Reluctant Polygamist

A Closer Look at Joseph Smith

Meg Stout
Dedication

To

My family, who gives me insight into what it means to yearn for those without whom heaven would not be heaven.
About the Cover

The cover is an altered copy of the 1842 portrait of Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of Mormonism.

The 1842 portrait is apparently the only full face image created of Joseph Smith during his lifetime.

After Joseph’s death, copies of the portrait were produced by the Herald Publishing House. Daguerreotypes were made from one of these copies, one of which is now in the possession of the Library of Congress and mischaracterized as a daguerreotype of Joseph during his lifetime.

Joseph reportedly didn’t feel the painting was an accurate likeness. Modern comparison of the painting with Joseph’s death mask shows that the portrait departed significantly from the placement of features on Joseph’s actual face. Profile portraits painted by Sutcliffe Maudsley show Joseph to have been a dignified but portly individual. Maudsley’s profiles happen to correspond closely with the profile of the death mask.

I was given an image of a painted copy that had been cherished over the years. The painting shows signs of wear, and the chin and nose were rather petite. But the face was more kindly than the original painting.

For the cover, I modified the digital copy to better match the dimensions of the death mask. I also took the liberty of reflecting that Joseph was a healthy eater, as seen in the Sutcliffe Maudsley profiles.
Advance Praise for Reluctant Polygamist

For an unexpected look at the secrets lurking around Nauvoo in the days of Joseph Smith, I highly recommend the Reluctant Polygamist as a very good place to start. Meg Stout has provided us the opportunity to see Joseph in a new light. — Gerald A. Smith, historian, blogger

Praise for Meg Stout’s Faithful Joseph series on the Millennial Star site, Dec ‘13 – Aug ‘14

[Meg Stout] surprised me when she mentioned that her studies had suggested to her the possibility that Joseph Smith rarely consummated his plural marriages — with even a chance that maybe he consummated none of them. Now of course this view easily falls into the ‘too good to be true’ category, so I politely asked her a few more questions out of curiosity but also to gently challenge her.

She promptly proceeded to bury me.

As I stood gasping for air and trying to spit factoids out of my teeth, I realized that this wasn’t just someone that was naively choosing to see what she wanted to see by ignoring all inconvenient facts. Meg was clearly someone that had done her homework and knew what she was talking about. — Bruce Nielsen, Dec 16, 2013

Meg deserves more praise than could ever be given for her faithful Joseph series… Her inclusion of John C. Bennett's participation in the history of Nauvoo was one of the most original yet seemingly obvious and logical aspects of her series… How other scholars glossed over this despite the overwhelming evidence presented by Meg is likely one of the tragedies of how the traditional narratives have been developed. — Jess W.

Thank you! Your posts continue to provide an astounding amount of information. — John S.

Meg, thank you for some basic common sense on this. — Geoff B.

A tad more complicated than the 'history" we usually hear about, but very informative and useful. — John H.
Thank you Meg Stout for putting together such an interesting, plausible, and faithful reconstruction of events! — Tom D

I stayed up all night reading your faithful Joseph posts… really great stuff. I don't know how to say this. It's like watching Ancient Aliens on the history channel or a 9/11 conspiracy documentary, but not silly. — Sam C.

I have personally found [Meg’s] narrative to be the *only* one that actually makes any kind of sense from a faithful perspective, tying up all sorts of loose ends. — Jeff C.

Your ability to gather facts and interpret them in a way that feels genuine to who I believe Joseph (and the others mentioned) to really be is invaluable. So. Invaluable. This feels more complete than other pieces I've found; more transparent, and, as mentioned, I think does a better job filling in the information gaps with guesswork that is both natural and intuitive. — Mickelle

Just finished your series at Millennial Star and wanted to say how much I appreciate the mental effort that went into your thoughtful examination of LDS polygamy. I'm one of those who struggled for years with the cognitive dissonance of keeping a picture of the Joseph who had the first vision and translated the Book of Mormon alongside a picture of the Joseph who took 27 wives in my head… I will be one of the first in line to buy the book, which I believe will be a landmark in Mormon literature. — Michael K.

Your series has opened my eyes to possibilities that I had never considered and which, in light of everything, make perfect sense. So count me among those who finds the study of this history as being full of secret honor and selfless sacrifice. I love that quote. So thank you and know how much I look forward to each post in this series. — Joey K.

[ Meg’s] analysis of the cultural setting in which polygamy was introduced and the details of the life of her polygamous ancestor add several new dimensions to our understanding of polygamy… — Jeff L.
# Contents

1 – Prelude to a Killing  
2 – Why Would God Command Polygamy?  
3 – Guns, Germs, and Sex  
4 – The 1831 Revelation Regarding Plural Marriage  
5 – Mormon Polygamy Prior to 1841  
6 – Six Funerals and a Blessing  
7 – A Doctor and His Beloved  
8 – The Angel of the Lord  
9 – Fall of the Doctor  
10 – The Pending Storm  
11 – Hunt in the City Beautiful  
12 – Arraigning the Band of Brothers  
13 – Wives of Sorrow  
14 – Sangamo and Pratt  
15 – The Apostles and Their Wives  
16 – Eliza Roxcy Snow [Smith]  
17 – Healing Wounded Hearts
 Acknowledgments

I owe a great debt to all who have documented Joseph Smith’s life, particularly those who were his contemporaries.

Among modern polygamy researchers, I owe a particular debt to Todd Compton for his 1997 *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, Brian Hales for his 2013 *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, and Ugo Perego, for his ongoing genetic research into the alleged biological children of Joseph Smith by plural wives. Andrew Ehat, George D. Smith, Gary Bergera, and Richard S. Van Wagoner have contributed greatly to knowledge of the polygamists other than Joseph Smith. Don Bradley’s analysis of the Fanny Alger relationship is exceptional. Michael Quinn has done much to illuminate the existence of documents unavailable to geographically-disadvantaged researchers.

I am indebted to recent biographers of key Nauvoo figures, including Andrew Smith for his *The Saintly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett*, Kyle Walker for his *William B. Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet*, and the inimitable Richard Bushman for his *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*. I am indebted to Valeen Tippets Avery and Linda King Newell for their biography *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* and the extensive research papers including raw material that did not make it to the final book.

In thanking each of these, I am necessarily also indebted to each of the individuals who assisted them in their researches. Further, I am indebted to Susan Easton Black, Fred E. Woods, William G. Hartley, and others who documented Early LDS members, Mormon Migration, and Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel. I am particularly indebted to the many individuals who have made their ancestors’ stories public via Family Search and other ancestor-oriented websites.

Finally, I owe a great debt to Bruce Nielsen and the fine folks at the *Millennial Star* website for inviting me to put my research before an audience of thousands, ultimately leading to the book you have before you now.
Foreword

The subject of Joseph’s plural wives is not a topic casually broached in faithful Mormon circles, even among those who are aware of Joseph’s many wives. Correlated lesson materials tend to minimize discussion of important historical points relating to plural marriage in order to avoid offending those who do not have a firm grounding in the gospel.

Unfortunately, this has led to polarized versions of early Mormon history. One is the sanitized hagiography familiar to modern Mormons, featuring a Joseph who appeared to be monogamously devoted to his beloved Emma. The other is the bawdy and smug tale accepted by non-Mormons and some Mormons, where Joseph deceived Emma and his followers to justify slaking his sexual appetite on dozens of women.

Joseph covenanted with dozens of women, based on the affidavits these women signed in the late 1860s and 1870s. Those familiar with the affidavits have presumed Joseph was married to these women, with all the conjugal privileges marriage implies. Thus both those who attack the LDS Church and those who defend the LDS Church have presumed that Joseph had sex with his plural wives unless the relationship was explicitly described as only for “eternity.”

Importantly, no one has both embraced the information regarding Joseph's covenants with women yet questioned whether many or all those covenant relationships might have been celibate. It has simply been an unexplored possibility. If it is a false possibility, it should be easy to dismiss.

Nightfall at Nauvoo

I was fourteen when I first came face to face with unpleasant possibilities regarding the life of Joseph Smith. My mother had just finished reading Nightfall at Nauvoo, then a newly-released novel written by her uncle, Samuel W. Taylor.

She put the thick paperback down and cocked her head. “I think Sam presents an overall positive view of Joseph Smith,” she said.
Presuming Sam’s book was therefore “safe,” I began reading. I was a child who was shocked to hear detractors had called Joseph Smith “Joe.” I was completely unequipped to deal with the salacious accusations made by John Bennett and Thomas Sharp, which Sam repeated in his book. My teenaged testimony was crushed. I white-knuckled for two decades harboring serious doubts about Joseph Smith and the Church.

Even so, I went on to graduate from Seminary, earn the Young Womanhood in Recognition Award, be a Relief Society President, serve a mission, and marry in the temple. In 1999 I realized that the God at the center of Joseph Smith’s theology is the God I had experienced in my life.

But I still had no comfortable explanation for Joseph and polygamy.

Annie Cowles

In 2001 a friend asked me to present a 5-minute spotlight in Relief Society on a notable Mormon woman. As she rattled off the names on her list, I recognized the name of my ancestor, Elvira Annie Cowles. Elvira Annie was the treasurer for the first Relief Society when Emma Smith was Relief Society President. I remembered being told Elvira Annie was one of Joseph Smith’s plural wives.

By 4 am the Sunday of the presentation, I had pieced together the fact that Elvira Annie, one of Joseph Smith’s plural wives, was mother of the three women who married Job Welling and grandmother of two women who married Apostle John Whitaker Taylor in 1901. As I sat looking at the short history I had assembled, I knew I had to write about these women. Yet I also feared writing about these women, certain that the story of Joseph’s plural marriages necessarily involved sexual relations.

In the years since 2001, I threw myself into the history and documents related to early Nauvoo events. Initially despairing of ever being in a position to write a serious history, I attempted to tell the story in novel form. Revisions conducted with dozens of advanced readers forced the story to take on a life of its own. One reader criticized my villain, Dr. Bennett, as one-dimensional. Another said I should tell the story from a male standpoint to retain male readers. One non-Mormon man said the sexual tension between my heroine and Joseph Smith was uncomfortably intense. As I warped the story in response to these comments, I had to dig deeper into the history, delving beneath the facile understanding I’d had of
events and motivations. Causalities emerged that I’d previously been blind to.

**No Sex?**

Some of my friends live without any form of birth control. I saw in their lives the typical pattern for most married couples in the 1800s. A child is born within the first year, and other children arrive every two years thereafter. Watching these friends, I realized something was wrong with Annie’s reproductive history.

Annie’s first child was born in October 1845, nearly three years after her public marriage to Jonathan Harriman Holmes and over a year after Joseph’s death. Annie continued to bear children regularly whenever Jonathan was around. For example, Elvira’s second daughter was born nine and a half months following Jonathan’s return with his Mormon Battalion unit.

Annie and Jonathan were fertile. Joseph had children with Emma regularly. And yet Annie did not produce a child for years after the ceremonies I presumed would legitimize intimacies between Annie and either Joseph or Jonathan.

Around this time I came across Ugo Perego’s DNA research looking into possible offspring of Joseph Smith by plural wives.¹ Not a single suspected child can be proven to have been fathered by Joseph on a plural wife. None of Joseph’s otherwise single wives appear to have conceived children prior to Joseph’s death.

Perhaps Joseph wanted to avoid engendering children with his plural wives while enjoying sex. If this were the case, there were few methods of birth control available to Joseph, and these were considered criminal.² The rhythm method would not even be generally understood until the 1930s.³ While lack of children does not prove lack of sex, it leaves lack of sex as a potential cause for the available data.

Modern belief in Joseph’s sexual activities with women other than Emma, therefore, is based on rumor and written reports, rather than objective evidence.⁴

There are three prominent views of Joseph Smith.
1. He was a practicing polygamist who was loved and honored by his followers. Many of his covenant wives so testified in seemingly unambiguous terms, including under oath in 1893.  

2. He was a monogamist who rejected polygamy. His wife, sons, and thousands of others supported this view.  

3. He was an abusive philanderer. Two men who had served as Assistant Presidents of the Church made these accusations, as did numerous others of his contemporaries.  

To quote Joseph’s own words, “I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they are all wrong together?”  

Is there a way that each of these contradictory testimonies might have told a species of truth? What is the common truth that can explain these divergent viewpoints?  

Conventions

Joseph’s revelations are typically expressed as the words of Jesus Christ, the Lord. There is no indication that he believed himself to be a fraud, nor do his followers believe he was a fraud. Therefore I will report his words as he wrote them, without constantly inserting qualifiers such as “allegedly.” I will reserve use of “allegedly” for times when someone is actually alleging something happened of which they seem not to have first-hand knowledge. If someone is talking about something of which they claim first-hand knowledge, I will use the term reportedly.  

Next, there are many, many individuals involved. It becomes even more confusing when we talk about women who are married to different people. The typical convention is to refer to a woman as First (Maiden) Married. However as nicknames are also sometimes put in parentheses and some women have middle names but are sometimes not called by those middle names, I will usually refer to a woman by her maiden name. When she is married, I will include the surname of her husband(s) in brackets. Thus you will see me refer to Joseph’s wife, Emma, as Emma Hale [Smith].  

Quotations will contain the original spelling and punctuation present in the source from which I drew the quotation.
Polygamy Terminology

There are numerous terms that are sometimes used synonymously now, but which had distinct and violently different meanings in the time of Joseph Smith.

Eternal marriage, where a man and his wife or wives would be together in heaven, was variously called Celestial Marriage, plurality of wives, plural marriage, and sealing. In later years in Utah many people simply began using the technical term for a marriage where an individual has more than one spouse, polygamy.

However there were those who believed that it was acceptable for men and women to indulge in sexual intercourse without benefit of marriage as long as it was not discovered. This was termed spiritual wifery, illicit intercourse, adultery, and polygamy.

During the Nauvoo era, Joseph Smith, Emma Hale [Smith], and others understood polygamy to be a synonym for men having sex with lots of women without any commitment. Emma Hale [Smith] allegedly said spiritual wifery came straight from hell. Yet she also reportedly participated in ceremonies uniting her husband to women in Celestial marriage. Joseph, Emma, and others did not see themselves as practicing polygamy. What they were doing was sealing themselves and others together in Celestial marriages.

Modern Mormons don’t talk of polygamy, don’t preach of polygamy, and they most certainly don’t rejoice in polygamy. And yet it is crucial that we understand our past, so that we and our children may know which assertions regarding polygamy are true, and which are lies.

Meg Stout
Annandale, VA
April 6, 2016
Foreward

Foreward – Notes

There are widely divergent versions of Joseph Smith, from monogamous man second only to Christ (e.g., John Taylor, D&C 135) to evil villain second only to Lucifer (random commentary on just about any Mormon-themed news story).

Stout first encountered troublesome possibilities regarding Joseph Smith when she was a teen, reading Nightfall at Nauvoo. She stayed within the Mormon faith tradition, but harbored major doubts about Joseph Smith and the religion he had “restored.” Even eventually coming to peace with Mormonism, Stout could not reconcile the stories of polygamy with the loving God of Mormonism.

In 2001 a friend requested Stout present a vignette on a famous Mormon woman. Selecting an ancestor, Stout realized that her own ancestry contained women at the very beginning and very end of Mormon polygamy. She felt she had to write about these women, but dreaded the task.

Over the years, Stout realized her ancestor ought to have conceived before 1845 if she had been engaged in intimacy with either her public husband or Joseph Smith. Around this time, Stout learned that DNA research has failed to confirm Joseph engendered any of the individuals long thought to have been his biological children. Most of those analyses positively identified the children as descended from some other man.

As Joseph said, “I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together?”

Considering the grossly different histories, Stout devoted herself to determining the common truth that could explain everything.

Due to the complexity of the marriages involve, Stout introduces a notation convention, identifying women by their maiden names, with married surnames in brackets. She uses the term “reportedly” if the provenance to a primary source seems credible. Else she uses the term allegedly.

Finally, Stout differentiates between terms used to discuss plural marriage within an eternal covenant and terms that were used to describe adultery and fornication, with no commitment whatsoever.
1 – Prelude to a Killing

On the evening of March 31, 1844, 1 Joseph Smith crouched in a skiff floating in the Mississipi river. Just upstream stood the large brick home 2 of William Law, formerly Assistant President in the Church Joseph had founded. According to Joseph’s informants, the brick home was filled to bursting with hundreds of men ready to swear an oath to kill.

Joseph’s informants were two youths, Dennison Harris and Robert Scott. They had been among those invited to the first of the seditious meetings. Prompted by Dennison’s uncle, Emer Harris, the two young men told Joseph Smith of the invitation. Joseph forbade Emer from participating in the meetings, predicting the conspirators would kill Emer if they determined he was not a full sympathizer. Dennison and Robert, however, were young. Joseph asked that the young men attend the meeting, pay strict attention to what was said, make no commitments, and report the entire matter back to him.

The first meeting involved a lot of organization, with talk denouncing Joseph as a fallen prophet. Joseph was head of the Mormon Church, Mayor of Nauvoo, Lieutenant General of the Nauvoo Legion, and recently announced candidate for the Presidency of the United States. 3 Beyond the concentration of power that resided in Joseph, there were stories that Joseph had secretly married several young women. Those assembled argued that Joseph must be overthrown.
By the end of the second meeting, the conspirators began to say that Joseph would have to be killed. Reporting this to Joseph, Robert and Dennison had discussed what they should do about the third meeting.

If they failed to show up, it was likely the conspirators would murder them for what they had already heard. If they did attend, they would be pressed to be part of the planned murder. If they refused to agree with the planned murder, it was possible they would be killed. Joseph hoped the conspirators would spare the two because they were so young, but he counseled them: “Don’t flinch. If you have to die, die like men, you will be martyrs to the cause, and your crowns can be no greater.”

Sitting in the skiff with Robert Scott’s brother at his side, Joseph must have worried that the two young men would become martyrs, that he would be required to pull their dead bodies from the river that ran so conveniently behind the large brick home. To his relief, he eventually saw the two youths approach and dip themselves into the water at the river’s edge.

The two young men were pulled into the skiff. In the chilly warmth of that late March evening, Dennison and Robert recounted what had occurred.

As anticipated, the hundreds who attended the third meeting were asked to swear a solemn oath to destroy Joseph Smith. Robert and Dennison reported they had evaded the matter as long as possible. When they could delay no longer, they refused, saying Joseph had never harmed them, and they were unwilling to participate in killing him.

“If you do not take that oath, we will cut your throats,” one of the leaders said. Knives were drawn and muskets cocked. The young men were forced to the cellar. Once more they were told to take the oath or die. They refused again. But before the fatal blows, someone cried out, “Hold on!” Though roughly two hundred men had signed the oath to kill Joseph, at least one of them was not ready to kill these two young men. Not only might the violence shatter the group’s murderous resolve, there would there be bodies to dispose of. Dennison or Robert’s families might know enough to make accusations.

Robert and Dennison had been threatened with certain death if they ever revealed what had transpired in the meetings or who had participated. With that, they were escorted away from the Law home.
Robert and Dennison had suggested they could take a dip in the river to explain the delay getting home. With this, their guards had let them go.

Despite their promise to the conspirators, Robert and Dennison reported everything, including the names of leaders of the group and the fact that at least 200 men had signed the oath.

In the light of a waxing gibbous moon, Joseph whispered his response to the conspiracy and their accusations:

“They accuse me of polygamy and of being a false prophet. But I am no false prophet… I am no imposter. I have had no dark revelations. I have had no revelations from the devil. I made no revelations—I have got nothing up of myself.

“The same God who has thus far directed me and strengthened me in this work gave me this revelation and commandment on Celestial and plural marriage.

“This same God commanded me to obey it. He said unless I accepted it and introduced it and practiced it, I and my people would be damned and cut off from this time hence.

“There are those who say that if I do so, I will be killed. What am I to do?

“If I do not practice plural marriage, I shall be damned, along with my people.

“If I do teach it and urge it and practice it, they say I will be killed. And I know they are right.

“But we have got to observe it. It is an eternal principle. It is given by way of commandment, not merely by way of instruction.”

Before letting the young men go, Joseph counseled them not to speak of this to anyone, not even their own fathers, for 20 years or more. Dennison Harris would keep the secret regarding the conspiracy for decades. There is no record suggesting Robert Scott ever told the tale.

In three months Joseph would be dead, shot by a mob of over one hundred men, many with blackened faces to hide their identity. Yet those
who picked up the baton of leadership would continue undeterred. Celestial marriages, rare in Joseph’s day, would become the norm for Mormon couples, uniting husbands and wives for all eternity. Joseph’s successor, remarried widower Brigham Young, would publicly proclaim plural marriage a central tenet of the Mormon faith, though the number of polygamous men was never more than a minority of all Mormon men.

The tension evident in the months prior to Joseph’s death would expand, eventually provoking extreme national opposition to Mormons and their “polygamous” lifestyle.

Then, during the lifetime of Joseph’s contemporaries, plural marriage9 was put aside with the Manifestos of 1890 and 1904. For the modern student seeking understanding over a hundred years after the Manifestos, the origins and purposes of plural marriage are a murky matter, provoking titillation, disgust, outrage, and disbelief.

Despite this troubling past, the modern Mormon Church continues to thrive, even as some other Christian denominations have gone into decline. Yet for many, the secretive past regarding plural marriage festers like a wound, denied the light and air that might allow it to heal.

This book attempts to shed light on this troublesome subject, airing out a space in Mormon history and doctrine that has been kept dark and closed.

Prelude to a Killing – Notes

A few months before Mormon founder Joseph Smith died in June 1844, he learned of a conspiracy amongst his followers. Hundreds of men had sworn an oath to participate in his murder. Despite acknowledging that death was certain, Joseph maintained that his actions related to Celestial Marriage and plural marriage were commanded by God, and that he and his entire people risked damnation if they did not embrace this commandment.
2 – Why Would God Command Polygamy?

Throughout the Bible, God promises to save all mankind. One of the most famous of these promises was captured by Luke as being spoken by the angel announcing Christ’s birth:

Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ¹

Another passage, less famous but perhaps more clear, states:

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.²
Throughout scripture, God and His prophets speak of the salvation of all mankind, of whosoever believeth in God.

Yet when Joseph knelt in the grove to pray as a boy, there was no theology that had a mechanism that might save all mankind. On that bright spring day in 1820, Joseph only knew that God lived and there was something missing from the religions of the day. The glorious being he saw in vision had declared “they were all wrong; ...their creeds were an abomination in my sight; ...that “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.”

Mormons believe God mourned the loss of doctrines that could save all mankind, doctrines they believe were present during Christ’s day, which are now only found in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the LDS Church.

**Lest the World be Wasted at His Coming**

Joseph’s life work began in earnest years later, in September 1823. In response to Joseph’s prayers, Joseph Smith reported an angel named Moroni appeared to him several times. Each repeat visit that night covered additional material. Yet the angel’s initial description of Joseph’s missions remained the same.

Joseph’s first mission was retrieval and translation of a book written on gold plates containing the fullness of the Gospel.

Next the angel spoke of Elijah, who would come and plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children would turn to their fathers.

If the children did not fulfill the promises made to the fathers, the whole earth would be utterly wasted in the great and dreadful day of the Lord, when the wicked would be left without branch or root.

The angelic message would eventually be understood in these terms: “If the people of your day do not fulfill the promise God made to save all mankind through baptism, those unable to be cleansed by baptism will remain in their wickedness. They will remain cut off from God and from both their parents and their children in eternity.”
However, Moroni spoke in language close to the biblical original, using the symbolic language characteristic of Jewish culture. Joseph would not comprehend for many years how God could keep the promises made to the fathers, or even how one could be saved with their fathers and their children.

Any modern Mormon child can explain how deceased ancestors can be baptized by proxy, allowing those who were not baptized in life a chance to embrace this saving ordinance prior to final judgment. But Joseph had not known this. When Joseph’s older brother, Alvin, died, the family presumed that Alvin would be damned.

Weaving the Family of Mankind Together

In 1835 Joseph had a vision of Alvin in heaven. This was his first understanding that it was possible for those who had not been baptized in life to attain heaven.

An understanding that proxy baptisms could be performed on behalf of the dead arose in response to the grief of Jane Nyman, a mother who believed her teenage son was condemned to hell as he died without baptism.

But in the theology Joseph revealed, it was not sufficient to be saved alone. We were to be saved as families, with our root and branch, as prophesied by Malachi and others. Baptism was a pre-requisite to a higher good, rejoining God in Heaven with our fathers and mothers, our sons and daughters. Thus the entire family of man could be offered the saving ordinances, throughout all history and all nations.

The work of Joseph’s life was restoring the mechanisms to eternally join parents and their children throughout all the generations of mankind. To those of the LDS faith, this is the clear meaning of the prophesy about Elijah. This was the work of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

The binding of children to their fathers was a work so sacred that Joseph would not allow the ordinances to be performed outside a temple of God. These ceremonies would not be performed until after Joseph’s death. But merely binding parents and children across generations would not be sufficient.
Binding husbands and wives together for eternity was required to weave the family of mankind together. Joseph could not imagine being bound to his children without also being bound to Emma, their mother and his beloved. He could not think of being bound to his father without also being bound to his mother.

**Orphans without Root**

If Joseph had lived a thousand years earlier, he could have restored these binding or sealing ordinances without any complication. A thousand years earlier, the occasional polygamous marriage was accepted. All wives would have been able to be sealed to their respective husbands. There would have been no cognitive dissonance if existence of a prior wife transformed a man into a “polygamist” in eternity.

But in the 1050s the Roman pope strengthened the impediment of affinity, which holds that the union of a man and woman creates a blood bond. This prohibited marriages between the couple’s respective kin. In following years, the Catholic faithful would adjust their laws to align with the realities of the impediments of consanguinity and affinity. Over the succeeding centuries, polygamous marriages would almost entirely cease to exist in Western Europe.

By the lifetime of Joseph Smith, monogamy had become the only allowable form of marriage. Widows and widowers were permitted to remarry. But with the introduction of eternal marriage, a remarried widower would be transformed into a polygamist. If monogamy were allowed to remain as the only valid form of marriage in eternity, all but first wives and their children would remain stranded, cut off forever.

It’s not clear Joseph understood this at first. He initially tried to teach eternal marriage without teaching polygamy. One early saint, William W. Phelps, wrote his wife in 1835. “Sally, you will be mine in this world and in the world to come… I have no right to any other woman in this world nor in the world to come according to the law of the Celestial Kingdom.”

Romantic though Phelps’ statement seems, this idea of eternal marriage would prohibit him from remarrying were Sally to die.

A belief that only eternal monogamy was permitted would have caused grief when proxy work was done for remarried ancestors or in the case of remarried converts. If a loved ancestor was not the first wife, she might not
have been able to be sealed to her husband for eternity. The children of women who could not be sealed might have been considered eternal orphans, never to be sealed to the family of mankind.

Mormons believe all are spirit children of God who lived before this life. Mormons believe that each soul only came to earth through an explicit decision to trust Heavenly Father and the promise that Christ would be our Savior. This Mormon God could not allow any of us to become eternal orphans, unless it was by our own choice.

The work of uniting all mankind into one great family in Celestial marriages required God’s people embrace the possibility of plural marriage. Only through this accommodation would none be categorically excluded from the fulfillment of the promises made to us before the world began.

Other reasons have been given for Joseph’s teachings regarding plural marriage. Critics claimed Joseph was motivated by lust and greed. Believers proposed plural marriage protected women or allowed more children to be born. But these reasons fail to explain such a radical institutional practice involving thousands of families over several decades. None of those reasons explain why modern temple practices allow a man to be sealed to more than one wife during his lifetime. None of these other reasons is sufficient to justify Joseph’s willingness to die rather than disobey.

The only logical reason for the God Mormons worship to command plural marriage was to permit universal salvation through baptism and sealing for all who love God.

**Why Would God Command Polygamy? – Notes**

The Bible repeatedly affirms that Christ sacrificed himself to save all mankind. Yet the Christian denominations of Joseph Smith’s day did not retain the mechanisms to permit salvation of the unbaptized dead. Joseph instituted proxy baptism on behalf of the dead, but went further to state that individuals must be united to their parents, spouses, and children, else “the whole earth would be utterly wasted at [Christ’s Second] coming.”16

The medieval rulers of Europe changed marriage laws. By the lifetime of Joseph Smith, monogamy was the only permissible form of marriage. Restoration of plural marriage was required to allow the entire human family to be joined together via posthumous sealing ordinances.
3 – Guns, Germs, and Sex

In 1998 Jared Diamond won the Pulitzer Prize for his non-fiction book, Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies. Diamond argued that Eurasian civilizations survived and conquered due to environmental factors. Diamond’s text emphasized the role of real physical conditions, and how important it is to consider these realities when interpreting history and constructing hypotheses.

Though Joseph Smith lived a mere two hundred years ago, the modern student needs to be reminded of the differences between Joseph’s time and our day. Weaponry was primitive. Medicine was primitive. Sexual innovations had emerged in the name of religion. However there were many beliefs that worked to persuade men and women to be circumspect even within the bonds of marriage. Hypotheses about what happened in Nauvoo during the 1840s must take these realities into consideration.

Guns

On June 27, 1844, Hyrum Smith died while in custody at Carthage Jail after being shot by several balls. One ball entered his back and shattered his pocket watch after having passed through his entire body.

Roughly a minute later, Joseph Smith was shot while poised in the upper window of the jail. Two balls hit him in the back, shot from the
doorway inside the jailhouse. One ball hit his shoulder and another hit him in the chest.

The facts regarding the deaths of the Smith brothers are not striking unless one understands the limited range and accuracy of guns in 1844.

Most guns used by armed forces in 1844 were muskets. A musket had a smooth bore, making the gun easy to load and shoot.¹ But muskets were significantly inaccurate by modern standards.

Rifled guns were invented by Germans in the late 1400s.² By making twisting grooves inside the barrel of the musket, the ball could be made to spin like a fletched arrow. A ball shot from a rifle had increased accuracy due to gyroscopic stability. The spinning eliminated sources of variation such as the Magnus effect. In addition, early rifles balls were loaded with a patch of natural fabric, to ensure the ball took the spin. Thus much more of the energy from the ignited gunpowder was imparted to the ball.

But accuracy and ability to kill at range came at a price. Rifled muskets took more time to load due to the tight fit required for a patched ball, and the grooves could be easily fouled with unexploded gunpowder. For these reasons, George Washington argued that rifles were militarily inferior to smooth bore muskets. In 1844 there were many more muskets in circulation than rifles. For example, in the year ending June 1844, the United States disbursed 5,750 muskets and only 680 rifles.³

John Taylor took the time to calculate the distance from which the shot must have been fired to hit Hyrum on the far side of a second-story room.⁴ John was only able to infer that someone at least 100 yards to the east had fired the shot that pierced Hyrum’s torso. On that basis, Taylor came to the conclusion that the bullet must have come from a member of the Carthage Greys, stationed some distance to the east of the jail. But the accuracy of the shot suggests more about the shooter.

Small Arms Trials conducted in 1860 demonstrated that over a quarter of the balls shot from a smoothbore musket at a range of 100 yards didn’t even hit a 10 foot by 10 foot target, a target as large as the side of a barn. An NRA B-18 torso target placed at the middle of the 10 foot target would have been hit by only one ball in ten, and no balls hit the inner core of the torso target associated with a lethal hit.

Despite the theoretical advantages of the rifle, when multiple men shot using rifles, they also missed the 10 foot target more than 25% of the time.
Again no balls hit close enough to the center of the target to suggest a lethal hit.

It was only when a single individual shot using rifles braced on a rest that the center of the target could be consistently hit from 100 yards. This use of an unusually accurate weapon braced for enhanced stability would eventually give rise to the military specialty of sniper. Appendix B contains charts showing representative targets from the 1860 Small Arms Trials.

Anyone other than a rifleman using a rest would have endangered the co-conspirators attacking the Smith brothers from the inner door. We know of a man using a rifle who claimed to have murdered the Smith brothers. John C. Elliott used a borrowed Neimeyer, reportedly a .49 caliber private weapon likely fitted with a hair trigger. John C. Elliott was reportedly an undercover US Marshall at the time and would go on to become a noted slave chaser prior to his death in the Civil War. John C. Elliott was celebrated by his peers as the man who killed the Smith brothers.

The coroner who examined the four wounds on Joseph Smith’s body found that the fatal ball was the one that had pierced his right breast, shot from the east from outside the jail. While the most noticeable wound on Hyrum was the wound to his face, it was arguably the body shot from the east that caused his actual death.

The contemporary testimony of William Daniels, who had been watching from across the road from Carthage Jail, suggested that a firing squad of four men shot at Joseph after he fell from the jailhouse window. However it seems unlikely that a firing squad shooting at a man propped against a wall could have inflicted two wounds in that man’s back. It is more likely that the marksman shooting from the east was merely gathered with others who wanted to claim they’d fired the fatal shot. A gathering of men, examining their handiwork and demonstrating their techniques could have appeared to a distant observer to be a firing squad.

The constraints of a prior time inform our understanding of that time. The killing shots from the east were almost certainly from a rifle, shot by a person using a rest. Death was thus delivered with chilling pre-meditation. The report that four men gathered around the body combined with later certainty that Elliott had inflicted the fatal shot evokes a scene of men jovially evaluating the evidence and then congratulating the winner.

The gun John C. Elliott had used on June 27, 1844, was cherished as “the rifle that killed Joe Smith” until at least the 1890s, as these same
owners boasted of their colleague’s daring raids on escaped slaves, returning the black escapees to their former masters.\(^9\)

**Germs**

Recently someone e-mailed me privately regarding a rape that had allegedly rendered a 19th-century woman infertile.

They postulated that she had realized she was infected with a venereal disease, then selflessly decided to give up any future attempt at intimacy, to spare a future partner any risk of infection.

The problem with this theory is that it presumes a modern understanding of disease and a modern ability to diagnose disease and its consequences.

The concept of bacteria was unknown in 1844 and would not be known until Lister’s experiments with *penicillium glaucum* in 1871. Even then, it would take well over a decade before doctors accepted Lister’s theories regarding bacteria.

The term infection was used in 1844 to refer to illness caused by bad air. It was not understood how illness affected the air. But belief in infection was not common. A belief in infection was associated with superstition. This is demonstrated in Jane Austen’s book *Sense and Sensibility*, in the scene where Marianne Dashwood becomes ill. When the doctor mentions infection, the reasonable characters dismiss the possibility of risk to the infant in the home. These reasonable characters were the doctor, Eleanor Dashwood, Colonel Brandon, and Mister Palmer. It is only the ridiculous characters who are concerned (Mrs. Jennings and her daughter, Charlotte Palmer).

Placing aromatic or pungent herbs near the nose was believed to ward off illness. Children would be sent out with pungent bags of asafetida around their necks to ward off colds and influenza. These “asfeddi” or “acifidity” bags were being recommended as late as 1918 to ward off the Spanish Influenza. However the National Institutes of Health webpage on asafetida dismisses the medicinal benefit of wearing asafetida, stating “Whatever effectiveness it had was probably due to the antisocial properties of the amulet rather than any medicinal virtue.”\(^{10}\)
Florence Nightingale, the famed nurse of the Crimean War during the 1850s, rejected germ theory. She did not believe that disease could be spread by physical contact, referred to as contagion. Instead she advocated patients be kept warm and clean in well-ventilated facilities.

Many casual students of Nauvoo presume there was frequent sexual activity between men and their plural wives, with instances of technical polyandry suggesting women might have been having sex with more than one man. It is sometimes asserted that the unusually low number of children associated with the many presumed liaisons was due to surgical removal of the unborn infants.

In the 1880s, long after Sarah Bates [Pratt] had given up any pretense of believing in Mormonism, she gave an interview to Wilhelm Wyl for his 1886 expose of Mormonism, Mormon Portraits. Sarah claimed to have seen Bennett with a long metal implement used to perform abortions, saying he had just performed such an operation on one of Joseph’s wives. By implication, other pregnancies were also surgically terminated, explaining the lack of offspring from the presumed liaisons.

However widespread non-exclusive sexuality could be expected to result in evidence of venereal disease, even if the mechanisms of venereal infection would not have been understood at the time.

More significantly, doctors in the 1840s would not have sterilized their instruments. Surgical termination of pregnancies should have resulted in statistically significant rates of maternal death.

Ironically, beliefs in the 1840s regarding the causes of illness would have discouraged unnecessary sexuality between married couples. Cholera in particular was believed to be associated with intemperate sexuality. Cholera first appeared in India in 1817. By 1832 cholera epidemics broke out in New York and London. The linkage between cholera and water would not be discovered until 1849, when Dr. John Snow was able to use statistics to construct a theory linking the spread of cholera to contaminated water. The existence of the micro-organisms causing cholera would not be confirmed until bacteriologist Robert Koch observed them in an advanced microscope in 1883.

Lacking a medical context for the scourge of cholera, leaders in both London and New York “attributed the disease to poor morality, because outbreaks clustered within the poverty stricken sectors of the cities. Specifically, Irish immigrants were regarded second class... their vice was
considered a contributing factor to their high mortality rates. Americans saw neither poverty nor wealth as accidental conditions. The affluent classes viewed success as testimony of their virtuous habits and poverty as a product of vice, idleness, intemperance, and immorality.”

The meaning of the term “intemperance” is illuminated by considering the epithet “Irish twins.” An Irish twin is a child born within a year of a preceding sibling. In an age where birth control was not considered moral, the only sure way for a husband to protect the health of his wife and a nursing infant was to avoid intercourse until pregnancy would not create a health burden. The intemperate Irish were being mocked for engaging in married sex when a new mother was newly delivered of a child.

**Sex**

With the advent of DNA analysis, we can now evaluate the biological parentage of the few children historically believed to be engendered by Joseph Smith with his plural wives. None of the children whose claim can be tested can be confirmed to be Joseph’s biological child. In all but one case, DNA analysis positively confirms that Joseph could not have been the father. On this last case the results strongly suggest Joseph was not the father despite common ancestry between the child’s descendants and Joseph Smith.

Yet casual scholars of Joseph’s life persist in trying to maintain the image of a manipulative and libidinous Joseph by putting forward seemingly plausible explanations for the lack of children.

For moderns who elevate sexual satisfaction to the status of an inalienable right and who regularly tinker with fertility, it is useful to review the sexual realities, mores, and folkways of the 19th century.

**Birth Control.** Moderns typically achieve desired intervals between children by using birth control. But in the 1800s birth control was considered to be criminal. In 1832 atheist physician Charles Knowlton published *The Fruits of Philosophy, or the Private Companion of Young Married People.* Knowlton’s little book described what was then known about the process of conception. He gave suggestions on treating infertility, overcoming impotence, and preventing conception. Knowlton was prosecuted and fined for the initial publication. A second printing earned Knowlton three months imprisonment at hard labor. Subsequent attempts to publish the book would result in the publishers being convicted of
obscenity. It was not until 1877 that the conviction of activists Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, who had reprinted Knowlton’s book, was overturned on a technicality. The publicity of the Bradlaugh/Besant case turned Knowlton’s little birth control pamphlet into a best-seller. Britains strove to eliminate the poverty attributed to “excess births” and avoid Malthusian catastrophe.

However the American frontier of the early 1800s was not overly concerned about overpopulation. The average citizen would have been horrified at the thought of promoting sex for purposes other than conception.

**Procreative Sex.** Considering the belief that sexual excess contributed to the cholera epidemic of 1832, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that married couples in the 1840s Nauvoo limited sexual activity to the minimum required to produce children. The legacy of such restraint or prudery was still manifest in Mormon circles over a century later. In some Mormon circles, the cultural habit of restricting sexual contact to the production of children was still in force well into the 1980s.\(^{15}\)

While far from sufficient to confirm sexual restraint, analysis of the pregnancies of Joseph’s wife, Emma Hale, suggests restraint. In only one case did Emma became pregnant sooner than two years after her prior conception. In addition, six of her children appear to have been conceived around the time of year she and Joseph retrieved the Golden Plates (September 1827). Two were conceived around the time of her wedding anniversary (January 18, 1827) following a seeming failure to conceive the previous September. The only exception to this pattern was Emma’s son Don Carlos, who was conceived as soon as Joseph reunited with Emma after escaping from Liberty Jail in April 1839. This pattern of conceptions, typical of families who settled the American frontier, is consistent with a couple limiting their sexual contact until the prior child was at least a year old.

**Infertility.** As none of the few child born to Joseph Smith’s plural wives can be confidently attributed to Joseph, some suggest that infertility may have been the cause.

Yet Joseph Smith engendered children with Emma Hale on a regular basis throughout their marriage. Emma first conceived within a year of the date Joseph and Emma married.\(^{16}\) She was pregnant with their final child when Joseph was killed.
Similarly many of the women with whom Joseph Smith covenanted during his lifetime went on to bear children. They usually conceived within weeks of re-marrying after Joseph’s death. In the case of Louisa Beaman, Joseph Smith’s first plural wife in Nauvoo, she remained childless during the period of Joseph’s life. After marrying Brigham Young in 1846, Louisa gave birth to five children in the period of five years before her death of cancer in 1850.

It is certainly possible to argue that something could have gone wrong in individual cases with the typical reproductive patterns. However Joseph Smith and those who believed in his teachings gifted us with dozens of such instances. Therefore theories as to what could have been happening must take into account this very large and fertile data set.

Infertility is not sufficient to explain why so few children were born to plural wives prior to Joseph’s death (with apparently none engendered by Joseph’s with his plural wives). Meanwhile, sexual abstinence in the service of religion was a commitment other respected Christians were making.

**Shakers and Celibacy.** The Christian sect most associated with celibacy was founded by English-born Ann Lee. Born in 1736, Ann Lee taught her followers that it was possible to attain perfect holiness, including giving up sexual relations.

Anne was forced to marry against her wishes. Her four children all died in infancy, confirming her radical rejection of sexuality and marriage. In 1774, Ann Lee and some followers emigrated from England to Albany County, New York, and formed the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing. They were also referred to as the Shaking Quakers or Shakers because their worship services involved dance and charismatic shaking. The community grew from converts and from taking in children who had been abandoned by others. However the unwillingness of Shakers to engender children has led to near extinction of practicing Shakers.

In 1831 Leman Copley, a Shaker from the Cleveland area, became a Mormon. Copley sought to bring Shaker beliefs into the Mormon faith. These beliefs included the idea that Ann Lee was the incarnation of Christ’s Second Coming, that it was wrong to eat meat, and that it was wrong to have sex or enter into marriage. D&C 49 specifically refuses these Shaker doctrines for the LDS faith. The revelation was sent to the Shaker group in Cleveland, but the message was rejected.
Since 1831, Mormon doctrine has clearly been built around the idea that families are ordained of God and that sexuality within marriage is righteous. And yet the example of the Shakers demonstrates that sexuality could be deferred for extensive periods of time or even denied entirely in the service of God.

There are those, however, who point to the aberrant sexual practices of other Christian sects as the source of Joseph Smith’s supposed activities.

Spiritual Wives. Jacob Cochran, like Ann Lee, formed a denomination that worshipped using dancing and charismatic shaking. Cochran’s initial settlement was located in Saco, Maine, and his denomination was called The Society of Free Brethren and Sisters. Like the Shakers, Cochran’s people were taught that marriage was not valid. Cochran taught that believers should hold everything in common. However instead of avoiding sexual intercourse, Cochran allegedly taught that intercourse could occur between “spiritual” husbands and wives, pseudo-marriage arrangements that were temporary. Care for children resulting from these short-duration “spiritual marriages” would theoretically be provided by the entire community.

Rival preacher, Ephraim Stinchfield, published a pamphlet in April 1819 exposing the sexual habits of the Cochranites, writing:

“each brother and sister in this fraternity, has a spiritual husband, wife, mate, or yoke fellow, such as they choose, or their leaders choose for them. These spiritual mates, dissolve, or disannul, all former marriage connections; and many of them bed and board together, to the exclusion of all former vows.”

Later that year Cochran was arrested for lewdness. After his release, he relocated his community to Grove township, in Allegany, New York.

Various high profile Mormons such as Warren Cowdery came from the areas near the Cochranite settlements. Austin Cowles was one who had lived near the Cochranites who would aggressively reject Joseph’s teachings regarding plural marriage.

The term “spiritual wifery” would be used in Nauvoo to describe sexual intercourse that was not part of a marriage. Secondary documents describing the marriage situation in Nauvoo tend to simplify the confusing terms by referring to everything as “polygamy.” Yet we see time and again that spiritual wifery was rejected by the same people who had embraced Joseph’s teachings regarding plural wives. We never see Joseph refer to his
teachings regarding Celestial Marriage as Spiritual Wifery. Even though Joseph’s own brother advocated Spiritual Wifery, Joseph’s most trusted intimates, including his plural wives, rejected Spiritual Wifery. An example of this is Zina Diantha Huntington’s strong negative reaction when William Smith preached in 1845 regarding Spiritual Wifery.  

Complex Marriage and Social Intercourse. Another relatively well known group sometimes cited as Joseph Smith’s inspiration was the Oneida community formed by John Noyes. Noyes claimed “his new relationship to God canceled out his obligation to obey traditional moral standards or the normal laws of society.”

John Humphrey Noyes was born in 1811. In early 1830 he attended Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut. In 1834, Noyes declared himself perfect and free from sin. This outraged the Divinity School, and Noyes’ license to preach was revoked. Undeterred, Noyes returned to his native Vermont and established a religious community committed to his unorthodox views. Regarding sex, Noyes would teach that sexual intercourse could be separated into two components: the social and the procreative. By 1844 the community became a formal organization where the pursuit of perfection was facilitated by male continence (sex without ejaculation) and complex marriage, where persons were permitted to engage in “social” intercourse with individuals to whom they were not married.

Noyes felt it was a positive social act for everyone to participate in intercourse starting at puberty, which Noyes considered began at age 14. Young men were initially to have intercourse with older women past the age of bearing, to avoid “sexual starvation” at a time when the sexual appetite is at its peak. Only men like himself, who had perfected the skill of engaging in intercourse without ejaculation, were permitted to have intercourse with nubile teens and women who were not married.

Noyes fled the United States in 1879 when he was told he was going to be arrested for statutory rape. Two months later, Noyes directed his followers to abandon complex marriage and revert to traditional marriage practices.

Noyes is sufficiently late that it is not clear that his sexual experiments would necessarily have informed the origins of Mormon polygamy. However the key technique Noyes used to achieve social intercourse without risking pregnancy was a variation of onanism, the practice of having intercourse without allowing the man to ejaculate during penetration. Onan and sufficient detail regarding what he did are described...
in Genesis 38: 8-10. On the other hand, the Bible record of onanism claims that Onan was killed for this behavior. Thus it seems a stretch to presume that a people who embraced the Bible would embrace onanism at that time, unless it was specifically documented as a practiced behavior.

Onanism was explicitly rejected by Mormon leaders as part of the 1885 excommunication of Mormon Apostle Albert Carrington. Carrington thought sex was not adultery unless the man ejaculated during penetration. On that basis, he had been “friendly” with young ladies to whom he wasn’t married. This was a time when the LDS Church still practiced polygamy. Yet Carrington’s onanism was considered adultery, fornication, and “lewd and lascivious conduct.” 22

Illicit Intercourse. There is documentation confirming that many individuals in Nauvoo from 1841-1842 were engaging in promiscuous sex. Though rarely mentioned in discussions of Mormon polygamy, this epidemic of illicit intercourse must be considered to fully understand why Joseph acted as he did to covenant himself to so many women and, via these women, to so many of his male and female followers.

Treatment of Hysteria. Given the discussion of the sexual prudery of the 1800s, it may seem incomprehensible that individuals in 1840s Nauvoo could embrace promiscuous sex to any significant degree. The millennia honored treatment for hysteria could have been the precursor to Nauvoo promiscuity.

Since the writings of Hippocrates (before 370 BC) medical literature had promulgated the idea that women were prone to a variety of disorders caused by the uterus, *hystera* in Greek. The uterus would supposedly wander about the body like a living creature, causing disease, blocked passages, and obstructed breathing.

The wandering of the uterus could supposedly be cured by causing it to become sufficiently lubricated. This occurred as a result of sex or pregnancy. Cappadocian physician Aretaeus, writing in the 1st century BCE, described the uterus or womb as “closely resembling an animal… It delights also in fragrant smells, and advances towards them.” Aretaeus’ views would become more influential in Medieval and Renaissance medicine regarding “hysteria” than the more biologically correct gynecological writings of Galen of Pergamon and Soranus of Ephesus. The idea of the wandering womb was still in vogue when Sigmund Freud described the wandering mind. 23
By the 1800s, the prescribed remedy for female hysteria was to massage the genitalia to produce a uterine paroxysm. Such a “paroxysm” was believed to cause the wandering uterus to become lubricated and reseat itself in the proper position. The medical literature of the day did not refer to this as orgasm.

It was believed a woman with an attentive husband would become regulated in the normal course of marital relations, as had been described in the Hippocratic corpus. However even a married woman might become hysterical in high stress situations. Treatment was administered manually by practitioners of either sex and was considered an honorable task.

In the latter half of the 1800s, a new device unimaginatively referred to as a vibrator was developed to assist healers. The vibrator helped relieve the repetitive stress a doctor incurred by treating hysteria manually. These new devices also allowed women to treat their own hysteria without having to resort to a medical professional. Vibrators were widely advertised in respectable periodicals of the day for medical use.

It was not until the advent of film that that this practice of treating hysteria was questioned. When the process of treating hysteria was shown on film in the 1910s, it was deemed to be offensive, obviously more of a sexual act than a medical act. This can be seen in the precipitous drop in the number of medical papers describing hysteria and treatment of hysteria after 1900.

Not only was the treatment for hysteria now seen as immoral, doctors began to be more exact about female ailments, rather than attributing every possible problem to hysteria.

In the early 1800s, when Mormonism was forming, it would have been perfectly respectable for a doctor to treat his female patients for hysteria. This becomes important as we consider recollections regarding early interactions between Dr. Bennett and Mormon women. It is possible that during Dr. Bennett’s early days in the community, his interactions with women was legitimate. He could have been performing a “proven” medical procedure on women who were experiencing stress.

Dr. Bennett’s medical experience would later give him the confidence to persuade appalling numbers of people that they could indulge in sexual relations outside of marriage. Dr. Bennett promised that it was acceptable, that it was safe, and that there would be minimal risk of pregnancy.
Guns, Germs, and Sex – Notes

Joseph Smith’s death was not the result of impulsive anti-Mormon mob action, but was apparently the result of a concerted conspiracy that included a pre-meditated killing by a highly-skilled marksman using state of the art weaponry.

The people of 1840s did not believe in germs. Therefore they would not have taken any of the sanitary precautions required to avoid infection. On the other hand, terrifying illnesses such as cholera were believed to be caused by moral depravity and excess. Given the ignorance regarding germs, surgical abortion should have produced a statistically noticeable number of deaths if it was a common practice.

Sexual mores and folkways of the 1840s were very different from modern practices and beliefs. Birth control was considered obscene and criminal. Frontier pioneers, specifically Joseph Smith and many of his plural wives, were not afflicted with infertility. Sexuality within marriage was often limited to intentional procreation.

Joseph Smith and the male and female leaders who succeeded him specifically rejected the celibacy of the Shakers, the spiritual wifery of Jacob Cochran, and the male continence or onanism taught by John Humphrey Noyes. Yet time-honored medical procedures for treating hysteria may have paved the way for gross sexual misbehavior in Nauvoo during the early 1840s.
4 – The 1831 Revelation Regarding Plural Marriage

Many presume Joseph was marrying women to justify libido-driven actions. Yet the report of Dennison Scott indicates Joseph considered the practice and teaching of plural marriage a commandment from God which he must obey or be damned. It was a commandment he said he would obey even if it led to his death, which it arguably did.

The only canonized document discussing plural marriage is found in D&C 132, which was not published during Joseph’s lifetime. The RLDS Church questioned the legitimacy of this revelation, bolstered by Emma Hale’s deathbed claim she had never seen the revelation.

However Erastus Snow wrote that Joseph had received the revelation while translating a passage in the Old Testament where “one of the Old Prophets was dividing His property to His offspring,” likely Genesis 17. ¹ We know Joseph abruptly ceased translating the Old Testament at Genesis 24: 31 prior to 7 March 1831. ² When we consider the initial revelation regarding plural marriage likely occurred at that time, the historical and revelatory record comes to life.

The Context for the 1831 Revelation

Several historical events lead up to March 1831 that provide us insight into the relationship between Joseph Smith and his wife, Emma Hale:
• Joseph marries Emma Hale over her father’s objection (January 1827).
• Joseph obtains the gold plates and begins to translate them (September 1827).
• Emma’s first child, Alvin Smith, is born and dies when Martin Harris loses the first 116 manuscript pages (June 1828).
• Believing himself under condemnation for having allowed the pages to be lost, Joseph starts attending the Methodist church. Emma’s uncle kicks him out (summer 1828).
• Translation resumes and The Book of Mormon is published (May 1829–March 1830).
• The Hale family decides to let Joseph farm a parcel near their home (summer 1830).
• Joseph forms the Church of [Jesus] Christ [of Latter-day Saints] (April 1830).
• Joseph is commanded to tend to the Lord’s work. He neglects the farm (summer 1830).
• Joseph comes home to find Emma talking with her father and uncle. Hale kicks Joseph off the farm, demanding that Emma leave Joseph (September 1830). Emma stays with Joseph.
• Emma becomes pregnant with twins (likely in September 1830, presuming typical twin gestation of 36 weeks).
• Joseph begins his translation of the King James Bible (NLT Dec 1830).
• Joseph and Emma travel to Kirtland, Ohio (February 1831).
• Joseph resumes his work on the King James Bible, translating from Gen 5:29 through Gen 24:31 prior to March 7, 1831.

Emma was no more than seven months pregnant with the twins by early March 1831. She had given up the family of her birth for a husband who had dedicated his life to God’s work. Yet Emma had also heard the vehement objections her father and uncle had to Joseph Smith. They considered him a heretic unfit to support a wife. Tales of religious innovators, such as Jacob Cochran, may have entered into these family conversations.

Emma seems the most likely person to have discussed Old Testament polygamy with Joseph in March of 1831. She had the strongest motive to question the institution of polygamy in the Old Testament. She certainly would later question whether polygamy could be the will of God. Other people close enough to Joseph to discuss these things in 1831, such as
Oliver Cowdery, or Newell K. Whitney, would likely have left a record of the interaction. Yet there is no such record.

Based on the Genesis account up to the death of Abraham’s wife, Sarah, Joseph went to God and seems to have asked how it was that Abraham and other honored Bible figures were justified in having many wives and concubines. We can infer that the initial verses of D&C 132 reflect the answer Joseph received in March 1831:

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines—

Behold, and lo, I am the Lord thy God, and will answer thee as touching this matter.

Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same.

For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory. 4

Whether or not this revelation came as a result of a discussion between Emma and Joseph, it seems natural that Joseph would have shared something about the answer with Emma. There is no indication Emma agreed to the requirements of this revelation and covenant at this time, however.

Arguing with God

Even though Joseph did not write down the revelation related to plural marriage at that time, we see the continued argument Joseph and God engage in after this point. Section 45 of the Doctrine and Covenants, received March 7, 1831, is the first revelation that hints of the turmoil Joseph would have been experiencing at receiving word of the New and Everlasting Covenant:
…I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people…to prepare the way before me [Jesus Christ]…in the day when I shall come in my glory in the clouds of heaven, to fulfil the promises that I have made unto your fathers…

After numerous verses describing the terrible events that would precede the time when Christ will come in glory, the Lord tells Joseph:

“[It] shall not be given you any further concerning this chapter, until the New Testament be translated, and in it [the New Testament] all these things shall be made known… I give unto you that you may now translate it, that ye may be prepared for the things to come. [Verily], great things await you.

Joseph stopped translating Genesis and began working on the New Testament. As per direction in the revelation, Joseph moved his family from the Whitney home in the center of the village to a cabin on the Morley Farm. Here Emma’s pregnancy continued. On April 30, 1831, Emma gave birth to her twins, Thaddeus and Louisa. The two infants would die hours later.

Thaddeus and Louisa were the second and third children taken from Joseph and Emma when they could have believed they were flouting commandment. Joseph and Emma may have therefore seen these deaths as a rebuke from God.

Take Unto You Wives

It is only after the revelation in early 1831 that we see mention of men having more than one wife. The first instance is a revelation remembered by William W. Phelps as occurring in July 1831. According to Phelps’ later record, Joseph Smith told the seven missionaries being sent to the American Indians to “take unto you wives of the Lamanites and Nephites.”

It seems Phelps did not even bother asking Joseph what he’d meant in July 1831 until three years later. There is no indication that any of the men present in July 1831 even considered courting or marrying an Indian woman, or any other plural wife for that matter.
In the New Testament These Things Shall be made Known

Joseph worked his way through translation of the New Testament Gospels until he got to the Gospel of John. At this point Joseph was working on his Bible translation with Sidney Rigdon in an upper room of the Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio. A little less than a year had passed since Joseph was told to shift his translation work to the New Testament. That day Joseph and Sidney were translating John chapter 5 and came to verse 29:

Speaking of the resurrection of the dead, concerning those who shall hear the voice of the Son of Man:

And shall come forth; they who have done good, in the resurrection of the just; and they who have done evil, in the resurrection of the unjust. 

Prompted by this mention of the dead who would hear “the voice of the Son of Man,” Joseph and Sidney proceeded to record a revelation now canonized as D&C 76. This is one of the most important revelations regarding Mormon eschatology, or beliefs regarding the ultimate destiny of mankind. The vision describes a heaven of many degrees based on earthly faith and works. The highest, or celestial, heaven would be reserved for those who were baptized and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise.

D&C 76 answered some of Joseph’s questions about the New and Everlasting Covenant he’d been asked to restore the year earlier. This revelation, prompted by the translation of the New Testament, answered Joseph’s question about the fate of mankind when the end would come. While Joseph’s vision did not answer all Joseph’s questions, it was an initial answer to Joseph’s turmoil about the revelation regarding the New and Everlasting Covenant and plural marriage.

By 1831 and 1832, then, it appears plural marriage may have become convolved with Joseph Smith’s beliefs regarding the salvation of mankind and the terrible happenings predicted for the end of times, described in D&C 45.

Mormon eschatology would evolve further after 1832, to include proxy ordinance work on behalf of the dead, multiple degrees of glory within
the Celestial Kingdom, 12 and the sealing of all mankind together via biological and adoptive family lines. 13

Biblical Marriage

When Joseph Smith eventually began to solemnize plural marriages, the seeds of his actions can be found in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. Many of the Biblical marriage patterns followed by Joseph and his immediate successors can be seen in the marriages of the patriarchs about whom Joseph had asked God, listed in D&C 132:1.

Abraham. Abraham was married to Sarah, who offered Abraham her servant Hagar as a wife. We see in this two important ideas, both a wife offering her servant and a wife being the one to select the additional woman for the husband.

After Sarah’s death, Abraham married Keturah and had five sons with her. Thus we see an Old Testament patriarch re-marrying after the death of his wife.

Isaac. The inclusion of Isaac in D&C 132:1 is curious, as there is nothing in the Bible account that leads us to think Isaac was married to anyone other than Rebekah. Thus we see one of the key Bible patriarchs who is only married to one woman.

Jacob. Jacob returned to the household of Rebekah’s brother, Laban. There he labored for seven years for Laban’s daughter Rachel, the woman he loved. But Laban, on the wedding night, switched Rachel for her older, unmarried sister, Leah.

Jacob proceeded to commit himself to another seven years of labor to obtain the hand of Rachel. Thus we see the third of the key Old Testament patriarchs married to sisters.

Both Rachel and Leah would offer Jacob their servants as wives. Thus we see a repetition of women encouraging their servants to marry the family patriarch.

Moses. The Bible record only mentions Zipporah, the Israelite, as Moses’ wife. Again we have an Old Testament prophet apparently married to only one wife.
David. King David married several women, though the number is not clear. In the story of David we see wives shifted between husbands in the case of Michal. In the case of Abigail, David married her after the death of her husband, who the Bible claims was smitten by the Lord. This marriage of a widow resembles the levirate marriage customs in place at the time of Abraham, as seen in the story of Tamar and Judah, the Levitical law, and the marriage of David's great-grandparents, Ruth and Boaz.

However David caused the death of Uriah to have Bathsheba. D&C 132 explained that for this murder David “shall not inherit [his wives] out of the world, for [the Lord] gave them to another.” This introduced the important belief that a man’s wife could be taken from him for sin.

Solomon. David was succeeded by Bathsheba’s son, Solomon. The only wife of Solomon mentioned by name is Naamah, mother of Solomon’s successor, Rehoboam. But the Bible states that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. In the wives of Solomon, we see a pattern of creating alliances through ceremonial “marriage” and concubinage. The number of wives and concubines suggests sexuality may not have played a role in all these relationships.

And Eve did labor with him. As has been discussed, it appears the covenants Joseph entered into with women other than his legal wife were rarely consummated. If the marriages were not initially for pleasure or procreation, then we must consider that some of the marriages were merely to create a bond wherein a man and his plural wife would assist one another within a relationship of complete loyalty.

Joseph entered into the vast majority of his plural marriages between November 1841 and November 1843, a period of only two years. Few understand the devastation caused by John Bennett as he and his followers seduced unknown numbers of women during 1841-1842. John Bennett and his acolytes taught their victims that “it was right to go to bed to a woman if not found out.”

While most of Joseph’s plural wives fit one of the Patriarchal Biblical archetypes, several of the women who became plural wives prior to Joseph’s death appear to have been victims of rape or seduction. No children born to possible victims during this time frame are known to have survived to adulthood. Joseph or other church leaders appear to have spoken with or “married” these women to provide for them and to protect them. In other cases it is clear Joseph feared the women were at risk, as in the case of the orphaned Partridge sisters.
A few other women can only be understood if we think of them as detectives seeking to uncover the corruption created by Dr. Bennett and his acolytes. As Emma was one of those seeking to end the corruption in her role as Relief Society President, it is possible and even likely that she knew about these “wives,” including her confidantes Elizabeth Davis [Durfee] and Sarah Kingsley [Cleveland].

Had Joseph entered into a plural marriage shortly after receiving the 1831 revelation, his people would arguably not have been so vulnerable to the deception taught by Dr. Bennett after April 1841. But it would take far more than a simple revelation and Biblical precedent to persuade Joseph to marry someone in addition to Emma Hale.

The 1831 Revelation Regarding Plural Marriage – Notes

Joseph Smith initially received a revelation commanding him to embrace plural marriage in February or March 1831 while translating Genesis. The first suggestion that married men consider taking other wives occurs after this time.

Published revelations indicate that Joseph may have believed the New and Everlasting Covenant and plural marriage would play an important role in preparing the world for the Second Coming of Christ (D&C 45, received March 7, 1831) and that the highest heaven was reserved for those who had been baptized and sealed by the holy spirit of promise.

Later refinements to Mormon beliefs about the afterlife would solidify the New and Everlasting Covenant of marriage binding all mankind together as the covenant and sealing required for individual entrance into the highest heaven.

Many early plural marriages resemble the plural marriages described in the Old Testament. However the timing of Joseph’s plural marriages suggest many of them occurred in reaction to the activities of Dr. John C. Bennett.
9 – Fall of the Doctor

From September 1840 to February 1841, Dr. John Cook Bennett had risen from Nauvoo’s newest immigrant to Mayor of the city and General of the Nauvoo Legion.

By April 1841, Dr. Bennett had been installed as Assistant President of the Church. Only a select few knew Dr. Bennett was anything but an honorable man. But by the summer of 1842, hundreds if not thousands of Nauvoo’s residents would revile Bennett as “a most consummate scoundrel… a vile wretch.”

Bennett’s initial embrace of Mormonism may have been sincere. Bennett had begun by securing freedom for his adopted people. He could have been one of the greatest leaders of the Mormon movement. Yet line by line, Bennett would fall from trusted friend to foul traitor.

Solace in the Arms of the Laundress

By May 1842 Joseph Smith had quietly but forcibly put an end to Dr. Bennett’s courtship. Meanwhile, Joseph had elevated Dr. Bennett to the post of Assistant President of the Church. Dr. Bennett was therefore installed at the highest level of power in military circles, ecclesiastical circles, and political circles. Furthermore, he was a trained physician and the hero who had won passage of the Nauvoo charter.
Power and position, however, appears not to have been sufficient. He had hoped to love, and he wished still to love. Dr. Bennett found a willing partner in the woman who had been caring for his mending and laundry, Sarah Marinda Bates [Pratt]. Sarah was a married woman, but her husband was absent and would be gone for months.

It seems possible the initiation of intercourse between Sarah and Dr. Bennett may have been accidental. Panic over an accidental intercourse may have prompted Dr. Bennett to reassure Sarah. She need not fear becoming pregnant when her husband could not have engendered the child. Bennett had tools to end pregnancy. We know that at some point in their acquaintance, Dr. Bennett showed her the tools that are used to surgically induce abortion. Yet there is no certain indication that the tools were used as often as Sarah would imply in the 1880s.

We do not know how long Sarah and Dr. Bennett continued their affair, or how many times they engaged in intercourse. However the Sheriff of Hancock County would provide an affidavit in 1842 accusing “Doctor J. C. Bennett, with having an illicit intercourse with Mrs. Orson Pratt, and some others, when said Bennett replied that she made a first rate go, and from personal observations I should have taken said Doctor Bennett and Mrs. Pratt as man and wife, had I not known to the contrary, and further this deponent saith not.”

It appears the affair was acknowledged in early July, 1841. In extensive municipal court testimony regarding Francis Higbee, it is possible to glean information regarding Dr. Bennett’s disgrace in the summer of 1841.

Hyrum Smith would testify “I recall Dr. Bennett asking forgiveness of the Lodge when there was about sixty present.”

Apparently referring to the same episode, Joseph Smith testified “a long time before John C. Bennet left this city… I brought Francis M. Higbee before Brigham Young, Hyrum Smith and others; Bennet was present, when they both acknowledged that they had done these things, and asked us to forgive them… Higbee had been guilty of adulterous communication, perjury, &c.; which I am able to prove by men who heard them confess it.”

Brigham Young provided the date for the confessions, testifying, “I knew of the whole affair, it was on the 4th of July, or a few days after—it was shortly after I came from England.” Continuing under cross-examination, Brigham would say, “I have heard Dr. Bennet say all these things were facts; he acknowledged that Higbee had the [pox, slang for
syphilis] and that he had doctored him, he acknowledged that and a great deal more.”

By 1844, Joseph and his trusted circle would not have wanted to mention Sarah’s name in connection with Dr. Bennett. Nor, indeed, would it have been necessary.

These statements against Dr. Bennett and Francis Higbee suggest that significant sexual misbehavior was already occurring by July 1841. However within a few days, Joseph had cause to show mercy to Dr. Bennett, sparing him public exposure.

The Widow Fuller

Sarah Bates [Pratt] knew her husband would be returning to Nauvoo at the end of his mission, as did Dr. Bennett. Based on affidavits that would be sworn out in 1842, it appears that Dr. Bennett proceeded to arrange for another woman to continue as Sarah had begun.

The woman he selected was a widow with five children, living in the Second Ward of Nauvoo, in the northeast quadrant of town. Joseph Smith’s home was located in the southwest quadrant of town. Sometime in June Bennett started to visit the widow, likely saying he wanted to help. By the end of the first week, Dr. Bennett revealed his true intent.

Catherine’s Widowhood. Catherine Laur [Fuller] and her family had lived in a small village near Shoal Creek in the fall of 1838. There was a smithy and a mill, and the mill was owned by Jacob Haun. There were roughly 30 Mormon families living in the village.

In October 1838 a militia of roughly 250 men threatened to attack the Mormons living near Haun’s Mill. A truce was called, and negotiations appeared to have secured a reprieve. Even so, the Mormon villagers gathered to the relative safety of the village center. Earlier attacks on solitary Mormon households showed that Mormons were very vulnerable when isolated. Animals were disbursed or killed, homes were burned, and other unspeakable horrors were alleged.

On the afternoon of October 30, 1838, the militia attacked. The women and children fled to the woods. The men and boys in the village took shelter in the smithy, a crude log structure with hardly any chinking. At least seventeen Mormon men and boys would be shot and killed that
day. In later months men who had participated in the attack on Haun’s Mill would brag of their actions to their Mormon prisoners. Hyrum would later testify that the guards boasted of “their great achievements at Haun’s Mill and at other places, telling us how many houses they had burned… how many rapes they had committed.”

Josiah Fuller was one of those killed. It is not possible to know whether Catherine was one of the women reportedly raped that day. Those who had not experienced the brutality were slow to believe it was not mere boasting. When the truth was known, delicacy forbade mentioning the names of the victims.

Catherine had no choice but to gather her children and survive. With the rest of the Mormon refugees, Catherine had fled Missouri. She and her five children settled in the flat lands northeast of the bend in the river.

**Unlawful Intercourse**

During Dr. Bennett’s third visit to Catherine’s home, he explained that he desired to have sex, and wished to have her grant his desires.

Catherine attempted to refuse, saying it was contrary to her feelings.

Bennett assured her there were others of higher standing than she who “would conduct in that way.” Bennett was presumably referring to Sarah Pratt. In case this was not persuasive, Bennett assured Catherine there was no harm in it. If the behavior was sinful, and he undoubtedly assured her it was not, then any sin would fall upon his head, not hers.

Catherine attempted to reassure Dr. Bennett that she was not a loose woman. He was undeterred, continuing to press her to yield to his desires.

Catherine finally fell back on what she no doubt thought was her sure-defense. If she were to become pregnant, the scandal would bring disgrace on the Church. As Bennett was a Church official, she must have supposed he cared.

Bennett had her. He was a medical doctor. He knew how to avoid pregnancy. She would later testify “I understood that he would give me medicine to prevent it.” She allowed Bennett to have his way with her.

Dr. Bennett now had a comfortable mistress, one who had no husband who might inconvenience return, one who was not in a position
to make demands. Bennett could be mayor and general and Church leader by day, then visit “the needy” at night and have his desires satisfied.

The Honorable Higbee Family

By July 1841, Dr. Bennett had discovered Francis Higbee was actively seducing women in his own right. Francis was the son of Nauvoo’s judge, Elias Higbee. The other scion of the Higbee family was Chauncy Higbee, a handsome young man who was an Aide de Camp in Dr. Bennett’s Nauvoo Legion unit. Elias Higbee’s brother, John, was also an honored and staunch member of the community, and a member of the Nauvoo Legion.

The Higbees had been part of the Mormon movement since the early 1830s. It is unclear how Francis, Chauncy, and John became involved in Bennett’s brave new world of no-consequence sexuality. However by the middle of the summer, John Higbee’s closest associates detected that he was living with two wives. It is not clear if Judge Elias Higbee knew what his brother and sons were doing.

The Suicide Attempt

Dr. Bennett may have originally planned to keep Catherine Fuller as his personal mistress. But as Catherine would testify, George Thatcher came to her home in mid-July 1841 and insisted she have sex with him. We don’t know what arguments he brought to bear. But as she had already yielded to Dr. Bennett, she apparently didn’t effectively resist George Thatcher’s advances.

Thatcher had his way with Catherine. At some point he would return and have his way with her again.

In mid-July Dr. Bennett attempted suicide. It seems Bennett’s despair had arisen from difficulties related to love. A remembered mock epitaph had been inscribed 'In memory of Major General John C. Bennett; who died at the seoge[sic] of Philter, in the defence of the cause of Venus, July 17, 1841.'

The public story, repeated by Joseph Smith in the Times and Seasons in July 1842, was that Hyrum Smith and William Law had sent a letter, recounting that Dr. Bennett appeared to have a wife. Joseph conveyed that discover of Bennett’s attempted bigamy was the cause of Dr. Bennett’s
despair. Ebenezer Robinson would repeat this explanation for Bennett’s suicide attempt many years later.

However Lorenzo Wasson would report in 1842 that in 1841 Lorenzo had overheard Joseph shouting at Bennett. Joseph dished out “a tremendous flagellation for practicing iniquity under the base pretense of authority from the heads of the Church.” This description doesn’t match the story about the letter.

The tremendous flagellation Lorenzo overheard was most likely associated with the July discipline involving Dr. Bennett and Francis M. Higbee. We don’t know what suasion Dr. Bennett used on Sarah Pratt to convince her to continue the affair. Even if Bennett had not overtly claimed a right to misbehave by virtue of his priesthood and civic power, the fact was that he was the Mayor, a high-ranking general, and a prominent Church leader.

Another possible cause for Dr. Bennett’s suicide attempt was the mid-July interaction between George Thatcher and the widow Fuller. What might have started as a personal wish to have his desires granted had ballooned. Perhaps Dr. Bennett hoped his death might stop the intrigue he had helped start.

Joseph had been undeniably furious with Dr. Bennett. But Joseph had compassion on the suicidal man. As soon as practicable, Bennett was again involved in the duties of his offices. No mention was made publicly at this time of his abandoned wife and children, his shady past, or the adultery with Sarah Pratt.

Joseph would not have been aware in summer 1841 of the teachings regarding illicit intercourse, which were spreading through his people.

**Colleagues, Friends, and Neighbors**

Catherine Laur [Fuller] had first slept with Dr. Bennett around June 1841. She first slept with George Thatcher in mid-July 1841. The dates when Catherine slept with the other men she would name as sex partners are not clear.

Several of the men were colleagues of Dr. Bennett in the Nauvoo Legion. The testimony of Jacob Backenstos, non-Mormon sheriff of
Hancock County and an aide-de-camp in the Nauvoo Legion, had provided an affidavit affirming that he found John C. Bennett:

“having an illicit intercourse with Mrs. Orson Pratt, and some others… and further this deponent saith not.” 11

If only Jacob Backenstos had said more. Catherine Fuller would list Jacob Backenstos as one of the several men with whom she had illicit intercourse. This suggests a scenario where Bennett, discovered in the midst of intercourse by some colleague from the Nauvoo Legion, lied to prevent disgrace. The spread of the promiscuity is explained if Bennett made his lie plausible by promising the colleague that he, too, could participate in free access to female charms.

A key portion of Backenstos’ testimony was “having an illicit intercourse with… some others…” Among the unpublished notes recording Matilda Nyman’s confession, Matilda would say “Widow Fuller is guilty of the same [engaging in illicit intercourse]. Dr. Bennett was with her… Saw Bennet in the act with Sis Fuller.” 12

Unlike the amusing testimony where Joseph Bates Noble was forced to admit he had not actually seen what he presumed must have happened, it appears there were many who in fact had seen sexual acts being performed by their fellows in the home of Widow Fuller.

Such a delicious “secret” did not stay secret for long. Orange Wight reported that by the summer of 1841, girls in Nauvoo were referring to one another as “spirituals.” Orange Wight was the teenage son of Apostle Lyman Wight. In the summer of 1841 Orange learned that John Higbee was keeping two wives. John Higbee had been a protector and mentor to Orange Wight since the expulsion from their Missouri home in 1833. In his 1903 letter for Joseph I. Earl, Orange Wight would assert that “the young folks was in advance of me [because] my work was in the machine shop 22 miles above Nauvoo where I spent nearly all my time. But when at Nauvoo in the winter of 1841 and 1842, I became fully initiated…” 13

Joseph’s Teachings

In July, 1841, Orson Pratt returned to Nauvoo after a successful mission to Britain. Orson was perturbed to find his wife living as a tenant, without the level of support other missionaries’ wives were receiving. However no one appears to have told Orson at that time about Sarah’s infidelity. Orson
re-established his household and looked to re-integrate himself into Nauvoo society. Orson’s interest in founding a University led him to Bennett. When Orson learned of Bennett’s care for Sarah while Orson was absent, he insisted Bennett come live with them. 14

Bennett was forced to be friends with a man he had cuckolded. Despite Bennett’s access to the widow Fuller, she wasn’t someone he could parade around openly or hope to raise a family with. The woman he loved was in the city, forever in sight, but never to be his. Bennett may well have been concerned that his illicit intercourse scheme might come to the attention of someone who could expose the whole thing as a fraud.

In the meantime, Bennett had to go through the performance of his duties knowing that Smith would not permit him any more opportunities for advancement. The suicide attempt had prevented Joseph from exposing Bennett. But there is little reason to think Joseph would trust Bennett with important matters after discovery of Bennett’s adultery in July. Still, Bennett had to pretend to be good, surrounded by the righteous who were forever attending Church meetings in the groves of Nauvoo. 15

Bennett was likely at one of these morning Church meetings during the latter part of 1841. Joseph was preaching, and mentioned that, when the gospel was taught in Turkey or India, it might be necessary for the Saints to embrace the possibility of a man having multiple wives. 16 After lunch the meeting reconvened, and Joseph recanted his words. But the sermon may have planted the seed of an idea in Bennett’s mind. No later than September 1841 we see the first indication that people are claiming Joseph Smith was teaching the acceptability of spiritual wifery. 17

Another possibility would be suggested by Bennett’s later exposé of Mormonism. As Bennett began naming names, he includes Joseph Bates Noble as having performed the marriage between Joseph Smith and Louisa Beaman. It seems likely that Bennett’s informant in this may have been Joseph Bates Noble himself. It almost certainly wasn’t Joseph Smith. If Noble was the informant, he may not have realized that a seemingly innocent remark to Bennett could have such devastating consequences.

No matter the source of Bennett’s inspiration, Bennett and his fellow seducers began to aggressively press the claim that Joseph Smith himself taught it was acceptable for women to yield. We see this in the extended testimony of Catherine [Fuller Warren]:
“Sometime last winter I became alarmed at my conduct and told him [Dr. Bennett] I did not wish his company any longer. He told me that the heads of the Church were conducting in that manner and specified Joseph’s name. I think this happened last October. He said that Joseph taught and conducted in the above manner.

“He also was with Mrs. Shindle now living beyond Ramus and also with the two Miss Nymans…”

“L. O. Littlefield had been at my house and made propositions to have unlawful intercourse – he urged hard. This was about the last of January or first of February, had been 3 or 4 times in course of 2 or 3 weeks. He urged doctrines such as the following, namely that there was no harm in having unlawful intercourse, that others conducted in the same way, there should be no sin come upon her—if there was any it should come upon himself, that the heads of the church now practicing the same things – named Joseph Smith – he urged this doctrine – was there about the first of February about 8 in the evening.”

From the affidavits sworn out during 1842, it seems at least a dozen men had either seduced women or were attempting to pressure women to yield to them. The common thread in the testimonies was the men’s assurance that it was right to engage in intercourse as long as it was kept secret.

There have been several interpretations of these accounts.

First, it has been presumed that these men were operating with the full authorization of Joseph Smith, but had the misfortune to be discovered. Thus they sacrificed themselves and their good names to protect the secret of polygamy.

Second, it has been presumed that the men had learned something of Joseph’s doctrine permitting plural marriage, but over-reached Joseph’s intent.

Third, it has been presumed that the affidavits accurately portrayed exactly what happened. This paints the men as vile seducers operating without authorization.

Unfortunately, few scholars have taken the affidavits at face value. For the most part, stories regarding any form of non-monogamous sexuality
have been presumed to be in some manner related to Joseph Smith’s teachings regarding Celestial marriage and plural marriage.

Even the Very Elect?

Rather than look at the 1842 Nauvoo High Council testimonies as careful lies to hide Joseph’s polygamy, let us look at tales regarding polygamy that have previously been presumed to reflect Joseph’s teachings. Is it possible some of these instances of “legitimate” plural marriage might be hints of spiritual wifery?

Here are some proposed tells that a story might be discussing spiritual wifery:

1. The women are not named or numbered.
2. Crude terminology is used.
3. Women are shared between multiple men.
4. Joseph calls the person to repentance or otherwise suggests that they risked damnation.
5. They themselves claim that it is acceptable for a man to engage in sex with a woman without benefit of marriage.
6. The man in question is sent away from Nauvoo.

William Smith. Joseph Smith’s younger brother had been a problem for years, certainly since initially refusing to ally himself with Mormonism in order to continue sowing his wild oats. Joseph Smith had insisted on selecting his problematic brother as one of the initial twelve apostles over the objections of others. When William felt he was being disrespected, he could become violent, once beating Joseph publicly so severely that Joseph appears to have suffered broken ribs. When other early apostles turned against Joseph, William called for Joseph’s death.

The women’s affidavits in 1842 claimed that William had been involved in persuading women to participate in illicit intercourse. Catherine Fuller claimed that on the morning of her marriage to Brother Warren, William Smith came to her to get her to abandon marriage and remain available to himself for unlawful intercourse.

Joseph attempted to reform his young brother. Despite Joseph’s best efforts, it became clear after Joseph’s death that William continued to teach and practice unlawful sexual intercourse. In September 1845 William would openly proclaim to believers in Nauvoo that he believed in spiritual wifery.
William would be excommunicated by the LDS Church and by all the LDS sects with which he subsequently affiliated in the decade after Joseph’s death. Late in life he would re-join the RLDS Church, but would never be granted the leadership position he continued to believe was his blood right.

John Snider and Joseph Kelly. In 1850 John Snider’s son-in-law, Joseph Ellis Johnson, submitted to Church discipline related to his seduction of a plural wife of Lorenzo Snow. In the course of the testimony, the seduction of Johnson’s mother-in-law was entered into evidence. Johnson would state “He was familiar with the first frigging that was done in his house with his mother in law—by Joseph.”

Joseph Kelly, like Johnson, had been specifically brought to Salt Lake City for this trial by Orson Hyde. Orson Hyde would say “[Joseph] Kelly told him John [Snider?] knew what he was about—it was done in [Snider’s] house by bro Joseph [Kelly]…”

Given the crudeness of the term used (frigging), it seems unlikely that there is an honorable interpretation of this sordid tale involving Joseph Kelly, John Snider, and Mary Heron [Snider]. In addition, the implication that John Snider knew what Joseph Kelly “was about” is troubling.

It appears both John Snider and Joseph Kelly subsequently repented and remained faithful Mormons.

Joseph W. Coolidge. In August 1870, Joseph F. Smith was attempting to collect any information regarding plural marriage that might refute the claim that Joseph had never taught plural marriage. Coolidge claimed “Joseph Smith had sealed more than one wife to Jos. W. Coolidge, and he ‘knew’ as he said, what he spoke.”

Though the testimony seemed to support Joseph F. Smith’s agenda, he was wary of the story. He wrote, “I record this as the testimony of a man who has not been with the Church for more than 20 years.” Specifically, Coolidge and his family (or families) did not join the main body of Saints who moved to Utah after 1846.

One of Coolidge’s extra wives was Rosilla Carter. Rosilla was a cousin of Marrietta Carter [Holmes], who had been killed in August 1840. Rosilla would leave Coolidge and agree to become a plural wife to Orange Wight. As it appears Orange Wight’s variant of polygamy was not orthodox, this further casts doubt on Coolidge’s variant of polygamy.
Vinson Knight. In 1843 Joseph Smith “conversed considerable concerning some delicate matters” with William Clayton. One of the assertions written in Clayton’s diary said, “Also Brother Knight he [Joseph Smith] gave him one but he [Knight] went to loose conduct and he [Joseph Smith] could not save him.” Vinson Knight died in July 1842, supporting the past tense used in the Clayton diary, along with the implication that “Brother Knight” had died, and Joseph “could not save him.”

Neither Vinson Knight’s wife nor the widow he cared for, Philinda Eldredge [Merrick], were sealed to Vinson in the Nauvoo temple.

John E. Page. John E. Page was baptized by Emer Harris in 1833. He was ordained an apostle on December 19, 1838, along with John Taylor. Page and Taylor were elevated to the office of apostle to fill vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The deaths and defections associated with the 1837-38 troubles in Kirtland and Missouri had drastically depleted this leading body of the Church.

Page failed to embark on a foreign mission as called. After returning to Nauvoo in the 1841/1842 timeframe, John E. Page tended to disagree with Joseph and his fellows in the Quorum of the Twelve apostles. Following Joseph’s death, Page is one of the myriad leaders who attempted to claim leadership of the LDS Church. He was finally dropped from the Quorum of the Twelve on January 9, 1846, for failing to sustain the exodus from Nauvoo. Less than three weeks later he was excommunicated for urging the saints to abandon Brigham Young’s leadership and align themselves with James Strang.

Page’s association with Emer Harris and James Strang put him squarely in the circle of those willing to conspire against Joseph Smith circa 1844, many of whom had been involved in spiritual wifery circa 1841/1842.

In 1904 Joseph Fielding Smith, then 28-years-old, visited Mary Judd Page, a resident of St. Louis and third civil wife of former Apostle, John E. Page. Following up on his father’s efforts to document any instance that resembled polygamy in Nauvoo during Joseph Smith’s lifetime, Joseph Fielding Smith questioned the aged woman.

Q. Did John E. Page have wives other than you?

A. Yes.
Q. How did he get them?
A. I gave them to him.

Q. How come you did that?
A. Well, he wanted them and I gave them to him.

Q. Well, that was in the days of the Prophet Joseph Smith[?]
A. Yes, it was. 25

It is possible that John E. Page’s “plural wives” were granted to him within the context of Joseph Smith’s teachings. However nothing about the Joseph Fielding Smith interview distinguishes John E. Page’s acquisition of “wives” from Bennett’s heresy. It is suspicious that Mary Judd Page did not name or even number the wives she “gave” to John E. Page.

Robert Thompson. In the William Clayton journal entry discussing delicate matters, R. Thompson is also mentioned. Clayton specifically mentions that R. Thompson had died. 26 The likely identity identity of R. Thompson is Robert Thompson, Joseph Smith’s scribe prior to Thompson’s death in August 1841. Robert Thompson was married to Mercy Fielding, sister of Mary Fielding [Smith], the wife of Hyrum Smith. Robert Thompson was so close to the Smith family that he is the only non-Smith to be buried in the Smith family plot in Nauvoo.

Brigham Young. In the same journal entry where William Clayton mentions Brother Knight and Thompson, he refers to B. Y. as having transgressed and yet having claimed that he had not transgressed. The only individual with the initials B. Y. in Hancock County for the 1840 census was Brigham Young. 27

There is a story regarding Brigham Young that might account for this claim that B. Y. had transgressed yet not transgressed.

Martha Brotherton arrived in the Nauvoo area in November 1841, after leaving England with her parents and two sisters on September 21, 1841. The leader of her party was Joseph Fielding. At some point roughly three weeks after arriving in the vicinity of Nauvoo, Martha Brotherton was invited to visit Nauvoo. She knew Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, who had been missionaries when she and her family joined the Mormon Church. Upon arriving in Nauvoo, she apparently saw William Clayton, a
fellow-convert from England who had arrived in Nauvoo a few months earlier and was then working in the tithing office.

According to Martha’s tale, Martha was asked to wait in a room for a period of time. Then Brigham Young came in and asked her to be his partner. Martha asked for time to consider the offer. When she was allowed to leave the room, she fled. She and her parents left the Mormon community nine weeks after arriving in the Nauvoo area and stayed in St. Louis before leaving the United States and returning to England.

Two contemporary versions of this story exist. First is the rumor that can be inferred from the rebuttal issued during the April 1842 general conference, reported in the Times and Seasons. Second is an affidavit sworn out by Martha and provided to a disgraced Dr. Bennett. Bennett would publish Martha’s affidavit as part of the body of calumny Dr. Bennett flung at Joseph Smith and his followers after May 1842. The original affidavit is not extant. Both the April 1842 rebuttal in the Times and Seasons and the affidavit published by Bennett mention Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball.

The combination of the Clayton journal with the Brotherton story suggests Brigham Young could have been temporarily misled regarding spiritual wifery. Brigham’s interview of Brotherton corresponded to Martha and her parents departure from Nauvoo. However Brigham Young does not appear to have actually committed sexual transgression.

The Brotherton interview appears to have occurred early in December 1841. Martha had arrived in Nauvoo in November, 1841, met with Brigham three weeks after arrival, was still in Nauvoo for the 1842 census (February 1842) and left with her parents nine weeks after arrival. It seems in December, 1841, Brigham Young was receiving his guidance regarding extra-monogamous activity from Dr. Bennett’s circle rather than Joseph Smith. However by January 1842, Brigham Young would become the first non-relative to officiate at a ceremony uniting Joseph to a plural wife.

Heber C. Kimball. The Martha Brotherton story named Heber C. Kimball as implicated in the attempt to, as she believed, pressure her to yield up her virtue.

Heber C. Kimball would carefully avoid documenting the early dates of his personal interactions with Celestial marriage. He never confirmed when he was sealed to his own wife, Vilate. There is no precise dating regarding
when he became a husband to the deserted English convert, Sarah Peak Noon.

Family stories relate that Heber had been informed that he had a responsibility to take on additional wives. Heber formed a plan to approach the Pitkin sisters, elderly spinsters who had cared for him when he was on his way to England in 1840.

Heber presented his plan to Joseph Smith, who promptly proceeded to forbid such a course. According to Stanley Kimball, though without reference and possibly in an incorrect context, “Joseph had to warn him [Heber Kimball] that he could lose his apostleship and to command him three times to obey.”

Stanley B. Kimball clearly believed the command to obey related to entering into the practice of plural marriage. However, the extreme nature of the threat makes more sense if Heber was on the verge of committing a sin, rather than merely not embracing Celestial marriage.

Lyman Wight. Lyman Wight was an apostle, like William Smith, John E. Page, Brigham Young, and Heber Kimball. However it does not appear that Wight’s “polygamy” occurred in 1841-42. Lyman’s wives were women he took to himself in Wisconsin, with no indication that he had been granted permission to administer to himself in this manner.

It seems a possible cause for Lyman’s beliefs in this area arose from the example of his son, and information his son had obtained that Joseph Smith had married several women.

Orange Lysander Wight. Orange Wight was the teenaged son of Apostle Lyman Wight, a boy who had been part of the Mormon movement since the earliest days of the Church. Yet in 1841 he learned that John Higbee had two wives. John Higbee, brother to Nauvoo judge, Elias Higbee, had protected young Orange and his family in Missouri.

There is no indication that John Higbee’s extra wife was duly provided to him within Joseph Smith’s system of Celestial marriage. As John Higbee was uncle to two men deeply involved in Dr. Bennett’s spiritual wifery, it seems most likely that John Higbee himself was engaged in spiritual wifery.

Orange mentions girls calling themselves “spirituals” in summer 1841, indicating that he was well behind his teenage peers when he himself was fully initiated in the winter of 1841/42.
Sometime in the spring of 1842, Orange was sent on a mission to the Eastern States. He was on this mission for 13 months before returning to Nauvoo in 1843.

**Horace Whitney.** It is not clear Horace actually embraced illicit intercourse. However on May 12, 1842, Horace was sent away from Nauvoo. The trip was ostensibly to visit his mother’s parents in North Canaan County, Connecticut and other relatives in Ohio. Horace would be kept from Nauvoo for over two years. Horace would not return to Nauvoo until after the death of Joseph Smith.

Sarah Ann Whitney covenanted to be a plural wife of Joseph Smith on July 27, 1842. Helen, writing in 1881, thought the covenant between Sarah Whitney and Joseph Smith had occurred in the spring of 1842, prior to Horace’s departure from Nauvoo. Helen writes Sarah covenanted with Joseph Smith:

“but had to do it unbeknown to her brother, which grieved her most, and also her mother, that they could not open their hearts to him. But Joseph feared to disclose it, believing that the Higbee boys would embitter Horace against him, as they had already caused serious trouble, and for this reason he favored his [Horace’s] going east, which Horace was slow to accept. He had had some slight suspicions that the stories about Joseph were not all without foundation, but had never told them, nor did he know the facts until after his return to Nauvoo, when Sarah hastened to tell him all.

It was no small stumbling block to him when learning of the course which had been taken towards him, which was hard for him to overlook. But Joseph had always treated him with the greatest kindness from the time that he came to live in his father’s house in Kirtland. In fact they had attended the same school and studied Hebrew together, and had pitched quoits and played ball together many a time there and in Nauvoo, and he could hold nothing against him now he was dead.”

Writing four decades after the events of 1842, Helen is gentle to the memory of her long-time husband when describing the urgency with which Horace was sent from Nauvoo. Even so, it is clear that Horace’s opposition to Joseph, in light of the rumors Horace had believed, was only softened in 1844 because the man he had known so well was now dead.
**Fall of the Doctor – Notes**

Dr. John C. Bennett had, in the course of a mere year, gone from simple adulterer to leader of a sexual underground of vast proportions.

Bennett’s seductions may not have started until after Joseph terminated his courtship, likely in the May 1841 timeframe. Bennett’s affair with Sarah Bates [Pratt], wife of Apostle Orson Pratt, may have started by accident. By June Bennett had cultivated a safer liaison with an obscure widow, Catherine Laur [Fuller]. But what might have started as a private arrangement for personal sin quickly ballooned into a sexual underground of vast proportions. Bennett’s various positions of authority gave him scope to spread the sexual heresy throughout all aspects of Nauvoo’s elite. Joseph’s brother, Apostle William Smith, was definitely ensnared. Teenaged boys, respectable women, and leading men in the Mormon community had been affected.

It appears Joseph Smith himself was unaware of these matters or how his name was being used until December 1841 at the earliest. It was only after the seducers began to attribute their evil to Joseph that we see Joseph claim that the angel came again, commanding him to obey. If he would not restore a proper understanding of Celestial marriage, with its allowance for plural marriage, he and his people would be cut off.

By the time of Joseph’s thirty-sixth birthday in December, 1841, he likely knew terrible things were occurring in Nauvoo. According to the journal of William Clayton, Joseph pled with the Lord on behalf of B. Y., who had been started down the road of coercion. Brigham Young is the only known “B. Y.” to fit the context of the Clayton journal. The window when Joseph’s pleading occurred must have fallen between Brigham’s attempt to acquire Martha Brotherton as a partner in early December 1841 and the first time we see Brigham officiating at Joseph’s sealing to Agnes Coolbrith [Smith] in January 1842.
In the fall of 2012, Taylor volunteered to campaign for one of the two US presidential candidates. He was primarily motivated by political ideology, but he also hoped that he might meet someone. He’d fought for his country in Iraq and served a mission to Thailand. For a couple of years since his mission, Taylor had been hoping to meet someone he could marry. He’d dated, of course, and he’d introduce whichever woman he was dating to his family. Time after time, however, he’d eventually have to tell well-wishers that, no, he was no longer dating the young woman he’d told them about.

In the pre-dawn mist, Taylor surveyed the group of fellow campaigners. They had gathered at the vans to travel to a swing district for the weekend of campaigning. Instead of the group of college students he’d expected, the other campaigners were mature individuals or children. Resigned, Taylor set about making friends of those around him.

After dawn, the vans of campaigners stopped for a break. Taylor noticed a woman amidst the older folks and helpful children. She was bundled in her coat against the fall chill, hair pulled back in a knot, glasses framing an attractive face of undetermined age. Taylor turned back to his new-found friends and continued the discussion. He didn’t want his new friends feel he was willing to ditch them just for an attractive woman. Besides, the woman might turn out to be much older or married or otherwise uninterested in a person like himself. However Taylor’s new friends urged him to meet the lady on the other side of the group.
Her name, Taylor learned, was Shazia. And, no, she was not in her thirties, nor was she married. As the weekend progressed, Taylor and Shazia began to learn how much they shared in common: music, academics, a love of the outdoors, politics, having a parent from Asia, pioneer heritage, ancestors who were shot at Carthage jail.  

In time Taylor introduced Shazia to his family and updated his Facebook status. Eventually an e-mail from Taylor’s grandmother went out, days before Valentine’s Day. The subject read “Taylor’s technically not engaged yet, but the marriage is set…”

Thus began one of the myriad love stories of those who believe in the importance of marriage, of those who believe their unions can last for eternity.

Together, Forever

Our modern culture is filled with movies and cards talking about being together forever. And yet there is only one religion with a doctrine that actually allows for couples and families to be together in eternity.
This is the legacy of Joseph Smith. He taught that we could we enter into eternal covenants with one another. Further, he taught, we can solemnize eternal linkages between our family members reaching through all generations of mortal existence, all countries, all eras.

We who love in this life know how much our spouse means to us, how much we care for our children, how much we care for our parents. As we consider the generations who preceded us and the generations yet to come, Mormons see mankind as a great eternal family. It is a grand global family that transcends all boundaries of time and space, a family that will transcend death and hell.

Isaiah prophesied that in the last day, the Lord God would rise up and save His people, as David had saved Israel from the Philistines in the valley of Gibeon. In that last day, Isaiah said, God would do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. 2

God would give His people line upon line, precept upon precept, giving them consolation, confirming their hope. 3 In that day Elijah would appear and restore the sealing power, that the fathers might be sealed to their children, and the children to their fathers. 4 The hour would come when those in their graves would hear the word of God, 5 that Word which is life and light, with power to make all who will believe the children of God. 6

This, then, was the purpose of the restoration. It was to save all mankind by binding us together in families. The saving ordinance of baptism would be performed by proxy as a prerequisite to each individual’s entry into the great eternal union.

No other theology envisions this universal salvation of mankind. Of modern religions, only in the religion Joseph Smith restored will each child of God become free from the circumstances and limitations of their birth. In the theology believers claim Joseph Smith restored, all are provided the means for salvation and then permitted to choose whether to embrace the salvation of Christ or reject it. 7

Why Polygamy?

If the family of mankind was to be bound together for eternity, it had to be possible to bind together those families where a man had been married to more than one woman during his lifetime.
A huge amount of controversy and suffering has been endured over plural marriage. Yet it seems Joseph’s introduction of plural marriage as part of the New and Everlasting Covenant was merely a procedural footnote to the great work of sealing mankind together.

In great stories, the hero’s quest is to right the great wrong that looms over the people. Christ died that all might be saved, that all might be resurrected. “Else why are they baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all,” Paul told the Corinthians. From this exasperated comment, we get a picture of a primitive Christian church that was performing ordinances on behalf of the departed. The primitive Christian Church was extending salvation to more than just those few who are privileged to hear it and embrace it in this life.

Yet this salvation is not just for the children of first wives. Insistence on monogamy as the only valid form of marriage had to be broken, else the great work of binding families together would fail. Women who married widowers would have been cut off. The plural wives of 70% of mankind’s cultures would have forever been cut off. And with these women, vast numbers of children would also be cut off.

A culture willing to kill over polygamy would not have willingly birthed an understanding that a man could be eternally sealed to more than one woman. And so restoration of that one small aspect of the work required the sacrifice of “the best blood of the nineteenth century,” as John Taylor would write of Joseph’s death. 8

Why the Secrecy?

Of late there have been those disturbed that the Church appeared to hide the past regarding polygamy. Something, surely, was rotten about this, if it had to be so thoroughly buried.

Three factors come into play. First is that polygamy is not what you want dominating an initial conversation about salvation and the precious gift of Christ’s atonement. When would it be discussed, if not then? Polygamy is discussed, but typically not until one is studying the history of the Church. But most people never get to a stage where they are seriously studying the history of the Church. Thus most people get stuck at a level where they are uncomfortable at the thought of polygamy yet do not have the background to understand why God might have restored this “principle.”
Second, there are those who learn of polygamy and desire to practice it, believing (incorrectly) that if it was good enough for Joseph, it is good enough for them. Surely this fear should be receding over a hundred years after the excommunication of John W. Taylor. But today’s general authorities were born when this was a very real threat. Some have adult memories of Apostle Richard Lyman’s excommunication in 1943. Lyman had slipped from friendship to imagined union in heaven to an adulterous liaison that betrayed his wife and thousands who had honored him. Leaders of the modern Church don’t want to risk losing even a single soul to polygamy.

Third, the actual history of Nauvoo polygamy has been clouded by obfuscation. This was originally intended to protect the repentant souls who had been seduced by John C. Bennett and his Strikers. How could the Church tell those things that had been stricken from the record, details that had only ever been known to a select few who took the secrets to their graves over a century ago?

Today, with the internet, the mangled and secretive story has power to wound, where it could previously simply be hidden. And so today it is necessary to assemble the story, as best as we possibly can, so that the most accurate truth can be laid before all, believers and detractors alike.

**Knowledge Brings Peace**

The initial draft of this book was written as a series of blog posts. I thought there would be many who would challenge my views, bringing forward facts that would fundamentally alter the my reconstruction. I looked forward to the challenge. Peer review is a proven method I have long used in my scientific career for arriving at a better final result.

What could not be sure was the number of those commenting and e-mailing me directly, telling me that this reconstruction made sense of a history they’d relegated to a back shelf. These were often those who had made a decision to be a faithful Mormon based on the witness of the Spirit, even though Joseph’s polygamy had remained a troublesome mystery.

Some have supposed me dogmatic in my views. But I have been open to change in response to data. Those who followed my blog posts in 2013-2014 saw this. I originally did not know the extent of John Bennett’s seduction of Joseph’s people. I did not originally think the Strikers had been
directly involved in Joseph’s killing. I did not originally consider my ancestor, Austin Cowles, to be a major conspirator contributing to Joseph’s death. I did not originally acknowledge how fundamentally responsible my ancestor, John W. Taylor, had been for today’s Mormon fundamentalists. I had not originally imagined how many of the women involved in early Nauvoo polygamy might have been seduced by the Strikers. I did not know that Eliza R. Snow may have been raped or that she had modified her 1842 poem about marriage or that she had written describing an intimate relationship with “that Foul hearted spirit, the traitor, The vile, faithless, rottenhearted wretch…,” presumably John C. Bennett.

This reconstructed history tells of horrific evil. And yet it has brought peace to some. In 2014 an e-mail arrived from someone related to Mary Clift. Mary’s son, Jason, has long been presumed to be one of the first children born into polygamy. The reconstructed history explains how Jason had been fathered Gustavus Hills. The High Council minutes had not been an elaborate ruse to “protect” the secret of Celestial marriage. The e-mail read:

Meg,

I wanted to thank you for sharing your thoughts on the Theodore Turley/Mary Clift marriage… In researching [Mary’s] life to present a biography, I was more than a little confused by the August 1842 Gustavus Hills testimony she gave in relation to the family’s insistence on the January 1842 marriage date. In asking [another family member] about it, he suggested (as a theory, since we do not know for sure) that it was a false testimony in an effort to hide the practice of plural marriage. I’ve recently discovered your theory that you published earlier this year to the contrary. This is much more satisfying to me in picturing both Mary and Theodore…

As my correspondent concluded, we may never truly know what happened. But we must acknowledge that other theories regarding Nauvoo and polygamy are similarly uncertain.

Ultimately we should select those reconstructions that best fit the totality of the data. The totality of the data suggests Joseph rarely consummated his “marriages” to plural wives, possibly out of deference to his beloved Emma. Likewise, his love for even those who would ultimately kill him rendered him perhaps too willing to forgive.
Joseph’s Legacy

If Joseph Smith was inspired by God, then today’s Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or Mormonism represents the result. Mormonism is a religion that envisions all mankind as brothers and sisters, a theology with a mechanism to save all mankind through all time as well as all space. It is a religion fundamentally based on the primacy of the love between spouses and the love between parents and children.

It is a religion that has power to offer salvation to even those who have fallen away: to John Bennett and William Law, to Francis Higbee and Lorin C. Wooley. When the final judgment commences, the hope is that all the ordinances of salvation will have been performed for all mankind, that all individuals will then stand before the judgment bar with an ability to embrace that baptism that has been performed on their behalf and choose Christ and God.

In that envisioned future judgment, no man or woman will be left behind except by their own, individual choice. No child will have been declared an eternal bastard unworthy of Christ’s salvation. All will be provided the ordinances of salvation as part of the human family, it all its complexities.

This, then, is the legacy of Joseph. This is the reason it was worth giving his life. It was to restore the knowledge that marriages in eternity could, at times, diverge from the monogamous ideal.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Bruce Nielson for inviting me to blog on this topic at Millennial Star. Without that opportunity, I would not have been forced to find the next level of documentation you seen here. I am also grateful to Brian C. Hales, who graciously shared the Nauvoo High Council Minutes and the testimonies of the women who reported having been seduced by the Strikers. Brian’s magnificent 1500 page work Joseph Smith’s Polygamy, with the accompanying website, contains a vast amount of information regarding Nauvoo events. It is a must-have resource for all students of Mormon polygamy.
I am also grateful for those researchers who have gone before me, and who have shared their writings. Of particular note are Todd H. Compton, Gary Bergera, Richard L. Bushman, Linda Newell, Val Avery, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher. Scholarship and probity are always of value, even when interpretations differ.

Finally, I am grateful to my family, for their support and example. In particular, I am grateful to my husband, Bryan Stout, for his unwavering love for me and all mankind, and for his suggestions throughout the years. He was the one who pointed me to works such as Compton’s *In Sacred Loneliness* and Hales’ *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, the one who constantly questions me, the one who shares his vast insights into Christianity across the millenia. He is the one who brings me food and water when I have been unwilling to move from my computer for hours on end. If I know that men can be good and great, it is because I know Bryan Stout.

**God’s Strange Act: A Legacy – Notes**

Modern Mormon marriages are like the marriages of any other group, with the hope that the spouses really can be together forever. While this hope is routinely voiced in cards and movies, there is no mechanism for this to be accomplished in any of the world’s religions, other than in Mormonism.

Plural marriage is merely an accommodation for the reality that some families don’t fit the monogamous ideal. There is no need for every man to be a polygamist, or for every woman to presume she will have to share her husband. But as we attempt to bind the family of mankind together in all its complexity, a mechanism for dealing with the many realities of real families was needed. The Biblical family model, where each woman and her children is linked to one man, is sufficient to bind the human family together. Mormons trust God to make any adjustments needed in heaven.

The secrecy of early plural marriage came about because of the illicit intercourse practice and taught by Dr. John C. Bennett. At the time, names and details were kept quiet in hopes that the women and men affected could have space to repent. The individuals of their day had no idea the way the information would get mangled in our day. They thought it no harm to take secrets to the grave, unrecorded.

We can continue to persist in the limited view of our recent past, or embrace the terrible and glorious truths that created Mormonism as it is – a religion that believes in families, even when they diverge from the ideal.
Appendix A – Conscientious History: A Guide

A reasonable person will want to observe a few short rules when reconstructing or evaluating history. Adapted from Wendie E. Schneider’s distillation of the 2000 ruling in Irving v. Penguin Books and Lipstadt.

1. Know the Basics of Evidence
   a. **Primary Evidence** is created by a participant in the event under investigation
      i. **Contemporary** evidence is created at the time of the event
      ii. **Late** evidence (usually recollection) is created well after the event
   b. **Secondary Evidence**, contemporary or late, is created by those not present at the event
   c. **Provenance**
      i. If the story or artifact changed hands, was there opportunity for **unintentional error** to have crept in?
      ii. Was any source likely to have **altered the story** or artifact?
   d. **Plausibility**
      i. Is the story or artifact **anachronistic**?
      ii. Is the story or artifact **contradicted by science**?

2. Evaluate the Evidence before Finalizing a Conclusion
   a. Treat all sources with **appropriate reservations**
   b. Don’t dismiss counter-evidence without **scholarly consideration**
   c. Be **even-handed** in treatment of evidence
   d. **Identify speculation** when suggesting conclusions
   e. **Correctly transcribe or translate** documents. Omissions or elisions should be used to clarify evidence, not alter it
   f. **Weigh the authenticity** of all accounts
   g. **Consider the motives** of historical actors

3. Avoid Fraud, the deliberate misrepresentation or manipulation of historical evidence
   a. **Do not knowingly present forgery** as genuine
   b. **Do not suggest implausible reasons** for dismissing genuine evidence or reasonable conjecture
   c. **Do not attribute distorted conclusions** to sources
   d. **Do not manipulate statistics** to alter conclusions
   e. **Do not deliberately mis-translate** texts
End Notes

Foreword
2 Massachusetts doctor, Charles Knowlton, wrote a book in 1832 titled The Fruits of Philosophy, or the Private Companion of Young Married People, which explained methods of birth control. He was sentenced to three months hard labor. As late as 1877 people were being prosecuted for attempting to publish Knowlton’s book.
3 Though it was earlier believed there was a “safe” period, a proper understanding of the gynecological basis for this safe period was not developed until the 1920s independently by Kyusaku Ogino in Japan and Hermann Knau in Austria. The Rhythm Method was popularized in 1932 by a Roman Catholic doctor in America, Leo J. Latz, who considered the rhythm method consistent with Catholic doctrine. See Latz, The Rhythm of Sterility and Fertility in Women, 1932.
4 Objective evidence here refers to physical evidence, such as children or disease. As early as 1825, Jeremy Bentham’s A Treatise on Judicial Evidence (1825) argued that testimony needed to be backed up by material proof.
5 Brian Hales’ book and website, Joseph Smith’s Polygamy, contains all public journals and records regarding this matter. Three primary sources are the Joseph F. Smith collection of affidavits, gathered circa 1869, Andrew Jensen’s affidavits also gathered circa 1869, and the 1893 Temple Lot trial. In the case of all three, the express purpose of the gathered testimonies was to confirm that Joseph Smith had covenanted with women other than Emma Hale.
6 Hales, Emma. Last Testimony of Sister Emma, February 1879. When asked if Joseph had other wives, she replied, “He had no other wife but me; nor did he to my knowledge ever have.”
7 Bennett, John Cook, History of the Saints, 1842.
8 Law, William, affidavit published in the only issue of The Expositor, May, 1844.
9 Joseph Smith – History 1:10

1 – Prelude to a Killing
1 March 31, 1844, The three meetings Dennison Harris attended were on Sundays. The Council of Fifty was formed on 26 March, where Joseph indicated he might be killed. Baugh, Alexander L. and Richard N. Holzapfel, I Roll the Burden and Responsibility of Leading This Church Off from My Shoulders on to Yours: The 1844/1845 Declaration of the Quorum of the Twelve Regarding Apostolic Succession, BYU Studies, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2010, pp. 5-19. Joseph’s acknowledgement that he might be killed is on p. 18. Footnote 20 on p. 13 provides the support for the date falling on March 26, 1844.
2 William Law owned a stately brick home at the edge of the river, just south of Parley Street. Joseph would have waited downstream to ensure he was able to recover his informants whether his informants were dead or alive.
3 Joseph Smith announced his candidacy for the Presidency of the United States on January 29, 1844, shortly after stripping William Law of his leadership positions. Law would be excommunicated in April 19, 1844, more than two weeks after the third seditious meeting held in his home on the river. See Joseph Smith: Campaign for President of the United States By Arnold K. Garr https://www.lds.org/ensign/2009/02/joseph-smith-campaign-for-president-of-the-united-states?lang=eng
4 This mention of a dip in the river suggests that the weather had turned warm.
5 The two leaders of the conspiracy were William Law, formerly Joseph’s counselor in the Presidency of the Church, and Austin Cowles, a member of the Nauvoo High Council and father of Joseph’s governess. Austin is my ancestor.

6 Joseph Smith, as conveyed via Dennison L. Harris to Horace Cummings, commented on by John Taylor. Horace Cummings’ version was published in the Contributor in 1884, and was included in Brian C. Hales, Joseph Smiths Polygamy, Volume 3, Chapter 15.

7 The Contributor, 1884.

8 Dennison Harris related the tale to Brigham Young sometime before Young’s death in 1877. The printed version of the tale was published in 1884, forty years after Joseph’s death.

9 Plural marriage, where a living man was married to multiple living women, was put aside. However modern Mormon doctrine allows for a man to be eternally united (or sealed) to all the women who had been his wives. Modern Mormon practice also allows for deceased women to have sealing ordinances performed on their behalf uniting them to all of their husbands, with the expectation that only one of these ordinances would be binding in eternity.

2 – Why Would God Command Polygamy?

1 Luke 2: 10-11

2 1 Timothy 2: 3-6

3 John Lefgren’s analysis of local weather patterns and the science of maple syrup place the date of this vision on March 26, 1820, which was Palm Sunday.

4 Joseph Smith – History 1: 19

5 Joseph Smith – History 1: 34-35

6 Joseph Smith – History 1: 36-38

7 Joseph Smith – History 1: 39, c.f. Malachi 4:6


9 Doctrine and Covenants 137:5

10 Baptism for the Dead article in Church History In The Fulness Of Times Student Manual, 2003, p. 251.

11 Hales, Brian, Joseph Smith’s Polygamy, Volume 3: Theology, 2013, chapter 7.

12 See Calisse, Carlo, A History of Italian Law, Volume II, p.545 for the 1054 laws declaring affinity by betrothal sufficient to create an impediment to marriage. The Catholic Encyclopedia article on Affinity (in Canon Law) discusses the eleventh Council of Rome in 1059 which established the impediment of affinity (and consanguinity) to the seventh degree.

13 Queen Margaret of Scotland tried to persuade the Witanagemot to revise the marriage code to wholly align with the papal position in the 1070s, but was only able to wrest an agreement that a widow ought not be forced to marry her step-son, a change to marriage law that was one of the five reasons cited for her canonization. See Turgot, Life of St. Margaret Queen of Scotlan, William Forbes-Leith translation, Edinburgh, 1884, pp. 51-52. Available online at https://archive.org/details/lifeofstmargaret00turguoft, retrieved Dec 9, 2015. By the time of King Henry VIII, Henry had to petition Rome for special permission to marry his brother’s widow, even though levirate marriage is very clearly a duty imposed on a dead man’s brothers (Genesis 38:8, Deuteronomy 25:5,6, 9-10, Ruth).

14 Even though Church laws made polygamy increasingly difficult for hundreds of years prior to the reformation, Martin Luther wrote in the early 1500s: “I confess that I cannot forbid a person to marry several wives, for it does not contradict the Scripture. If a man wishes to marry more than one wife he should be asked whether he is satisfied in his conscience that he may do so in accordance with the word of God. In such a case the civil authority has nothing to do in the matter.” (De Wette II, p. 459)
3 – Guns, Germs, and Sex

1 It takes about 20 seconds to muzzle-load a smooth-bore musket. The ease of loading and shooting is noted in comparison to the time required to load and shoot early rifles, prior to the creation of the minié ball after 1848.

2 As bow wood became more dear, it appears gun makers attempted to make muskets more accurate by imparting spin to the balls, as spinning arrows were known to fly more true.


4 I have verified the 100 yard estimate using the dimensions of the upper story room and the minor amount of drop a rifled ball would experience.

5 See Appendix B.


11 Wilhelm Wyl was the pen name of Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal. Wyl, Wilhelm, Mormon Portraits, pp. 61-62.


13 Ibid., p. 4.


15 I was a teenager living in the Washington DC suburbs in the 1970s when a special adults-only session of Stake Conference was held. After it was over, my mother shared that the sermon had been focused on encouraging couples to express their love physically to one another also for the purpose of strengthening the relationship, not only to produce children. Not long afterwards, the periodical Exponent II (By Mormon Women, For Mormon Women, About Mormon Women) discussed that sexuality between married individuals could extend beyond mere procreation. We children were amused, as it had never occurred to us that sexuality should be limited to mere procreation. The article in question may have been Bonnie Shaw, Mormon Sexuality: An Interview with Mary Beth Rayner, Exponent II Vol. 9, Issue 1 (Fall 1982): 3-4 or letters to the editor in the subsequent issue.

4 – The 1831 Revelation Regarding Plural Marriage

17 From visit to Watervliet Shaker Historic District in Colonie, New York, a National Park Service site, see also www.nps.gov/ar/travel/shaker/wat.htm.

18 D&C 49: 15-16 specifically refutes the idea that it is acceptable to forbid to marry, indicating that marriage is lawful “that the earth might answer the end of its creation.”

19 Ephraim Stinchfield wrote his observations of the Cochranite Delusion in 1819. Cochran would spend four years in prison for what the state deemed gross lewdness.


21 I have been unable to find the exact source of this oft-quoted Noyes assertion, however it is pulled from the same source as statements that “mankind was now living in a new age,” “he did not sin,” and his choices “came from a perfect heart.” See www.gutenberg.us/articles/john_humphrey_noyes. It appears these would have come from a Noyes writing circa 1834, when he embraced Perfectionism.


25 Micale, Mark S., On the “Disappearance” of Hysteria: A Study in the Clinical Deconstruction of a Diagnosis, Department of History, Yale University, pp. 496-526. See chart showing number of French psychiatric theses on hysteria, which reached a high of 111 in the 1890s, when Freud was writing about hypnosis to cure hysteria, dropping to under 20 in the 1910s and less than 10 in the 1920s.

4 – The 1831 Revelation Regarding Plural Marriage

1 Erastus Snow wrote that Joseph explained in 1843 “that when He was translating the Scriptures that part of it were one of the Old Prophets was dividing His property to His offspring ^Then it was that the Lord revealed unto him^” Erastus Snow returned from his mission in April 1843. Other internal evidence suggests it was after August 1843 that Joseph said “That the time had come now when the principle should be practiced.” See Bergera, Gary James, *Identifying the Earliest Polygamists, 1841-44*, Dialogue Volume 38, Number 3 p. 37.

2 Jackson, Kent P. and Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: The Original Manuscripts*, 2004. Multiple early historians suggest the revelation on plural marriage was received in February or March of 1831, including B. H. Roberts (History of the Church V:XXIX), Joseph F. Smith (1882 funeral address), and Hubert Howe Bancroft (1889, History of Utah).

3 This was not translation in the modern sense of the word, but Joseph writing or making edits based on revelation.

4 From D&C 132:1-4. Even though D&C 132 was formally received in 1843, Joseph indicated the initial part of the revelation was well known to him and that he could write it again if destroyed.

5 D&C 45: 9, 16

6 D&C 45: 60-62

7 The idea that death could be a result of sin is seen in Joseph Smith’s June 23, 1843, confidence to William Clayton, where he told Clayton of [Robert] Thompson’s death as a


9 Wording from the Joseph Smith Translation, also D&C 76: 16-17. c.f. John 5: 28-29

10 The original interpretation of the term sealed was different from the sealing between family members performed in temples today

11 Sermon delivered at the funeral of Seymour Brunson on August 10, 1840, also D&C 127 and D&C 128. See also a poetic version of D&C 76 in 1843 attributed to Joseph Smith but possibly written by William W. Phelps. The 1843 version softens the original 1832 D&C 76 implication that an individual can only merit the afterlife earned by their works prior to death.

12 See D&C 131 and D&C 132.

13 April 1894 revelation received by Wilford Woodruff, see Wilford Woodruff journal for 5-6 April 1894 and Deseret Evening News, _General Conference Proceedings_, of 14 April 1894.

14 The quoted description comes from the Church court that tried Joseph Ellis Johnson in 1850. See Hales, Brian, _Mary Heron_. Available online 16 March 2014 at http://www.josephsmithspolygamy.com/NonWivesSexualRelations/24Accusations/MaryHeronSniderACC.html. Similar descriptions can be found in the confessions of the women who had been seduced in 1842, Joseph Smith's description of Dr. Bennett's activities, and Dr. Bennett's assertions regarding the “seraglio” over which he claimed Emma Hale [Smith] presided.

5 – Mormon Polygamy Prior to 1841

1 D&C 76

2 Compton, _Sacred Loneliness_, p. 231.

3 I first became aware of this in conversation with one of Hannah’s descendants. Hales also recounts one such story from an earlier generation, though Hales thought the liaison was supposed to have produced one of Hannah’s 1840s children.

4 Compton lists Hannah as one of the supposed wives where he did not believe the data supported the earlier claims.

5 Examination of the death records for Nauvoo shows no one who matches the particulars for the supposed John F. Smith

6 Hales, Volume 1, Chapter 3, pp. 77-83.

7 Hales, Brian C., _Joseph Smith’s Polygamy_, Volume 1, Chapter 11, p. 291.

8 Brian Hales devotes Chapter 3 of his Joseph Smith’s Polygamy to this lack of contemporary sexual rumors. Neither Todd Compton, George Smith, nor Richard Bushman lend credence to the idea that Joseph was sexually opportunistic during this early time frame.


10 The suggestion that Rosetta Marietta Carter was Joseph’s wife may have arisen from the fact that her husband, Jonathan Harriman Holmes, would later marry one of Joseph’s wives, Elvira Annie Cowles. Certainly Rosetta Marietta isn’t included as a wife of Joseph Smith in any of the recent scholarly books.

11 Compton, In Sacred Loneliness, p. 32.

12 Hales, Joseph Smith’s Polygamy, Vol.s 1 & 2, Chapters 4-6 and Appendix D.

13 Compton, Sacred Loneliness, Fanny as wife in 1833.


15 Chauncy Webb’s belief that Fanny was pregnant could have been caused by amenorrhea, or cessation of menstruation. This can occur in times of heightened stress, such as the stress Fanny might have experienced as a result of the intense controversy regarding her time in
the Smith home. Amenorrhea is insufficient to explain the total lack of children in the Nauvoo timeframe due to the sheer number of women involved.


17 For example, Missourians claimed Mormons had killed ten of their number during the fighting at Crooked River. However subsequent evaluations indicated only one Missourian was killed while three Mormons were killed.

18 D&C 121:1

19 D&C 121:7, 10

20 D&C 121:26, 27

6 – Six Funerals and a Blessing

1 Smith, Lucy, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations, Liverpool, 1853, p. 88

2 D&C 137:5

3 The Rachel Neyman Story, available at https://familysearch.org/photos/stories/514482

4 Familysearch.org, Cyrus Livingston Neyman (L7GB-KDL). The Rachel Neyman Story claims Cyrus left Butler, Pennsylvanian with his family in 1830, he and Frederick are the only children who could have died before the family left Butler.

5 Times and Seasons Vol. 1. Whole No. 6., Commerce, Illinois, April, 1840, recounting events during the General Conference held April 6, 1840.

6 John 3:3

7 John 3:5

8 In August 1840 Joseph would reveal the doctrine that proxy baptisms could be performed on behalf of the dead, after noting Jane Neyman, “a particular widow in the crowd whose son had died without baptism.” He then quoted the verse from John 3 where Jesus told Nicodemus baptism was required—the same verses Joseph had quoted during his April 1840 Conference address.


11 Jane Neyman’s presence is inferred from Joseph’s comments regarding the widow whose son had died.

12 1 Corinthians 15:19–26

13 1 Corinthians 15:29

14 Jane’s husband, William, was still alive. But he would die less than three weeks later.


16 History of the Church, 4:569; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 27, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.

17 D&C 128:22, from an epistle from Joseph Smith the Prophet to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, containing further directions on baptism for the dead, dated at Nauvoo, Illinois, September 6, 1842.

18 Vienna Jacques is sometimes listed as one of Joseph Smith’s plural wives, though the purported evidence did not lead to her inclusion in Todd Compton’s Sacred Loneliness.

19 Black, ‘A Voice of Gladness for the Living and the Dead’ (D&C 128:19).”


21 The double ceremony was performed by Frederick G. Williams on 13 April 1837. The Prophet Joseph had intended to perform the marriages, but threat of violence related to the


23 The Community of Christ map shows the Holmes property at the northwest corner of block 146, just north of Water Street and block 157. The Smith homestead is located on the northeast corner block 155, just south of Water Street.

24 The stories Sarah told her children are contained in the records for Jonathan Harriman Holmes available at the Lands and Records Office in Historic Nauvoo. The family stories lump Marietta’s death with the Missouri persecutions (e.g., Compton, Sacred Loneliness, p. 546) but Marietta died in August 1840 in Nauvoo (see Cook, Lyndon, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 1839-1845).

25 Cook, Lyndon, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 1839-1845.

26 Records for Jonathan Harriman Holmes record, Nauvoo Land and Records Office.

27 The first ceremony known to bind a widower to his deceased spouse was performed for Joseph C. Kingsbury in April 1843. Eliza’s poem was written in September 1842.


29 Although it is possible some other mother could have nursed Mary Holmes, Jonathan and Sarah lived in the Smith home after Marietta’s death, making Emma the most likely wet nurse for the child.

30 Cook, Lyndon, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 1839-1845.

31 I experienced this firsthand at the death (and abrupt weaning) of my own son.

32 Those disenfranchised with the LDS Church point out that Father Smith sometimes drank. He had also “allowed” events that impoverished the family, which forced his sons to seek every opportunity to make work to pay the debt. The failed mortgage was the reason Joseph hired himself out as a “dowser,” which would lead to the claims Joseph was a money digger.

33 From The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, edited by Scot and Maurine Proctor.

34 ibid.

35 ibid.

36 ibid.

7 – A Doctor and His Beloved

1 The August date is given by Joseph Smith in the July 1, 1842 issue of the Times and Seasons.

2 This does not include the time Dr. Bennett spent in LDS sects after Joseph’s death.

3 Smith, Andrew, Saintly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett, University of Illinois Press, 1997 pp. 2-3.

4 Smith, Saintly Scoundrel, Chapters 2 and 3 are titled “The Diploma Peddler” and “The ‘Getter Up’ of Colleges”, pp. 13-33.

5 Smith, Saintly Scoundrel, p. 79.

6 To the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and to All Honorable Part of Community, Times & Seasons, 1 July, 1842, online Feb 22, 2014 at http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/9200.

7 Goddard, Stephen H. and Zeruiah N., sworn before George W. Harris, Alderman of the City of Nauvoo on July 23rd, 1842. Published in Affidavits and Certificates on August 31, 1842.


9 Joseph Smith, letter to Vilate Kimball, March 2, 1841, in *Helen Vilate Bourne Fleming Papers*, MS 9670, Box 1, Folder 25, CHL.

10 *Nauvoo Female Relief Society, Petition to Thomas Carlin, circa July 22, 1842*, CHL (MS 15535).

11 Justin [sic] Brooks to Joseph Smith, 7 Nov. 1842 in Journal History of the Church; see *Times and Seasons* 4 (Jan 2, 1843):63.

12 From Wright’s use of the name “LaVina” for Elvira, it seems either John Fish Wright or the person writing the letter tended to switch around sounds or words. The elided portion of the transcription reads “I came to Utah in ’69, and rented LaVina Holmes farm.” John Fish Wright emigrated to Utah in 1852 as a ten-year-old boy. The sentence would make sense if the original had been intended to read “I came to Utah and in ’69 rented LaVina Holmes farm.” John Fish Write apparently came to Paradise, Cache County, Utah in 1869, having previously resided elsewhere in Cache County, Utah. Jonathan Holmes had a daughter who lived in Millville, Cache County, Utah, just 10 miles north of Paradise, suggesting the “LaVina Holmes farm” was a place Elvira [Holmes] had stayed, rather than a place she owned.


16 Phebe’s belief that her mother lived with Joseph as a wife was likely formed in 1868, when Phebe was refusing to consider becoming plural wife to Job Welling, who had previously married her older sister. Elvira’s intent appears to have been assuring Phebe that plural marriage was an appropriate form of marriage, rather than necessarily explicitly confirming that Elvira had engaged in conjugal relations with Joseph Smith.


18 D&C 121: 41-43.

8 – The Angel of the Lord


13 Zina would become president of the Relief Society until her death in 1901. Zina was the third president of the Relief Society. She was also the third and last of Joseph’s wives to head that organization.
9 – Fall of the Doctor

1 Dr. Bennett was elected Mayor of Nauvoo on February 1, 1841.


3 Times & Seasons, May 15, 1844, Municipal Court, p. 539

4 The civil wards and the ecclesiastical wards had different boundaries. Catherine Laur [Fuller] and her children were enumerated in the second ward. It appears the census refers to the civil ward, which means the Fullers lived in the northeast quadrant of the city. According to Lyman De Platt, “The streets separating the wards were Wells, which ran north and south, and Knight, which ran east and west. Ward 1 was in the northwest, Ward 2 the northeast, Ward 3 the southeast and Ward 4 the southwest quadrants of the city.” De Platt, Lyman, Nauvoo: Early Mormon Records Series, Vol. 1, Highland, UT, 1980.

5 See History of the Church, Vol. 3, pp. 149-160, also p. 428. On October 2, 1838, a mob of 30-50 men began to fire at the Mormon village of DeWitt in Carroll County. The Mormons attempted to defend themselves, while knowing that if there were a single death amongst the mob members, thousands of the residents of Missouri would raise arms against the Mormons. By October 6 the Mormons’ provisions were nearly exhausted and the mob had grown to two or three hundred men. By October 9 homes were being set on fire, forcing the residents of DeWitt to live in the center of town in their wagon boxes. Any who tried to venture out for food were shot. The Mormons had petitioned Governor Boggs for assistance. He first ignored the plea, then said they “might fight it out.” When the state militia arrived, they sided with the mob. A woman who had recently given birth died of exposure and starvation. In another incident, a man’s brains were knocked out. Multiple gang rapes involving a dozen or more men upon each woman were boasted of openly, which the Mormon leaders were horrified to learn had actually occurred.


7 Catherine Fuller statement before the Nauvoo High Council, LDS Archives MS/d/2375/Box 8/fd. Nauvoo, copied and included in the Valeen T. Avery Papers USU_COLL MSS 316, Box 24, Fd 14, Special Collections and Archives, Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library, Logan, Utah.

8 A philter was a potion or charm with power to arouse sexual passion.

9 The Wasp, Vol. 1, Number 15, Nauvoo, Hancock Co., Sat., July 23, 1842. The issue was devoted to Bennetania. The full description of Bennett’s 1841 suicide attempt reads “This reminds us of the time when the Doctor undertook to poison himself to death, but some good Samaritan-like Mormons saved his life; though a wag or two fixed a pile of sand, [as a] monument and fingered on it the following epitaph; ‘In memory of Major General John C. Bennett; who died at the seoge of Philter, in the defence of the cause of Venus, July 17, 1841.’” Available online at http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/LDS/wasp1.htm, retrieved 23 March 2016. The description of Bennett’s suicide attempt is also mentioned in Smith, Saintly Scoundrel, but the date of the suicide is given as July 27, 1841 (see p. 80).

11 Backenstos, Jacob B., sworn to the 28th of July, 1842, before Ebenezer Robinson, J. P., contained in Affidavits and Certificates Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters, August 31, 1842.
12 Backenstos, Jacob B., sworn to the 28th of July, 1842, before Ebenezer Robinson, J. P., contained in Affidavits and Certificates Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters, August 31, 1842.
14 Smith, Saintly Scoundrel, pp. 80-83.
15 There was no church building for general meetings during the Nauvoo era. Worship meetings were held in the open or under a bowery. There had been plans to create a grand tent to protect worshipers, but the flight from Nauvoo in 1846 prevented the tent from ever reaching completion.
16 Hales, Joseph Smith's Polygamy. Hales does not specify which date this sermon occurred, but includes fall 1841 as one possibility.
17 Robinson, Ebenezer, The Return, Volume 2, Number 7 (July 1890): 302, see also Volume 2, Number 6 (June 1890): 287. Ebenezer Robinson alleges Don Carlos Smith said “Any man who will teach and practice the doctrine of spiritual wifery will go to hell, I don’t care if it is my brother Joseph.” Don Carlos died in September 1841.
18 Nauvoo testimonies before the High Council, May 1842.
20 Walker, William B. Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet, pp. 141-142. Walker suggests William’s verbal abuse of Joseph’s memory may have been motivated by persuading potential enemies that he was not a Mormon sympathizer, a somewhat generous view of the situation.
21 Catherine Fuller statement before the Nauvoo High Council, LDS Archives MS/d/2375/Box 8/fd. Nauvoo, copied and included in the Valeen T. Avery Papers USU_COLL MSS 316, Box 24, Fd 14, Special Collections and Archives, Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library, Logan, Utah.
22 D. Michael Quinn papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, WA MSS S-2692. William Wright, Letter to unidentified addressee but stamped as received in the First Presidency Office on June 2, 1931.
24 Smith, George, An Intimate Chronicle, p. 108. This entry is from the second of three notebooks from Some question why William Clayton kept a separate notebook for his polygamy journal, information regarding the time between
25 Bergera, Earliest Mormon Polygamists.
27 My thanks to Bryan Stout for reviewing all the Hancock County records for the 1840 census and the 1842 Nauvoo census, which lists all members of Nauvoo households by name. Though it is remotely possible B. Y. might refer to someone not covered by the 1842 Nauvoo City census, who was not the head of household listed in the census, or whose nickname started with a “B.” However, there is strong reason to believe the B. Y. of Clayton’s journal was, in fact, Brigham Young.
29 Reference to Martha Brotherton letter of summer 1842.
31 Bergera, *Earliest Mormon Polygamists*.
33 Helen’s article states this occurred in 1843, but the year 1842 is clear from the context. See Whitney, Helen Mar Kimball, *Scenes and Incidents in Nauvoo, Woman’s Exponent*, 11 (1882-1883), available online at http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/HWhitney.html, retrieved November 29, 2015.

10 – The Pending Storm
1 Josephine would grow up to be known as Ina Coolbrith, the first female poet laureate of any American state.
3 Temple Lot transcript, respondent’s testimony, part 3, pp 521-522, questions 679, 687.
4 Robinson, Ebenezer, *The Return*, Volume 2, Number 7 (July 1890): 302, see also Volume 2, Number 6 (June 1890): 287.
9 ibid.
10 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 211.

11 – Hunt in the City Beautiful
1 Nancy Winchester was born in August 1828, a couple of weeks before Helen Mar Kimball, who would marry Joseph Smith when she was only 14 years old.
3 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 607.
4 An elevated frequency of sexual abuse is a suspected causal factor for psychogenic non-epileptic seizures (PNES). Modern diagnostic techniques involve monitoring seizures with video and an electroencephalograph. It is obviously impossible to know whether a report of “fits” in 1845 meets the diagnostic criteria for PNES. Given the reported abuses that occurred in Missouri, Nancy’s possible trauma could have occurred in the 1838-1839 timeframe. But the excommunication of Nancy’s brother and the change of management for the Times and Seasons, with which her brother had been associated, suggest something happened in early 1842.
5 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, particularly p. 608.
A picture of the alleged revelation is extant, which appears to be written in John Taylor’s handwriting. But the original document is not publicly available. See 1886 Revelation, available online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1886_Revelation, retrieved 4 August, 2014.

In Sam Taylor’s Family Kingdom, he describes his father, John W. Taylor, being approached after his excommunicated by two groups. One group consisted of protestant preachers, who hoped to win the now-underutilized Taylor to their cause. He refused. The second group consisted of those wishing to reinstate polygamy, arguing that John W. Taylor could attract a large portion of the Church to his banner, were he to publicly declare a return to the teachings of his father, John Taylor. Again, John W. Taylor refused. It appears Lorin Woolley’s publication of the account of the 1886 revelation followed John W. Taylor’s refusal to be the standard bearer of post-Manifesto polygamy.


Others claim John W. Woolley was the rightful successor of Joseph F. Smith.

The United Order is a form of Christian communalism attempted in the early days of the Church in which property is shared. This sort of communalism is described in the New Testament, in Acts 4:32-37.


Allegedly the Laffertys’ anger was associated with Brenda’s counsel to Ron’s wife that led Ron’s wife to refuse him a second wife and then leave Ron herself.

Alas, I was told this story in 1980, before I cared about family history, so I never recorded the young woman’s name. The generation that maintained this level of vigilance has now passed from this life.

I am unaware that any Cowleys entered into fundamentalist polygamy, but cannot state that with authority. Owen Woodruff’s eldest son, Wilford Owen Woodruff, only five when his father died, married a plural wife in 1942 and was excommunicated, but his first wife left him and he was eventually re-baptized into the Church.

2015 Statistical Report for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, presented by Brook P. Hales during the Saturday afternoon session of General Conference, April 2, 2016.

30 – God’s Strange Act: A Legacy

1 John Taylor and Hyrum Smith.
4 c.f., Malachi 4:5-6.
5 c.f., John 5: 28
7 This ability for the individual to choose, combined with God’s justice and Christ’s mercy, is expected to result in individuals spending eternity in any of various desirable states, from a state where God is not to a state where all effort goes towards forwarding God’s plan of “bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of Man.” Thus no one is forced to heaven against their will, nor is anyone consigned to hell due to an accident of birth.
8 D&C 135: 6
9 Some propose that Eliza was describing someone else or even society in general as the innocence seduced by the “rotten-hearted wretch.”
10 This assertion is based on Mary’s own affidavit before the Nauvoo High Council in 1842. See The Nauvoo City Council and High Council Minutes, John S. Dinger editor, Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 2011, pp. 424-426.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meg Stout has been an active member of the LDS church for over four decades. She lives in the DC area with her husband, Bryan, and several daughters. She is an engineer by vocation and a writer by avocation. According to the website Relative Finder, she is related to most the individuals of whom she writes in this book, in addition to the ones she already knew were direct line ancestors.

Meg Stout has been blogging at the Mormon website Millennial Star since December 2013.

Meg may be contacted via her website, megstout.com.