

## Plural Wives in Nauvoo

There was a gradual development in regard to the belief that men holding the Melchizedek Priesthood had the “privilege” of being married to an additional wife or wives by priesthood authority. This practice is commonly called polygamy (though technically the word would include women having more than one husband). It was also known as spiritual wifery, celestial (heavenly) marriage, plural marriage, or “the principle.” Various religious beliefs regarding marriage of individuals and groups had been around for years. The Latter-day Saint version of having more than one wife was taught and practiced in Nauvoo.

This chapter will explore what is currently known about the marriages or priesthood sealings of wives to Joseph Smith. It also includes an attempt by Brigham Young to obtain a plural wife. Some background is needed to understand how this system of marriage was introduced to believers in the prophetic ministry of Smith. Many questions remain unanswered because of the secret nature of the practice. When unauthorized discussion of marriage beliefs became public, those involved denied the practice so as to not reveal the true nature of what was going on secretly. Some church members knew nothing about plural marriage in Nauvoo.

The text of the Book of Mormon explains that it is an abomination to have “many wives and concubines.” The command was for a man to have one wife. In a prophet’s sermon denouncing the practice, Jacob, the brother of Nephi, regarded the Lamanites more righteous than the Nephites in regard to marital relations. The instructions gave the bad example of David and Solomon:

But the word of God burdens me because of your grosser crimes. For behold, thus saith the Lord: This People begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the Scriptures: for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son. Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

So essential was the Book of Mormon text that a large section explains that "whoredoms are an abomination." God's command should be kept "in all the lands of my people." While the wording, "otherwise they shall hearken unto these things" may not be clear, what is definite is the command to have one wife. Expressed in Book of Mormon terms, the words in Jacob gave important direction:

Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: for there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none: For I, the Lord God, delighteth in the chastity of women. And whoredoms is an abomination before me: thus saith the Lord of Hosts. Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of Hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes. For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto

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<sup>1</sup> 1830 BOM, 126-27; LDS Jacob 2:23-24; RLDS 2:31-33.

me, I will command my people: otherwise, they shall hearken unto these things. For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem; yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands.<sup>2</sup>

Men in biblical times, such as Abram (Abraham) and Jacob, had wives or concubines. As discussed in the book of Genesis, there were problems in their lives, and in their households. Before his death Jacob (Israel) blessed his twelve sons with a father's blessing. These blessings are recorded in Genesis 49.

Many years afterwards, laws were instituted for Israelites to regulate how men could add to their households. In a list of prohibitions that were regarded as abominations, the writings in Leviticus recorded a command to Moses: "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter." Also forbidden was marrying sisters while they are both alive: "Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life time."<sup>3</sup> Added to this were instructions that if Israel had a king, "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away."<sup>4</sup> But it was permitted that if a man died, having no child (son), then that man's brother could take her as a wife.<sup>5</sup>

A concubine could be added to a man's family in addition to his recognized wife. The husband was obliged to feed, clothe, and have marital rights with this concubine,<sup>6</sup> although her children could not inherit on equal grounds with the wife's children. Though men in biblical times were allowed to have more than one wife, he was obligated to provide for her support.

A king would usually have resources to maintain his wives and concubines. Such was the situation of David and Solomon, who are given as an example of how women can lead kings astray from God. Solomon was reported to have "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines."<sup>7</sup>

The Book of Mormon also tells about a king, Noah, who was disobedient to God and "had many wives and concubines." He led the people into sin and taxed them heavily "to support himself, and his wives, and his concubines, and also, his priests, and their wives, and their concubines; thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom."<sup>8</sup>

One of the first revelations given by Joseph Smith on February 9, 1831, after he arrived in Kirtland, Ohio, was relating to church law:

Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart and cleave unto her & none else, and he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith & shall not have the spirit & if he repent not he shall be cast out. Thou shalt not Commit adultery and he that committeth adultery & repenteth not shall be cast out and he that committeth adultery and repenteth with all his heart and forsaketh & doeth it

<sup>2</sup> 1830 BOM, 127; LDS Jacob 2:27-31; RLDS 2:36-40. See also LDS Jacob 3:5; RLDS 2:54-55.

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 18:17-18. On marrying a daughter and her mother see 20:14.

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 17:17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 25:5.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 21:10.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Kings 11:3.

<sup>8</sup> 1830 BOM, 178; LDS Mosiah 11:2, 4; RLDS 7:3, 7.

no more, thou shalt forgive him, but if he do it again he shall not be forgiven, but shall be cast out.<sup>9</sup>

The next month Smith received a revelation telling those going to preach to the Shakers that marriage was "ordained of God unto man wherefore it is lawful that he should have one wife & they twain [two] shall be one flesh & all this that the Earth might answer the end of its Creation & that it might be filled with the measure of man according to his creation before the world was made."<sup>10</sup> This instruction followed the early Christian church which taught that elders, deacons, or bishops were to be "the husband of one wife."<sup>11</sup>

In 1833 when Joseph Smith was revising the Old Testament, he considered the Song of Solomon as uninspired. This writing mentioned sexual love in the context of Solomon's marriage (Song. 3:11). When Smith revised 1 Kings 3 he added the wording, "the Lord was not pleased with" Solomon.<sup>12</sup> Smith's revision reflects his concern that Solomon, like David his father, was immoral (1 Kings 11:4, 6). The following biblical text tells about Solomon:

But king Solomon loved many strange women. . . . Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods.<sup>13</sup>

This problem of love and women was a concern for Smith as he reviewed the "many wives and concubines" of David and his son Solomon, continuing his objection found in the Book of Mormon. By the time Joseph recommenced revising the Old Testament in 1833 he had his scribe write, "The Songs of Solomon are not Inspired writings."<sup>14</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 18, it appears that Joseph Smith had an affair with Fanny Alger about 1836 before she left Kirtland. Luman A. Shirtliff married Eunice Bagg Gaylord, sister of Lester Gaylord. Elder Shirtliff described a conversation with his brother-in-law, Lester Gaylord, about March 1838 in Ohio before departing for Missouri:

While I and Br Leister [Lester Gaylord] was going from Kirtland to Sullivan to see about getting our Teems [Teams] In our conversation on the advancement of the Kingdom of God on the Earth I told him I believed that the time would come when men <in this Church> would have more than <one> Wife[.] Br Gaylord had told his Wife and she had told Sister [Ruth] Williams and Sister Williams had told Br [Samuel] Williams and They had talked it over and concluded it was redicalous [ridiculous] for an Elder to believe such an awfull [awful] doctrin<e>.

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<sup>9</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 108; LDS D&C 42:22-26; RLDS D&C 42:7.

<sup>10</sup> BCR, 81; LDS D&C 49:15-17; RLDS D&C 49:3; (May 1831).

<sup>11</sup> See Titus 1:5-6; 1 Timothy 3:12; 3:2.

<sup>12</sup> OT MS 2, 75, CCLA, revised in 1832; revision of 1 Kings 3:1.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Kings 11:1-4.

<sup>14</sup> OT MS 2, 97, CCLA.

Luman said he defended his position with brother Williams. Ruth Williams said, "I tell you br Shirliff if such things are ever practiced in this Church I will leave it before Night that I will." Shirliff continued his narrative:

I think no other word of that nature passed between us for over six years[.] while sitting near her in one of the upper Rooms of the Temple in Nauvoo [in 1846] while a Br[other] was passing through the Room with two women to the Sealing Room to be Sealed I said to Sister Williams, what do you think of that[?] she replied, O that is all right. I then said, then you dont think of leaveing to night[?] O no I am perfectly Satesfied.<sup>15</sup>

Joseph Smith was sexually active with Emma, his wife for thirteen years, before he taught others the importance of being married to additional wives, not only in this life but for eternity. Because he was the prophet, Smith's word was regarded by church members as the word of God. It appears that he would teach individual members the principle of plural marriage in secret and have them ask God for confirmation that it was a correct teaching. Joseph and Emma, prior to moving to Nauvoo, had six children; three of whom died the day they were born. The couple was also raising an adopted daughter Julia. The three children who lived prior to the move to Nauvoo were young Joseph, known as Joseph III (born November 6, 1832), Frederick Granger Williams (born June 20, 1836), and Alexander Hale (born June 2, 1838). Another son, Don Carlos, was born in June 1840, but died in August 1841.

The law of Illinois was clear on the status of matrimony: "Bigamy consists in the having of two wives or two husbands at one and the same time, knowing that the former husband or wife is still alive." Conviction could lead to a thousand dollar fine and send the guilty to the penitentiary for up to two years. For an unmarried woman, if convicted, she could be fined up to five hundred dollars and be imprisoned not more than a year.<sup>16</sup>

The religious ceremony of celestial marriage included the possibility of widowed, married, or single women being sealed in a priesthood rite to Joseph Smith with the promise, if faithful, to enter the celestial kingdom of heaven with themselves, their families, and be associated with Smith for eternity.

Documentation of this ordinance, like other priesthood-related practices, was secret for many reasons. Publicly in Nauvoo the practice of being married or sealed to more than one wife was denied. After Joseph Smith's death, some of the women made notarized affidavits which gave the date and named the person who performed the ceremony. Other women told about it in their life story. Some women believed that Smith's advances were too much for their comfort. A few plural wives died before making any statement. Joseph Bates Noble recalled that, as early as 1840, Joseph Smith told him about celestial marriage:

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<sup>15</sup> Luman Andrus Shurtliff, *Autobiography*, 116-118, CHL. Ruth Williams was sealed for time and all eternity to her husband Samuel in the Nauvoo Temple on January 16, 1846. Lisle G Brown, comp., *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: A Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841-1846* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2006), 337.

<sup>16</sup> *The Revised Laws of Illinois* (Vandalia: Printed by Greiner & Sherman, 1833), 198.

In the fall of the year A.D. 1840 Joseph Smith taught him [Noble] the principle of Celestial marriage or a "plurality of wives", and . . . the said Joseph Smith declared that he had received a Revelation from God on the subject, and that the Angel of the Lord had commanded him, (Joseph Smith) to move forward in the said order of marriage.<sup>17</sup>

Louisa Beeman was sealed to Joseph Smith by Joseph Noble. According to Noble, he performed the sealing on April 5, 1841. This was "according to the order of Celestial Marriage revealed to the Said Joseph Smith."<sup>18</sup> In early 1842 rumors circulated that certain unnamed men had "debauch[ed] the innocent," stating they had authority from church leaders. At the third meeting of the Relief Society held on March 30, 1842, Emma Smith, the society president, read an epistle signed by church President Joseph Smith, Apostles Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards; also church Patriarch Hyrum Smith, and bishop Vinson Knight. It would be a test in keeping secrets for the sisters:

A knowledge of some such things having come to our ears, we improve this favorable opportunity, wherein so goodly a number of you may be inform'd that no such authority ever has, ever can, or ever will be given to any man, and if any man has been guilty of any such thing, let him be treated with utter contempt, and let the curse of God fall on his head, and let him be turned out of Society as unworthy of a place among men, & denounced as the blackest & the most unprincipled wretch; and finally let him be damned!

The epistle further stated:

We do not mention their names, not knowing but what there may be some among you who are not sufficiently skill'd in Masonry as to keep a secret, therefore, suffice it to say, there are those, and we therefore warn you, & forewarn you, in the name of the Lord, to check & destroy any faith that any innocent person may have in any such character; for we do not want any one to believe *any thing* as coming from us, contrary to the old established morals & virtues & scriptural laws, regulating the habits, customs & conduct of society; and all persons pretending to be authoriz'd by us, or having any permit, or sanction from us, are & will be *liars & base impostors*, & you are authoriz'd on the very first intimation of the kind, to denounce them as such, & shun them as the flying fiery serpent, whether they are prophets, Seers, or revelators; Patriarchs, twelve Apostles, Elders, Priests, Mayors, Generals, City Councillors, Aldermen, Marshalls, Police, Lord Mayors or the Devil, are alike culpable & shall be damned for such evil practices; and if you yourselves adhere to anything of the kind, you also shall be

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<sup>17</sup> Affidavit of Joseph B. Noble, June 26, 1869, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Book 1:38, original in CHL. See also Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record* 6 (May 1887):221, Salt Lake City.

<sup>18</sup> Affidavit of Joseph B. Noble, June 26, 1869, separate affidavit from one noted in footnote 17, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Book 1:3.

damned. . . . Let this Epistle be had as a private matter in your Society, and then we shall learn whether you are good masons.<sup>19</sup>

It appears that women were sealed to the prophet Joseph Smith to secure their salvation. At times these sealings were to also assist the parents of the plural wife to have a family relationship and eternal glory with Smith. In 1842 the sealing of women to Joseph Smith accelerated. Smith made advances toward females, some of whom objected. Most accepted his doctrine and were united by a priesthood sealing ceremony. As far as is known, these women were secretly sealed to Joseph Smith without courtship. Many of the single women, because of their commitment to Smith in a plural relationship, would not be able to marry a man near their own age.

The following is a listing of women who obtained the sealing rite with the date and person who performed the ceremony, if known.<sup>20</sup> Some of the sealings of single women are not as well documented as others. The dates are based on statements made in 1869 by over a dozen women, and on recollections of the women or the men who were present at the sealing. Included were a couple of wives who were biological sisters. While the charts presented on the following pages may not include all of Smith's plural wives, it does give an indication of the variety of situations involved in plural marriage at Nauvoo.

#### SINGLE WOMEN SEALED TO JOSEPH SMITH

<i>Spiritual Wives</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sealing Date</i>	<i>By Whom</i>
Louisa Beeman	26	April 5, 1841	Joseph B. Noble
Eliza Roxey Snow	38	June 29, 1842	Brigham Young
Sarah Ann Whitney	17	July 27, 1842	Newel K. Whitney
Desdemona W. Fullmer	32-33	1842-43	Brigham Young
Emily Dow Partridge	19	March 4, 1843	Heber C. Kimball
sealed a second time		May [23], 1843	James Adams
Eliza Maria Partridge	22	March 8, 1843	Heber C. Kimball
sealed a second time		May [23], 1843	James Adams
Flora Ann Woodworth	16	circa April 1843	unknown
Lucy Walker	17	May 1, 1843	William Clayton
Maria Lawrence	19	circa May 1843	unknown
Sarah Lawrence	17	circa May 1843	unknown
Rhoda Richards	58	June 12, 1843	Willard Richards
Helen Mar Kimball	14	circa June 1843	unknown
Almera W. Johnson	29-30	circa June-Aug. 1843	Hyrum Smith

<sup>19</sup> A Book of Records, Containing the proceedings of The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, 86-88, CHL, emphasis retained. The epistle was recorded at the end of the September 28, 1842 meeting.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Jenson printed in the *Historical Record* 6 (May 1887):233-34 a list of twenty-seven reported wives of Joseph Smith. The article included some biographical sketches of a few of the women. Apostle Wilford Woodruff wrote to Jenson, "We do not think it a wise step to give these names to the world, at the present time, in the manner which you have done in this 'Historical Record.'" Woodruff to Jenson, August 6, 1887, typed copy, CHL.

SINGLE WOMEN SEALED TO JOSEPH SMITH

<i>Spiritual Wives</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sealing Date</i>	<i>By Whom</i>
Melissa Lott	19	Sept. 20, 1843	Hyrum Smith
Hannah S. Ells	29-30	1843	unknown

Accounts vary as to the character of Joseph Smith and women at Nauvoo. John C. Bennett indicated in his book that he considered Smith as licentious. The same type of charge was made against Bennett, who lived in the prophet’s home for nine months.<sup>21</sup> These two men had become good friends in the fall of 1840 and then had a bitter relationship and engaged in mutual exposés of each other after their falling out in May 1842.<sup>22</sup> Statements on spiritual wifeism made by the opportunist Bennett<sup>23</sup> were countered by Joseph Smith and friends in the Nauvoo press. Rather than get into the politics of their debate I will document two instances relating to attempts to obtain wives before Bennett left Nauvoo.

The pressure was enormous not to discuss details of how individual men attempted to secure plural wives. In order to talk to a woman a man would have to teach her ideas or doctrines that the church had opposed for years. Two women who were approached were Nancy Rigdon, daughter of Sidney Rigdon, and Martha Brotherton, a convert from England.

Women who were sealed to Smith considered him to be a prophet and rarely said anything about the sexual nature of their marriage. Most of the sealings, in private ceremonies, were kept from the knowledge of his legal wife, Emma. Whatever Joseph Smith's reasoning for celestial marriage, he knew that Emma would almost certainly not approve of having women sealed to her husband. It was not until May 1843 that Joseph was able to convince Emma to be a part of this process. She did consent to some sealings in 1843 but quickly withdrew her approval.

Besides the few single women sealed to Smith in 1841-42, there were married women who received the sealing ordinance to Joseph. This type of sealing commenced late in 1841. Included is the sealing of a daughter and her mother (Sylvia Sessions Lyon, date unknown, and Patty Bartlett Sessions) to Smith. Exactly what arrangement was made between those women who had a living husband and were sealed to Joseph Smith is not known. Smith evidently offered them association with himself in the celestial kingdom. The following charts list some of the married and widowed sisters who were sealed to President Smith.

MARRIED WOMEN SEALED TO JOSEPH SMITH

<i>Spiritual Wives</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sealing Date</i>	<i>By Whom</i>
Zina D. Huntington Jacobs	20	Oct. 27, 1841	Dimick Huntington
Prescenda Huntington Buell	31	Dec. 11, 1841	Dimick Huntington
Mary Rollins Lightner	23	circa Feb. 1842	Brigham Young

<sup>21</sup> “Autobiography of Emily D. P. Young,” *Woman’s Exponent* 14 (August 1, 1885):37. Emily wrote, “John C. Bennett made his home at the Prophet’s house at this time.” See Andrew F. Smith, *The Sainly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 214n10.

<sup>22</sup> See Smith, *The Sainly Scoundrel*, 78-128.

<sup>23</sup> John C. Bennett’s book-length exposé was *The History of the Saints; or, An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842).

MARRIED WOMEN SEALED TO JOSEPH SMITH

<i>Spiritual Wives</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sealing Date</i>	<i>By Whom</i>
Sylvia Sessions Lyon	23-24	1842-43	unknown
Patty Bartlett Sessions	47	March 9, 1842	Willard Richards
Marinda Johnson Hyde	27	May 1843	Brigham Young
Elvira Cowles Holmes	29	June 1, 1843	Heber C. Kimball
Ruth Vose Sayers	35-36	1843-44	Hyrum Smith

WIDOWS SEALED TO JOSEPH SMITH

<i>Spiritual Wives</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sealing Date</i>	<i>By Whom</i>
Agnes Coolbrith Smith	33	Jan. 6, 1842	Brigham Young
Martha McBride Knight	37	circa Aug. 1842	Heber C. Kimball
Fanny Young Carr Murray	55	Nov. 2, 1843	Brigham Young

Publicly these women were not known as Smith's spiritual wives, as Emma was the only legal wife of Joseph. It appears that Emma did not give Joseph permission to be sealed to married women or widows. What exactly Emma knew is not known. A number of females who did domestic work in Joseph Smith's homestead became Smith's wives. Three of these women were Desdemona Fullmer, Eliza Partridge, and her sister, Emily.<sup>24</sup>

Those sealed to Smith did not go with him to public meetings or social activities. They had no legal status as Smith's wives. There is no indication how the sealings of married wives were to be worked out temporally or spiritually. On the other hand, John C. Bennett and other men approached females to obtain sexual intercourse with their intended victims.<sup>25</sup>

Only a few church members knew about the command to practice plural marriage, and there were some honest denials of the practice. Stake president William Marks said he knew "of no Order in the Church which admits of a plurality of wives, and [did] not believe that Joseph Smith ever taught such a doctrine."<sup>26</sup>

Of the seven spiritual wives that John C. Bennett listed (with asterisks for letters in their names) some have been identified. Bennett wrote, "Joe Smith was privately married to his spiritual wives," and mentioned "Mrs. A\*\*\*\* S\*\*\*\*, by Apostle Brigham Young" this was Mrs. Agnes Smith (widow of Don Carlos Smith) sealed to Joseph Smith in January 1842. "Miss L\*\*\*\*\* B\*\*\*\*\*, by Elder Joseph Bates Noble" was Louisa Beeman sealed to Smith in April 1841. "Mrs. B\*\*\*\*" who was Mrs. Prescenda Huntington Buell having been also sealed in 1841. Bennett listed a "Mrs. S\*\*\*\*\*" which was probably Mrs. Patty Sessions.<sup>27</sup>

Seventeen-year-old Martha Brotherton, with her older sister Elizabeth, and their parents, Thomas and Sarah, left Liverpool, England, on the ship *Tyrian*. They arrived at New Orleans on

<sup>24</sup> Nauvoo Stake, Ward Census 1842, Fourth Ward, CHL. The church census was taken in February 1842.

<sup>25</sup> See Gary James Bergera, "'Illicit Intercourse,' Plural Marriage and the Nauvoo Stake High Council, 1840-1844," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 23 (2003):59-90.

<sup>26</sup> *Times and Seasons* 3 (August 1, 1842):875.

<sup>27</sup> Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 256.



November 9, 1841.<sup>28</sup> Later the family moved to Nauvoo, and Martha received a patriarchal blessing from Hyrum Smith on February 23, 1842.

John C. Bennett requested Martha to make a public statement of her experience with church leaders. She did on July 13. Martha gave some background of her meeting with Apostles Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball at Joseph Smith's red brick store. At the store Martha saw William Clayton, whom she recognized in the tithing office.<sup>29</sup> The following conversation is reproduced from Martha's affidavit written in July 1842.<sup>30</sup> Brigham Young wanted Martha as a plural wife. This exchange probably took place in March of that year. Her affidavit is one of the earliest published documents concerning the belief in a plurality of wives by leaders of the church. Martha said she sat down and wrote about her experience shortly after it took place.

Going upstairs with Heber C. Kimball to the second floor of the red brick store Martha found Brigham Young and Joseph Smith alone. She was introduced to the Prophet Joseph Smith (JS) by Brigham Young. Joseph offered Martha his seat after which Smith and Heber Kimball left the room leaving Martha alone with Apostle Young. Brigham Young (BY) arose, locked the door, closed the window, and drew the curtain. He then came and sat before Martha Brotherton (MB). The following is based on her memory of what took place that day:

BY: This is our private room, Martha.

MB: Indeed, sir, I must be highly honored to be permitted to enter it.

BY: Sister Martha, I want to ask you a few questions; will you answer them?

MB: Yes, sir.

BY: And will you promise not to mention them to anyone?

MB: If it is your desire, sir, I will not.

BY: And you will not think any the worse of me for it, will you, Martha?"

MB: No sir.

BY: Well, what are your feelings toward me?

MB: My feelings are just the same towards you that they ever were, sir.

BY: But, to come to the point more closely, have not you an affection for me, that, were it lawful and right, you could accept of me for your husband and companion?

MB: If it was lawful and right perhaps I might; but you know, sir, it is not.

BY: Well, brother Joseph has had a revelation from God that it is lawful and right for a man to have two wives; for as it was in the days of Abraham, so it shall be in these last days, and whoever is the first that is willing to take up the cross will receive the greatest blessings; and if you will accept of me I will take you straight to the celestial kingdom; and if you will have me in this world, I will have you in that which is to come, and brother Joseph will marry us here today, and you can go home this evening, and your parents will not know any thing about it.

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<sup>28</sup> Conway B. Sonne, *Ships, Saints, and Mariners: A Maritime Encyclopedia of Mormon Migration 1830-1890* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 190. See Paul B. Pixton, "The Tyrian and Its Mormon Passengers," *Mormon Historical Studies* 5 (Spring 2004):29-52.

<sup>29</sup> Clayton began to enter the amounts of tithes on February 10, 1842. William Clayton Journal, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

<sup>30</sup> Brotherton to Bennett, July 13, 1842, *Native American Bulletin* 1 (July 16, 1842), St. Louis, Missouri, emphasis omitted. Martha Brotherton's affidavit appeared in a number of Illinois newspapers and was published twice in New York City. See *New York Herald* 8 (July 25 and 27, 1842).

MB: Sir, I should not like to do anything of the kind without the permission of my parents.

BY: Well, you are of age, are you not?

MB: No, sir, I shall not be until the 24th of May.

BY: Well, that does not make any difference. You will be of age before they know, and you need not fear. If you will take my counsel it will be well with you, for I know it to be right before God, and if there is any sin in it, I will answer for it. But brother Joseph wishes to have some talk with you on the subject, he will explain things, will you hear him?

MB: I do not mind.

BY: Well, I want you to say something.

MB: I want time to think about it.

BY: Well, I will have a kiss any how.

Brigham Young said he would bring Joseph Smith. Brigham unlocked the door, took the key, and left, relocking the door behind him. After Martha had been in the room alone for about ten minutes, Brigham returned with Joseph. The interview continued:

BY to JS: Well, sister Martha would be willing if she knew it was lawful and right before God.

JS: Well, Martha, it is lawful and right before God. I know it is. Look here, don't you believe in me? Well Martha, just go ahead and do as Brigham wants you to, he is the best man in the world except me.

BY: Oh then you are as good.

JS: Yes.

BY: Well, we believe Joseph to be a Prophet. I have known him near eight years, and always found him the same.

JS: Yes, and I know that this is lawful and right before God, and if there is any sin in it I will answer for it before God, and I have the keys of the kingdom, and whatever I bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever I loose on earth is loosed in heaven; and if you will accept of Brigham, you shall be blessed. God shall bless you, and my blessing shall rest upon you, and if you will be led by him you will do well; for I know Brigham will take care of you, and if he don't do his duty to you, come to me and I will make him; and if you do not like it in a month or two, come to me and I will make you free again; and if he turns you off I will take you on.

MB: Sir, it will be too late to think in a month or two after. I want time to think first.

JS: Well, the old proverb is, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained;" and it would be the greatest blessing that was ever bestowed upon you.

BY: Yes, and you will never have reason to repent it, that is, if I do not turn from righteousness, and that I trust I never shall, for I believe God who has kept me so long will continue to keep me faithful. Did you ever see me act in any way wrong in England, Martha?

MB: No, sir.

BY: No, neither can any one else lay any thing to my charge.

JS: Well, then, what are you afraid of? Come let me do the business for you.

MB: Sir, do let me have a little time to think about it, and I will promise not to mention it to any one.

BY: Well, look here, you know a fellow will never be damned for doing the best he knows how.

MB: Well, then, the best way I know of, is to go home and think and pray about it.

BY: Well, I shall leave it with brother Joseph, whether it would be best for you to have time or not.

JS: Well, I see no harm in her having time to think, if she will not fall into temptation.

MB: O, sir, there is no fear of my falling into temptation.

BY: Well, you must promise me you will never mention it to any one.

MB: I do promise it.

JS: Well, you must promise me the same.

MB: I promise.

JS: Upon your honor, you will not tell.

MB: No, sir, I will lose my life first.

JS: Well, that will do, that is the principle we go upon. I think I can trust you, Martha.

MB: Yes, I think you ought.

JS: She looks as if she could keep a secret.

Martha left the store and the next day, being Sunday, she sat down and wrote about the conversation. She shared it with her sister. Later rumor went around relating to the incident. At a special conference held on April 7, Hyrum Smith "spoke in contradiction of a report in circulation about Elder Kimball, B. Young, himself, and others of the Twelve, alledging that a sister had been shut in a room for several days, and that they had endeavored to induce her to believe in having two wives."<sup>31</sup> How accurate the rumor was we do not know. It did mention Brigham Young and the idea of believing that men could have two wives. That the sister was "shut in a room for several days" was certainly an exaggeration.

Later Martha Brotherton's July statement would bring denials from both Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball. Martha wrote to her relatives in England. The *Millennial Star*, the church periodical, not knowing the private teachings in Nauvoo, wrote:

But, for the information of those who may be assailed by those foolish tales about the two wives, we would say that no such principle ever existed among the Latter-day Saints, and never will; this is well known to all who are acquainted with our books, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants; and also all our periodicals are very strict and explicit on that subject, indeed far more so than the Bible.<sup>32</sup>

Reaction in the church from Martha's published recollection was negative against her integrity. Martha's brother-in-law John McIlwrick made a statement that Martha "is a deliberate liar." Her two sisters, Elizabeth and Mary, concurred. Brigham Young also made an affidavit stating, "I do hereby testify that the affidavit of Miss Martha Brotherton that is going the rounds in the politics and religious papers, is a base falsehood, with regard to any private intercourse or unlawful conduct or conversation with me."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 3 (April 15, 1842):763.

<sup>32</sup> "Apostacy," *Millennial Star* 3 (August 1842):74.

<sup>33</sup> Affidavit of Brigham Young, August 25, 1842, sworn and subscribed to on August 27, 1842, published in the broadside *Affidavits and Certificates, Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters. Nauvoo. Aug. 31, 1842*. Subsequently Brigham Young had Martha Brotherton sealed to him after her death, her younger sister Elizabeth being proxy for her, in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City. Apostle Joseph F. Smith performed the sealing. Salt Lake Temple and Endowment House Records, under date of August 1, 1870, Family History Library.

Shortly afterwards it was rumored that Joseph Smith privately asked Nancy Rigdon, a daughter of Sidney Rigdon, to become his (Smith's) spiritual wife. She declined, but Smith dictated a letter to her of a doctrinal nature. The letter by Joseph Smith contained ideas that were conducive to persuading a person to accept a religious principle, though it may be contrary to the accepted norm. Smith indicated:

Happiness is the object and design of our existence, and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it, and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God. . . . Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire. If we seek first the kingdom of God, all good things will be added. So with Solomon—first he asked wisdom, and God gave it him, and with it every Desire of his heart, even things which might be considered abominable to all who understand the order of heaven only in part, but which, in reality, were right, because God gave and sanctioned by special revelation.<sup>34</sup>

George W. Robinson, son-in-law of Sidney Rigdon, wrote that Nancy told her story in front of her family and Joseph Smith. Robinson wrote about the meeting:

I was present. Smith attempted to deny it at first, and face her down with the lie; but she told the facts with so much earnestness, and the fact of a letter being present, which he had caused to be written to her, on the same subject, the day after the attempt made on her virtue, breathing the same spirit, and which he had fondly hoped was destroyed,—all came with such force that he could not withstand the testimony; and he then and there acknowledged that every word of Miss Rigdon's testimony was true. Now for his excuse, which he made for such a base attempt, and for using the name of the Lord in vain, on that occasion. He wished to ascertain whether she was virtuous or not, and took that course to learn the facts!!!<sup>35</sup>

Smith's confession was private, and Nancy did not make a public statement. The letter dictated by Smith and written by Willard Richards was still in her possession. The public position taken in the Nauvoo newspaper *The Wasp* was denial that Joseph Smith was its author.

To further complicate the matter, Stephen Markham wrote disparaging comments about John C. Bennett and Nancy, insinuating that they "were guilty of unlawful and illicit intercourse

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<sup>34</sup> Smith to Nancy Rigdon, circa April 11, 1842, original letter in the handwriting of Willard Richards not extant. Published in the *Sangamo Journal* 10 (August 19, 1842):2, Springfield, Illinois. Quotation marks and emphasis are omitted. See Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 538-39.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson to James Arlington Bennet, July 27, 1842, as cited in John C. Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 246, emphasis omitted.

with each other."<sup>36</sup> Sidney Rigdon countered this by stating that "Markham is not to be believed, that his word for truth and veracity is not good."<sup>37</sup> The statement by Markham was so unreliable that the *Wasp* reported, "We are authorized to say, by Gen. Joseph Smith, that the affidavit of Stephen Markham, relative to Miss Nancy Rigdon, as published in the handbill of affidavits, was unauthorized by him: the certificate of Elder Rigdon relative to the letter, being satisfactory."<sup>38</sup> The handbill was authorized by Smith who made no affidavit regarding his conduct with Nancy Rigdon. Concerning the letter to his daughter, Sidney Rigdon made his own statement:

I am fully authorized by my daughter, Nancy, to say to the public through the medium of your paper, that the letter which has appeared in the *Sangamo Journal*, making part of General Bennett's letters to said paper, purporting to have been written by Mr. Joseph Smith to her, was unauthorized by her, and that she never said to Gen. Bennett or any other person, that said letter was written by said Mr. Smith, nor in his hand writing, but by another person, and in another persons' [sic] hand writing. . . . I would further state that Mr. Smith denied to me the authorship of that letter.<sup>39</sup>

The date when Heber C. and Vilate Kimball were sealed together for time and all eternity is not known. According to family tradition, thirty-year-old Sarah Peak Noon was "abandoned in Nauvoo by her husband [William Spencer Noon] when he returned to England."<sup>40</sup> Shortly after, about January 1842, Sarah Peak was sealed to Apostle Heber C. Kimball as a plural wife. Sarah entered into the plural relationship with two children. In July, Heber wrote to Vilate from Pittsburgh, "give my kind love to sister S[arah]. fore [for] she is not forgot[t]en."<sup>41</sup> In October Vilate wrote a letter to Heber when she and Sarah Noon were both pregnant:

Our good friend S[arah]. is as ever, and we are one. You said I must tell you all my feelings; but if I were to tell you that I sometimes felt tempted and tried and feel as though my burden was greater that I could bear, it would only be a source of sorrow to you, and the Lord knows that I do not wish to add one sorrow to your heart, for be assured my dear Heber, that I do not love you any less for what has transpired, neither do I believe that you do me; therefore I will keep my bad feelings to myself, as much as possible; and tell you the good. I can say with propriety that the most of my time I feel comfortable in my mind, and feel that I have much to be thankful for. I realize that the scenes we are called to pass through are calculated to wean us from the world, and prepare us for a better one. . . . I must leave room for Sister S[arah]. to write you a few lines.

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<sup>36</sup> Affidavit of Stephen Markham, August 29, 1842, published in the broadside *Affidavits and Certificates, Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters. Nauvoo. Aug. 31, 1842.*

<sup>37</sup> Certificate of Sidney Rigdon, September 3, 1842, *Sangamo Journal* 10 (September 23, 1842).

<sup>38</sup> *The Wasp* 1 (September 3, 1842):2, Nauvoo.

<sup>39</sup> Rigdon to Editor, August 27, 1842, *Ibid.*, 1 (September 3, 1842):4. Also printed in *Affidavits and Certificates.*

<sup>40</sup> Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer*, 95.

<sup>41</sup> Heber C. Kimball to Vilate Kimball, July 25, 1842, CHL.

Vilate ended her portion of the letter and left room for Sarah Noon, Heber's first plural wife, to add her thoughts in the same letter:

My very dear friend: Inasmuch as I have listened to your counsel hitherto I have prospered, therefore I hope that I shall ever adhere to it strictly in future. Your kind letter was joyfully received. I never read it but I receive some comfort and feel strengthened, and thank you for it. You may depend upon my moving as soon as the house is ready. I feel anxious as I perceive my infirmities increasing daily. Your request with regard to Sister Kimball I will attend to. Nothing gives me more pleasure than to add to the happiness of my friends; I only wish that I had more ability to do so. I am very glad we are likely to see you soon, and pray that nothing may occur to disappoint us. When you request Vilate to meet you, perhaps you forget that I shall then stand in jeopardy every hour, and would not have her absent for worlds. My mind is fixed and I am rather particular, but still, for your comfort, I will submit.<sup>42</sup>

The first known child born to a plural wife in Nauvoo was a son Adelmon (Adelbert) who was born October or November 1842 to Heber and Sarah. Six months later little Adelmon died. His obituary reads: "Adelmon H. Noon, 6 months; fit of Appoplexy" having died the week ending April 24, 1843.<sup>43</sup>

On January 2, 1843, Charles S. Kimball was born to Vilate and Heber. If Heber and Vilate were sealed for time and eternity by this time, then the birth of Charles would be the first child born in the new eternal covenant of marriage. Helen Mar Kimball, fourteen years old at the time, recalled many years later, "I remember the birth of another son of my father's wife Sarah which happened not far from the time that that my mother's was born."<sup>44</sup>

In another letter Vilate told Heber about Parley and Mary Ann Pratt coming to their home and mentioned to Heber that one (plural wife) had been appointed for Parley. The next month Elizabeth Brotherton was sealed to Parley P. Pratt on July 24, 1843, by Hyrum Smith. Vilate wrote:

June 29<sup>th</sup> since writing the above I have had a visit from brother Pa<r>ley and his wife they are truly converted it appears that J...h [Joseph] has taught him some principles and told him his privilege, and even appointed one for him, I dare not tell you who it is, you would be astonished and I guess some tried. she has be[e]n to me for counsel, I told her I did not wish to advise in such matters. sister Pratt has ben rageing against these things, she told me her self that the devel had ben in

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<sup>42</sup> Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, October 16, 1842, as cited in Helen Mar [Kimball] Whitney, "Scenes and Incidents in Nauvoo," *Woman's Exponent* 11 (June 1, 1882):1-2. The words "(Sarah, father's other wife)" after "friend S." are omitted.

<sup>43</sup> *The Wasp* 1 (April 26, 1843):3. Also recorded in "Record of Deaths in the City of Nauvoo," CHL. See Fred E. Woods, "The Cemetery Record of William D. Huntington, Nauvoo Sexton," *Mormon Historical Studies* 3, no. 1 (2002):138.

<sup>44</sup> Helen Mar [Kimball] Whitney, "Scenes and Incidents in Nauvoo," *Woman's Exponent* 11 (July 15, 1882):26. Charles Spalding Kimball died December 2, 1925 and is buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery.

her until within a few days past, she said the Lord had shown her it was all right. she wants Parley to go ahead, says she will do all in her power to help him; they are so ingaged [engaged] I feer they will run to[o] fast. they asked me many questions on principle I told them I did not know much and I rather they would go to those that had authority to teach. Parley said he and J[oseph] were interrupted before he got what instruction he had wanted, and now he did not know when he should have an opportunity. he seamed unwilling to wate. I told him these were sacred things and he better not make a moove until he got more instruction.<sup>45</sup>

There are gaps in our knowledge of plural marriage because of the scarcity of written records. Some letters written at Nauvoo ask the recipient to burn the letter after reading it because of the nature of the content. But there are enough documents retained through the years that help us establish the basic nature of the plural relationships. The next chapter will discuss the marriage of Sarah Ann Whitney to Joseph Smith in July 1842.

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<sup>45</sup> Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, June 27-29, 1843, CHL. The letter ended: "I think you had better burn this, as soon as yuo [you] can after reading it. I should not dare to send it by mail, but I trust it will go safe."