

## *Joseph Smith and the Puzzlement of “Polyandry”*

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**H**ISTORICAL EVIDENCE indicates that Joseph Smith was sealed to several women who had legal husbands. Generally called “polyandry,” this paper will explore these relationships, attempting to discern the nature of the marriages. Polyandry will be discussed in light of early Mormon teachings concerning morality and marriage. The possibility of polyandrous sexual relations existing in these unions will be investigated.

In 1854, First Presidency Counselor Jedediah M. Grant instructed: “Did the Prophet Joseph want every man’s wife he asked for? He did not, but in that thing was the grand thread of the Priesthood developed. The grand object in view was to try the people of God, to see what was in them... A man who has got the Spirit of God, and the light of eternity in him, has no trouble about such matters.”<sup>1</sup> Todd Compton identified

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1. Jedediah M. Grant, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol.2, p.14, February 19, 1854.

twelve women who were civilly married to another man at the same time they were sealed to Joseph Smith. Included are Sylvia Sessions, Ruth Vose, Mary Elizabeth Rollins, Sarah Kingsley, Presendia Lathrop Huntington, Sarah Ann Whitney, Zina Diantha Huntington, Patty Bartlett, Marinda Nancy Johnson, Elivira Annie Cowles, Elizabeth Davis, and Lucinda Pendleton.<sup>2</sup>

Lawrence Foster wrote: “Perhaps the most puzzling and difficult-to-interpret behavior of Joseph Smith during this period [of Nauvoo polygamy] is the evidence that he asked some of his closest associates to give their wives to him.”<sup>3</sup> “How are such actions to be explained? Of course, one easily could make the assumption that most non-Mormons and anti-Mormons have that Smith simply was letting his sexual impulses get away with him in these or other cases. Or, as most Mormon writers have done, one could ignore the evidence entirely and hope that it would be forgotten.”<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Daynes echoed: “Perhaps nothing is less understood than Joseph Smith’s sealings to women already married, because the evidence supports conflicting interpretations.”<sup>5</sup>

### “Ceremonial Polyandry” versus “Sexual Polyandry”

Before looking specifically at Joseph Smith’s “polyandrous” marriages, we must determine the meaning of “polyandry.” Todd Compton defines “marriage as any relationship solemnized by a marriage ceremony of some sort.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore a woman married in a civil *ceremony*, who is subsequently married in a religious *ceremony*, would be considered to be practicing *ceremonial* polyandry. A legal divorce would be necessary to prevent ceremonial polyandry because it would nullify the actions of the civil ceremony (the legal marriage).

2. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 4-7.

3. Lawrence Foster, “Sex and Prophetic Power: A Comparison of John Humphrey Noyes, Founder of the Oneida Community, with Joseph Smith, Jr., the Mormon Prophet,” *Dialogue*, 31 (Winter 1998) 4:76-77 [65-83]

4. W. Lawrence Foster, “Between Two Worlds: The Origins of Shaker Celibacy, Onedia Community Complex Marriage, and Mormon Polygamy,” Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1976, 256.

5. Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001, 29.

6. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 632.

While defining “polyandry” as ceremonial polyandry might have a few advantages, overall it seems to generate confusion, because it does not address the issue of sexuality. Theologically, there is a huge difference between ceremonial polyandry and sexual polyandry. If in the case above, the woman ceases to sleep with her legal spouse because of the religious marriage, even without a legal divorce, she would not be practicing *sexual* polyandry. Proving the presence of *ceremonial* polyandry does not prove the presence of sexual polyandry. Specific evidence of sexual polyandry is required.<sup>7</sup>

Too often readers assume sexual relations are included when they hear the term “polyandry.” However, they may or may not be present depending upon the meanings of the words employed. One could argue that practically speaking, a marriage without sexuality is not a marriage and the woman would not be truthfully married to two men at the same time. With respect to Joseph Smith’s “polyandry,” antagonists sometimes show that he practiced ceremonial polyandry and then imply he was also practicing sexual polyandry. For several reasons, such assumptions may not be warranted.

If sexual relations were absent in “polyandrous” marriages as defined by Compton, they might be more accurately characterized as “pseudo-polyandrous.”<sup>8</sup> LDS scholar Andrew Ehat agreed that Joseph’s sealings to married women were, in fact, “pseudo-polyandrous,” because of the absence of physical relations.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps a more useful definition of marriage is “a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are the rec-

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7. Documenting the presence of sexual relations between two people is often difficult. Even more challenging is proving that such relations occurred over one-hundred-and-sixty years ago. Accordingly, verifying the presence of polyandrous sexuality (of one woman sexual relations with two husbands during the same period of time) in the 1840s will be even more formidable. The lack of evidence does not prove that absence of sexual polyandry as it is impossible to prove a negative. However, without such evidence, caution must be exercised when making assumptions and conjectures.

8. See Andrew F. Ehat, “Pseudo-Polyandry: Explaining Mormon Polygyny’s Paradoxical Companion, Sunstone Symposium, August 22, 1986, 1-29.

9. Andrew Ehat, “Pseudo-Polyandry: Explaining Mormon Polygyny’s Paradoxical Companion,” presented at the 1986 Sunstone Salt Lake Symposium; copy of typescript in possession of the author, pages 4-12. SL86300. Available for download at <http://www.sunstoneonline.com/symposium/symp-mp3s.asp> (SL86300).

ognized legitimate offspring of both partners.”<sup>10</sup> Using this classification, polyandry would require the presence of sexual relations with both husbands during the same time period. While Joseph Smith undoubtedly practiced “ceremonial polyandry,” the question remains did he also practice “sexual polyandry?” Was he sleeping with other men’s wives during the same season those women were also experiencing connubial relations with their legal husbands?

### *Did Joseph Smith Practice Sexual Polyandry? Differing Opinions*

Anti-Mormon literature composed toward the end of the nineteenth century often leveled the accusation of sexual polyandry at Joseph Smith. Usually the claim appeared as one item on their laundry lists of the Prophet’s alleged indiscretions. However, the allegation was not always taken seriously by historians.

Notwithstanding, in her 1945 biography of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History*, Fawn M. Brodie treated the behavior as a documented actuality, giving it new credibility as an acknowledged reality, in the minds of many of her readers. She penned: “Joseph could with a certain honesty inveigh against adultery in the same week that he slept with another man’s wife, or indeed several men’s wives, because he had interposed a very special marriage ceremony.”<sup>11</sup>

Since 1945, many other authors have repeated Brodie’s seemingly secure position. George D. Smith gave this regal explanation in 1994: “Beginning in 1841, Joseph Smith took as plural wives several married women, as if exercising a variant of the feudal *droit du seigneur*: a king’s right to [have sexual relations with] the brides [betrothed to other men] in his domain. This option was presented to the married woman as a favor to her.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, D. Michael Quinn reflected certainty that Mary

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10. Royal Anthropological Institute, *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (1951), 110. Quoted in Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: from Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*, New York: Viking, 2005, 27.

11. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd rev. ed. New York, 1971, 308.

12. George D. Smith, “Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841-46: A Preliminary Demographic Report.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1994):10.

Elizabeth was “cohabiting with both” Adam Lightner and Joseph Smith, but unfortunately does not provide any corroborating evidence.<sup>13</sup>

George D. Smith’s most recent publication, *Nauvoo Polygamy* “... but we called it celestial marriage”, advances the concept beyond Brodie’s conjectures. Smith chronicles the initial introductions between Joseph and several of his future “polyandrous” wives. For example, he notes the ages of the women when they first met the Prophet. Sarah Ann Whitney was only five, Mary Elizabeth Rollins twelve, Nancy Marinda Johnson fifteen, Sylvia Sessions nineteen, Ruth Vose twenty-four, etc.<sup>14</sup> The implication seems clear. George D. Smith indicates that for many years, Joseph Smith had his eye on these girls/women and developed sexual polyandry in order to establish conjugal relations with them, even though they were already married.

Todd Compton was less than positive: “It seems probable that Joseph Smith had sexual relations with his polyandrous wives.”<sup>15</sup> Regarding one polyandrous sealing, he speculates: “Nothing specific is known about sexuality in their [Zina Diantha Huntington and Joseph Smith] marriage, though judging from Smith’s other marriages, sexuality was probably included.”<sup>16</sup>

Other researchers have been more hesitant, but they leave the door open. Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward provided this view concerning one relationship: “Sexual relations with Joseph Smith [and Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs, legal wife of Hen-

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13. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 184-85. Specifically Quinn writes: “Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner also claimed that she ‘was sealed to Joseph for Eternity.’ However, this statement for the public was an effort to conceal the polyandrous circumstances of her marriage to Smith at a time when the twenty-five-year-old woman was also married to Adam Lightner and cohabiting with both men” (ibid.). Quinn provides no documentation to explain his certainty that Mary Elizabeth was concealing anything. Nor is evidence offered to demonstrate that in fact she was sleeping with both men. Neither have I encountered any documentation for either allegation.

14. George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*: “... but we called it celestial marriage”, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008, 36.

15. Todd Compton, “Fawn Brodie on Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives and Polygamy: A Critical View,” in Newell G. Bringham, ed., *Reconsidering No Man Knows My History: Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect*, Logan, Utah: USU Press, 1996, 165.

16. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 82.

ry B. Jacobs], if any, had been infrequent and irregular.”<sup>17</sup> In 1975, Danel Bachman wrote concerning the marriage of Joseph Smith to Mary Rollins Lightner, who was legally married to Adam Lightner: “She [Mary Elizabeth] may well have had conjugal relations with Smith.”<sup>18</sup>

In 2004, anti-Mormon writer Richard Abanes provided this extreme interpretation: “Although the wives continued to live with their husbands, they would receive conjugal visits from Smith whenever the need arose... Wife-swapping was eventually looked upon as wholly acceptable if an influential church authority was involved.”<sup>19</sup> No credible evidence of wife-swapping has been located in manuscript sources.

### *Evidence of Sexual Polyandry*

A review of the literature identifies several allegations of sexual polyandry leveled at Joseph Smith. Notably, all are from anti-Mormon or unsympathetic writers and none are first-hand. Three of the allegations are simple assertions. Ann Eliza Webb Young wrote in her expose, *Wife No. 19*: “One woman said to me not very long since, while giving me some of her experience in polygamy: “The greatest trial I ever endured in my life was living with my husband and deceiving him, by receiving Joseph’s attentions whenever he chose to come to me.”<sup>20</sup> Wilhelm Wyl quoted Sarah Pratt claiming that Lucinda Pendleton Morgan Harris stated in 1842, “Why I AM HIS [Joseph Smith’s] MISTRESS SINCE FOUR YEARS” (emphasis in original).<sup>21</sup> And a third author asserted she heard Presendia

17. Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward, *Four Zinas: A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000, 132-33.

18. Danel Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith.” M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975, 135. He also suggests that Presendia’s seventh child, may have been “sired” by the Prophet. (Ibid., 139).

19. Richard Abanes, *Becoming Gods: A Closer Look at 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Mormonism*, Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2004, 237.

20. Ann Eliza Webb Young wrote in her expose, *Wife No. 19*, (Hartford, Conn: Dustin, Gilman & Co., 1875, 71). In 1887, Zina referred to Ann Eliza’s claims stating flatly: “She was not truthful... she has convicted herself out of her own mouth... Ann Eliza knew she was misrepresenting the facts...” (“J.J.J.,” “Two Prophet’s Widows,” August 8, 1887, *Globe Democrat*). See also Eliza Jane Churchill Webb Letter of Aug. 27, 1876, Myron H. Bond Papers, Community of Christ Archives.

21. Wilhelm Wyl quoting Sarah Pratt in *Mormon Portraits*, Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing and Publishing Co., 1886, 60. Several problems exist with Pratt’s recollection. In 1842, she reported that Joseph’s proposal (later called a “dastardly attempt”) occurred prior to her husband’s return from his mission to England. (John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints: Or an Exposé of Joe*

Huntington “say afterwards in Utah, that she did not know whether Mr. Buell [her legal husband] or the Prophet was the father of her son.”<sup>22</sup>

Reviewing these alleged quotations raises important questions including problems with credibility and plausibility. In the nineteenth century, for a woman to mention her personal sexual involvement was rare. To admit to a polyandrous relationship would be rarer, but to openly refer to a polyandrous sexual involvement would be very extraordinary. The listeners to such admissions would have had no context to evaluate the declarations except to consider the behaviors plainly immoral. Even in the secret teachings of plurality in Nauvoo, there is no evidence that a doctrinal foundation for sexual polyandry was ever discussed. Hence, the women would be essentially declaring themselves to be unchaste. Zina, Lucinda, and Presendia all partook of the conservative Victorian standards of the time and were devout Latter-day Saints. It seems highly unlikely that these women would make such comments. A review of other allegations suggests that none rises above the level of tabloid reporting.

Other acknowledged anti-Mormon authors made similar claims. John Bowes quoted William Arrowsmith in a confusing narrative that alleged sexual polyandry between Joseph Smith and Marinda Nancy

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*Smith and Mormonism*. Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842, 230-31.) Orson Pratt arrived in Nauvoo on July 19, 1841. (*History of the Church*, 4:389.) Hence, Sarah’s alleged conversation with “Mrs. Harris” must have occurred prior to that date. Counting back four years establishes the described mistress-hood as beginning in the first half of the year 1837. However, Joseph Smith did not meet Lucinda until March 14, 1838, when the Smith family moved permanently from Ohio to Missouri (*History of the Church*, 3:8-9). Accordingly, the beginning of a four year adulterous relationship in 1837 between Joseph Smith and Lucinda Harris was a geographic impossibility.

22. Nelson Winch Green quoting Mrs. Mary Ettie V. Smith in, *Fifteen Years Among the Mormons: Being the Narrative of Mrs. Mary Ettie V. Smith*, New York: D.W. Evans, 1860, 35. Anti-Mormon writer Fanny Stenhouse described Ettie Smith in 1875 as “a lady who wrote very many years ago and in her writings, so mixed up fiction with what was true, that I was difficult to determine where the one ended and the other began.” (Fanny Stenhouse, “Tell It All”: *The Story of a Life’s Experiences in Mormonism*, Hartford: A. D. Worthington & Co., 1875, 618.) Fawn Brodie theorized that the child was Oliver Buell (Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd rev. ed. New York, 1971, 301-02). However, genetics researcher Ugo A. Perego, has shown through DNA testing that Oliver was not Joseph Smith’s son. (Ugo A. Perego, Jayne E. Ekins, and Scott R. Woodward, “Resolving the Paternities of Oliver N. Buell and Mosiah L. Hancock through DNA,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, vol. 28 [2008], 128-36.) Further research shows Mary Ettie Smith could only have been referring to John Hiram, who was born July 13, 1843 at Adams, Illinois, over sixty miles south of Nauvoo. Other than speculation, nothing has been found to support a connection between Joseph and Presendia during that period.

Johnson Hyde that apparently bothered only Arrowsmith, since all other described participants remained true to Joseph Smith.<sup>23</sup> William Hall accused the Prophet of impregnating Zina Huntington Jacobs in an account that contains factual errors and has been recently shown to be false through DNA testing.<sup>24</sup> John Hyde paired Joseph Smith with Hannah Ann Dubois Smith Dibble in a story based upon hearsay evidence.<sup>25</sup>

### *No Complaints from Legal Husbands*

Despite several allegations, research fails to identify complaints of sexual polyandry from any of the described participants, including the women or their legal husbands. Todd Compton acknowledges that true polyandrous relationships would be difficult for the men involved: “One wonders why these ‘first husbands’ apparently acquiesced to their wives’ marriages to Smith.”<sup>26</sup> He recognized that “If polygyny offended against the American cult of true womanhood, polyandry offended even more.”<sup>27</sup> In addressing the legal husbands’ reactions, we are confronted with the question, “Did they know of their wives’ sealings to Joseph?” Richard Van Wagoner wrote in 1985: “The legal husband did not usually know about the extralegal husband.”<sup>28</sup> Richard L. Bushman penned in 2005: “In most cases, the husband knew of the plural marriage and approved.”<sup>29</sup> Todd Compton provided his own assessments (see chart 4.1).

23. John Bowes, *Mormonism Exposed*, London: R. Bulman, 1850, 63.

24. William Hall, *The Abominations of Mormonism Exposed*, Cincinnati: I. Hart, 1851, 43; Ugo A. Perego, Natalie M. Myres, and Scott R. Woodward. “Reconstructing the Y-Chromosome of Joseph Smith: Genealogical Applications.” *Journal of Mormon History* 31 (Fall 2005): 59-60 [42-60].

25. John Hyde, *Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs*, New York: W.P. Pettridge, 1857, 84-85. I have found no evidence to corroborate Hyde’s assertion. Hyde was capable of extreme claims, asserting that proxy marriages for the dead had “to be consummated in the same manner as that of the living... And as a marriage ceremony is not valid till completed, there is practice in consequence more abomination.” (Ibid. 88-89.) This claim is unfounded and contradicted by more reliable evidence.

26. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 21.

27. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 80.

28. Van Wagoner, Richard S. “Mormon Polyandry in Nauvoo.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Fall 1985): 81. [67-83.]

29. *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, 439.



<i>Legal Husband</i>	<i>In Sacred Loneliness Commentary</i>	<i>Page</i>
George Harris	"George Harris may have given permission for the marriage, since he was a close friend of Smith and a church leader"	49
Henry B. Jacobs	"Apparently, Henry knew of the marriage and accepted it"	81
Norman Buell	"Norman, a man bitterly opposed to Mormonism, was probably not told of Presendia's marriage."	123
David Sessions	It is not known "whether he [David] knew it or not."	185
Adam Lightner	"He [Adam] was out of town, 'far away' at the time, so probably did not know about it."	213
Orson Hyde	"Four writers offer no consensus on the issue of whether Orson was aware of the marriage"	239
Jabez Durfee	"He may have known about the marriage"	260
John Cleveland	"Because he [John] was a non-Mormon... it is unlikely that Sarah or Joseph told him about their marriage."	278
Edward Sayers	"Whether Edward knew about the marriage are entirely unknown"	383
Jonathan Holmes	"The fact that Holmes was so close to Joseph Smith suggests that he knew of Smith's marriage to his wife and permitted it..."	548
Windsor Lyon	"Nothing is known of Windsor's reaction to the marriage, if he knew of it."	179

CHART 4.1: *Todd Compton's assessments of whether the legal husband knew of their wives' relationships with Joseph Smith. From the chart, it appears that we have no reliable evidence describing the husbands' knowledge of or immediate response to their wives' sealings to the Prophet in eleven cases.*

\*Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward wrote: "Henry gave tacit approval, believing that whatever the prophet did was right. We do not know if Zina told Henry about Smith's earlier proposals before their marriage or if he fully understood what the sealing meant." (*Four Zinas: A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000, 113.) Benjamin F. Johnson provided this interesting recollection: "Of the Prophet's partiality or love for Sister Zina, I will only say she was always in his favor. And that after a two and half years mission to Canada and the middle states, I returned to learn she had but recently married, which perhaps did not quite please the Prophet. For in answer to his great love for her, she soon became his own wife. [She] was among the first to accept the plural order of marriage." ("*Aunt Zina' as I Have Known Her from Youth—By 'Uncle Ben'*" [Benjamin F. Johnson], in *Zina Card Brown Family Collection*, MS 4780, Box 3, Folder 6, LDS Church Archives.)

Huband	Huband's church membership	Civil marriage	Wife	Wife's sealing to Smith	Huband's history	Huband's Death	Complaints about polyandry
Henry B. Jacobs	Yes baptized in 1832	Mar 7 1841	Zina Diantha Huntington	Oct 1841	Henry stood as a witness as Zina was married to Joseph Smith for eternity and Brigham Young for "time," on Feb 2, 1846.	1886 Utah	None
Norman Buell	Yes; baptized in 1836; disaffected in 1838	Jan 6, 1827	Presendia Lathrop Huntington	Dec 11, 1841	Norman "felt the difficulties were too much, and would have persuaded her, if possible, to leave the Church, but she remained firm and steadfast." <sup>46</sup>	1872	None
Adam Lightner	No	Aug 11, 1835	Mary Elizabeth Rollins	Feb, 1842	Adam apparently remained a non-member his entire life.	1885 Utah	None
Windsor Lyon	Yes; Excommun. Nov 1842; Rebaptized Jan. 1846	April 21, 1838	Sylvia Sessions	Feb. 8, 1842	Windsor fathered three children with Sylvia prior to his excommunication and two after his 1846 rebaptism. The only child conceived while he was out of the Church was Josephine — allegedly the daughter of Joseph Smith.	1850 Utah	None
David Sessions	Yes; baptized in 1834	Jun 28, 1812	Patry Bartlett	Mar 9, 1842	David married two wives polygamously and largely abandoned Patry.	1850 Utah	None
Orson Hyde	Yes; reinstated in 1839	Sep 4, 1834	Marinda Nancy Johnson	Apr 1842	Served as apostle and member of the Quorum of the Twelve. Marinda divorced Orson in 1870.	1878 Utah	None <sup>47</sup>

CHART 4-2: Additional information concerning the husbands of Joseph Smith's "polyandrous" wives. (Continued on following page.)

<sup>46</sup>"Death of Presendia Kimball," *Deseret News Weekly*, Feb 6, 1892, vol. XLIV, no. 7, page 14. + A letter from John L. Smith to First Presidency, Mar 8, 1895 supports that Sarah was sealed to Joseph for only "eternity": "In the days of Joseph, Mother [Sarah M. Kingsley (Howe)] Cleveland by advice, was sealed to the prophet in Nauvoo but lived with her husband John Cleveland..." (D. Michael Quinn Papers—Addition—Unecat WA MS 244 [Accession:19990209-c] bx 1.) The author of this letter is likely John Lyman Smith (1823-1898), who was both a son-in-law to Sarah Kingsley Cleveland and a first cousin to Joseph Smith, Jr. John L. married Sarah's daughter Augusta Bowen Cleveland; and he was a son of John Smith, and brother to George A.

<i>Huband</i>	<i>Huband's church membership</i>	<i>Civil marriage</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Wife's sealing to Smith</i>	<i>Huband's history</i>	<i>Huband's Death</i>	<i>Complaints about polyandry</i>
Jabez Durfee	Yes	Mar 3, 1834	Elizabeth Davis	<Jun 1842?	Jabez and Elizabeth divorced prior to Jan. 1846.	1867 Kansas	None
John Cleveland	No; friendly at first but turned bitter	Jun 10, 1826	Sarah Kingsley	<Jun 29, 1842?	On August 2, 1850 Sarah wrote: "Your Father would by no means go to live with the Mormons, therefore I beg of you not to ask us any more, it offends him."	1860 Illinois	None
George Harris	Yes; baptized in 1834	Dec 3, 1830.	Lucinda Pendleton	?	Served on Nauvoo High Council. George stood proxy as his wife was sealed to Joseph Smith for eternity on Jan 22, 1846. Divorced by 1853.†	1857 Iowa	None
Edward Sayers	No**	Jan 23, 1841	Ruth Vose	Feb, 1843	Edward lived among the Saints until his death.	1861 Utah	None
Jonathan Holmes	Yes; baptized in 1832	Dec 1, 1842	Elvira Annie Cowles	Jun 1, 1843	Jonathan was always a faithful Mormon, serving as a bodyguard and pallbearer to the Prophet. He stood as proxy when Elvira was sealed to Joseph Smith in the Nauvoo temple.	1880 Utah	None
Joseph C. Kingsbury	Yes	April 29, 1843	Sarah Ann Whitney	July 7, 1842	This marriage was simply a front, apparently to dispel suspicions then focused on the Prophet. Sarah Ann and Joseph C. Kingsbury never consummated the union.	1898 Utah	None

†A letter from John L. Smith to First Presidency, Mar 8, 1895 supports that Sarah was sealed to Joseph for only "eternity": "In the days of Joseph. Mother [Sarah M. Kingsley (Howe)] Cleveland by advice, was sealed to the prophet in Nauvoo but lived with her husband John Cleveland. . ." (D. Michael Quinn Papers—Addition—Unrat WA MS 244 [Accession:19990209-c] bx 1.) The author of this letter is likely John Lyman Smith (1823-1898), who was both a son-in-law to Sarah Kingsley Cleveland and a first cousin to Joseph Smith, Jr. John L. married Sarah's daughter Augusta Bowen Cleveland; and he was a son of John Smith, and brother to George A. \*\*Andrew Jenson's personal notes state Edward was not a member. (Andrew Jenson Papers [ca. 1871-1942], LDS Archives).

From chart 4.1, it appears that we have no reliable evidence describing the husbands' knowledge of or immediate response to their wives' sealings to the Prophet in eleven cases. Chart 4.2 provides additional historical information. The twelfth "polyandrous" sealing occurred before the legal marriage (see below).

Reviewing these twelve "polyandrous" husbands, we find great diversity respecting their relationships to the Church and its leaders. There are friendly non-members (Cleveland, Lightner, and Sayers), antagonistic (Buell), unpredictable (Jacobs),<sup>30</sup> active (Durfee, Harris, and Sessions), cyclic (Hyde), and stalwart (Kingsbury and Holmes).

Despite their differences, research suggests that these men shared two things in common. First, their legal wives were sealed to Joseph Smith during the Prophet's lifetime. The second is that they all seem to have reacted to the relationship with the exact same response: *nothing*.

It might be argued that the historical record is so incomplete that such complaints could have been made but were not recorded or have not yet been located. However, grievances are usually designed to publicize a perceived injustice. Protests against a man's sexual involvement with another man's legal wife would have constituted juicy gossip that could have easily resulted in backwoods justice endangering the life of the non-husband. Undoubtedly, rumors of either the behavior or the repercussions would have been exploited by newspapermen scrounging for titillating details about the Mormons, if any such tales had reached their ears. To date, no gripes from any of these legal husbands have been identified in the historical documents.

After evaluating the available evidence regarding conjugal relations in Joseph Smith's polyandrous sealings, Todd Compton wrote that "theoretically" it might be argued that in eleven cases of polyandry "there is no evidence for sexuality. In only one case do we have evidence."<sup>31</sup> That "one

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30. Jacobs experienced several failed marriages, besides his union to Zina. Caroline Barnes Crosby wrote of one in her diary: January 11, 1852: "There were two couples married in our chamber. Mr. John M Horner officiated. Henry B. Jacobs to Mary Clawson..." March 20, 1852: "Mary Clawson called. She looked very sad, said she had been weeping, gave us an account of her late husband Henry B. Jacobs leaving her in consequence of his old wife [Asenath Babcock married n 1848] coming and claiming her previous right." (Diary of Caroline Barnes Crosby, USHS, pp. 17-30, Dec. 1852 to March, 1853.)

31. Todd Compton, "Truth, Honesty and Moderation in Mormon History: A Response to Anderson, Faulring and Bachman's Reviews of *In Sacred Loneliness*, section "Sexuality in the Polyan-

case” has been touted as an undeniable example of polyandrous sexual relations with the implication that conjugality was probably present in some or all of the rest.

### *Josephine Rosetta Lyon—Biological Daughter of Joseph Smith?*

The marriage in question involves Sylvia Sessions Lyon and her daughter Josephine Rosetta Lyon. In 1915, Josephine signed the following statement:

Just prior to my mother’s death in 1882 she called me to her bedside and told me that her days on earth were about numbered and before she passed away from mortality she desired to tell me something which she had kept as an entire secret from me and from all others but which she now desired to communicate to me. She then told me that I was the daughter of the Prophet Joseph Smith...<sup>32</sup>

All researchers do not agree that this statement clearly declares Josephine to be the biological daughter of the Prophet.<sup>33</sup> It is true that words reflect some ambiguity and could possibly be interpreted to mean that Josephine was to be Joseph Smith’s daughter only in eternity, without implying an actual paternal physical connection.<sup>34</sup> However, other details support that Josephine was the literal offspring of the Prophet. For

drous Marriages, (accessed February 11, 2007) .<http://www.geocities.com/athens/oracle/7207/rev.html> . Todd deals with eleven cases of “polyandry,” having eliminated one, the marriage to Sarah Ann Whitney. See discussion below.

32. Affidavit of Josephine F. Fisher, February 24, 1915, LDS Archives, Ms 3423, folder 1, images 48-49; see also Danel W. Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith.” M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975, 141. See discussion in Richard S. Van Wagoner observed: “Mormon Polyandry in Nauvoo,” *Dialogue*, Vol.18, No.3, (Fall 1985) p.78fn12.

33. For an alternate view see, “Sylvia Porter Session Lyon Kimball,” in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1967, vol. 10, p. 415.

34. Historian Rex E. Cooper writes: “I find the evidence to be less convincing on three different grounds. First, although the possibility that Josephine was a daughter of Joseph Smith was being discussed as early as 1905, the statement reports a conversation that took place twenty-three years before in 1882. Second, since the statement is transmitted through Andrew Jenson, it is a third-hand account of Sylvia P. Session’s statement. And third, the statement is unclear about what it meant to be ‘a daughter of Joseph Smith.’ For example, because of his mother’s matrimonial sealing to Joseph Smith, Heber J. Grant was regarded as a ‘son of Joseph Smith’ even though he was born twelve years after the prophet’s death.” (Rex E. Cooper, *Promises Made to the Fathers: Mormon Covenant Organization*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990, 144, fn1.)



*Sylvia Sessions Lyon (Photo courtesy  
Clark Layton.)*



*Josephine Lyon (Courtesy of Clark  
Layton.)*

example, if no genetic connection existed between Josephine and Joseph Smith, it is strange that Sylvia would wait until her deathbed to dramatically divulge that the Prophet was to be Josephine's father only in the next life. If Josephine "was the daughter of the Prophet Joseph Smith" only because of a sealing ordinance, rather than through physical siring, all of Sylvia's children would be equally his offspring. However, none of them reported any similar divulgements from their dying mother, nor would there be any compelling reason to keep such knowledge secret.<sup>35</sup> Josephine's name also supports the relationship.

In addition, other sources, beyond the 1915 affidavit, corroborate the story. In 1886, future BYU president George H. Brimhall recorded: "Went to Spanish Fork... Evening had a talk with Father Hales, who told me that it was said that Joseph Smith had a daughter named Josephine living in Bountiful, Utah... Soon the contemporaries of the Prophet Joseph will be all gone."<sup>36</sup> The Hales and Fisher families both

35. Windsor and Sylvia reunited after his January 1846 rebaptism. Byron Windsor Lyon was born September 4, 1847 and David Carlos Lyon on August 8, 1848. However, these children would be part of Joseph Smith's family in eternity.

36. George H. Brimhall, *Diary of George H. Brimhall*, Volume 1, Bound typescript, undated, no publisher; edited by Jennie H. Groberg, copy in Harold B. Lee Library, Special Collections, for

emigrated from Kent, England and may have known each other prior to their arrival in the United States. In 1905, Stake President Angus M. Cannon had an interview with Joseph Smith III, wherein he stated:

I will now refer you to one case where it was said by the girl's grandmother that your father has a daughter born of a plural wife. The girl's grandmother was Mother Sessions, who lived in Nauvoo and died here in the valley. She was the grand-daughter of Mother Sessions. That girl, I believe, is living today in Bountiful, north of this city. I heard Prest. Young, a short time before his death, refer to the report and remark that he had never seen the girl, but he would like to see her for himself, that he might determine if she bore any likeness to your father."<sup>37</sup>

Since Sylvia said she had never told anyone prior to revealing Josephine's paternity to her, these accounts suggest that rumors of Josephine's true biological father arose from other sources that received limited private circulation prior to Sylvia Sessions' death. In other words, several historical documents support a genetic relationship between the Prophet and Josephine, besides Sylvia's affidavit.

### *Joseph Smith and Sylvia Sessions—Polyandry or Polygyny?*

Sylvia Sessions wedded Windsor Lyon in a civil ceremony on 21 April 1838. Together they moved to Nauvoo and were comfortably established there by July 1840. At some point thereafter, Sylvia was sealed to the Prophet. The question is when did that sealing occur and what was the status of her marriage to Windsor at that moment. If they had experienced a religious divorce prior to her sealing to Joseph Smith, a religious divorce that would have curtailed sexual relations between the two, then Sylvia would be guilty of ceremonial polyandry, but not sexual polyandry.

Todd Compton wrote: "On February 8, 1842, when Sylvia was twenty-three, she was sealed to Joseph Smith."<sup>38</sup> Other authors have agreed

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date; George H. Brimhall Journal, Jan 1, 1888, CA, MS d 1902. The most likely identity of "Father Hales" is Charles Henry Hales (1817-1889), Brian C. Hales' great-great grandfather.

37. Angus Munn Cannon, "Statement of an interview with Joseph Smith, III, 1905," regarding conversation on October 12, 1905, MS 3166, LDS Church Archives.

38. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 179, 681-82; Todd Compton, "Remember Me in My Affliction": Louisa Bea-

with this date.<sup>39</sup> The source of this information is an unsigned document written in 1869 in an affidavit book.<sup>40</sup> Importantly, within that same collection of affidavit books is a second unsigned document that specifies an 8 February 1843 date, a full year later.<sup>41</sup> Research shows that neither of the documents is more reliable than the other and therefore, should not be treated preferentially. In addition, Josephine was born on 8 February 1844 raising additional questions about the reliability of the month and day written on the two manuscripts. Taken together, it appears that the documents present conflicting years and suspicious dates that are unconfirmed. Consequently, they provide contradictory information regarding the timing of Joseph Smith's and Sylvia Session sealing ceremony.

Without the assistance of the affidavit books, other sources must be consulted. In a document undoubtedly used to write his 1887 *Historical Record* article on plural marriage, independent historian Andrew Jenson referred to Sylvia a "formerly the wife of Windsor Lyons."<sup>42</sup> He also penned: "Sessions, Sylvia Porter, wife of Winsor [*sic*] Palmer Lyon, was born July 31, 1818... [She] Became a convert to 'Mormonism' and was married to Mr. Lyons - When he left the Church she was sealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith."<sup>43</sup> A second corroboration is found in the 1915 statement from Josephine. She remembered her mother also "told me that I was the daughter of the Prophet Joseph Smith, she having been sealed to the Prophet at the time that her husband Mr. Lyon was out of

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man and Eliza R. Snow Letters, 1849," *Journal of Mormon History*, vol. 25, no. 2, (Fall 1999), 60, [46-69].

39. Gary J. Bergera, "Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-1844," *Dialogue*, 38, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 66; Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816-1844*, Longwood, Florida: Xulon Press, 2005, 561; George D. Smith, "The Summer of 1842: Joseph Smith's relationships with the 12 Wives He Married After His First Wife, Emma," Sunstone Symposium presentation, Salt Lake Community College, July 31, 1998, 5; Danel W. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith." M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975, 350, #77; D. Michael Quinn lists on the year, 1842 in *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994, 587.

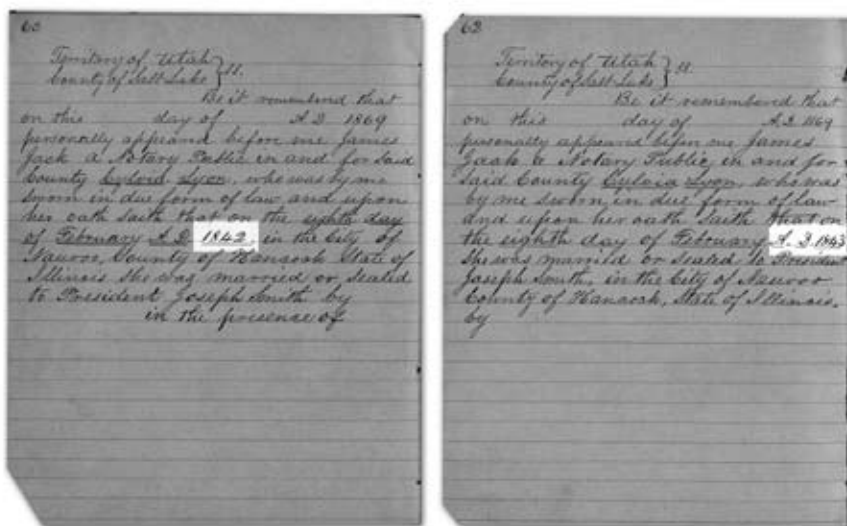
40. Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books 1:60, CHL. See also Todd Compton, "A Trajectory of Plurality: An Overview of Joseph Smith's Thirty-Three Plural Wives," *Dialogue*, Vol. 29, (Summer 1996) No. 2, p. 34.

41. Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 4:62, CHL. See discussion in Brian C. Hales, "The Joseph Smith—Sylvia Sessions Plural Sealing: Polyandry or Polygyny?" *Mormon Historical Studies*, Spring 2008, Vol. 9, No. 1, 41-57; [www.JosephSmithsPolygamy.com](http://www.JosephSmithsPolygamy.com).

42. Andrew Jenson Papers, LDS Archives.

43. Biographical Information on Windsor and Sylvia Lyon, undated sheet in Andrew Jenson Collection, LDS Archives.





Pages from Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:60, 4:62 showing conflicting dates.  
(Courtesy LDS Church History Library.)

fellowship with the Church."<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, these documents place the sealing after Windsor's excommunication.

Windsor had a falling out with Stake President William Marks over a financial negotiation in the fall of 1842. In the end Windsor sued Marks in the civil courts—a violation of Church standards since such matters were to be resolved between members within the Church. In response, Marks brought Windsor up for a Church court. On 19 November 1842, Windsor was excommunicated.<sup>45</sup> One question arises: "Did Windsor and Sylvia obtain a civil divorce after his excommunication?"

Currently, no documentation of a legal divorce between Windsor and Sylvia after his excommunication has been found. Such divorces required a hearing before the circuit court in Carthage. In fact, it is doubtful that Joseph Smith or Sylvia Sessions seriously considered the need prior to her sealing to the Prophet. After introducing celestial marriage in Nauvoo, the validity of civil ceremonies in comparison to eternal seal-

44. Josephine R. Fisher, certificate, February 24, 1915. Original in Vault Folder LDS Archives, Ms 3423, folder 1, images 48-49; see also Danel Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith." M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975, 141, 350, #77.

45. Fred C. Collier, *the Nauvoo High Council Minute Books of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Hanna, Utah: Collier's Publishing Co., 2005, 74.

ings was often questioned. Stanley B. Kimball penned: “Some church leaders at that time considered civil marriage by non-Mormon clergymen to be as unbinding as their baptisms. Some previous marriages... were annulled simply by ignoring them.”<sup>46</sup>

There is no question that in special circumstances, Joseph Smith, as President of the Church, believed himself capable of granting permission to ignore legal unions (constituting a religious divorce). In October of 1835, the Prophet was consulted regarding the status of Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey’s marriage to her abusive husband, Calvin Bailey, who had deserted her three years earlier. At that time, Lydia had received a marriage proposal from Newel Knight and didn’t know what to do, since a formal divorce had not occurred. Hyrum Smith was acting as an intermediary. Newel Knight recorded:

Bro Hiram came to me said he had laid the affair before Bro Joseph, who at the time was with his council. Broth Joseph after p[ray]or & reflecting a little or in other words enquiring [of the] Lord Said it is all right, She is his & the sooner they [are] married the better. Tell them no law shall hurt [them]. They need not fear either the law of God or man for [it] shall not touch them; & the Lord bless them. This [is the] will of the Lord concerning that matter... I told her all that had transpired, & we lifted our hearts with gratitude to our heavenly Father for his goodness towards us, & that we live in this mometuou[s] age, & as did the ancients, so we have the privilege of enquireing through the prophet, & receiveing the word of the Lord concern[ing] us.<sup>47</sup>

After prayer and reflection, Joseph declared that Lydia was capable of remarrying. Interwoven within his directive was the acknowledgement that Lydia was, from a religious standpoint, divorced from Calvin Bailey.<sup>48</sup> Given that the Prophet’s jurisdiction concerned only religious laws, the separation or divorce granted could only be considered ecclesiastical. However, Joseph instructed that thereafter they needed to no longer “fear

46. Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981, 95.

47. Newel Knight, “Autobiography and journal [ca. 1846];” MS 767, Folder 1, item 4, pages 57-58; LDS Archives.

48. Evidence shows that the Latter-day Saints never considered full marital polyandry to be acceptable to God. Nor is there any manuscript documentation to suggest that any Church members ever viewed themselves as being polyandrously married. Accordingly, there is no doubt that a divorce from her first husband was acknowledged by Latter-day Saints.

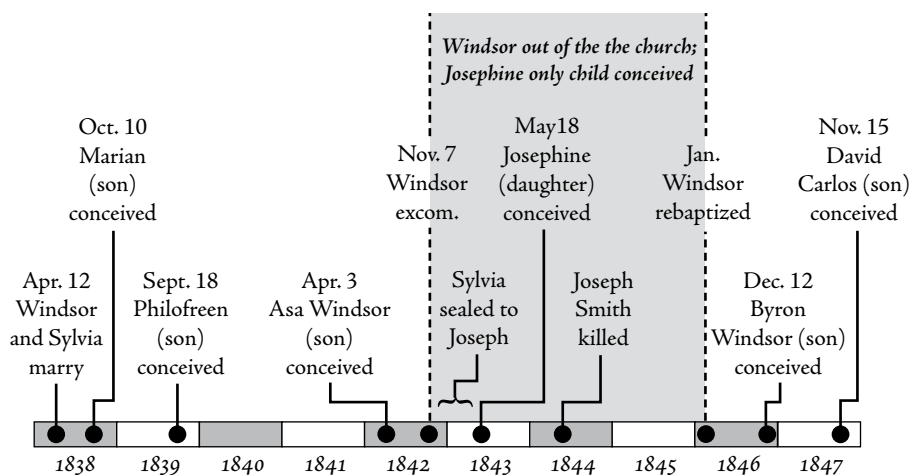


CHART 4.3: Timeline showing the approximate conception dates of Sylvia's children and important activities of Joseph Smith and Windsor Lyon.

either the law of God or man." Joseph Smith evidently considered his judgment in that matter to satisfy all pertinent concerns including state and federal laws, so far as the participants were concerned. Throughout the proceedings, there is no hint of approved polyandry, sexual or otherwise. On occasion, the Nauvoo High Council also assumed authority to allow a new matrimony to a man still legally married.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, it appears that for most Latter-day Saints, the sealing ceremony constituted a matrimonial upgrade sufficient to dissolve previously contracted earthly matrimones. For them, priesthood authority was so superior as to trump any marriage ceremony sanctioned only by worldly powers. The eternal union authorized conjugality in the sealed marriage and eliminated permission for sexual relations in the previous union. The need for a legal divorce was ignored in the wake of an eternal nuptial, but the religious divorce was binding, prohibiting sexual relations.

49. See the case of Henry H. Wilson tried on January 21, 1843. Even without a legal divorce, "it was decided by President Hyrum Smith and William Marks, that if he feels himself justified and can sustain himself against the laws of the land, that he is clear as far as they were concerned (i.e. the jurisdiction of the High Council) and was at liberty to marry again on the aforesaid conditions." Fred C. Collier, *the Nauvoo High Council Minute Books of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Hanna, Utah: Collier's Publishing Co., 2005, 80.

Several evidences indicate that some sort of divorce or termination was inherent in Windsor Lyon's excommunication or at least accompanied it chronologically. Andrew Jenson's notes reflect this perspective as he referred to Sylvia as "formerly the wife of Windsor Lyons,"<sup>50</sup> also writing that Sylvia "was married to Mr. Lyon. When he left the Church she was sealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith."<sup>51</sup>

Josephine Lyon's 1915 statement also implies that the excommunication invalidated her marriage to Windsor, allowing her to be legitimately sealed to Joseph Smith and bare a child with him. Sylvia told Josephine that she was "sealed to the Prophet at the time that her husband Mr. Lyon was out of fellowship with the Church."<sup>52</sup>

Researchers who accept Josephine's 1915 statement as evidence that she was Joseph's offspring cannot easily reject the timeline presented or the implication that Windsor's Church estrangement was interpreted by Josephine as an official separation or divorce, thus legitimizing her mother's ability to be sealed to the Prophet. Neither is there any indication that Josephine thought her mother was simultaneously married to two men polyandrously or that Sylvia continued to cohabit with Windsor after his excommunication. Importantly, there is no evidence of sexual polyandry in this relationship.<sup>53</sup>

### **LDS Theology: Sexual Polyandry is *Non-Doctrinal* and *Anti-Doctrinal***

Besides the lack of credible evidence of sexual polyandry, other observations make such a practice less likely among the Latter-day Saints. Foremost is that from the standpoint of LDS theology, sexual polyandry

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50. Andrew Jenson Papers, CHL.

51. Biographical Information on Windsor and Sylvia Lyon, undated sheet in Andrew Jenson Collection, LDS Archives.

52. Josephine R. Fisher, certificate, February 24, 1915. Original in Vault Folder LDS Archives, Ms 3423, folder 1, images 48-49.

53. Some researchers may dismiss the two Jenson accounts and Josephine Fisher's recollection indicating that an official separation or religious divorce occurred between Windsor and Sylvia as simply attempts to cover-up sexual polyandry. They might also assume that since they had children together, both before his November 1842 excommunication and after his January 1846 rebaptism, that they continued to cohabit while Windsor was out of the Church. However, no evidence exists to support continued conjugality between Sylvia and Windsor after his excommunication and prior to Joseph Smith's death.

is easily classified as *non-doctrinal* and *anti-doctrinal*. An evaluation of scriptures and Joseph Smith's teachings fails to identify any statements that would authorize its practice. No ceremonies are described that would solemnize a true polyandrous relationship wherein a woman was authorized to be sexually involved with both husbands.

The revelation on eternal marriage, Utah Doctrine and Covenants section 132: 63 defines sexual polyandry as adultery saying that if a woman: "after she is espoused, shall be with another man, she has committed adultery, and shall be destroyed" (see also v. 42).

Early Utah Church leaders condemned polyandry. Brigham Young stated in 1852: "What do you think of a woman having more husbands than one? This is not known to the law."<sup>54</sup> On 8 October 1869, Apostle George A. Smith taught that "a plurality of husbands is wrong."<sup>55</sup> Six years later Orson Pratt instructed: "God has strictly forbidden, in this Bible, plurality of husbands, and proclaimed against it in his law."<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

Bathsheba Smith, wife of Apostle George A. Smith, was asked in 1892 if it would "be a violation of the laws of the church for one woman to have two husbands living at the same time..." She replied: "I think it would."<sup>58</sup>

Importantly, all of these individuals were involved with Nauvoo polygamy and several were undoubtedly aware of Joseph Smith's sealings to legally married women. There is also evidence that he may have discussed eternal plural marriage with Orson Pratt's legal wife, Sarah.

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

55. George Albert Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, 13:41, October 8, 1869.

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

57. Orson Pratt, "Celestial Marriage," *The Seer*, 1:4 (April 1853) 60.

58. Bathsheba Smith, Testimony given in the Temple Lot Case, part 3, page 347, question 1142.

Hyrum Smith's son, 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."<sup>59</sup>

One of the ways sexual polyandry is anti-doctrinal comes as it creates confusion regarding the paternity of the wife's offspring. Charles W. Penrose wrote in the Utah Church's publication, the *Millennial Star*, in 1867: "Polyandry is contrary to nature, that it strikes at the foundation of the object of marriage—the propagation of the race, that, if it be productive of any increase whatever, the paternal identity is destroyed, or made so doubtful, as to annihilate those natural sympathies which properly should exist between the father and his offspring."<sup>60</sup>

Mormon theology assigns specific responsibilities to parents regarding their own children. "And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents" (Utah D&C 68:25). Correspondingly, a father is not held accountable for teaching and disciplining his neighbor's children. Instead, "great things" are expected from fathers concerning their own offspring (Utah D&C 29:48). Polyandry would unavoidably introduce confusion into this strict injunction. How could either husband be held stringently responsible for the mandated fatherly duties in a polyandrous family?

In light of these doctrinal difficulties, it appears that foisting a new moral standard of sexual polyandry upon LDS women in Nauvoo might have been difficult, even for Joseph Smith. As observed, no religious precedent could be recruited to use as an example. There were no Biblical prophetesses and priestesses who practiced it who could be used as examples. No scriptures were available justify it. Joseph Smith would have been starting from scratch to defend such a principle to women

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59. Joseph F. Smith to Zenos H. Gurley, June 19, 1889, CA. 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.

60. Charles W. Penrose, "Why We Practice Plural Marriage," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, N. 37 (September 14, 1867) XXIX, 578. [577-80]

who possessed an understanding of the Old Testament and a devout dedication to Biblical standards.

Joseph's eternal sealings involved witnesses and officiators, often family members of the women involved. They too would have needed to be convinced of the propriety of sexual polyandry. Dimick Huntington performed the ceremony as two of his already married sisters, Zina and Presendia, were sealed to Joseph, while his wife, Fanny, willingly served as a witness.<sup>61</sup> How readily would these individuals have accepted and participated in a process that they could have viewed only as adultery, except their natural inclinations had been turned 180 degrees? Importantly, there is no credible documentation that any of these women saw themselves as practicing practical polyandry or that sexual polyandry was acceptable to them.

### *Some Researchers Readily Ignore Theology*

One common thread running through the reports of researchers who depict Joseph Smith as practicing sexual polyandry is a willingness to ignore his theology. Many authors may feel justified because they believe Joseph Smith was a deceiver.

Dan Vogel in his *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, reflects this view: "One cannot ignore Smith's capacity to deceive. One of the clearest evidences of this is his repeated public denial during the early 1840s of his own and other's plural marriages."<sup>62</sup> Vogel is correct in observing that the Prophet carefully denied the practice of plural marriage several times publicly during his lifetime, even though privately, evidence shows he was involved. When asked in July 1838, "Do the Mormons believe in having more wives than one?" He replied: "No, not at the same time."<sup>63</sup> Five months later, the Prophet wrote to the Saints saying: "Was it for committing adultery that we were assailed? We are aware that that false slander has gone abroad, for it has been reiterated in our ears. These are falsehoods also."<sup>64</sup> In 1844, one month before the martyrdom, the

61. Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, LDS Archives, 1:5, 1:7.

62. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004, ix.

63. *Elders' Journal*, Vol.1, No.3, p.43 (Kirtland, Ohio, July, 1838)

64. Joseph Smith's letter to the Church, December 16, 1838, as quoted in *History of the Church*, 3:230.

Prophet stated: "What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one."<sup>65</sup>

Regarding these statements, Danel Bachman observed: "Most of these denials stressed semantical and theological technicalities. That is, the language of the defense was carefully chosen to disavow practices that did not accurately represent Church doctrines."<sup>66</sup> Todd Compton concurred: "Faced with the necessity of keeping polygamy secret, the Mormon authorities generally chose to disavow the practice, sometimes using language with coded double meanings."<sup>67</sup> Lawrence Foster wrote: "Smith himself most characteristically made indirect denials of polygamy in which he said simply that such statements were too ridiculous to be believed. But he always carefully refrained from saying that such statements weren't true."<sup>68</sup>

Regardless, Dan Vogel and other writers seem willing to assume that since Joseph Smith was not strictly abiding his public declarations on polygamy, his public declarations and private teachings need not be taken too seriously. In other words, the Prophet's theology can be essentially ignored under the assumption that he was not living it. Their approach often reflects the idea that writers can compose their historical reconstructions of Joseph Smith's actions and behaviors, largely independent of the doctrines he taught.

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65. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds. *The Words of Joseph Smith: Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourse of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980, History of the Church, 6:408-12: 26 May 1844 (Sunday Morning), p.377. For other general denials of the practice of polygamy see *Millennial Star*, August 1, 1842, 74; January 15, 1850, 29-30; July 1, 1845, 22-23; *Times and Seasons*, September 1, 1842, 909; October 1, 1842, 939-40; March 15, 1843, 143; February 1, 1844, 423; March 15, 1844, 474; November 15, 1844, 715; May 1, 1845, 893-94.

66. Danel W. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith." M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975, 197. Fawn Brodie agreed: "The denials of polygamy uttered by the Mormon leaders between 1835 and 1852, when it was finally admitted, are a remarkable series of evasions and circumlocutions involving all sorts of verbal gymnastics." (Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd rev. ed. New York, 1971, 312.)

67. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 643.

68. W. Lawrence Foster, "Between Two Worlds: The Origins of Shaker Celibacy, Onedia Community Complex Marriage, and Mormon Polygamy. Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1976, 208 fn1.



Two problems emerge with this methodology. First, while it appears that Joseph Smith did in fact use careful language to secretly defy public laws that contradicted divine laws, to conclude that similar tactics spread to other aspects of his life requires specific evidence. Stated another way, in order to obey God, Joseph Smith may have publicly feigned obedience to the laws of the land while privately disobeying them. However, assuming that he also publicly feigned obedience to God's laws while privately disobeying them is not justified. The two processes are very dissimilar.<sup>69</sup>

A 1 August 1831 revelation states: "Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land" (Utah D&C 58:21). Critics sometimes allege that this directive would prohibit the secret practice of polygamy because it violated state laws in Ohio and Illinois. However, a revelation received two years later specifies which laws are to be embraced and which "cometh of evil": "Therefore, I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land; And as pertaining to law of man, whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil" (Utah D&C 98:7).

Plural marriage is not prohibited by the United States constitution; in addition, the Bill of Rights guarantees religious freedom. It appears that Church members viewed state laws against it, laws that were passed in the 1830s, as "extra-constitutional" or as "more or less than" the constitution and therefore "evil." The Saints felt little compulsion to obey unconstitutional laws if it interfered with the practice of their religion. Using subterfuge to hide compliance with divine mandates undoubtedly generated inner conflict, but there was never any real question which of the laws (the laws from God or the laws of the land) the Latter-day Saints were going to follow.

The second problem with assuming Joseph was not living his theology is that the religious men and women surrounding him apparently observed no such inconsistency. Many antagonistic writers reconstructing the Nauvoo period assert that Church members were very gullible dupes. George T. M. Davis wrote in 1844: "From personal observation, I am convinced that there are many poor, unfortunate, deluded beings

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69. See Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Theology*, appendix.

there, who are naturally honest, and who, under the influence of good example and upright leaders, would 'act well their part' in society. That class, however, are, generally speaking, of weak intellect, to a great extent uneducated, and easily made the dupes of the vicious."<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Mrs. B. G. Ferris asserted twelve years later: "Anyone with half an eye can see the object of the prophet Smith, in promulgating such a doctrine [of plural marriage]; and the wonder is, that its transparency is not obvious to all... The effect of the Mormon creed is, evidently, to gather together a low class of villains, and a still lower class of dupes."<sup>71</sup>

However, individuals who have closely studied the lives of Nauvoo polygamists can usually see that such descriptions are not accurate.<sup>72</sup> The men and women who lived close to Joseph Smith and were involved with the first plural marriages generally reacted to the principle with the same revulsion most of us do today. In addition, they were men and women of piety and strong convictions. Non-Mormon Bernard DeVoto observed in 1930: "[Joseph Smith] attracted to his support not only the ordinary fanatics who gave the American Pentecost its hundreds of sects and supported them all, but also such superior and more significant men as [Sidney] Rigdon, Orson and Parley Pratt, Orson Hyde, W.W. Phelps, and Brigham Young."<sup>73</sup> Fawn Brodie agreed: "The best evidence of the magnetism of the Mormon religion was that it could attract men with the quality of Brigham Young, whose tremendous energy and shrewd intelligence were not easily directed by any influence outside himself."<sup>74</sup>

Accordingly, to assume that Joseph Smith could have blithely transgressed his own theological teachings without disillusioning followers

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70. George T. M. Davis, *An Authentic Account of the Massacre of Joseph Smith*, St. Louis: Chambers and Knapp, 1844, 38.

71. Mrs. B. G. Ferris, *The Mormons at Home; With some Incidents of Travel from Missouri to California*, New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856, 130-31. William Harris referred to the Mormons as "dupes and fanatics" (*Mormonism Portrayed*, Warsaw: Sharp Gambel, 1841, 35). See also Rev. F.B. Ashley, *Mormonism: An Exposure of the Impositions Adopted by the Sect Called "The Latter-day Saints"*, London: John Hatchard, 1851, 8.

72. See Steven C. Harper, "By No Means Men of Weak Minds: The Gullible Bumpkin Thesis and the First Mormons," *Nauvoo Journal*, Fall 1995, vol. 7, no. 2, 39-48.

73. Bernard DeVoto, "The Centennial of Mormonism," *American Mercury* 19 (Jan. 1930): 5.

74. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd rev. ed. New York, 1971, 126-27. Joseph Johnson writing in 1885 disagreed: "[Brigham Young] must have been an idiot, or thought he was addressing idiots." (*The Great Mormon Fraud*, Manchester, Butterworth and Nodal, 1885, 17.)

like Brigham Young, Eliza R. Snow, and many others is problematic. Most of Joseph's closest followers were too perceptive to be bamboozled and too religious to become accomplices in a deliberate deception. When asked in 1859: "Is the system of your church [a plurality of wives] acceptable to the majority of its women?" Brigham Young replied: "They could not be more averse to it than I was when it was first revealed to us as the Divine will. I think they generally accept it, as I do, as the will of God."<sup>75</sup> On 18 August, 1887, Eliza R. Snow declared: "It [plural marriage] is so great and grand an institution that only the good and god-like can understand and appreciate it."<sup>76</sup> Excusing these comments as the babblings of dupes or the cover-ups of confederates seems insufficient. The documented behavior of men and women like Brigham and Eliza suggests that from their viewpoint, Joseph Smith lived his religion.

The historical record shows there were a few Church members who dissented along the way, but they constituted a small minority when compared to the numbers who embraced Joseph Smith's teachings as bona fide revelations from the heavens. It could be argued that even the Prophet could not have convincingly dressed up immorality in divine garb without more than a few people becoming rattled and breaking ranks.

In view of these observations, it seems unwise to ignore Joseph Smith's theological teachings concerning polygamy and sexuality under the assumption that he didn't live them and no one really cared. Joseph Smith taught in D&C132:63 that sexual polyandry is adultery. For authors to assert that he disobeyed this teaching without concomitantly explaining the lack of disgust from the Nauvoo polygamy insiders to the Prophet's alleged hypocrisy is problematic.

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75. Horace Greeley, "Overland Journey. XXI. Two Hours with Brigham Young," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 20 Aug. 1859, 19:5,718, 5/6-6/1-2; cited in Greeley, Horace. *An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859*. New York: H. H. Bancroft & Co., 1860, reprinted with Charles T. Duncan ed., New York: Ballantine Books, 1963, 138. This interview was reprinted in the *Millennial Star*, 21, no.38, September 17, 1859, 608-11, with the following qualification: "Although the wording of the conversation might not be exactly as spoken, on the whole, we have no hesitation in endorsing it by republication." (*Ibid.* 605.)

76. "Two Prophets' Widows A Visit to the Relicts of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young," J.J.J., in *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (St. Louis, MO) Thursday, August 18, 1887; pg. 6; Issue 85.

### *Eternal Sealings in the New and Everlasting Covenant*

If Joseph Smith lived his theology, then why did he engage in ceremonial polyandry? Historical evidence shows that Joseph Smith taught of eternal marriages called the “new and everlasting covenant.”<sup>77</sup> It allows two forms of eternal marriage. One is for “time and eternity,” which comprises earth life and beyond. The second is for “eternity” only, meaning a marriage that exists only after death.

For reasons that are unclear, a few authors have taken the position that none of the sealings in Nauvoo including any of the Prophet’s could have been exclusively for “eternity.”<sup>78</sup> Todd Compton explained: “There are no known instances of marriages for ‘eternity only’ in the nineteenth century.”<sup>79</sup> D. Michael Quinn agreed: “If the phrase ‘eternity only’ ever appeared in an *original* record of LDS sealing in the nineteenth century, I have not discovered it while examining thousands of such manuscript entries.”<sup>80</sup>

While these observations may be technically true, they probably have little application to sealings solemnized in Joseph Smith’s time. Prior to his death, several dozen plural sealing ceremonies were performed for approximately thirty men and their polygamous wives.<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately, only one contemporary document is available specifying the terminol-

77. See D&C 131:2, 132:6 and George D. Smith, ed. *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995, 102, 110, 111, 115, 119, 123, 151, etc.

78. See Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 298 (see also 295) for Delcena’s “time only” marriage to Joseph Smith, although no evidence exists to verify it. Contrast pages 14 and 500 for an argument citing the lack of evidence as showing “eternity” only sealings may never have occurred. See also Gary James Bergera, “The Earliest Eternal Sealings of Civilly Married Couples Living and Dead,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 51, 59.

79. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 14; see also 500.

80. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 184; italics in original. See also D. Michael Quinn, “Organizational Development and Social Origins of the Mormon Hierarchy, 1832-1932. A Prosopographical Study.” University of Utah, 1973, 154-55; D. Michael Quinn, “The Mormon Hierarchy, 1832-1932: An American Elite.” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1976, 64.

81. Thirty-four were for Joseph Smith (Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 4-7) and fifty-one for an additional twenty-nine men (See Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: History*, chapter one, Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, forthcoming.)

ogy that was used.<sup>82</sup> The ceremonial prayer uniting Joseph to previously unmarried Sarah Ann Whitney was dictated by written revelation stating: “You both mutually agree calling them by name to be each others companion so long as you both shall live... and also through out all eternity.”<sup>83</sup> Otherwise, it does not appear that the terminology employed in the dozens of plural sealing ceremonies during Joseph Smith’s lifetime was written down, either at the time they were performed or shortly thereafter. If any such original records were kept, they apparently have not been preserved. In short, we do not have a record of the specific language used in the rest of these sealings.

It is true that some later reminiscences state that their sealings in Nauvoo were for “time and eternity.” However, to assume that the women were remembering the exact language may not be warranted. When asked in 1892 if she could remember the words used to seal her to Joseph Smith, Malissa Lott replied: “I don’t know that I can go and tell it right over as it was... I don’t remember the words that were used.”<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Emily Partridge testified: “I can’t remember the exact words, that he said.”<sup>85</sup> Most late recollections were recorded at a time when sealing ceremonial language had been standardized utilizing the phrase “time and eternity.” Whether individuals would have recalled early variations in the wording of the prayers is unclear. Furthermore, to presuppose that sexual relations were present based solely on a late memoir that declared a Nauvoo marriage (“polyandrous” or not) was for “time and eternity” would be unjustified by the documents alone. More specific evidence would be required.

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82. The words are found in a revelation given through Joseph Smith to Newel K. Whitney specifying the language of the sealing ceremony he was to use in solemnizing the plural marriage of his daughter, Sarah Ann to Joseph Smith. Quoted in Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999, 315-16; see also Revelations in Addition to Those Found in the LDS Edition of the D&C on *New Mormon Studies: A Comprehensive Resource Library*. CD-ROM. Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1998.

83. Quoted in Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999, 315-16; see also Revelations in Addition to Those Found in the LDS Edition of the D&C on *New Mormon Studies: A Comprehensive Resource Library*. CD-ROM. Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1998.

84. Malissa Lott, Testimony in the Temple Lot Case, part 3, pages 95-96, questions 54, 70.

85. Emily Partridge, Testimony in the Temple Lot Case, part 3, page 359, question 198.

## *Evidence for “Eternity” Only Sealings in Joseph Smith’s “Polyandrous” Marriages*

Manuscript documentation has been identified supporting that “eternity” only sealings occurred during Joseph Smith’s lifetime and even within his own “polyandrous” marriages. Nauvooan Justus Morse recounted in an affidavit dated 23 March 1887:

In the year 1842, at Nauvoo, Illinois, Elder Amasa Lyman, taught me the doctrine of *sealing*, or marrying for eternity, called *spiritual wifery*,<sup>86</sup> and that within one year from that date my own wife and another woman were sealed to me for eternity in Macedonia, by father John Smith, uncle to the Prophet. This woman was the wife of another man, but was to be mine in eternity and the said father John Smith, also taught me that if an unmarried woman was sealed to me that she was mine for *time* as well as eternity and that I was not limited as to number.”<sup>87</sup>

In an 1895 letter to his Aunt, Joseph Riley Morse wrote of his father, Justus Morse: “He was a good man. His word was a good as his note any place we ever lived.”<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, Gary Bergera discounts the accuracy of Justus’ memory by observing: “John Smith did not take his first plural wife until August 1843, and Lyman not until September 1844.”<sup>89</sup> While Bergera’s observations appear to be correct, the historical record demonstrates that Joseph Smith did not require men to be polygamists in order to teach the principle to others or to perform plural sealings. Joseph B. Noble, Dimick B. Huntington, Brigham Young, Willard Richards, Newel K. Whitney, and William Clayton all performed plural marriages

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86. Lawrence Foster observed: “This author has never encountered the term ‘plural marriage,’ and almost never encountered the term ‘celestial marriage,’ in Mormon or non-Mormon accounts from the Nauvoo period.” (W. Lawrence Foster, “Between Two Worlds: The Origins of Shaker Celibacy, Onedia Community Complex Marriage, and Mormon Polygamy. Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1976, 277, fn3 continued.)

87. Affidavit, March 23, 1887, in Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy*, Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1914, 169-70; italics in original. Morse served as an Elder, a Seventy, and a High Priest under Joseph Smith and joined the RLDS Church in 1870.

88. Quoted in Michael S. Riggs “His Word Was as Good as His Note” The Impact of Justus Morse’s Mormonism(s) on His Families,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 17 (1997): 80 [49-80.]

89. Gary James Bergera, “Illicit Intercourse, Plural Marriage, and the Nauvoo Stake High Council, 1840-1844,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, 23, 2003, 74fn73. [59-91]

for others prior to becoming polygamists themselves.<sup>90</sup> Brigham Young, and members of the Quorum of the Twelve, learned of the restoration of plural marriage in 1841 and shared that information with others before individually entering into plurality.

Specific evidence exists supporting that Joseph Smith personally experienced sealings for “eternity,” not “time and eternity” and therefore without sexual relations.<sup>91</sup> Within the research papers of Andrew Jensen, author of the 1887 *Historical Record* article on Joseph Smith’s plural wives, is the following statement:

\Sister Ruth/ ~~Mrs. Sayers~~ was married in her youth to Mr. Edward Sayers, a thoroughly practical horticulturist and florist, and though he was not a member of the Church, yet he willingly joined his fortune with her and they reached Nauvoo together some time in the year 1841;

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 [page2—the first 3 lines of which are written over illegible erasures] her in this life. She \was/ accordingly ~~the~~ sealed to the Prophet in Emma Smith’s presence and thus were became numbered among the Prophets plural wives. ~~She however~~ \though she/ \continued to live with Mr. Sayers / ~~remained with her husband~~ \until his death.<sup>92</sup>

90. All of the men listed performed plural marriages for Joseph Smith and perhaps others. See Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 59, 81, 122, 179, 213, 298, 348 for marriage performance dates and sealer identities. Cross reference this with George D. Smith, “Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841-46: A Preliminary Demographic Report.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 52-74 and Gary James Bergera, “Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-1844,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 1-74, for the dates the sealers themselves became polygamists.

91. Recognizing that Joseph Smith’s marriages could have been for either “time and eternity” or just “eternity,” P.P. Kelley questioned Malissa Lott in 1892 regarding the type of sealing ceremony that she experienced with the him: “Did you live with Joseph Smith as his wife, or were you just simply sealed to him for eternity?” (Temple Lot Case, complete transcript, part 3, pages 97, questions 94.) Malissa, who was single at the time of her sealing to the Prophet, had earlier stated: “I was married to him for time and all eternity.” (*Ibid.*, page 95, question 56.)

92. Andrew Jensen Papers [ca. 1871-1942], LDS Archives. It appears that the documents in these folders were used to compile Jensen’s 1887 *Historical Record* article on plural marriage. See Joseph F. Smith affidavit books, LDS Archives, 1:9 for date of this sealing “February A.D. 1843.”

Another document from Jenson's hand corroborated that concerning Joseph's plural sealing to Ruth Sayers: "Joseph did not pick that woman. She went to see whether she should marry her husband for eternity."<sup>93</sup> Other documents from Zina Huntington, Patty Bartlett, and Mary Elizabeth Rollins indicate their marriages may also have been "eternity" only sealings as well.<sup>94</sup>

Another example, apparently unknown to Todd Compton in 1997 and not included on his list of "polyandrous" wives, occurred between Esther Dutcher and Joseph Smith.<sup>95</sup> Esther was the legal wife of Albert Smith. She died in 1856; years later her widowed husband described her circumstances to Daniel H. Wells who thereafter wrote to Joseph F. Smith concerning the matter: "He [Albert] is... much afflicted with the loss of his first wife. *It seems that she was sealed to Joseph the Prophet in the days of Nauvoo, though she still remained his wife*, and afterwards nearly broke his heart by telling him of it, and expressing her intention of adhering to that relationship. He however got to feeling better over it and acting for Joseph had her sealed to him, and to himself for time."<sup>96</sup> Wells' description indicates that Esther was "sealed" to Joseph, but was the "wife" of Albert, implying an eternity sealing. Unfortunately, we have no other information regarding the circumstances surrounding the sealing including when it might have occurred or who performed the ceremony.

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However the affidavit states that the sealing was performed by Hyrum Smith, which is unlikely because Hyrum did not accept plural marriage until May of that year.

93. Recorded by D. Michael Quinn Papers, Yale University, Addition—Uncat WA MS 244 (Accession:19990209-c) bx 1. I have been unable to identify the primary document to verify this quotation.

94. See Zina Huntington in Wight interview, "Evidence from Zina D. Huntington Young," *Saints Herald*, January 11, 1905, 29; Patty Bartlett in Donna Toland Smart, ed., *Mormon Midwife: The 1846-1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions*, Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 1997, 276; and Mary Elizabeth Rollins in "Remarks" at B.Y.U April 14, 1905, copy of original signed typescript, Vault Mss 363, fd 6, HBLL, BYU, 7.

95. I am indebted to Michael Marquardt for bringing this to my attention. It constitutes a new plural wife on my list of Joseph Smith's polygamous marriages, previously unreported by any researcher. See forthcoming *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History*, Greg Kofford Books, 2010.

96. Daniel H. Wells to Joseph F. Smith, June 25, 1888, CHD; italics added.



### *The “Pretend” Marriage of Joseph C. Kingsbury and Sarah Ann Whitney*

Returning to Todd Compton’s list of twelve “polyandrous” wives, evidence indicates that Sylvia Sessions’ relationship was not polyandrous and Joseph Smith’s sealing to Ruth Vose Sayers was an “eternity” only marriage. That leaves ten more to investigate.

The relationship between Sarah Ann Whitney, Joseph Smith and Joseph C. Kingsbury is unique. It is the only eternal “polyandrous” marriage where the eternal sealing preceded the legal marriage. That is, Joseph Smith was sealed to Sarah and then months afterwards, she was legally married to Kingsbury. Researcher Michael Marquardt summarized:

Sarah Ann Whitney was married to Joseph Smith on July 27, 1842. Nine months later on April 29, 1843, she was [legally] married to Joseph C. Kingsbury with the Prophet Joseph Smith officiating. She was then eighteen years old. It seems that Joseph Smith married Sarah Ann Whitney for time and for all eternity and then relinquished her for time, in a pretended marriage ceremony to Joseph C. Kingsbury.<sup>97</sup>

Evidence supports that this civil marriage was never consummated. Todd Compton wrote:

One wonders what the dynamics of a pretend marriage would have been—there would have been no sexual dimension, but Joseph Kingsbury and Sarah must have lived as close friends... We do know that Sarah Ann continued to live with her parents after the marriage to Smith; and Kingsbury, the day after the “pretend” marriage, apparently moved in the Whitney house also. Sarah became generally known as Mrs. Kingsbury, and she and Joseph C. attended public functions together. Outsiders would have suspected nothing unusual in the relationship.<sup>98</sup>

Years later in 1880, Kingsbury submitted a bill to the Church for his financial support of Sarah Ann. The bill read: “Nov 23, 1880, Joseph C.

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97. Marquardt, H. Michael. *The Strange Marriages of Sarah Ann Whitney to Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet, Joseph C. Kingsbury, and Heber C. Kimball*. Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1973; rev. ed., Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1982, 18.

98. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 352.

Kingsbury asked John Taylor that an \$8000 debt to the church be remitted in consideration of services he had rendered in Nauvoo, and after leaving there, to the Prophet Joseph, in keeping one of his wives, Sarah Whitney, daughter of Bishop N. K. Whitney.”<sup>99</sup> It is not known if Church President John Taylor honored the claim.

This episode demonstrates that Joseph Smith facilitated the creation of at least one “front husband” and perhaps others. It is possible that after Windsor Lyon’s excommunication and religious separation from Sylvia Sessions Lyon, Joseph Smith asked him to serve as a front husband to Sylvia.

Kingsbury’s relationship with Sarah Ann shows that Joseph Smith’s plural wives could feign legal matrimony to someone else in order to shield the Prophet from suspicion from law enforcement officers. Importantly, it demonstrates that observing that a woman lived under the same roof with a man does not verify a sexual connection between her and her legal husband. In other words, assuming conjugality from outward appearances may not be warranted. Accordingly, documenting sexual polyandry requires specific evidence of sexuality in both relationships. That is, conjugality between the woman and both husbands during the same time period must be confirmed. Such evidence will not be easy to obtain, but should be the standard for any writer affirming that Joseph Smith engaged in sexual polyandry. Authors who are willing to *assume* sexual polyandry should inform their readers that their conclusions are speculative, without specific supportive evidence.

### *The Four Women Married to Non-Members or Anti-Mormons*

Besides Ruth Vose Sayers “eternity” sealing to Joseph Smith, several other “polyandrous” wives appear to have experienced “eternity” only marriage to the Prophet. Historical documents show that he began teaching about eternal marriage (independent of plural marriage) as early as Janu-

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99. L. John Nuttall Notes for J. Taylor Office Jrnl, HDC, d1346; quoted in D. Michael Quinn Papers—Addition—Uncat WA MS 244 (Accession:19990209-c) Box 1, Yale University Special Collections.

ary, 1840.<sup>100</sup> As the Prophet carefully explained those teachings to selected listeners, there were three other women (in addition to Ruth Vose) who could not be eternally sealed to their earthly spouses. Both Mary Elizabeth Rollins and Sarah Kingsley were married to non-Mormons and Presendia Huntington's husband, Norman Buell, was an avid anti-Mormon, who would never have participated in a church-sponsored marriage of any kind. Norman's brother-in-law left this report:

[While] Norman Buell was in Clay Co. saying good Lord and kind devil, for a time; but the time finally came that he must choose a side, so he chose the Master that would give him the most money then, and in whos hands he thought he would be the safest. He even got to the pitch that he would not let his wife say a word in favor of her brethren, and would say all manner of evil of them himself. He was once an Elder in the church of Jesus Christ.<sup>101</sup>

All four of these women had ample reason to seek an "eternity" sealing to Joseph Smith.

Antagonistic writers have alleged that sexual relations might have existed in these relationships. If so, such intimacies could not have occurred with the consent of the respective legal husbands—they simply would not have allowed it. Some authors have suggested Joseph Smith might have contracted clandestine sexual encounters, which seems unlikely for several reasons.

First, there is no persuasive evidence to support it. Second, Joseph Smith's previous experience with mobbings and the complications of the Fanny Alger relationship in Kirtland, Ohio years before undoubtedly generated powerful memories informing him of the inherent risks

100. 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., 1985, 259-60. In their book *Four Zinas: A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier* (Signature Books, 2000, 108) Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward wrote that Joseph Smith proposed plural marriage to Zina Huntington three times in 1840. However, supporting historical documents are not available to corroborate this story and Zina contradicted it in her own testimony (Zina D. H. Young, Interviewed by John W. Wight, October 1, 1898, "Evidence from Zina D. Huntington-Young," *Saints' Herald* 52, no. 2, January 11, 1905: 28-30. Also in J. D. Stead, *Doctrines and Dogmas of Brighamism Exposed*, [Lamoni, Iowa: RLDS Church, 1911, 212-14). Accordingly, this family tradition should be quoted with caution.

101. Oliver B. Huntington, "Oliver B. Huntington Diaries," Ms 162, Harold B. Lee Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, volume 2—"History of Oliver Boardman Huntington"—"commenced December 10<sup>th</sup> 1845," page 45.

and possible consequences. Third, the Prophet knew how readily a man would grab a gun or otherwise threaten the life of another male who takes sexual advantage of his wife. Even Church member Benjamin F. Johnson, who greatly admired the Prophet, threatened deadly retaliation should anything improper happen between his sister and Joseph. In 1869 he recalled:

I sincerely believed him [Joseph Smith] to [be] a prophet of God, and I loved him as such, and also for the many evidences of his kindness to me, yet such was the force of my education, and the scorn that I felt towards anything un-virtuous that under the first impulse of my feelings, I looked him calmly, but firmly in the face and told him that, "I had always believed him to be a good man, and wished to believe it still, and would try to;"—and that, "I would take for him a message to my sister, and if the doctrine was true, all would be well, but if I should afterwards learn that it was offered to insult or prostitute my sister I would take his life." With a smile he replied "Benjamin, you will never see that day, but you shall live to know that it is true, and rejoice in it."<sup>102</sup>

Historian Craig L. Foster described an 1851 incident of a man who was caught sleeping with another man's wife:

Howard Egan... in 1851, killed James Monroe. Monroe had an affair with Egan's first wife, Tamson. Monroe wisely chose to get out of town before Egan's return from a prolonged journey to California. However, Egan followed Monroe and finally caught up with him close to the Utah border, where he shot and killed him. Egan was later brought to a trial... During the closing arguments, Smith [George Albert Smith, his defense attorney] stated, "In this territory it is a principle of mountain common law, that no man can seduce the wife of another without endangering his own life... The man who seduces his neighbor's wife must die, and her nearest relative must kill him!" Egan was acquitted.<sup>103</sup>

102. Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 2:3-4, 1869, CA MS 3423 fd 5. On another occasion Johnson remembered telling Joseph Smith: "If I even Should know that you do this [plural marriage] to Dishonor & debauch my Sister I will kill you as Shure as the Lord Lives." (Dean R. Zimmerman, ed., *I Knew the Prophets: An Analysis of the Letter of Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs, Reporting Doctrinal Views of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young*, Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1976, 41.)

103. Craig L. Foster, "The Butler Murder of April 1869: A Look at Extralegal Punishment in Utah," *Mormon Historical Studies* vol. 2 No. 2, 109. [105-114] See also Cannon, Kenneth L., II.

In 1855, Apostle Parley P. Pratt was sealed to Eleanor McComb McLean as a plural spouse. She had been civilly married to an abusive and angry anti-Mormon, Hector McLean.<sup>104</sup> Upon learning of the plural marriage, Hector tracked down Parley, stabbing and shooting him to death. T. B. H. Stenhouse wrote that shortly after the cold blooded murder, Hector “walked through the town with his friends, and in the evening took the passing steamer for the South. No one seemed to think that he should be arrested... There is always a feeling of sympathy for the injured when domestic intrusions are before the public.”<sup>105</sup> “Domestic intrusions” in Joseph’s day were not tolerated by legal husbands or the public in general.

As can be seen, it seems to have been a common reaction and expectation in nineteenth-century America for husbands and brothers to avenge women who were coerced into extra-marital intimacies or ravished.<sup>106</sup> It is unlikely that any of the husbands of these four women would have accepted an explanation of plural marriage had they learned that Joseph Smith was sexually involved with their wives. Retribution to the Prophet and perhaps even the man’s wife might have been swift and destructive.

It appears the fear of frontier justice would be a natural deterrent to Joseph Smith were he to contemplate a sexual polyandrous arrangement in these four instances. It is impossible to prove a negative but it seems Joseph would be hesitant to accept the associated risks. Certainly such recklessness does not characterize the Prophet’s life.

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“Mountain Common Law’: The Extralegal Punishment of Seducers in Early Utah.” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 51 (Fall 1983): 308-27.

104. Steven Pratt, “Eleanor McLean and the Murder of Parley P. Pratt.” *Brigham Young University Studies* 15 (Winter 1975): 225-234 [225-256.]

105. T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873, 430

106. In another example, the record of the Morgan County, Utah Probate Court, Book “A,” March 1869 term, pages 17-22 reports that Charles A. Walker was convicted of rape on a married woman and the jury recommended a prison term of 15 years, which sentence was pronounced by Probate Judge Haven. Sentence was pronounced on March 16 and the prisoner ordered committed to the penitentiary. But when court convened on March 20, “Josiah Eardly Sheriff stated before the court that the prisoner, Charles A. Walker, had been killed while in his custody by one Neils Swenson (husband of Palia Swensen, raped by said Charles Walker).” On March 22, the grand jury indicted Swenson for murder. He was tried the same day and the jury reported that they “do hereby return a verdict of ‘not guilty’ it being justifiable homicide.” Cited in Stanley S. Ivins Collection, notebook #8, 166.

Fourth, correspondence in 1892 between Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner and John Henry Smith, implies an “eternity” only sealing between her and the Prophet:

I hope you will not think me intrusive, I am sure I do not wish to be- If I could have an oportunity of conversing with you, and Brother Joseph [F. Smith] I could explain some things in regard to my living with Mr L, after becoming the *Wife of another*, which would throw light, on what *now* seems mysterious—and you would be perfectly satisfied with me. I write this; because I have heard that it had been commented on to my injury. I have done the best I could, and Joseph will sanction my action—I cannot explain things in this Letter—some day you will know *all*. That is, if I ever have an oportunity of conversing with either of you.<sup>107</sup>

Mary Elizabeth doesn't explain what information would make John Henry Smith “perfectly satisfied” regarding the apparent polyandrous arrangements, but it seems the only possible explanation would be that her sealing was for the next life and did not include intimate relations during mortality. She could not have expected Smith to be “perfectly satisfied” if the answer was that she was sleeping with two husbands during the same time period. In 1892, Church members would have considered sexual polyandry to be a sin next to murder (see D&C 132:61-63).

### *The Remaining Six “Polyandrous” Wives*

Of the thirteen “polyandrous” marriages compiled, evidence supports that one was a pretend marriage (Sarah Whitney), another was simply non-polyandrous (Sylvia Sessions), and five were for “eternity” only

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107. Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner to John Henry Smith, January 25, 1892, in George A. Smith Family Papers, MS 36, Box 7, Folder 12 (John Henry Smith, incoming correspondence); Marriott Library; emphasis in original. This quotation is referenced in Danel Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith.” M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975, 135. Bachman lists the recipient as John A. Young in the text and John A. Smith in the footnote (*ibid.*). Also cited by Richard S. Van Wagoner as a letter to “John R. Young,” in “Mormon Polyandry in Nauvoo.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Fall 1985): 77, 82 [67-83]. Van Wagoner's second reference in the article lists the date as “January 25, 1892,” as does his citation in *Mormon Polygamy: A History*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989, 43, 232. Apparently Van Wagoner did not locate the original, but repeated Bachman and assumed the recipient was John R. Young. Dan Bachman was unable to recall the precise primary reference (email to author June 14, 2008). I am indebted to Don Bradley for solving this mystery.

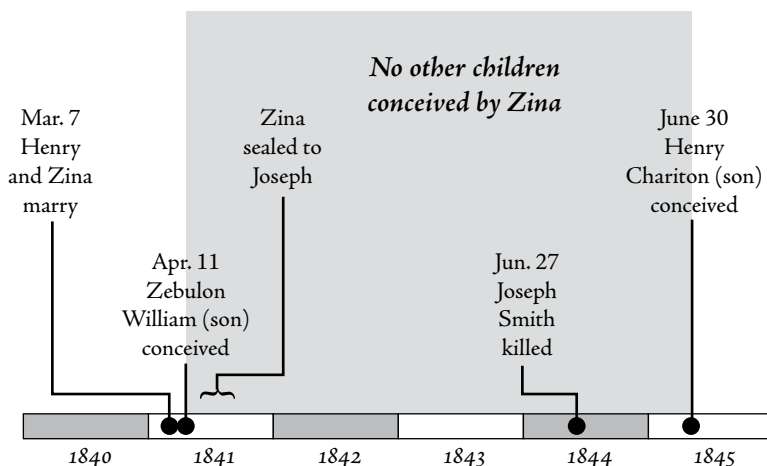


CHART 4.4: Timeline of Zina Huntington showing the approximate conception dates for her children.

(Ruth Vose, Esther Dutcher, Presendia Huntington, Mary Elizabeth Rollins, Sarah Kingsley). The remaining six present a more complex picture, creating questions that are not easily answered without additional information. One thing they all had in common was that the women’s legal husbands were all very active Latter-day Saints. It is not known how any of those men might have initially reacted to a situation wherein their wives sought to be sealed to Joseph Smith for “eternity” (like Ruth Vose Sayers) or even for “time and eternity,” with its accompanying ramifications. A review of their marital relationships provides few clues.

### *Zina Huntington*

Zina married Henry Bailey Jacobs 7 March 1841 and became pregnant the following month.<sup>108</sup> However, according to available evidence, she did not conceive any additional children with Henry until well past Joseph Smith’s death.

<sup>108</sup>. See Allen L. Wyatt, author of “Zina and Her Men: An examination of the Changing Marital State of Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Smith Young,” (Mesa, Arizona: FAIR, 2006 FAIR Conference) available at [http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR\\_Conferences/2006\\_Zina\\_and\\_Her\\_Men.html](http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/2006_Zina_and_Her_Men.html) [accessed August 16, 2007].)

Interestingly, Zina testified that her sealing to Joseph Smith was performed twice. The first time was on 27 October 1841 by Dimick Huntington, her brother. She also affirmed: "When Brigham Young returned from England, he repeated the ceremony for time and eternity."<sup>109</sup> The timeline is problematic because Brigham arrived from England in July of 1841. Zina Huntington described her marriage to Henry B. Jacobs as "unhappy" and later divorced him.<sup>110</sup> The date of their separation is unknown and they may have reconciled at least once. Henry stood as a witness as Zina was resealed to Joseph Smith with Brigham Young acting as proxy in the Nauvoo Temple.

### *Patty Bartlett*

Patty Bartlett kept a Nauvoo journal that mentioned her interactions with Joseph Smith. *Woman's Exponent* editor Emmeline Wells paraphrased several entries in a 15 November 1884 article: "On the 13<sup>th</sup> [of December, 1842] she was very sick, the Prophet came and laid hands on her and she was healed. From that time she speaks of Joseph having visited at her house almost daily... On the 30<sup>th</sup> [June 1843] she says Bro. Joseph is at home again; she went to see him, and then heard him address the people... Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup> [1843] she took dinner at the Prophet' Joseph's..."<sup>111</sup> The whereabouts of the original Sessions' Nauvoo journal is unknown; neither have Emmeline's prepublishing notes for the *Woman's Exponent* articles been located. Many documents housed in the *Woman's Exponent* office were destroyed due to a fire and a flood, but whether the Sessions diaries or other important manuscripts were among them is not clear.<sup>112</sup>

It is interesting that David and Patty Sessions attended the Nauvoo Temple together, receiving their endowments on 15 December 1845, but they were not sealed in marriage, nor did Patty participate in a resealed

109. Zina D. Huntington, John Wight interviewer, "Evidence from Zina D. Huntington Young," Interview with Zina, October 1, 1898, *Saints Herald* 52 (January 11, 1905): 29.

110. Wight interview, "Evidence from Zina D. Huntington Young," *Saints Herald*, January 11, 1905, 29; Zina also reported: "It was a most unhappy and ill-assorted marriage, and she subsequently separated from the husband who was so little suited to be a companion for her through life. Joseph Smith taught her the principle of marriage for eternity, and she accept it as a divine revelation, and was sealed to the Prophet..." ([Emmeline B. Wells] "A Distinguished Woman, Zina D. H. Young," *Woman's Exponent*, 10 (Dec 1, 1881) 99.)

111. [Emmeline Wells], "Patty Session," *Woman's Exponent*, November 15, 1884, 95.

112. Personal communication with Carol Cornwall Madsen, October 5, 2008.



to Joseph Smith at that time. Had Patty lost interest or was her sealing to Joseph Smith a point of contention with David? We do not know. Patty's diary recounts many struggles in their relationship after Nauvoo.<sup>113</sup>

### *Marinda Nancy Johnson*

Little is known concerning Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde's relationship with the Prophet. Records provide two different sealing dates during his lifetime. The first is "Apr 42," which is written by Thomas Bullock on one of the blank pages at the back of the second of four small books Willard Richards used to record Joseph Smith's journal between December 1842 and June 1844.<sup>114</sup> It follows the 14 July 1843 entry and could also be transcribed: "Spri 42." The accuracy of the record is unknown, but Marinda's involvement with the Prophet's proposal to Nancy Rigdon in April 1842 is supportive that Marinda had been initiated into Nauvoo polygamy's inner circle by that time.

The second sealing date is a year later and is documented in an affidavit signed by Marinda in 1869 that records the date of May 1843.<sup>115</sup> A late second-hand report of questionable accuracy supports the earlier sealing date. It states that upon learning of the sealing, Orson Hyde was irate. Exposé author Ann Eliza Webb Young wrote:

When Joseph Smith first taught polygamy, and gave the wives as well as the husbands opportunity to make new choice of life-partners, Mrs. Hyde, at that time a young and quite prepossessing woman, became one of the Prophet's numerous fancies... Hyde was away on a mission at the time, and when he returned, he, in turn, imbibed the teachings of polygamy also, and prepared to extend his kingdom indefinitely. In the mean time it was hinted to him that Smith had had his first wife

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113. Donna Toland Smart, ed., *Mormon Midwife: The 1846-1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions*, Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 1997.

114. See 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 # 20, MS155\_1\_6\_320.jpg; it is written in the hand of a different scribe from previous entries). Scott H. Faulring, ed. *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989, 396;

115. Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:15, CHD, MS 3423.

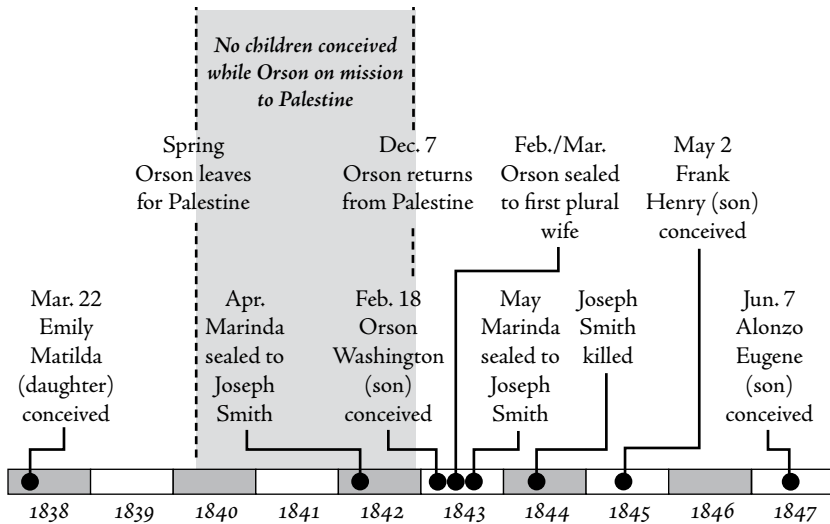


CHART 4.5: Timeline showing important events for Orson Hyde, Marinda Johnson, and Joseph Smith

sealed to himself in his absence, as a wife for eternity. Inconsistent as it may seem, Hyde was in a furious passion."<sup>116</sup>

Whether this account contains any elements of truth is unknown. It may describe a situation where Joseph's "polyandrous" sealing was not immediately approved by the legal husband. John D. Lee remembered that Orson gave his permission: "Hyde's wife, with his consent, was sealed to Joseph for an eternal state."<sup>117</sup> Whatever misgivings Orson Hyde might have possessed, if any, must have been assuaged soon. Within months, Orson appealed to Joseph to perform his own plural marriage, stating in 1869: "In the month of February or March, 1843, I was married to Miss Martha R. Browitt, by Joseph Smith, the martyred prophet, and by him she was sealed to me for time and all eternity in Nauvoo, Illinois."<sup>118</sup> In-

116. Ann Eliza Webb Young, *Wife Number 19, or, The Story of a Life in Bondage, Being a Complete Exposé of Mormonism, and Revealing Sorrows, Sacrifices and Sufferings of Women in Polygamy*. Hartford: Dustin, Gilman, and Co., 1876, 325-26.

117. John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled, or, The Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee*. Ed. W. W. Bishop. St. Louis: Byron, Brand, 1877, 147. Lee added "but I do not assert the fact."

118. Affidavit of Orson Hyde, September 15, 1869, MS 3423\_2\_7s.jpg, CHD; Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 2:45; published in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1905) 74.

terestingly, a Hyde family tradition states that “before Orson Hyde married Marinda, Joseph Smith cautioned him against marrying her, as she was his celestial wife, but Orson married her anyway.”<sup>119</sup>

The reproductive history of Marinda shows that Orson Washington Hyde was born 9 November 1843; conception would have occurred approximately 16 February 1843. No evidence has been found to connect Joseph Smith with this child. Todd Compton observes: “It is striking that Marinda had no children while Orson was on his mission to Jerusalem, then became pregnant soon after Orson returned home. (He arrived in Nauvoo on 7 December 1842, and Marinda conceived Orson Washington Hyde two to three months later.)”<sup>120</sup>

A second son, Frank Henry Hyde, has been proposed as a children of Joseph Smith.<sup>121</sup> However, *The Ogden Standard*, 29 June 1908, contains an article entitled: “Frank H. Hyde Dies Suddenly.” While obituaries can contain inaccurate information, it states: “Mr. Hyde was the eldest son of the late Apostle Orson Hyde and Marinda Johnson Hyde, and was born sixty-two years ago, at Nauvoo, Illinois.”<sup>122</sup> Working back sixty-two years from June 1908 corresponds to a birth year of 1846 for his 23 January birth date. That would correlate with a roughly 2 May 1845 conception date, which is almost a year after Joseph Smith’s death.

### *Elvira Annie Cowles*

Elvira Annie Cowles married her legal husband, Jonathan Holmes on 1 December 1842. Jonathan was a close friend of the Prophet and served as a pall bearer at Joseph Smith’s funeral. Elvira signed an 1869 affidavit saying she was sealed to Joseph Smith 1 June 1843. A letter written on 2 June 1931, from a Church member, William Wright records:

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119. Myrtle Stevens Hyde, *Orson Hyde: The Olive Branch of Israel*, Salt Lake City: Agreka Books, 2000, 160.

120. Todd Compton, “Fawn Brodie on Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives and Polygamy: A Critical View,” in Newell G. Bringhurst ed., *Reconsidering No Man Knows My History: Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect*, Logan, Utah: USU Press, 1996, 165.

121. See below and, Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd rev. ed. New York, 1971, 345; Ugo A. Perego, Natalie M. Myres, and Scott R. Woodward. “Reconstructing the Y-Chromosome of Joseph Smith: Genealogical Applications.” *Journal of Mormon History* 31 (Fall 2005): 43[42-60].

122. “Frank H. Hyde Dies Suddenly,” *The Ogden Standard*, June 29, 1908, 5.

I was well acquainted with two of Joseph's wives, LaVina [Elvira] and Eliza. I came to Utah in '69, and rented LaVina Holmes farm. Before Joseph was shot, he asked Jonathan Holmes if he would marry and take care of LaVina, but if LaVina wanted him to take care of her he would take her. He would fill that mission to please his Father in Heaven.<sup>123</sup>

Despite her 1842 wedding date to Jonathan, Elvira did not conceive her first child until seven months after the Prophet's death. The couple went on to have a total of five children together. Jonathan respected his wife's sealing to the Prophet, standing proxy for Joseph Smith in the Nauvoo temple as she was resealed to the Prophet vicariously for eternity.<sup>124</sup>

### *Elizabeth Davis*

The date of Joseph Smith's sealing to Elizabeth Davis Durfee has not been verified. There is no doubt that she was a member of the polygamy inner circle in Nauvoo, however, that she was actually sealed to Joseph has been questioned.<sup>125</sup> After Emily Partridge was sealed to the Prophet, she related a conversation demonstrating Durfee's ignorance of restored plural marriage: "Mrs. Durfee invited my sister Eliza and I to her house to spend the afternoon. She introduced the subject of spiritual wives as they called them in that day. She wondered if there was any truth in this report she heard. I thought I could tell her something that would make her open her eyes if I chose, but I did not choose to. I kept my own counsel and said nothing."<sup>126</sup>

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123. Undated holograph letter of William Wright, stamped as received in the First Presidency Office on June 2, 1931, in Box 65, CR 1/44, Misc. Corresp. Of 1<sup>st</sup> Pres., at CHL; copy in D. Michael Quinn Papers, Yale University, Special Collections, Uncat WA MS Uncat. WA MS. 98, 881028, bx3, fd 2.

124. Lisle Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: a Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841-1846*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006, 282 n268, 284 n306.

125. Richard Lloyd Anderson and Scott H. Faulring, "Review of *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, by Todd M. Compton," *FARMS Review of Books*, (Provo, Utah: Maxwell Institute, 10/2 (1998), 74-76. [67-104]

126. Emily D. P. Young, autobiographical sketch, "Written Especially for My Children, January 7, 1877," Marriott Library, manuscript owned by Emily Young Knopp, copy of typescript in possession of the author.

Even though Elizabeth's legal husband, Jabez Dufee, was an active Latter-day Saint, he was endowed on a different day than Elizabeth when the Nauvoo Temple opened in the winter of 1845.<sup>127</sup> The two formally divorced the next year, but it appears a separation had occurred previous to that time. Elizabeth was resealed by proxy to Joseph Smith in the Nauvoo Temple on 22 January 1846, but Jabez did not participate either as a proxy husband or witness. Cornelius Lott represented the Prophet in the vicarious ordinance.<sup>128</sup>

### *Lucinda Pendleton*

The sealing date for Lucinda Pendleton is also unknown. Evidence supporting her inclusion as a plural wife of Joseph Smith is the weakest of all thirty-four women. Regardless, her legal husband, George Harris, stood proxy for Joseph Smith in the Nauvoo temple as Lucinda was sealed to the Prophet for eternity.<sup>129</sup> The couple divorced sometime in the early 1850s.

Hopefully additional evidence concerning these six women will be discovered in the future helping to clarify the nature of their relationships with Joseph Smith and their respective legal husbands after their sealings to the Prophet.

### *“Polyandry” and Joseph Smith’s Behaviors*

Concerning the confusion surrounding some of Joseph Smith's “polyandrous” wives, Todd Compton insightfully observes: “It would help [the] case [that their sealings were only for ‘eternity’] if they found polyandrous wives who explicitly, unambiguously stated that their marriages were for eternity only, not for time.”<sup>130</sup> Comments by Mary Eliza-

127. Lisle Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: a Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841-1846*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006, 88.

128. Lisle Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: a Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841-1846*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006, 282.

129. Lisle Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: a Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841-1846*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006, 282 n268, 284 n306.

130. Todd Compton, “Truth, Honesty and Moderation in Mormon History: A Response to Anderson, Faulring and Bachman’s Reviews of *In Sacred Loneliness*, section “Sexuality in the Polyandrous Marriages, (accessed February 11, 2007) .<http://www.geocities.com/athens/oracle/7207/rev.html> .

both Rollins Lightner suggest that the Prophet instructed her not to talk about it. In a letter to Emmeline B. Wells, Mary Elizabeth explained: "I could tell you why I stayed with Mr. Lightner. Things the leaders of the Church does not know anything about. I did just as Joseph told me to do, as he knew what troubles I would have to contend with."<sup>131</sup>

Amidst the silence are certain clues from Joseph Smith's behavior that might shed some light on what was happening in Nauvoo. For example, evidence indicates that Joseph Smith was just as motivated to be sealed to a woman for "eternity," as he was to be sealed to her for "time and eternity." Brigham Young recalled the non-polyandrous sealing of his sister Fanny to the Prophet:

I recollect a sister conversing with Joseph Smith on this subject [plural marriage]. She told him: "Now, don't talk to me; when I get into the celestial kingdom, if I ever do get there, I shall request the privilege of being a ministering angel; that is the labor that I wish to perform. I don't want any companion in that world; and if the Lord will make me a ministering angel, it is all I want." Joseph said, "Sister, you talk very foolishly, you do not know what you will want." He then said to me: "Here, brother Brigham, you seal this lady to me." I sealed her to him. This was my own sister according to the flesh.<sup>132</sup>

Fanny Young was then fifty-six years of age. There is no indication that sexual relations were in any way contemplated or experienced by the participants, yet Joseph instantly requested the participation of both Fanny and Brigham in effectuating the ordinance. Todd Compton observed that this sealing "shows how casual and unromantic polygamy could be."<sup>133</sup>

Another observation is that the Prophet respected women's desires and choices. When turned down in his plural marriage proposals, as in the case of Sarah Kimball, he departed saying simply he would pray for her.<sup>134</sup> While he gave Lucy Walker a twenty-four hour time limit to

131. Excerpts from a letter from Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner dated November 21, either 1870 or 1880, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner Collection; MS 752, Folder 4; LDS CHD. Location of original letter is unknown.

132. Journal of Discourses, 16:166-67, Brigham Young, August 31, 1873.

133. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 616.

134. See "Sarah M. Kimball's Testimony," in Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 232. When accused of improper behavior by women such as Sarah Pratt and Nancy

make a reply, this ultimatum came only after she had vacillated for over a year.<sup>135</sup>

Todd Compton wrote: "Sometimes these sacred marriages were felt to fulfill pre-mortal linkings and so justified a sacred marriage superimposed over a secular one."<sup>136</sup> "Heavenly marriages in the pre-existence required earthly polyandry here. Certain spirits were 'kindred,' matched in heaven, were born into this life, and, because of unauthorized marriages performed without priesthood sealing power, became linked 'illegally' to the wrong partners."<sup>137</sup> There is documentation for this in one of the marriages. Mary Elizabeth Lightner remembered Joseph saying to her that, "I was created for him before the foundation of the Earth was laid."<sup>138</sup> On another occasion she recalled: "Joseph said I was his, before I came here and he said all the Devils in Hell should never get me from him."<sup>139</sup> And she noted her own feelings: "I had been dreaming for a number of years I was his wife."<sup>140</sup>

Evidence also indicates that he gave his consent for one of his other plural wives to separate from him and marry another man. Malissa Lott, one of Joseph Smith's plural wives, wrote to Andrew Jenson on 27 June 1887: "Flora Ann Woodworth... married Carlos Gove at Navoo with the consent of the Prophet."<sup>141</sup> Don Bradley explains:

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Rigdon, Joseph Smith defended himself. However, women who quietly spurned his proposals were in no way disciplined for their choices.

135. See 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, 46-48; see also testimony in Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 229-30.

136. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 22. Anti-Mormon J. H. Beadle wrote in 1870: "In the pre-existent state souls are mated, male and female, as it is divinely intended they shall fill the marriage relation in this life; or, in more poetic phrase, 'marriages are made I heaven.'" (Beadle, John Hanson. *Life in Utah: Or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism*. Philadelphia: National Publishing Co., 1870, 340.)

137. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 19.

138. Mary Elizabeth Lightner Summer 1905 letter to Emmeline Wells, Lee Library, Mary Elizabeth Lightner collection, CHD.

139. Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, "Statement" signed February 8, 1902, Vesta Crawford Papers, copy, MS 125, bx 1 fd 11, Marriot Library. Original owned by Mrs. Nell Osborne. See also Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 19, 212.

140. Mary Rollins Lightner, Remarks at Brigham Young University, 2, April 14, 1905.

141. Andrew Jenson Papers [ca. 1871-1942], MS 17956; LDS Church Archives, Box 49, Folder 16, document #14. Helen Mar Kimball wrote a conflicting account, that Carlos did not approach

This statement tells us... that he [Joseph Smith] was at least in some cases willing to release an unhappy plural wife and allow her to remarry. Flora Woodworth is known to have married again after her marriage with Joseph Smith, but this marriage has sometimes been understood to have occurred after his death. However, if Malissa Lott is regarded as a credible witness on the subject, Flora not only remarried during Joseph's lifetime, but also with his consent. In this case, the Prophet would presumably have granted Flora divorce, at least "for time," and left her free to make her own choices regarding future marriage. Having married Joseph in plural marriage, she was not simply "trapped" if she found this difficult practice intolerable.<sup>142</sup>

In addition, legally married women were given a choice to whom they would be sealed for "eternity" and perhaps even "time and eternity." John D. Lee provided this recollection:

About the same time the doctrine of "sealing" for an eternal state was introduced [1842-43], and the Saints were given to understand that their marriage relations with each other were not valid. That those who had solemnized the rites of matrimony had no authority of God to do so. That the true priesthood was taken from the earth with the death of the Apostles and inspired men of God. That they were married to each other only by their own covenants, and that if their marriage relations had not been productive of blessings and peace, and they felt it oppressive to remain together, they were at liberty to make their own choice, as much as if they had not been married.<sup>143</sup>

While Lee's declarations cannot always be taken at face value, his description may have been accurate, especially regarding the possibility that a woman could have been sealed for eternity to someone other than her legal husband.<sup>144</sup> With Ruth Vose Sayers serving as an example, other women who were married to non-members or unworthy husbands

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Flora until after the death of Joseph Smith. See "Travels Beyond the Mississippi," *Woman's Exponent*, November 1, 1884, 407.

142. Don Bradley, unpublished forthcoming manuscript analyzing the Andrew Jenson Papers MS 17956; LDS Church Archives, Box 49, Folder 16, documents 1-18. Copy in possession of the author.

143. John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled*. St. Louis: Bryan, Brand & Company, 1877, 146.

144. Historical evidence shows that John D. Lee's *Mormonism Unveiled* was edited by his attorney, who was paid from the royalties of his book. On many points it may not be reliable.



may have followed her lead, or perhaps preceded her in this practice.<sup>145</sup> Apparently some women with active LDS husbands chose to be sealed to the Prophet, as with Esther Dutcher.

Women's preferences continued to be respected concerning sealings to Joseph Smith after his death. For example, Joseph married two widows, Delcena Johnson Sherman and Martha McBride Knight, presumably only for "time." However, after the Prophet's death, when the women appeared at the Nauvoo Temple to be re-sealed to him for eternity by proxy, Delcena was sealed vicariously to her deceased legal husband, Royal Lyman Sherman, while Martha McBride was sealed to Joseph Smith, not her civil spouse, Vinson Knight.<sup>146</sup> It is probable that the individual choices of these women determined who they were to be united to eternally.<sup>147</sup>

Also, when eternal sealings were performed, the Prophet was apparently comfortable either ignoring legal marriages or granting religious divorces as in the cases of Lydia Bailey (Kirtland, Ohio, 1835) and Sylvia Sessions. The legal system would not acknowledge the matrimonial separation or the new marriage, but Church member participants would be bound religiously to follow them. Importantly, they would prohibit sexual polyandry. Once a woman or man was sealed to a new eternal companion, subsequent conjugality with former spouses would be considered adultery. Brigham Young explained: "If after she has left her husband, and is sealed to another, [and] she shall again cohabit with him it is illicit intercourse, and extremely sinfull."<sup>148</sup>

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145. See Justus Morse, Affidavit, March 23, 1887, in Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy*, Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1914, 169-70; italics in original quoted earlier in this article.

146. Lisle Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: a Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841-1846*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006, 272, 283. See also Biographical Sketch of Martha McBride Knight, internally titled "Part history of Martha McBride," by Mary Louisa Belnap Lowe, MS 14269, LDS Archives.

147. Todd Compton penned: "Some widows whom Smith married were sealed to their first husbands in the temple, but Martha [McBride] evidently chose the Mormon prophet as her eternal companion, not Vinson." (Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 372.

148. Brigham Young, "A Few Words of Doctrine," 8 October 1861, uncorrected notes of George D. Watt, From "Reports of Speeches ca. 1845-1885," by the Historian's Office, CR 100 317; CHD. President Young was speaking of a different but analogous situation.

Lastly, documents support that the Prophet was comfortable having a legal husband serve as a caretaker to one of his “time and eternity” spouses, as in the case of Joseph C. Kingsbury. The legal husband would not experience connubial relations with the wife, but could have plural wives of his own besides the one he was sheltering. This process could create a number of “front husbands.” Todd Compton discounts the idea:

The ‘pretended’ marriage opens up the possibility of other ‘front husbands’ in Smith’s polyandrous marriages. But the evidence generally does not support front husband marriages in the other unions of the Mormon leader. In a pretend marriage we would expect a sealing to Smith, then a subsequent civil ceremony with the front husband, but most of Joseph’s polyandrous wives married ‘first husbands’ before him; and there is no evidence that any of them agreed to become front husbands *after* Smith married their wives. In fact, such a marriage—living with a wife and not having sexual relations with her after a period of full marriage—would probably have been impracticable.<sup>149</sup>

In evaluating Compton’s observations, it is useful to note that opposite is also true, that “there is no evidence that any of them *declined* to become front husbands *after* Smith married their wives.”

### ***Three Interpretations of the Complexities and Incomplete Information***

Examining the available evidence concerning these last six “polyandrous” wives and their relationship with Joseph Smith provides incomplete information. It is possible that additional documents will be discovered, like Patty Sessions Nauvoo diaries or other manuscripts, which will bring clarity to these associations. The limited historical data currently identified can be interpreted at least three ways. First, it is probable that some or all of the six women were sealed to Joseph Smith in “eternity” only marriages, like Ruth Vose.

A second reconstruction, popular with detractors, asserts that Joseph Smith practiced sexual polyandry with some (or most or all) of

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<sup>149</sup>. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 352.

the “polyandrous” wives. This interpretation also affirms Compton’s view stated above, that a husband would not suddenly stop conjugal relations with his legal wife, even if confronted with a religious dissolution of the marriage and a request from the wife and the Prophet to do so. Researchers who embrace this view must accept four assumptions:

1. That credible evidence exists beyond the tabloid level accusations supporting it. Most serious researchers would not draw strict conclusions based upon the sensationalized claims that are currently available.

2. That Joseph Smith would blithely disobey a commandment he had dictated, a commandment that labels such behavior as “adultery,” stating that women so involved would be “destroyed” (D&C 132:63).

3. That the plural wives and other participants, those who performed and witnessed the sealings, would have condoned the relationships, by ignoring Biblical teachings and Joseph Smith’s instructions condemning such relations.

4. That all participants would have easily overlooked Joseph Smith’s hypocrisy on this point, continuing to follow him as a prophet without apparent complaint.

For decades, anti-Mormon writers have apparently been comfortable with these assumptions, accusing Joseph Smith of sexual polyandry. Doubtless this phenomenon will continue.

The third interpretation acknowledges Joseph’s willingness to dissolve legal nuptials through eternal sealings and in one instance, to personally ask one man to serve as a “front husband.” It suggests that these processes could have been repeated. Importantly, it asserts that identifying sexuality between the Prophet and a “polyandrous” wife would not demonstrate sexual polyandry unless the persistence of sexual relations was also verified in the legal marriage.

This last explanation proposes the following scenario: A woman is given a choice to be eternally sealed to Joseph Smith or her legal husband. She chooses the Prophet and is sealed, not just for “eternity” only (as seen with Ruth Vose), but for “time and eternity.” The sealing nullifies her civil marriage in the eyes of all participants (as seen with Sylvia Sessions). Then, appealing to the legal husband’s devotion to him and the Church, Joseph Smith asks the legal husband to support the woman and to carry on a façade to shield the Prophet from suspicion (as seen

with Joseph C. Kingsbury). Concerning this possibility, Todd Compton wrote: “One might conjecture that a ‘first husband’ very devoted to Smith would, at his command, refrain from sexual relations with his wife.”<sup>150</sup>

Of the six legal husbands, several may have been willing to serve as “front husbands” for their spouses under these strange but not impossible circumstances. Zina Huntington’s spouse, Henry B. Jacobs, believed: “whatever the Prophet did was right, without making the wisdom of God’s authorities bend to the reasoning of any man.”<sup>151</sup> As already discussed, one historical source referred to Jonathan Holmes’ willingness to care for Elvira in a way similar to that of a “front husband.”<sup>152</sup>

Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde’s childbearing supports a continued marriage to Orson at least until the second sealing date, but thereafter it is less clear. She conceived a child shortly after Orson returned home from his mission to Palestine. He also married polygamously about that same time. However, after the second sealing date, Marinda bore no other children until well after Joseph Smith’s death. Patty Sessions’ age (47) at the time of her sealing might argue against a sexual relationship with Joseph. The cases of Elizabeth Davis and Lucinda Pendleton are inconclusive due to the lack of evidence.

For three of the wives, Zina Huntington, Marinda Nancy Johnson, and Sylvia Sessions, two sealing dates have been discovered. If two ceremonies were performed, perhaps a first was for “eternity” and then a later second sealing was for “time and eternity.” The depth of these conjectures further illustrates the problems arising from a lack of evidence in these cases.

### Summary

A review of Joseph Smith’s alleged “polyandrous” marriages demonstrates the importance of clarifying the meaning of “polyandry.” The Prophet unquestionably participated in “ceremonial polyandry,” whereby a woman was married to him in a second marriage ceremony, without

150. Todd Compton, “Fawn Brodie on Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives and Polygamy: A Critical View,” in Newell G. Bringhurst ed., *Reconsidering No Man Knows My History: Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect*, Logan, Utah: USU Press, 1996, 165.

151. Zina Diantha Huntington Young, *Autobiography*, Zina D. H. Young Collection, CHD.

152. William Write letter, ca May 1931, copy in D. Michael Quinn Papers—Addition—Uncat WA MS 244 (Accession:19990209-c) Box 1—Card file—Topic: Polygamy, Joseph Smith’s.

<i>Joseph Smith's "Polyandrous" Wives</i>	<i>Legal Husband</i>	<i>Eternity Only</i>	<i>Religious Divorce/ Sealing</i>	<i>"Front" Husband</i>	<i>Sexual Polyandry</i>
1. Sylvia Sessions	Windsor Lyon		probable	?	no
2. Sarah Ann Whitney	Joseph C. Kingsbury			yes	no
3. Ruth Vose	Edward Sayers	probable			no
4. Mary Elizabeth Rollins	Adam Lightner	probable			no
5. Sarah Kingsley	John Cleveland	probable			no
6. Presendia Lathrop Huntington	Norman Buell	probable			no
7. Esther Dutcher	Albert Smith	probable			no
8. Zina Diantha Huntington	Henry B. Jacobs	?		?	?
9. Patty Bartlett	David Sessions	?		?	?
10. Marinda Nancy Johnson	Orson Hyde	?		?	?
11. Elivira Annie Cowles	Jonathan Holmes	?		?	?
12. Elizabeth Davis	Jabez Durfee	?		?	?
13. Lucinda Pendleton	George Harris	?		?	?

CHART 4.6 outlines the probable and unknown characteristics of Joseph Smith's thirteen "polyandrous" marriages. It appears that one was not polyandrous, a second was based upon a "pretend" marriage, and several were "eternity" sealings. Greater clarification on the remaining relationships will come only as new historical data is discovered. Importantly, to assert that Joseph Smith practiced sexual polyandry is a conclusion that goes beyond available evidence.

securing a legal divorce from her first husband. However, to assume Joseph also was involved with “sexual polyandry” requires specific evidence because the second nuptial may have been for “eternity” only (without a sexual union) or may have accompanied a religious divorce from the woman’s civil husband (prohibiting further sexual relations with the legal husband).