*. And then, she would come home in the evenings,

and she would either be personally trained by Marietta, or eventually she would start taking English literature classes at Graceland College. I never found any documentation that showed that she graduated college, but she at least was taking some university level classes to improve her writing and editing skills. So this is a time, 1907 Lamoni, there was a massive fire at Herald Publishing House in January, and so January is the fire. Estelle was hired April, May time period. So she starts working in the temporary office until *Herald* is able to build their new building. They're not there much longer before they move the presses to Independence, Missouri, and Estella moved with them. So, her Sundays, she was occupied at the Lamoni brick church, teaching the junior boys Sunday school class, which I could only applaud her. I've taught those classes before myself. And then eventually, she was moved up to teach the intermediate, slightly older boys' and girls' classes. And she noticed that these kids really didn't have good Sunday School material that was for their age. This is a time period we've talked about Christiana Salyards, and she, all the work that she was doing creating Sunday School material, but she was one woman trying to do, if I remember correctly, three different age ranges of Sunday School material, and more was needed. And so Estella and Marietta worked together and talked to the publication board about trying to help with this process and get a more varied age range. They approve, and eventually, out of this was born a new children's magazine. So I've talked about *Zion's Hope*. I've mentioned *Autumn Leaves* many times over in all these different episodes we've had. These have been in publication for decades. *Hope* was aimed at children, very young, like three and four years old to maybe about nine. *Autumn Leaves*, again, we would call them teenagers, young adults. And so, Estella aimed right in the middle for about that 10 to 14 age range, and they created *Stepping Stones* magazine. And this magazine, you might recognize it. I recognized it because I remember seeing *Stepping Stones* magazines as a child. It was in publication for 60 years. And if you went to a congregation like I did as a child, they held on to those and continued to use them for many years after and in that 60-year time period, Estella wrote for nearly half of that, so about 30 years of that was under her direct editorial-ship of the magazine. So truly, a massive amount of work and an incredible amount of magazines and Sunday school lessons and reading material that was put into the hands of children within the church, and she said of the workload, because this was a massive workload, she said, "busy years when spent at tasks that are near to your heart are not unhappy ones, You may grow weary to the point of exhaustion sometimes, but afterward, you don't begrudge anything you've ever done because of the joy and the satisfaction it has brought." So, for five years, like I said, she's working up in Lamoni, getting *Stepping Stones* started. Then they moved to Independence, and she, as I said, moves with them, and she lives in Independence for the rest of her life. And though she focuses on *Stepping Stones*, she continues to contribute to *Zion's Hope* and to *Autumn Leaves*. Not as much for *Autumn Leaves*, she focused more on the younger kids, and it was in *Autumn Leaves*, though, that I found a really fun serialized story. So, this is 1918. Elbert A Smith is the editor in charge of *Autumn Leaves* at this point, and he pulls together 12 authors that were regular contributors to all the church children's publications, including himself, his cousin Vita, Estella, we talked about Marcella, she's included in this too, and they do a joint work together. And so, the first month January, one author started a story, and in February, a second author built on that story, and it was included, the first chapter in January, 2 in February, and so on. Estella had the November slot. So, she had the 11th, and Marcella got to wrap the whole thing up in December. And in the January 1919 issue, Elbert wrote of this, this massive project, saying how much fun these 12 authors had doing this big writing project together. And I think that they would have seen it in their terms as a Zionite community building, and I think today that we would look at it as blessings of community, these 12 individuals who got together

and created this story. Now I have to admit, I have not chased down this story to read it. I had enough to try to read of Stella's works to get ready for this episode, but I'll have to go find it someday, just to see how much fun that they were having with this work. It's pretty exciting to see these different things happening all those years ago.

Karin Peter 23:55

And that's a, that's actually a technique that writers do in series now, where you'll get a group of writers together, they'll write a detective story or something else, and it'll be different chapters by different authors. So that's a wonderful way of bringing what's in the culture into the life of the church.

Wendy Eaton 24:14

And like you said, this is, this is a common writing technique. This is seen all over the place, and that's something that I saw over and over again in researching Estella, because I've always liked history. I love old children's books, and my favorite books of all are L/ Frank Baum's Wizard of Oz books, and that's in the same time period of writing. And so, you see all these different things reflecting from the broader culture, and now I'm seeing it directly within the church writing community. And it was just really neat to see that a lot of the children's poems that I've come across, they feel very much like AA Milnes Winnie the Pooh, his writing within the Pooh books and the different poetry books that he did for children. It's it's very similar, and it's just fun to see all of that reflecting back and forth between the bigger community and this smaller group. So, as I mentioned, she wrote over 70 short stories under that name of Pebbles, for *Zion's Hope* not near as much for *Autumn Leaves*, and I didn't even try to count the *Stepping Stones* contributions. As editor, she was writing poems, short stories and serialized stories, and so I decided to just focus on those serialized stories. So again, just a reminder for people, if you're not familiar what this is, it was pretty common in broader newspapers at this time, but then in also the church publications for an author to tell a story, like in the January issue of the *Herald*, a story would be started, and then in February it would continue. And this was happening in the children's publications as well, and that's how Estella put out bigger works of writing that she did. She had at least four different stories that were serialized. I think there were more, but these four were later put together and published in book form. So, that was pretty exciting to see that, that these stories were popular enough at the time that the effort was made to put them out as books. Now it's interesting because Herald Publishing didn't really want to spend the money to publish books, especially children's books and novels. And so there was an effort made to raise funds to specifically contribute to, basically a kickstarter to get these books published. And when you read through some of these issues of *Zion's Hope*, especially the early ones, you start seeing this little column called "Birth Offerings," and so families would, or congregations, perhaps would, send in maybe just a few pennies to have their child's name published in the *Zion's Hope* newspaper at basically a birth announcement, But to see your child's name in a newspaper, it's exciting to see that kind of thing that still happens a lot. Well, I don't know newspapers aren't quite so common today, but I remember growing up and you see the birth announcements with the newspapers. So these birth offerings, for a time, they designated the funds to specific projects. And one of the projects was what was called the Birth Offering books. And that's where Estella's books were published, was within this Birth Offering series. And so, they had a goal of \$100, so families contributing little bits as they can, and when they got to the \$100 they were able to publish the first book, and that it wasn't Estella's, it was somebody else's book, but they published the first book, and in the back of the book, they list the children's names again. And so, not only did you get

to see your child's name in a newspaper you were subscribing to, but if you bought the book, you had your child's name within this church publication as well. It's a little bit of a wily technique for *Herald*, but it worked, and they had so many gifted writers that the books are pretty good. Now you have to read them with a grain of salt. This is still early 1900s This is still a church theology that we treat with respect, we treat with a little bit of caution, because this is still "one true church" era. And you gotta watch some of the things that are being pushed, but it's still exciting to see all of this happening and how it just exploded into this, this massive publication. I think there were at least 12 books that were published in this Birth Offering series. So, 12 children's books that the families within the church sponsored to get going because they wanted to have these books available to their children to have to read. And it's, it's just a really neat idea, and it's something that you still kind of see today. I was in a congregation here in Missouri just about a month and a half ago, and it happened to be the guy who was preaching that day. It was his birthday, and during morning announcements, they sing happy birthday. And he came down from the rostrum with his handful of change and dropped in a special offertory bucket. And this stirred memories within me, because I'm studying Estella and this "Birth Offerings." I'm seeing this happen as he dropped 80 some cents into the bucket, a penny for each year of his life. And I remember back to the early 1990s when I was a child, we had a jar in the back of the sanctuary that was designated for the Independence Temple Endowment, and it was encouraged with us kids to put our change into that jar. And so, these "Birth Offerings," they might not be called that anymore, but they're still happening within the church today, and it's pretty neat to see it getting started back late 1890s and growing into what it is today. A lot of these, I know this congregation I was at, the fund was designated. I don't remember now what it was, but they had a designated idea for any of the money that was raised through this birth offering jar that they had. It's just really neat to see all those connections through history pulling into today. So, I wanted to bring up one other thing about church publications before we jump directly back to Estella, and I was brought to the attention of an article in the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal. This is volume 25. An article David Howlett wrote. And David Howlett helps with church history and helping us share the stories. He's an incredibly gifted storyteller himself, but he wrote about the social justice causes of the early church through literature. And so, he didn't get into Estella, but he talked about some of the other women authors of the time. And so, it's a really neat article. Again, it's volume 25 of the John Whitmer Journal, and the title is, "Zion as Fiction, Gender, Early RLDS Novels and the Politics of Place," he focused more on adult-oriented novels. And it was between 1891 and 1939 and there were, let me see, 16 novels published that he puts into this social justice, these social issues that the people were concerned about at the time. And these 16 novels, four of them were written by men, so 11 or were 12 were written by women. And of those four written by men, Elbert A Smith wrote three of them. So, it was mostly women carrying this idea of social justice. And so, this is, you think women's rights prohibitions, kind of it gets thrown in there too at this point in time. But then the economy and the struggles of widows. These are all reflected in these novels, and it's just really neat to see these again. You have to read them with the grain of salt because of the time period they're written in, but it's a neat collection of books, and he does a good job covering them in that story, in that article that he wrote.

Karin Peter 33:19

That's also an interesting aspect of ministry and leadership within the church, in the Ministry of Women that wasn't really acknowledged as ministry in the way that we would think that the men were acknowledged at that period of time. So, it wasn't preaching, it wasn't serving as an officer, General

Officer of some kind. But if you're, if you're writing books that the church is reading, whether it's adult or children, you are influencing the minds and the hearts and the development of the people who read your work. So women had a huge influence in that time through this kind of writing.

Wendy Eaton 34:01

It kind of snowballed my women in church history, just finding that article by David, and I'm like, man, this is this is so much information I could take in and keep moving with is pretty exciting.

Karin Peter 34:15

I sense more episodes in the future coming from that particular article.

Wendy Eaton 34:19

A lot of novels to read. But speaking of novels, I did read two of Estella's published novels. So, two of them I just kind of flipped through. They're right about 100 pages. They're very much young children's stories. I decided to pull the two books that seemed to get published over and over again into, I think, the 1950s so I think these were two very popular books. And so the first one was titled, *In the Shelter of a Little Brown Cottage*, and initially it was published in *Stepping Stones* magazine, so this nine to 14 age range, and breaking it up into chunks that the kids could absorb, it was spread across 38 issues, so well over two years of information, of content for *Stepping Stones*, was dedicated to telling this story, and then the sequel, *A Vineyard Story*, it was graduated up to *Autumn Leaves*. And so, the older readers could take bigger chunks of information. It was spaced out over 17 issues, still over a year. But you get the idea these are substantial books that she had created. So, *In the Shelter of the Little Brown Cottage*, I read this one, cover to cover. The other one I'd skimmed because I got hooked on the story, but *in The Shelter*, it covers two families over the course of a year, and they're living in a fictional town somewhere in the Midwest, probably Iowa. It may have been Missouri, but I'm guessing it was probably Iowa, and it was a fictional town called Banforth. It's two families, and the first was the Warren family. It's widowed Mrs. Warren and her four children, 17 year old, Janie, the only son, Ned, around 12 year old, Lou and the youngest, 10 year old, Madeline. So it opens with Ned and Lou, the middle children sacrificing a lot so that their older sister Janie, can graduate from high school, because when she graduates, she can get a teaching job, and that would help alleviate the poor conditions that the family was living in because their mother was widowed. And so Jamie graduates, there's this whole wonderful making her a graduation dress section within one of the chapters. It's really fun. It's, it reminds you of the old sketch of making the dress out of the curtains that you see in a lot of different movies. But so she graduates, she gets a teaching job in North Dakota. So the family is not happy that she's going to be so far away, but they desperately need this income, so she is sent off on the train to settle up in North Dakota for a year. The rest of the family continues in Banforth, and the chapters alternate back and forth between North Dakota and this little town in probably Iowa. The other family that they focus on are the Claytons. They're new to town and elder Clayton is a missionary for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and he's getting his family settled quickly, because he's gotta get off on his mission. And so it's, it's Mrs. Clayton, and then two children, a 17 year old named Robert and a few years younger, a daughter named Mammy, which is a very early 1900s name.

Karin Peter 38:17

I was gonna say that about Ned as well here anymore.

Wendy Eaton 38:22

So Robert and Mammy are incredibly popular at school. Robert is a sports hero, so he gets football stories within this which, of course, would have caught the attention of boys reading this story, and probably some of the girls as well. And Mammy is incredibly kind, and so they quickly make friends, but then the community finds out that they are LDS church members, and that's when you start to get into the portion where you have to take this with a grain of salt, because they're defending their church in ways that we would not today, and some of the theology that they're defending their church with, especially the issue of polygamy that's going on in this point. Even though the Utah church is past it at this time, it's still a big part of their defending of their church. And eventually, as you're reading these two stories happening up in North Dakota and then down in Iowa, you figure out that elder Clayton is up in North Dakota. So, the Warrens are not church members at the beginning of the book, but by the end of the books, they have been baptized and they've established a congregation. And so Janie, it's, it's a very common trope for children's literature, especially in the Midwest. Within the United States, she's teaching in her classroom when a blizzard just explodes around them, and this would be just a few years after the great Blizzard that's sometimes called the children's blizzard. So this would very much inspiring part of the story. But Janie prays. She had been to a couple of the missionary meetings, but she wasn't too sure about this whole RLDS business, but she prays, and when she's able to get all her students through this storm safely, she decides, well, I better get baptized now. And so it's a charming book. It's incredibly predictable, but maybe I've just read enough children's books of this time that I found it very predictable, but it was just it was so well written, and I just found the story captivating, so I wasn't planning to read the sequel. I'm like, I'm just gonna pick one book and go with it. But like I said, the story caught my attention enough, and then I also came across an editorial from Elbert A Smith within *Autumn Leaves*. And so Estella is in the midst of writing the sequel. And the sequel is called *A Vineyard Story*, and so again, it's being printed serially, and there's a lot of chatter going on, especially in the Sunday schools, about what's going to happen next in this book, especially since Janie and Robert are now dating. Are they going to get engaged? Are they not going to get engaged? What's going to happen? Everybody's invested in this story, and so Elbert drops into Estella's office one day, and he asked her, what's going to happen? I guess that they had gotten to the end of one chapter, and Robert had proposed, but that's where she ended the chapter. And so he was like, well, give me the inside scoop what's going on. And I love her response to him. And so I'm going to quote portions of this editorial that Elbert writes for *Autumn Leaves'* readers at this time period. "She said to me, I've been trying for a long time to find out from those in a position to know, especially the sisters who have given the fateful answer, just what one says under such circumstances." So basically, translation, I've been talking to the Sisters of the church who have been proposed to, and said yes, and I want to know how they responded. And she said that she wasn't getting answers from them. Well, this could be a little bit of leftover Victorian society. You don't talk about things like that, but I think she was genuinely curious. She had never married. Nobody had ever proposed to her. She wanted the experience to be able to write this faithfully, and so she turns to him, she's like, Well, how did, how did your wife respond when you proposed? And he backtracks and changes the subject. He gets all embarrassed. I just get this picture. Elbert A Smith is one of those church leaders that we often not intentionally put up on a pedestal to worship, but we deeply respect his contributions to the church. And the fact that this, this just very unassuming little old lady, has completely embarrassed, just because he wanted to find out what's happening next in the story. So of course, I had to skim through the rest of the

book to see what happens in the story. And so the sequel, *A Vineyard Story*, It covers seven years. And so it covers a lot more time than the first book, but she had a lot to that she wanted to get included. And so the families have continued on. It starts immediately after all the Warrens had been baptized, Janie again, the oldest who had gone up to North Dakota, she has found a job in Banforth, so the family's happy that she doesn't have to leave, and so this couple years passes, she's teaching at the school there in town, and her brother and then Robert's sister are able to go off to Graceland College. Robert wasn't able to go to Graceland because he was in a similar position, helping support the family at home while dad's off being a missionary, so he just goes to a local university. But he and Janie do end up engaged, and not long after their engagement, he's getting ready to graduate college and goes off to the Spring General Conference, and at the General Conference, so here he's newly engaged, he's about to graduate, and he's called and ordained to be a seventy. So, happening very quickly, and they give him a missionary post that they say is going to be a five-year commitment in the South Pacific islands. Yes, oh my, so they encourage him. You know, we know you're engaged. You ought to get married and take her with you. Now this is very art imitating life. When you read some of the earliest accounts of the missionaries who were committing to very long-term missions. They went without their spouses. And there were issues that came up. And this isn't the time and place to go into it, but if you're interested in some of those issues. F, Henry Edwards, did I get the name right? He wrote a book. F, Edward Butterworth, I knew I mix those two up all the time. F Edward Butterworth, he wrote a book titled, *Roots of the Reorganization*, which is a good introduction to some of the missionary efforts in the South Pacific. So back to the story. Jamie's family are happy she's getting married. Happy she's marrying a good church boy, not too happy that they're going to be going to the other side of the world for a five-year commitment, but being good church people now, they're supportive of their decision to go off into the unknown and pursue this. And so Janie and Robert are now off in the South Pacific. They never named the island, which I kind of wish that Estella had just picked an island, but it's just out in the South Pacific somewhere. They're out there. Their families are back, Ned and Mammy able to graduate from Graceland. Lou is doing the best she can to keep the household together without her older brother and older sister there, and it all gets tied up very nicely in a bow at the end of their five year mission, and they have a daughter now, Lou has gotten married. I didn't pick up who was happening. Maybe Ned and Mammy got married too. I don't know. I didn't read the book in detail. I'll have to go back, out of respect to Estella, and read it more thoroughly, but I picked up enough of the story to just get this very rosy glow image of the life of a missionary, which was not rosy by any means, but just this lovely fairy RLDS idealism that's happening within that story, they would it was just charming. I loved it.

Karin Peter 47:26

So I'm thinking about some of the many people I know who actually served those kinds of missions in my lifetime, and went and served in that same way. And I know some of some of the good stories and some of the struggles that happen there. But I think if I'm writing for young people and want them very much to have an experience that what we would call a faith building experience, I probably would only tell the high points as well, so the rest later on.

Wendy Eaton 48:01

If you share any of the low points, it's the ones that they easily remedy, and it's not that stressful. So...

Karin Peter 48:06

Absolutely, because, because, after all, if I'm a kid and I'm reading, I don't want it to be something that's going to cause upset.

Wendy Eaton 48:16

So, as I mentioned, these two books, they're published multiple times. They're a little hard to find today because they are very much older books and a small audience, but the first one, *In the Shelter of the Little Brown Cottage*, you can find it on Google books and read it for free, just again, if you seek it out and read it, remember, you're reading very dated children's literature, and don't start preaching sermons from how Ned and mammy are, or Robert and Mammy are defending their church, because theology is not that great. Theology. Exactly. So, to start to wrap things up as we started, it was the 25th anniversary of Estella working in publication for the church that she's encouraged to write this biography and to mark her 30th anniversary, Elbert A Smith gave the order to stop all the machines. So, if you've ever been in an old press house, you know how loud it is. He orders to stop all the machines so that they could have a little celebration. He gives her a gift, and he makes a lovely speech. And in August of 1947, 40 years of service. She's 73 years old, she finally decides to retire, and they have another celebration there at Herald Publishing and another article within the *Herald* to talk about this accomplishment of how long Estella has been looking after the literary needs of the youth of the church, she retires. She only lives a few years longer, not quite 10 years. She dies in Independence. Her body's taken up to Lamoni and she's buried at Rose Hill Cemetery. So next time I'm up in Lamoni, I have another grave to find when I'm there. A remarkable collection of work that she contributed to the church as a whole, and in this whole process, I was just astonished by the literary efforts of the women of the church. I've covered things with Sunday School material and some of the things that Marietta Walker has done, especially with *Autumn Leaves*, but I truly started to get an idea of the impact that the women had on the needs that the children had at this time, and getting books into their hands, and probably fairly affordable books, because it would have been a luxury still at this time period, and it was just exciting to see all these different works and to read the incredibly charming, sappy story of hers. It was great fun.

Karin Peter 51:27

So as you have gone through to prepare for this particular episode, Wendy, what did you discover was your like favorite bit? Because I can tell you my favorite bit is still Marcella. I never said yes to a man. So what is your favorite bit from today's episode or that you learned about Estella?

Wendy Eaton 51:47

I was reading back through my notes to get ready to record this. The thing that stuck out was that quote that I shared about the workload that she was under that the one of the busy years when you're working at something that's dear to your heart, even though you work to exhaustion at times, you don't begrudge the effort that you put in. And it was a really good reminder to me, it's been a rough year with the sale of the historic sites in Kirtland and Nauvoo, they've been such an important part of my life, and this quote is helping me think to embrace all of those experiences that I had and try not to begrudge what has happened, because it needed to happen. I don't like that it happened, but it needed to happen. And I think that quote is one that I'm going to need to keep near me as I continue to work through all the grief that I'm dealing with over the loss of those sites.

Karin Peter 53:05

You and a lot of other people as well. I'm hoping to do a Project Zion episode, because the Council of Presidents of Seventy recently visited the Nauvoo historic site, and we had a wonderful visit with Joseph Monson, who showed us around the site, and some of our council had never been before, and it was really a lovely experience, as he shared a little bit about his relationship with Lach and Christin McKay, who lived at Nauvoo and who headed up our part of the transition of those properties. So who knows? We'll have an episode coming up that hopefully will give another perspective on that. So I'm thinking, I can imagine already what the answer to this might be. But let's see what you come up with when I ask you, what do you see right now as part of Estella's legacy in the church?

Wendy Eaton 54:01

Think it was her desire to take the skills that she had and contribute to the church in what turned out to be an incredibly significant way, again, putting books into the hands of children that were positive and affirming and supportive of the church, of course, because that was who we were at that point in time. But well produced materials for children and youth. For everybody, but for children and youth, they are so important, and sometimes it's hard to look at today and see that we don't have as much of that anymore, especially produced by our church. We don't always have the capacity to be able to create what was created. It, back then we needed a Stella to step up to the plate again, to help really push publications that we have the capability of creating. It's just we need to. We need somebody that can do it,

Karin Peter 55:16

Well, and the good news on that front is that we do have a team looking into what exactly do we need, using the platforms that are around today, right, for delivery. They're a little bit different than paper and ink, but how do we provide the same level of relevant material for kids as what Estella and Marcella and some of the others were able to do with their gifts in their lifetime. So, do you have any like last comment about Estella before we close our episode?

Wendy Eaton 55:50

I do. One of the Birth Offering books that was brought to my attention was a little book from 1922 called, *Home Spun Rhymes by Home Folk*. So, it is a book of children's poetry that was created by the women of the church. Well over 100 poems by women, 25 poems by Estella. So, there were some of the women that created multiple poems for this, but it was adorable, nine year old Alice Smith, so one of Fred M and Ruth's daughters wrote a poem for the book as well, but I wanted to share one of the shorter poems that Estella contributed. I really think this must have been one of the poems she wrote as a teenager, just because of its simplicity, but I wanted to share that one is in closing today. So, it's called "Baby Cotton Tail's Choice," and it's accompanied by this adorable little pen and ink sketch of a rabbit, "But baby Cotton Tail weed just out of the nest, with long velvet ears and soft silken vest, for your dinner today, which would you most please some nice lettuce salad or fresh garden peas? Pray answer me now, as a wise rabbit might, if salad raised the left ear, if green peas the right, Baby Cotton tail sat in my hand looking shy. And what do you fancy he did in reply? Both the long ears went up in the cunningness way. So on green peas and lettuce, he dined richly today.

Karin Peter 57:41

Oh, that's delightful.

Wendy Eaton 57:44

It's adorable. I mean, it's children's poetry. It's adorable.

Karin Peter 57:48

It's marvelous, absolutely. Well, I would imagine that if any of our listeners are interested, they can probably go scavenge some of our older congregational buildings that still have the pastor's study or the library, where all of the books from all of the members over the decades and decades and decades and decades that your congregation has been in existence might actually, you might actually uncover one of these treasures. I know all kinds of treasures in some of our older buildings and older congregations. This is just marvelous. I'm actually looking forward to looking for some of those myself. So, I want to thank you as always, Wendy, and I'm really excited to hear about all the authors that you talked about, because I'm thinking we could do like a mini-series within a series about female authors within the Community of Christ story. But in the meantime, we will look forward to our next installment of our Cuppa Joe series, Women in Community of Christ History. If you have any questions for Wendy, or perhaps you have a suggestion of someone from Community of Christ history, you can reach her at W Eaton, which is weaton@cofchrist.org. This is Cuppa Joe, part of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter, thanks for listening. Foreign.