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**Beehive Archive**

Welcome to the Beehive Archive—your weekly bite-sized look at some of the most pivotal—and peculiar—events in Utah history. With all of the history and none of the dust, the Beehive Archive is a fun way to catch up on Utah’s past. Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council, provided to local papers as a weekly feature article focusing on Utah history topics drawn from our award-winning radio series, which can be heard each week on [KCPW](#) and [Utah Public Radio](#).

**Defying Expectations: Elizabeth Randall Cumming’s Journey to Utah**

**Elizabeth Randall Cumming came to Salt Lake in 1858 as the wife of Utah’s first non-Mormon Territorial Governor. Her expectations of the journey were defied every step of the way.**

Believing the Mormons were in rebellion in the late 1850s, the US government sent army troops to Utah, both to monitor the population and to provide a military escort for Alfred Cumming, an Easterner appointed as the new Territorial Governor. Cumming’s wife Elizabeth would be Utah’s new First Lady.

While waiting for Alfred’s orders to travel, Elizabeth made plans to set up housekeeping at their new post. Relying on newspaper accounts of the situation in the Utah Territory, Elizabeth was as skeptical of the Mormons as they were of her and her husband. As she prepared to say goodbye to Boston, Elizabeth knew she was leaving not only her physical home, but the only society and people she knew.

As she crossed the country, Elizabeth began to form her own conclusions about the journey West. She found the passage less difficult than advertised, and wrote to her sister that sensational newspaper accounts of traveling West had “some striking discrepancies” from her own experience. Reaching the Utah Territory in April 1858, Elizabeth waited at Fort Bridger while Alfred went to Salt Lake City to claim his leadership and demand recognition from the Mormons. The Cummings expected that Alfred might be imprisoned upon arrival, but he received a peaceful reception and Elizabeth soon joined him.

During her four years in Utah, Elizabeth reported positively about her experiences. She was accepted into Mormon society and had many conversations with women about polygamy. Despite her personal aversion to local customs, Elizabeth wrote that the peculiarities of the Mormons were “their own business, [not] mine” and was impressed by the women’s avid expressions of faith.

Elizabeth helped with her husband’s official duties and gained the respect of the Mormon community. Her writings about Utah and its people in the 1850s provide a unique glimpse into how one woman established herself in a new land and among a new people.

*Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council. Sources consulted in the creation of the Beehive Archive and past episodes may be found at [www.utahhumanities.org](http://www.utahhumanities.org) © Utah Humanities Council 2015.*

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