



How Emily Richards Had “Something to Say”

Emily Richards stepped up to the narrow pulpit at the National Woman Suffrage Association meeting in the U.S. capital, Washington, D.C. She knew this was one of the most critical experiences of her life. The year was 1889, and the topics of women’s suffrage in Utah and plural marriage were being fiercely debated. Although Emily was nervous, she felt prepared to speak on behalf of her home, gender, and religion.

NOTES

1. Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah* (1904), 4:605.
2. In Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, 4:605.
3. In *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women*, ed. Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook (2017), xxii–xxiii.

One source related, “It was feared that the lady from Utah would not be able to make herself heard throughout the hall—other speakers having failed in that regard—but to the general surprise and delight, her clear tones penetrated to the remotest recesses of the building, and her speech was a veritable triumph.”¹

Although there is not a record of what Emily said that day, one journalist reported that she spoke for about half an hour. She gave “an orderly, scholarly presentation” that presented facts and ideas that “disarm[ed] prejudice.” The reporter went on to say that Emily’s words had a “gentle spirit” that softened many hearts that day towards the territory of Utah.²

However, Emily was not always a skilled public speaker. She remembered how Eliza R. Snow, then Relief Society General President, had given her some advice: “The first time



[Sister Snow] asked me to speak in meeting, I could not, and she said, ‘Never mind, but when you are asked to speak again, try and have something to say.’”³

Emily took this advice to heart and made sure she was prepared to speak when she was needed. Like Emily Richards, we must be ready at all times to “open [our] mouths” (Doctrine and Covenants 60:2) and proclaim the word of God.



ILLUSTRATION BY KATHLEEN PETERSON