

Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841-46: A Preliminary Demographic Report*

George D. Smith

POLYGAMY, MARRIAGE TO MORE THAN ONE SPOUSE AT A TIME, cannot be seen in the fossil record of our primitive ancestor, *Homo erectus*, and no one knows if Lucy of the African Rift, reputed to be the mother of us all, was a plural mate. A recent study of the evolution of human sexuality concludes, however, that while modern man is often culturally obliged to be monogamous, he may be biologically predisposed to polygamy.¹ Therefore it should not surprise us that polygamy has been practiced in many parts of the world. Plural marriage has been found in India, Nepal, China, the Middle East, Africa, Indonesia, Australia, in early Germanic tribes, among certain native Indian societies of the Americas and Eskimos of the Arctic, and, notably, the Mormons of North America.²

There were multiple wives and concubines in ancient Mesopotamia and among Old Testament leaders of the early Hebrew peoples. Abraham, David, and Solomon had many wives, but Jewish law required

*This article first appeared in Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 1994): 1-72. It has not been updated.

1. Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *Mystery Dance: On the Evolution of Human Sexuality* (New York: Summit Books, 1991). An informative study of primate evolution is Kathy D. Schick and Nicholas Toth, *Making Silent Stones Speak: Human Evolution and the Dawn of Technology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

2. Polygamy has been practiced to some extent in about 80 percent of the 853 cultures on record (Delta Willis, *The Hominid Gang* [New York: Viking, 1989], 259; G. P. Murdock and D. R. White, *Ethnology* 8 (1969): 329-69.

monogamy by the eleventh century C.E. Polygamy was also found in pre-Islamic Arabic cultures of the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. Later the Koran limited Moslem husbands to a maximum of four wives. Ancient Roman law, which recognized marriage by solemn ceremony, by purchase, and by mutual consent or extended cohabitation, eventually excluded polygamy. The marriage law of most Western nations is the product of Roman Catholic canon law, which recognizes marriage as a lifelong monogamous union between a woman and a man by consent and consummation.³ Polygamy was prohibited by the Justinian Code in the sixth century C.E., is generally forbidden in Europe and the Americas, and was strictly against Illinois law when the Mormons secretly introduced the practice in 1841.⁴

POLYGAMY BEFORE JOSEPH SMITH

Mormons were not the first in America to think of plural marriage. In fact, for three centuries before Joseph Smith introduced Mormon "celestial marriage," polygamy was a popular subject of public debate in Europe and America. In 1531 Martin Luther advised England's Henry VIII to "take another queen in accordance with the examples of the patriarchs of old who had two wives at the same time"; eight years later Luther, arguing that polygamy was sanctioned by Mosaic Law and was not banned by the New Testament, gave Prince Philip of Hesse a dispensation to take a second wife.⁵ Since the Protestant Reformation had replaced the authority of the Pope with a "literally inspired" Bible, Old Testament polygamy became a persuasive argument for marital innovation in the sixteenth century.

In 1534 John Bockelson of Leyden, Holland, led the Anabaptists in Münster, Germany, in eleven months of polygamy as they awaited the end of the world. This town of 15,000 had been "purified" of all infidels—Catholics and Lutherans—and was expected to become the New Jerusalem. Revered as prophet of the Lord, Bockelson issued twelve

3. See James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 52, 128, 225, 256, 299, 304, 478-79, 577, 615; Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1982), 118-28.

4. Through the Nauvoo period, polygamy was a criminal act under the Illinois 1833 antibigamy laws, which remained unchanged during statute revision in 1845. Polygamy, thus defined, was punishable by fines of \$1,000 and two years imprisonment (previously married persons) or \$500 and one year imprisonment (previously single persons) (*Revised Laws of Illinois 1833 and Revised Statutes of the State of Illinois 1845*, secs. 121, 122, University of Chicago Law Library).

5. John Cairncross, *After Polygamy Was Made a Sin: The Social History of Christian Polygamy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 36-51.

articles revealed to him by God, including sanction for a man to take as many women to wife as he wanted. Bockelson was proclaimed king and took sixteen wives who were considered "queens." Domestic arrangements were decided by a stick placed at the dinner table in front of the queen who had been chosen to spend the night with the king. All unmarried females who had reached the marriage age of twelve were pressured to take a husband of at least fourteen years of age, but most women strongly supported the prophet⁶:

Some of the women and girls stayed on after he had preached, danced about and cried in a loud voice, Father, Father, Father, give! give! give! then they leapt up, raised their hands to the sky and clapped. Their hair undone, hung round their neck or down their back. They stared at sun and imagined that God the Father was sitting up there in his glory. Then they danced like maenads in pairs through the streets and gazed at the sun till they were exhausted, white and deadly pale.

Anabaptist wives found other wives for their husbands, as Sarah had done for Abraham, and men often married their wives' sisters. The man with the most wives was considered the best Christian.

Theologians justified polygamy by appealing to its practice among Hebrew patriarchs, such as Abraham, Isaac, and David, noting that it was not forbidden in the New Testament nor by church fathers Augustine and Jerome. Social rationale linked the desirability of children to provide a worshipful population and a large labor force, the needs of men, expected displacement of prostitution, and fulfillment of man's natural patriarchal domination of women. Münster theologians also asserted that semen was precious and should not be wasted, as it would be if it did not provide offspring, for example, if a woman was menstruating, pregnant, or infertile. Assuming that "men cannot contain themselves," in order to avoid wasting semen, "hence they can marry several women."⁷

Anabaptist polygamy met with difficulty. Forced cohabitation gave rise to "constant dissension," and there was "fierce resentment" where two or three women shared a husband. Church authorities put "refractory wives" in prison and executed some who protested their husbands' taking other wives. One woman was summoned to a tribunal and sentenced to death after she was to complete her pregnancy. Another was

6. Herman von Kerksenbroick in Klemens Löffler, *Die Wiedertäufer zu Münster, 1534/35: Berichte, Aussagen und Aktenstücke von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1923), 79; cited in Margrit Eichler, "Charismatic Prophets and Charismatic Saviors," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 55, no. 1 (January 1981): 54.

7. Löffler, 107, in Cairncross, *After Polygamy*, 7-8.

pardoned when she begged her husband's forgiveness. In 1535 the town was attacked and John of Leyden was interrogated and killed; Münster has remained Catholic ever since.⁸

Writers such as Milton, Boswell, Newton, Rousseau, Spinoza, Napoleon, and the Lutheran scholar John Leyser all advocated polygamy. Schopenhauer, who considered woman to be "Nature's knockout blow," endorsed Mormon plural marriage since Nature's aim was to increase the species.⁹

In 1780 in England, Rev. Martin Madan, the disciple of John Wesley who co-wrote "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," advocated the restoration of biblical polygamy, which would "return discipline to the sexual informality of the age, correct a declining population, eliminate abortion, save innumerable women from ruin, and restore men to their rightful, patriarchal role."¹⁰ During the years following 1817, American utopian Jacob Cochran taught a "spiritual matrimony" to communities in Maine and New Hampshire; it was "sanctioned by a ceremony of his own, within which any man or woman, already married or unmarried, might enter into choosing at pleasure a spiritual wife or spiritual husband." Cochran reportedly had a "regular harem, consisting of several unmarried females."¹¹ Starting in the 1830s, John Humphrey Noyes and his Perfectionists practiced another form of group marriage. Settling in Oneida, New York, in 1847, more than 500 men and women shared land, clothes, sex partners, and children. The communal spirit waned when Noyes ruled that he had first claim on the women, and in 1879 the men revolted, accusing Noyes of taking young women against their will. By 1881 the Oneida community was disbanded.

In 1837, when Mormon headquarters was located in Kirtland, Ohio, a Cleveland newspaper fifteen miles away printed a letter which argued for polygamy as a remedy for the "distress" of "so many old maids." If a man first obtained "the consent of his wife, or wives," the writer asked, "what evil would arise" from allowing him "as many more wives as he may judge proper?" It would be "more desirable to be the second or even third wife of a generous man, than to remain an old maid, neglected and laughed at. . . and it would eminently lessen prostitution in one sex and ranging in the other." Furthermore, it would "not be more

8. Cairncross, *After Polygamy*, 2-30.

9. *Ibid.*, 84-93, 112-40, 153.

10. Martin Madan, *Thelyphthora; or, a Treatise on Female Ruin. . .*, 3 vols. (London: J. Dodsley, 1780-81), cited in B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 2, and Cairncross, *After Polygamy*, 157-64.

11. "The Cochran Fantasy in York County [Maine]," 3 Aug. 1867, in *Maine Historical Quarterly* 20 (Summer 1980): 30.

expensive for a man to have two wives, than to have one wife, and hire a seamstress."¹²

That year the Mormon church responded to the idea of plural marriage with a resolution denying fellowship to any member guilty of polygamy and it even disciplined one Solomon Freeman for "living with another woman."¹³ Latter-day Saints publicly denied rumors of polygamy until 1852, a decade after the first plural marriages were officially recorded in Nauvoo.

IMPORTANCE OF NAUVOO POLYGAMY

Utah polygamy has received considerable attention, but any definitive study of Mormon plural marriage must begin with its Nauvoo roots. This essay explores the extent and character of Nauvoo polygamy, from the first documented plural marriage on April 5, 1841, to the ceremonies concluded in 1846, the year of westward migration.¹⁴

Although Joseph Smith met his death at the hands of outsiders, it was internal dissent, precipitated by polygamy, which brought him to the Carthage jail in June 1844. Rumors about Smith's extramarital relationships with women had circulated for a decade before his 1841 plural marriage and the revelation sanctioning polygamy, recorded in 1843. The

12. Letter signed "Enquirer" to the *Cleveland Liberalist* 1:164 (4 Feb. 1837), Oberlin College Library.

13. Resolution in *LDS Messenger and Advocate*, May 1837, 511; action against Freeman in "Elders Quorum Record," 23 Nov. 1837, archives, The Auditorium, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), Independence, Missouri, in Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2d. ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), 185.

14. The data on plural marriages cited throughout this essay were derived from various sources: official sealing (marriage) and temple endowment lists (the first men to receive their temple endowments were more likely to have plural families); the list of Mormon pioneers leaving Nauvoo; William Clayton's so-called "temple journals"; census data; family history group sheets; and a variety of letters, diaries, early newspapers, and oral histories. Research was conducted in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, the Marriott Library at the University of Utah, the Utah State Historical Society, Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library, and archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Specifically, among the scholarly research that facilitated this study were Susan Ward Easton Black, *Membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1848*, vols. 1-50 (Provo, Utah: Research Study Center, Brigham Young University, 1984-88); Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977); Dale Morgan and George P. Hammond, eds., *A Guide to the Manuscript Collections of the Bancroft Library*, vol. 1 (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1963); Brodie, *No Man Knows*, app. C; Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *The Historical Record* 6 (May 1887): 219-40; and especially D. Michael Quinn, personal correspondence, 6 Dec. 1991. Further research will undoubtedly generate more accurate data for a few families, but these small differences will not change the following overall demographic portrait of the number and scope of plural marriages in Nauvoo.

story repeated most often involved Fanny Alger, a young woman whom Smith employed in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1835 to help his wife Emma with housework. Several Mormon leaders claim that Fanny Alger was Smith's first plural wife.¹⁵ Some suggest that Smith advocated polygamy as early as 1831, when he presented a revelation directing several married elders to take Native American women as wives "that their posterity may become white, delightful and just."¹⁶ Nevertheless, evidence from Smith and his secretary William Clayton suggests that the prophet claimed to receive a separate injunction to practice polygamy in 1843.¹⁷ Although Mormon plural marriage was intended to remain a closely guarded secret, word that Joseph Smith and possibly other Mormons were practicing polygamy began to spread across towns and villages of western Illinois in the early 1840s.

The secret became a scandal in May 1844 when William Law, a counselor to Joseph Smith who equated polygamy in the restored church with concubinage, filed suit against Smith in the circuit court of Hancock

15. According to Mormon apostle William McLellin, Emma witnessed her husband and Fanny in a "transaction" identified as the "first well authenticated case of polygamy" (McLellin to Joseph Smith III, 8 July 1872, RLDS archives; *Salt Lake Tribune*, 6 Oct. 1875; Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986], 5-12). The prophet's scribe, Warren Parrish, said that "he himself and Oliver Cowdery did know that Joseph had Fannie Alger as wife, for they were spied upon together." After Book of Mormon scribe Oliver Cowdery wrote a letter characterizing Joseph's relations with Fanny as a "dirty, nasty, filthy affair," he was excommunicated on charges that included "seeking to destroy the character of President Joseph Smith jr by falsely insinuating that he was guilty of adultery &c." (Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983], 162-63 [12 Apr. 1844]; Joseph Smith et al., *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, 1963], 3:16, hereafter HC). In 1899 Alger was married by proxy to the deceased prophet, and assistant church historian Andrew Jenson described her as "one of the first plural wives sealed to the Prophet" (Jenson, "Plural Marriage," 223; Thomas M. Tinney, *The Royal Family of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.* [Salt Lake City: Green Family Organization, 1973], 41). Heber C Kimball also referred to Fanny Alger as Smith's first plural wife (recounted by church patriarch Benjamin F. Johnson in a letter to George F. Gibbs, 1903, 10, LDS archives).

16. The Book of Mormon prophecies, "the scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white [pure] and delightful people" (2 Ne. 30:6). A 17 July 1831 revelation (uncanonized) on plural marriage was asserted in W. W. Phelps's 12 August 1861 letter to Brigham Young. LDS church president Joseph F. Smith also concluded that the principle of plural marriage must have been revealed to Joseph Smith in 1831 (*Deseret News*, 20 May 1886). In the 8 December 1831 *Ohio Star*, Ezra Booth wrote of a Mormon revelation to form a "matrimonial alliance with the natives" (Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1981], 299 n28).

17. Joseph Smith's own journal contains a contemporary account of a 12 July 1843 plural marriage revelation: "Received a Revelation in the office in presence of Hyrum and W[illia]m Clayton" (Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and*

County, Illinois. Law charged that Smith was living “in an open state of adultery” with Maria Lawrence, a teenaged orphan who was living in the Smith household. In fact, Smith had secretly married both Maria and her sister Sarah by the fall of 1843 and was serving as executor of their \$8,000 estate. Law apparently hoped that disclosing Smith’s relationship with the young girls might lead him to abandon polygamy, but Smith immediately excommunicated Law, had himself appointed the girls’ legal guardian, and rejected the charge in front of a church congregation, denying that he had more than one wife:

Another indictment has been got up against me. . . I had not been married scarcely five minutes, and made one proclamation of the Gospel, before it was reported that I had seven wives. . . This new holy prophet [William Law] has gone to Carthage [county courthouse] and swore that I had told him that I was guilty of adultery. . . What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one.¹⁸

The following month Law and other Mormon dissidents published the inaugural issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor* to reveal Smith’s “mormon seraglio, or Nauvoo harem; and his unparalleled and unheard of attempts at seduction.”¹⁹ Declaring the *Expositor* a public nuisance, the Nauvoo City Council, led by Mayor Joseph Smith, ordered all copies of the paper to be burned and its printing press destroyed. These actions created an uproar throughout the state, where Smith’s growing political power—as well as his alleged immorality—were both feared and resented. When Governor Thomas Ford ordered Smith arrested, Joseph and his brother Hyrum were jailed at Carthage. On June 27, a large mob overpowered the guards and shot the brothers to death.

INCEPTION OF PLURAL MARRIAGE

How did the Mormon community in Nauvoo arrive at this state of affairs? On July 12, 1843, Joseph Smith dictated a ten-page revelation to his private clerk, William Clayton, which indicated that he meant to

Journals of Joseph Smith [Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1987], 396). The entry for that date in the official church history confirms 1843 in the first person: “I received the following revelation in the presence of my brother Hyrum and Elder William Clayton,” and entitles the text, “Revelation on the Eternity of the Marriage Covenant, including the Plurality of Wives; Given through Joseph, the Seer, in Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois, July 12th, 1843” (HC 5:500-501). Clayton also confirms that the revelation occurred in 1843: “I testify again that the revelation on polygamy was given through the prophet Joseph Smith on the 12th of July 1843” (Clayton to Madison M. Scott, 11 Nov. 1871, LDS archives).

18. HC 6:403, 405, 410-11; Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 64; Lyndon Cook, “William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter,” *BYU Studies* (Winter 1982): 47-72.

19. Frances Higbee to Mr. Gregg, May 1844, Nauvoo, Chicago Historical Society.

"restore" the ceremonies and cultural patterns of ancient Israel. The revelation on plural marriage, or "celestial marriage" as it was called, claimed to restore the practice of "Moses, Abraham, David and Solomon having many wives and concubines. . . a new and everlasting covenant" in which "if any man espouse a virgin. . . [or] ten virgins. . . he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him" (D&C 132:4, 61, 62).

A few months earlier, Clayton recalled, Smith "also informed me that he had other wives living besides his first wife Emma, and in particular gave me to understand that Eliza R. Snow, Louisa Beman, Desdemona W. Fullmer and others were his lawful wives in the sight of heaven."²⁰ In fact, by the time of the 1843 revelation, Smith had married at least twelve women besides his legal wife Emma, and a dozen of his most trusted followers had also taken plural wives.

About forty years later, assistant LDS church historian Andrew Jenson collected statements from Smith's former wives, who willingly confirmed that they had "consented to become the Prophet's wife" and that he "associated with them as wives within the meaning of all that word implies."²¹ On behalf of Jenson, and working with plural wife Eliza R. Snow, journalist Emmeline B. Wells wrote in 1886 to ask Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner,

to prepare a careful sketch of your life for publication in the Historical Record along with others of the wives of Joseph Smith, the prophet. Begin with your name and birthplace also date, the names of your parents and their origin whether American born etc. and from the North or the South then your conversion to the true Gospel etc. But positively your marriage ceremony to Joseph on what day and by whom performed, and who were the witnesses if any. This is the principal point such other matter in brief as may seem to you suitable. Perhaps you had better direct it to me, though it will all be submitted to someone in authority before being published.

Aunt Eliza asked me to write you and ask you to prepare this and sent her love to you. Helen who sends love, she has the same to do, also Lucy Walker Kimball. Do you know the particulars about Sister Marinda Hyde's being sealed to Joseph & on what day or in what year, or who officiated in the ceremony?²²

Jenson published these statements in 1887, primarily in an attempt to

20. "William Clayton's Testimony," 16 Feb. 1874 (in Jenson, "Plural Marriage," 224-26).

21. Lucy Walker affidavit in Jenson, "Plural Marriage," 230.

22. Emmeline B. Wells to Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Salt Lake City, 12 Mar. 1889, LDS archives.

convince Smith's family, who remained in the Midwest after his death, that their progenitor had in fact practiced polygamy.²³

Just when Mormon polygamy began is conjectural, but it had clearly commenced by April 5, 1841, with Smith's first officially acknowledged plural marriage. In a ceremony beside the Mississippi River, he married twenty-six-year-old Louisa Beaman disguised in a man's hat and coat. The ceremony was performed by her brother-in-law, using words dictated by the prophet.²⁴ At that time Smith was thirty-five and had been married fourteen years to thirty-six-year-old Emma Hale Smith. They had five living children.

During the two-and-one-half years from his first official plural marriage in April 1841 to his last known marriage in November 1843, Smith took as many as forty-two wives, one or two at a time.²⁵ On average, this pace produced 1.5 new wives each month. By the end of 1843, Emma Smith's biographers observed, most close friends of Smith's legal wife had either married her husband or had given their daughters to him.²⁶ Reportedly, some of the younger women were discreetly instructed in polygamy by older women who had been inducted previously into the secret order.²⁷

Smith courted these plural wives with an offer of eternal marriage too wonderful to refuse. According to the doctrine of celestial marriage, a woman who was "sealed" (married) to a man in a special religious ceremony was united to him and their children, not only for "time"—until death—but for eternity where they eventually could become gods. Implicit in the revelation was the requirement that a man and woman must accept the "principle"—of taking plural wives, known as the law of Abraham—in order to gain the highest afterlife, the celestial kingdom. Just as Abraham, David, Solomon, and other Old Testament patriarchs took "many wives and concubines," the patriarchs and elders of the restored church could attain "crowns of eternal lives in the eternal worlds"

23. Jenson listed Fannie Alger, Louisa Beaman, Lucinda Harris, Zina Huntington, Precindia Huntington, Eliza Roxcy Snow, Sarah Ann Whitney, Desdemona Fullmer, Helen Mar Whitney, Eliza Partridge, Emily Partridge, and Lucy Walker as Smith's plural marriages prior to the 1843 revelation ("Plural Marriage," 233-34).

24. Joseph B. Noble performed the marriage. See Linda K. Newell and Valeen T. Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 95-96. Noble married his first plural wife exactly two years later, on 5 April 1843.

25. Andrew Jenson ("Plural Marriage") identified twenty-seven of Smith's wives, while Fawn Brodie identified forty-nine (Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 335-36, 457-88).

26. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 147.

27. Elizabeth Durfee had the "duty to instruct the younger women in the mysteries of polygamy" (Joseph H. Jackson, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Experiences of Joseph H. Jackson* [Warsaw, Ill.: n.p., 1844], 14, in Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 305).

and have descendants as “innumerable as the stars.” A woman’s salvation thus depended on entering into a polygamous relationship with a man of high status in the church, because such men were thought to have made the greatest progress towards godhood on earth.

A charismatic, handsome man, Joseph Smith apparently had little trouble persuading young women that he was their way to eternal realms of glory. Sixteen-year-old Lucy Walker, for example, had been adopted by the Smiths and worked as a maid in the Smith home. The prophet told Walker that God had commanded him to take her as a wife. She was angry and insulted, but she feared Smith’s warning that if she rejected the “principle” of plural marriage, “the gate will be closed forever against you.” On May 1, 1843, while Emma was shopping for supplies in St. Louis, Lucy married Joseph Smith.²⁸

For young women living in the Smith home, the prophet’s advances were hard to resist. After the death of their father, Emily and Eliza Partridge came to live with Joseph and Emma Smith to care for their son, Don Carlos. Each of the sisters married the prophet, at first without Emma’s knowledge, and later in another ceremony to which Emma consented. Emily wrote in her diary: “From that very hour Emma was our bitter enemy.”²⁹

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 the brides in his domain. This option was presented to the married woman as a favor to her. A woman who wanted higher status in the celestial kingdom could choose to leave a husband with lower status in the church, even if she had been sealed to him, and become sealed to a man higher in authority.

On October 27, 1841, Smith was married for eternity to Zina D. Huntington, Henry B. Jacobs’s wife. Jacobs, a devout church member, consented to this “celestial marriage” even though Zina was six months pregnant with Jacobs’s child. On December 11, 1841, the prophet married Zina’s sister, Prescindia Huntington, who had been married to Norman Buell for fourteen years and remained married to Buell until 1846.³⁰ Prescindia then left Buell and married Heber C. Kimball “for time,” that is, until the end of her life. In the afterlife, “for eternity,” she would revert to Joseph Smith.

28. George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1991), 100; Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 139.

29. “Autobiography of Emily Partridge,” cited in Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 240; Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 138-39.

30. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 41-43.

Smith married Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner in February 1842, when she was already married and eight months pregnant. "As for Sister [Elizabeth] Whitney," she wrote, "it was at her house that the Prophet Joseph first told me about his great vision concerning me." Mary was "sealed to Joseph Smith the Prophet by Brigham Young in a room over the old red brick store in Nauvoo."³¹ Apparently, Smith had planned to marry her long before her marriage to Adam Lightner: Mary was just thirteen years old when she first met the prophet in 1831 in Kirtland, Ohio. As she recalled, "the Savior appeared and commanded him to seal me up to everlasting life, gave me to Joseph to be with him in his kingdom. . . . Joseph said I was his before I came here and he said all the Devils in Hell should never get me from him."³² After her celestial marriage to Joseph, Mary lived with Adam Lightner until his death in Utah and had eight children by him. In April 1842, two months after the Lightner ceremony, Nancy Marinda Johnson married Joseph Smith while her husband, Orson Hyde, was on a mission to Jerusalem. After Hyde returned, his wife went back to live with him.³³

The question of how many children came from Smith's plural marriages has never been answered decisively. Josephine L. Fisher wrote that her mother, Sylvia Sessions, told her "that [Josephine] was the daughter of the Prophet Joseph Smith."³⁴ Prescindia Huntington Buell once said that "she did not know whether Mr. Buel or the Prophet was the father of her son [Oliver]."³⁵ Researchers have tentatively identified eight children that Joseph Smith may have had by his plural wives.³⁶ Emily Partridge

31. Mary E. Rollins Lightner to Emmeline B. Wells, Summer 1905, LDS archives.

32. "Autobiography of Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner," quoted in Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 443-44; statement in LDS archives.

33. Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 119; Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record*, 396.

34. Josephine L. Fisher to Andrew Jenson, 24 Feb. 1915. On 12 October 1905, Angus M. Cannon confirmed this account to Joseph Smith III, the prophet's son: "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." He added that Aunt Patty Sessions "asserts that the girl was born within the time after your father was said to have taken the mother" (cited in Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 48 n3).

35. Nelson W. Green, *Fifteen Years Among the Mormons, Being the Narrative of Mrs. Mary Ettie V. Smith*, 2d. ed., (New York: Charles Scribner, 1859), 34; see Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 301-302, 437-39, and photograph of Oliver Buell showing his likeness to Joseph Smith, 306ff.

36. Besides Josephine Fisher (b. 8 Feb. 1844) and Oliver Buell, named as possible children of Joseph Smith by his plural wives are John R. Hancock (b. 19 Apr. 1841), George A. Lightner (b. 12 Mar. 1842), Orson W. Hyde (b. 9 Nov. 1843), Frank H. Hyde (b. 23 Jan 1845), Moroni Pratt (b. 7 Dec. 1844), and Zebulon Jacobs (b. 2 Jan. 1842). See Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 345; Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 44, 48-49 n3.

observed: "Spiritual wives, as we were then termed, were not very numerous in those days and a spiritual baby was a rarity indeed."³⁷

AN INVITATION FROM THE PROPHET TO MARRY PLURAL WIVES

Although he insisted that the practice of polygamy remain secret, Joseph Smith introduced his teaching regarding plural wives to thirty families of his close followers among the 15,000 Mormons living in and around Nauvoo.³⁸ When he denied from the pulpit having plural wives, at least 100 other polygamous adults sitting in the congregation knew about the secret doctrine.

How did Smith convert his followers to the practice of plural marriage? One of the clearest records of how Smith persuaded married men to take additional wives comes from the pen of William Clayton. An ardent believer in Smith and in the heavenly mandate for polygamy, Clayton had been baptized in Victorian England in 1837 during the first foreign Mormon mission; he himself served a mission to Manchester and migrated to Nauvoo in 1840. He seems to have been unaware of the earliest secret marriages; those dating from 1841 escaped mention in the meticulous diary he began in 1840.

By the time Clayton first mentions plural marriage in early 1843, he had been married to his legal wife Ruth for six years and had three children. Smith called at his home and invited Clayton for a walk, during which he said he had learned of a sister back in England to whom Clayton was "very much attached." Clayton acknowledged the friendship, but "nothing further than an attachment such as a brother and sister in the Church might rightfully entertain for each other." The prophet then suggested, "Why don't you send for her?" Clayton replied, "In the first place, I have no authority to send for her, and if I had, I have not the

37. Emily D. P. Young, "Autobiographical Sketch," quoted in Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 230. After Smith died, Emily became the wife of Brigham Young and by him bore a son whom she later carried across the Mississippi on her way to Winter Quarters. She later wrote: "While in Nauvoo I had kept my child secreted and but few knew I had one. But after I started on my journey it became publicly known and some have told me, years after that he was the handsomest child they ever saw. One woman told me she thought he was the smartest spiritual child she had ever seen. I said dont you think they are as smart as other children. She said no she did not think they were. There was a good deal of that spirit at that time and sometimes it was very oppressive" ("Incidents of the Early Life of Emily Dow Partridge," typescript, Western Americana, Marriott Library).

38. Jenson, "Plural Marriage," 219-40; Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 61, 77, 79, 85; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 139-80. George A. Smith estimated that prior to Joseph Smith's 12 July 1843 revelation on plural marriage only "one or two hundred persons" in Nauvoo knew that LDS leaders privately taught and practiced polygamy (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saint's Book Depot, 1854-86], 14:213, hereafter JD).

means to pay expenses." Smith answered, "I give you authority to send for her, and I will furnish you with means," which, according to Clayton, he did. Noting that this day in early 1843 was the first time the prophet had talked with him "on the subject of plural marriage," Clayton recalled the prophet's further sanction: "It is your privilege to have all the wives you want."³⁹

Following Smith's admonition, Clayton fully embraced plural marriage. Later in Utah he wrote: "I support a family of near forty persons on a salary of \$3,600 per annum and we live well, are well clothed and very comfortably situated. . . . I have six wives whom I support in comfort and happiness and am not afraid of another one. I have three children born to me during the year, and I don't fear a dozen more."⁴⁰ Clayton eventually married a total of ten women who bore him forty-seven children.

There were other polygamous husbands in Nauvoo besides the prophet and his private clerk. Smith urged that plural marriage was essential for the church, warning that "the church could not go on until that principal [sic] was established."⁴¹ Between April 5, 1841, and January 17, 1842, he took his first four officially recorded plural wives: Louisa Beaman, Zina D. Huntington, Prescindia L. Huntington, and Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner. Theodore Turley, Brigham Young, Jonathan Holmes, Reynolds Cahoon, and Heber C. Kimball each took one plural wife in 1842. Smith married fourteen more women that year, making a total of twenty-three plural wives he and his associates married by the end of 1842. On January 18, 1843, Willard Richards took the twenty-fourth plural wife. Other new polygamous husbands in 1843 included Thomas Bullock, William D. Huntington, Lorenzo Dow Young, Orson Pratt, Joseph Bates Noble, William Clayton, Orson Hyde, James Bird, Parley P. Pratt, James Adams, William Felshaw, Amasa Lyman, Hyrum Smith, Benjamin Mitchell, John Bair, Henry Lyman Cook, Ebenezer Richardson, John Taylor, and Edwin D. Woolley. In addition, Joseph Smith contributed fifteen more women to the total of forty-two new plural wives in 1843. In 1844, up to June 27 when the prophet was killed, Erastus Snow, John D. Lee, Ezra T. Benson, and Dominicus Carter became polygamists, and nineteen more plural wives in that half-year made a grand total of eighty-four plural marriages in the Nauvoo community while Smith was still alive.

39. "William Clayton's Testimony" (in Jenson, "Plural Marriage," 224-26).

40. Clayton letterbooks, 7 Nov. 1869, Marriott Library.

41. Joseph Smith to John Taylor in Nauvoo, between Mar. 1842 and Feb. 1846, Mary Isabella Hales Horne, "Autobiography," 10-11, Utah State Historical Society, hereafter USHS.

TABLE 1

Sequence of Nauvoo Plural Marriages, April 5, 1841-June 2, 1844

Husband	Wife	Date of Marriage
1. Joseph Smith	Louisa Beaman	Apr 5, 1841
2. Joseph Smith	Zina Diantha Huntington	Oct 27, 1841
3. Joseph Smith	Prescendia Lathrop Huntington	Dec 11, 1841
4. Joseph Smith	Mary Elizabeth Rollins (Lightner)	Jan 17, 1842
5. Theodore Turley	Mary Clift	Jan 1842
6. Joseph Smith	Patty Bartlett (Sessions)	Mar 9, 1842
7. Joseph Smith	Nancy Marinda Johnson (Hyde)	Apr 1842
8. Joseph Smith	Delcena Johnson	Early 1842
9. Brigham Young	Lucy Ann Decker	Jun 14, 1842
10. Joseph Smith	Eliza Roxcy Snow	Jun 29, 1842
11. Joseph Smith	Sarah Ann Whitney	Jul 27, 1842
12. Joseph Smith	Martha McBride (Knight)	Aug [3] 1842
13. Joseph Smith	Elvira Annie Cowles (Holmes)	1842
14. Joseph Smith	Sarah Bapson	1842
15. Joseph Smith	Agnes M. Coolbrith	1842
16. Joseph Smith	Elizabeth Davis (Brackenbury Durfee)	1842
17. Joseph Smith	Sally A. Fuller	1842
18. Joseph Smith	Desdemona W. Fullmer	1842
19. Joseph Smith	Sarah Kingsley	1842
20. Joseph Smith	Lucinda P. (Morgan Harris)	1842
21. Jonathan Holmes	Elvira Annie Cowles	Dec 1, 1842
22. Reynolds Cahoon	Lucina Roberts	1842
23. Heber C. Kimball	Sarah Peak	1842
24. Willard Richards	Sarah Longstroth	Jan 18, 1843
25. Thomas Bullock	Lucy C. Clayton	Jan 23, 1843
26. Wm D. Huntington	Harriet Clark	Feb 5, 1843
27. Joseph Smith	Ruth D. Vose (Sayers)	Feb 1843
28. Joseph Smith	Eliza Partridge	Mar 8, 1843
29. Lorenzo Dow Young	Harriet Page Wheeler	Mar 9, 1843
30. Orson Pratt	Charlotte Bishop	Mar 10, 1843
31. Joseph Smith	Almera Woodard Johnson	Apr [3] 1843
32. Joseph Bates Noble	Sarah B. Alley	Apr 5, 1843
33. William Clayton	Margaret Moon	Apr 27, 1843
34. Orson Hyde	Mary Ann Price	April 1843
35. Joseph Smith	Lucy Walker	May 1, 1843
36. James Bird	Sophia A. Fuller	May 5, 1843
37. Joseph Smith	Emily Partridge	May 11, 1843
38. Joseph Smith	Sarah Lawrence	May 11, 1843
39. Joseph Smith	Maria Lawrence	Spring 1843
40. Joseph Smith	Helen Mar Kimball	May 1843
41. Joseph Smith	Rhoda Richards	Jun 12, 1843
42. Parley P. Pratt	Elizabeth Brotherton	Jun 24, 1843
43. Joseph Bates Noble	Mary Ann Washburn	Jun 28, 1843
44. Joseph Smith	Flora Woodworth	Spring 1843
45. James Adams	Roxena Repshire	Jul 11, 1843
46. Orson Hyde	Martha Rebecca Browett	Jul 20, 1843
47. William Felshaw	Charlotte Walters	Jul 28, 1843
48. Amasa M. Lyman	Diontha Walker	July 1843

TABLE 1 (Continued)
 Sequence of Nauvoo Plural Marriages, April 5, 1841-June 2, 1844

Husband	Wife	Date of Marriage
49. Hyrum Smith	Mercy R. Fielding Thompson	Aug 11, 1843
50. Joseph Smith	Melissa Lott	Sep 20, 1843
51. Joseph Smith	Olive Grey Frost	Summer 1843
52. Joseph Smith	Hannah Ells	Summer 1843
53. Joseph Smith	Mary Ann Frost	Summer 1843
54. Benjamin Mitchell	Lovina Buckwater	Oct 10, 1843
55. John Bair	Lucinda T. Owen	Oct 19, 1843
56. Brigham Young	Augusta Adams	Nov 2, 1843
57. Brigham Young	Harriet Cook	Nov 2, 1843
58. Joseph Smith	Fanny Young (Murray)	Nov 2, 1843
59. Henry L. Cook	Lovina Thaves	Nov 5, 1843
60. Ebenezer Richardson	Polly Ann Child	Nov. 1843
61. John Taylor	Elizabeth Kaighan	Dec 12, 1843
62. Edwin D. Woolley	Louisa Gordon	1843
63. Edwin D. Woolley	Ellen Wilding	Dec 28, 1843
64. Hyrum Smith	Catherine Phillips	1843
65. Hyrum Smith	Lydia D. Granger	1843
66. John Taylor	Jane Ballentyne	Feb 25, 1844
67. Theodore Turley	Eliza Clift	Mar 6, 1844
68. Erastus Snow	Minerva White	Apr 2, 1844
69. John D. Lee	Rachel A. Woolsey	Apr 19, 1844
70. John D. Lee	Louisa Free	Apr 19, 1844
71. John D. Lee	Abigail S. Woolsey	Apr 19, 1844
72. Theodore Turley	Sarah Ellen Clift	Apr 26, 1844
73. Ezra T. Benson	Adeline B. Andrews	Apr 27, 1844
74. Brigham Young	Clarissa Decker	May 8, 1844
75. Dominicus Carter	Mary Durfee	Jun 2, 1844
76. Joseph Smith	Sylvia Porter Sessions	by 1844
77. Joseph Smith	Mary Houston	by 1844
78. Joseph Smith	Nancy Maria Winchester	by 1844
79. Joseph Smith	Sarah Scott	by 1844
80. Joseph Smith	Olive Andrews	by 1844
81. Joseph Smith	Jane Tippets	by 1844
82. Joseph Smith	Sophia Sanburn	by 1844
83. Joseph Smith	Phoebe Watrous (Woodworth)	by 1844
84. Joseph Smith	Vienna Jacques	by 1844

The thirty polygamous husbands from 1841 up to Joseph Smith's death on June 27, 1844, had married a total of 114 legal and plural wives, who had borne 132 children. These men averaged thirty-six years of age (range: 24-60) and had been married an average of ten years (1-32 years) before marrying a second wife of a mean twenty-five years of age (14-39 years). At that time, their legal wives averaged thirty-two years of age (22-56 years), four years younger than their husbands and seven years older than the first plural wife at the time of her marriage. At the time of

these first polygamous marriages, the nuclear family included an average of four pre-polygamous children (0-9). During the Nauvoo years, these families would grow to include an average of eight wives (2-43) and six children (1-17). In the post-Nauvoo years, these original thirty families would eventually accumulate an average of twelve wives (2-55) and twenty-seven children each (2-65). Without Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball—the three most-married men—these families averaged four wives and six children during the Nauvoo years, and ultimately eight wives and twenty-five children each.

The thirty early Nauvoo polygamists are listed below as of the dates they first took plural wives.

TABLE 2
Nauvoo Polygamists, 1841-44 (to June 27)

Name	Entered Polygamy	Prior Years Married	Pre-Polygamy Children	Eventual Children	Wives
1. Joseph Smith	Apr 5, 1841	14	5	5est.	43
2. Theodore Turley	Jan 1842	20	9	22	5
3. Brigham Young	Jun 14, 1842	8	4	50	55
4. Jonathan Holmes	Dec 1, 1842	5	2	7	3
5. Reynolds Cahoon	1842	32	7	10	3
6. Heber C. Kimball	1842	20	6	65	45
7. Willard Richards	Jan 18, 1843	4	1	27	14
8. Thomas Bullock	Jan 23, 1843	4	3	23	3
9. William D. Huntington	Feb 5, 1843	3	0	7	3
10. Lorenzo Dow Young	Mar 9, 1843	16	7	26	8
11. Orson Pratt	Mar 10, 1843	6	3	45	10
12. Joseph Bates Noble	Apr 5, 1843	8	5	31	11
13. William Clayton	Apr 27, 1843	6	3	47	10
14. Orson Hyde	April 1843	8	3	26	7
15. James Bird	May 5, 1843	11	5	7	3
16. Parley P. Pratt	Jun 24, 1843	6	3	32	11
17. James Adams	Jul 11, 1843	NA	NA	NA	2
18. William Felshaw	Jul 28, 1843	16	9	17	3
19. Amasa M. Lyman	Jul 1843	8	2	37	9
20. Hyrum Smith	Aug 11, 1843	5	2	2	4
21. Benjamin Mitchell	Oct 10, 1843	NA	NA	17	6
22. John Bair	Oct 19, 1843	14	7	30	6
23. Henry L. Cook	Nov 5, 1843	1	0	4	3
24. Ebenezer Richardson	Nov 1843	10	4	35	4
25. John Taylor	Dec 12, 1843	10	4	35	16
26. Edwin D. Woolley	1843	12	5	26	6
27. Erastus Snow	Apr 2, 1844	5	3	37	16
28. John D. Lee	Apr 19, 1844	10	6	52	19
29. Ezra T. Benson	Apr 27, 1844	12	5	34	8
30. Dominic Carter	Jun 2, 1844	5	1	40	8
Average		10	4	27	12

This brotherhood of Mormon polygamists was expanding at a rate which alarmed William Law, who had once been dedicated to Smith's ideals and remained a believer in Mormonism. Law had always been a sympathetic listener to Emma Smith's complaints about the practice. When he learned that secret plural marriages were being performed among Joseph Smith's inner circle of followers, Law tried to persuade Smith to stop. In a desperate attempt to convince the prophet, he reportedly threw his arms about Smith's neck and begged him to abandon his polygamous relationships.⁴² Smith responded by telling Law that God had commanded him to teach the doctrine of celestial marriage. God, he said, would condemn him if he did not obey.

We know what happened next. On June 7, 1844, the reformers published 1,000 copies of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, which claimed to be "rich with facts, such expositions, as make the guilty tremble and rage."⁴³ The newspaper asserted that Smith had "introduced false and damnable doctrines into the church" such as "the plurality of wives," which "are taught secretly, and denied openly" and amount to "abominations and whoredoms." It detailed how "many females in foreign climes" were attracted by promised "blessings" from Smith regarding "the will of the Lord concerning them," only to "meet brother Joseph, or some of the Twelve, at some insulated point. . . on the bank of the Mississippi" where they were requested to "never indulge what is [then] revealed to them, with a penalty of death attached. . . that she should be his (Joseph's) Spiritual wife."⁴⁴

The *Expositor* was intended to be a weekly reformist newspaper, but the first issue was its last. Following Smith's lead, according to William Clayton's journal, June 10, 1844, "The City Council passed a resolution declaring the Printing press on the hill 'a nuisance' and ordered it destroyed if not moved in 3 hours notice. About sundown the police gathered at the Temple and after organizing proceeded to the office and demolished the press and scattered the Type." So were events set into motion which resulted in charges of riot and treason, Smith's arrest by the governor of Illinois, and the prophet's death two weeks later.

In a letter to Smith's brother-in-law, William Law described Smith's death as an event in which "the wicked slay the wicked," and "the hand

42. "William Law," 66. Law was aware of the "doctrine. . . of Plurality and Community of wives" at least by 1 January 1844 (William Law diary, 1844, copy in private possession).

43. William Law diary, 7 June 1844.

44. The *Nauvoo Expositor* is available at some libraries, such as the New York Public Library, and at LDS archives. Similar penalty oaths were sworn to participants in Mormon temple ceremonies (see Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Evolution of the Mormon Temple Ceremony: 1842-1990* [Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990], 16-22).

of a blasphemed God. . .has taken sudden judgment."⁴⁵ Law recorded in his diary that the deaths of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum represented "the judgment of an offended god," that Joseph Smith "set the laws of god and men at defiance. He was naturally base, brutal and corrupt and cruel. He was one of the false prophets spoken of by Christ who would come in sheep's clothing but inwardly be a reveling wolf. . .but god stopped him in his career and gave him to his destroyers."⁴⁶

With such opposition to polygamy in the church itself, how could the Nauvoo community fail to connect the death of their leader with his secret marriages? Half of the 1,000 printed copies of the *Expositor*, expressing the complaints reformist Mormons shared about polygamy, had been mailed prior to the press's destruction. Yet church members believed the denials from their leaders, that charges of polygamy were untrue. All Mormons loyal to Smith then—and many devout Mormons today—believe that Smith died a martyr, murdered because of hostility from godless outsiders, the "mob." Brigham Young avoided mention of polygamy when he concluded, "They killed Joseph, and what for? For the Gospels' sake. It was for no evil for I was well acquainted with him. He testified to the truth and sealed his fate with his blood."⁴⁷

The account of Smith's assassination in the official *History of the Church* mentions his indictment on charges of polygamy but says nothing of Smith's having plural wives. Thomas Ford, Illinois governor in 1844, did list Smith's marital practices as one of the issues causing internal dissent but did not mention other Nauvoo polygamists.⁴⁸ Although some scholarly writing has linked polygamy in Nauvoo to Smith's death, studies of polygamy typically overlook Nauvoo and begin counting plural husbands and wives in 1852 when the practice was announced in Utah.⁴⁹ The recently published semi-official *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* tells different parts of the story in different sections, but does not in any

45. William Law to Isaac Hale, Nauvoo, Illinois, 20 July 1844, LDS archives.

46. William Law diary, 27 June 1844. The memory of Law's estrangement to Smith is preserved today in the restoration of historic Nauvoo where the foundations of Law's un-restored house remain visible in the grass across the street from Smith's "Red Brick Store," in which some of the plural marriage ceremonies took place.

47. JD 18:361 (6 May 1877).

48. Thomas Ford, *History of Illinois*, 2 vols. (Chicago: S. C. Griggs, 1854), 2:166-76. Ford listed the following causes of antagonism toward the Mormons: Mormon violations of freedom of the press, their religious views, polygamy, their military strength, rumors of their intent to destroy the Warsaw Sentinel, Mormon alliance with Indians, Joseph Smith being crowned "king," revival of Danite vigilante bands, Mormon assertions that God had consecrated all their neighbors' property to the Saints, and their bloc voting (Mormon approval required for election).

49. Several studies rely on Danel Bachman's "Not Lawful to Utter—An Examination of Historical Evidence for the Mormon Practice of Polygamy Before June 27, 1844," Aug. 1971, privately circulated. Bachman refers to Fawn Brodie's landmark research of diaries,

one place draw together Smith, his wives, the spread of the practice to other men during his lifetime, and the internal dissent over the practice which led to his death.⁵⁰

PERSONAL ACCOUNTS OF NAUVOO POLYGAMY

The Nauvoo temple was the centerpiece of the physical and social arrangements of Nauvoo polygamy. Sarah Rich wrote of the temple

letters, and affidavits which demonstrate the extent of Smith's plural marriages in app. C of *No Man Knows My History*. Each of these studies in turn relies upon Jenson's "Plural Marriage."

Lawrence Foster's *Religion and Sexuality* is rich in anecdotal description of Smith's polygamy but only mentions that "most Mormon leaders had taken at most two to three additional wives," citing D. Michael Quinn's Yale University Ph.D. dissertation, "The Mormon Hierarchy, 1832-1932: An American Elite," 1976. James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), mention polygamy in the 1830s, Smith's first recorded plural marriage in 1841, his teachings to close associates, and their being "sealed" to additional wives. However, they do not say anyone actually practiced polygamy: It is "not clear whether Joseph Smith lived as husband with any of his plural wives" (171).

Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), observes that Smith had taken several plural wives by 1842 and that he taught his most loyal friends. The Mormon dissent, which got Smith charged with adultery and polygamy, is described in detail. Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Knopf, 1979), mention polygamy in the 1830s and that Smith "had formed several plural relationships before the 1843 revelation," and recognized that he "may have sired in polygamy several children whose identities were obscured by their being raised under other surnames" (197). Polygamy is described as a "clandestine arrangement, limited to the prophet and two to three dozen of the leading men and the wives," but few are actually mentioned (199). The reformists are seen as a "small group of Mormon dissidents" who published "inflammatory allegations about the sex lives of Mormon leaders" (77-78).

Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), does connect Smith's destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, a dissident, anti-polygamous press, with his arrest and martyrdom. Although "many of the other church leaders eventually married additional wives," (6) no Nauvoo marriages are included in her calculations, which begin in 1852.

Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, relates evidence that many of Joseph Smith's secret plural wives ignited internal opposition to polygamy, which led to the prophet's arrest and death. But the story then moves quickly to the public announcement of polygamy in 1852 and its practice in Utah. Although the author is aware that "church leaders were secretly practicing polygamy long before it was publicly admitted," he makes no suggestion that over 150 polygamous husbands and 550 plural wives were involved in the secret practice in Nauvoo that would later include 940 wives and 2,885 children as part of these original Nauvoo polygamous families.

50. *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1991). The "History of the Church" (612) and "Social and Cultural History" (1,378) entries omit mention of actual practice of polygamy; "Plural Marriage" (1,091) and "Joseph Smith" (1,337) entries make limited mention of polygamy but refrain from discussing the extent of the practice, especially in Nauvoo.

work she and her husband, Charles, did during the wave of marriages in January and February 1846: "We were to be there at seven in the morning and remain until the work was done at ten or twelve o'clock at night if necessary. So we got a good girl Mary Philips a wife of my husband to stay and take care of the children and we helped in the house of the Lord."⁵¹

The "pecking order" among plural wives often determined how much control they had over family life. As in a complex mating dance, first wives not only directed households but also frequently chose subsequent wives. George A. Smith's first wife, Bathsheba Bigler, recalled: "I had since the Prophet's martyrdom, like Sarah of old, given to my husband five wives."⁵² Jane Snyder Richards told western historian Matilda Bancroft of placing a young woman as a housekeeper in a home: "In the course of a few months she married the master of the house; and the two wives had two daughters with but twelve days difference in their ages."⁵³ In a slightly different way, Adelia Kimball assumed control of her marital choice: after obtaining Vilate's consent to marry Heber C. Kimball, she "concluded to become his wife."⁵⁴

Although later journals and memoirs kept by members of leading polygamous families in Utah include references to Brigham Young's Beehive House, Heber Kimball's "Big House" with its "Girls' Parlor" and separate rooms for each wife, William Clayton's "Big House," and the Richardses' spacious two-story dwelling, these more comfortable living arrangements differed from conditions in Nauvoo, where families lived in secrecy and, as they faced intensifying persecution, anticipated leaving town. Emily Partridge Smith wrote: "Times were not then as they are now in 1877." She recalled that at the time of Smith's death she was living at the Coolidge home, and later, though remarried to Amasa Lyman, she lived with her mother before moving in with Lyman and his first wife.⁵⁵ Plural wives sometimes worked as servants in the home of the first wife, often hiding the special relationship they had with the man of the house. They had to disguise their pregnancies from citizens who had not been let in on the secret doctrine, and accept their contempt for "loose women" when babies were born apparently out of wedlock. Plural wives were frowned on by some legal wives who knew about the doctrine and feared that Smith might ask their husbands to practice it.

51. Rich, "Autobiography," 66-67, LDS archives.

52. Bathsheba Smith, "Autobiography," 13, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

53. Jane Snyder Richards, "The Inner Facts of Social Life in Utah," 1880, 15, Bancroft Library.

54. Adelia Kimball, "Memoirs," 17, USHS.

55. Emily Dow Partridge Young, "Incidents."

CONVINCED BY FAITH, AUTHORITY, AND PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES

Plural wives entered polygamy with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Prescinda Huntington, third recorded plural wife of Joseph Smith, wrote late in life that

in 1841 I entered into the New Everlasting Covenant—was sealed to Joseph Smith the Prophet and Seer, and to the best of my ability I have honored plural marriage, never speaking one word against the principle. I have been the mother of nine children—seven sons and two daughters, two by my last husband—Heber Chase Kimball. Never in my life, in this kingdom, which is 44 years, have I doubted the truth of this great work.⁵⁶

However, some women had to struggle to accommodate their sensibilities to the radical new teaching they believed they must obey. Caroline Rogers Daniels, Nauvoo divorcee, married polygamist Abraham Owen Smoot because “[i]t was necessary for my salvation and exaltation.”⁵⁷ Adelia Almira Wilcox Hatton Woods chose church leader Heber C. Kimball because she desired to marry a man who could not only “save himself, but also me.”⁵⁸ Bathsheba Smith was convinced by “a revelation from God and having a fixed determination to attain to Celestial Glory, I felt to embrace every principle, and that it was for my husband’s exaltation that he should obey the revelation on plural marriage in order to attain to kingdoms, thrones, principalities and powers, firmly believing that I should participate with him in all his blessings, glory and honor.”⁵⁹

Plural wife Sarah Studeviant Leavitt of Nauvoo recalled when “[i]t was whispered in my ear by a friend that the authorities were getting more wives than one,” she reasoned that “the Anointed of the Lord would not get more wives unless they were commanded to do so. . . . I have seen so much wrong connected with this ordinance that had I not had it revealed to me from Him that cannot lie I should sometimes have doubted the truth of it.”⁶⁰ Mercy Rachel Fielding Thompson, widow of one of Joseph Smith’s secretaries, wrote, “On the 11 of August 1843 I was called by direct revelation from Heaven through Brother Joseph Smith the Patriarch” to join her sister and become the plural wife of his brother Hyrum. Persuaded by the authority and character of Joseph Smith, she explained that she was “convinced that it was appointed by him who is too wise to err and too good to be unkind.”⁶¹

56. Prescinda Lathrop Huntington Smith Kimball, “Autobiographical Sketch,” 1 Apr. 1881, LDS archives.

57. Caroline Rogers Daniels, “Autobiography,” in Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 328.

58. Adelia Kimball, “Memoirs,” 17.

59. Bathsheba Smith, “Autobiography,” 13.

60. Sarah S. Leavitt, “Autobiography,” 22-23, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

61. Mercy Rachel Fielding Thompson Smith, “Autobiography,” n.d., LDS archives.

Eliza Maria Partridge Smith Lyman, who with her sister Emily "went to live in the family of the prophet Joseph Smith. . . about three years," wrote that "this was truly a great trial for me but I had the most implicit confidence in him as a Prophet of the Lord and [could] not but believe his word and as a matter of course accept of the privilege of being sealed to him as a wife."⁶² Sarah Dearmon Pea Rich said,

when my husband and myself had this doctrine explained and taught to us in its true light by those that had a right to teach it we both saw the propriety of the same and believed it to be true and [essential] to our future glory and exaltation hereafter we accepted the same and like old Sarah of old Joseph had in that temple given to my husband four other wives which were sealed to him in that temple by the holy order of god by one having authority to do the same.⁶³

Some plural wives told of advantages they found for themselves in polygamy. Jane Snyder Richards wrote of how faithfully Elizabeth McFate, her husband's new wife, took care of her while she was recovering from a miscarriage.⁶⁴ Although she expressed difficulties when her husband took another wife, Mary Horne found she could "work out her individual character separate from her husband." She felt "freer" and able to "do herself individually things she could never have attempted before."⁶⁵ Lucy Walker, who was on intimate terms with Smith's other wives, the Partridge and Lawrence sisters, experienced "less room for jealousy when wives live under the same roof." She said, "Instead of a feeling of jealousy [plural marriage] was a source of comfort to us."⁶⁶

DIFFICULTIES FOR PLURAL WIVES

At times women wrote frankly about their difficulties with polygamy. For Mary Horne, "Celestial marriage" was "one of the ordinances of the house of God," but she felt that "no one can ever feel the fullweight of the curse till she enters into polygamy." She accepted this "great trial" because "her religion demanded it."⁶⁷ Lucy Walker Kimball regarded polygamy as "a grand school" to "learn self control, self denial."⁶⁸ Mary Ellen Kimball recorded Heber C. Kimball's analogy that

62. Eliza Maria Partridge Lyman, "Life and Journal of Eliza Maria Partridge Lyman," 1877, 13, Marriott Library.

63. Rich, "Autobiography," 68.

64. Jane Snyder Richards, "Reminiscences," 1880, 19, Bancroft Library.

65. Horne, "Autobiography," 22.

66. Lucy Walker Smith Kimball, "Autobiographical Statement," 6-7, Bancroft Library.

67. Horne, "Autobiography," 22.

68. Lucy Walker Smith Kimball, "Autobiographical Statement," 8.

plural marriage should be like a dish of water into which he puts a quart and his wives each put in a pint. She grasped the essence: “[S]o you see our will swallowed up in his will.”⁶⁹

The dilution of a woman’s will, an image which would offend twentieth-century feminist sensibilities, extended to the subjugation of wives by polygamous husbands. Eventually husband to forty-five wives, Heber C. Kimball wrote that wives should be “in subjection to their husbands.” He preached, “I am subject to my God, my wife is in subjection to me and will reverence me in my place and I will make her happy.”⁷⁰ Kimball justified this dominance of women with the view that man was primary in a creation which only secondarily came up with a woman for man to use:

The man was created, and God gave him dominions over the whole earth, but he saw that he never could multiply, and replenish the earth, without a woman. And he made one and gave her to him. He did not make the man for the woman; but the woman for the man, and it is just as unlawful for you to rise up and rebel against your husband, as it would be for man to rebel against God.⁷¹

Other polygamous Nauvoo husbands affirmed their authority over women. Amasa Lyman, who eventually married eight wives, lectured to the priesthood holders in the Nauvoo temple: “A man becomes responsible for his own conduct, and that of his wife. . .we want the man to remember that he has covenanted to keep the law of God, and the Woman to obey her husband.”⁷² George A. Smith, then husband to six wives, agreed that “the woman ought to be in subjection to the man, be careful to guard against loud laughter, against whispering, levity, talebearing.”⁷³ And Brigham Young, who married fifty-five women, wrote that “woman will never get back, unless she follows the man back. . .the man must love his God and the woman must love her husband.”⁷⁴

Martha Spence Heywood expressed the stoic attitude that some Mormon women took toward the difficult role of plural wife: “I tried to recognize the hand of the Lord in all of this for the perfecting of my character.”⁷⁵

People of both genders expressed anguish over polygamy. Nauvoo polygamist Joseph Fielding wrote in the 1840s and 1850s of dissent in the Mormon community: “This is my greatest trial, and I think there is more

69. Mary Ellen Kimball, *Journal*, n.d., LDS archives.

70. “Nauvoo Temple Record,” 21 Dec. 1845, in Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 222.

71. William Clayton diary, 21 Dec. 1845, in Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 227.

72. *Ibid.*, 225-26.

73. *Ibid.*, 225.

74. *Ibid.*, 28 Dec. 1845, 239.

75. Martha Spence Heywood diary, 74, USHS.

trouble on the Subject of Plurality of Wives than anything else. . . [it] appears in general to have given great Offence to the Wife. . . some of the best of our Sisters are tyransed [sic] over by some of the meanest." He bemoaned that "My Wives have not spoken to each other for many Months."⁷⁶ Patty Sessions, plural wife to Joseph Smith as well as the first wife of "Mr. Sessions," spoke of her husband's preference for another wife: "I feel very bad. . . he took [Harriet] to the farm with him [and] leaves me here alone."⁷⁷ Victoria Hancock Jackson, a granddaughter of Levi W. Hancock, resented that "[s]ome men neglected present wives with children and were captivated by a younger face."⁷⁸ Emeline B. Wells spoke of being "tortured" by her husband's inattention: "O if my husband could only love me even a little and not seem to be perfectly indifferent."⁷⁹ Adelia Almera Wilcox Hatton Wood Kimball left her first plural marriage because her husband's first wife considered a plural wife to be "nothing more than a concubine," and Adelia felt that she and her children were "looked upon as intruders."⁸⁰ Jane Richards spoke of feeling "like wringing the neck of any other child than hers that should call her husband papa."⁸¹

REJECTION

There were women who could not easily be persuaded to endorse the doctrine of plural marriage. Emily M. Austin, whose sister married polygamist Newell Knight, escaped to Ohio to avoid this "horrible" practice.⁸² Rachel Ridgway Ivins Grant, mother of future LDS president Heber J. Grant, refused even to meet with Joseph Smith, reportedly saying that she would "sooner go to hell as a virtuous woman than to heaven as a whore."⁸³

The prophet faced rejection more than once. In the spring of 1842, Smith told Sarah Pratt, wife of Apostle Orson Pratt, that the Lord wanted him to take her as his "spiritual wife." Sarah refused Smith's offer and

76. Joseph Fielding, Journal (1832-59), 178, LDS archives; see also Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 106-107.

77. Patty Sessions, Journal, 61, 63, USHS.

78. Victoria Hancock Jackson, Journal, in Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 172.

79. Judith R. Dushku and Patricia R. Gadsby, "'I Have Risen Triumphant': A Personal View of Emmeline B. Wells," ca. 1977, 12, USHS.

80. Adelia Kimball, "Memoirs," 15, 17.

81. Jane Snyder Richards, "Inner Facts," 2.

82. Emily M. Austin, "Autobiography," in Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 15.

83. Ronald W. Walker, "The Continuing Legacy of the Feminine Ideal," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Autumn 1982): 109. A decade later in Salt Lake City, Rachel married the deceased prophet Joseph Smith by proxy and became the seventh wife of Jedediah M. Grant "for time only" (111).

eventually exposed him to her husband. When he confronted Smith, Orson Pratt was excommunicated, but he was reinstated five months later. After Smith's death, Pratt himself took plural wives and he became the primary apologist for plural marriage when it was officially announced in Utah in 1852. Sarah ultimately left both Orson and the church; she labeled polygamy the "direst curse" which "completely demoralizes good men, and makes bad men correspondingly worse. As for the women," she wrote, "well, God help them."⁸⁴

When Smith proposed in April 1842 to Nancy Rigdon, daughter of his close friend and counselor, Sidney Rigdon, he reportedly took her into a room, "locked the door, and then stated to her that he had had an affection for her for several years, and wished that she should be his." Nancy refused him, saying she would only marry a single man. The following day Smith explained in a letter to her: "That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another." He added, "Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof." She remained unconvinced.⁸⁵

Any discussion of resistance to polygamy is incomplete if it does not mention Emma Smith's reluctance to accept co-wives. Joseph's plural marriage revelation went so far as to threaten her with destruction if she did not comply. She responded by reportedly throwing the written revelation into the fire. After Joseph Smith died, she consistently denied that her husband had ever practiced polygamy. According to Lucy Meserve Smith, Emma "bore testimony to me that Mormonism was true as it came forth from the servant of the Lord Joseph Smith but said she the Twelve had made bogus of it. She said they were living with their [plural] wives and raising children and Joseph never taught any such doctrine."⁸⁶ Eventually, Emma Smith allowed the majority of Mormons under the leadership of Brigham Young to migrate west without her. She later became a member of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, headed by her son, Joseph Smith III.

84. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 29-36, 98-100.

85. Ebenezer Robinson, "Items of Personal History of the Editor," *The Return* (Davis City, Iowa, 1889-90); *Sangamo Journal*, 19 Aug. 1842; "The Letter of the Prophet, Joseph Smith to Miss Nancy Rigdon," Joseph Smith Collection, LDS archives; HC 5:134-36.

86. After hearing of this denial of plural marriage, Lucy's husband, Apostle George A. Smith, said "Emma knows better." He told of visiting the prophet as he had finished helping Emma deliver the child of one of his plural wives. Finding Joseph "out on the porch with a basin of water washing his hands," George A. "said to him what is up, said Joseph one of my wives has just been confined and Emma was midwife and I have been assisting her. He said she had granied [delivered] a number of women for him. This is word as I had it from brother G. A. Smith" (Lucy Meserve Smith statement, n.d., LDS archives).

SECRECY

Considering the explosive nature of what was taking place, Nauvoo polygamy was surprisingly well-concealed. The words of the early polygamists convey Joseph Smith's need for secrecy. Lucy Walker said that Joseph "lived in constant fear of being betrayed."⁸⁷ Jane Richards explained that when Joseph Smith had taken some more wives a few months previous to his death, he received a "revelation in regard to polygamy," which required that he "should do it without publicity this time" because "mob spirit was already quite excited."⁸⁸ Thus polygamy was made known only to "a few trusted ones," according to Mary Horne's account: "At first the brethren and sisters were so averse to it that it could scarcely be mentioned."⁸⁹ Joseph Lee Robinson tells the story of Smith saying in Nauvoo that if "I should reveal the things that God has revealed to me, there are some on this stand that would cut my throat or take my hearts blood."⁹⁰ Nancy Tracy recalled that Smith taught the "Celestial Order of Marriage" only to "a few that could bear it."⁹¹

Evidently, one such person was Ebenezer Robinson, who recalled that the "doctrine of spiritual wives" was "talked privately in the church in Nauvoo, in 1841" but he was not invited to participate until 1843. Hyrum Smith "instructed me in Nov or Dec 1843 to make a selection of some young woman and he would seal her to me, and I should take her home," he recalled, "and if she should have an offspring give out word that she had a husband, an Elder, who had gone on a foreign mission." Possibly referring to a secluded birthplace, or conceivably to abortion, Robinson spoke of "a place appointed in Iowa, 12 or 18 miles from Nauvoo to send female vic[t]ims to his polygamous births."⁹²

Motifs of caution and danger recur in the stories of early polygamy. When the pregnancy of William Clayton's first plural wife threatened to expose them, the prophet advised Clayton to "just keep her at home and brook it and if they raise trouble about it and bring you before me I will give you an awful scourging and probably cut you off from the church and then I will baptize you and set you ahead as good as ever."⁹³

87. Diary of Lucy Walker Kimball, 7.

88. Jane Snyder Richards, "Reminiscences," 18.

89. Horne, "Autobiography," 10.

90. Joseph Lee Robinson, "Autobiography and Journal," 24, LDS archives.

91. "A Sketch of the Life of Nancy Naomi Tracy," n.d., 20, USHS.

92. Ebenezer Robinson to Jason W. Briggs, 28 Jan. 1880, LDS archives. On 29 December 1873, Ebenezer and Angeline Robinson signed an affidavit saying that Hyrum Smith had come to their house in the fall of 1843 to teach them the doctrine of polygamy and that he had been wrong to oppose it.

93. William Clayton diary, 19 Oct. 1843.

According to church historian Andrew Jenson, Sarah Ann Whitney became the seventh plural wife of Joseph Smith, and the story of Smith's marriage to her illustrates another strategy. She disguised her relationship to the prophet by pretending to marry Joseph Corodon Kingsbury on April 29, 1843. In his autobiography, Kingsbury wrote: "I according to Pres. Joseph Smith & Council & others agreed to stand by Sarah Ann Whitney as though I was supposed to be her husband and [participated in] a pretended marriage for the purpose of. . .[b]ringing about the purposes of God in these last days." Three weeks later, while in hiding, Joseph Smith wrote a revealing letter addressed to her parents, Newel and Elizabeth Whitney, inviting them to bring their daughter to visit him "just back of Brother Hyrums farm." He advised Brother Whitney to "come a little a head and nock [sic] at the south East corner of the house at the window." He assured them, especially Sarah Ann, that "it is the will of God that you should comfort me now." He stressed the need for care "to find out when Emma comes," but "when she is not here, there is the most perfect safty [sic]." The prophet warned them to "burn this letter as soon as you read it" and "keep all locked up in your breasts." In closing he admonished, "I think Emma won't come to night if she dont[,] dont fail to come to night."⁹⁴ In 1845-46, after now-widowed Sarah Ann went to live with Heber C. Kimball, "her husband for time," Kingsbury, married his own plural wives.⁹⁵

Most of Smith's plural wives boarded with other families, whom he visited periodically. His secretary, William Clayton, recorded one such visit to young Almera Johnson on May 16, 1843: "Prest. Joseph and I went to B[enjamin] F. Johnsons to sleep." Johnson himself later noted that on this visit Smith stayed with Almera "as man and wife" and "occupied the same room and bed with my sister, that the previous month he had occupied with the daughter of the late Bishop Partridge as his wife." Almera Johnson also confirmed her secret marriage to Joseph Smith: "I lived with the prophet Joseph as his wife and he visited me at the home of my brother Benjamin F."⁹⁶

After the destruction of the *Expositor* and the death of their leader, most rank-and-file Mormons did not find out about the doctrine of polygamy until the winter of 1845-46. John D. Lee wrote that "in the Winter of 1845 meetings were held all over the city of Nauvoo" to teach "celes-

94. Joseph Smith to Newel K. Whitney family, 18 Aug. 1842, photocopy, George Albert Smith papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library. Joseph had recently married Sarah Ann Whitney on 27 July 1842.

95. "History of Joseph Kingsbury, Written by His Own Hand, 1846, 1849, 1850," Stanley Snow Ivins Collection, 15:74-76, USHS.

96. Jenson, "Plural Marriage," 222; Johnson to Gibbs; Joseph F. Smith Jr., *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1905), 70-71.

tial marriage." He tells a fascinating tale of who married whom, of partner exchanges and trades, and stresses that "plural marriages were not made public. They had to be kept still. A young man did not know when he was talking to a single woman."⁹⁷ Making the same point from a woman's perspective, Eliza Maria Partridge Smith Lyman wrote that "a woman living in polygamy dared not let it be known."⁹⁸ Jane Richards speaks of the winter of 1845-46 as the time when polygamy was first presented to the Mormon community at large: "During the winter and previous to the company starting [February 1846], Mr. Richards took his second wife, Elizabeth McFate [on January 31, 1846]. Polygamy was now made known to us for the first time, and while the majority of the church were made acquainted with the doctrine, it was only practically entered into by a few."⁹⁹

The memories of Jane Richards reveal a personal culture of privacy among women. Leonora Cannon Taylor, hearing that Jane Richards's life in polygamy was going "not very well," advised her, "you have too much pride and grit to let any of your domestic trials be known to the world." Mrs. Richards passed on this "code of silence" to a younger woman, telling her that "as long as she had lived in polygamy she had never spoken to any one of her troubles or allowed that she had any trials."¹⁰⁰

NAUVOO POLYGAMY AFTER JOSEPH SMITH'S DEATH

While the journals and personal writings tell a complex human story, numbers give depth to the picture. After Joseph Smith's death, the number of plural marriages in Nauvoo began to increase rapidly. In the fall of 1844, Brigham Young took ten wives, Heber C. Kimball, nine, Parley P. Pratt, three; William Clayton, Isaac Morley, and George A. Smith each took a pair of wives. Of the sixty plural marriages in 1844, forty-one (two-thirds) took place after Joseph Smith died, seven to former wives of the prophet. Many of Smith's wives were married "for time" to other men, such as Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, twenty-two during 1844-46 in Nauvoo. (They continued to be sealed "for eternity" to the dead prophet.)

Plural marriages accelerated even more in winter 1845-46, after the temple opened on December 10 and it became clear that the westward

97. As an example of dispersing plural wives to pretend monogamy, Lee noted that "as far as Brigham Young was concerned, he had no wives at his house, except his first wife, or the one that he said was his first wife. Many a night have I gone with him, arm in arm, and guarded him while he spent an hour or two with his young brides, then guarded him home" (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], chap. 14).

98. Eliza Maria Partridge Lyman, "Life and Journal," 13.

99. Jane Snyder Richards, "Reminiscences," 19.

100. Jane Snyder Richards, "Inner Facts," 17-18.

migration would actually take place. Brigham Young urged priesthood-holders to take plural wives during their brief use of the newly opened temple. Heber C. Kimball, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Samuel Bent, John Bernhisel, Alpheus Cutler, John Smith, Peter Hawes, Willard Richards, Amasa Lyman, Joseph Coolidge, Winslow Farr, George A. Smith, Newel K. Whitney, and Cornelius Lott led the way with a total of 117 wives. By this time, Smith's "inner circle" of thirty polygamous husbands had broadened to include over 150 men.

Forty of the 153 Nauvoo polygamous husbands married sisters, six before Joseph Smith's death, twenty after his death in Nauvoo, and the rest after the migration to Utah. Ultimately about one-third of Nauvoo's polygamous families included sister-wives. It was probably easier for a woman to share a husband with a sister than with a stranger. Mormons may also have seen a precedent in the Levirate marriages mandated in the Torah, where a brother had special rights and obligations to father a first-born son for his deceased brother's widow.¹⁰¹

In most sister-marriages, there were two sibling wives. William Clayton's first plural wife (April 27, 1843), like those of many polygamists, was his legal wife's sister, Margaret Moon. When he asked Joseph Smith in 1843 for permission to marry a third Moon sister, Lydia, Smith replied that he had just received a revelation that forbade a man from taking more than two sisters of a family. Smith then asked Clayton to petition Lydia in his favor to become one of his own plural wives.¹⁰² The marriage data indicates, however, that this proscription against more than two sister-wives was not always heeded.

For whatever reason—to provide for women during the difficult journey, to ensure a growing population in the West, or to fulfill Joseph Smith's new marital doctrine—there were fifty-five Nauvoo polygamous marriages in 1845, and 252 in 1846, primarily in January and February, up to the time when the pioneer camp began to cross the Mississippi River. During this winter of celestial marriages, Heber C. Kimball took twenty-four wives; Brigham Young, twenty-one; John Taylor and Samuel Bent, eight; Willard Richards and John Smith, seven; John Bernhisel, Alpheus Cutler, and Newel K. Whitney, six; Amasa Lyman, five; Joseph Coolidge, Winslow Farr, Peter Hawes, Cornelius Lott, and George A. Smith, four; Benjamin Covey, Eli Kelsey, John D. Lee, William Miller, John Pack, William Smith, Guy Wilson, Clark, Whitney, and Joseph Young, three each; John Bair, William Blackhurst, Rufus Beech, John Butler, Simeon Carter, Benjamin Clapp, Frederick Cox, Charles Dana,

101. James R. Baker, *Women's Rights in Old Testament Times* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 51, 142-43, 147, 151-53.

102. William Clayton diary, 15 Sept. 1843.

George Dykes, David Fullmer, Alfred Hadden, Edward Hunter, Joel Johnson, Asahel Lathrop, Isaac Morley, John Parker, W. W. Phelps, Orson Pratt, Parley Pratt, Charles C. Rich, Samuel Russell, William Sagers, David Sessions, Abraham Smoot, Erastus Snow, Lorenzo Snow, Allen Weeks, and Thomas Woolsey each took two; and some seventy other husbands added one more wife to their families. About 80 percent of Nauvoo plural marriages occurred after Smith's death. By the end of the Nauvoo period in 1846, the 153 polygamous husbands had married 587 women and produced 738 children.

TABLE 3
Polygamous Marriages by Nauvoo Husbands

Husbands	Total Nauvoo Wives*	Years						
		1841	1842	1843	To June 27, 1844	After June 27, 1844	1845	1846
Smith, Joseph	43	3	15	15	9est.	—	—	—
Young, Brigham	40	0	1	2	1	10	4	21
Kimball, Heber C.	37	0	1	0	0	9	5	21
Taylor, John	11	0	0	1	1	0	0	8
Bent, Samuel	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Lee, John D.	10	0	0	0	3	1	2	3
Richards, Willard	9	0	0	1	0	0	2	5
Lyman, Amasa	8	0	0	1	0	1	0	5
Smith, George A.	8	0	0	0	0	2	3	2
Smith, John	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Whitney, Newell K.	8	0	0	0	0	1	0	6
Bernhisel, John	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Cutler, Alpheus	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Pratt, Parley P.	7	0	0	1	0	3	1	1
Snow, Lorenzo	6	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
Clayton, William	5	0	0	1	0	2	1	0
Coolidge, Joseph	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Farr, Winslow	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Hawes, Peter	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Lott, Cornelius	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Morley, Isaac	5	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Pratt, Orson	5	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Rich, Charles C.	5	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Smith, William	5	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
Turley, Theodore	5	0	1	0	2	1	0	0
Bair, John	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Butler, John	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Covey, Benjamin	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Kelsey, Eli	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Miller, William	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Pack, John	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Smith, Hyrum	4	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Snow, Erastus	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Wilson, Guy C.	4	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Young, Joseph	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3

Over the six years when polygamy was practiced in Nauvoo, 1841-46, Smith, Kimball, and Young were the most-married men in Nauvoo; they accounted, in fact, for 117 of the 432 Nauvoo polygamous marriages, over one-fourth of the marriages by the community of 153 polygamous husbands. After Nauvoo, Brigham Young married fifteen more wives and Heber C. Kimball married eight. At the funeral of his wife, Vilate, Kimball, pointing to the coffin, Heber C. Kimball said: "There lies a woman who has given me forty-four wives."¹⁰³

Joseph Smith's pattern of marriages differed from that of his followers. He married approximately forty-three women, but his plural wives usually lived apart in separate households or, in the case of working girls in the Smith home, were soon forced by Emma to leave. Emma's opposition to Joseph's plural wives, and perhaps his regard for them as one-time participants in a brief relationship (albeit followed by eternal marriage), may account for this unusual pattern. His followers, on the other hand, tended to marry fewer wives and formed more coherent families. Twenty-one of the thirty polygamous families during Joseph Smith's time contained just two wives, four men had three, John D. Lee, Hyrum Smith, and Theodore Turley had four, and Brigham Young had five wives. As the number of polygamous families increased from thirty to 153 in the later Nauvoo period following Smith's death, so did the number of wives per typical family, from an average of 2.5 (3.8 if Joseph Smith's forty-three wives are included) in the early period when Smith

TABLE 4
Incidence of Nauvoo Plural Marriage of the Most-Married Men

	Year							Cumulative
	1841	1842	1843	1844 (to 6/27)	1844 (after 6/27)	1845	1846	
Total Nauvoo	3	20	42	19	39	56	255	434
Smith	3	15	15	9	0	0	0	42
Kimball	0	1	0	0	9	5	21	36
Young	0	1	2	1	11	4	20	39
Total Marriages by S, K, and Y	3 (100%)	17 (85%)	17 (40%)	10 (53%)	20 (50%)	9 (16%)	41 (16%)	117 (27%)
Total Marriages less S, K, and Y	0	3	25	9	19	47	214	317

103. Orson F. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball, an Apostle: The Father and Founder of the British Mission* (Salt Lake City: Kimball Family, 1888), 436n. Whitney affirms that Kimball was the husband of forty-five wives and father of sixty-five children.

was alive, to 3.1 for the whole Nauvoo period (3.7 including Smith's forty-three, Brigham Young's forty, and Heber C. Kimball's thirty-seven). There were seventy-eight Nauvoo families with two wives, forty families had three wives; ten families had four wives, ten families had five wives; twelve families had six to eleven wives; and one family each, the cumulative households of Kimball, Young, and Smith, had thirty-seven, forty, and forty-three wives.¹⁰⁴

TABLE 5
Incidence of Polygamous Families by Number of Wives.

A. During Joseph Smith's Lifetime			
Number of Wives	Polygamous Families	Total Marriages	Average Wives per Family
43	1	43	
5	1	5	
4	3	12	
3	4	12	
2	21	42	
Total	30	114	3.8
Excl. Joseph Smith	29	71	2.5
B. During Entire Nauvoo Period			
Number of Wives	Polygamous Families	Marriages	Average Wives per Family
43 (Smith)	1	43	
40 (Kimball)	1	40	
37 (Young)	1	37	
11	1	11	
10	2	20	
9	1	9	
8	4	32	
7	3	21	
6	1	6	
5	10	50	
4	10	40	
3	40	126	
2	78	152	
Total	153	587	3.8
Exc. S, K, Y	150	467	3.1

104. An interesting narrative of William Hickman's ten marriages in Nauvoo is contained in Hope A. Hilton, *"Wild Bill" Hickman and the Mormon Frontier* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988).

During the years after the westward migration—considering post-Nauvoo children of Nauvoo wives and later wives of these Nauvoo families, and their children—the 153 families who began practicing plural marriage in Nauvoo eventually accounted for a total of 974 wives and over 2,800 children, a mean incidence of 6.4 wives and 18.5 children per each family. Excluding the large families of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball, the ultimate size of these Nauvoo families averaged 5.5 wives and 18.0 children per household. After the Nauvoo polygamists reached the Great Salt Lake, the total of Nauvoo families with two wives declined from seventy-eight to sixteen; thirty-three families each had three wives; 91 families had from four to ten wives; and one to four families each had eleven to nineteen wives.

LEGACY OF NAUVOO PLURAL MARRIAGE

These preliminary demographic observations indicate that the practice of plural marriage, which Joseph Smith initiated among thirty families, more than quintupled for these families in total number of participants—husbands, wives, and children—by the end of the Nauvoo period in 1846. Afterward, these polygamous Nauvoo families nearly tripled in size from the end of the Nauvoo period to the later Salt Lake period. It is clear from these data that Nauvoo provided the model and impetus for the later practice of polygamy in the west. These Nauvoo roots of Mormon polygamy eventually encompassed thousands of people, and the practice expanded in Utah territory to include tens of thousands of men, women, and children, involving over half the population of some Mormon communities.¹⁰⁶

TABLE 6
Nauvoo Polygamous Families¹⁰⁵

	During Joseph Smith's Life	Total Nauvoo Period	Eventual Nauvoo Families in West
Husbands	30	153	153
Wives	114	587	971
Children	131	734	2,790
Total Persons	275	1,474	3,914

105. A detailed, annotated table of these 153 Nauvoo polygamous families, listing husbands, wives, marriage ages, and family size over time, can be found in Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 1994): 37-72.

106. By 1880, at the end of the Brigham Young era and before federal raids on polygamous households, about 33 percent of Mormons in the St. George stake and 67 percent in Orderville, Utah, lived in polygamous families (Lowell "Ben" Bennion, "The Incidence of

The discovery and rejection of this relatively unknown doctrine by a vocal minority seems to have been one of the primary factors leading to Joseph Smith's death. One historian concludes: "Joseph Smith's belief in, preaching about and practice of plural marriage must be considered as one of the factors precipitating the martyrdom."¹⁰⁷

Rejection of plural marriage was also one of the elements dividing the church after Smith's death. Until recently, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) never wholly accepted the idea that Smith practiced polygamy. Early RLDS leaders believed that Smith, in the last weeks before his death, told several people that his plural marriage revelation had been a mistake: "We are a ruined people. This doctrine of polygamy, or spiritual wife system, that has been taught and practiced among us, will prove our destruction and overthrow. I have been deceived. . . it is wrong; it is a curse to mankind, and we shall have to leave the United States soon, unless it can be put down."¹⁰⁸ After Smith was killed, Brigham Young pushed completion of the Nauvoo temple and accelerated plural marriages, and indeed, the Mormons were soon compelled to leave the United States for Mexico (the Great Salt Lake Valley). Later, when polygamy was outlawed as a condition for statehood, Mormons who wanted to maintain their polygamous families again had to flee to Mexico (now below the Rio Grande), where remnants of these expatriate colonies still exist. Many polygamists who persisted in their belief in the divine sanction of their practice remained in the

Mormon Polygamy in 1880: 'Dixie' Versus Davis Stake," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 [1984]: 27-42). Stanley S. Ivins found that a sample of 1,651 families in Utah produced an average of fifteen children per family. He also found that of 1,784 polygamists, 66 percent married one extra wife, 21 percent married three wives, nearly 7 percent four wives, and 6 percent five or more wives. Applying these ratios to an 1890 census of 2,451 plural families, we arrive at an estimate of 45,416 persons involved in polygamy.

2,451 families x 15 children = 36,765 children

2,451 families x 66% x 2 = 3,235 wives

x 21% x 3 = 1,544

x 7% x 4 = 686

x 6% x 5 = 735

Total = 6,200 wives

2,451 husbands + 6,200 wives + 36,765 children = 45,416 total

See Ivins's "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 35 (Fall 1967): 311, 313-14, 318. Current research into this subject may produce more definitive statistics which are beyond the scope of this essay.

107. Bachman, "Not Lawful to Utter," 45.

108. Recalled by William Marks in a letter to *Zion's Harbinger and Beneemy's Organ*, July 1853. Although the Council of the Twelve rejected it, Marks's account did fit the outcome of plural marriage in Nauvoo.

United States. Reported to number in the tens of thousands, these “Fundamentalist” Mormons have endured years of government prosecution and official LDS censure.

What do LDS people today think about polygamy in the early Nauvoo church? Since that period was enshrouded with secrecy and denials, and the practice was not announced until 1852 from a new home in the Great Salt Lake Valley, Nauvoo polygamy has remained a mystery. The prophet’s mother concluded that Joseph Smith taught plural marriage but that we have no knowledge that anyone practiced it until the later Salt Lake period under Brigham Young.¹⁰⁹ Not even the relationship between Nauvoo polygamy and the internal Mormon dissent which led to the prophet’s arrest and assassination is clearly recognized. Latter-day Saints tend to identify reports of Nauvoo polygamy with anti-Mormon propaganda, which is considered to be based on unfounded rumors of Joseph Smith’s illicit marriages. The community of 153 polygamous husbands, 585 plural wives, and 738 children has remained beneath the horizon of perception.

Yet these 153 families, which would themselves grow to include 4,000 people after the westward migration, provided the model for the approximately 50,000 who would eventually be associated with Mormon polygamous families in Utah. Many Latter-day Saints—especially those with polygamous ancestors—take pride in the faithful men and women who practiced plural marriage long ago. Even though LDS men take just one legal wife today, many devout Mormons still believe in the “principle” and may be sealed to more than one woman for eternity. The Mormon church’s present doctrine of celestial marriage—which includes the promise of plural marriage in the afterlife, and the current practice of plural marriage among Fundamentalist Mormons, are the legacies of Joseph Smith’s revelation sanctioning Nauvoo polygamy as a “new and everlasting covenant.”

109. Lucy Mack Smith, preliminary manuscript of biography of Joseph Smith, 1845.