

Brooke LeFevre becomes USU History Department's First Whitworth Scholar

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Brooke LeFevre

Brooke LeFevre is the History Department's first Whitworth Scholar! The Faye and Terry Whitworth Aggie Family Scholarship Endowment is given to "help students grow in their love of history and understanding of the world." Brooke is a second-year graduate student with interests in LDS women's history and medical history. She was kind enough to respond to a few questions about her research, teaching plans, and the Whitworth scholarship.

Brooke:

My research project is female infertility in the nineteenth century. My thesis is on the diary of a woman named Elizabeth Pickett Tolman who was a nineteenth-century Mormon polygamous wife who struggled with infertility. After about ten years of marriage, Elizabeth decided to pursue medical treatment for her infertility, first from a female doctor and then from a male homeopathic doctor. Thus, I will be using Elizabeth's experience as a case study to explore the broader experience of infertility in nineteenth-century America.

The main primary source which I am working with is the personal diary of Elizabeth Pickett Tolman, in which she details her health and her efforts to receive treatment for her infertility.

Elizabeth lived during the medicalization of infertility, meaning that had she lived even a couple of decades earlier, she would not have had the option to seek medical treatment for her infertility. The nineteenth century is when the practice of gynecology began, and while Elizabeth did not go to seek treatment from someone specifically trained in that field, her doctor's knowledge of infertility was heavily influenced by the work of "pioneering" gynecologists during this time.

The Whitworth Scholarship is a teaching fellowship. It allows a graduate student the opportunity of writing and delivering a lecture on a topic related to the topic of health, disease, and medicine in North American history. Additionally, they have the opportunity to lead multiple class discussions, assist with basic classroom management, and work with the instructor of the class on instruction and course design.

I am planning on lecturing about infertility in the nineteenth century, particularly the medicalization of infertility which happened in the second half of the nineteenth century. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, women had the opportunity to seek medical intervention with their infertility, something that women from an earlier generation did not. While most women who sought medical treatment still left treatment without becoming pregnant, this shift tells us a lot about the shifting expectations and attitudes regarding childbearing and pregnancy. I am looking forward to working with Dr. Seth Archer and for the opportunity to learn more about lesson development, classroom management, and alternative approaches to instruction and course design. It is an exciting opportunity to expand my teaching experience and skills.

Congratulations to Brooke on this prestigious award!