

PROLOGUE.

A Trajectory of Plurality: An Overview of Joseph Smith's Wives

I have identified thirty-three well-documented wives of Joseph Smith, which some may regard as an overly conservative numbering (see chart). Historians Fawn Brodie, D. Michael Quinn, and George D. Smith list forty-eight, forty-six, and forty-three, respectively. Yet in problematic areas it may be advisable to err on the side of caution. Unless further evidence surfaces, I regard the "possible" wives as subjects for additional research rather than as women whose marriages to Joseph Smith can be conclusively demonstrated.

What criteria can be used to evaluate whether a woman's marriage to Joseph Smith (during his lifetime) can be reliably documented? In 1869 Joseph F. Smith, countering Reorganized Latter Day Saint Church (RLDS) denials of Joseph Smith's polygamy, had Joseph Smith's living widows sign affidavits documenting their marriages to him. An affidavit is very good evidence. A woman mentioning in a journal or autobiography that she married the prophet is also good evidence, as is a close family member's or friend's testimony or affidavit or reminiscence, especially if he or she supplies convincing detail, anecdotal or documentary.

Even without an affidavit or holographic evidence for a woman, multiple pieces of evidence can make a convincing case for her marriage. The contours of a woman's life support or weaken the likelihood that she married the Mormon leader. For instance, while two or three uncertain pieces of evidence suggest that Vienna Jacques may have married Smith, the rest of her life does not make her look like his plural wife. (Some assume she married him in Kirtland, Ohio, but then immediately left him and moved to Missouri, where she married another man. Nor did she have a proxy marriage to Smith in the Nauvoo temple.) If a woman lived in Smith's home, this is possible supporting evidence for a wedding but not conclusive by itself.

Certain lists have proved to be reliable. Though John C. Bennett was unscrupulous in many ways, he was a Nauvoo insider, and his 1842 list of Smith's wives has been adequately substantiated. Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jenson's 1887 list of twenty-seven wives, based on interviews and affidavits, is also a basic resource. Small lists, from sources both sympathetic and hostile to polygamy, have been authenticated.

Joseph Smith's

NAME AT TIME OF MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE DATE	STATUS	AGE
1. Fanny Alger	[early 1833]	sg	[16]
2. Lucinda Pendleton (Morgan Harris).	[1838?]	md	37?
3. Louisa Beaman.	5 April 1841.	sg	26
4. Zina Diantha Huntington (Jacobs).	27 Oct. 1841	md	20
5. Presendia Lathrop Huntington (Buell).	11 Dec. 1841	md	31
6. Agnes Moulton Coolbrith (Smith)	6 Jan. 1842.	wd	33
7. Sylvia Sessions (Lyon)	8 Feb. 1842	md	23
8. Mary Elizabeth Rollins (Lightner)	late Feb. 1842	md	23
9. Patty Bartlett (Sessions)	9 March 1842	md	47
10. Marinda Nancy Johnson (Hyde)	Apr. 1842	md	27
11. Elizabeth Davis (Goldsmith Brackenbury Durfee)	< June 1842	md	50-51?
12. Sarah Kingsley (Howe Cleveland)	< 29 June 1842.	md	[53-54]
13. Delcena Johnson (Sherman)	< July 1842	wd	[37-38]?
14. Eliza Roxcy Snow	29 June 1842	sg	38

Plural Wives

LATER LIFE

Fanny separated from JS and married Solomon Custer, non-LDS.

Lucinda remained with polyandrous first husband, George Harris, LDS; married by proxy in Nauvoo temple to JS {Harris}; later divorced Harris.

Louisa was married by proxy to JS {BY}

Zina remained with polyandrous first husband, Henry B. Jacobs, LDS; polyandrous proxy marriage to JS {BY} but remained with Jacobs; eventually left Jacobs and became BY's connubial wife.

Presendia remained with polyandrous first husband, Norman Buell, disaffected LDS; polyandrous proxy marriage to JS {HCK} but stayed with Buell; eventually left Buell and became HCK's connubial wife.

Agnes was married by proxy to Don Carlos Smith {G. A. Smith}. Don Carlos was JS's deceased brother and Agnes's first husband. She then married William Pickett, erratic LDS, in a technically polyandrous union; eventually separated from Pickett.

Sylvia remained with polyandrous first husband, Windsor Lyon, LDS; polyandrous proxy marriage to JS {HCK}; remained with Lyon until his death; married Ezekiel Clark, non-LDS; divorced Clark; moved to Utah (to be with HCK?).

Mary remained with polyandrous first husband, Adam Lightner, non-LDS; polyandrous proxy marriage to JS {BY}, but stayed with Lightner till his death.

Patty remained with polyandrous first husband, David Sessions, LDS, till his death; married John Parry for time.

Marinda remained with polyandrous first husband, Orson Hyde, LDS apostle, and was married eternally to him in the Nauvoo temple; later eternal proxy marriage to JS; eventually divorced Hyde.

Elizabeth apparently remained with polyandrous first husband, Jabez Durfee, LDS, after JS's death; separated from Durfee; proxy marriage to JS {Cornelius Lott}; separated from Lott.

Sarah remained with polyandrous first husband, John Cleveland, non-LDS; polyandrous proxy marriage to JS {John Smith}; stayed with Cleveland to her death.

Delcena was married by proxy to Lyman Sherman {Almon Babbitt}.

Eliza was married by proxy to JS {Brigham Young}.

More 

Joseph Smith's

NAME AT TIME OF MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE DATE	STATUS	AGE
15. Sarah Ann Whitney	27 July 1842	sg	17
16. Martha McBride (Knight).	Aug. 1842	wd	37
17. Ruth Vose (Sayers)	Feb. 1843.	md	33
18. Flora Ann Woodworth	spring 1843	sg	16
19. Emily Dow Partridge	4 March 1843	sg	19
20. Eliza Maria Partridge	8 March 1843	sg	22
21. Almera Woodward Johnson	2-22 April 1843	sg	30
22. Lucy Walker	1 May 1843	sg	17
23. Sarah Lawrence	May 1843.	sg	17
24. Maria Lawrence.	May 1843.	sg	19
25. Helen Mar Kimball	May 1843.	sg	14
26. Hannah Ells	< mid-1843	sg	29-30
27. Elvira Annie Cowles (Holmes).	1 June 1843	md	29
28. Rhoda Richards	12 June 1843	sg	58
29. Desdemona Fullmer	July 1843	sg	32-33
30. Olive G. Frost	summer 1843	sg	27-28?
31. Melissa Lott	20 Sept. 1843.	sg	19
32. Nancy M. Winchester	[1842-43?]	sg	[14?]
33. Fanny Young (Carr Murray).	2 Nov. 1843.	wd	56

Plural Wives (continued)

LATER LIFE

Sarah separated from Joseph Kingsbury, her "pretend" polyandrous husband; proxy marriage to JS {HCK}.

Martha married by proxy to JS {HCK}; separated from HCK?

Ruth remained with polyandrous first husband, Edward Sayers, non-LDS, till his death.

Flora married [Carlos] Gove, non-LDS.

Emily married by proxy to JS {BY}.

Eliza married by proxy to JS {Amasa Lyman}. Later divorced Lyman.

Almera married Reuben Barton (proxy marriage?).

Lucy married by proxy to JS {HCK}.

Sarah married by proxy to JS {HCK}; divorced HCK; married Joseph Mount.

Maria married by proxy to JS {BY}? Separated from BY? Proxy marriage to JS {Almon Babbitt}.

Helen married by proxy to JS {Horace Whitney}.

Hannah never remarried. Died [1845].

Elvira remained with polyandrous first husband, Jonathan Holmes, LDS; proxy marriage to JS {Holmes}.

Rhoda married by proxy to JS {BY}; separated from BY or never cohabited.

Desdemona married by proxy to JS {Ezra Taft Benson}; separated from Benson; married Harrison McLane but later separated.

Olive married by proxy to JS {BY}.

Melissa married by proxy to JS {John Bernhisel}; separated from Bernhisel; married Ira Willis.

Nancy married by proxy to JS {HCK}; divorced HCK; married Amos Arnold.

Fanny never remarried.

More 

Possible Wives

NAME AT TIME OF MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE DATE	STATUS	AGE
1. Vienna Jacques	1832-33/41-43?	sg/ md?	43-44? 54-57?
2. Hannah Ann Dubois (Smith)	11 Feb 1841?	wd?	32-33?
3. Sarah Bapson	< June 1842?	sg?	48-51?
4. Mrs. G*****	June 1842?	md/ wd?	?
5. Sarah Scott (Mulholland)	1841-43?	wd	24-27?
6. Mary Houston	1841-43?	sg	23-26?
7. Mrs. Taylor	1841-43?	md/ wd?	?
8. Mary Heron (Snider)	1842/3?	md	38-39?

EARLY POSTHUMOUS MARRIAGES TO JOSEPH SMITH

The following women were sealed to Joseph Smith after his death (see proxy marriage below). There is no evidence that these women married him during his lifetime. Morley, in fact, stated that she had not married Joseph before his death:

Olive Andrews	January 15, 1846, Brigham Young proxy
Jane Tibbetts	January 17, 1846, Elam Luddington proxy
Phebe Watrous (Woodworth)	January 17, 1846, Lucien Woodworth proxy
Aphia Sanborn (Dow Yale)	January 27, 1846, Gad Yale proxy
Cordelia Morley	January 27, 1846, Frederick Cox proxy
Mary Ann Frost (Stearns Pratt)	February 6, 1846, Parley P. Pratt proxy
Sally Ann Fuller	January 29, 1847, Samuel Gully proxy
Lydia Kenyon (Carter)	possibly sealed in late 1844, HCK proxy

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

- < earlier than
- ? unknown
- [] unverified
- { } "proxy"
- sg single at time of marriage to Smith
- wd widowed at time of marriage to Smith

of Joseph Smith

LATER LIFE

Vienna married Daniel Shearer in 1838; separated by 22 Jan. 1846.

Hannah married Philo Dibble 11 Feb. 1841; sealed to Dibble for eternity in Nauvoo temple 15 Jan. 1846.

?

?

Sarah married by proxy to James Mulholland {HCK}, 3 Feb. 1846.

Mary married by proxy to JS {HCK}, 3 Feb. 1846.

?

Mary continued with polyandrous first husband, John Snider.

ABBREVIATIONS, CONTINUED

md married to another man at time of marriage to Smith, creating polyandry, as the woman continued to cohabit with the “first husband”

BY Brigham Young

HCK Heber C. Kimball

JS Joseph Smith

TERMS

POLYGAMY (“many-marriage”): A man or woman has two or more marriage partners. Plural marriage is the preferred Mormon term. Anthropologically, polygamy is divided into two subcategories: polygyny and polyandry.

POLYGyny (i.e., “many-woman”): A man is married to two or more women simultaneously.

POLYANDRY (i.e., “many-man”): A woman has multiple husbands.

PROXY: When one is sealed for eternity to a deceased person, with a living partner standing in for the deceased, the living surrogate is known as a proxy. In early Mormon history the woman was also sealed (for time, not eternity) to the living proxy. Children from the “time” marriage were sealed eternally to the deceased husband, not to the biological father. On this chart the living proxy’s name is given within S brackets.

Stone's story, like Joseph Smith's, was the product of the Burned-over District in New York, where a Protestant revival atmosphere served as a seeding ground for a great deal of religious and marital experimentation. The "Spiritual Wives" polyandrous doctrine, so foreign to twentieth-century Mormons, was part of Joseph Smith's *Zeitgeist*. Though the system was clearly subject to the danger of extremist abuse, it was developed by sincerely religious men: "The advocates of Spiritual wifehood are, and have been, for the most part ministers of the gospel, men of thought and learning," wrote Dixon.

Some historians have proposed the interpretation that Joseph either had no marital relations with his "polyandrous" wives, if the husband was faithful to the church, or that the "first husband" had no marital relations with the woman. Such a theoretical relationship has been called "pseudopolyandry." However, the Josephine Lyon Fisher affidavit argues against this. According to Josephine, her mother Sylvia, one of Smith's polyandrous wives, "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 fellowship with the Church."

Another piece of evidence used to show that polyandrous wives were married only for eternity, not for time, is the interview with Zina Huntington Jacobs, which, as we have seen, is unsatisfactory for taking either side of the argument. In the same way, Mary Elizabeth Lightner's statement that she was married to Smith for eternity (as a polyandrous wife) has been used to show that she was not married to him for time; but she elsewhere specifically and repeatedly stated that she was married to him for time and eternity. Patty Sessions, another polyandrous wife, wrote in a genealogical record that she had been married to Joseph Smith "for Eternity," but to clarify, wrote above the line, "time and all eternity."

Therefore there is no good evidence that Joseph Smith did not have sexual relations with any wife, previously single or polyandrous. On the other hand, there is evidence that he did have relations with at least some of these women, including one polyandrous wife, Sylvia Sessions Lyon, who bore the only polygamous offspring of Smith for whom we have affidavit evidence.

Finally, one wonders why these "first husbands" apparently acquiesced to their wives' marriages to Smith. One possibility would be that they were promised spiritual rewards as a result of the marriages, as was the case with the families of three "single" plural wives. When Fanny Alger married Joseph, her family was proud of the sealing, according to Ann Eliza Webb. In the same way, when Sarah Whitney was sealed to the prophet, he rebaptized her parents and gave special blessings to her father, Newel Whitney. Heber C. Kimball greatly desired that his daughter