

Summary of Joseph Smith's Plural Marriages

Prior to his death on June 27, 1844, Joseph had been married to perhaps thirty-five women. He took his first plural wife, Fanny Alger, in Kirtland and then apparently waited several years until settling in Nauvoo to reintroduce the practice. On April 5, 1841, he was sealed to Louisa Beaman for time and eternity. Joseph contracted a number of eternity-only sealings with women who were civilly married until February 1842, after which most sealings were for time and eternity. There is no record of any additional sealings after November 2, 1843.

JOSEPH SMITH'S PLURAL WIVES AND PROBABLE TYPES OF SEALINGS

Wife	Sealing Date	Year	Probable Sealing Type			Legal Husband	Involved Sexuality
			Time Only	Time and Eternity	Eternity Only		
1. Fanny Alger	1835–1836						Possible Yes
2. Louisa Beaman	April 5	1841		X			
3. Zina Huntington	Oct.				X	Henry B. Jacobs	
4. Presendia Huntington	Dec. 11				X	Norman Buell	
5. Agnes Coolbrith	Jan. 6	1842	X			[widow]	
6. Mary Elizabeth Rollins	Feb.				X	Adam Lightner	
7. Patty Bartlett	March 9				X	David Sessions	
8. Marinda Nancy Johnson	April				X	Orson Hyde	
9. Delcena Johnson	<July		X				
10. Eliza R. Snow	June 29			X			Possible
11. Sarah Ann Whitney	July 27			X		[Joseph Kingsbury]	Possible
12. Martha McBride	Aug.		X				
13. Sylvia Sessions	Early	1843		X		[Windsor Lyon]	Yes
14. Ruth Vose	Feb.				X	Edward Sayers	
15. Flora Ann Woodworth	Spring			X			

16. Emily Dow Partridge	March 4	X			Yes
17. Eliza Maria Partridge	March 8	X			Yes
18. Almera Johnson	April	X			Yes
19. Lucy Walker	May 1	X			Yes
20. Sarah Lawrence	May	X			Yes
21. Maria Lawrence	May	X			Yes
22. Helen Mar Kimball	May	X			
23. Hannah Ells	mid year	X			Possible
24. Elivira Annie Cowles	June 1		X	Jonathan Holmes	
25. Rhoda Richards	June 12		X		
26. Desdemona Fullmer	July	X			
27. Olive G. Frost	Summer	X			Yes
28. Malissa Lott	Sept. 20	X			Yes
29. Fanny Young	Nov. 2		X		
30. Lucinda Pendleton	Unknown		X	George Harris	
31. Nancy Winchester			X		
32. Elizabeth Davis		X		Jabez Durfee	
33. Sarah Kingsley		X		John Cleveland	
34. Esther Dutcher		X		Albert Smith	
35. Mary Heron			Possible	[John Snider]	Possible

Biographical Sketches

“Nothing but a firm desire to keep the commandments of the Lord could have induced a girl to marry in that way. I thought my trials were very severe in this line.”

—Eliza Partridge

Emma’s personal struggles with plural marriage and post-martyrdom history are well known, but those of the remaining wives are less so. Secretly practicing plural marriage in Nauvoo was not an easy path for them to walk. It was not only a new and difficult principle to practice but also contrary to the established social and religious conventions of the day. Neighbors whispered, Emma sometimes rebelled, and non-Mormons persecuted.

Joseph’s death was unexpected. Some had looked forward to moving west after the completion of the temple where they could live openly as Joseph’s plural wives. Then, perhaps, some of their struggles would cease. That hope was permanently extinguished with the martyrdom, though. One can imagine that while grieving the death of Joseph they also worried about what would become of them.

Though their trials were not over, it is doubtful they realized how much their lives would be scrutinized more than a hundred years after their deaths. Nor did they likely anticipate that their silence on things they felt were sacred and private would enable critics to make assumptions based on recorded slurs and secondary attestations. These were real women; it would be a shame if their legacy were reduced to names on a chart under the label “Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives.” The stories of their lives involve much more than the activities of the short period of time they were married to Joseph Smith.

Fortunately we can piece together some of the details of their experiences through government, Church and family records, personal journals, autobiographies, contemporary publications, and the transcript of the Temple Lot case. When reading these stories, one gets a glimpse of early plural marriage through the eyes of those who actually practiced it. Some share their struggle accepting the principle, and some record manifestations they received of its truthfulness. A few discuss the intense fear they had that their relationship would be discovered. Regarding several other wives, the record is silent, and we are left to wonder.

The accounts of these women before, during, and after their marriages to Joseph show the courage, tenacity, and faith they possessed. Certainly this

strength of character helped them transition to the next stage of their lives. Hopefully sharing their stories will elevate them from mere names on a page or caricatures of critics to real people facing real life while trying to remain true to their God. Many of these women kept journals and wrote autobiographies. We encourage readers to seek out those resources after reviewing these brief snippets from their lives to learn more about these intriguing women.

Agnes Moulton Coolbrith (Sealed January 6, 1842)



Born on July 9, 1808, Agnes Moulton Coolbrith was the third of eight children. After joining the Church in Boston on June 26, 1832, she traveled to Ohio. There she met and married Don Carlos Smith, youngest brother of the Prophet. Even though she was eight years his senior, they fell in love and wed on July 30, 1835. Two years later on May 7, they left for Missouri where they stayed until February 1839. By November Don Carlos and Agnes were situated in Nauvoo. Unfortunately, he passed away on August 7, 1841, from malaria; he was only twenty-five years old.¹

Five months later, Joseph was sealed to Agnes. Brigham Young's journal for January 6, 1842, records: "I was taken in to the lodge J Smith *was Agnes*" (*italics added*).² The word "was" probably stands for "wed and sealed." Whether it was for time only, eternity only, or time and eternity is unknown. Some have conjectured that Joseph's marriage to her was to approximate the Old Testament Levirate marriage custom where a man marries his brother's widow to raise up seed to him. Deuteronomy 25:5 states: "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her." However, Agnes had a child with Don Carlos, so it is unclear if this would apply.

An 1892 account from Mary Ann West, who lived with Agnes in Nauvoo after Don Carlos's death, states: "She [Agnes] told me herself she was [married to Joseph Smith]. . . . She said it was the wish of her husband, Don Carlos that she should marry him [Joseph]."³ After Joseph's death, Agnes married William Pickett, a Church member. Pickett left the Church and moved with Agnes to California. There they no longer identified themselves as Latter-day Saints.

In 1876, just months before her death, Agnes was visited by David and Alexander Smith, sons of Joseph Smith, who were on a missionary journey promoting their anti-polygamist RLDS religion. They were undoubtedly surprised by what Aunt Agnes had to say regarding their father's plural marriages. Lucy Walker visited Ina Coolbrith, Agnes's daughter, eight years later and was warmly received. Concerning the visit, Lucy wrote:

I had a very pleasant visit at Oakland, [California] with Ina, who received me with much tenderness and affection. . . . From her, I learned many things I was glad to know, one fact was, that her mother bore testimony to the "Boys" [David and Alexander Smith] in regard to the faith and teachings of their Father and told them that what they had seen, and heard in Salt Lake was Truth, that those women were their Father's wives, and it was useless to

promulgate falsehood to the world, and advised them to desist. They pretended not to believe, but she could plainly see they were stung with the truth of her testimony.

David seemed struck dumb, astounded at the living testimony of so many—What could their object [could] be! Alexander said he would not take any bodys word – not even Aunt Agnes. Jos. [Joseph Smith, III] would not talk on the subject. After they left [they] sent Ina what purported to be the “History of their Father with their Mother’s dying testimony—and desired her to place them in the Library—She wrote them She could not with the knowledge She had—that they were false.”⁴

Although Agnes Coolbrith had separated herself physically from the Utah Church by moving to California and had apparently lost faith in the restored gospel, she remained in contact with various Church members throughout her life. When her nephews, RLDS missionaries, came teaching Joseph Smith was not a polygamist, Agnes directly challenged their testimony by recalling earlier events in her own life. Reportedly, her last words were “O! what a dupe I have been; what a dupe I have been!”⁵ Agnes’s daughter interpreted this as referring to her association with Mormonism, but Agnes’s nephew Joseph F. Smith believed it a reference to her marriage to William Pickett and her separation from the Church.

Almera Woodard Johnson (Sealed April 1843)



Courtesy Todd Compton

Almera Woodard Johnson was born October 12, 1812, in Westfield, Vermont, the daughter of Ezekiel Johnson and Julia Hills. She moved to Kirtland, Ohio, in 1833 with her family where she, her siblings, and mother were baptized two years later.

Benjamin F. Johnson, Almera's brother, who was a close friend of the Prophet, remembered: "In talking with my mother . . . he [Joseph Smith] told her that when the Lord required him to move in plural marriage, that his first thought

was to come and ask her for some of her daughters; and I can now understand that the period alluded to was at Kirtland, where she had three unmarried daughters at home.”⁶ Almera was one of those “three unmarried daughters,” but her introduction to plural marriage occurred seven years later through the assistance of her brother Benjamin who later wrote:

On the first day of April A.D. (1843,) eighteen hundred and forty-three, President Joseph Smith, Orson Hyde, and William Clayton and others came from Nauvoo to my residence in Macedonia or Ramus in Hancock Co. Illinois, and were joyfully welcomed by myself and family as our guests.

On the following morning, Sunday April second, President Smith took me by the arm for a walk, leading the way to a secluded spot within an adjacent grove, where to my great surprise, he commenced to open up to me the principle of plural or celestial marriage, but I was more astonished by his asking for my sister Almera to be his wife.

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

He wished me to see my sister and talk to her,—I told him, I did not know what I could say to convince her, he replied, “when you open your mouth, you shall be able to comprehend, and you shall not want for evidence nor words.”. . . I called my sister to private audience and with fear and trembling, and feelings that I cannot express commenced to open the Subject to her, when, just as he had promised, the light of the Lord Shone upon my understanding and my tongue was loosed and I at least was convinced of the truth of what I was attempting to teach.

My sister received my testimony, and in a short time afterwards consented to become the wife of President Smith.

Subsequent to this I took her to the City of Nauvoo, where she was married or Sealed for time and eternity to President Joseph Smith, by his brother Hyrum, in the presence of myself, and Louisa Beaman who told me She had also been Sealed or married to the Prophet Joseph.⁷

Several recollections validate the existence of the marriage. In 1883, Almera W. Johnson provided this account:

That in the years 1842 and 1843, I resided most of the time at Macedonia, in the County of Hancock, State of Illinois, sometimes with my sister who was the wife of Almon W. Babbitt, and sometimes with my brother Benjamin F. Johnson. During that time the Prophet Joseph Smith taught me the principle of Celestial Marriage including plurality of wives and asked me to become his wife. He first spoke to me on this subject at the house of my brother Benjamin F. I also lived a portion of the time at Brother Joseph Smith's in Nauvoo, when many conversations passed between him and myself on this subject. On a certain occasion in the spring of the year 1843, the exact date <of> which I do not now recollect, I went from Macedonia to Nauvoo to visit another of my sisters, the one who was the widow of Lyman R. Sherman, deceased, at which time I was sealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith. At the time this took place Hyrum Smith, Joseph's brother, came to me and said, I need not be afraid. I had been fearing and doubting about the principle and so had he, but he now knew it was true. After this time I lived with the Prophet Joseph Smith as his wife, and he visited me at the home of my brother Benjamin F. at Macedonia.⁸

Andrew Jenson recorded that Almera Johnson

removed to Nauvoo, where she was married to the Prophet Joseph Smith. . . . The ceremony was performed by Elder William Clayton at the house of Almera's sister, Mrs. Delcena D. Sherman. Patriarch Hyrum Smith was present and remarked at the time to Sister Almera, 'The Lord has revealed the principle of plural marriage to me, and I know for myself that it is true. I will have you for a sister[-in-law], and you shall be blest.'⁹

Benjamin Johnson also recorded:

The Prophet with Louisa <Beeman> and my Sister Delcena, had it agreeable arranged with Sister Almara and after a little instruction, She Stood by the Prophets Side and was Sealed to him as a wife by Brother Clayton. After which the Prophet asked me to take my Sister to occupy Room No 10 in his Mansion home dureing her Stay in the City. But as I could not long be absent from my home & Business We Soon Returned to Ramus, whare on the 15th of May Some three weeks later the Prophet again Came and at my house ocupied the Same Room & Bed with my Sister.¹⁰

After the martyrdom, Almera married Reuben Barton, and together they had five children. The couple divorced in 1860, and Almera migrated to Utah, settling in Parowan. She died March 4, 1896, a faithful member of the Church.

Delcena Didamia Johnson (Sealed Prior to July 1842)



Courtesy of Todd Compton.

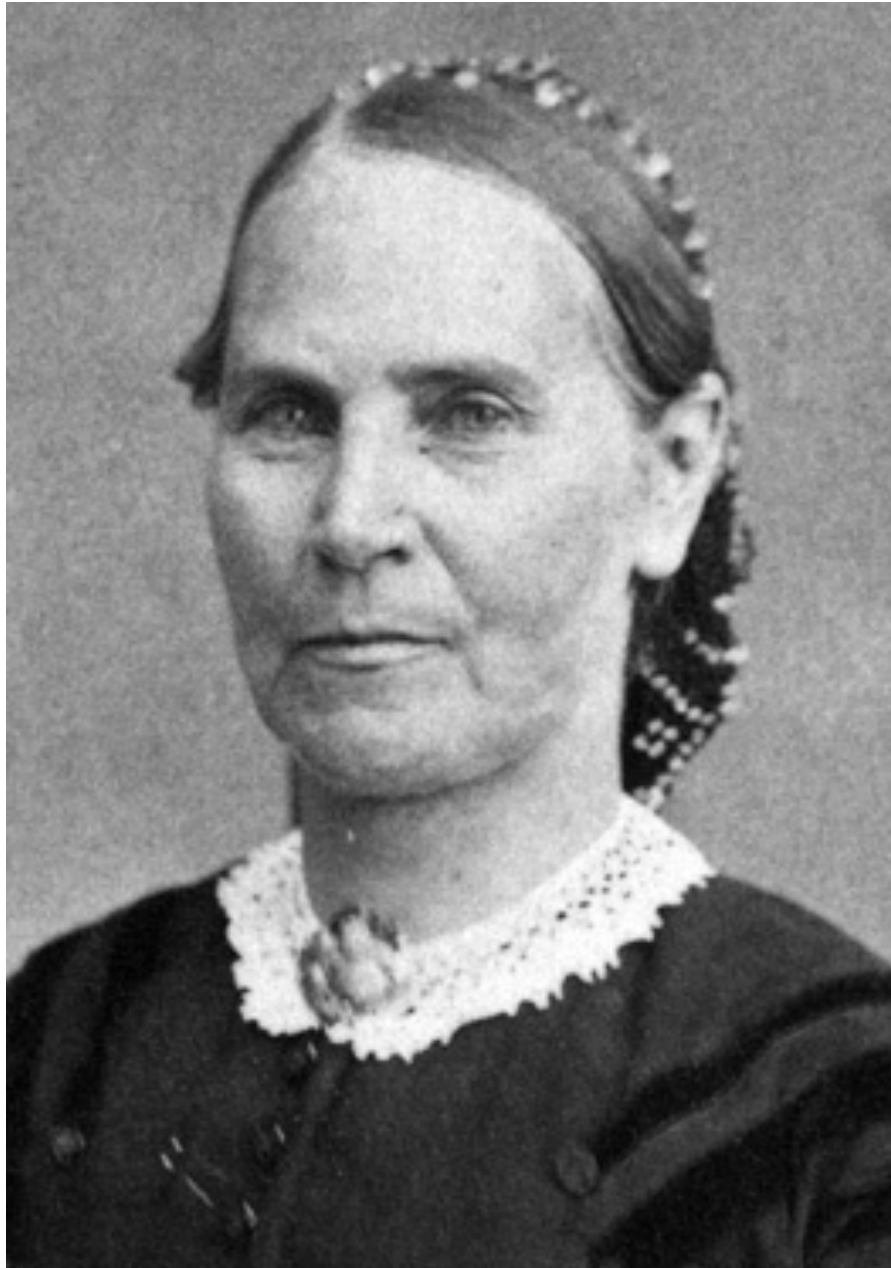
Delcena Diamia Johnson, Almera's older sister, was born November 19, 1806, in Westfield, Vermont, to Ezekiel Johnson and Julia Hills Johnson. She married Lyman Royal Sherman on January 16, 1829. She and her husband, along with others of her family, were converted to the Church in January 1832. The Shermans moved to Kirtland, Ohio, probably in June 1833 and boarded with Mrs. Julia Johnson and family where they resided until 1838. Lyman Sherman, a

close friend of the Prophet, died in early 1839 in Far West, Missouri.

Delcena left no record of her relationship with Joseph. Benjamin F. Johnson, her brother, mentioned in his journal that: “The marriage of my eldest sister to the Prophet was before my return to Nauvoo [on July 1, 1842], and it being tacitly admitted, I asked no questions.”¹¹ Delcena was married to Joseph Smith for time and was later sealed for eternity to Lyman Sherman by proxy in the Nauvoo temple. Joseph’s plural widows were given a choice to whom they would be sealed in the Nauvoo temple. Delcena’s choice of her deceased husband supports the idea that sealings to high Church leaders was not then viewed as being superior to sealings to worthy legal husbands.

Delcena Johnson died October 21, 1854, in Salt Lake City, Utah, an active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Desdemona Fullmer (Sealed July 1843)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

On October 6, 1809, Desdemona Fullmer was born to Peter Fullmer and Susannah Zerfass in Huntingon, Pennsylvania. The Fullmer family settled south of Cleveland, Ohio, in 1835, and Desdemona was converted and baptized two years later. Desdemona moved to Nauvoo, and according to the Nauvoo 4th Ward records, was living in Joseph Smith's home in the spring of 1842.

Desdemona married Joseph Smith in July 1843.¹² She gave this brief account

of her sealing: “Having been convinced of the truth of polygamy I therefore entered into the order but I dared not make it known not even to my parents for I was forbidden by the Prophet for it would endanger the life of Joseph and also many of the Saints.”¹³ She also reported a night vision in which an angel told her that the polygamy doctrine was true.¹⁴

At the time Joseph Smith taught Desdemona about plural marriage, she remembered Hyrum expressed his suspicions:

After I left [moved out of] brother Joseph’s house, Sister Hyrum Smith [Mary Fielding Smith] wanted me to come for the winter with her to work tailoring as that is trade. And while I was living at their house, Hyrum had by some way learned something about polygamy. So one evening while the family of us were sitting around the fire he said to me, “I will ask you a fair question, will you answer me?” “Yes sir Brother Hyrum” [I said]. He said, “Supposing Brother Joseph would say to you that he had a revelation from God that it was right for him to have another wife besides Emma, would you believe it was of God?”¹⁵

Perhaps caught off guard by Hyrum’s direct methods, Desdemona quickly recovered by asking Hyrum if he believed Joseph Smith was a prophet. He answered, “Yes.” Then she gave her opinion that since Joseph is a prophet, she cannot pick and choose which revelations she will believe. There the conversation ended. The next morning: “He [Hyrum] made mention of the subject in the following words said he: ‘If I knew that any or thought that any women in his house believed in such doctrine as polygamy, I would kick them 40 rods from his house and follow them and kick them still further.’ Soon after that I made tracks not feeling it safe to stay there any longer and went to another place to live.”¹⁶

That she would fear her safety even from Joseph’s brother is somewhat surprising, yet it is an indicator of the revulsion felt by even some of Joseph’s staunchest supporters to the idea of plural marriage. Even devout members struggled accepting the practice, thus requiring absolute secrecy on the part of pluralists.

On May 26, 1843, William Clayton recorded, “Hyrum received the doctrine of priesthood.”¹⁷ Shortly after his change of heart, Hyrum returned to Desdemona, whom he had earlier threatened:

Afterwards Brothers Joseph and Hyrum came a long and called there. And Brother Hyrum wanted to talk with me and said, “Do you remember how I talked when [you were] at my Home?” “Yes Sir I do.” He said, “Now I have

come to make it right with you. I hurt your feelings I ask your forgiveness and where I have said anything against the doctrine of polygamy in public or in private, I must take it all back for the Lord has shown unto me that I was wrong and that Joseph was right.” Then he (Hyrum) preached to me and exhorted me much and said that I had done God service and for me to hold on to the faith that was taught me by Joseph and much more he said to me on the subject that I cannot write.¹⁸

She kept her word and remained true to her testimony, to Joseph Smith, and to the Church. Desdemona migrated to Utah with the Saints and died in 1886, a lifelong member.

Eliza Partridge (Sealed March 4, 1843 and May 11, 1843)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Eliza Maria Partridge, born on April 20, 1821, was the eldest child of Edward Partridge and Lydia Clisbee. In late 1830, missionary Parley P. Pratt visited the Partridges, then living in Kirtland, Ohio, and gave them a copy of the Book of Mormon. Edward traveled to New York to investigate the Church further and was baptized one of the newest members of the Church on December 11, 1830. On February 4, 1831, Edward was called to be the first bishop in the Church and

later baptized his children. The Partridges migrated to Missouri and endured the hardships of the first Church members who settled there. They moved to Nauvoo in January 1839, living in a tent until a log cabin could be built. Unfortunately Edward died unexpectedly on May 27, 1840, leaving the family fatherless. Eliza and Emily then went to live in the Prophet's home.

Unlike her sister Emily, Eliza wrote little regarding her plural marriage to the Prophet. In 1869 she signed four affidavits attesting to her sealings and her witnessing two other plural marriages.¹⁹ In fact, she only briefly mentioned her own sealing in her 1877 autobiography:

After a time my sister Emily and myself went to live in the family of the Prophet Joseph Smith. We lived there about three years. While there he taught to us the plan of Celestial marriage and asked us to enter into that order with him. This was truly a great trial for me, but I had the most implicit confidence in him as a Prophet of the Lord and not but believe his word and as a matter of course accept of the privilege of being sealed to him as a wife for time and all eternity. We were sealed in 1843 by Heber C. Kimball in presence of witnesses. I continue to live in his family for a length of time after this.

Times were not then as they are now in 1877 but a woman living in polygamy dare not let it be known and *nothing but a firm desire to keep the commandments of the Lord could have induced a girl to marry in that way*. I thought my trials were very severe in this line, and I am often led to wonder how it was that a person of my temperament could get along with it and not rebel. But I know it was the Lord who kept me from opposing his plans, although in my heart I felt I could not submit to them. But I did, and I am thankful to my Heavenly Father for the care he had over me in those troublous times.²⁰

In contrast to several other plural wives, Eliza admits that at the time of ^{her} sealing, she had no personal witness of the need to enter plurality but instead relied upon her testimony of the prophetic role of Joseph Smith. She also recounted a common theme: her own severe trials associated with living plural marriage.

Two references from Benjamin F. Johnson indicate this marriage was consummated, though no pregnancies resulted. In 1903 Johnson wrote: "The first plural wife brought to my house with whom the Prophet stayed, was Eliza Partridge."²¹ A year later Benjamin penned a letter to the *Deseret News*: "I saw one of my sisters married to him [Joseph Smith] and know that with her he occupied my house on May 16 and 17, 1843, which he had occupied with Eliza Partridge, another plural wife, on the 2nd of the previous month."²²

Emma eventually sent the Partridge sisters away from the Nauvoo Mansion. The precise month of their departure is not known, but it would have been after August 31, 1843, when the Smith family moved into the Mansion house and most likely after October.

After Joseph's death, Eliza Partridge married Amasa Lyman, who was also married to her sister Caroline, and immigrated to Utah. Eliza died in 1886, a faithful member of the Church.

Eliza R. Snow (Sealed June 29, 1842)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Eliza Roxcy Snow, the most widely known of Joseph Smith's plural wives, was born on January 21, 1804, to Oliver and Rosetta Pettibone Snow. Though she first met the Prophet in the winter of 1831–1832, she did not join the Church until April 5, 1835. In December of that year, she moved to Kirtland, Ohio, where she boarded with the Smith family, taught their children, and became well acquainted with Fanny Alger. In April 1838, her father led his family to Missouri where they stayed until the following March. They then moved to Illinois with some of the family living in Warren County (north of Nauvoo) and others moving to Lima, thirty miles south. When the Nauvoo Relief Society was organized on March 17, 1842, Eliza was chosen as secretary, a probable acknowledgement of her scholastic abilities and her closeness to Emma Smith, the society's first president.

The details of her introduction to plural marriage by Joseph Smith are unavailable. However, Eliza recalled:

When first plural marriage was suggested to me . . . I would not listen to the matter. The idea was repugnant, abhorrent. I was like any other young woman who had beaux and suitors for her hand. I wanted to share a husband with no woman. But I was told it was God's command, and I went to God and asked God to enlighten me, and he did. I saw and felt that plural marriage was not only right, but that it was the only true manner of living up to the gospels and I quenched my womanly emotions and entered the order.²³

She further explained that it wasn't until Nauvoo that she learned polygamy would eventually be introduced to the general Church membership:

In Nauvoo I first understood that the practice of plurality of wives was to be introduced into the church. The subject was very repugnant to my feelings—so directly was it in opposition to my educated prepossessions, that it seemed as though all the prejudices of my ancestors for generations past congregated around me: But when I reflected that I was living in the Dispensation of the fulness of times, embracing all other Dispensations, surely Plural Marriage must necessarily be included, and I consoled myself with the idea that it was far in the distance, and beyond the period of my mortal existence. It was not long however, after I received the first intimation, before the announcement reach me that the “set time” had come—that God had commanded his servants to establish the order, by taking additional wives—I knew that God . . . was speaking. . . . As I increased in knowledge concerning the principle and design

of Plural Marriage, I grew in love with it. . . .

I was sealed to the Prophet, Joseph Smith, for time and eternity, in accordance with the Celestial Law of Marriage which God has revealed—the ceremony being performed by a servant of the Most High—authorized to officiate in sacred ordinances. This, one of the most important circumstances of my life, I have never had cause to regret.²⁴

Eliza boarded at the Homestead in Nauvoo with the Smith family for almost six months (August 14, 1842 to February 11, 1843). Afterwards she went to live with the Jonathan Holmes family. In 1887 a newspaper reporter interviewed Eliza concerning the secrecy surrounding her sealing: “She lived in the same cottage with another lady [Elvira Cowles Holmes] for two years after she had been sealed, but said not a word to her friend and neighbor. At last Joseph told her one day that she might talk with her neighbor on the subject, and then for the first time she revealed her connection with plural-marriage. ‘We women kept secrets in those days,’ she added.”²⁵ Eliza’s ability to keep her marriage to Joseph Smith concealed from her cottage-mate seems to indicate that any visits to see her would have been sporadic and would not have included any physical dimension that could have been observed.

Eliza began her diary on the date of her plural sealing to Joseph Smith. In a reflective entry, hints are given of her recent plural marriage:

This is a day of much interest to my feelings. Reflecting on past occurrences, a variety of thoughts have presented themselves to my mind with regard to events which have chased each other in rapid succession in the scenery of human life.

As an individual, I have not passed altogether unnoticed by change, in reference to present circumstances and future prospects . . . though I rejoice in the blessing of the society of the saints, and the approbation of God; a lonely feeling will steal over me before I am aware, while I am contemplating the present state of society—the powers of darkness, and the prejudices of the human mind which stand arrayed like an impregnable barrier against the work of God. While these thoughts were revolving in my mind, the heavens became shadowed with clouds and a heavy shower of rain and hail ensued, and I exclaimed “O God, is it not enough that we have the prepossessions of mankind—their prejudices and their hatred to contend with; but must we also stand amid the rage of elements?” I concluded within myself that the period might not be far distant, that will require faith to do so; but the grace of God is sufficient, therefore I will not fear. I will put my trust in Him who is mighty to save; rejoicing in his goodness and determined to live by every word that

proceedeth out of his mouth.²⁶

In 1872, Eliza shared her convictions concerning plural marriage to a Relief Society in Payson, Utah: “Plurality of Wives is a great trial. If you want to sit in the courts of Heaven honor, don’t suffer your lips to say ought even if you do not believe in it. When I entered it I had no anticipation of ever being acknowledged as a lawful wife. I believed in it because I felt the work was true, and I longed to see a Prophet. I feel proud that I ever embraced it.”²⁷

Eliza died December 5, 1887, while serving as the second President of the Relief Society. She was undoubtedly the most reknown woman in the Utah Territory at that time.

Elizabeth Davis (Sealing Date Unknown)

Elizabeth Davis, one of Joseph’s older sealed wives, was born to Gilbert Davis and Abigail Reeves on March 11, 1791. At the age of 40, she joined the Church, and two years later the twice-widowed Elizabeth married Jabez Durfee on March 3, 1834. Casting their lot with the Saints, they moved to Missouri and later Nauvoo.

Details of Joseph Smith’s sealing to Elizabeth Davis Durfee are unknown, but it was likely an eternity-only sealing. Elizabeth’s legal husband, Jabez Durfee, was an active Latter-day Saint, so why she chose the Prophet rather than Jabez as her eternal husband is unclear. It appears that the couple experienced some marital turmoil before the sealing or perhaps as a consequence of it. Jabez was endowed on a different day than Elizabeth when the Nauvoo Temple opened in the winter of 1845,²⁸ and Elizabeth was resealed by proxy to Joseph Smith on January 22, 1846, but Jabez did not participate either as a proxy husband or witness. Cornelius Lott represented the Prophet in the vicarious ordinance.²⁹ Jabez and Elizabeth formally separated later that year.

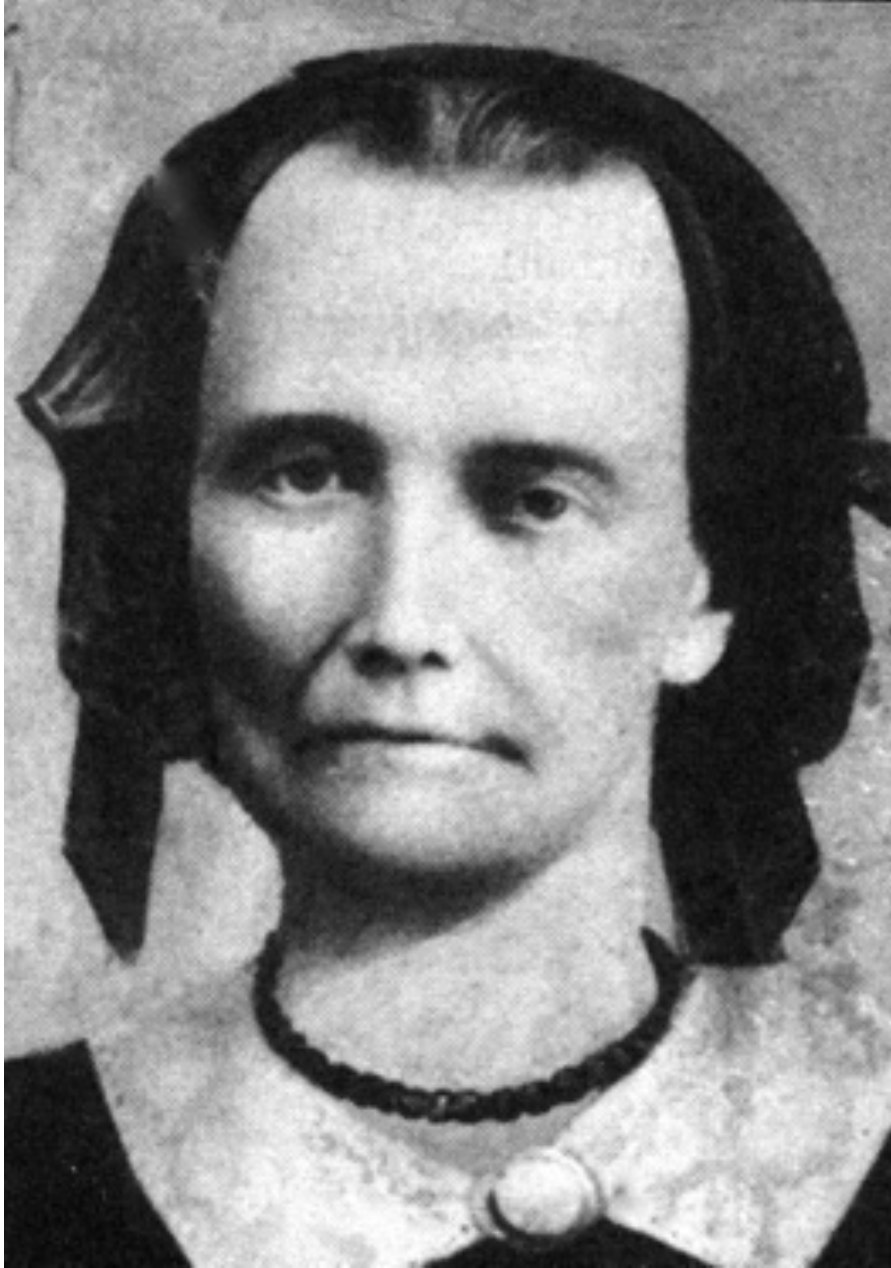
Though it is widely presumed that Elizabeth was a member of the polygamy inner circle in Nauvoo, Emily Partridge, a plural wife of the Prophet, related a conversation demonstrating Elizabeth’s apparent ignorance of restored plural marriage: “Mrs. Durfee invited my sister Eliza and I to her house to spend the afternoon. She introduced the subject of spiritual wives as they called them in that day. She wondered if there was any truth in this report she heard. I thought I could tell her something that would make her open her eyes if I chose, but I did not choose to. I kept my own counsel and said nothing.”³⁰ If Elizabeth Davis was, in fact, a plural marriage insider, it is strange that she asked about “spiritual wives” on the occasion described. Perhaps she was just testing Emily’s

knowledge or using the comment to open a discussion on the topic with which she was well informed. Historians debate whether she was actually sealed to Joseph.³¹ Richard Lloyd Anderson and Scott H. Faulring believe the evidence for Elizabeth's inclusion on Joseph Smith's list of wives is not compelling.³² However, they were unaware that her name was added to Andrew Jenson's list personally by Eliza R. Snow.

Elizabeth Davis followed the westward movement as far as Winter Quarters, but then she departed from the migrating Saints, turning back to Illinois. During the 1850s, she visited Salt Lake City. Anti-Mormon Sarah Pratt wrote: "There was an old woman called [Elizabeth Davis] Durfee. . . . I don't think that she was ever sealed to him [Joseph Smith], though it may have been the case after Joseph's death, when the temple was finished. At all events, she boasted here in Salt Lake of having been one of Joseph's wives."³³ This statement further muddies the water regarding Elizabeth's actual relationship with Joseph and her position as a polygamy insider.

Elizabeth lived out the remainder of her life with her son. Interestingly, both were baptized into the RLDS Church in the late 1860s, despite its official position that Joseph Smith did not practice plural marriage.

Elvira Annie Cowles (Sealed June 1, 1843)



Courtesy of Todd Compton.

Born November 23, 1813, the daughter of Austin and Phoebe Wilbur Cowles, Elvira was baptized on October 19, 1835. The following year she went to Kirtland, probably with her family. By October of 1838, the Cowles were settled in Far West, Missouri, only to move to Nauvoo, Illinois, in early 1839.

Elvira's obituary indicates that in the spring of 1840 she lived in the Smith household, staying there until she married.³⁴ She and her future husband, Jonathan Holmes, were engaged by September 1842 and married on December

1, 1842.³⁵

Little is known regarding Elvira's sealing to Joseph Smith, including whether it was an eternity-only or a time-and-eternity sealing. On August 28, 1869, she signed an affidavit stating she was sealed to the Prophet on June 1, 1843, without specifying the type of sealing.³⁶

On February 9, 1938, just months before her death at eighty-eight years of age, Phebe Louisa Holmes, daughter of Elvira Ann Cowles Holmes, recalled, "I heard my mother testify that she was indeed the Prophet's [Joseph Smith's] plural wife in life and lived with him as such during his lifetime."³⁷ The words "lived with him as such" imply sexual relations in the marriage. Elvira died March 10, 1871, so Phebe's recollection spanned at least sixty-six years. None of Elvira's other children were able to validate Phebe's recollection or to recall similar comments.

Since Elvira was living with her legal husband at the time and presumably experiencing conjugal relations with him, sexuality between her and the Prophet under those arrangements would have been considered adultery. Therefore, it is likely her daughter's reminiscence was in error.

A letter written on June 2, 1931, by Church member William Wright describes a different dynamic and may help to qualify the relationship between Joseph, Jonathan, and Elvira: "I was well acquainted with two of Joseph's wives, LaVina [Elvira] and Eliza [Snow or Partridge]. I came to Utah in '69, and rented LaVina Holmes farm. Before Joseph was shot, he asked Jonathan Holmes if he would marry and take care of LaVina, but if LaVina wanted him to take care of her he would take her. He would fill that mission to please his Father in Heaven."³⁸

Although this letter is very late and secondhand, it is reportedly from a man who spoke with Elvira. It seems to corroborate that Jonathan may have been given a mission to marry Elvira and take care of her in a legal pretend marriage (perhaps like Joseph Kingsbury and Sarah Ann Whitney). After the martyrdom, Jonathan would have been free to take Elvira as his own wife. She did not conceive her first child until seven months after Joseph's death. The couple went on to have a total of five children together. Polygamy researcher Meg Stout wrote:

Elvira's lack of children during this time [June 1, 1843 to June 27, 1844] indicates this sealing to Joseph was not physically consummated, despite Phoebe Holmes Welling's 1939 history (remembered hearsay recorded almost 100 years later). Family tradition and the lack of children also indicate that Jonathan didn't consummate his marriage to Elvira until after Joseph's death, as late as February 1845. Elvira's first child, Lucy, was born nine months

later. Elvira's daughter, Marietta, would be born nine months after Jonathan returned from his Mormon Battalion service. Elvira continued to bear a child every two years thereafter until she was 43 years old.³⁹

If the assumption is accepted that Jonathan was a front husband, then there are problems with the timeline of the historical documents. Jonathan and Elvira were engaged in September 1842 and married on December 1, 1842. However, Joseph and Elvira were not sealed until June 1, 1843. That Joseph anticipated a need for a front husband nearly a year before his sealing to Elvira would be an optimistic conjecture regarding the deliberation that went into Joseph's plural marriage activities. Nevertheless, Jonathan apparently respected his wife's sealing to Joseph, acting proxy in the Nauvoo temple as she was resealed to him vicariously for eternity.⁴⁰ Beyond the fact that Elvira was sealed to Joseph for eternity, other aspects of their marriage are unknown. Jonathan and Elvira traveled to Utah with the Saints where she passed away on March 10, 1871, in Farmington.

Emily Partridge (Sealed March 4 and May 11, 1843)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Emily, third child of Edward Partridge and Lydia Clisbee, was born on February 28, 1824, in Painesville, Ohio. When Emily's father died unexpectedly on May 27, 1840, Emily and her older sister, Eliza, went to live in the Prophet's home, as her mother was destitute. She recalled: "Joseph and Emma offered us [Emily and her sister Eliza] a home in their family. They treated us with great kindness. We had been there about one year when the principle of plural

marriage was made known to us, and I was married to Joseph Smith on the fourth of March 1843 Brother Heber Kimball performing the ceremony.”⁴¹ Her sister was sealed to the Prophet about the same time, but neither was aware of the other’s marriage: “It was about this time [Feb. 1843] that the principles of Celestial marriage were being taught to a few. I and my sister Eliza received it and were married to br. Joseph about the same time, but neither of us knew about the other at the time, everything was so secret.”⁴²

In 1892 Emily reported how Joseph approached her concerning plural marriage:

When I was 18 years, Joseph Smith said to me one day, “Emily, if you will not betray me, I will tell you something for your benefit.” Of course, I would keep his secret, but no opportunity offered for some time to say anything to me. As I was passing through the room where he sat alone, he asked me if I would burn it if he would write me a letter. As I felt very anxious to know what he had to tell me, I promised to do as he wished, and left the room. I began to think that was not the proper thing for me to do, and I was about as miserable as I ever wished to be for a short time. I went to my room and knelt down and asked my Father in Heaven to direct me in the matter. I had no where else to go. I could not speak to anyone on earth, and I had to stand alone and act for myself. I received no comfort until I went back and watched my opportunity to say I could not take a private letter from him. He asked me if I wished the matter ended, and I said I did and it rested so for some time. I had plenty of time to think and began to wish I had listened to what he would have said. I began to be as miserable as I was before.⁴³

Emily admitted that she was not completely ignorant of what the Prophet might want to discuss with her. Regarding that period, she testified:

I had heard the reports that were out, and I thought that what he had to say to me might be something relating to that [plural marriage]. . . . I don’t know whether my information was gained from talking with women, or from reading the papers or books or something of that kind. . . . Some people must have known about it because I heard it whispered around there in Nauvoo, before he told me what it was, and that is what made me suspect what it was at the time he spoke about writing the letter to me.⁴⁴

Mrs. [Elizabeth Davis] Durfee came to me one day and said Joseph would like an opportunity to talk with me. I asked her if she knew what he wanted. She said she thought he wanted me for a wife. I was thoroughly prepared for almost anything. I was to meet him in the evening at Brother Kimball’s. I had

been helping with the wash all day. I was so afraid somebody would mistrust where I was going that I dare not change my wash dress. So I threw a large cloak over me and said I was going to run over to see mother; which I did, but did not stay long. I started out as if going back, but went to the place appointed instead. When I got there, nobody was at home but William and Helen Kimball.⁴⁵ I don't know what they thought to see me there at that hour. I did not wait long before Brother Kimball and Joseph came in. Brother Heber told his children they had better go in to one of the neighbor's, that there would be a council that evening at their house, and said to me, "Vilate is not at home, and you had better call another time." So I started out with William and Helen and bid them goodbye. I started for home fast as I could so as to get beyond being called back, for I still dreaded the interview. However, soon I heard Brother Kimball call, "Emily, Emily," rather low, but loud enough for me to hear. I thought that at first I would not go back and took no notice of his calling. But he kept calling and was about to overtake me so I stopped and went back with him. I cannot tell all that Joseph said, but he said the Lord had commanded him to enter into plural marriage and had given me to him, and although I had got badly frightened, he knew I would yet have him. So he waited until the Lord told him.

My mind was now prepared and would receive the principles. I do not think if I had not gone through the ordeal I did, that I could ever have gone off that night to meet him. But that was the only way that could be done then. Well, I was married there and then. Joseph went home his way, and I going my way alone. A strange way of getting married, wasn't it? Brother Kimball married us 4 March 1843. . . .

While I was struggling in deep water those few months, I received a testimony of the words that Joseph would have said to me and of their nature before they were told me, and being convinced I received them readily.⁴⁶

Emily's accounts provide interesting details. She reviews Joseph's concern about secrecy and highlights his patience in sharing the principle of plural marriage. Over a span of time, the Prophet personally taught her of the doctrine and told her that she had been given to him by the Lord. Emily recalled her anxiety with the whole proceedings, not wishing to raise suspicion and consequently being married in her wash clothes. Other measures were taken to ensure the ceremony would remain secret. She recalled receiving her own testimony of plural marriage, but not at first. Apparently Elizabeth Davis Durfee served as an intermediary who was either unaware of the actual practice of plural marriage or was simply testing Emily to see what she might know.

Understandably, in all of her writings, Emily was reticent to address the issue of conjugality in her plural marriage with Joseph Smith. However, when giving her deposition in the Temple Lot litigation in 1892, she was asked point-blank by the RLDS attorney, “Did you ever have carnal intercourse with Joseph Smith?” and answered frankly: “Yes sir.”⁴⁷ However, when asked during their year-long courtship period prior to the sealing, if Joseph would “lay his hand on your shoulder,” “put his arm around you,” or “offer to take your hand?” Emily Partridge testified: “He never did for he was not that kind of a man. He was a gentleman in every way and did not indulge in liberties like that . . . not before we was married.”⁴⁸ When the questioner asked: “Were you in bed with him at any time before . . . you were married?” she also acknowledged: “No sir, not before I was married to him. I never was.”⁴⁹

Emma Smith eventually forced Emily and her sister to leave the Mansion. Emily recalled:

Emma had consented to give Joseph two wives if he would let her choose them for him, and . . . she choose Eliza and myself. . . . I do not know why she gave us to him unless she thought we were where she could watch us better than some others, [who lived] outside of the house.

[After the ceremony] she wanted us immediately divorced, and she seemed to think that she only had to say the word, and it was done. But we thought different. We looked upon the covenants we had made as sacred. She afterwards gave Sarah and Maria Lawrence to him, and they lived in the house as his wives. I knew this; but my sister and I were cast off.⁵⁰

Emily also remembered, “I think Emma always regretted having any hand in getting us into such trying circumstances. But she need not have blamed herself for that . . . for it would have been the same with or without her consent. . . . I have never repented the act that made me a plural wife . . . of Joseph Smith and bound me to him for time and all eternity.”⁵¹

In an 1899 letter, Emily summarized her feelings regarding plural marriage: “Did Joseph Smith, the Prophet claim to have a revelation on polygamy, or plural marriage? . . . It is a positive fact that he did so claim, and teach, and also practice. I am a living witness of the same. With me it is neither guess work or hearsay. I had it from his own mouth. To us, it was the word of the Lord. I accepted the pure and sacred principle, and was married, or sealed, to him, as his wife, for time and all eternity.”⁵²

After Joseph’s death, Emily Partridge married Brigham Young and bore him a son on October 30, 1845. As a child of polygamy, she felt her boy was spurned by some Latter-day Saints. In 1883 she related:

In the days of Nauvoo the holy order of celestial marriage was in its infancy; it was not taught publicly, consequently the people generally did not know of it. After we crossed the Mississippi River it was not considered necessary to any longer conceal it. I remember after crossing the river I sat myself upon a fallen tree with my babe in my arms; the snow was falling in large flakes, thick and fast. I was cold and hungry, for food and clothing were scarce, and much had to be done before comfortable quarters could be provided.

Many eyes were turned upon me, or rather upon my baby; some with favor and some with disfavor or contempt. Spiteful things were said, and the oppressive influence that hovered over and around me was so distressing that it seemed though I must sink; but God has sustained me through it all.⁵³

Not only did early plural wives endure derision from non-Mormons but also on occasion from their fellow Saints. Truly Emily suffered great trials from practicing plural marriage, but she never denounced the prophetic nature of its restoration. She died in 1899, a faithful member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Esther Dutcher (Unknown Sealing Date)

Born January 25, 1811, in Cherry Valley (Boylston Centre), Oswego, New York, to Thomas Dutcher and Betsy Hurlbert (Holerbert), Esther Dutcher's relationship with Joseph Smith is among the poorest documented of all of his plural wives. Only one late attestation refers to this sealing. The lack of additional documentation has caused some authors to discount the overall credibility and to view Esther Dutcher as strictly a possible plural wife, but one that is too poorly documented to include in a list of official plural wives of the Prophet. However, since the single reference is from a reliable source, albeit late, she is included here.

Esther Dutcher married Albert Smith (no relation to the Joseph Smith or Apostle George A. Smith) on May 19, (or May 11) 1826, at Boylston Centre, Oswego, New York. In 1835, Albert removed his family to Ohio where in 1837 they joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From there, they migrated with the Saints to Far West, Caldwell, Missouri, and later to Nauvoo, Hancock, Illinois, where they attended the Nauvoo First Ward.

In a letter from Daniel H. Wells to Joseph F. Smith dated June 25, 1888, Apostle Wells speaks of Albert Smith whose wife Esther Dutcher had died in 1856: "He [Albert Smith was] also much afflicted with the loss of his first wife. It seems that she was sealed to Joseph the Prophet in the days of Nauvoo, though she still remained his wife, and afterwards nearly broke his heart by telling him

of it, and expressing her intention of adhering to that relationship. He however got to feeling better over it, and acting for Joseph, had her sealed to him, and to himself for time.”⁵⁴ This letter constitutes the only evidence of a plural sealing between Joseph and Esther.

None of the details surrounding this sealing have been discovered. Esther, like Ruth Vose Sayers, may have actively petitioned Joseph to be sealed to him. Wells’s description of Esther as “sealed to Joseph the Prophet in the days of Nauvoo, though she still remained his [Albert’s] wife” is consistent with an eternity-only sealing. However, there is no known date for the ceremony.

Albert and Esther Smith had five children: Azariah (b. 1828), Emily (b. 1832), Candace (b. 1833), Joseph Albert (b. 1844), and Esther (b. 1849).⁵⁵ Esther did not conceive any children while Albert was on his mission between September 12, 1842, and August 22, 1843. Joseph Albert Smith was conceived about four months after his return (on approximately December 29, 1843).⁵⁶

David L. Bigler, biographer of Esther’s son Azariah, noted she was a literate and “gentle woman,” beloved of her family.⁵⁷ After several years of ill health, she died on September 17, 1856, at Manti, Utah.

Fanny Alger(Marriage Date Unknown—Probably 1835 or 1836)

The union of Fanny and Joseph has received much scrutiny. Only a synopsis is included here.

Born on September 20, 1816, as one of ten children to Samuel Alger and Clarissa Hancock Alger, Fanny worked as a domestic in the Smith household in Kirtland, Ohio, from 1834 to 1836. It was during this period of time that she and Joseph were married. After Emma discovered the marriage, she asked Fanny to leave her home.

The Alger family left for Missouri in September 1836, accompanied by Fanny.⁵⁸ Two months later in Wayne County, Indiana, she married non-member Solomon Custer.⁵⁹ Fanny stayed in Wayne County and raised a large family. Late in life she reportedly rebuffed questions about her relationship with Joseph Smith, replying: “That is all a matter of my own, and I have nothing to communicate.”⁶⁰

Fanny Young (Sealed November 2, 1843)

Born November 8, 1787, to John and Abigail Howe Young in Hopkinton,

Massachusetts, Fanny was an older sister of Brigham Young, future president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Fanny married Roswell Murry in 1832, and while he refused to join the Church, Fanny was baptized later that year. The Murrys moved to Kirtland, Ohio, to Missouri, and finally to Nauvoo, Illinois, where Roswell died in 1839, leaving Fanny a single woman.

Beyond one recollection from Fanny's brother Brigham Young, relatively little is known regarding her November 2, 1843, sealing to the Prophet. In 1873 Brigham reminisced:

I recollect a sister conversing with Joseph Smith on this subject [plural marriage]. She told him: "Now, don't talk to me; when I get into the celestial kingdom, if I ever do get there, I shall request the privilege of being a ministering angel; that is the labor that I wish to perform. I don't want any companion in that world; and if the Lord will make me a ministering angel, it is all I want." Joseph said, "Sister, you talk very foolishly, you do not know what you will want." He then said to me: "Here, brother Brigham, you seal this lady to me." I sealed her to him. This was my own sister according to the flesh.⁶¹

Fanny was then fifty-six years of age. In 1870, one of Brigham's plural wives, Harriet Cook, affirmed that Fanny Young's sealing was for time and eternity.⁶² As a widow, conjugal relations were not disallowed from a religious standpoint. However, there is no indication that sexual relations were contemplated or experienced by the participants.

According to Joseph's reported comments, the union was created to fulfill D&C 132:16–17, providing Fanny with an eternal spouse. Helen Mar Kimball remembered:

Aunt Fanny was a true Saint, and was beloved by all who had the pleasure of her acquaintance; her sympathies were always exercised for the poor and distressed. She was agreeable society for old or young and many an evening her young acquaintances would gather at her house to hear her sing or relate the "Scottish Chiefs," "Children of the Abbey," and other like tales, which she could do as I never heard anyone else. She had been a great reader; and I was named by her after the Scottish Lady, Helen Mar.

The Youngs were all gifted singers and when they sang together they made a grand choir. Aunt Fanny sang many beautiful songs, but the one I loved best was "Oft in the still night." She had a clear melodious voice, and sang with such pathos, that all present would be affected to tears. The words are so touching and so expressive that I often repeat them as applicable to my own feelings.⁶³

The November 2, 1843, sealing between Fanny Young and Joseph Smith represents the last documented plural marriage of the Prophet. Whether Emma was informed is unknown. However, since the context of the sealing was to allow Fanny to have a husband in the celestial kingdom, it may not have been a great concern to Emma. Fanny Young Murry migrated to Utah and died in 1859 in full faith.

Flora Ann Woodworth (Sealed Spring 1843)

Flora Ann Woodworth was born on November 14, 1826, in New York, the first child of Lucien Woodworth and Phebe Watrous. The Woodworths contacted the missionaries in 1832 and were soon baptized. They subsequently joined the Saints in Missouri and then moved to Illinois by 1839. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney described Flora Ann as a “very intelligent, smart, and bright girl.”⁶⁴

Joseph’s relationship with Flora Ann Woodworth is poorly documented. She left no records and no sealing date is available. A March 4, 1843, entry in the Prophet’s diary appears to be “Woodworth,” which is crossed out and is difficult to discern. However, the name “Woodworth” reappears interlineally above in shorthand, so it is possible they were sealed that day.⁶⁵

Flora had been previously chided by Orange Wight, another suitor, for allowing him to consort with her even though she was secretly sealed to the Prophet. Wight related in 1903:

I now come to that part of my story that you will be most likely interested in. Which regards the doctrine taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith in regard to the Plural Marriage sistim, At first the Doctrin was taught in private. the first I knew about it was in John Higbie’s famely he lived close to us and being well acquainted with him and famely I discovered he had two wives. . . .

Now altho only in my 20th year would not be 20 until 29 November, 1843, I concluded to look about and try to pick up one or more of the young ladies before they were all gone, so I commenced keeping company with Flora Woodworth—Daughter of Lucian Woodworth—(called the Pagan Prophet) I was walking along the street with Flora near the Prophets Residence when he Joseph drove, up in his Carrage stoped and spoke to I and Flora and asked us to get in the carrage and ride with him he opened the doore [?—doors?] for us and when we were seated oposite to him he told the driver to drive on we went to the Temple lot and many other places during the Afternoon and then he drove to the Woodworth <house> and we got out and went in,—

After we got in the house Sister Woodworth took me in an other room and told me that Flora was one of Josephs wives, I was awar or believed that Eliza R. Snow and the two Partra<t>ge Girls were his wives but was not informed about Flora But now sister Woodworth gave me all the information nessary, so I knew Joseph Believed and practiced Poligamy. . . .

Now as a matter of corse I at once—after giving her <Flora> a mild lecture left her and looked for a companion in other places, and where I could be more sure. I was now called on a mission to go up the river 5 or 6 hundred miles to make lumber for the Nauvoo house and Temple.⁶⁶

Sometime after her sealing, Joseph presented her with a gold watch. There was a confrontation between Emma and Flora after which Flora legally married Carlos Gove. Despite her husband's dislike for the Church, Flora convinced him to accompany the western migration of the Saints. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney provided this narrative of later interactions with Flora:

On the evening of September 1st [1846] Brother Woodworth and family arrived [at Winter Quarters]; all sick. They encamped outside of the square a little distance from our tent. We had a temporary bedstead prepared and took their daughter, Flora Gove, into our tent, where I nursed her until she recovered her strength. Her husband was also sick with fever; she had lain helpless for many days, and her heavy raven locks were so matted together that it took me hours to comb them out. We have lived neighbors in Nauvoo and were old schoolmates. She was older than myself and was sealed to the Prophet Joseph as his wife. This happened before I was aware of the principle. A young man boarding at her father's . . . not a member of the Church had sought her hand, in time won her heart, and in a reckless moment she was induced to accept his offer and they eloped to Carthage, accompanied by a young lady friend, and were there married by a Justice of the Peace. Flora was never happy with him as he hated the Mormons, and she felt condemned for the rash step she had taken. She made this confession to me while I was nursing her, and said she desired to cling to Joseph hereafter.

They settled at the "Point," and she paid me a visit the following winter. She still expressed herself as strong in the faith of the Gospel, also her great desire to cleave to the Prophet. I never saw her again as she died at that place, leaving two or three children.⁶⁷

Hannah Ells (Sealed Prior to the Summer of 1843)

Hannah Ells was born in 1813 in New Castle, Northumberland, England, the

daughter of Thomas and Hanna Ells. Later the Ells family immigrated to Philadelphia where they met Church missionaries in 1838 and were baptized. Sometime in 1840 they moved to Nauvoo.

During the summer of 1843, Hannah Ells was sealed to Joseph Smith.⁶⁸ Eliza R. Snow wrote to President John Taylor on December 27, 1886: “I think President Taylor will recollect a young English sister in Nauvoo by the name of Hannah Ells. She was sealed to Joseph the Prophet before his death. She died in Nauvoo in Sister Sarah Kimball’s house. I loved her very much—was present at her death.”⁶⁹

In 1869, church member John Benbow signed an affidavit affirming: “President Smith frequently visited his wife Hannah at his [John Benbow’s] house.”⁷⁰ Whether those visits included conjugal relations is not clear, but possible. Otherwise, little is known regarding her marriage and relationship with the Prophet.

Andrew Jenson recorded: “Ells, Hannah . . . described as a good and noble woman—strong lady of culture and refinement[,] tall and lady-like in appearance—died in 1844 at Nauvoo[.] Sister E. R. Snow was with her when she died [in 1845]. died in the house of Hiram Kimball at Nauvoo.”⁷¹ At her death, she appears to have been firm in her faith in the Restoration.

Helen Mar Kimball (Sealed May 1843)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Vilate Murray Kimball, wife of Heber Chase Kimball, gave birth to Helen, her third child, on August 22, 1828, in Mendon, New York. In 1832, Heber and his friend Brigham Young, visited the branch in Columbia, Pennsylvania, to investigate the Church. Three months later Heber was baptized, and three years later he was called as one of the original members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Helen, who was baptized at age eight in Kirtland, traveled with her

family to Missouri and later Nauvoo.

Controversy has accompanied discussions of Helen Mar Kimball's plural marriage to Joseph Smith for several reasons. First, she was fourteen at the time of the ceremony. Helen described her introduction in an 1882 narrative:

With all the false traditions in which we were born, and in consequence of the degenerate tide with which the human family has been drifting for generations past, and as the Lord had no organized priesthood on the earth, it is not to be wondered at that in our ignorance of His ways the feelings of our natures should rebel against the doctrine of a plurality of wives.

I remember how I felt, but which would be a difficult matter to describe—the various thoughts, fears and temptations that flashed through my mind when the principle was first introduced to me by my father [Heber C. Kimball], who one morning in the summer of 1843, without any preliminaries, asked me if I would believe him if he told me that it was right for married men to take other wives, can be better imagined than told. But suffice it to say the first impulse was anger, for I thought he had only said it to test my virtue. . . . My sensibilities were painfully touched. I felt such a sense of personal injury and displeasure for to mention such a thing to me I thought altogether unworthy of my father, and as quick as he spoke, I replied to him, short and emphatically, “No, I wouldn’t!” I had always been taught to believe it a heinous crime, improper and unnatural, and I indignantly resented it.

This was the first time that I ever openly manifested anger towards him, but I was somewhat surprised at his countenance, as he seemed rather pleased than otherwise. Then he commenced talking seriously, and reasoned and explained the principle, and why it was again to be established upon the earth, etc., but did not tell me then that anyone had yet practiced it, but left me to reflect upon it for the next twenty-four hours, during which time I was filled with various and conflicting ideas. I was skeptical—one minute believed, then doubted. I thought of the love and tenderness that he felt for his only daughter, and I knew that he would not cast her off, and this was the only convincing proof that I had of its being right. I knew that he loved me too well to teach me anything that was not strictly pure, virtuous and exalting in its tendencies; and no one else could have influenced me at that time or brought me to accept of a doctrine so utterly repugnant and so contrary to all of our former ideas and traditions. This was just previous to his starting upon his last mission but one to the eastern states. Fearing that I might hear it from a wrong source, knowing, as he did, that there were those who would run before they were sent, and some would not hesitate to deceive and betray him and the brethren,

he thought it best that I should hear it from his own lips.

The next day the Prophet called at our house, and I sat with my father and mother and heard him teach the principle and explain it more fully, and I believed it, but I had no proofs, only his and my father's testimony. I thought that sufficient, and did not deem it necessary to seek for any further.⁷²

As Helen declared, her father facilitated the union, apparently motivated by a desire to be related to the Prophet through the plural marriage. In another narrative, Helen explained: "He [her father, Heber C. Kimball] taught me the principle of Celestial marriage and having a great desire to be connected with the Prophet, Joseph, he offered me to him; this I afterwards learned from the Prophet's own mouth. My father had but one ewe lamb, but willingly laid her upon the alter."⁷³ Richard Anderson observed: "Helen says several times that her father took the initiative to arrange the marriage and very possibly he did so with a view to committing her to the Prophet before her budding social life produced a choice or a proposal" from someone else.⁷⁴

It is clear that Helen's sealing to Joseph Smith prevented her from socializing as an unmarried young lady. The primary document referring to the relationship is an 1881 poem penned by Helen that has been interpreted in different ways:

I thought through this life my time will be my own
The step I now am taking's for eternity alone,
No one need be the wiser, through time I shall be free,
And as the past hath been the future still will be.
To my guileless heart all free from worldly care
And full of blissful hopes and youthful visions rare
The world seemed bright the thret'ning clouds were kept
From sight and all looked fair but pitying angels wept.
They saw my youthful friends grow shy and cold.
And poisonous darts from sland'rous tongues were hurled,
Untutor'd heart in thy gen'rous sacrafise,
Thou didst not weigh the cost nor know the bitter price;
Thy happy dreams all o'er thou'st doom'd also to be
Bar'd out from social scenes by this thy destiny,
And o'er thy sad'nd mem'ries of sweet departed joys
Thy sicken'd heart will brood and imagine future woes,
And like a fetter'd bird with wild and longing heart,
Thou'lt dayly pine for freedom and murmur at thy lot;

But could'st thou see the future & view that glorious crown,
Awaiting you in Heaven you would not weep nor mourn.
Pure and exalted was thy father's aim, he saw
A glory in obeying this high celestial law,

For to thousands who've died without the light
I will bring eternal joy & make thy crown more bright.
I'd been taught to receive the Prophet of God
And receive every word as the word of the Lord,
But had this not come through my dear father's mouth,
I should ne'r have received it as God's sacred truth.⁷⁵

One year after writing the above poem, Helen elaborated:

During the winter of 1843, there were plenty of parties and balls. . . . Some of the young gentlemen got up a series of dancing parties, to be held at the Mansion once a week. . . . I had to stay home, as my father had been warned by the Prophet to keep his daughter away from there, because of the blacklegs and certain ones of questionable character who attended there. . . . I felt quite sore over it, and thought it a very unkind act in father to allow [my brother] to go and enjoy the dance unrestrained with others of my companions, and fetter me down, for no girl loved dancing better than I did, and I really felt that it was too much to bear. It made the dull school still more dull, and like a wild bird I longed for the freedom that was denied me; and thought myself a much abused child, and that it was pardonable if I did murmur.⁷⁶

After leaving the Church, dissenter Catherine Lewis reported Helen saying: "I would never have been sealed to Joseph had I known it was anything more than ceremony."⁷⁷ Assuming this statement was accurate, which is not certain, then what did Helen mean by "more than a ceremony?" A likely interpretation from Helen's personal writings is that the ceremony prevented her from associating with her friends as an unmarried teenager, causing her distress after the sealing.

Another area of controversy involving Helen Mar Kimball arises from a statement she wrote in an 1881 autobiographical letter written to her children: "I heard him [Joseph Smith] teach and explain the principle of celestial marriage. After which he said to me, 'If you will take this step, it will ensure your eternal salvation and exaltation and that of your father's household and all of your kindred.' This promise was so great that I willingly gave myself to purchase so glorious a reward."⁷⁸

This quotation is sometimes cited by critics as solid proof that the Prophet promised exaltation to at least one of his plural wives and her family if they would agree to a marriage. Typically omitted from such accounts is the fact that one year later Helen clarified that she may not have understood everything correctly: "I confess that I was too young or too 'foolish' to comprehend and appreciate all" that Joseph Smith then taught.⁷⁹

Contemporaneous writings from more mature family members who were

better positioned to comprehend and appreciate the Prophet's promises to Helen demonstrates that her statement reflects her misunderstanding of the blessings predicated on this sealing. Just weeks after Helen Mar's plural wedding to Joseph Smith, Helen's father, Heber C. Kimball, in a July 10, 1843, letter to her from Pittsburg, expressed concern for her soul, reminding her that salvation in the next life would depend on how she lived this life: "My child, remember the care that your dear father and mother have for your welfare in this life, that all may be done well, and that in view of eternal worlds, for that will depend upon what we do here, and how we do it."⁸⁰ Helen's mother, Vilate, had written to Heber a month earlier on June 8, 1843: "I am yours in time and through all eternity. This blessing has been sealed upon us by the holy spirit of promise and cannot be broken only through transgression or committing a grosser crime than your heart or mine is capable of."⁸¹ If fourteen-year-old Helen Mar understood her eternal sealing to the Prophet to ensure her exaltation, her parents apparently thought otherwise.

Thirteen months after her sealing to the Prophet, he was killed. Years later she reflected:

I am thankful that He [Heavenly Father] has brought me through the furnace of affliction and that He has condescended to show me that the promises made to me the morning that I was sealed to the Prophet of God will not fail and I would not have the chain broken for I have had a view of the principle of eternal salvation and the perfect union which this sealing power will bring to the human family and with the help of our Heavenly Father I am determined to so live that I can claim those promises.⁸²

Helen became a defender of the practice of polygamy, authoring several articles and a book defending the practice. She died in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1896, an active member of the Church.

Louisa Beaman (Sealed April 5, 1841)

Louisa Beaman was born February 7, 1815, to Alvah Beaman and Sarah Burts in Livonia, New York, some twenty-five miles south of Palmyra. In 1829, Alvah became one of the earliest converts to the religion and assisted Joseph Smith as he was translating the Book of Mormon by helping to hide the golden plates. The family migrated to Kirtland, Ohio, but in 1837, Alvah died. Louisa's sister, Mary, married Joseph B. Noble in 1834, and by 1840, Louisa was living with the Nobles in Montrose, Iowa, and later Nauvoo, Illinois.

After learning of the restoration of plural marriage in 1841, she accepted a

proposal from Joseph. Noble left multiple historical reports referring to the incident. In 1869, Noble signed an affidavit affirming “that, on the fifth day of April A.D. 1841, At the City of Nauvoo, County of Hancock, State of Illinois, he married or sealed Louisa Beaman, to Joseph Smith.”⁸³ This sealing was for time and eternity and included sexual relations.

Louisa apparently left no accounts of the sealing ceremony or of her relationship with the Prophet. However, in 1883 “Elder Noble bore testimony to the purity of character of his sister-in-law, who was a woman of irreproachable morality, who entered into the plural marriage on a deep-seated conviction that the doctrine was from God.”⁸⁴ She died in Utah in 1850, faithful and true to her convictions.

Lucinda Pendleton (Sealing Date Unknown)

Lucinda Pendleton was born September 27, 1801, and married renowned anti-Mason William Morgan in 1819. Morgan was apparently murdered seven years later, and Lucinda married George Washington Harris in 1830. The Harris family was baptized four years later and by March 1838 was living in Far West, Missouri, where George served on the high council of the stake.

Joseph visited Far West, from “the latter part of October or first of November” until shortly after November 10, 1837, and probably met the Harris’s at that time.⁸⁵ He returned five months later with Emma and his children. Joseph’s diary records: “On the 14th of March [1838], as we were about entering Far West, many of the brethren came out to meet us, who also with open arms welcomed us to their bosoms. We were immediately received under the hospitable roof of Brother George W. Harris, who treated us with all possible kindness, and we refreshed ourselves with much satisfaction, after our long and tedious journey.”⁸⁶ The Smiths stayed with the Harris’s for two months. Both families relocated to Nauvoo by the early 1840s.

Several authors affirm that Lucinda was married to Joseph Smith (or had a sexual relationship with him) at this time. The strongest is the testimony of Brigham Young’s plural wife Harriet Cook Young. Andrew Jenson wrote in 1887: “Harriet Cook Young is positive that she [Lucinda] was married to Joseph in Missouri.”⁸⁷ While Harriet was a member of the polygamy inner circle both in Nauvoo and in Utah, her witness is not firsthand. Born November 7, 1824, and baptized at age seventeen on May 1, 1842, she was not a member of the Church during the Missouri period. A year after her baptism, on November 2, 1843, she was sealed to Brigham Young by Joseph Smith. Importantly, neither Malissa Lott, nor Eliza R. Snow, who were also interviewed by Jenson at that time

included Lucinda as a plural wife of the Prophet. It is possible that Harriet obtained knowledge of Lucinda that was unknown to both Lott and Snow, but it is perhaps more likely that one or both of them knew of the information Harriet shared, but did not consider it credible.

Another supportive statement, attributed to Lucinda alleges that she stated in early 1841 that she had been Joseph Smith's "mistress since four years!"⁸⁸ Multiple problems exist with this quote, including that it comes filtered through anti-Mormons Wilhelm Wyl and Sarah Pratt.⁸⁹

Lucinda Pendleton left no records, so documenting her sealing, if one occurred, is difficult. Not all historians agree that a marriage relationship was formed. Scholars Richard Lloyd Anderson and Scott H. Faulring expressed doubt: "The claim that Lucinda was sealed to Joseph Smith is not based on impressive evidence."⁹⁰

At some point prior to 1853, Lucinda separated from her husband, for in 1856 George petitioned for a divorce on the grounds that his wife had willfully deserted him and without reasonable cause absented herself for more than the space of three years. Lucinda died at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Lucinda Wesley Smith, in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1856. Her feelings toward Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saints prior to her death are unknown.⁹¹

Lucy Walker (Sealed May 1, 1843)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Born April 30, 1826, in Peacham, Vermont, Lucy was the fourth child of John Walker and Lydia Holmes. In 1832 her father was baptized into the Church, and her mother was baptized two years later. Lucy joined in 1835 and the family left three years later for Missouri. Their stay was short. The Walker family was settled in Nauvoo, Illinois, by the spring of 1841. Lucy's mother died less than a year later on January 15, 1842. She wrote of the aftermath:

Ten motherless children, and such a Mother. The youngest not yet two years old. What were we to do? My Father's health seemed to give way under this heavy affliction. The Prophet came to our rescue. He said, "If you remain here brother Walker, you will soon follow your wife. You must have a change of scene, a change of climate. You have just such a family as I could love. My house shall be their house. I will adopt them as my own. For the present I would advise you to sell your effects, place the little ones with some kind friends, and the four eldest shall come to my house and be received and treated as my own children, and if I find the others are not content, or not treated right, I will bring them home and keep them until you return." I wrung my hands in the agony of despair at the thought of being broken up as a family, and being separated from the loved ones. But said the Prophet, "My home shall be your home, eternally yours." I understood him not. However my father sought to comfort us by saying two years would soon pass by, then with renewed health he hoped to return and make us a home where we might be together again. . . . The Prophet and his wife introduced us as their daughters. Every privilege was accorded us in the home. Every privilege within reach was ours. He often referred to brother Lorin as his "Edwin." He was indeed his confidential and trusted friend. He was ever by his side, arm in arm they walked and discussed freely various subjects.⁹²

Lucy Walker may have been one of the first women to learn of the restoration of plural marriage from the Prophet. In 1892, she recalled: "In '42 was the time. That was the time that this principle [of plural marriage] was first taught, but it was revealed to the Prophet in '31, but he did not teach it then, only to a very few in whom he had confidence and felt he could trust absolutely, for he felt the importance and responsibility of the step he was taking."⁹³ Since Lucy's father was away on a mission, the Prophet approached her brother William Holmes Walker before proposing. William remembered that in the early 1840s, he rode to Nauvoo to visit his ailing mother. There he was introduced to the subject of plural marriage by the Prophet:

I went to Joseph Smith's, and was made welcome. I learned that mother was living on the island in the Mississippi River, and that it was dangerous to cross because of so much ice running. The next morning the Prophet invited me to hitch up my horse with one of his, in a buggy, and ride with him. We were riding all day through the city and county making a number of calls on business [and] pleasure combined. On this occasion the subject of celestial, or plural marriage, was introduced to me. As we returned home he remarked, "If there was anything I did not understand, to hold on a little, and I would

understand it.”

In the spring of 1843, my father, being away on a mission, the Prophet asked my consent, for my sister Lucy in Marriage. I replied that if it was her choice: that if she entered into the Celestial order of marriage of her own free will and choice, I had no objection. This of course was in contrast with my former education and traditions. It also was altogether different from the course to[o] generally pursued by monogamists. Instead of taking a course to deceive and prostitute and bring about her ruin, he took a straight-forward, honorable, and upright course, in no way depriving her of her agency.

When father returned from his mission, the matter being fully explained in connection with the doctrine, received his endorsement and all parties concerned received his approbation.⁹⁴

Lucy’s story of her acceptance of plural marriage was published in 1888:

In the year 1842, President Joseph Smith sought an interview with me, and said: “I have a message for you. I have been commanded of God to take another wife, and you are the woman.” My astonishment knew no bounds. This announcement was indeed a thunderbolt to me. He asked me if I believed him to be a prophet of God. “Most assuredly I do,” I replied. He fully explained to me the principle of plural or celestial marriage. He said this principle was again to be restored for the benefit of the human family, that it would prove an everlasting blessing to my father’s house, and form a chain that could never be broken, worlds without end. “What have you to say?” he asked. “Nothing.” How could I speak, or what could I say? He said, “If you will pray sincerely for light and understanding in relation thereto, you shall receive a testimony of the correctness of this principle. I thought I prayed sincerely, but was so unwilling to consider the matter favorably that I fear I did not ask in faith for light. Gross darkness instead of light took possession of my mind. I was tempted and tortured beyond endurance until life was not desirable. Oh that the grave would kindly receive me, that I might find rest on the bosom of my dear mother. Why should I be chosen from among thy daughters, Father, I am only a child in years and experience, no mother to counsel [she died in January, 1842]; no father near to tell me what to do in this trying hour [he was on a mission to a warmer climate to help his health]. Oh, let this bitter cup pass. And thus I prayed in the agony of my soul.

The Prophet discerned my sorrow. He saw how unhappy I was, and sought an opportunity of again speaking to me on this subject, and said: “Although I cannot, under existing circumstances, acknowledge you as my wife, the time is near when we will go beyond the Rocky Mountains and then you will be

acknowledged and honored as my wife.” He also said, “This principle will yet be believed in and practiced by the righteous. I have no flattering words to offer. It is a command of God to you. I will give you until tomorrow to decide this matter. If you reject this message the gate will be closed forever against you.”

This aroused every drop of Scotch in my veins. For a few moments I stood fearless before him, and looked him in the eye. I felt at this moment that I was called to place myself upon the altar a living sacrifice--perhaps to brook the world in disgrace and incur the displeasure and contempt of my youthful companions; all my dreams of happiness blown to the four winds. This was too much, for as yet no shadow had crossed my path, aside from the death of my dear mother. The future to me had been one bright, cloudless day. I had been speechless, but at last found utterance and said: “Although you are a prophet of God you could not induce me to take a step of so great importance, unless I knew that God approved my course. I would rather die. I have tried to pray but received no comfort, no light,” and emphatically forbid him speaking again to me on this subject. Every feeling of my soul revolted against it. Said I, “The same God who has sent this message is the Being I have worshipped from my early childhood and He must manifest His will to me.” He walked across the room, returned and stood before me with the most beautiful expression of countenance, and said: “God Almighty bless you. You shall have a manifestation of the will of God concerning you; a testimony that you can never deny. I will tell you what it shall be. It shall be that joy and peace that you never knew.”

Oh, how earnestly I prayed for these words to be fulfilled. It was near dawn after another sleepless night when my room was lighted up by a heavenly influence. To me it was, in comparison, like the brilliant sun bursting through the darkest cloud. The words of the Prophet were indeed fulfilled. My soul was filled with a calm, sweet peace that “I never knew.” Supreme happiness took possession of me, and I received a powerful and irresistible testimony of the truth of plural marriage, which has been like an anchor to the soul through all the trials of life. I felt that I must go out into the morning air and give vent to the joy and gratitude that filled my soul. As I descended the stairs, President Smith opened the door below, took me by the hand and said: “Thank God, you have the testimony. I too have prayed.” He led me to a chair, placed his hands upon my head, and blessed me with every blessing my heart could possibly desire.

The first day of May, 1843, I consented to become the Prophet’s wife, and was sealed to him for time and all eternity, at his own house by Elder William

Clayton.⁹⁵

It is apparent that Lucy Walker's experience was similar to Emily Partridge's regarding the chronology of events. Joseph first introduced the principle to Lucy in 1842, but she demurred. He waited until April of 1843 to finally readdress the issue. During this later meeting—with a total lack of romance—he instructed Lucy saying: "I have no flattering words to offer. It is a command of God to you." Then he gave a very singular directive, "I will give you until tomorrow to decide this matter." This twenty-four hour time limit is sometimes misrepresented by critics who wish to portray Joseph as issuing ultimatums to his potential plural spouses to quickly press them into compliance.⁹⁶ In fact, after her initial introduction, Lucy agonized for many months as the Prophet waited. Lucy related: "I was tempted and tortured beyond endurance until life was not desirable. Oh that the grave would kindly receive me, that I might find rest. . . . Oh, let this bitter cup pass. And thus I prayed in the agony of my soul. The Prophet discerned my sorrow. He saw how unhappy I was."⁹⁷ After witnessing Lucy's turmoil, Joseph gave Lucy the twenty-four hour limit. The deadline was unique, not encountered in any other account of Joseph's plural marriage proposals, and it was given many months after the initial introduction.

A secondhand account speaks of her receiving an angelic appearance to assuage her concerns:

I went to live with Joseph Smith's family as a maid and after I had grown up, Joseph asked me if I would marry him. I felt highly insulted and he said that if I wanted to know whether the principle was true, I could go to God and find out. One night after supper I went out into the orchard and I kneeled down and prayed to God for information. After praying I arose and walked around the orchard and kneeled again and repeated this during the night. Finally as I was praying the last time, an angel of the Lord appeared to me and told me that the principle was of God and for me to accept it.⁹⁸

The question of sexuality in Lucy's plural marriage to Joseph was broached during Lucy's deposition in the 1892 Temple Lot litigation. When asked: "Did you live with Joseph Smith as his wife?" She answered: "He was my husband sir."⁹⁹ This somewhat ambiguous answer is better understood in light of her statement: "I am also able to testify that Emma Smith, the Prophet's first wife, gave her consent to the marriage of at least four other girls to her husband, and that she was well aware that he associated with them as wives within the meaning of all that word implies."¹⁰⁰

Lucy also reported her discussion with RLDS missionaries Alexander and

David Smith, the Prophet's sons: "They seem surprised that there was no issue from asserted plural marriages with their father. Could they but realize the hazardous life he lived, after that revelation was given, they would comprehend the reason. He was harassed and hounded and lived in constant fear of being betrayed by those who ought to have been true to him."¹⁰¹

Lucy Walker's recollections are the source of several declarations of Joseph Smith regarding plural marriage. For example, regarding the motives for entering polygamous marriages, she recalled the Prophet's words: "Men did not take polygamous wives because they loved them or fancied them or because they were voluptuous, but because it was a command of God."¹⁰² But she also described the relationship that should exist in plural marriages: "He [Joseph Smith] often referred to the feelings that should exist between husband and wives, that they, his wives, should be his bosom companions, the nearest and dearest objects on earth in every sense of the word."¹⁰³ In addition, she remembered his emphasis that plural wives should not be coerced or manipulated: "A woman would have her choice, this was a privilege that could not be denied her."¹⁰⁴ Lucy died in 1910 as a faithful member of the Church.

Malissa Lott (Sealed September 20, 1843)



Courtesy Todd Compton.

Malissa Lott was born January 9, 1824, to Cornelius Peter Lott and Permelia Darrow in Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania. Her parents were baptized in 1834, and the family soon migrated to Kirtland, Ohio, where they met Joseph Smith for the

first time. In 1838 the Lotts moved to Missouri and then later to the outskirts of Nauvoo, Illinois, where Cornelius served as a caretaker for Joseph Smith's farm.

On June 29, 1843, Eliza R. Snow recorded: "Took a ride to br. Lot's in company with Mrs. Whitney, Mrs Durfee & Mrs. Holmes."¹⁰⁵ By that date, Eliza, Mrs. Durfee, and Mrs. Holmes may have all been sealed to the Prophet, and Mrs. Whitney had approved her daughter's plural marriage to him (Sarah Ann Whitney). It is probable that the quartet discussed celestial marriage on that journey and possibly later with Malissa at the farm.

Malissa was sealed to the Prophet on September 20, 1843. In 1892, she explained: "He [Joseph Smith] was the one that preached it [plural marriage], and taught it to me."¹⁰⁶ She also testified that Emma "knew all about it. . . . [S]he gave her consent."¹⁰⁷ When asked: "Who said that she gave her consent?" Malissa answered: "My father and mother. . . . I don't know that they went to her or she came there. I know they were both there at the time with brother Joseph, - father and - mother, - the whole of them, talking a good many times."¹⁰⁸ Malissa made a plain disclosure during the Temple Lot depositions that she had physical relations with Joseph Smith affirming she had "roomed" with him.¹⁰⁹ She reaffirmed the nature of the relationship the following year on August 4, 1893, when interviewed by Joseph Smith III, acknowledging she had been his wife "in very deed."¹¹⁰

In late 1886 independent researcher Andrew Jenson interviewed Malissa and published this report in the December issue of the *Historical Record*:

WILLES, (Malissa LOTT,) daughter of Cornelius P. Lott and Permelia Darow, was born Jan. 9, 1824, in Bridgewater, Luzerne Co., Penn. Her parents having embraced the fulness of the Gospel, the family removed to Kirtland, Ohio, where Sister Melissa was baptized in November, 1837. After the expulsion of the Saints from Kirtland and Missouri, Brother Lott located with his family in Pike County, Illinois, where they remained until 1842, and then moved unto Joseph Smith's farm, located some four miles east of Nauvoo, on the Carthage road. Shortly afterwards Sister Melissa became intimately acquainted with the Prophet's family, and on Sept. 20, 1843, she was married to Joseph Smith for time and all eternity. She spent most of the following winter in his family, going to school in the so-called brick store. The Prophet's children, Joseph, Frederick and Alexander, went to the same school, under the immediate watch-care of Sister Melissa. In the spring of 1844 she went back to live with her parents on the farm, where she remained until after the martyrdom of her husband in Carthage jail. Subsequently she lived with Emma Smith, occasionally, until the exodus in 1846, when she left Nauvoo

with the rest of the Saints. After spending two winters at Winter Quarters, she accompanied her father's family to G. S. L. Valley in 1848, coming through in Heber C. Kimball's company. On May 13, 1849, she married Ira Jones Willes, formerly a member of the Mormon Battalion, with whom she lived in Salt Lake City and Lehi, Utah Co., until his death, Dec. 5, 1863. He was accidentally killed while crossing a creek near Lehi, being thrown from a load of wood into the water together with his son Cornelius John, about nine years old. Both were drowned. With Elder Willett Sister Melissa had seven children, of whom four are yet living. Although now somewhat advanced in years, she is still bright and active, and occupies a prominent position in the Lehi Female Relief Society. She is ever unflinching in her testimony of what she knows to be true, and states in the most positive terms, and without any hesitation, that she was sealed to Joseph Smith the Prophet on the above named date, and became, in the full meaning of the term, his wife, according to the sacred order of celestial marriage. She further states that when she was married to Ira Jones Willes, he fully understood that he was marrying a widow of Joseph Smith, the martyred Prophet; that their association together would end with this life, and that in the morning of the resurrection she would pass from him to the society of her deceased husband.¹¹¹

Malissa Lott died in 1898 in Utah as a faithful, lifelong member of the Church.

Maria Lawrence (Sealed May 1843)

Born to Edward and Margaret Lawrence in Pickering, Canada, on December 18, 1823, Maria Lawrence was older than her sister Sarah whose birth occurred two and a half years later. The family was converted in 1837 in Canada and moved to Nauvoo in 1840. Joseph Smith was appointed guardian for the family after Edward died in March, and thereafter the Lawrence sisters went to live with the Smith family.

Three years later in May of 1843, Emma Smith facilitated Joseph's marriages to four plural wives including Sarah and Maria Lawrence and Eliza and Emily Partridge. Lovina Smith Walker (b. 1827), daughter of Hyrum Smith, signed a statement on June 16, 1869: "I was living with Aunt Emma Smith, in Fulton City Fulton Co. Illinois, in the year 1846. that she told me, that She Emma Smith was present and witnessed the marrying or Sealing of Eliza Partridge, Emily Partridge, Mariah Lawrence, and Sarah Lawrence to her husband, Joseph Smith, and that she gave her consent thereto."¹¹²

Since Joseph served as Maria and Sarah's legal guardian, he has been

criticized for being sealed to them. The assumption is that he exercised improper influence to coerce them into their plural marriages. Arguing against this assumption is the fact that Emma Smith facilitated those marriages even if she afterwards regretted it.¹¹³ William Law recalled: “Emma complained about Joseph’s living with the L[awrence] girls, but not very violently.”¹¹⁴ Benjamin F. Johnson remembered: “I do know that at his [Joseph Smith’s] Mansion home was living Maria and Sarah Lawrence and one of Cornelius P. Lott’s daughters as his plural wives with the full knowledge of his wife, Emma, of their married relations to him.”¹¹⁵ Maria died before the Saints left Nauvoo, but neither she nor her sister left any accusations against Joseph for inappropriate behavior.

A second criticism regarding Joseph Smith and the Lawrence sisters stems from his purported mismanagement of the estate with accusations that he stole money from it. These allegations were put forth in an 1887 statement made by William Law when interviewed by exposé author Wilhelm Wyl:

Soon after my arrival in Nauvoo the two Lawrence girls came to the holy city, two very young girls, 15 to 17 years of age. They had been converted in Canada, were orphans and worth about \$8000 in English gold. Joseph got to be appointed their guardian, probably with the help of Dr. Bennett. He naturally put the gold in his pocket and had the girls sealed to him. . . . After Joseph’s death, A. W. Babbitt became guardian of the two girls. He asked Emma for a settlement about the \$8000. Emma said she had nothing to do with her husband’s debts. Now Babbitt asked for the books and she gave them to him. Babbitt found that Joseph had counted an expense of about \$3000 for board and clothing of the girls. Now Babbitt wanted the \$5000 that was to be paid Babbitt, who was a straight, good, honest, sincere man, set about to find out property to pay the \$5000 with. *He could find none.*¹¹⁶

Unfortunately, some authors have taken this account at face value, but LDS attorney and researcher Gordon Madsen reviewed surrounding documents and concluded that most of Law’s claims are “one-hundred eighty degrees off.”¹¹⁷ Further research demonstrates the propriety of the Prophet’s financial decisions as guardian. The inheritance was not “\$8000 in English gold,” but a farm in Lima, Illinois, possibly worth \$1000, and a promissory note for \$3000, if repaid in full.¹¹⁸ Even at its most generous valuation, it was half of Law’s claimed value. The Prophet did not enrich himself by taking money from the estate. Gordon Madsen explained: “Unlike Josiah Butterfield, who billed the [Lawrence] estate for boarding Edward’s [Lawrence] three youngest children, Joseph made no claim against the estate for boarding or supporting Sarah and Maria. . . . Furthermore, Joseph was entitled by statute to make a claim of 6

percent as compensation for acting as the children's guardian, but he never did."¹¹⁹ Madsen concludes: "Contrary to the negative picture painted by the [William] Law-Wyl interview, the record shows that he [Joseph Smith] performed his duty honorably."¹²⁰

It is probable that the plural marriage between Joseph Smith and Maria Lawrence was consummated. Concerning her 1847 death, Mary B. Smith (b. 1837), daughter of the Prophet's brother Samuel, wrote in 1911:

There was a mystery about Mariah Lawrence. The Lawrences lived just across the street from us. . . . Maria Lawrence died of consumption or one might more truthfully put it of a broken heart. My Aunt Lucy visited her and and felt great sympathy for her. She said to Aunt at one time "That if there was any truth in Mormonism she would be saved for[]" said she [""]My yoke has not been easy nor my burden light." As to what was the cause of Maria's deep sorrow I do not exactly know. I have reason to believe that she was one of Almond Babits wives [after Joseph's death] – And her heartbreak was as likely to be occasioned by him as anyone else.¹²¹

Marinda Nancy Johnson (Two Sealing Dates: April 1842 and May 1843)



Courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society.

On June 28, 1815, in Pomfret, Vermont, Marinda Nancy Johnson was born to John Johnson and Alice Jacobs into a family that would become somewhat prominent in the early years of the Church. The Johnsons moved to Hiram, Ohio, in 1818. After hearing about the restoration in the winter of 1830, they traveled to Kirtland to meet the Prophet and were baptized. They invited the Smith family to stay with them at Hiram, so Joseph and Emma moved in and were living there in the spring of 1832.

Orson Hyde, Marinda's future legal husband, marched with Zion's Camp in 1834 and was ordained an apostle on February 15, 1835. He and Marinda were legally wed on September 4, 1834. Interestingly, a Hyde family tradition states that before Orson married Marinda, Joseph Smith cautioned him against marrying her, as she was his celestial wife, but Orson married her anyway.¹²²

The relationship between Joseph Smith and Marinda Nancy Johnson is difficult to decipher due to a lack of documentation. Two separate sealing dates for Joseph Smith's marriage to Marinda are available in the historical record. Joseph Smith's journal contains a list of a few of his plural wives written after the July 14, 1843, entry in the handwriting of Thomas Bullock: "Apri 42 marinda Johnson to Joseph Smith."¹²³ Four months before, Joseph Smith received a revelation for her:

Verily thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have called upon me to know my will concerning my handmaid Nancy Marinda Hyde--behold it is my will that she should have a better place prepared for her, than that in which she now lives, in order that her life may be spared unto her; therefore go and say unto my servant, Ebenezer Robinson, and to my handmaid his wife--Let them open their doors and take her and her children into their house and take care of them faithfully and kindly unto my servant Orson Hyde returns from his mission, or until some other provision can be made for her welfare and safety. Let them to these things and spare not, and I the Lord will bless them and heal them if they do it not grudgingly, saith the Lord God; and she shall be a blessing unto them; and let my handmaid Nancy Marinda Hyde hearken to the counsel of my servant Joseph in all things whatsoever he shall teach unto her, and it shall be a blessing upon her and upon her children after her, unto her justification, saith the Lord.¹²⁴

The statement "let my handmaid Nancy Marinda Hyde hearken to the counsel of my servant Joseph in all things whatsoever he shall teach unto her" is ambiguous. Whether it was a general admonition or a specific reference, perhaps to plural marriage, is unknown.

Marinda personally testified concerning a second sealing through a signed affidavit "that on the [blank] day of May A.D. 1843, at the City of Nauvoo, County of Hancock, State of Illinois, She was married or Sealed to Joseph Smith, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, by Brigham Young, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, of Said Church, according to the laws of the same, regulating Marriage; in the presence of Eliza Maria Partridge Lyman, and Emily Dow Partridge Young."¹²⁵ Generally a signed affidavit is considered more reliable than an entry in a journal by a scribe

from an unknown source. So whether the first date is in error or two sealing ceremonies were performed is unclear.

The timeline shows that Apostle Orson Hyde, Marinda's legal husband, served a mission to Palestine from the spring of 1840 to December 7, 1842. Weeks after his return, Marinda became pregnant with Orson Washington Hyde (conception approximately February 16, 1843), who was born on November 9, 1843. To date, there is no indication of a physical relationship between Marinda and Joseph. If the 1842 date for the sealing between Joseph and Marinda marriage is correct, then Joseph may have been sealed to Marinda in an eternity-only sealing without Orson Hyde's knowledge, which would not have affected her civil union with Orson. However, John D. Lee remembered that Orson gave his permission: "Hyde's wife, with his consent, was sealed to Joseph for an eternal state."¹²⁶ Whatever the sequence, Orson appealed to Joseph to perform his own plural marriage weeks after returning from his mission.

The details of the relationship between Marinda and the Prophet will probably never be known. If Marinda had chosen Joseph as her eternal husband, she apparently changed her mind because she chose to be sealed to her legal husband Orson Hyde in the Nauvoo temple on January 11, 1846. However, she relocated to Salt Lake City in 1852 and later divorced Orson Hyde. She died in 1886, having kept the faith in the Church.

Martha McBride(Sealed Summer 1842)



Courtesy of the International Society
of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers.

On March 17, 1805, Martha McBride was born in Chester township, New York, the fifth child of Daniel McBride and Abigail Mead. Martha married Vinson Knight on July 26, 1826, and the two were converted in 1834 after meeting the Prophet. They moved to Kirtland, Ohio, the following year, where they stayed until the spring of 1838. Then they migrated to Missouri where they stayed for less than two years before moving on to Nauvoo by October of 1839.

Vinson Knight served as a bishop in Nauvoo and also assisted the Prophet's own family: "If Bro. Joseph were away, it was he who looked after the wants of his [Joseph's] family. He was always ready to look after the widows and orphans."¹²⁷ Sometime before his untimely July 31, 1842, death, Vinson was sealed to a plural wife. A late secondhand account relates:

Martha [McBride Knight] was told by Joseph Smith that she was the first woman to give her consent for her husband to enter into plural marriage. The story is told that Martha knew something was worrying her husband and he couldn't seem to tell her about it. One evening as Martha was sitting in the grape arbor behind the house, Vinson returned home carrying a basket. He explained to Martha that he had taken some fruit and vegetables to the widow of Levi N. Merrick, whose husband had been killed at Haun's Mill. Vinson explained to Martha that he had been told to enter plural marriage and that, if he had to, this Sister Merrick would be the one he could help best. Martha's reply is said to have been, "Is that all."¹²⁸

Concerning Vinson's plural marriage, Church member Hyrum Belnap remembered: "At the time plural marriage was reviled. There was difficulty to find persons that would consent to go into it on the female side. Martha Knight says the Prophet Joseph told her that she was the first one who consented to her Husband to have another wife. and her husband Vinson Knight did take another woman and was sealed to her, a Mrs. Merrick."¹²⁹

Martha McBride Knight signed an 1869 affidavit declaring that "in the summer of the year 1842 at the city of Nauvoo, County of Hancock, State of Illinois, She was married or sealed to Joseph Smith President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, by Heber C. Kimble one of the Twelve Apostles in said Church according to the law of the same regulating marriage."¹³⁰ Martha's affidavit does not specify whether the sealing to the Prophet in 1842 was just for time because she was then sealed to Vinson for time and eternity vicariously or whether she was sealed to Joseph Smith for time and eternity. Regardless, in the Nauvoo temple on January 26, 1846, Martha was sealed for eternity to Joseph Smith (by proxy). If she had been previously sealed to Vinson, then who should be regarded as her eternal husband is not entirely clear. Even today, a deceased woman is permitted to be sealed by proxy to all the men with whom she lived as a legal wife during mortality (after her husbands have passed away).

Joseph Smith emphasized that women have the right to choose their husbands without coercion. Since Martha can be the eternal mate of only one man, it is obvious that some sorting out of these timeless issues will need to occur during

the millennium, prior to the resurrection. The authority to bind on earth for eternity is also capable of unbinding. Martha McBride Knight affirmed in 1869 that her sealing to Joseph Smith occurred “in the summer of the year 1842.”¹³¹ Her obituary was more precise and specified “August 1842.”¹³²

Martha migrated to Utah with the Saints and in April 1877 attended the dedication of the St. George Temple, where she performed ordinance work for many of her deceased ancestors. On November 20, 1901, she died in Hooper at the home of her daughter Adaline.

Mary Elizabeth Rollins (Sealed February 1842)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mary Elizabeth Rollins was born on April 9, 1818, in Lima, New York, about twenty miles southwest of Palmyra, to John Porter Rollins and Keziah Keturah Van Benthuisen. The Rollins moved to Mentor, Ohio, near Kirtland in 1830 where Mary was baptized by Parley P. Pratt on the Isaac Morley farm. Her family moved to Independence, Missouri, in 1831, and four years later she married a non-Mormon, Adam Lighter. The Lighters migrated to Nauvoo in

1840 and boarded with Mary's mother.

In a 1902 signed statement, Mary Elizabeth summarized her experience:

In 1834, [Joseph] was commanded to take me for a wife. I was a thousand miles from him. He got afraid. The angel came to him three times, the last time with a drawn sword and threatened his life. I did not believe. If God told him so, why did he not come and tell me? The angel told him I should have a witness. An angel came to me – it went through me like lightning – I was afraid. Joseph said he came with more revelation and knowledge than Joseph ever dare reveal. (Brigham Young sealed me to him, for time and all eternity – Feb. 1842.) Joseph said I was his before I came here and he said all the Devils in Hell should never get me from him.¹³³

Mary also left two long accounts detailing her experiences. In an undated autobiographical sketch, she penned:

In January [1842] . . . Brother Joseph and Brother Brigham came to see me and invited me to go the next day to his office in the Brick Store. I was surprised at this. He asked me if I was afraid to go? I replied, "Why should I be afraid of a Prophet of God?" He said Brother Young would come for me.

That night I dreamed I was married to him and occupied an upper room in a new house. In the morning, we were called to breakfast. And I wondered what Emma would say to me for I was afraid of her, but Joseph took me by the hand and led me down stairs, at the foot of which, stood Emma smiling at us and conducted us to the breakfast room.

I awoke then and did not know what to think of my dream. But on going to the office [the] next day, I received the interpretation for what to my astonishment, when Joseph made known to me that God had commanded him in July, 1834, to take me for a wife. But he had not dared to make it known to me, for when he received the revelation, I was in Missouri and when he did see me, I was married. But he was again commanded to fulfill the first revelation or suffer condemnation, for I was created for him before the foundation of the earth was laid.

I said if the Lord told you such a thing, why doesn't He come and tell me? Furthermore, I never would consent to be sealed to him, unless I had a witness for myself. He told me a great many things concerning the order and the blessings pertaining to it etc. I felt that he and I were both wrong for I had dreamed for years that I belonged to him; and had besought the Lord to take away such thoughts from my heart. No human being can tell my feeling on this occasion. My faith in him, as a Prophet about failed me. I could not sleep, and scarcely eat.

Next day, Brother Young came to see me, and said after we left the office, Joseph told him that an angel appeared to him, and told him that the Lord was well pleased with him and that I should have a witness that what he told me was true. I marveled at this, but made it a subject of prayer, night and day. One night in February I felt impressed to pray as Moses did in the battle of Israel with the Amalekites, by holding up my hands towards heaven. I also covered my head with a white cloth and I prayed with all my soul, that if the doctrine was true, to give me a witness of the same.

One night I retired to bed, but not to sleep, for my mind was troubled so sleep fled from me. My Aunt Gilbert was sleeping with me at the time when a great light appeared in the room. Thinking the kindling wood was on fire, that was spread on the hearth, I rose up in bed to look. When lo, a personage stood in front of the bed looking at me. Its clothes were whiter than anything I had ever seen. I could look at its person, but when I saw its face so bright and more beautiful than any earthly being could be, and those eyes piercing me through and through, I could not endure it. It seemed as if I must die with fear. I fell back in bed and covered up my head so as not to see it. I pushed Aunt very hard to have her look up and see it too. But I could not wake her and I could not speak. I thought if she were awake, I would not feel so afraid. As it is, I can never forget that face. It seems to be ever before me.

A few days after this Joseph asked me if I had received a witness yet. I said no. He said you soon will have, for the angel expressly told me you should have. Then I told him what I had seen, for I fully realized what I had lost by my cowardice. The family all said they knew something had happened to me, for my countenance was almost transparent. And when I told them of it, there was great rejoicing and they felt that I had been highly favored of the Lord. As yet they knew nothing of what Joseph had said to me.

When Joseph had enquired about the appearance of the person, and I had told him, he seemed much affected and told me that it was an angel from God and that it came for aught with more knowledge and revelation, than he dare reveal at that time. And that if I had prayed in my heart to God, all fear would have left me. As it was, Satan snatched the cup from my lips. He told me of many things to take place soon in my life. As a sign of the truth of what he had revealed to me, his words were verified to the letter.

After receiving other testimonies, I felt I could no longer disbelieve and in the month of March, [1842], Brigham Young sealed us for time and all eternity. Willard Richards and Heber C. Kimball knew of it, but were not present on the 23rd of March.¹³⁴

In 1905, Mary Elizabeth provided additional details to a group of elders preparing to leave for their missions:

When Joseph sent for me he told me all of these things. “Well,” said I, “don’t you think it was an angel of the devil that told you these things?” Said he, “No, it was an angel of God. God Almighty showed me the difference between an angel of light and Satan’s angels. The angel came to me three times between the years of 1834 and 1842 and said I was to obey that principle or he would slay me. But,” said he, “they called me a false and fallen prophet but I am more in favor with my God this day than I ever was in all my life before. I know that I shall be saved in the Kingdom of God. I have the oath of God upon it and God cannot lie; all that he gives me I shall take with me for I have that authority and that power conferred upon me.”

Well, I talked with him for a long time and finally I told him I would never be sealed to him until I had a witness. Said he, “You shall have a witness.” Said I, “If God told you that, why does he not tell me?” He asked me if I was going to be a traitor. “I have never told a mortal and shall never tell a mortal I had such a talk from a married man,” said I. “Well,” said he, “pray earnestly for the angel said to me you should have a witness.” Well, Brigham Young was with me. He said if I had a witness he wanted to know it. “Why should I tell you?” said I. “Well,” said he, “I want to know for myself.” Said he, “Do you know what Joseph said? Since we left the office the angel appeared to him and told him he was well pleased with him and that you should have a witness.”

I made it a subject of prayer and I worried about it because I did not dare to speak to a living being except Brigham Young. I went out and got between three haystacks where no one could see me. As I knelt down I thought, why not pray as Moses did? He prayed with his hands raised. When his hands were raised, Israel was victorious, but when they were not raised, the Philistines were victorious. I lifted my hands and I have heard Joseph say the angels covered their faces. I knelt down and if ever a poor mortal prayed, I did. A few nights after that an angel of the Lord came to me and if ever a thrill went through a mortal, it went through me. I gazed upon the clothes and figure but the eyes were like lightning. They pierced me from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet. I was frightened almost to death for a moment. I tried to waken my aunt, but I could not. The angel leaned over me and the light was very great, although it was night. When my aunt woke up she said she had seen a figure in white robes pass from our bed to my mother’s bed and pass out of the window.

Joseph came up the next Sabbath. He said, "Have you had a witness yet?" "No." "Well," said he, "the angel expressly told me you should have." Said I, "I have not had a witness, but I have seen something I have never seen before. I saw an angel and I was frightened almost to death. I did not speak." He studied a while and put his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands. He looked up and said, "How could you have been such a coward?" Said I, "I was weak." "Did you think to say, 'Father, help me?'" "No." "Well, if you had just said that, your mouth would have been opened for that was an angel of the living God. He came to you with more knowledge, intelligence, and light than I have ever dared to reveal." I said, "If that was an angel of light, why did he not speak to me?" "You covered your face and for this reason the angel was insulted." Said I, "Will it ever come again?" He thought a moment and then said, "No, not the same one, but if you are faithful you shall see greater things than that. . . .

My husband did not belong to the Church. I begged him and pled with him to join but he would not. He said he did not believe in it, though he thought a great deal of Joseph. He sacrificed his property rather than testify against Joseph, Hyrum and George A. Smith. After he said this, I went forward and was sealed to Joseph for eternity."¹³⁵

Correspondence in 1892 between Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner and John Henry Smith, indicated that the sealing performed while Joseph was alive was for eternity:

I hope you will not think me intrusive, I am sure I do not wish to be. If I could have an opportunity of conversing with you, and Brother Joseph F. Smith I could explain some things in regard to my living with Mr Lightner, after becoming the *Wife of another*, which would throw light, on what *now* seems mysterious—and you would be perfectly satisfied with me. I write this; because I have heard that it had been commented on to my injury. I have done the best I could, and Joseph will sanction my action – I cannot explain things in this Letter – some day you will know *all*. That is, if I ever have an opportunity of conversing with either of you.¹³⁶

Mary Elizabeth doesn't explain what information would make John Henry Smith perfectly satisfied regarding the supposed polyandrous arrangements. Yet, if she reported that she had experience sexual polyandry with Joseph Smith and Adam Lightner, John Henry Smith would most likely not have been perfectly satisfied. In 1892 and at all times, Church members would have considered sexual polyandry to be adultery.

In a letter to Emmeline B. Wells, Mary Elizabeth explained: "I could tell you

why I stayed with Mr. Lightner. Things the leaders of the Church does not know anything about. I did just as Joseph told me to do, as he knew what troubles I would have to contend with.”¹³⁷ Apparently her silence regarding the specifics of her relationship with the Prophet were according to his instructions.

Because of Mary Elizabeth’s longevity, she and other of Joseph Smith’s plural wives were able to correspond into the late decades of the nineteenth century. Presendia Huntington Kimball wrote to Mary on March 9, 1880, saying: “Won’t it be a happy time for us if we can gain the place where Joseph & our loved ones mingle?”¹³⁸ Zina D. Huntington Young sent a letter to Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner on June 27, 1886, the anniversary of Joseph Smith’s martyrdom: “We remember this day, of all days to us. I went into Sister Elizas Snow. we talked over our past a little, then Sister Eliza spoke in tounges to comfort and cheer us, and how the veil was thinning as we advanced I cannot tell but you will feel the spirit of it.”¹³⁹

Mary Elizabeth outlived all of the other women who had been sealed to Joseph Smith, dying in 1913 with a firm conviction of the truthfulness of the Church.

Mary Heron (Sealing Date Unknown)

According to one isolated source, Mary Heron, the legal wife of John Snider, was sexually involved with Joseph Smith in 1843. The lack of additional documentation has caused some authors to discount the evidence as insufficient to include her name on a list of official wives.¹⁴⁰ While the Prophet was the victim of many slanderous accusations during his lifetime, this reference cannot be summarily dismissed because it was made by Joseph Ellis Johnson, Mary’s son-in-law, and recorded in 1850. The lack of historical documentation will probably always lead to debate as to whether Mary Heron was one of Joseph’s plural wives.

John Snider and Mary Heron Snider

Born February 11, 1800, at New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, John Snider moved with his family to Toronto, Upper Canada (now Ontario), where he worked as a mason. On February 28, 1822, he married Mary Heron, four years his junior. Together the Sniders had four children: Harriet Ellen (b. September 4, 1823), Edgerton (b. January 9, 1826), John Jr. (b. May 3, 1828), and Julia (b. in 1833), who apparently did not live long. John and Mary associated with fellow Canadian John Taylor in studying scriptures in 1833. Three years later they were converted and baptized through the missionary efforts of Parley P. Pratt.

The Sniders left Upper Canada to join the body of the Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, in the spring of 1837. A June 4, 1837, revelation to Joseph Smith, instructed Heber C. Kimball to lead a group of missionaries to England.¹⁴¹ John Snider was among that vanguard of Mormon emissaries, the first to ever preach in Great Britain.¹⁴² He arrived in Liverpool on July 18, 1837, and stayed until October when he boarded a ship back to America. He joined Mary and his children in Far West, Missouri. They were forced to leave within a year, traveling east to Springfield, Illinois. There they were befriended by the Ezekiel Johnson family, including Ezekiel's son, Joseph Ellis Johnson, who eventually married John and Mary's oldest daughter, Harriet. Ordained a Seventy on January 19, 1839, John was appointed four months later to serve a second mission to England with the Twelve Apostles, but apparently he did not go.¹⁴³ John did, however, fulfil a third mission to England in 1842–1843.

Weeks after arriving home, on February 18 and 19, John Snider was asked to serve as a *pro tem* member of the Nauvoo High Council.¹⁴⁴ On January 3, 1844, Joseph Smith, acting as mayor, directed the marshal to bring Snider before the Nauvoo City Council to testify on his behalf against William Law, who was accusing the Prophet of sexual improprieties.¹⁴⁵ On June 28, the day after Joseph Smith's death, John Snider was invited to serve as a member of Joseph's bodyguard, escorting the bodies of Joseph and Hyrum back into the city.¹⁴⁶

Unfortunately, Mary Snider's activities before and after the death of Joseph Smith are poorly documented. Her reactions to the multiple separations from her husband as he served the Church are unknown, but her trials would not have been significantly different from those of many other wives whose husbands had similar leadership responsibilities. While it appears that Mary was not present at the organization of the Relief Society on March 17, 1842, Emma presented her name along with those of six others for admittance.¹⁴⁷ On May 26, 1842, Mary contributed fifty cents to the Relief Society.

According to a 1909 life sketch penned by Edwin George Snider, "The family [after the Prophet's death] returned to Toronto, the object being to give the sons Edgerton and John Junior, a chance to learn the masons' trade."¹⁴⁸ Their exit from Nauvoo at that time is strange because John was also a mason and there was probably ample work in Nauvoo, especially since the temple was being constructed at that time. Their absence from Illinois explains why neither John nor Mary was endowed in the Nauvoo Temple or received other ordinances there. In the fall of 1847, the family moved to Iowa and then six months later, back to Nauvoo, where John assisted in disposing of Mormon properties after the Saints began the exodus west.¹⁴⁹

In 1850, John journeyed alone to California in search of gold, leaving Mary and the children in the Midwest.¹⁵⁰ Mary crossed the plains in the Almon W. Babbitt Company in the spring of 1851 with their two sons, arriving July 17, 1851.¹⁵¹ Fellow traveler Mary Augusta Hawkins Snow recorded on May 23, 1851: “We are all rejoicing to day in a glorious sunshine inward as well as outward I trust for all seem happy—particularly the children after being confined in the wagons so long. . . . Mrs Snider is quite sick and has been made as comfortable as possible, her canaries, the only ones with us, are gaily singing quite unconscious that the hand which has tended them so faithfully thus far is able to do it no longer.”¹⁵²

John joined Mary months later in Salt Lake City. Whether she suffered a lingering illness, or experienced bouts of different sicknesses is unknown, but she died January 31, 1852. John was never sealed to Mary, even though a proxy sealing after her death would have been possible. Curiously, John waited until two weeks after Mary’s passing away to obtain his own temple endowments.¹⁵³ Perhaps the timing of John Snider’s first temple visit was coincidental, or possibly a sealing between Mary and Joseph Smith had created an awkward situation while they were both living.

John Snider remained in Salt Lake City, an active member of the Church, and married Sylvia Ameretta Meacham (Mecham) on November 3, 1855. The couple had three children, Marlin (b. 1856), Martin Henry (b. 1859), and John Hyrum (b. 1860) and were sealed in the Endowment House on February 16, 1867.¹⁵⁴ John lived the remainder of his life in the Seventeenth Ward, dying on December 17, 1875. The notice of his death reads: “Deceased was a veteran in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, having been connected with it in the days of the Prophet Joseph Smith and ever since. He was a man much respected, being true to his convictions of right.”¹⁵⁵ Two weeks later, Apostle John Taylor, who had joined the Church in Toronto, Canada, in 1836 with John, penned a second obituary that was also published, which stated: “He [John Snider] gathered to Utah in 1851, where he has since continued a steadfast, faithful and honorable member in the Church. . . . Having been well acquainted with him for upwards of forty years, I thought it proper to give the above short statement.”¹⁵⁶ There is no mention of his marriage to Mary Heron in either obituary notice.

Joseph E. Johnson and Hannah Goddard

Joseph E. Johnson was born April 28, 1817, to Ezekiel Johnson and Julia Hills Johnson, a family destined to figure prominently in early Mormonism. His brother Benjamin would become a very close friend of the Prophet, and two of

his sisters, Delcena and Almera, became Joseph's plural wives. On October 6, 1840, Joseph Ellis Johnson married Harriet Ellen Snider, oldest daughter of John Snider and Mary Heron Snider, in a ceremony performed by the Prophet.

On January 19, 1845, Brigham Young sealed Lorenzo Snow to Hannah M. Goddard, sister of his legal wife.¹⁵⁷ After the sealing, but apparently prior to consummating the union, Lorenzo left on a mission. Around April 21, 1849, Joseph E. Johnson had sexual relations with Hannah who became pregnant with his child, Joseph Eugene Johnson, born January 3, 1850. Upon learning of the liaison, Lorenzo Snow relinquished his claim to Hannah Maria as his wife, allowing her to eventually be sealed to Johnson as a plural wife. Endowment House records indicate the Joseph Ellis Johnson and Hannah Goddard Johnson were sealed on November 17, 1861. Together, they had eight children—six before the sealing and two afterwards.

Upon learning of Hannah Maria's pregnancy and the circumstances, Joseph Ellis Johnson's Church membership was in jeopardy. He attended a council of priesthood leaders in the Salt Lake Valley on September 2, 1850. Brigham Young presided at the meeting, which was also attended by Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, Ezra T. Benson, George A. Smith, Orson Spencer, Daniel Carn, Alexander Neibaur, Joel H. Johnson, Benjamin F. Johnson, and Joseph Kelly (secretary).

During the proceedings, secretary Kelly recorded Joseph Ellis Johnson's explanatory comments that make it clear he was not attempting to justify his conduct: "I never heard any conversation to say it was right to go to bed to a woman if not found out—I was aware the thing was wrong.—had been with—he sd. *He was familiar with the first frigging [slang for sexual relations]—that was done in his house with his mother in law—by Joseph.*"¹⁵⁸ The "mother in law" was Mary Heron Snider.

Observations

If Joseph E. Johnson's statement is true, contextualizing it is hindered by a lack of historical documentation regarding the relationship between Joseph Smith, Mary Heron Snider, and her legal husband, John Snider. The fact that John and Mary were not sealed during Mary's lifetime may have been due to their absence from Nauvoo and consequent lack of access to the Nauvoo Temple and the absence of opportunity afterwards. However, the fact that the sealing was not performed vicariously thereafter, especially in 1867 when John was sealed to his second wife, supports the possibility that Mary may have been sealed to Joseph Smith.

It appears that the one-sentence record of Joseph E. Johnson's statement during the council meeting constitutes the only whisper of a relationship between Joseph Smith and Mary Heron Snider, making it impossible to conclusively identify the nature of Joseph Smith's relationship with Mary Heron—if any special relationship ever existed. What is certain is that the individuals who understood the details of the relationship all remained true to Joseph Smith and the Church he established.

Nancy Maria Winchester (Unknown Sealing Date)

Born August 10, 1828, in Black Rock, Pennsylvania, to Stephen Winchester and Nancy Case, Nancy Maria Winchester was apparently baptized at age eight in 1836 in Kirtland, Ohio, her family having converted to the Church three years earlier.

Two late sources support that at some point she might have been sealed to Joseph Smith. Orson F. Whitney, who was the son of Helen Mar Kimball, compiled a list of Joseph's wives. He wrote that Nancy Maria Winchester was one of nine “wives of the Prophet who wedded Heber C. Kimball.”¹⁵⁹ In addition, Eliza R. Snow penned Nancy's name on a list of Joseph's wives in 1886. Eliza may have been the only witness to affirm that Nancy Maria was sealed to Joseph Smith while he was living. No additional information was apparently collected concerning her involvement with the Prophet.

During the months of January and February of 1846, proxy sealings to Joseph Smith were performed on fifteen different days.¹⁶⁰ Four such sealing ceremonies were performed on February 3, including both Eliza's and Nancy Maria's. The two sealings were about four hours apart, but it is possible that Eliza learned of the sealing and thereby simply assumed that Nancy Maria had been sealed to Joseph Smith during his lifetime.

It is curious that Nancy's brother Benjamin failed to mention her marriage to Joseph. Benjamin had many negative things to say about the Prophet, even accusing him of adultery in Philadelphia in 1840 and criticizing him several times in later accusations. But throughout it all, Benjamin never mentioned a plural marriage or any improper relations between Joseph and his fourteen-year-old sister. This might be because there was no marriage or because Benjamin was simply unaware of the sealing. Had Benjamin been aware, he would likely have condemned the plural union.

Historians Scott Faulring and Richard L. Anderson argue that the “*cumulative evidence* argument for such marginal references [supporting Winchester as one of Joseph's plural wives] does not meet historical guidelines” and Winchester

should not be included. However, they were undoubtedly unaware of the opinion of Eliza R. Snow.¹⁶¹ While it appears that Nancy Maria Winchester was fourteen or fifteen when she was sealed to Joseph Smith, no documentation exists suggesting that she was sexually involved with the Prophet.

After Joseph Smith's death, Maria was sealed to Heber C. Kimball and in 1849 immigrated to Utah. In 1865 she separated from Kimball, marrying Amos George Arnold in a marriage arranged by Kimball. She bore Arnold one child and died in 1876 at the age of forty-seven in Salt Lake City—apparently strong in the faith.

Olive G. Frost (Sealed Summer 1843)

Olive Frost was born on July 24, 1816, in Bethel, Maine, the eighth of the eleven children of Aaron Frost and Susannah Grey. Olive's widowed sister, Mary Ann Frost Stearns, was converted in 1836 and subsequently married Parley P. Pratt in Kirtland, Ohio. Three years later Olive joined her sister as a newly baptized Church member and traveled with her and Parley on his mission to England. While several of the members of the Quorum of the Twelve returned to America from their missions in Great Britain in the summer of 1841, Parley, with Mary Ann and Olive, remained behind. His responsibilities ended in late 1842, and on April 12, 1843, they arrived in Nauvoo with a group of English Saints.

At some point thereafter, Joseph Smith was sealed to Olive Frost. Unfortunately, very little is known regarding the union. An October 26, 1902, entry in the journal of Church member Joseph E. Robinson records: "During the afternoon I called on Aunt Lizzie. . . . She knew Joseph Smith had more than two wives. Said he married . . . Olive Frost [who] had a child by him and that both died."¹⁶² On April 20, 1885, Joseph Smith III interviewed James Whitehead, former clerk to Joseph Smith, who also corroborated Robinson's record.¹⁶³ No other information concerning the gender, name, birth date, or other details of this possible offspring of the Prophet has been located.

Some information concerning Olive Frost was provided by Mary Ann Frost Pratt, her sister:

She [Olive Frost] seemed to realize and appreciate the magnitude of the great and important mission allotted to woman in the perfect plan of this Gospel Dispensation, and she desired to do her part in the good work. She freely accorded to man the title of king, and joyfully accepted the place of queen by his side, for it was at this time that the principle of the plurality of wives was

taught to her, she never opposed it, and as in the case of baptism, soon accepted it to be her creed, in practice as well as theory. That she was sealed to Joseph Smith in his lifetime is well known to her family by the testimony of her own words. Also that after the death of Joseph Smith she was sealed to Brigham Young <for time>. Sister Olive died at Nauvoo, Ill. Oct 6th 1845, after an illness of two weeks & of chills fever and pneumonia.¹⁶⁴

Patty Bartlett (Sealed March 9, 1842)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Patty Bartlett was born on February 4, 1795, to Enoch Bartlett and Anna Hall in Bethel, Maine. She married David Sessions on June 28, 1812, and together, in August 1833, they were introduced to the restored gospel. According to Patty's son, "As soon as my Mother heard she believed" and was baptized on July 2, 1834.¹⁶⁵ The family moved to Missouri in 1837 and then moved on to Nauvoo, Illinois, three years later.

Patty Bartlett was sealed to Joseph Smith on March 9, 1842. A June 1860 handwritten entry in her diary reports she was sealed for eternity.

I was sealed to Joseph Smith by Willard Richards March 9 1842 in Newel K Whitneys chamber Nauvoo *for Eternity* and I and if I do not live to attend to it myself when there is a place prepared I want some one to attend to it for me according to order Sylvia <my daughter> was present when I was sealed to Joseph Smith. I was after Mr. Sessions death sealed to John Parry senior for time on the 27 of March 1852 G[reat] S[alt] L. City.¹⁶⁶

In this entry Patty states that she was sealed for eternity to Joseph Smith. This is similar to the language found in other eternity-only sealings. Seven years later, Patty signed an affidavit providing much of the same information:

I Patty Bartlett daughter of Enoch and Anna Bartlett was born February 4th 1795 town of Bethel State of Maine[.]I was Baptised into the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Saints July 2d 1834[. I] was sealed to Joseph Smith the Prophet by Willard Richards March the 9th 1842 in Nauvoo in Newel K Whitneys chamber Sylvia my Daughter was present[.]I received my Endowment in Nauvoo Dec 16 1845I Never was sealed at the alter to any one.

Yours Truly Patty Sessions¹⁶⁷

It was common in many plural marriage ceremonies performed in Nauvoo for family members to attend plural marriage sealings, and Patty's daughter Sylvia Sessions Lyon witnessed the sealing. In addition, David and Patty Sessions attended the Nauvoo Temple together, receiving their endowments on December 15, 1845, but they were not sealed to each other in marriage. In her 1867 account Patty acknowledges that she "never was sealed at the alter to any one," either Joseph Smith or David Sessions. Her original sealing to Joseph was not performed in the temple because the Nauvoo Temple was not yet completed. But it also was not re-performed vicariously in the Nauvoo Temple.

Apparently all marriage sealings performed outside of a temple had to be

performed again (in person or by proxy) within a temple edifice in the future. In 1845–1846, many of Joseph Smith’s plural wives were resealed to him by proxy there. Similarly, in 1899 President Lorenzo Snow instructed Church historians to compile a list of women sealed to Joseph Smith for whom a written temple record was not available. Subsequently, proxy sealings were performed for eleven plural marriages.¹⁶⁸

The reason Patty Sessions was not resealed to Joseph Smith by proxy in the Nauvoo Temple is unclear. It is possible that she was unsure of her desires, or perhaps her preference to be the Prophet’s eternal wife, rather than David Session’s, created tension to the degree that the resealing was not then considered. As of 1867, a repeated proxy sealing had not yet been performed. It appears that just weeks after receiving the affidavit at Church headquarters, Priesthood leaders invited Patty to be resealed, with Joseph F. Smith serving vicariously for his Uncle Joseph Smith. A July 3, 1867, entry in Patty’s personal journal reads: “I was sealed to Joseph F. Smith for time and all eternity. . . . He Joseph F. Smith acting for and in behalf of his Uncle Joseph. Smith. The Prophet. Who was Martyred June 27th, 1844. in Carthage Jail with his Bro Hyram. Joseph Fs Father. [signed] Patty Sessions”¹⁶⁹

After receiving this proxy sealing, Patty’s journal indicates that she went back and made an addition to her 1860 entry interlineally above the sentence describing her sealing to Joseph: “I was sealed to Joseph Smith by Willard Richards March 9 1842 in Newel K Whitneys chamber Nauvoo for <time and all eternity> Eternity.”¹⁷⁰ “Time and eternity” was the standard language of that time.

Patty Bartlett kept a Nauvoo journal that mentioned several of her interactions with Joseph Smith. *Woman’s Exponent* editor Emmeline Wells paraphrased multiple entries in a November 15, 1884, article: “On the 13th [of December, 1842] she was very sick, the Prophet came and laid hands on her and she was healed. From that time she speaks of Joseph having visited at her house almost daily. . . . On the 30th [June 1843] she says Bro. Joseph is at home again; she went to see him, and then heard him address the people. . . . Oct. 3rd [1843] she took dinner at the Prophet’ Joseph’s.”¹⁷¹ The whereabouts of Patty’s original Nauvoo journal is unknown; neither have Emmeline’s prepublication notes for the *Woman’s Exponent* articles been located. Many documents housed in the *Woman’s Exponent* office were destroyed due to a fire and a flood, but whether the Sessions diaries or other important manuscripts were among them is not clear.¹⁷²

Her obituary recorded:

Sister Session drove her own team 1030 miles, arriving in Salt Lake valley Sept. 28th, 1847. . . . She has assisted liberally in the building of temples, done much to send the Gospel to the nations of the earth, and gather the poor, has been a strict observer of the Word of Wisdom, not have drunk tea or coffee for over forty years. . . . She was ever a true and faithful Latter-day Saint, diligent and persevering, her whole soul, and all she possessed being devoted to the Church and the welfare of mankind. She has gone to her grave ripe in years, loved and respected by all who knew her.¹⁷³

Presendia Lathrop Huntington(Sealed December 11, 1841)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Presendia Huntington was born on September 7, 1810, in Watertown, New York, to William Huntington and Zina Baker. In 1827 at age sixteen she married Norman Buell and seven years later her sister Zina introduced her to the Church. She and Norman joined the following year and in 1838 migrated to Missouri where Norman became disaffected. Nevertheless, through Presendia's coaxing, the Buell family moved to Lima, Illinois, thirty miles south of Nauvoo, at the

end of 1840.

Sometime in 1841, Joseph Smith taught Presendia about eternal marriage. Since her husband was inactive, she could not be sealed to him, so she needed a husband for the next life. On May 1, 1869, she signed the following affidavit:

Be it remembered that on this first day of May A.D. 1869 personally appeared before me Elias Smith Probate Judge for Said County Presenda Lathrop Huntington <Kimball> who was by me Sworn in due form of law and upon her oath saith, that on the eleventh day of December A.D. 1841, at the City of Nauvoo, County of Hancock State of Illinois, She was married or Sealed to Joseph Smith, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints by Dimick B. Huntington, a High-Priest in Said Church, according to the laws of the Same regulating Marriage; in the presence of Fanny Maria Huntington.¹⁷⁴

Oliver Huntington remembered Dimick marrying his sisters Zina and Presendia to Joseph for eternity.¹⁷⁵ The only other record from Presendia regarding this sealing is her 1881 biographical sketch that states:

I was married to Norman Buell Jan 6th 1827. both joined the Church in in [sic] Kirtland Geauga Co Ohio he left the church in Mo in 1839 the Lord gave me strength to stand alone & keep the faith amid heavy persecution in 1841 I entered into the new & everlasting Covenant was sealed to Joseph Smith the Prophet & Seer & to the best of my ability I have honored Plural Marriage never speking one word against the principal.¹⁷⁶

Emmeline Wells wrote in the *Woman's Exponent*:

Sister Presendia . . . became more familiarly associated with the Prophet and his teachings. . . . Joseph himself taught the principle of plural marriage to Sister Presendia, and her heart was humble, and her mind open to receive the revelations of heaven. She knew Joseph to be a man of God, and she had received many manifestations in proof of this, and consequently when he explained to her clearly the knowledge which he had obtained from the Lord, she accepted the sealing ordinances with Joseph as a sacred and holy confirmation.¹⁷⁷

In an 1860 publication, Mary Ettie V. Smith is quoted as having heard Presendia Huntington, “say afterwards in Utah, that she did not know whether Mr. Buell or the Prophet was the father of her son.”¹⁷⁸ This alleged polyandry declaration is problematic in many ways. In the nineteenth century, for a woman to mention her personal sexual involvement was rare.¹⁷⁹ To admit to a polyandrous relationship would be rarer, but to openly refer to a polyandrous

sexual involvement would be very extraordinary. The listeners to such admissions would have had no context to evaluate the declarations except to consider the behaviors plainly immoral. Even in the secret teachings of plurality in Nauvoo, no doctrinal foundation for sexual polyandry was ever discussed; the women would be essentially declaring themselves unchaste.

An additional observation addresses the likelihood that Mary Ettie would have been sufficiently close to Presendia in a social sense to have heard the admission in the first place. Mary Ettie mentions “Mrs. Buel” three times in her book, each time misspelling her name and never referring to her as “Presendia.”¹⁸⁰ Presendia makes no mention of Mary Ettie in any known document. That Presendia would have confided in Mary Ettie, a divorced woman who had separated from her sealed husband and was also seventeen years her junior, seems less probable.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty is found in Mary Ettie as a reliable witness. Stanley S. Ivins considered Mary Ettie V. Smith’s report as “inaccurate and of no value.”¹⁸¹ Even anti-Mormon Fanny Stenhouse recognized her confusion, describing Ettie Smith in 1875 as “a lady who wrote very many years ago and in her writings, so mixed up fiction with what was true, that it was difficult to determine where the one ended and the other began.”¹⁸²

Presendia’s faith in the Church and Joseph Smith never wavered. Presendia died in 1892 having penned in her autobiographical sketch: “Never in my life, in this kingdom, which is 44 years, have I doubted the truth of this great work, revealed in these, the last days.”¹⁸³

Rhoda Richards (Sealed June 12, 1843)



Courtesy of the International Society
of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers.

Born on August 8, 1784, at Framingham, Massachusetts, to Joseph Richards and Rhoda Howe, Rhoda Richards was over twenty years older than Joseph Smith. In 1807 she fell in love and became engaged to Ebenezer Damon, but he died before the couple could wed. This left her heartbroken and constituted an emotional blow from which she never fully recovered. She and her brother, future apostle Willard Richards, were baptized in 1838 and followed the Saints

to Nauvoo.

On June 12, 1843, Rhoda was sealed to Joseph Smith.¹⁸⁴ This marriage appears to have been an eternity-only sealing that did not include any physical intimacy or notable closeness. She later recalled her life of loneliness: “In my young days I buried my first and only love, and true to that affiance, I have passed companionless through life; but am sure of having my proper place and standing in the resurrection, having been sealed to the prophet Joseph, according to the celestial law, by his own request, under the inspiration of divine revelation.”¹⁸⁵ Her comments that Ebenezer was her “only love” and that she passed “companionless through life” support a limited relationship with Joseph Smith.

Rhoda immigrated to Utah and lived in Salt Lake City for the remainder of her life as a faithful Church member. On January 1, 1879, the sixty-fifth anniversary of Ebenezer Damon’s passing, Rhoda declared, “it was the first ‘Happy New Year’ she had known for sixty-six years. She said the snow looked exactly as it did the day ‘Mr. Damon’ was buried.”¹⁸⁶

Ruth Vose (Sealed February 1843)

Born February 26, 1808, in Watertown, Massachusetts, Ruth Vose was one of two children of Mark and Sally Vose. Baptized by Brigham Young in August of 1836, Ruth married non-Mormon Edward Sayers on January 23, 1841. The *Times and Seasons* reported: “In St. Louis, Mo. Jan. 23rd , by Elder A. P. Rockwood Mr. E. Sayers to Miss Ruth D. Vose formerly of Boston, Mass.”¹⁸⁷

Joseph Smith became closely associated with the Sayers when hiding from Missouri lawmen in August of 1842.¹⁸⁸ After evading the Missouri sheriff, Joseph “proceeded through the timber to Brother Sayers’ house where [he was] very kindly received and made welcome.”¹⁸⁹ William Clayton, recorded:

On the 11th [August 1842], the sheriffs returned, but the Prophet had concluded to keep out of their reach; and, consequently, they could not find him. The sheriff tarried in Nauvoo several days, frequently uttering heavy threats to be executed if the President failed to give himself up, but the officer finally concluded to leave the city. The President remained secure at Brother Sayers’ of the north of the city, about a mile from the corporation, where he was visited frequently by Sister Emma and his brethren.¹⁹⁰

Apparently Joseph Smith believed that the officers would be less inclined to search the home of a non-member. During the stay, the Prophet became good friends with Edward, although Ruth’s husband felt no desire to convert.

In 1869, Ruth signed an affidavit that reads:

Be it remembered that on this first day of May, A.D. 1869, personally appeared before me, Elias Smith, Probate Judge for Said County, Ruth Vose Sayers who was by me Sworn in due form of law and upon her oath Saith that on [blank] day of February A.D. 1843 at the City of Nauvoo County of Hancock, State of Illinois, She was married or Sealed to Joseph Smith President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, by Hyrum Smith, Presiding Patriarch of Said Church, according to the laws of the Same, regulating Marriage; in the presence [blank].¹⁹¹

Ruth states the sealing was performed by Hyrum Smith who did not accept plural marriage until several months later on May 26, 1843. Therefore, either the identity of the sealer or the date is in error. Regardless, Ruth Vose's sealing to Joseph Smith is especially important to understanding the practice of plural marriage because it is documented to have been for eternity only, not time and eternity, and therefore did not include sexual relations. Andrew Jenson, author of the 1887 *Historical Record* article on Joseph Smith's plural wives, recorded that "the strongest affection sprang up between the Prophet Joseph and Mr. Sayers. The latter not attaching much importance to the theory of a future life insisted that his wife Ruth should be sealed to the Prophet for eternity, as he himself should only claim her in this life. She was accordingly then sealed to the Prophet in Emma Smith's presence and thus were became numbered among the Prophets plural wives. . . . She continued to live with Mr. Sayers and remained with her husband until his death." ¹⁹² Another document corroborated that concerning Joseph's plural sealing to Ruth Sayers: "Joseph did not pick that woman."¹⁹³

Ruth and Edward chose to return to Boston where they stayed until 1849. After their five year stay in Boston, Ruth and Edward moved to Utah, reuniting with old acquaintances. Edward died in 1861 and Ruth in 1884. Her obituary gives a glimpse of her demeanor:

"Tall and erect in figure, a countenance always beaming with human kindness, charitable to the poor and ever ready to comfort the disconsolate, she endeared herself to her associates. She was a woman of brilliant conversational powers and possessed a ready fund of valuable information, especially upon topics of interest to the Saints. She was never tired of relating incidents of her Boston life nor of dwelling upon Gospel themes and the days of Joseph and Hyrum."¹⁹⁴

Sarah Ann Whitney (Sealed July 27, 1842)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Sarah Ann Whitney was born on March 22, 1825, to Newel K. Whitney and Elizabeth Ann Smith in Kirtland, Ohio. Five years later the Whitneys heard of a new Prophet named Joseph Smith. Orson F. Whitney, Sarah Ann's nephew and son of Helen Mar Kimball and Horace Whitney, recorded:

One day—it was in February 1831—a sleigh containing several persons drove in from the East and drew up in front of the mercantile store of Gilbert and

Whitney. A stalwart young man sprang out, walked up the steps into the store and to where the junior partner was standing. Extending his hand as if to an old and familiar acquaintance, he exclaimed: "Newel K. Whitney, thou art the man!"

The merchant was astonished. He had never seen this person before. "Stranger," he said, "you have the advantage of me; I could not call you by name, as you have me."

"I am Joseph the Prophet," said the stranger, smiling. "You've prayed me here, now what do you want of me?"¹⁹⁵

Soon after this meeting Newel was called to be a bishop in Kirtland where he lived until 1837. After a brief, two-year stay in Missouri, the Whitney family moved to Nauvoo.

On June 19, 1869, Sarah Ann Whitney signed the following affidavit:

Be it remembered that on this nineteenth day of June A.D. 1869 personally appeared before me Elias Smith Probate Judge for said County, Sarah Ann Kimball, who was by me sworn in due form of law, and upon her oath Saith, that on the twenty-seventh day of July A.D. 1842 at the City of Nauvoo, County of Hancock, State of Illinois, She was married or Sealed to Joseph Smith, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints, by Newel K. Whitney, Presiding Bishop of Said Church, according to the laws of the Same regulating marriage; in the presence of Elizabeth Ann Whitney, her mother.¹⁹⁶

Sarah Ann's July 27, 1842, marriage to the Prophet was unique in several ways that were discussed earlier. Only a brief synopsis is included here.

Sarah Ann's parents reported receiving their own confirming witness regarding their daughter's marriage to Joseph, prompting their approval. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, Sarah's sister-in-law, recalled:

Bishop Whitney was not a man that readily accepted of every doctrine, and would question the Prophet very closely upon principles if not made clear to his understanding. When Joseph saw that he was doubtful concerning the righteousness of this celestial order he told him to go and enquire of the Lord concerning it, and he should receive a testimony for himself.

The Bishop, with his wife, who had for years been called Mother Whitney, retired together and unitedly besought the Lord for a testimony whether or not this principle was from Him; and they ever after bore testimony that they received a manifestation and that it was so powerful they could not mistake it. The Bishop never afterwards doubted, and they willingly gave to him their

daughter, which was the strongest proof that they could possibly give their faith and confidence in him as a true Prophet of God.¹⁹⁷

Elizabeth recounted her experience:

Joseph had the most implicit confidence in my husband's uprightness and integrity of character, and so he confided to him the principles set forth in that revelation [D&C 132], and also gave him the privilege of reading and making a copy of it [with Joseph C. Kingsbury as copyist], believing it would be perfectly safe with him. . . . My husband revealed these things to me. We had always been united, and had the utmost faith and confidence in each other. We pondered upon the matter continually, and our prayers were unceasing that the Lord would grant us some special manifestation concerning this new and strange doctrine. The Lord was very merciful to us; He revealed unto us His power and glory. We were seemingly wrapt in a heavenly vision, a halo of light encircled us, and we were convinced in our own bosoms that God heard and approved our prayers and intercedings before him. Our hearts were comforted and our faith made so perfect that we were willing to give our eldest daughter, then seventeen years of age, to Joseph, in the order of plural marriage. Laying aside all our traditions and former notions in regard to marriage, we gave her with our mutual consent.¹⁹⁸

Despite the spiritual confirmations, the process was, nevertheless, difficult for Sarah's mother, Elizabeth. Sidney Rigdon's son J. Wycliffe was apparently aware of the proceedings, writing in 1904: "In 1843 & 1844 it was the common talk of the members of the church Joseph Smith married at Nauvoo Sarah Ann Whitney. . . . I talked with her Mother Old Mrs Whitney at Salt Lake City in 1863—the old Lady told me how bad she felt when Joseph Smith first broched the subject to her, how she cried about it <but> the Prophet at last obtained her consent."¹⁹⁹

No details regarding Sarah Ann's relationship with Joseph are known. Helen Mar Kimball recalled that when her father was teaching her about plural marriage in May of 1843, "he took the first opportunity to introduce Sarah Ann [Whitney] to me as Joseph's wife." And that "This astonished me beyond measure."²⁰⁰

After Joseph Smith's death, Sarah married Heber C. Kimball on March 17, 1845, for time, ending her pretend marriage to Joseph C. Kingsbury, which had been entered into to deflect suspicion of a relationship with Joseph. Seven children resulted from her union with Kimball, two of which died in infancy. Sarah was described by Orson F. Whitney as "a woman of wonderful character,

respected by the other wives and children. She was deeply devoted to her own children and to Heber C. Kimball.”²⁰¹ Sarah died in 1873, a faithful member of the Church.

Sarah Kingsley (Sealing Date Unknown)

Sarah Kingsley was born October 20, 1788, in Becket, Massachusetts, the second child of Ebenezer Kinsley and Sarah Chaplin. On June 10, 1826, the once-widowed Sarah married John Cleveland, who followed Emanuel Swedenborg and was not interested when Sarah joined the Church in 1835. The following year the Clevelands moved to Quincy, Illinois, and warmly received many of the Saints as they were exiled from Missouri in 1838–1839, including Joseph Smith’s family while he was incarcerated. Within two or three years, they relocated to Nauvoo.

Upon being driven from Missouri in 1838, Emma Smith and her children resided with Sarah and her husband in Quincy, Illinois, while Joseph was incarcerated in the Liberty Jail. On May 24, 1839, Joseph wrote a letter to Judge John Cleveland and Sarah whom he had never met. It read: “We have selected a lot [in Nauvoo] for you, just across the street from our own, beside Mr. [George W.] Harris.”²⁰²

A letter from John L. Smith, Sarah Kingsley’s son-in-law, to the First Presidency, dated March 8, 1895, states: “In the days of Joseph. Mother [Sarah M. Kingsley (Howe)] Cleveland by advice, was sealed to the prophet in Nauvoo but lived with her [non-LDS] husband John Cleveland.”²⁰³ Sarah was also resealed to Joseph Smith vicariously in the Nauvoo Temple in 1846.²⁰⁴ This sealing is consistent with an eternity-only ceremony; however, the dating is unknown. One clue may be found in a June 7, 1869, affidavit signed by Eliza R. Snow:

Be it rem[^]em[^]bered that on this Seventh day of June A.D. 1869, personally appeared before me, James Jack, a notary public in and for Said county Eliza Roxcy Snow [^]Smith[^] who was by me Sworn in due form of law and upon her oath Saith, that on the twenty-ninth day of June A.D. 1842, at the City of Nauvoo, county of Hancock, State of Illinois, She was married or Sealed to Joseph Smith, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, by Brigham Young, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of Said Church, according to the laws of the Same regulating marriage, in the presence of Sarah M. Cleaveland.²⁰⁵

The fact that Sarah was allowed to view Eliza R. Snow’s June 29, 1842, sealing

ceremony to Joseph Smith shows she was at that time a polygamy insider. Whether it signifies that she had also been sealed to the Prophet previously is less clear.

Another question is whether Emma Smith was aware of Sarah's eternity-only sealing. Emma may have learned of nonsexual, eternity-only sealings prior to learning of her husband's time-and-eternity plural marriages. Lucy Meserve Smith remembered that at some point in Nauvoo: "Emma had told me . . . they [Joseph's plural wives] were only sealed for eternity [;] they were not to live with them and have children."²⁰⁶ Consequently, it is possible and even probable that since Sarah Kingsley was Emma's counselor in the Relief Society and since Sarah's husband was a non-member, that Emma may have facilitated the sealing of Sarah to the Prophet.

Sarah Kingsley's husband John Cleveland refused to migrate west. So when the Latter-day Saints pulled out for the Rocky Mountains, Sarah joined them, leaving her husband behind. However, Church leaders Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball counseled her to return to John in Illinois.²⁰⁷ Sarah's family biographer wrote: "Brigham Young and council . . . counseled her to stay with her husband as he was a good man, having shown himself kind ever helping those in need, although for some reason his mind was darkened as to the gospel. She obeyed council and stayed with her husband, and was faithful and true to her relation and died a faithful member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints."²⁰⁸

Despite Sarah's biographer's positive view, it appears that just prior to her 1856 death, she had joined a revivalist religion. Her son-in-law John L. Smith visited her in mid-1855 and recorded:

Mother had joined a Church a couple of weeks before my arrival I bore my testimony to her she seemed to have forgotten what her feelings were once.

Father Cleveland treated me with more respect than ever before & seemed greatly pleased to see me, asked me to pray & ask the blessing regularly while I was there, saying John you know we never pray but I wish you to pray with us.²⁰⁹

John L. Smith's journal entry may have been too pessimistic considering the many years she had gone without the social association that comes with participation in organized religion.

Sarah Lawrence (Sealed May 1843)

Sarah Lawrence was born to Edward and Margaret Lawrence in Pickering,

Canada, on May 13, 1826. The family was converted in 1837 in Canada and moved to Nauvoo in 1840. Unlike her sister Maria, Sarah lived long enough to visit the Saints established in the Rocky Mountains, dying in 1872. Helen Mar Kimball remembered that during Sarah's "last visit to Salt Lake she denied emphatically ever being connected to Joseph."²¹⁰ Despite this denial, she left no criticisms or allegations against the Prophet of abuse. It seems that if Sarah felt that she had been manipulated or deceived by him, she might have voiced an accusation in her later years or disparaged him to the anti-Mormon audiences in Salt Lake City.

Sarah Lawrence's open denial of her plural marriage to Joseph Smith is the only such denial available in the historical record. That is, she is the only one of the proposed thirty-five women sealed to Joseph to later deny it. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney chronicled her history in the pages of the *Woman's Exponent*:

It is a sad thing to record the apostasy of any who were once so highly favored as to receive the great spiritual manifestations which were enjoyed by . . . Sarah Lawrence. [She] had been the wife of the Prophet Joseph, his first-wife, Emma, having given her and her sister to him as his wives for time and all eternity. Sarah made choice of my father to stand as proxy for Joseph in this life. But she allows a jealous nature to have full sway. She and I became warm friends after she entered my father's family, and even after she became disaffected and thought to better her condition by marrying another we were still friends and she met nothing but kindness from father and his family. . . .

But the man she married had proven truant to one wife and her little ones, leaving them to struggle for existence in this valley through the hardest times experienced here. And not until they had found friends to succor and help to keep the wolf from their door, did he make his appearance and then he had very little of the Gospel though he, at first, professed to be a "Mormon." He had come from the goldmines of California where he had made what was then considered quite a fortune. It was not long before he proved the truth of my father's predictions as he denied the faith and returned to California, taking Sarah with him. But it seems she failed to find happiness even in monogamy. As it turned out a dissipated character, and it was only a few years before she was divorced from him. She had lost every spark of the Gospel, which had once been her guiding star and was finally left to herself. She became so wicked that when paying her last visit to Salt Lake she denied emphatically ever being connected to Joseph or to my father, and was very insulting to those who dared to dispute her word. She abused her brother Henry's second wife most shamefully, when meeting her in his store, laying to her the most

humiliating and abusive accusations, which proved her to be a most vicious and heartless woman. Her brother, Henry Lawrence, was so annoyed by her unprincipled course, that he was among the most thankful when she left here and returned to California, where she soon died.²¹¹

Helen's narrative may have exaggerated Sarah's status and feelings later in her life, but it seems clear that Sarah lost her belief in Joseph as a prophet and her devotion to the Church he founded.

Sylvia Sessions (Sealed between November 19, 1842 and approximately May 18, 1843)

Sylvia Porter Sessions was born on July 31, 1818, in Andover, Maine, to David Sessions and Patty Bartlett. The family was baptized in 1835 and migrated to Missouri in 1837. It was there that Sylvia met Windsor Lyon whom she married on April 21, 1838, in a ceremony performed by Joseph Smith. Two years later they had relocated to Nauvoo. Windsor was excommunicated in November 1842, and thereafter they separated in the equivalence of a Church divorce. Sometime later Sylvia married Joseph presumably for time and eternity.

In the past few decades, Sylvia's relationship with Joseph Smith has been scrutinized by many and is covered in more detail in Chapter 11. It is believed that she was the only plural wife to bear a child to Joseph who lived to adulthood. The child was Josephine Lyon.²¹²

After Joseph's death, Sylvia rejoined Windsor, and he was rebaptized. Enoch Tripp, a relative of Patty Sessions, wrote: "On Sunday morning, February 1, 1846, Heber C. Kimball came to the house of Mr. Windsor P. Lyon in order to rebaptize him into the church and they sent up to the temple and got a large bath tub. The mob violence was so strong, Heber C. Kimball did not dare to do it in public."²¹³

Sylvia and Windsor began their trek to Utah, but he died in 1849 in Iowa. Sylvia thereafter married non-member Ezekiel Clark and together they finished the journey. Despite her non-Mormon husband, she continued to be active in the Church in Utah and died in full fellowship in 1882.

Zina Diantha Huntington (Sealed October 27, 1841)



Courtesy of the Church History Library,
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Zina Diantha Huntington, sister of Presendia, was born on January 31, 1821, in Watertown, New York, to William Huntington and Zina Baker. Although the Huntingtons heard of Joseph Smith in 1831, they did not join the Church until 1835 after they had read the Book of Mormon several times. The following year they moved to Kirtland where they lived until 1838. Thereafter, they stayed in Missouri eleven months and then relocated to Nauvoo.

In 1840, Zina met Henry Jacobs and agreed to wed him. Oa Cannon, Zina's biographer, wrote:

While Zina and her brothers were living with the Prophet and Emma she met and became engaged to Henry Bailey Jacobs. They asked the Prophet to perform their marriage ceremony which was to be held at the County [sic] Clerk's office [March 7, 1841]. When the couple arrived the Prophet was not there. After a wait, they decided to ask the clerk, John C. Bennett, if he would perform the marriage, which he did. When the couple later met the Prophet, Zina asked him why he hadn't come as he had promised. He told her it had been made known to him that she was to be his Celestial Wife and he could not give to another one who had been given to him.²¹⁴

On May 1, 1869, Zina Huntington signed the following affidavit regarding her sealing to Joseph Smith:

Be it remembered that on this first day of May A.D. eighteen sixty nine before me Elias Smith Probate Judge for Said County personally appeared, Zina Diantha Huntington ^Young^ who was by me Sworn in due form of law, and upon her oath Saith, that on the twenty-Seventh day of October A.D. 1841, at the City of Nauvoo, County of Hancock, State of Illinois, She was married or Sealed to Joseph Smith, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, by Dimick B. Huntington, a High Priest in Said Church, according to the laws of the same; regulating marriage; In the presence of Fanny Maria Huntington.²¹⁵

Like other eternity-only plural wives, Zina referred to the events and the process that led up to her sealing to the Prophet, but she left no record discussing any special interactions with him after the marriage ceremony. Zina commented in an 1898 interview that, "It [plural marriage] was something too sacred to be talked about; it was more to me than life or death. I never breathed it for years." She declared to the interviewer, "We hardly dared speak of it. The very walls had ears. We spoke of it only in whispers . . . you are speaking on the most sacred experiences of my life."²¹⁶

Several controversial stories about Zina have been published. Unfortunately, these narratives have been perpetuated as documented history by some authors, though their accuracy is questionable.

Since Zina Huntington was legally married when she was sealed to the Prophet, some authors have accused Zina of practicing sexual polyandry, or having two husbands. In an 1898 interview with RLDS elder John W. Wight, Zina clarified that her marriage to Joseph was for eternity.

Another complicating factor is that two sealing dates for Joseph and Zina are available. Besides the October 27, 1841, date in the affidavit above, she reported in the 1898 interview: “When Brigham Young returned from England, he repeated the ceremony for *time and eternity*” (italics added).²¹⁷ The timeline is problematic because Brigham arrived from England in July of 1841 and could have performed the first sealing as well.

One possibility is that Zina or the recorder documented the wrong date, and there was only one eternity-only sealing. Another is that the first sealing on October 27, 1841, was for eternity only and that a second ceremony performed between Joseph and Zina by Brigham Young was for time and eternity. The fact that Zina immediately became pregnant after her legal marriage to Henry B. Jacobs (prior to her sealing to Joseph), but then had no other children with him until well after Joseph Smith’s death could support the tentative hypothesis that Henry served as a front husband during that period. This would be strange, but similar to the pretend marriage experienced by Sarah Ann Whitney and Joseph C. Kingsbury. According to Zina, Henry believed that “whatever the Prophet did was right, without making the wisdom of God’s authorities bend to the reasoning of any man.”²¹⁸ He also stood as a witness as Zina was resealed to Joseph Smith by Heber C. Kimball with Brigham Young acting as proxy in the Nauvoo Temple on February 2, 1846.²¹⁹

During the three weeks prior to the martyrdom, she mentions Henry only four times in her journal and Joseph Smith ten, but at that time of intensifying turmoil surrounding the Prophet, many Nauvooans may have been prompted to closely follow their leader’s day-to-day circumstances. Zina’s entries in those days immediately prior to the martyrdom include specific details, but whether she was recording generally known news or privileged information indicating her greater access to the Prophet based on their sealing, is not apparent. Her references to Henry during those three weeks prior to the martyrdom are inconclusive regarding the possibility that the legal union was a pretend marriage (though, not surprisingly, she does not mention sexual relations), and she was definitely pregnant with Henry’s child by June 1845 (a year after the Prophet’s death). The fact that she conceived no children between her October 27, 1841, sealing to the Prophet and his death could be interpreted different ways, since she seemed to have quickly conceived after her 1840 legal marriage to Henry.

Whatever the relationship between Zina and Henry Jacobs during Joseph Smith’s lifetime, it is clear that Zina and Henry were united after the martyrdom since she conceived a son with him approximately June 30, 1845. As mentioned, when Henry and Zina attended the Nauvoo Temple on February 2, Henry stood

as a witness as Zina was resealed to Joseph Smith for eternity. At this point, a strange thing occurred. Zina, who was seven months pregnant with Henry's child, was sealed to Brigham Young for time. The motivations for this sealing are unclear. Reportedly, Joseph Smith asked the Twelve to marry his widows to take care of them, but Zina needed no such support as Henry was a dutiful husband.²²⁰ Zina's dissatisfaction with her marriage to Henry may have played a role. She characterized the union as "a most unhappy and ill-assorted marriage."²²¹ Whether she had privately met with Brigham Young and requested a separation from Henry is unknown.

Despite her February 2, 1846, temple marriage for time to Brigham, Zina traveled with Henry as they left Nauvoo for the West just five days later. Henry cared for pregnant Zina who delivered their second child, Henry Chariton Jacobs, on March 22 at the crossing of the Chariton River in Iowa. A little over two months later while camped at Mt. Pisgah, Iowa, Brigham Young called Henry on a mission to England, apparently informing him that Zina was no longer his wife and advising him to marry another.

Like the experiences of other women with legal husbands, Zina's plural marriages after Joseph's death are odd even by polygamy standards. They are polyandrous in a ceremonial sense, but in regard to conjugality, they seem to represent consecutive matrimonies to Henry and then Brigham. That her previous sealing to Joseph Smith was for eternity only and without conjugality or was for time and eternity and consummated is unknowable.

Zina served as the third General President of the Relief Society, set apart on April 8, 1888, and as the first Matron of the Salt Lake Temple in 1893. Eight years later she died firm in the faith she had sacrificed for most of her life. In an 1895 memoir she reflected: "I received a testimony for myself from the Lord of this work, and that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God before I ever saw him, while I resided in the state of New York, given in answer to prayer. I knew him in his lifetime, and know him to have been a great, true man, and a servant of God. . . . I wish to bear my testimony to the principle of celestial marriage, that it is true."²²²