
The Joseph Smith-Sylvia Sessions Plural Sealing: Polyandry or Polygyny?

Brian C. Hales

Historical evidence supports that the only well-documented offspring of Joseph Smith's plural marriages is Josephine Lyon, daughter of Sylvia Sessions Lyon. The traditional view of Smith's plural sealing to Sylvia is that it was polyandrous. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines polyandry as "the condition or practice of having more than one husband at one time." Accordingly, the presence of sexuality is often generalized upon Smith's other polyandrous marriages by assumption and speculation. This paper will analyze two aspects of the polygamous sealing between Smith and Sessions to determine if it truly merits the classification of polyandrous. Specifically, the date of the plural ceremony and the status of her civil union to Windsor Lyon at that point in time will be further examined.

In his comprehensive and impressive book *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), Todd Compton identifies eleven polyandrous marriages entered into by Joseph Smith. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Deborah Blum observed that in human societies, polyandry is "extraordinarily rare."¹ Despite the fact that such relationships are nowhere to be found in the Old Testament or Book of Mormon; it is undeniable that between 1841 and 1843, Joseph Smith was sealed to women who were already civilly married to other men. These appar-

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Compton's 11 Polyandrous Wives of Joseph Smith	Marriage Date	Year	Legal Husband
1. Zina Diantha Huntington	October 27	1841	Henry B. Jacobs
2. Presendia Lathrop Huntington	December 11		Norman Buell
3. Mary Elizabeth Rollins	Late February	1842	Adam Lightner
4. Patty Bartlett	March 9		David Sessions
5. Marinda Nancy Johnson	April		Orson Hyde
6. Elizabeth Davis	Before June		Jabez Durfee
7. Sarah Kingsley	Before June 29		John Cleveland
8. Lucinda Pendleton	?		George Harris
9. Ruth Vose	February	1843	Edward Sayers
10. Elivira Annie Cowles	June 1		Jonathan Holmes
11. Sylvia Sessions	?		Windsor Lyon?

Figure 1. List taken from Todd Compton's *In Sacred Loneliness* identifying Joseph Smith's polyandrous wives. List compiled by Brian C. Hales.

ent polyandrous marriages are perhaps the most confounding detail in Joseph Smith's polygamy.

Kathryn Daynes wrote: "Perhaps nothing is less understood than Joseph Smith's sealings to women already married, because the evidence supports conflicting interpretations."² Lawrence Foster echoes: "Perhaps the most puzzling and difficult-to-interpret behavior of Joseph Smith during this period is the evidence that he asked some of his closest associates to give their wives to him."³ LDS scholar Andrew Ehat agrees: "If polygamy is the most controversial story in the history of Mormonism, 'polyandry' must surely be its darkest, least understood, and most troubling chapter."⁴

Different opinions exist regarding the possibility that Joseph Smith's polyandrous marriages included sexuality.⁵ Antagonistic writers, citing three commonly cited quotations, assert that conjugal relations were a part of the Mormon leader's polyandrous relationships. One writer asserts that Zina Huntington said that "the greatest trial of her life was, to live with her husband and Joseph too at the same time."⁶ Another woman writes that Lucinda Pendleton Morgan Harris stated in 1842, "Why I am his [Joseph Smith's] mistress since four years."⁷ A third author claims she heard Presendia 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."⁸

Reviewing these alleged statements raises many important questions, including obvious problems with 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 behavior as explicitly immoral. Even in the secret teachings of plurality in Nauvoo, no 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 ever make such comments.

A few other similar allegations can be identified, but none seems to rise above the level of unsubstantiated anti-Mormon propaganda.⁹ After reviewing all the available documentation, Compton concludes: “In ten cases [of ‘polyandry’] there is no evidence for sexuality. In only one case do we have evidence.”¹⁰ That “one case” is routinely referenced as illustrating sexuality in *one* polyandrous marriage with the implication that conjugality was probably present in some or all of the rest. The case involves Sylvia Sessions Lyon and her daughter Josephine Lyon Fisher. 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.”¹¹

Sylvia Sessions married Windsor Lyon in a civil ceremony on April 21, 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 questions are when did that sealing occur and what was the status of her marriage to Windsor at that moment? Compton wrote: “On February 8, 1842, when Sylvia was twenty-three, she was sealed to Joseph Smith.”¹² Other authors have agreed with this date.¹³ The source of this information appears to be an unsigned affidavit written in 1869:

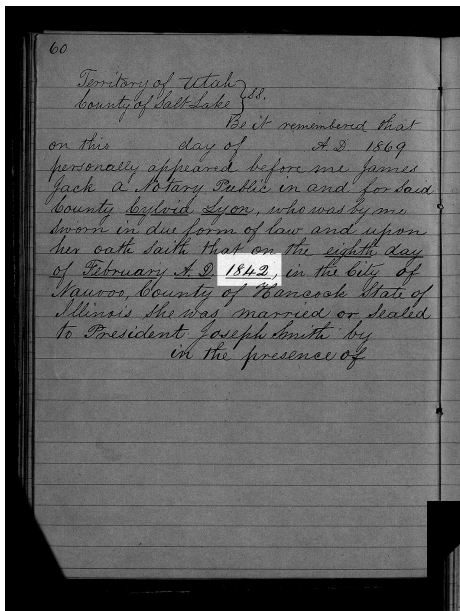
Territory of Utah

SS.

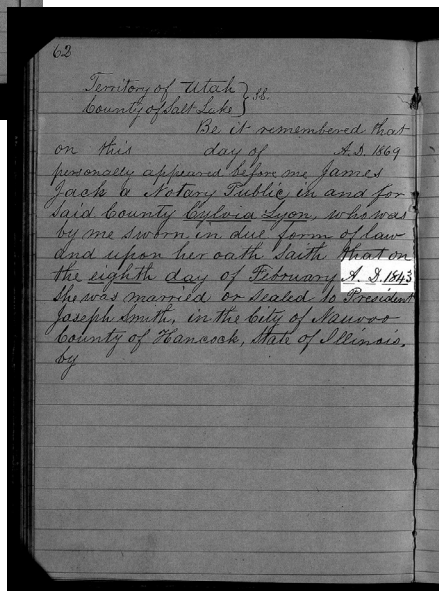
County of Salt Lake

Be it remembered that on this [blank] day of [blank] A.D. 1869 personally appeared before me James Jack a Notary Public in and for Said County Cylvia [*sic*] Lyon, who was by me sworn in due form of law and upon her oath Saith that on the eighth day of February A.D. 1842, in the City of Nauvoo, County of Hancock State of Illinois She was married or Sealed to President Joseph Smith by [blank] in the presence of [blank]¹⁴

Historians Stanley S. Ivins or Fawn Brodie do not specify a date for the sealing in their respective treatises on plural marriage.¹⁵ It appears that the first person to list the sealing as February 8, 1842, was Danel Bachman, but he also provided asterisks which explained that the affidavit from which the date was taken was unsigned.¹⁶ Compton also acknowledges the affidavit is



Left: Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Book, 1:60, showing Sylvia Sessions Lyons sealing to Joseph Smith on February 8, 1842. Image courtesy LDS Church History Library.



Right: Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Book, 4:62, showing Sylvia Sessions Lyons sealing to Joseph Smith on February 8, 1843. Image courtesy LDS Church History Library.

“unfinished” (not specifically “unsigned”) in a chapter endnote, but in the text of *In Sacred Loneliness*, he uses the date without raising any questions about its reliability.¹⁷

A closer look at the document, and the collection from which it comes, shows that a second affidavit exists, apparently written at the same time. It has similar wording and is also unsigned but has a different year for Sylvia’s

sealing to the Joseph Smith.¹⁸ Whether Compton or Bachman were aware of this important discrepancy is unclear. They list both affidavits as the source of the 1842 date only.¹⁹ To better understand the incongruity, we must briefly discuss the affidavit books themselves.

In attempts to refute claims made by RLDS missionaries visiting Utah that plural marriage originated with Brigham Young, not Joseph Smith, LDS Apostle Joseph F. Smith in 1869 accumulated a number of affidavits. Many were recorded, signed, and notarized within the pages of four books. Other affidavits written on sheets of paper were also transcribed into notebooks. All the affidavits were designed to prove that Joseph Smith taught and practiced plural marriage.

At some point since 1869, an unidentified person penciled in identifying marks in two of the books, namely Book 1 and Book 2. It is unclear why those numbers were assigned specifically to those two books. The other two books have since been labeled 3 and 4. A simple review of the books shows that 1 and 4 are nearly identical, as are books 2 and 3.

In both sets of pairs (1 and 4, 2 and 3), neither book is simply a handwritten copy of the other. The affidavits in both books contain genuine signatures and often a notary stamp. It is clear that Apostle Smith wanted two equivalent books, probably so that if one were lost the other could persist as a record. Making the second copy created a great deal more work for the scribes and witnesses involved, but the copied books were apparently deemed worth the effort.

The 1842 date for Sylvia Sessions sealing comes from Book 1 and the 1843 date from Book 4. Book 4 is also unique because it contains two additional unfinished affidavits, one for Vienna Jacques, and a second started on June 26, 1869, but never completed.²⁰ Book 1 does not contain those two aborted affidavit attempts.

Accordingly, it appears that since Book 4 contains more documents than Book 1, it was in fact the primary of the two and was the first to receive entries, at least in those two instances. This observation suggests that the 1843 date could well be the more accurate, or at least the first recorded, even though it is found in a book currently referred to a Book 4. Either way, it is a date with at least as much validity as the date (1842) written in Book 1 and should not be dismissed on the inaccurate assumption that it was simply a copyist error that occurred as the contents of Book 1 were being duplicated in Book 4. In light of these observations, the best conclusion seems to be that the year of the sealing is entirely unsubstantiated in these documents.

A second observation also seems to undermine the day and month listed in the affidavits. Both documents list February 8 (either 1842 or 1843), which is also the birth date of Josephine Lyon (1844) and Windsor Lyon (1809). It

is possible that Joseph and Sylvia were sealed on Windsor's birthday, exactly one or two years prior to Josephine's birth, but the likelihood is small. Accordingly, a rigid insistence on a February 8 sealing date of either year seems unjustified.

A third observation is that an unsigned affidavit is only slightly better than no affidavit at all. It may or may not reflect genuine beliefs of the scribe, and since it is unsigned, its relationship to the beliefs of the intended signatory are entirely unknown. Taken together, it appears that the affidavits provide little or no reliable information regarding the day or year of Joseph Smith and Sylvia Session's sealing ceremony.

Without the assistance of the affidavit books, other sources must be consulted to discover the sealing date of Joseph Smith and Sylvia Session. In a document undoubtedly used to write his 1887 *Historical Record* article on plural marriage, Andrew Jenson penned: "Sylvia Sessions . . . became a convert to 'Mormonism' and was married to Mr. Lyons. When he left the Church she was sealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith."²¹ A second corroboration is found in a 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 fellowship with the Church."²² Accordingly, these two documents place the sealing after Windsor's excommunication.

Windsor had a falling out with Nauvoo Stake President William Marks over a financial negotiation in the fall of 1842. In the end, Windsor sued Marks in the civil courts, and Marks in response brought Windsor up for a Church court. On November 19, 1842, Windsor was cut off.²³ He subsequently "left Nauvoo and went up to Iowa City, making his home there, but leaving his wife in Nauvoo, who apparently did not wish to leave the Church and go with him."²⁴

Perhaps unaware of the dating discrepancies in the affidavits, Compton uses only the earlier date found in Book 1, a practice that has been followed by several other authors who have since addressed this issue.²⁵ He concludes that Sylvia's statement that she was "sealed to the Prophet at the time that her husband Mr. Lyon was out of fellowship with the Church" was in error:

This scenario is not strictly consistent with the chronology provided by history, since Sylvia married Joseph Smith *before* Windsor was excommunicated. There are two possible explanations for this inconsistency. First, Sylvia may have been "revising" history to explain to her daughter why she married Smith when she was already married to Windsor. Another possibility is that Sylvia meant that she had had sexual relations with Smith after Windsor was disfellowshipped, which is chronologically possible.²⁶

In fact, two pieces of evidence could be cited to support a sealing date prior to Windsor's excommunication. Sylvia also reportedly stated "that she was sealed to the Prophet about the same time that Zina D. Huntington and Eliza R. Snow were thus sealed."²⁷ Zina was sealed to Joseph Smith on October 27, 1841, and Eliza on June 29, 1842, thus supporting an 1842 date. However, it is likely that Sylvia chose to compare her sealing to that of Eliza and Zina because she knew Josephine would be familiar with those two women, rather than to specifically define the month of her sealing.

In 1882, Eliza R. Snow was the most widely acknowledged wife of Joseph Smith, as well as the most prominent woman in the Church. Zina was also well known. Compton observes: "Zina [Huntington] was an extraordinary woman. She became the most important woman leader in the nineteenth-century Utah, after Eliza R. Snow."²⁸ Zina served as one of the first matrons of the Salt Lake Temple. Clearly, Josephine would not have known the specific sealing dates of these two women, which were not published until five years later.²⁹ Nor would she have recognized any dating discrepancy in her mother's story.

An additional piece of evidence involves Sylvia's mother, Patty Bartlett Sessions. Patty was also sealed to Joseph Smith, the ceremony occurring on March 9, 1842. Importantly, Sylvia was present at that sealing.³⁰ Most of the individuals who witnessed these ultra secret early plural marriages were personally involved with polygamy.³¹ However, exceptions occurred and were usually composed of monogamist relatives of the sealed wives. For example, in the latter half of 1841, Dimick's wife, Fanny A. Huntington, witnessed the sealings of her two sisters-in-law, Zina and Presendia, to Joseph Smith, although Fanny was not a plural wife herself.³² Two years later, both Cornelius and Permelia Lott were present at the sealing of their daughter to the Prophet, but Cornelius would not become a polygamist until after Joseph's death. Malissa Lott's brother Joseph (b. 1834) and her sister Amanda (b. 1836) also attended the ceremony.³³ Accordingly, Sylvia's similar participation in the sealing of her own mother may or may not indicate that she was at that time personally sealed to Joseph Smith as a plural wife.

While a near-useless unsigned "affidavit" and limited circumstantial evidence support an early 1842 sealing date for Joseph and Sylvia, it appears that the best evidence sustains that Windsor and Sylvia separated after Windsor's excommunication and the Prophet's sealing to Sylvia occurred after that date. Josephine Lyon was conceived approximately May 18, 1843; thus the eternal marriage most likely occurred between November 19, 1842, and May 18, 1843.

Currently no documentation of a legal divorce between Windsor and Sylvia after his excommunication has been found. However, several obser-



Sylvia Sessions Lyon Smith, date unknown. Documentary evidence suggests her marriage to Joseph Smith occurred between November 1842, and May 18, 1843. Photograph courtesy Clark Layton.

vations suggest that a divorce did occur, practically and religiously, if not also legally. Several years earlier, on April 21, 1838, Joseph Smith had performed the civil marriage of Sylvia and Windsor.³⁴ Possibly the Prophet felt he had de facto authority to annul that same relationship as well.

More likely, however, Joseph may have seen himself as capable of single-handedly granting a divorce based on his position as mayor of Nauvoo. The Nauvoo Charter was a liberal document, granting broad powers including the right to create the Nauvoo Municipal Court, “which court shall be composed of the Mayor as Chief Justice.” It further specified that “the Mayor shall have exclusive jurisdiction in all

cases.”³⁵ Three other Illinois city charters granted their respective cities the right to create a city municipal court, similar to the one in Nauvoo.³⁶ However, the Nauvoo Municipal Court was unique in several ways. Most prominent was the powers attributed to it by Nauvoo citizens, especially Church leaders.

An 1827 Illinois law, still in effect in 1842–43, allowed divorce for natural impotence, adultery, desertion for two years, or “cruelty or habitual drunkenness for the space of two years.”³⁷ Obviously, Sylvia’s case did not justify a divorce from Windsor based on those criteria. However, an 1832 Act, also in force in 1842–43, stated: “In addition to the causes already provided by law for divorces from the bands of matrimony, courts of chancery in this state shall have full power and authority to hear and determine all causes for a divorce, not provided for by any law of this state.”³⁸ Typically, the Illinois Supreme Court would grant circuit courts the right to act as courts of chancery. The Nauvoo Municipal Court was never so designated. John C. Bennett, having been appointed as the master in chancery of Hancock County, may have subsequently presided over a court of chancery, but Joseph Smith was not similarly selected after Bennett’s 1842 resignation as Nauvoo mayor.

It is possible that Joseph Smith assumed authority as chief justice of the Nauvoo Municipal Court to deal with a divorce proceeding within the boundaries of the city, whether or not that power had been formally granted to him

by the judiciary of the Illinois Supreme Court. Believing that since other courts in the state were so empowered, he and the citizens of Nauvoo should not be denied such rights, he might have proceeded in granting a quasi-legal divorce to Sylvia. Regardless, it seems doubtful that Joseph seriously considered the need to grant a civil divorce to Sylvia prior to their eternal sealing. Most likely, given their religious beliefs, neither of them worried about the associated legalities.

A number of factors suggest that Sylvia considered herself divorced from Windsor after his excommunication with or without a legal divorce. It is feasible that since Joseph claimed “priesthood authority,” rather than civil authority, to perform their initial wedding ceremony, he may have asserted the same authority to cancel such an agreement.³⁹

At any rate, Josephine’s 1915 statement implies that Windsor’s excommunication invalidated her marriage to him, allowing her to be legitimately sealed to Joseph Smith and then naturally bear 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.”⁴⁰ Researchers who accept Josephine’s 1915 statement as evidence that she was Joseph’s offspring cannot easily reject the timetable presented or the implication that Windsor’s estrangement from the Church was seen by Josephine as legitimizing her mother’s availability to be sealed to the Prophet. Neither is there any indication that Josephine thought her mother was simultaneously married to two men. In fact, in Nauvoo during this period, the validity of civil ceremonies in comparison to eternal sealings was often questioned. Stanley B. Kimball wrote: “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.”⁴¹ John D. Lee provided this recollection:



Josephine Lyons Fisher, date unknown. Josephine claimed she was a daughter of Joseph Smith. Photograph courtesy Clark Layton.

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.⁴²

While Lee's declarations cannot always be taken at face value, his assertions seem to square with other recollections.⁴³ Compton wrote: "Joseph regarded marriages performed without Mormon priesthood authority as invalid, just as he regarded baptisms performed without Mormon priesthood authority as invalid. Thus all couples in Nauvoo who accepted Mormonism were suddenly unmarried, granted Joseph's absolutist, exclusivist claims to divine authority."⁴⁴ Compton's view that accepting Mormonism made a person "suddenly unmarried" represents an extreme interpretation of Joseph Smith's teachings on civil marriage, not otherwise substantiated. Nevertheless, it does illustrate the perceived differences between marriages performed for time and eternity using priesthood sealing authority, when compared to legal marriages.

Joseph and Sylvia may have viewed the sealing authority so superior as to trump any marriage ceremony sanctioned only by civil powers, thus negating the need for a legal divorce. Compton explains the result: "The distinction between civil and spiritual marriage produced what might be called practical polyandry—i.e., on earth there were clearly two co-existent marriages, but they were of different types. By Joseph Smith's authoritarian perspective, there was only one marriage that was 'real,' performed by priesthood authority—the eternal bond . . . Marriages authorized by the Mormon priesthood and prophets took precedence."⁴⁵ Perhaps a better characterization would be "technical polyandry," technical because a legal marriage was still on the books, but was ignored by everyone. Importantly, because of religious constraints, the civil union did not and could not include sexuality.

Under Church law, a religious divorce may have been included or implied with the excommunication. Historian Kenneth L. Cannon recounts an example of a woman who automatically became divorced from her husband upon his excommunication. In 1857, when missionary John Hyde's feelings soured towards the Church,⁴⁶ he apostatized and published *Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs* (New York: W. P. Fetridge and Company, 1857), "a vitriolic attack on the Church, which contains an early expose of the 'mysteries' of the endowment and a bitter denunciation of the practice of plural marriage."⁴⁷ Cannon continues:

Hyde's activities did not go unnoticed in Salt Lake City. In a sermon delivered on 11 January 1857, Heber C. Kimball publicly moved that the errant elder be "cut off root and branch" from the Church and "delivered over to Satan to be buffeted in the flesh" because "there is no sympathy to be shown unto such a man." The motion carried unanimously. Elder Kimball went on to state that Hyde's wife was "not cut off from this Church, but she is free from him; she is just as free from him as though she never had belonged to him.—The limb she was connected to is cut off, and she must again be grafted into the tree, if she wishes to be saved."⁴⁸

Bachman observes that in the nineteenth century "it appears that men or women were permitted to remarry without a divorce if it could be proven that their former spouses' conduct was adulterous or seriously marred by unfaithfulness. On the other hand, Saints who were considered guilty of gross marital misconduct were judged harshly."⁴⁹ In 1861 Brigham Young taught that if a man becomes "unfaithful to his God and his priesthood," he also "forfeits his covenant with a wife" and that wife is "free from him without a bill of divorcement."⁵⁰

Several observations suggest that from a practical standpoint, Sylvia considered herself divorced from Windsor after his Church discipline. Kathryn Daynes noted: "If Sessions knew that Fisher was Joseph Smith's biological child . . . she could have been having sexual relations only with Smith, not with Windsor Lyon. That is, her marriages were polyandrous in name only because she could be certain of her child's paternity only if she restricted her sexual relationship to one husband at a time."⁵¹

In addition, a review of Sylvia's child-bearing chronology shows that she conceived only one child during the years Windsor was outside of the Church. That child was Josephine. The approximate conception dates of the six children born to Sylvia Lyon supports that Windsor's excommunication curtailed his cohabitation with her. Daynes observed:

The timing of the births of Sylvia Session's children lends some credence to her having denied Lyon cohabitation rights if Joseph Smith was the father of [Josephine] Fisher. Married to Lyon in March 1838, she gave birth to their first child sixteen months later, in July 1839. Their second child was born twenty-three months later, in June 1841, and another thirty months later their third child was born and died the same day, in December 1842, one month after Lyon had been excommunicated from the church. The next child, the purported daughter of Joseph Smith, was born in February 1844, fourteen months after Session's third child, a common interval between children when the previous child died as an infant [no natural nursing birth control]. The child after [Josephine] Fisher, however, was not born until forty-two months later, in September 1847, over three years after Smith's death and nineteen months after Lyon was rebaptized a member of the Church. Sessions' sixth and last child was born only eleven months after the fifth, a surprisingly short interval. Only [Josephine] Fisher was conceived during the entire time Lyon was excommunicated from the Church.⁵²

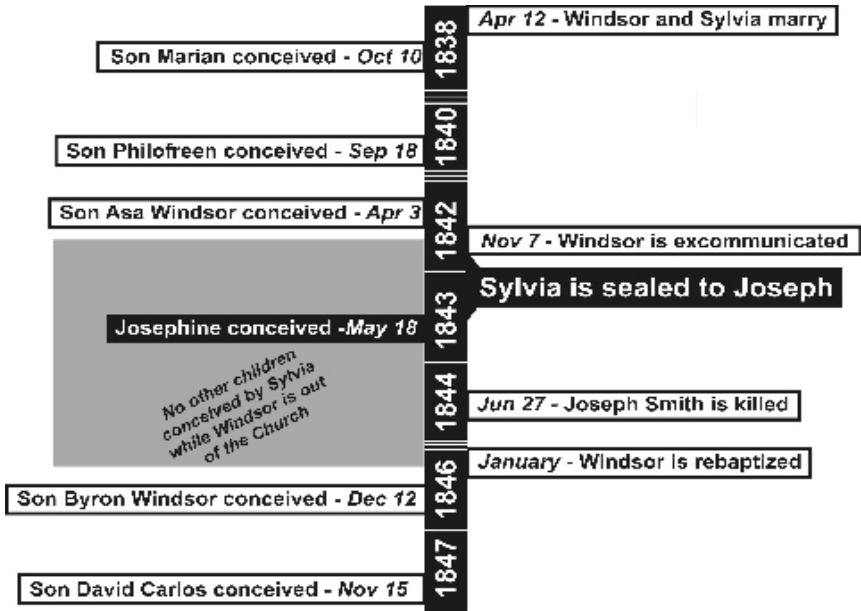


Figure 2. Timeline showing approximate conception dates of Sylvia's children and important activities of Joseph Smith and Windsor Lyon. Figure courtesy Brian C. Hales.

A significant observation is that after his excommunication, Windsor did return to Nauvoo, but it does not appear that he was then residing with Sylvia in the Lyon home. Land records for Nauvoo show that Windsor owned a store with attached living quarters, as well as a house located less than a block away.⁵³ It is possible that the couple were separated but lived close to each other so Windsor could participate in parental responsibilities to their child Philofreen (b. June 1841).⁵⁴

This view is substantiated by several accounts written during this period that mention Sylvia or Windsor in Nauvoo, but do not describe them as being together. Windsor must have returned to Nauvoo within a few weeks of his excommunication because Patty Session's biographer penned: "On the 12th of February [1843] . . . Bro. Joseph was at her house, and Mr. Lyons, Sylvia's husband, lent him five hundred dollars."⁵⁵ We notice that transaction did not take place at the Lyon home and that Sylvia was evidently not involved. On June 5, 1843, Sylvia, apparently alone, bought a building lot from Joseph Smith for \$500.⁵⁶

Another starker example is found with the Partridge daughters, Emily and Eliza, who needed new lodging in the latter half of 1843. Emily wrote: "My sister Eliza found a home with the family of Brother Joseph Coolidge, and I

went to live with Sister Sylvia Lyons. She was a good woman, and one of the lord's chosen few.⁵⁷ In the reference, Emily mentioned "the family of Brother Joseph Coolidge," but she did not similarly refer to the "family of Brother Windsor Lyon." Instead Emily went to live with "Sister Sylvia Lyons," suggesting the Windsor was not living with his wife at that time.⁵⁸

Available research shows Sylvia rejoined Windsor shortly after his 1846 rebaptism. Enoch Tripp, a relative of Patty Sessions, wrote: "On Sunday morning, February 1, 1846, Heber C. Kimball came to the house of Mr. Windsor P. Lyon in order to rebaptize him into the church and they sent up to the temple and got a large bath tub. The mob violence was so strong, Heber C. Kimball did not dare to do it in public."⁵⁹ Windsor and Sylvia became the parents of two more children prior to Windsor's 1849 death from tuberculosis.

The historical documents currently available do not conclusively describe the timetable or dynamics of Sylvia's marriages to both Windsor Lyon and Joseph Smith.⁶⁰ However, the best evidence indicates that Windsor and Sylvia experienced a religious and practical divorce after his excommunication and that she ceased living with him after that point. Her sealing to Joseph Smith also occurred after that date. These observations combine to suggest that Sylvia's case should not be categorized as polyandrous, but polygynous, and should not be grouped with the other ten polyandrous marriages identified by Compton and other researchers. Importantly, no evidence of polyandrous sexuality is identified in Sylvia's marital relationships.

Notes

1. Deborah Blum, *Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences Between Men and Women* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1997), 110.

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

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: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 76–77.

4. Andrew Ehat, "Pseudo-Polyandry: Explaining Mormon Polygyny's Paradoxical Companion.," 2, unpublished paper presented at the 1986 Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, Utah. Copy in possession of the author.

5. See Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward, "Plurality, Patriarchy, and the Priestess: Zina D. H. Young's Nauvoo Marriages," *Journal of Mormon History* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 96. See also the summary in Todd Compton, "Truth, Honesty and Moderation in Mormon History: A Response to Anderson, Faulring and Bachman's Reviews of *In Sacred Loneliness*," in the section "Sexuality in the Polyandrous Marriages," electronic copy without pagination. See <http://www.geocities.com/athens/oracle/7207/rev.html>.

6. Eliza Jane Churchill Webb letter, August 27, 1876, Myron H. Bond Papers, Com-

munity of Christ Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri. Eliza Jane is undoubtedly repeating a story she heard from her daughter Ann Eliza Webb Young as published in the book *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’” Ann Eliza Webb Young, *Wife No. 19* (Hartford, Connecticut: Dustin, Gilman & Co., 1875) 71. In 1887, referring to Ann Eliza’s claims, Zina stated 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,” *Globe-Democrat* (St. Louis, Missouri), August 8, 1887. Other problems with Webb’s claims is that the only child born to Zina while Joseph Smith was alive was Zebulon Jacobs, who was conceived approximately April 11, 1841, over six months before her sealing to the Joseph Smith.

7. Wilhelm Wyl quoting Sarah Pratt in *Mormon Portrait* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing and Publishing Co., 1886), 60.

8. Nelson Winch Green quoting 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.

9. See John Bowes, *Mormonism Exposed* (London: R. Bulman, 1850), 63; William Hall, *The Abominations of Mormonism Exposed* (Cincinnati: I. Hart, 1851), 43; and John Hyde, *Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs* (New York: W. P. Petridge, 1857), 85.

10. Compton, “Truth, Honesty and Moderation in Mormon History,” electronic copy without pagination, see n. 5.

11. Josephine L. Fisher, Affidavit, February 24, 1915, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. See also Danel W. Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith” (MA thesis, Purdue University, 1975), 141; and Richard S. Van Wagoner “Mormon Polyandry in Nauvoo,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 78, n. 12.

12. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 179.

13. Gary James, Bergera, “Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841–1844,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 66; Michael H. 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,” unpublished paper presented at the Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, July 31, 1998, 5; D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 587; and Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith,” 350.

14. Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books (1869), 1:60, Church History Library.

15. Stanley S. Ivins list is reproduced in Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith and Polygamy* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, n. d.), 43. See also Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed., rev. (New York: Knopf, 1971), 486–87.

16. Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith,” 350, 354.

17. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 179, 681–82.

18. Smith, Affidavit Books, 4:62.

19. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 681–82; and Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith,” 350, n. 77.

20. The affidavit reads: “Be it remembered that on this twenty-sixth day of June, A.

D. 1869, personally appeared before me Elias Smith, Probate Judge for said county,” and has one big “X” crossed through the entirety. Smith, Affidavit Books, 4:3. There is no hint regarding for whom the document was to be written or the information it was going to contain.

21. Biographical information on Windsor and Sylvia Lyon, undated sheet in Andrew Jenson Collection, Church History Library.

22. Fisher, Affidavit, February 24, 1915; see also Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith,” 141.

23. Fred C. Collier, *The Nauvoo High Council Minute Books of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Hanna, Utah: Collier’s Publishing, 2005), 74.

24. Irvin F. Fisher to A. B. Call, April 9, 1945, typescript copy by N. B. Lundwall in Alan H. Gerber, Church Manuscripts Collection, vol. 12, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

25. Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*, 561; Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 587 (only year provided); Bergera, “Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841–1844,” 66. In contrast, George D. Smith places the marriage in 1844 in “Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841–46: A Preliminary Demographic Report.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 61.

26. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 183, italics in original.

27. Fisher, Affidavit, February 24, 1915.

28. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 72.

29. Andrew Jenson, *Historical Record*, 9 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson Publishing Company, 1886–1890), 6:233.

30. Patty Bartlett Sessions, copy of undated holograph, Church History Library.

31. The Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books and other historical sources contain the names of witnesses, most of who were involved with polygamy. Included were Sarah Cleveland, Louisa Beaman, Elizabeth Whitney, Eliza Partridge, Orson Hyde, Emily Partridge, Vilate Kimball, Heber, C. Kimball, Cornelius Lott, Permelia Lott, Mary Angel Young, and August Adams Cobb.

32. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:5, 7, 19. Dimick Huntington would not marry polygamously during Joseph Smith’s lifetime.

33. Malissa Lott, Testimony, Temple Lot Case (Part 3), 100, question 150.

34. Emmeline B. Wells, “Patty Sessions,” *Women’s Exponent* 13, no. 11 (November 1, 1884): 86.

35. *Nauvoo City Charter*, Section 17, copy in Church History Library.

36. James L. Kimball Jr., “The Nauvoo Charter: A Reinterpretation,” in Roger D. Launius and John E. Hallwas, eds., *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited: Nauvoo in Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 40.

37. *Revised Laws of Illinois* (Vandalia: Greiner and Sherman, 1833), 233. Courts of chancery were unique in that they did not have to call witnesses and were not always subject to other legal formalities. I am appreciative to Raymond Collins, reference librarian at the Illinois State Library, for his assistance in locating pertinent historical documents defining legalities in Illinois in 1843.

38. *Revised Laws of Illinois*, 234. See discussion in John G. Henderson, *Chancery Practice with Especial Reference to the Office and Duties of Masters in Chancery* (Chicago: T. H. Flood, 1904), 48–49.

39. Sketch of the Life of Newel Knight, manuscript, Church History Library. Quinn identifies this as a first draft, although the manuscript does not so indicate. It is the shortest of several manuscripts in the collection. See Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 88.

40. Fisher, Affidavit, February 24, 1915; see also Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith," 141.

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

42. John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled* (St. Louis: J. H. Mason, 1891), 146.

43. 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.

44. Todd Compton, "A Trajectory of Plurality: An Overview of Joseph Smith's Thirty-three Plural Wives," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 23.

45. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 20, 22.

46. See Edward L. Hart, "John Hyde, Jr.—An Earlier View," *BYU Studies* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1976): 305–12.

47. Kenneth L. Cannon II, "A Strange Encounter: The English Courts and Mormon Polygamy," *BYU Studies* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 76.

48. Cannon, "A Strange Encounter," 76, citing Heber C. Kimball in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–1886), 4:165, January 11, 1857.

49. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith," 133.

50. Elden J. Watson, ed., *Brigham Young Addresses 1836–1877: A Chronological Compilation of Known Addresses of the Prophet Brigham Young*, 6 vols. (n. p., n. d.), 4:139–40. Young also instructed: "If a woman can find a man holding the keys of the priesthood with higher power and authority than her husband, and he is disposed to take her, he can do so . . . there is no need for a bill of divorcement." Watson, *Brigham Young Addresses*, 1:138. See also B. Carmon Hardy, *Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy, Its Origin, Practice, and Demise* (Norman, Oklahoma: Arthur H. Clark, 2007), 182; and Catherine Lewis, *Narrative of Some of the Proceedings of the Mormons; Giving an Account of their Iniquities* (Lynn, Mass: By the author, 1848), 5.

51. Daynes, *More Wives Than One*, 29–30. In contrast, Compton seems unaware of the obvious possibility of a non-physical pseudo-polyandrous arrangement. "How Sylvia was sure that Josephine was Joseph's, not Windsor's, is not clear." Furthermore, he concludes that Sylvia's story "is convincing evidence that Smith had sexual relations with his wives, including his polyandrous spouses." Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 183.

52. Daynes, *More Wives Than One*, 30.

53. Land records show a store on the corner of Main and Hotchkiss Streets and a home down the block on Hotchkiss during the 1840–46 period. Copy of plats in possession of the author. See also Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and T. Jeffery Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo and Southeastern Iowa: Historical Photographs and Guide*, 2nd ed. (Santa Ana, California: Fieldbrook Productions, 1991), 111–12.

54. The Lyon's three boys born prior to 1843 included Marion (b. July 3, 1839; d. March 19, 1842), Philofreen (b. June 11, 1841; d. January 2, 1844), and Asa Windsor (b. December 25, 1842; d. December 25, 1842). Only Philofreen was alive in 1843.

55. Emmeline B. Wells, "Patty Sessions," *Woman's Exponent* 13, no. 12 (November 15, 1884): 95.

56. "Nauvoo Project" cited in Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 683.

57. Emily Dow Partridge Smith Young, Autobiography, typescript, April 7, 1884, Perry Special Collections, electronic copy without pagination.

58. Windsor was recruited as a witness of Joseph Smith's good character on June 26, 1844. See Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed.

B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 6:576. Because Windsor was a nonmember and a respected community leader, his opinion might have been more believable to Illinois Governor Thomas Ford. His inclusion as a witness, however, provides no details regarding his relationship with Sylvia at that time.

59. Enoch Tripp, Journal, 9, Church History Library, cited in Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 185–86.

60. In Utah in later years, many of Joseph Smith's plural wives maintained closer relations in their own sort of sorority. An undated poem written by Zina Huntington Young to Sylvia Sessions Lyon may have had specific reference to Josephine in this verse: "But thy husband will caress thee/ And thy sweet angelick child/ With her growing charms will bless thee/ Thus the hours will be beguiled." Zina D. H. Young to Sylvia Sessions Lyon, Zina Card Brown Family Collection, Church History Library.