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Quest for historic listing opens up colors history of Relief Society grain saving program



This is the Ephraim Relief Society Granary as it appears today. It is now home of the Granary Arts Center.

space, and who made a significant impact on their community.”

Jorgensen found Shalae Larsen, lead landscape architect at IO LandArch, a Salt Lake City landscape design firm, to spearhead the nomination effort.

Larsen laughs as she recalls her first call with Jorgensen, “I told Amy I had roots in Ephraim since C.C.A. Christensen (a famous 19th Century Mormon artist who lived in Ephraim) is my third great-grandfather. Amy told me that they had, in fact, heard of him. His cabin is on the property.”

Rhonda Lauritzen, founder and author at Evalogue.Life, a business that helps people create their personal histories, was contracted to do the historic research and writing to support the application for national register listing.

When Lauritzen first arrived onsite, she found out two sets of her fourth great-grandparents were original settlers of Fort Ephraim and that a monument to those settlers sits on the property. The stories she and Larsen uncovered captivated her, and Lauritzen now has thousands of pages of research.

The Ephraim Relief Society Granary was built in the early 1870s and was owned by Relief Society women, who used it to store wheat as part of the grain saving program that operated throughout the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The program is still a source of pride for the Relief Society. Wheat is depicted the Relief Society emblem—and a bronze rendition of that emblem is on the exterior of the Relief Society headquarters building in downtown Salt Lake City.

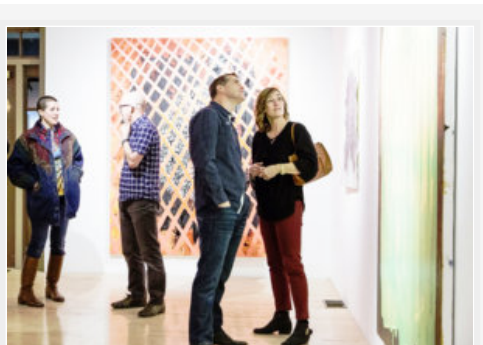
At one time nearly every Utah

When Amy Jorgensen, executive director of the Granary Arts Center, decided to try to get the Ephraim Relief Society Granary added to the National Register of Historic Places, she had no idea the rich stories that would emerge as part of the nomination process.

Now home to Granary Arts and adjacent to the historic Ephraim Co-op, the building evokes a sense of history, but staff knew only a few details before they began the project.

“When beginning the historic nomination process it was important for me to have the voices of women telling their own story,” Jorgensen said.

“Putting a building on the registry is more than honoring historical architecture. It’s about unearthing and sharing the narrative of the people involved. This was the work of women who built and worked in this



Patrons view an art exhibit inside the restored gallery space at the Granary Arts Center.

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town had a Relief Society granary, but today only nine remain. At the time, the Sanpete Valley was known as the “granary of Utah.” Grain fields extended along the valley for 30 miles from Fairview to Manti. The Ephraim Granary was regarded as one of the finest of Relief Society granaries.

When the Ephraim Relief Society purchased the granary and the Relief Society Hall on the second floor of the Ephraim Co-op, it gave the organization a public presence on Main Street. Today the granary stands as a symbol of early female autonomy, economic success and charitable endeavors in 19th Century Ephraim.

The Ephraim Relief Society was organized in 1856, just two years after the first Mormon settlers came to Ephraim. Because of hostile Indians in the area, the town started out in a walled fort. Women first held Relief Society meetings in a “small hall inside the fort in an outdoor bowery,” according to a typed history of the Ephraim Relief Society now on file at the Church History Library in Salt Lake City.

In 1860, after local members moved out of the fort and built their first chapel, the Relief Society began meeting there. According to the typed history, this arrangement continued until the women bought their own hall on the second floor of the Co-op in 1872.

Shortly after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young asked congregations to store up grain, partly in response to years when “Mormon Crickets” and grasshoppers had decimated the harvest.

In 1876-1877, Brigham Young became frustrated by milquetoast efforts to store grain and asked Relief Society General Secretary Emmeline B. Wells to head up the program. The Relief Society worked with gusto.

The Ephraim Relief Society was particularly successful. At one time, the organization had 200,000 pounds of wheat in storage.

The women donated other goods too. The typed history says, “Hundreds of dozens of Sunday eggs were gathered each summer.... Everyone had cows and donated milk for cheese, and practically all the wool for quilts was given from local sheep herds.”

That history adds, “Marion Dorius has been in charge of collecting Sunday eggs this year. She has done exceptionally well. I’ve heard that she rewards the children with lump sugar when they bring a heaping full basket of eggs....”

An 1881 ledger listed other assets of the local Relief Society, besides the granary, as share in the Co-op valued at \$40, along with shares in a thresher, sawmill, straw mill, a knitting machine, a cheese vat, a share in a book called “Women of Mormondom,” a silk farm and machinery used to manufacture silk.

The granary and space on the second floor of the Co-op gave women a place to be heard. The book, “Building Zion, the Material World of Mormon Settlement” by University of Utah architecture professor Tom Carter notes: “Zion was a man’s world. In reading over 50 years of ward minutes for each town in the [Sanpete Valley], I encountered no female voice. They were there, but in public at least, perfectly silent. We can hear their voices in journals and diaries, but mostly they speak of their daily routines.”

Times changed after turn of the century, when the Relief Society sold its building to a roller mill. After World War II, the mill closed, and the Granary and Co-op became eyesores. If not for the cost of demolition, the buildings probably would have been torn down.

On March 27, 1969, the Ephraim Enterprise ran the headline, “Historic Landmark to be Razed.” Local residents Richard and Nadine Nibley scrambled to buy time after bulldozers had already arrived onsite.

It worked. On May 29, 1969, the Ephraim Enterprise and Manti Messenger both ran a short notice with the headline, “Ephraim Pioneer Building Saved.”

But it wasn’t until the 1990 that champions of “Ephraim Square” secured financing to renovate the historic structures.

Saving the buildings took grit, thick skin and creativity. Many have said that the turning point was when artist Kathleen Peterson, now of Spring City, painted a watercolor of the Co-op not as it was, but how it should be. She literally painted the picture of a restored building. People who had not been able to imagine restoration before, now could.

The Ephraim Co-op became the home of a crafts co-op and is also used for meetings and receptions. The granary became a community art gallery.

Jorgensen summarized the history of the Relief Society Granary this way, “The building has a long history of women working on behalf of the community, whether in the...grain program of the 1800s, the arts cooperative model of the late 1900s, or Granary Arts today in the 2000s. It is a significant structure with a unique and rich history, placing women at the front of commerce, food security and community engagement.”

The author, who lives in Ogden, is the founder of EvalogueLife and specializing in writing biographies and personal histories. She was co-authored the narrative to nominate the Ephraim Relief Society Granary to the National Register of Historic Places.