

Mildred J. "Barry" Berryman

by Connell O'Donovan

Mildred J. Berryman was born September 22, 1901 in Salt Lake City, Utah, the third and last child of Richard Gordon and Mildred Stokes Berryman. Richard Berryman was born November 28, 1862 in Tronis, England, the son of William and Mamie Rowe Berryman. He left England with his family in 1867, settling in New Jersey. In his twenties, he drove a spring wagon across the Rocky Mountains and settled in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he worked several years as a miner near Leadville, and was one of the first "vigilantes" in that area.¹ While in Colorado, he met Mildred Stokes, an actress who was touring the United States. She was born on February 16, 1871 in New York State (town and parentage unknown). Richard Berryman and Mildred Stokes were married in Colorado Springs in 1892. They lived there for two more years and then moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, where Richard first got work in 1897 as a bartender for the Utah Liquor Company, located between Main and State Streets on 200 South, at the heart of Salt Lake City's red light district. Their first child, George Stokes Berryman, was born in March of 1896 and their second child, Richard Gordon Berryman Jr. was born August 14, 1898. Until 1910, the family moved residences almost yearly. But in the summer of 1910, Mildred's mother grew ill and died in August. After her death, the family finally settled into a home at 412 East and 900 South, which the family eventually bought and remained in. Mildred's father continued working at the Utah Liquor Company until 1913, when he got a job tending bar at Hanak and Rumph. In 1914, Hanak and Rumph changed its name to the Opera Buffet and a year later, it was called the Opera Bar, where Richard continued to work until the 1920's, when Prohibition forced him out of his job. In its earlier days, the Opera Bar had a significant homosexual clientele.

Mildred Berryman graduated from public secondary schooling and then entered Westminster College (a private school owned and run by the Presbyterian Church) in Salt Lake City on October 11, 1916,² less than a month after turning 15 (although she would later remember that she was about 14).³ She lived in the all-female dormitory on campus, and that year enrolled in classes in the Bible, English, German, Art, Geography, History, and Spelling. While studying there, she met and befriended Theodora Anderson, who would later become her sister-in-law when "Theo" married her brother Richard. Theo informed me in 1988 that it was at that time that Mildred came out as a Lesbian, when she informed a faculty member of Westminster that she wanted to do a study of Lesbianism. This threw the college into an uproar. The faculty member refused to allow her to do her study, and several other female students were pulled out of school (including Theo) until Mildred was expelled. Mildred later wrote that "she was shocked by the discovery" of her homosexuality and "did everything to break from the attraction for other girls" and also "felt deeply humiliated and disgraced by it".⁴ Mildred had such a

¹ Richard Gordon Berryman obituary, Salt Lake Tribune, January 9, 1945, p. 18.

² Handwritten note from Helen Olpin, Alumni Coordinator at Westminster College, made on September 28, 1988, listing entry date, age, address, father's name, department number, and class list.

³ Berryman case study #23, page 61, Berryman Papers, Mazer Collection.

⁴ Berryman papers, page 61.

difficult time due to the scandal at school that when she was 16, she "ran away and married...to try and escape her homosexuality", but this too was "proven disastrous" and soon left her husband, feeling "a horror of [heterosexual] coitus". Apparently, her foray into heterosexuality appeased the college, for she continued her studies there until 1919, according to *Polk's Directory* of Salt Lake City (although academic transcripts for those terms are missing).

In 1920, Mildred got a job as a stenographer for McLaren, Goode, and Company, and also finally had her first Lesbian relationship. According to Theo Anderson Berryman, this was with a woman named Mae Anderson (no relation) who had been teaching Mildred to play the violin. Mae Anderson was a music teacher in Salt Lake City, from 1915-1923, according to the *Polk's Directories*. Anderson was Mildred's senior by six years. According to Mildred Berryman, this homosexual relationship lasted about a year and a half, but "then through jealousy of the companion [Mae Anderson], they became estranged". In 1924, Mae Anderson became a faculty member at the Latter-day Saint (LDS) School of Music (located in the McCune Mansion), where other prominent Mormon homosexuals also taught music, such as Tracy Young Cannon, Willard Weihe, and Grace Nickerson. (In 1905 Weihe was President of the Bohemian Club, the social group for homosexuals in Salt Lake City, founded in 1886, and which Mildred Berryman would eventually join.)

Mildred continued to work for several years as a stenographer, and also made several attempts to form a lasting relationship with a woman, but she "was not happy because she could not find what she searched for in her companionship", according to her own case study. So Mildred tried heterosexuality one last time, marrying another man, "but never had relations with [her] husband and left him right after the ceremony, trying to explain to him somehow that they could not be happy together and it was better this way." Berryman also records that "after many disappointments [sic] [she] decided to give up the quest for the ideal companion and devote her entire time to her writing and science."

Since 1913, Mildred's brother George had been working for a photography studio, and Mildred eventually landed a job as a stenographer in 1924 for the De Lux Photo Company, working with her brother. That same year, her father began working at the Wasatch Municipal Hot Springs, just a few blocks north of Temple Square, where he would eventually become the engineering foreman, and work there until his death in 1942. Interestingly, the Municipal Baths, where Richard Berryman worked for almost 20 years, was a well-known cruising area for homosexual men, as early as the 1890's.⁵ It was also at this time that Mildred met Edith Mary Chapman, a recent graduate of the University of Utah and a Critic Teacher and Instructor of Elementary Education at the University,⁶ who was some 16 years older than Mildred (who later recorded that their age difference was about 19 years).⁷ Edith, whom Mildred described as having a "definite heterosexual attitude" and whose "entire makeup mental and physical are positively feminine", had been engaged to a man for many years, but due to family interference had

⁵ Jack Pembroke (1913-2000), another Gay close relative of Mormon Church President Spencer W. Kimball through his mother Afton Kimball Pembroke, began cruising the Wasatch Baths for homosexual encounters in the 1920s and he told me in an interview in 1988 that he had met a man in the 1920s who was then in his 60s, who had been cruising for sex there at the baths since at least the 1890's.

⁶ University of Utah Catalogue, 1925, p. 21.

⁷ Berryman Papers, Case Study #9 (Edith M. Chapman), p. 49.

broken up with him, which Mildred hypothesized might have "produced a psychic hermaphroditism" in Edith and after the break with her fiancé, Edith "never cultivated masculine [male?] attentions" again.

Edith had been in one previous relationship of several years duration with another female school teacher "who was masculine, dominating and aggressive", but the relationship was finally broken by the other woman, who "tired of [Edith's] persistent attention and ceaseless demands upon her time." For several years after this break-up, Edith had "made no further amatory attachments and devoted her time and attention to study and teaching", but when Edith met Mildred Berryman, she "fell desperately in love". While Mildred later recorded that this relationship lasted "but a short time", actually they lived together for some four years at Edith's home across the street, to the north, from Liberty Park in Salt Lake City. This home, which Edith had inherited after her father's death in 1919, and her mother's death in 1923, she turned into a boarding house for other homosexual women. Grace Nickerson (the above-mentioned music teacher at the LDS School of Music with Mae Anderson) lived there briefly, while Mildred Berryman, Carline Monson (aunt of Mormon Apostle, Thomas S. Monson), and Dorothy Graham lived there for several years.

Jan McKenzie, who as a young girl moved next door to Edith Chapman's home in 1925, remembered that Edith was "very high class", dark-haired, beautiful, with pretty teeth, and "high ideals", and who loved working with children as a school teacher. Jan described Mildred then as a "small, petite woman - very friendly" who treated Jan well. She also remembers that Mildred loved wearing riding boots and "masculine clothes".⁸ In 1928, the *Polk's Directory* lists Mildred as a photographer, and a year later indicates that she was working for the Superior Photo Company. When I interviewed Theo Anderson Berryman, she downplayed Mildred's abilities as a photographer and claimed that all she did was process film. However, Jan McKenzie insisted that indeed Mildred was a very good photographer, and in fact showed me photos that Mildred had taken of her two sisters, Lucille and Frances, in Liberty Park during the 1920's, and indeed, they were quite professional and very aesthetically pleasing.

According to the *Polk's Directory*, Mildred continued residing with Edith Chapman until 1929. Jan McKenzie believed that Mildred was the first of the long-term residents of the Lesbian boarding house to move out. Mildred recorded that she was "unhappy in the relationship" with and the "possessiveness" of Edith, who, Mildred claimed, "wanted a lover and child in one individual and made the object of her affections wretched with heavy attention, jealous rages and amorous demands". By 1931, the other members of the boarding house had moved out, except Carline Monson, who had done all of the cooking at the boarding house. Edith Chapman decided to move to Berkeley, California, where she could pursue her teaching career in an environment more conducive to her sexuality. While there were several bars in Salt Lake City at the time where homosexual men could frequent, the homosexual women of the city mainly resorted to "parties at home" or would make pilgrimages to "gay bars in San Francisco", which even featured a male impersonator bar.⁹ Apparently Edith had gone on some of these excursions and

⁸ Connell O'Donovan interviews with Jan McKenzie, September 4, 12, and 17, 1988, notes in my possession.

⁹ "Bonnie & Vern Bullough" essay in Berryman papers, Mazer Collection, dated August 2, 1989(?).

thus knew that the San Francisco Bay area was at least marginally tolerant of others like her.

Mildred Berryman moved back home with her family in 1929. That same year, Mildred decided to continue her earlier pursuit of a thesis on homosexuality. Her unknown lover of that time worked (as a nurse?) for the Red Cross, and provided Mildred with Red Cross stationery on which to keep notes and type up her summaries of the case studies. Mildred gathered the data for the case studies over the next several years, following the lives of her cases that she had met through the above-mentioned Bohemian Club of Salt Lake City. In her study, she included data on 24 homosexual women (including herself - as case #23) and nine homosexual men.

By 1936, she was doing so well as a photographer, that she was able to open up her own studio in her family residence. That same year, Mildred met her next companion who was 12 years her junior. Her new lover, known only as Z in case study #24, had been in "heterosexual relations" from around the age of 18 until 22, when Z had an "accidental homosexual relationship and began to wonder about her own status". A few months after the "accidental" relationship, Z met and "became infatuated" with Mildred. Mildred recorded that this "proved to be of such powerful import that [Z] felt obliged to give up any further heterosexual relationship and has since found complete happiness in her homosexual life." Z was "perfectly willing to forgo one of her principle aims in life, to have children [,] and live happily in a homosexual relationship. While Z is described as "definitely feminine in her psychology, loves a home, the things pertaining to the woman's part in a home and demands the most masculine attention [and I] loves pretty[,] feminine clothes, frills and acutremets [sic]", Mildred describes her own self as one who prefers "slacks and shirts, doesn't care for fancy clothes, but likes women well and tastefully dressed". In 1937, when Mildred wrote her and her partner's case studies, she was very optimistic about their life together. She felt that their relationship "embodies all of the things [Mildred] sought and now they have an ideal home, are socially accepted and [Mildred] happily pursues her varied interests". While making her living as a photographer, Mildred was aspiring to be an author and scientist (probably a geologist). Z was also working (apparently as a social worker) "to assist [Mildred] until the time comes when [Mildred] is able to make a sufficient income to support them both upon the same standard of living they both desire. It is understood between them [that] Z will give up working and keep house for her companion." Mildred indicated that they "both regard their relationship in the light of marriage and hold it just as sacred, neither ever go with anyone else, they are never separated, they share everything together. Later when their financial circumstances will permit they have talked of adopting a child to rear."¹⁰ These two women were certainly far ahead of their time in their ideas of Lesbian domesticity.

Mildred probably stopped working on her "thesis" in 1939, titled *The Psychological Phenomena of the Homosexual*, which she had hoped to turn in to Temple Bar College in Seattle, Washington (which was probably a diploma mill, as there is no record of such a college ever existing in the Seattle area) in order to obtain a PhD. According to one source, she stopped working on it because she "probably didn't have enough of a theoretical basis for her paper". Had she finished the thesis, this same source felt that

¹⁰ Case Study #24, Berryman Papers, p. 64.

Berryman would have been as prominent a sexologist as Evelyn Hooker, "though not as insightful & very prejudiced".¹¹

Despite Mildred's optimism over her relationship with Z, their happiness did not last into the 1940's. Mildred continued her work as a photographer until 1941 or '42, when wartime necessities led her into the defense industry. Like so many other women of that time, World War II provided opportunities for women to meet and work and live together as never before, fostering a homosociality which often led to more overt Lesbian sexuality. While working at a small arms defense plant at Hill Air Force Base (or perhaps one located at 2100 S. Redwood Road in Salt Lake City), which lies about 40 miles north of Salt Lake, 41 year old Mildred met 34 year old Ruth Uckerman Dempsey, a Mormon housewife from Beaver, Utah, who was working at the same plant.

Ruth Uckerman Dempsey had been raped around May of 1926 by fellow Mormon, Francis Ervin (or Ewing) "Pat" Larsen, and when it was discovered that she was pregnant by him, her Mormon leaders forced her to marry him, in order to legitimize the child. A year after Bonnie Louisa Larsen was born, the Larsen family moved to Manti, Utah (where Ruth had been born), and Ruth soon after divorced Larsen. On May 20, 1929, Ruth married another Mormon man, Harry J. Dempsey, and later that year, the Dempsey family moved to Indiana, where Ruth gave birth to two more children, Violet and Clyde. Sometime between 1935 and 1940, the Dempsey family moved back to Manti, Utah, and in 1941, they moved to Salt Lake City. Information is sketchy for the time when Ruth and Mildred met. Apparently things weren't going well between Ruth and her husband. They divorced and Harry Dempsey moved to Boise, Idaho. Ruth met Mildred, and they began a relationship. In interviewing Bonnie Larsen Bullough, I discovered that her daughter feels that Ruth was not a "dedicated Lesbian" but rather "opportunistic". When Mildred and her ailing father moved up to Woods Cross, a rural area just north of Salt Lake City, Ruth decided to move with her. Unfortunately, she left Bonnie, a 16 year old, to raise her two half-siblings alone in Salt Lake City for almost a year. Bonnie's father did send her money to help out when he could, while she began training to become a nurse. Eventually the three children went to live with their grandmother Uckerman, who had since moved to Salt Lake, and the two younger ones were adopted by Harry Dempsey's brother. Bonnie continued her studies, became a nurse, and married a fellow Mormon, Vern LeRoy Bullough, on August 2, 1947, whom she had met in high school. Because of her mother's lesbianism, Vern and Bonnie "explored the lesbian culture in San Francisco in the late 40's". Vern Bullough at that time was a reporter for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, and thus began covering police harassment of homosexuals at bars and cruising spots. Vern Bullough later wrote a seminal history book titled *Homosexuality, A History*, published in 1978, and he is now a prominent sexologist at SUNY Buffalo.

At the end of the war, as women were expected to return to homemaking, Ruth and Barry (as Mildred began to prefer as a nickname) began their own manufacturing company, using their experience they had gained at Hill Field. Initially they made "tourist items for Indian jewelry" and later carved plastic items for displays and made ribbons for fairs, etc. out of their shop, which they called "Berryman Novelty Manufacturing".

¹¹ "Bonnie & Vern Bullough", p. 5.

Richard Berryman died on January 5, 1945, with services provided by St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Ruth and Barry Berryman stayed together for 33 years, and while they moved homes every so often, they always stayed in the Woods Cross/Bountiful/North Salt Lake area. Eventually there was reconciliation between Ruth and her daughter for the abandonment that had happened, and Ruth and Barry "were very nice to Vern". Still, Bonnie and Ruth had a "very strained" relationship.

Mildred J. Berryman died of natural causes on November 7, 1972 at the age of 71. Her obituary lists that she was a member of the Bountiful Community Church (which, since 1966, was a combination of the Congregational and Episcopal Churches¹²), past president of the Business and Professional Women organization, and past president of the American Legion Auxiliary. Her obituary does not even mention Ruth Uckerman. At Barry's death, her relatives descended on their home, "to take whatever they could". Fortunately for Ruth, the house and shop were legally protected and belonged to her. However, Ruth did have to hide the manuscript thesis of Mildred's from the prying eyes of her relatives. Once things settled, Ruth sent Vern and Bonnie the manuscript, asking that they publish it, however keeping Mildred (and her other subjects) anonymous, as she would have wished. Vern and Bonnie Bullough published some of Mildred's findings in the 1978 issue of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. One source indicates that Ruth moved to Idaho to live with her son Clyde.¹³ However, Nellie Mathis, a neighbor of the two women, told me that rumors spread in Bountiful, Utah that Ruth had joined the People's Temple and had died in Guyana in 1978. However Ruth Uckerman is not listed among the victims of Jonestown, and the Social Security Death Index reports that Ruth Uckerman died in July, 1979 in Aberdeen, Washington.

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¹² Leslie T. Foy, *The City Bountiful*, n.d. n.p. p. 269.

¹³ "Bonnie & Vern", p. 5.