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Stretching to Find the Negative: Gary Bergera's Review of Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History and Theology

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STRETCHING TO FIND THE NEGATIVE: GARY BERGERA'S REVIEW OF JOSEPH SMITH'S POLYGAMY: HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

Brian C. Hales

Abstract: At an author-meets-critic Sunstone Symposium on August 2, 2013, Gary Bergera devoted over 90% of his fifteen-minute review to criticize my 1500+ page, three-volume, Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History and Theology. This article responds to several of the disagreements outlined by Bergera that on closer inspection appear as straw men. Also addressed are the tired arguments buoyed by carefully selected documentation he advanced supporting that (1) John C. Bennett learned of polygamy from Joseph Smith, (2) the Fanny Alger-Joseph Smith relationship was adultery, and (3) the Prophet practiced sexual polyandry. This article attempts to provide greater balance by including new evidences published for the first time in the three volumes but ignored by Bergera. These new documents and observations empower readers to expand their understanding beyond the timeworn reconstructions referenced in Bergera's critical review.

During a spirited exchange at an author-meets-critic session during the 2013 Sunstone Symposium, Gary Bergera served as one of three reviewers of my three volumes, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History and Theology*. He was diplomatic and kind in his delivery, but his comments were overwhelmingly critical.¹ I might compare his review to my own comments

¹ Approximately 223 words (of the total of 3348) or 6.7% of the review were positive.

delivered at a similar author-meets-critics session at the John Whitmer Historical Association meeting in Independence, Missouri, in 2009. There I critiqued *Nauvoo Polygamy: "...but we called it celestial marriage"* authored by George D. Smith of the Smith-Pettit Foundation (Gary Bergera's employer). While I believe on that occasion I was more balanced in my review, I did portray *Nauvoo Polygamy* as being flawed in many ways, especially regarding its scanty use of the historical evidences in reconstructing the story of Joseph Smith's polygamy. Somewhat ironically, I find Gary's review of my volumes to share the same weakness of the George D. Smith book—he fails to deal with all of the available evidences in his counterarguments. In doing so, he leaves himself vulnerable to a more expanded review that may reveal his interpretations to be problematic.

This response will touch upon only some of Bergera's concerns, but similar weaknesses in virtually all his criticisms can be identified. As a writer seeking to know how to strengthen a possible second edition, Bergera's critique provided few useful suggestions.

Use of Late Recollections

In his comments during the Sunstone session, Gary Bergera criticized at length my use of *late recollections* as primary sources of information. These are documents written by and recorded from Nauvoo polygamists but sometimes many decades after the described event occurred. Gary eloquently outlined the weaknesses inherent in such reminiscences by quoting several notable historians. In fact, Gary and I agree that when people remember events and conversations many years afterward, inaccuracies can creep into the accounts, and in extreme situations entirely erroneous details may be related. These observations are pertinent to any historical reconstruction.

In my response I noted that Bergera seemed to promote a double standard. I reviewed his own articles dealing with Joseph Smith and plural marriage, including “Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-44,” published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* in 2005. There he quotes numerous late recollections, which are the same documents found in my trilogy.² I observed that all authors to date have employed later reminiscences because those are essentially the only sources available. Demanding that such sources be filtered or eliminated from historical reconstructions regarding Joseph Smith’s polygamy would compromise (and greatly shorten) the works of other accomplished authors like Todd Compton and Larry Foster, not to mention Gary Bergera’s own useful articles.

Gary is undoubtedly aware that there are only two known documents providing contemporaneous teachings from Joseph Smith regarding plural marriage, the Revelation on Celestial and Plural Marriage (now LDS D&C 132) and a few entries in the journal of William Clayton. Joseph dictated two other documents in conjunction with the expansion of polygamy, but neither mentions plural marriage. The first is a letter from Joseph to Nancy Rigdon written in the spring of 1842 and first published by John C. Bennett on August 19, 1842, and the second is a letter Joseph Smith received on behalf of Newel K. Whitney on July 27, 1842.³ However, beyond these documents,

2 See for example, Gary James Bergera, “Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-44,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38/ 3 (Fall 2005): 4 n.7, 5 n.8, 6 n.10, n.12, 7 n.14, 8 n.15-16, 9 n.18, 9 n.20, 10 n.21, 11 n.24, etc.

3 John C. Bennett, “Sixth letter from John C. Bennett,” *Sangamo Journal* (Springfield, Illinois), August 19, 1842; rpt., John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints: Or an Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842), 243-44. The revelation for Newel K. Whitney, July 27, 1842, holograph in LDS Church History Library. is quoted in H. Michael Marquardt, ed., *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 315-16.

no firsthand accounts from Joseph Smith are available.⁴ In summary, criticizing my sources without criticizing other authors (and himself) who have used these same sources seems a little inconsistent.

What Was the Purpose of Plural Marriage?

A second concern in Gary Bergera's review deals with the reasons Joseph Smith recounted for the need for plural marriage. The Prophet gave three justifications, one of them much more important than the other two. Regardless, in the Sunstone session and elsewhere, Bergera has insisted upon emphasizing the explanation dealing with sexual reproduction: "multiply and replenish the earth."⁵

4 Four dissenters recorded contemporary accounts. Oliver Olney and William Law left journal entries for the Nauvoo period. Olney began his diary shortly after being cut off from the Church in 1842. (See Oliver Olney Papers, Beineke Library, Yale University; microfilm at LDS Church History Library, MS 8829, item 8.) He also published *The Absurdities of Mormonism Portrayed: A Brief Sketch* (Hancock, Ill., 1913). In 1843, William Law was called as a counselor in the First Presidency on January 19, 1841, (D&C 124:126) and was personally familiar with the revelation on celestial marriage (now D&C 132). However, he did not begin his journal until January 1, 1844, just weeks before his own excommunication. (See Lyndon W. Cook, *William Law: Biographical Essay - Nauvoo Diary - Correspondence - Interview* [Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1994], 37.) Although its references to plural marriage are limited, the *Nauvoo Expositor* printed June 7, 1844, provided a few additional details. John C. Bennett published his *History of the Saints* in November of 1842, which was based on six letters published earlier that year in the Sangamo Journal. Lastly, Joseph H. Jackson printed: *A Narrative of the Adventures and Experiences of Joseph H. Jackson in Nauvoo, Exposing the Depths of Mormon Villainy* (rpt. Morrison, Ill., 1960) just weeks after the martyrdom. Much of his material came from letters Jackson wrote to the *New York Herald*, September 5 and 7, 1844, and to the *Weekly Herald* (New York City), September 7, 1844. Of these four authors, only Law was personally taught plural marriage by Joseph Smith. The usefulness of their documents is limited by anti-Mormon biases, a lack of specificity in the reports, internal contradictions, and the advancement of obvious untruths.

5 See, for example, Gary James Bergera, "Vox Joseph Vox Dei: Regarding Some of the Moral and Ethical Aspects of Joseph Smith's Practice of Plural Marriage," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 31/1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 42.

The first reason mentioned by the Prophet is the need to restore Old Testament polygamy as a part of the “restitution of all things” prophesied in Acts 3:21. The necessity to restore this ancient marital order was apparently the only justification given in Kirtland, Ohio, in the mid-1830s when Joseph married Fanny Alger. Benjamin F. Johnson recalled in 1903: “In 1835 at Kirtland I learned from my Sisters Husband, Lyman R. Shirman,⁶ who was close to the Prophet, and Received it from him. That the ancient order of plural marriage was again to be practiced by the Church.”⁷ A few years later in 1841, Joseph Smith even attempted to broach the topic publicly. Helen Mar Kimball remembered: “He [Joseph] astonished his hearers by preaching on the restoration of all things, and said that as it was anciently with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so it would be again, etc.”⁸ This need for a restoration is mentioned in section 132: “I am the Lord thy God.... I have conferred upon you the keys and power of the priesthood, wherein I restore all things” (v. 40; see also 45).

It might be argued that this was the only reason Joseph Smith ever needed to give. He simply had to say, “Old Testament patriarchs practiced polygamy and I’m restoring it.” There was

6 Sherman was a close friend and devout follower of Joseph Smith. He was called as an apostle but died before learning of the appointment. See Lyndon W. Cook, “Lyman Sherman—Man of God, Would-Be Apostle,” *BYU Studies* 19/1 (Fall 1978): 121-24.

7 Dean R. Zimmerman, *I Knew the Prophets: An Analysis of the Letter of Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs* (MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1967), 37-38; Joseph H. Jackson referred to three Nauvoo women who served as intermediaries as “Mothers in Israel.” Joseph H. Jackson, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Experiences of Joseph H. Jackson*, 13.

8 Helen Mar Whitney, *Plural Marriage as Taught by the Prophet Joseph: A Reply to Joseph Smith [III]*, *Editor of the Lamoni Iowa “Herald,”* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1882), 11; see also Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, eds., *A Woman’s View: Helen Mar Whitney’s Reminiscences of Early Church History* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1997), 142-43. See also Joseph A. Kelting, “Affidavit,” March 1, 1894, images 11-16a; see also Kelting, “Statement,” *Juvenile Instructor* 29 (May 1, 1894): 289-90.

no need for a complicated and detailed theology of celestial and eternal marriage. Authors like Fawn Brodie who affirm that such was needed to assuage Joseph's conscience simply do not understand the evidences.⁹

The second reason given by Joseph Smith was that through plural marriage additional devout families would be created to receive noble pre-mortal spirits who would be born into them. Nauvoo Latter-day Saint Charles Lambert quoted the Prophet discussing "thousands of spirits that have been waiting to come forth in this day and generation. Their proper channel is through the priesthood, a way has to be provided."¹⁰ Helen Mar Kimball agreed that Joseph taught of "thousands of spirits, yet unborn, who were anxiously waiting for the privilege of coming down to take tabernacles of flesh."¹¹ These recollections from the 1880s could have been influenced by later teachings. However, this rationale is also explicated in the revelation on celestial marriage: "they [plural wives] are given unto him [their husband] to multiply and replenish the earth" (D&C 132:63).

It is true that "multiply and replenish the earth" is one of the three reasons. The presence of sexual relations in plural marriages is required to fulfill this purpose of reproduction. Several writers have selectively emphasized this while completely ignoring the most important justification. One author went as far as to write: "Celestial marriage was all about sex and children."¹² Bergera similarly instructed the Sunstone

9 See Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Vintage, 1971), 297.

10 Charles Lambert, "Autobiography," 1883, quoted in Daniel W. Bachman, "The Authorship of the Manuscript of Doctrine and Covenants Section 132," 43 n. 44.

11 Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1884), 7.

12 George D. Smith, "Persuading Men and Women to Join in Celestial Marriage," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 30 (2010): 161.

crowd: “The intent of Smith’s doctrine is clear: to reproduce and provide bodies for children.” This statement inadequately explains Joseph Smith’s teachings and constitutes an unjustified endorsement that libido was driving him to establish plural marriage. It also implies that any plural marriage that was without sexuality, such as Joseph Smith’s sealing to Ruth Vose Sayers, which was “for eternity” only (see below), could not fulfill the primary goal of plural marriage in his theological teachings. This is not true.

Joseph Smith clearly described the third reason in the July 12 revelation on eternal and plural marriage (now D&C 132):

Therefore, if a man marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me nor by my word, and he covenant with her so long as he is in the world and she with him, their covenant and marriage are not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when they are out of the world.

Therefore, when they are out of the world they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are appointed angels in heaven, which angels are ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory.

For these angels did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever (D&C 132:15-17).¹³

13 See discussion in Samuel Brown, “The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging,” *Dialogue* 44/ 1 (Spring 2011), 28.

Verses 61-63 also specify that a plurality of husbands is adultery and a plurality of wives is acceptable and occurs “for their [the plural wives’] exaltation in the eternal worlds.” The Prophet also explained: “Those who keep no eternal Law in this life or make no eternal contract are single & alone in the eternal world” (see also D&C 131:1-4).¹⁴

Whereas the first two reasons, the need for a “restitution of all things” and “to multiply and replenish the earth,” are significant, the third reason is vastly more important because it deals with *eternity*. As described, worthy women without a sealed husband would live “separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity” (D&C 132:16), which is damnation in the context of D&C 132 (see vv. 4 and 6). The eternal significance of the principle of a plurality of wives is that all worthy women are able to be sealed to an eternal husband prior to the final judgment.

Accordingly, I discouraged Gary from describing the primary purpose of Joseph Smith’s polygamy as sexual because there is essentially no historical evidence to support his statement. To do so is to miss the most important explanation, which deals with the eternal benefits of the ordinance.

Contradictions?

Bergera also outlined a series of “contradictions” that he identified in my books. In one example, he referred to two references to the space accommodations in the Homestead, the first domicile the Smith’s inhabited in Nauvoo. In Volume 1, I wrote that they “may not have been as cramped as described.”¹⁵

14 Andrew F. Ehat, and Lyndon W. Cook, eds. *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980); Franklin D. Richards reporting. 16 July 1843, 232. See also Lorenzo Snow, “Discourse,” *Millennial Star* 61/ 35 (May 8, 1899): 547-48.

15 Brian C. Hales *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: History and Theology*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books), 1:550 n17.

Later, Bergera observed that I assessed that the living space “would have been very crowded.”¹⁶ This alleged contradiction is remarkable for two reasons. First, he ignored my comment in the footnote about a conversation I had with Community of Christ historian Lach Mackay wherein he suggested that perhaps the west addition to the Homestead may have been added during Joseph Smith’s lifetime. Most historians to date have believed that the home was composed of a kitchen with a small outbuilding, the living room, and a small upstairs during Joseph Smith’s day. Without the annex, the family with boarders would have been especially cramped. Even with the addition, accommodations would have been tight. The second important observation regarding Bergera’s “contradiction” is that he apparently had to scrutinize the text in great detail, even examining minutia, in order to discover and expose an apparent incongruity.

Another “contradiction” identified by Bergera involves my statement that “there is no known evidence that Joseph Smith taught that all men and women, irrespective of the time and place they existed, must practice plural marriage in order to be exalted.”¹⁷ Bergera provided several quotes from the volumes wherein I acknowledge that between the 1840s and 1890, the practice of plural marriage was a commandment to the Latter-day Saints, implying a contradiction.¹⁸ This “contradiction” appears to be based upon a straw man argument. Nowhere in my text do I declare that polygamy is God’s commandment to all of His followers regardless of when they are born or where they live on earth. Nor does it appear that such a declaration has ever been made by Church leaders. There is no question that obedience to the principle of plural marriage was required in order to be a devout Latter-day Saint between the 1840s and

16 Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 2:90.

17 Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 3:192.

18 Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 3:7, 3:218.

1890. However, no Church leader during those decades taught that all of God's followers in all places and times were similarly commanded and that the monogamist generations in the Book of Mormon and New Testament will be eternally condemned for their lack of polygamous unions.

John C. Bennett: A Polygamy Insider?

Bergera also observed that 40% of the pages of volumes 1-2 deal with three topics, John C. Bennett, Fanny Alger, and polyandry. He disagreed with my interpretations regarding whether John C. Bennett was a polygamy insider, whether Fanny Alger was a plural wife of Joseph Smith, and whether the Prophet practiced sexual polyandry. Supporting his explanations, Bergera quotes a few selected evidences. However, his arguments would have been much stronger if he could have invalidated the historical documentation I present in my books that supports my new interpretation and contradicts his views.

For example, regarding John C. Bennett, Bergera observed that Cyrus Wheelock learned about plural marriage from Joseph Smith in 1841. Regarding Wheelock, Bergera affirmed: "Hales does not allow Bennett, who for a time was demonstrably closer to Smith than Wheelock, the same opportunity." In other words, Wheelock was a polygamy insider, but he was geographically more separated from Joseph than Bennett. Therefore, from an interpretation perspective, Bennett deserves the "same opportunity." This argument may seem persuasive until we consider three historical observations.

First, research shows that individuals much closer to Joseph Smith did not learn about plural marriage until almost a year after Bennett left Nauvoo. By his own recollection, William Law, second counselor in the First Presidency, was introduced to the secret polygamy teachings in mid-1843. Sidney Rigdon, first counselor in the First Presidency, never learned about plural marriage from the Prophet. Hyrum Smith, Joseph's brother,

Associate Church President, and Church Patriarch, didn't learn about celestial marriage until May 1843.¹⁹ Similarly, Emma Smith was taught in the spring of 1843. These observations support that if Joseph Smith could have kept William Law, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, and Emma Smith in the dark until 1843, he could have easily kept Bennett out of the loop through June 1842.

Second, Bennett admitted in an October 1843 letter that he did not learn about eternal marriage the entire time he was in Nauvoo.²⁰ In other words, we are to believe that Bennett knew about plural marriage proposals to Sarah Pratt and Nancy Rigdon and the other polygamy related interactions with Joseph Smith that he reported.²¹ However, no one bothered to tell him the marriages were for eternity. We do not have any record of Joseph teaching plural marriage except within the context that they could be eternal. In addition, there is good evidence he taught eternal marriage before he taught plural marriage.²²

Third, an examination of the topics discussed in *The History of the Saints* written by Bennett and published in October 1842 fails to identify any teachings similar to those privately taught at that time by Joseph Smith or those written in July 1843 as the revelation on celestial and plural marriage (now D&C 132). If

19 George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 106; see also Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the Mormon Succession Question." (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), 56-60.

20 John C. Bennett, "Letter from General Bennett," dated October 28, 1843, *Hawk Eye* (Burlington, Iowa, December 7, 1843), 1.

21 Bennett portrays himself as assisting Nancy from being "ensnared by the *Cyprian Saints*... taken in the net of the chambered *Sisters of Charity*... [and avoiding] the poisoned arrows of the *Consecratees of the Cloister*..." (Bennett, *The History of the Saints*, 241.) Bennett's description of polygamy in Nauvoo is unsupported by any other source and contradicted by all other available evidence, suggesting he was fictionalizing his assertions.

22 Parley P. Pratt, Jr., ed., *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), 297-98 (1985 edition, 259-60).

Bennett had learned anything from Joseph Smith, it is strange that he did not exploit it in his writings, instead choosing to fabricate details that even the most ardent disbeliever could not accept, like polygamous women divided into echelons of Cyprian Saints, Chambered Sisters, and Consecratees of the Cloister.²³

In summary, Bergera's claim that because Cyrus Wheelock was a polygamy insider in 1841, Bennett should be afforded the "same opportunity" is a weak argument, without any credible supporting historical documentation. In contrast, the contradictory observations and evidences that Bergera fails to take into account seem to be more convincing.

Fanny Alger and Joseph Smith: Plural Marriage or Adultery?

In an interesting defense of the position that Joseph Smith committed adultery with Fanny Alger in 1835, Gary Bergera affirmed: "The more contemporary the account of Smith and Alger, the more Smith's involvement is interpreted as an extramarital affair. However, Hales tends to privilege later statements, which support the idea of a marriage (1:151), over earlier statements, which he dismisses as unreliable, the product of ignorance or misunderstanding or of animosity towards Smith."

This statement is problematic and misleading. I reproduce all nineteen known accounts dealing with this relationship. None are dismissed.²⁴ Furthermore, I classify them as to

23 Bennett, *The History of the Saints*, 220-25. Lawrence Foster suggested one possible parallel between Bennett's descriptions of polygamy in Nauvoo and Joseph Smith's teachings on plural marriage: "Thus, 'wives and concubines' could well correspond to Bennett's two upper levels of plural wives." (Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1981], 173.) There is no evidence of women being designated as concubines or of concubines being married in Nauvoo. Nor is there any form of official sanction of concubinage in the Church before or after Joseph Smith's death.

24 See Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:369-378.

whether they support adultery or plural marriage but ultimately allow the reader to make the final judgment.²⁵

The earliest known account referring to the Joseph-Fanny relationship is from 1838, at least two years after the relationship ended. Three additional references are identified that were composed prior to the end of 1842 for a total of four “more contemporary accounts.” The problem is that none of the four accounts discuss whether a plural marriage ceremony was performed.

Of the four, two are ambiguous regarding details of the association. The two remaining include the 1838 narrative from Oliver Cowdery, who labeled the relationship a “dirty, nasty, filthy scrape”²⁶ and a reference from John C. Bennett’s *History of the Saints* quoting Fanny Brewer, who recalled that in 1837 there were rumors in Kirtland, Ohio, of sexual impropriety between the Prophet and a servant girl.²⁷ It is clear that both of these accounts reflect the belief that the relationship was not a

25 See Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 1:125, table 5.1.

26 Oliver Cowdery, Letter to Joseph Smith, January 21, 1838; copied into a letter of Oliver Cowdery to Warren A. Cowdery for the same date, Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 80, original at Huntington Library. In “Letters of Oliver Cowdery,” 80–83. In *New Mormon Studies: A Comprehensive Resource Library*; emphasis mine. It is not known if Joseph ever received the original letter.

27 Fanny Brewer, quoted in Bennett, *The History of the Saints*, 85–86; emphasis mine. It is doubtful that Brewer had firsthand knowledge of the event, since Fanny Alger was not an orphan but a housemaid in the Smith home. In 1889, dissident Benjamin Winchester wrote a reminiscence about “Primitive Mormonism” that was published in the *Salt Lake Tribune*: “[In 1835] there was a good deal of scandal prevalent among a number of Saints concerning Joseph’s licentious conduct, this more especially among the women. Joseph’s name was then connected with scandalous relations with two or three families.” Winchester, “Primitive Mormonism—Personal Narrative of It,” 2. Winchester was present in Kirtland during the 1835–37 period, but he was born August 6, 1817; thus his youth would have likely prevented him from becoming a confidante of Joseph Smith regarding his first plural marriage. Furthermore, Winchester’s recollection of scandal “with two or three families” is unsubstantiated by any other witness. It appears Winchester was repeating rumors he had heard rather than recording firsthand recollections.

valid plural marriage. This could be due to one of three reasons. First, Cowdery and/or Brewer may have known that a plural marriage ceremony was performed, but they did not think it was valid. Second, they may not have known that a ceremony was performed. Third, no ceremony occurred. Bergera affirms that Cowdery's and Brewer's statements support adultery, but they could also support that a formal plural marriage was performed but that Cowdery and Brewer were either unaware or did not think it legitimate. Regardless, it is impossible to prove something did not happen (see 1:162, 377, 408, 446; 3:66).

Importantly, there is evidence that a plural ceremony did occur. Mosiah Hancock left a record detailing how his father, Levi Hancock, united Fanny Alger to Joseph Smith as a plural wife.²⁸ Regarding that narrative, Todd Compton wrote: "I accept it as generally reliable, providing accurate information about his own life, his family's life, and Mormonism in Kirtland, Nauvoo and Salt Lake City."²⁹ Surprisingly, Bergera fails to mention a new document discovered by Don Bradley in the Andrew Jenson Papers at the Church History Library. Jenson interviewed Eliza R. Snow in 1886 and wrote in his notes that she was "well acquainted" with Fanny Alger and knew about the aftermath of the discovery of the relationship.³⁰ Then Eliza listed Fanny as a plural wife of Joseph Smith, writing Fanny's name in her own hand.

28 Levi Ward Hancock Autobiography with additions in 1896 by Mosiah Hancock, 63, CHL; cited portion written by Mosiah (Ms 570, microfilm). See also Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 32. We are indebted to Compton who discovered that both published versions of the journal (*The Mosiah Hancock Journal*, Salt Lake City: Pioneer Press, n.d., 74 pp and *The Levi Hancock Journal*, n.p., n.d. 58 pp) are incomplete having had all references to the Fanny Alger marriage removed. See also Todd Compton, "Fanny Alger Smith Custer Mormonism's First Plural Wife?" *Journal of Mormon History*, 22/1 (Spring 1996) 1:175 n3.

29 Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 29.

30 Andrew Jenson Papers [ca. 1871-1942], MS 17956; CHL, Box 49, Folder 16, documents 1 and 2.

In summary, by not including evidences that contradict his position, Bergera reports that the relationship between Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger was an “extramarital affair.” However, “more contemporaneous” documents referenced by Bergera fail to address the primary question of whether or not a plural marriage ceremony was performed. Recently discovered documents first published in Joseph Smith’s *Polygamy: History and Theology* provide a newly identified recollection from an eyewitness that Fanny Alger was indeed a plural wife of Joseph Smith.

Sexual Polyandry: Was it Part of Joseph Smith’s Plural Marriages?

In his presentation, Bergera continued to promote the position that Joseph Smith practiced sexual polyandry and is critical of my treatment of the topic: “[Hales] suggests that the lack of any surviving record regarding sexual activity involving Smith and his polyandrous wives is likely evidence of no sexual activity (see chaps. 11-16). He does not seem to entertain seriously the alternate interpretation that Smith married already-married women to conceal the paternity of possible plural children and that his married wives had compelling reason to avoid mention of legally adulterous sexual activity. This, to my mind, at least, is an equally plausible explanation.” Of course Bergera is entitled to his own views, but to assert sexual polyandry occurred to hide a child’s paternity (should pregnancy have resulted) is a remarkable oversimplification of an alleged behavior that is inherently very complex and would have been shocking to Nauvooans in the 1840s.

For Gary and other proponents of the position that Joseph Smith practiced sexual polyandry, the overriding question that helps delineate the problem with their interpretations is whether such relations were part of Joseph Smith’s marriage theology or were they in contradiction to that theology. In

other words, do proponents of sexual polyandry believe that Joseph taught his followers that it was morally acceptable? Or did Joseph Smith teach that such behavior would have been grossly immoral?

If sexual polyandry was adultery, where are the expressed concerns or criticisms from skeptical participants and others who may have been more cynical? Is it possible to believe that Joseph was so authoritative and charismatic and that participants were so gullible that no one complained of his blatant hypocrisy? (And no one did.) Also, why didn't John C. Bennett or William Law capitalize on such alleged relations? The first charge of sexual polyandry I have found by any person was published in 1850.

If Joseph Smith taught that sexual polyandry was a correct principle, where are the documents recording those teachings either written contemporaneously or in later recollections? Where are the defenses of the behavior from participants and from the other believers who knew of those plural sealings and would have felt compelled to defend the practice if it occurred? Where are the later apologetic explanations from LDS leaders like Orson Pratt or Joseph F. Smith? Why was sexual polyandry a non-issue throughout the nineteenth century? (A review of the historical record during the nineteenth century reads as if sexual polyandry didn't exist.)

Polyandry was Universally Condemned

Another important question is why the three references to sexual polyandry in section 132 (vv. 41-42, 61-63) label it "adultery," in two cases stating that the woman involved "would be destroyed" (41, 63). Also, why have all other Church leaders and members continually condemned the practice? When asked in 1852, "What do you think of a woman having more husbands than one?" Brigham Young answered, "This

is not known to the law.”³¹ Five years later Heber C. Kimball taught, “There has been a doctrine taught that a man can act as Proxy for another when absent—it has been practiced and it is known—& its damnable.”³² The following year Orson Pratt instructed: “God has strictly forbidden, in this Bible, plurality of husbands, and proclaimed against it in his law.”³³ Pratt further explained:

“Can a woman have more than one husband at the same time? No: Such a principle was never sanctioned by scripture. The object of marriage is to multiply the species, according to the command of God. A woman with one husband can fulfill this command, with greater facilities, than if she had a plurality; indeed, this would, in all probability, frustrate the great design of marriage, and prevent her from raising up a family. As a plurality of husbands, would not facilitate the increase of posterity, such a principle never was tolerated in scripture.”³⁴

Belinda Marden Pratt wrote in 1854: “‘Why not a plurality of husbands³⁵ as well as a plurality of wives?’ To which I reply: 1st God has never commanded or sanctioned a plurality of husbands....” On October 8, 1869, Apostle George A. Smith taught that “a plurality of *husbands* is wrong.”³⁶ His wife, Bathsheba Smith, was asked in 1892 if it would “be a violation of the laws of the church for one woman to have two husbands

31 Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:361, August 1, 1852.

32 *Minutes of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1835-1893* (Salt Lake City: Privately Published [Smith-Pettit Foundation], 2010), 160; see also 157.

33 Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 18:55-56, July 11, 1875.

34 Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage,” *The Seer*, 1/4 (April 1853): 60.

35 Belinda Marden Pratt, “Defense of Polygamy: By a Lady of Utah, in a Letter to Her Sister in New Hampshire,” *Millennial Star*, 16 (July 29, 1854): 471.

36 George Albert Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, 13:41, October 8, 1869, emphasis in original.

living at the same time....” She replied: “I think it would.”³⁷ All of these individuals were involved with Nauvoo polygamy, and several were undoubtedly aware of Joseph Smith’s sealings to legally married women. First Presidency Counselor Joseph F. Smith wrote in 1889: “Polyandry is wrong, physiologically, morally, and from a scriptural point of order. It is nowhere sanctioned in the Bible, nor by the law of God or nature and has not affinity with ‘Mormon’ plural marriage.”³⁸ Elder Joseph Fielding Smith wrote in 1905: “Polygamy, in the sense of plurality of husbands and of wives never was practiced in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Utah or elsewhere.”³⁹

The New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage Supersedes All Other Marriage Covenants

An important revelation that all authors who declare Joseph Smith practiced sexual polyandry overlook is that D&C 22:1 states that the new and everlasting covenant causes all old covenants to be “done away.” Hence from a religious standpoint, the legal covenant of a civilly married woman is “done away” as soon as she enters into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage (see D&C 132:4). She would not have two husbands with whom she could experience sexual relations, at least according to Joseph Smith’s revelations. Going back to her legal husband would be adultery because in the eyes of the Church, that marriage ended with the sealing.

37 Bathsheba Smith, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent’s testimony (part 3), page 347, question 1142.

38 Joseph F. Smith to Zenos H. Gurley, June 19, 1889, CHL. Richard E. Turley, Jr. *Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, (Provo, Utah: BYU Press), vol. 1, DVD #29.

39 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1905), 48.

“Eternity Only” Sealings Did Occur

Joseph was sealed to 14 women with legal husbands. Studying polyandry is complicated because the 14 sealings were not of the same type or duration. Contrary to the assertions of several authors, “eternity only” sealings were performed in Nauvoo. That is, a woman like Ruth Vose Sayers, whose husband was a non-member, was allowed to be sealed to another man for eternity only, with no marriage on earth. Sayers was sealed to Joseph Smith for “eternity only” as documented in Andrew Jenson’s handwriting in his notes found in the Church History Library.

<p>While there the strongest affection sprang up between the Prophet Joseph and Mr. Sayers. The latter not attaching much importance to the theory of a future life insisted that his wife Ruth should be sealed to the Prophet for eternity, as he himself should only claim</p>	
<p>her in this life. She was accordingly sealed to the Prophet in Emma Smith's presence and thus were became numbered among the Prophets plural wives. Though she continued to live with Mr. Sayers remained with her husband until his death.</p>	

Of the 14 civilly married women, I believe 11 of the unions were of this type: “eternity only” sealings. The 3 remaining women were sealed for “time and eternity,” which probably included sexual relations with Joseph. Two (Sarah Ann Whitney and Sylvia Sessions) were already physically separated from their legal husbands, so no change in marital dynamics between them and their civil husbands was required. Information regarding Joseph’s relationship with the third

woman, Mary Heron, is so limited that anyone giving details is simply speculating.

Why Were Women Eternally Sealed to Joseph Instead of the Legal Husbands?

The question arises as to why women would be sealed to Joseph Smith instead of their legal spouses? In several cases, the husbands were ineligible because they were not active Mormons. However, some of the women were married to devout Latter-day Saints. Evidence indicates that in each case, the woman made the decision. Lucy Walker remembered the Prophet's counsel: "A woman would have her choice, this was a privilege that could not be denied her."⁴⁰ The lack of clarifying documents creates an incomplete picture that seems strange in several respects. However, nothing currently available supports that Joseph behaved hypocritically or committed transgression. None of the participants, the men or women who knew the details of what was going on ever complained about Joseph Smith allowing these sealings.

No Evidence that Joseph Smith Forced Any Woman to Marry Him

Stories that Joseph Smith forced women to marry him are sometimes repeated in antagonistic literature, but they are not supported by available historical evidences. One popular anti-Mormon narrative recounts how Joseph Smith met a woman and gave her 24 hours to comply or she would be cut off forever.⁴¹

40 Lucy Walker Kimball, "A Brief Biographical Sketch of the Life and Labors of Lucy Walker Kimball Smith," CHL; quoted in Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience* (Logan, Utah: Utah Journal Co, 1888), 46.

41 See for example George D. Smith, "The Forgotten Story of Nauvoo Celestial Marriage," *Journal of Mormon History*, 36/4 (Fall 2010):157. By selectively quoting Lucy Walker's account, George D. Smith makes it appear as if Joseph introduced plural marriage and then immediately gave her a twenty-four

The story is folklore, but it is based upon the introduction of the previously unmarried Lucy Walker to plural marriage.

Joseph introduced the principle to Lucy in 1842. She did not accept, but she agonized for many months as he patiently waited. She related: "I was tempted and tortured beyond endurance until life was not desirable. Oh that the grave would kindly receive me, that I might find rest.... Oh, let this bitter cup pass. And thus I prayed in the agony of my soul. The Prophet discerned my sorrow. He saw how unhappy I was...."⁴² Finally, on April 30, 1843, Joseph saw her anguish and spoke to her, pushing her to resolution: "I have no flattering words to offer. It is a command of God to you. I will give you until tomorrow to decide this matter. If you reject this message the gate will be closed forever against you." How did Lucy respond to this challenge? Not as cynical writers have portrayed Nauvoo polygamists in their narratives, as gullible dupes who lacked the fortitude to reject the charismatic Joseph. Instead, she responded as skeptics would today:

This aroused every drop of Scotch in my veins. For a few moments I stood fearless before him, and looked him in the eye.... I had been speechless, but at last found utterance and said: "Although you are a prophet of God you could not induce me to take a step of so great importance, unless I knew that God approved my course. I would rather die. I have tried to pray but received no comfort, no light," and emphatically forbid him speaking again to me on this subject. Every feeling of my soul revolted against it.⁴³

hour ultimatum to participate, when in reality many months passed between the two events.

42 Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints*, 46; see also testimony in Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887):229-30.

43 Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints*, 46-48; ; see also testimony in Jenson, "Plural Marriage":229-30.

Lucy called his bluff. She had the same questions that observers voice today. Then she demanded a divine manifestation from the same source Joseph said he had received the commandment to practice plural marriage:

Said I, “The same God who has sent this message is the Being I have worshipped from my early childhood and He must manifest His will to me.” He walked across the room, returned and stood before me with the most beautiful expression of countenance, and said: “God Almighty bless you. You shall have a manifestation of the will of God concerning you; a testimony that you can never deny. I will tell you what it shall be. It shall be that joy and peace that you never knew.”⁴⁴

She related how Joseph’s promise was fulfilled shortly thereafter:

One night after supper I went out into the orchard and I kneeled down and prayed to God for information. After praying I arose and walked around the orchard and kneeled again and repeated this during the night. Finally as I was praying the last time, an angel of the Lord appeared to me and told me that the principle was of God and for me to accept it.⁴⁵

Another common behavior attributed to Joseph Smith, but is not documentable, involves John C. Bennett’s claim that Joseph would destroy the reputation of any woman who turned him down.⁴⁶ We know of five women who refused the

44 Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints*, 46-48; see also testimony in Jenson, “Plural Marriage”: 229-30.

45 Untitled typed sheet “The following was given by Judge D. H. Morris of St. George, Utah...” copy in Vesta P. Crawford Collection, Marriott Library, University of Utah, MS 125, bx 1, fd 5.

46 See for example Bennett, *The History of the Saints*, 231 (Sarah Pratt) and 253 (Widow Fuller).

Prophet's plural proposals.⁴⁷ After each one he exerted no force and told no one. The only reason we know of those proposals is because each woman (or one of her relatives) related it later. Sarah Kimball was one of the five women – her husband being a nonmember. She later related:

I asked him to teach it to some one else. He looked at me reprovngly and said, "Will you tell me who to teach it to? God required me to teach it to you, and leave you with the responsibility of believing or disbelieving." He said, "I will not cease to pray for you, and if you will seek unto God in prayer, you will not be led into temptation."⁴⁸

It is true that Sarah Pratt and Nancy Rigdon accused Joseph Smith of impropriety, and he aggressively defended himself against their allegations. However, his interactions with the five other women indicate that if Pratt and Rigdon had remained silent, he too would have quietly left them "with the responsibility of believing or disbelieving."

In summary, to simply state Joseph may have practiced sexual polyandry to hide paternity fails to address the multiple complexities of the marital processes as discussed above and in my chapters (11-16) in Volume 1. Furthermore, multiple observations and evidences support that such relations did not occur and would have been considered to be adultery by the Prophet. Polyandrous wives chose Joseph as their eternal

47 Besides Sarah Granger Kimball, included are Ester Johnson (Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review*, Mesa: 21st Century Printing, n.d., 85.), Lydia Moon (Smith, ed. *An Intimate Chronicle*, 120.), Cordelia C. Morley (Autobiography, holograph, HBLL, BYU, 4.) and Rachel R. Ivins Grant (quoted in Ronald W Walker, "Rachel R. Grant: The Continuing Legacy of the Feminine Ideal," in *Supporting Saints: Life Stories of Nineteenth-Century Mormons*, Donald Q. Cannon, and David J. Whittaker, eds. [Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1985], 22.)

48 Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record*, 232.

husbands for reasons that are unclear, but there is no credible evidence that he forced any woman to marry him polyandrously or otherwise.

Conclusion

Gary Bergera is entitled to his opinion of *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History and Theology*. When requested to review it in a session at Sunstone, he was asked to share that opinion. However, reviewers will often seek a balance in presenting both positive and negative aspects no matter how hard they may have to look for those qualities in the texts. It is interesting that Gary failed to mention several important new contributions the three volumes provide to their readers. Specifically they:

1. Contain documents from the Andrew Jenson papers published for the first time anywhere, including high resolution reprints of several originals (black and white). Regardless of whether a researcher agrees with the content of the Andrew Jenson papers, they are very significant to the study of Joseph Smith's polygamy.
2. Contain a complete list of all known documents supporting plural sealings of Joseph Smith to 35 wives, including Todd Compton's "possible wives" and the additional wives listed by George D. Smith (Appendix B).
3. Contain a collection of all 22 known accounts of the angel and the sword appearing to Joseph Smith (Volume 1, Chapter 8).
4. Contain all known narratives supporting sexual relations in 12 of the plural marriages with ambiguous evidence in three more (Appendix E).
5. Contain transcripts of the 19 accounts dealing with Fanny Alger—all that have been found to date (Appendix D).

6. Contain a chart showing all the plural wives listed by all known contemporaries of Joseph Smith, as well as lists from all known compilers (Volume 2, Chapter 33).
7. Contain the most complete set of extractions from the 1892 Temple Lot case published to date.
8. Contain an in-depth discussion of why Joseph Smith established plural marriage, presenting virtually all available theories, including anti-Mormon and apologetic sources. It is the first publication ever to address this topic in a complete volume (Volume 3).
9. Include a useful and complete bibliography. The bibliography in Volume 2 has more than 1300 entries, with repositories and manuscript numbers identified when applicable.
10. Include a detailed index with sub-entries rather than a computer generated generic version.

Other reviewers have noted positives regarding the volumes. Cheryl Bruno referred to the three books as “clearly the single greatest guide to available resources on the practice of polygamy in Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo”⁴⁹ and Larry Foster wrote that the volumes are a “path-breaking and indispensable... study [that] provides the most comprehensive documentation and assessment yet available of the extant evidence on the topic.” Todd Compton considered the three volumes a “landmark in the historiography of Mormon polygamy.”⁵⁰

Observers comfortable with Gary Bergera’s description of Joseph Smith as a womanizer, who had an extramarital affair with Fanny Alger and who practiced sexual polyandry, may believe that additional discussions on his polygamous activities

49 Cheryl L. Bruno, “First Thoughts on Joseph Smith’s Polygamy by Brian Hales,” *Worlds Without End: A Mormon Studies Roundtable*, March 4, 2013, at <http://www.withoutend.org/thoughts-joseph-smiths-polygamy-brian-hales/> (accessed August 2, 2013).

50 Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, dust jacket.

are like beating a dead horse. Nevertheless, the reality is that my three volumes provide new evidences and new observations that cannot be swept under the rug or ignored. It is hoped that reviewers, even those who disagree with my interpretations, will acknowledge these additional pieces of the plural marriage puzzle and upgrade their previous reconstructions to include them.

Brian C. Hales, is the author of six books dealing with polygamy, most recently the three-volume, Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History and Theology (Greg Kofford Books, 2013). His Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto received the "Best Book of 2007 Award" from the John Whitmer Historical Association. He has presented at numerous meetings and symposia and published articles in The Journal of Mormon History, Mormon Historical Studies, and Dialogue as well as contributing chapters to The Persistence of Polygamy series. Brian works as an anesthesiologist at the Davis Hospital and Medical Center in Layton, Utah, and has served as the President of the Utah Medical Association.

