

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: BRIGHAM YOUNG'S BAPTISM DATE

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Published in the *Journal of Mormon History* 38 (Fall 2012):195-99.
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MANY BRIGHAM YOUNG BIOGRAPHIES and Latter-day Saint reference books state that Brigham Young's baptism occurred on either April 14 or 15, 1832, at Mendon, New York.¹ The earliest records--which I accept as the most accurate--date his baptism as April 9, 1832. Much confusion originated from Brigham Young himself. This article seeks to trace this development and how, over time, the date was moved to five or six days later.

Brigham, born June 1, 1801, married Miriam Angeline Works when he was twenty-three and fathered two daughters: Elizabeth and Vilate. The Brigham Young family was enumerated in the 1830 U.S. census in two New York locations: Canandaigua, Ontario County, and Mendon, Monroe County. This dual entry may represent the family's move to Mendon from Canandaigua. Mendon is where Young was baptized, confirmed, and ordained an elder the same day. He started a journal with the first entry on April 9, 1832. As Figure 1 shows, he dates his baptism on "April 9 th 1832."

Brigham's handwritten ordination license is severely damaged; but enough of it is preserved to conclude that he was ordained an elder by Eleazer Miller on April 9, 1832. See Figure 2.

In addition to these two contemporary documents, a third adds corroboration. At a family gathering on January 8, 1845, in Nauvoo, Illinois, Brigham Young spoke of his conversion. Clerk Thomas Bullock recorded: "I was baptized in Melville [sic] by Ebenezer Miller April 9, 1832." The baptism location was corrected above the line to "Mendon, Monroe Co. N. Y." and Miller's first name to "Eleazer."²

The three historical records previously cited all concur that April 9, 1832, was the day Brigham was baptized. Then, nine years after the Mormons settled in the Salt Lake Valley, those laboring in the Church Historian's Office commenced writing the "History of Brigham Young" in the fall of 1856. The information they received concerning Brigham's baptism, presumably but not certainly, came from him and was entered into the record in the first person. The first draft read: "During the month [added above the line, "of – [Blank space] 1832"] Having heard Eleazur Miller and others preach the new and everlasting Gospel as restored by the administration of an holy angel . . ."

¹ For example, Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 30; Leonard J. Arrington and Larry C. Porter, "Young, Brigham," *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, edited by Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 1375.

² Brigham Young and Willard Richards Family Meeting Minutes, January 8, 1845, 8, General Church Minutes, 1839-77, CR 100 318, Box 1, fd. 28, LDS Church History Library, in Richard E. Turley, ed., *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2 vols. DVD (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, [Dec. 2002]), Vol. 1, #18.

Aprill 9th 1832
I was baptized under the hand
of Ebenezer Miller - and ordained,
preacht as opportunity presented
Baptized Rachel Flumerfelt
June went to Hector, preacht at ^{the} here
July, Baptized John D. Morgan
out went to Redding from their to
Hornby, held ^{Baptized 3} meetings, then neti
to Cotton held 2 meetings, from
their to Redding, held 1 meeting, from
to Hector held 1 meeting, from their
ham, from their to Brown held 1 meeting
and in the adjacent towns Baptized
in Ararat ... Brother Heber
Kimbel and Brother Joseph Young,
and my self went to Ohio Baptized
sister Whitney, Father and then
returned from then to Wovesau

Figure 1. Brigham Young's Journal, April 9, 1832. Courtesy LDS Church History Library.

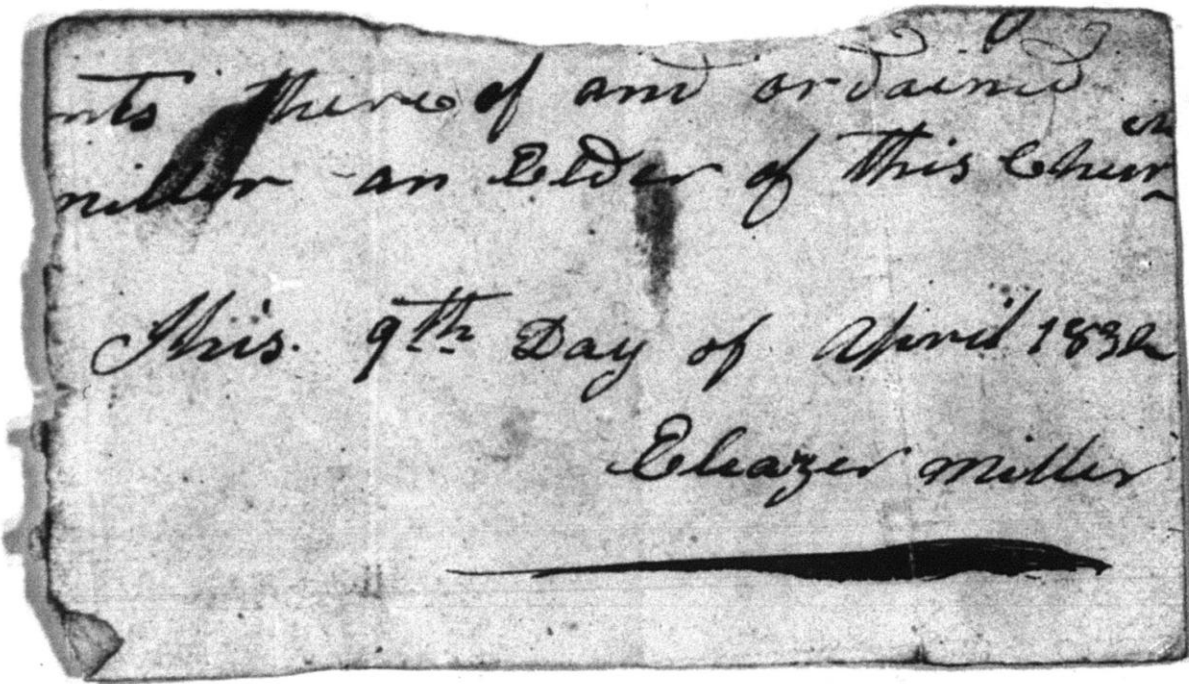


Figure 2. Reconstruction of Brigham Young's Elder's License, Courtesy, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. The retained writing in the line-by-line transcript is in **bold**, line breaks indicated by /: This certifies that Brigham Young / was baptized into the Church of / Christ according to the articles & / covenants **there of and ordained** / by Eleazer Miller an Elder of **this Chur^h / ch** / **This 9th Day of April 1832** / **Eleazer Miller**

The blank for the month and day were filled in later and read: "14th 14 April." Other drafts of Brigham's history also incorporated April 14, 1832, as the date.³ Brigham may have been the source of this misinformation. The final fair copy read: "April 14, 1832, I was baptized by Eleazer Miller, who confirmed me at the water's edge. We returned home, about two miles, the weather being cold and snowy; and before my clothes were dry on my back he laid his hands on me and ordained me an elder, at which I marvelled."⁴

In 1858, the first part of Brigham's history, including the story of his baptism and ordination, was printed.⁵

³ Brigham Young History, Drafts, 1856-1858, CR 100 475, LDS Church History Library.

⁴ Manuscript History of Brigham Young, holograph, CR 100 150, Box 3, LDS Church History Library. The number 9 was added at a later date in the left margin.

⁵ "History of Brigham Young," *Deseret News*, February 10, 1858, 385.

On July 23, 1858, Brigham wrote a letter to an unidentified correspondent about the period of his life spent in Canandaigua, New York; and in it, he included the new date of his baptism: "I left Canandaigua in the first part of 1832, and returned to Mendon. April 14, same year, I was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints."⁶ Since he was the author of this letter, then it strengthens the possibility that he supplied the mistaken date to those drafting his history in the fall of 1856.

Then, in a discourse delivered on February 16, 1863, Brigham spoke of a third baptismal date: "It is thirty years the 15th day of next April (though it has accidentally been recorded and printed the fourteenth) since I was baptized into this Church, and in that time I have gained quite an experience."⁷ April 15 fell on a Sunday in 1832, and Brigham continued to associate his baptism with this date. In another address to the Saints in 1870, he stated: "I recollect the Sunday morning on which I was baptized, in my own little mill stream; I was ordained to the office of an Elder before my clothes were dry upon me."⁸

This series of shifts--from Monday (April 9, 1832) to Saturday (April 14) in his history, and then to a Sunday (April 15)--shows how fluidly a date can be when a person is recalling even an event as important as baptism. It is understandable when writers follow either Brigham's history or his correction to April 15, 1832, that the incorrect date becomes entrenched in telling his story. A few writers who have noticed the dating discrepancy have returned to the earliest documents for dating Brigham Young's baptism.⁹ I hope that this chronology of dates, clarifying when and (to some extent) how mistaken dates entered the historical record, will make it easier for future historians to use the correct date of April 9, 1832.

⁶ Brigham Young, Letter to unknown correspondent, July 23, 1858, *New York Semi-Weekly Tribune*, September 17, 1858, 4, reprinted from the *Ontario Republican Times*.

⁷ Brigham Young, February 16, 1863, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854-86), 9:219.

⁸ Brigham Young, July 17, 1870, *Journal of Discourses* 13:211.

⁹ Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and R. Q. Shupe, *My Servant Brigham: Portrait of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 58, suggest "9 April 1832 as the date of the baptism." See also Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, eds., *Joseph Smith's Quorum of the Anointed, 1842-1845: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2005), 242.