VIENNA JAQUES: THE OTHER WOMAN IN THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS

Vienna Jaques, a single woman who through her own efforts amassed a small fortune, is addressed as "my handmaid" in the 90th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants and advised on how to dispose of her wealth. Other than Emma Hale Smith, the prophet's wife, she is the only contemporary woman named in that book of scripture. In four verses she is admonished to consecrate her money to the church and move to Zion (Missouri) that she might receive an inheritance from the bishop there and "settle down in peace . . . and not be idle in her days . . ." She consecrated her money and went to Missouri, but like the other saints who tried to settle there, she found no peace.

She was born in New Rowley (now Georgetown) Massachusetts June 10, 1787 the daughter of Henry and Lucinda Jaques. Her father was an immigrant from France; her mother a direct descendant of John Rogers, the English martyr. When Vienna came of age, she moved to Boston and there using "self-reliance, patient toil and strict economy" over the years she managed to accumulate more than $1400 which was a considerable amount of
Sisters/Hurd

money for the time.

She was a devout Christian and had associated with the Methodists receiving "sanctification" as a member of the Bromfield Street church in Boston, but she became dissatisfied and began investigating several other Christian sects seeking a church which evidenced the spiritual gifts described in the New Testament. Hearing of a new prophet living in the west who had published a sacred record, she sent for the Book of Mormon and read it, but at first she was unimpressed. Then late one evening as she walked home from a church meeting, she contemplated what the theme of her evening prayers should be and suddenly saw a vision of the Book of Mormon. She resolved to ask concerning its truthfulness. As she tells it, after praying, she was able to more fully comprehend the book as she continued to study until her mind "was illuminated," and she became convinced of its divinity.

In 1831 traveling alone by canal and stagecoach, she made her way to Kirtland, Ohio. She described her journey to a reporter years later as "an arduous undertaking; but strong and concentrated in purpose, braving all danger and trusting in the Almighty for protection, the way was marvelously opened up." In Kirtland, she met the prophet and after being further instructed, was baptized. She stayed in Ohio about six weeks, then returned to Boston where she became the means of converting her mother, sister and her nieces who were also baptized. They remained in the east, but Vienna was determined to join the prophet and his other followers. She concluded her affairs in Boston, collected
her valuables and returned to Ohio where on March 8, 1833 she was instructed by revelation to give her money to the church and settle in Missouri.

She was in her mid-forties, past an age when most of her contemporaries would have considered giving up the security of a hard-earned nestegg to take up the uncertainties of life on the edge of the western frontier, especially as a lone woman, but she accepted the prophet's advice and relinquished her wealth, turning it over to the church. Joseph Smith acknowledged her contribution giving her credit for having done a great service both to himself and to the church, both he and the church were near destitute at the time. In turn, Vienna received means from the church (a portion of her own money returned to her) to help her make the journey to Missouri. She may have intended to leave immediately, but on April 30, 1833 at a Kirtland conference of high priests, it was decided that she should wait and travel with a company headed by William Hobart. On July 2, 1833, Joseph Smith mentions her in a letter he addressed to the Missouri brethren commenting on how happy he was to have heard of her safe arrival.

In Missouri Vienna received her inheritance, a parcel of land, in Jackson County, from Bishop Edward Partridge. The Missouri saints, particularly those in Jackson County had already been the objects of harassment and the persecutions intensified. Likely she was driven from her land shortly after receiving it, for she seems to have been among the displaced when Zion's Camp arrived a year later led by Joseph Smith.
Zion's Camp consisted of between one hundred and fifty and two hundred Kirtland brethren who had come to Missouri hoping to force Governor Dunklin to address the difficulties the saints were experiencing. The camp arrived in Jackson County in the spring of 1834 and opened negotiations asking the Governor to use the state militia to help the saints repossess the land they had been forced to leave. The Governor granted that their request was just, but refused to order out the militia for fear of inflaming a civil war within his state. Disheartened by the failure to "redeem Zion" and other disappointments that had plagued Zion's Camp from the beginning, Joseph disbanded the organization on Rush Creek in Clay County Missouri on the 24th of June. On the eve of that disbandment cholera broke out among the members of the camp with such violence that within four days thirteen were dead, not counting the Missouri members some of whom also died.

Heber C. Kimball describes that event in his journal. He said that about midnight he "began to hear the cries of those who were seized . . . . Even those on guard fell with their guns in their hands to the ground, and we had to exert ourselves considerably to attend to the sick, for they fell on every hand." He describes the mounting difficulty of facing "enemies without and the destroyer within." He tells of standing guard while they dug graves and of his frustration and sorrow at seeing his brethren so severely stricken "who had traveled a thousand miles through so much fatigue." But he complains most at how little help he and the others of Zion's camp received from the local saints. He specifically mentions how one of their company
approached a Missouri brother asking him for a chicken to make a little broth and was refused. At the last, he mentions finding haven in the home of Peter Whitmer saying, "I received great kindness from them (the Peter Whitmer's) and also from sister Vienna Jaques, who administered to my wants and also to my brethern--may the Lord reward them for their kindness."

No detail is offered about how Vienna Jaques aided the members of Zion's camp, but Heber C. Kimball's praise of her is almost the only positive note in his narrative of that summer's march, and closely resembles the praise Joseph Smith echoed in a letter he addressed to Vienna shortly after returning to Ohio following the Zion's Camp episode.

In his letter, which Vienna would prize for the rest of her life, Joseph offered an explanation about why things had not gone well in Missouri. Nothing suggests she had asked for such an explanation. Quite the opposite, the prophet attributes the promptings of the spirit and her prayers as the source of his wishing to communicate with her and reassures her that her offering was acceptable--"respected by the Lord" and that notwithstanding her present difficulties she would be blessed. His letter dated September 4, 1833 reads:

Dear Sister: --Having a few leisure moments, I sit down to communicate to you a few words, which I know I am under obligation to improve to your satisfaction, if it should be a satisfaction for you to receive a few words from your unworthy brother in Christ. I received your letter some time since, containing a history of your journey and your safe arrival, for which I bless the Lord; I have often felt a whispering since I received your letter, like this: "Joseph, thou art indebted to thy God for the offering of thy Sister Vienna, which proved a savor of life as pertaining to thy pecuniary concerns. Therefore she should
not be forgotten of thee, for the Lord hath done this, and thou shouldst remember her in all thy prayers and also by letter, for she oftentimes calleth on the Lord, saying, O Lord, inspire thy servant Joseph to communicate by letter some word to thine unworthy handmaiden, and say all my sins are forgiven, and art thou not content with the chastisement wherewith thou hast chastised thy handmaiden?" Yea, sister, this seems to be the whispering of a spirit, and judge ye what spirit it is. I was aware when you left Kirtland that the Lord would chasten you, but I prayed fervently in the name of Jesus that you might live to receive your inheritance, agreeable to the commandment which was given concerning you. I am not at all astonished at what has happened to you, neither to what has happened to Zion, and I could tell all the whys and wherefores of all these calamities. But alas, it is in vain to warn and give precepts, for all men are naturally disposed to walk in their own paths as they are pointed out by their own fingers, and are not willing to consider and walk in the path which is pointed out by another, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, although he should be an unerring director, and the Lord his God sent him. Nevertheless I do not feel disposed to cast any reflections, but I feel to cry mightily unto the Lord that all things which have happened may work together for good; yea, I feel to say, O Lord, let Zion be comforted, let her waste places by built up and established an hundred fold; let Thy Saints come unto Zion out of every nation; let her be exalted to the third heavens, and let Thy judgment be sent forth unto victory; and after this great tribulation, let Thy blessing fall upon Thy people, and let Thy handmaid live till her soul shall be satisfied in beholding the glory of Zion; for notwithstanding her present affliction, she shall yet arise and put on her beautiful garments, and be the joy and glory of the whole earth. Therefore let your heart be comforted; live in strict obedience to the commandments of God, and walk humbly before Him and He will exalt thee in His own due time. I will assure you that the Lord has respect unto the offering you made. Brother David W. Patten has just returned from his tour to the east, and gives us great satisfaction as to his ministry. He has raised up a church of about eighty-three members in that part of the country where his friends live—in the state of New York. Many were healed through his instrumentality, several cripples were restored. As many as twelve that were afflicted came at a time from a distance to be healed; he and others administered in the name of Jesus, and they were made whole. Thus you see that the laborers in the Lord's vineyard are laboring with their might, while the day lasts, knowing "the night soon cometh when no man can work."

(signed) Joseph Smith

Sometime before the saints were driven out of the state of
Missouri, Vienna Jaques married Daniel Shearer, a blacksmith and whipmaker from New York who had joined the church and come to Far West. The marriage seems not to have been happy. In 1839 she received a blessing from the patriarch, Joseph Smith Sr, using her married name. In 1844 at Nauvoo, Illinois she received a similar blessing from Hyrum Smith as Vienna Shearer and again in 1845 from William Smith as Vienna Shearer, but on January 22, 1846 as the saints were being expelled from Nauvoo, she was washed, anointed, endowed and then assigned to a traveling company different from her husband for the westward exodus. From that date forward she returned to using her maiden name.

At age 60, Vienna drove her own wagon across the plains. Traveling with Captain Charles C. Rich's guard, she arrived in the Great Salt Lake Valley October 2, 1847 placing her among the first women to complete the trip. By the end of that first season, there were more than 2000 saints in the valley of which more than half were women. She was given a city lot in the Twelveth Ward and spent the first winter living in her wagon at that location. The next year she erected a house.

Daniel Shearer came west in a later company and was assigned a lot in the Thirteenth Ward. He erected a separate residence. Twenty-five years later he named Vienna in his will, using her maiden name, and cut her off with only a dollar and twenty-five cents.

About that same time, in November of 1876, Joseph Smith III, the son of the prophet, came to Salt Lake City and interviewed Vienna Jaques. He interviewed several women who had known
his father and questioned them concerning polygamy, particularly about whether his father had ever preached or practiced that principle. Joseph, the third, remembered Vienna as having been in Kirtland when he was a child and describes her as "a frequent visitor in our home" particularly at the time when they were living in Nauvoo.

According to his account of their meeting, they reminisced for a time and then Vienna spoke "favorably of the plural wife system of marriage." He asked her, if such was her belief, why she hadn't married long ago and become "the plural wife of some respectable high priest or bishop." He says that she answered, "I have never married either as one wife or as a plural one . . ." and that being prodded, she went on to admit that his mother had been opposed to polygamy. He reports that she continued speaking of herself saying that in answer to prayer she had been told "as if an audible voice spoke" that marriage was not for her and it was better for her to remain as she was. He then cites her as a proof that his father and mother were never involved in the practice of plural marriage.

His account of that meeting seems fully detailed, but he and Vienna must have been speaking at odds, either not really understanding each other or simply hearing what was wanted. Extant records are incomplete, but circumstantial evidence is substantial. Vienna lived most of her life alone, but she was married to Daniel Shearer for a time and sealed to the prophet Joseph Smith while he was still alive, probably in 1843. That sealing ordinance was repeated March 28, 1858 in Salt Lake City.
One blessing Joseph Smith promised Vienna was that "she would live until her soul was satisfied in beholding the glory of Zion." She lived into her ninety-sixth year. At ninety years of age she traveled with John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Orson Pratt and Bishop Edward Hunter from Salt Lake City to Provo, Utah where she spoke to a gathering of over six hundred "old folk." At age ninety-one she entertained a reporter from the Women's Exponent telling her how she milked her own cow and had made sixty-one pounds of butter that spring. The reporter went on to describe her saying: "She lives entirely alone, never having had any family, does all her own housework, including washing, ironing and cooking, writes many letters and does a great deal of reading. Sister Vienna is very familiar with the scriptures."

On her ninety-second birthday she was treated to a surprise party. She entertained her guests on that occasion by reading them the letter she had received from Joseph Smith many years before. At age ninety-three she was honored in American Fork, Utah and given an arm chair. At ninety-four years of age another reporter from the Woman's Exponent commented on the "erectness of her carriage" citing Vienna's fine posture as an example young girls might follow. Later that same year on December 23, the anniversary of the prophet's birth, Vienna was seated at the same table with President John Taylor, President Joseph F. Smith, Apostle Wilford Woodruff and many other prominent men and woman at a formal event. As an honored veteran she lived to see the saints firmly established in the west with every indication that
her soul was "satisfied." She died February 7, 1884 in Salt Lake City in the home she built on the lot she was given when she first arrived in the valley.

Her funeral, three days later, drew a large crowd including many notables. Wilford Woodruff, who was then President of the Church, was the principle speaker. He praised her for her integrity and liberality. Other speakers included President A. M. Cannon, Apostle Heber J. Grant and Elders C. W. Penrose, and George Hamlin. She was buried at City Cemetery.

Vienna Jaques was described by her contemporaries as "eccentric," a woman of "life-long integrity and many virtues," a "person of marked individuality of character . . . true to her covenants and (who) esteemed the restoration of the gospel as a priceless treasure." She was a woman who knew her own mind, valued her independence and took pride in her self-sufficiency. Yet her pride and self-sufficiency did not inhibit her. She had tasted the famine in the land—the famine described by the Old Testament prophet, Amos, as a hunger for the hearing of the word of god. So when she heard of a new prophet, she investigated. When through her own prayers she became convinced of his divine calling, she sought him out. When he asked her to forsake her worldly goods and follow him, she did. Even when events did not transpire exactly as she had been led to believe, she remained steadfast. Vienna Jaques knew how to separate the day to day difficulties from the larger currents in her life, and she launched her boat on the mainstream.
Reference

Doctrine and Covenants 90:28-31

Bibliographical Note

Information for this chapter was drawn mainly from church archives sources and other historical records; also Woman's Exponent 7 (July 1, 1878): 20; 8 (June 15, 1879): 12; 8 (July 1, 1879): 20-21; 9 (June 15, 1880): 13; 9 (Jan 1, 1881): 116; 12 (March 1, 1884): 152; "Extracts from H. C. Kimball's Journal," Times and Seasons 6 (March 15, 1845): 838-840; and Joseph Smith, History of the Church Vol 1 pp. 407-8.