

# Anthony Maitland Stenhouse, Bachelor “Polygamist”

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*I have no intention of practicing polygamy,  
but I accept and will firmly maintain it as a  
doctrine, and am in no way ashamed of it.*

—Anthony Maitland Stenhouse

SO WROTE ANTHONY MAITLAND STENHOUSE (no relation to T. B. H. Stenhouse), a Scot transplanted temporarily to the western Canadian wilderness and an ardent nineteenth-century proponent of polygamy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Colonist*, 20 Oct. 1887. This newspaper began publication in 1858 as the *British Colonist*, became the *Daily British Colonist* in 1860, the *Daily British Colonist and Victoria Chronicle* in 1866, and the *Daily Colonist* from 1886. It will be cited hereafter as *Colonist*.

Unless otherwise noted, the biographical details of Stenhouse's life up to 1890 will be drawn from the *Colonist* and will not be cited specifically in the text. His letters to the editor, the editor's replies, and reports of his activities appeared frequently in that newspaper. His letters were published on the following dates: 28 March, 15 Aug., 15 Sept. 1886; 17, 31 July, 20, 21 Oct., 1887; 18 June, 1889. Editorial replies to his letters and other comments concerning him appeared on: 7 March 1886; 22 Jan., 16, 18, 20 Oct., 4, 6, 27 Nov., 15, 20, Dec. 1887; 18 Jan., 3, 20 May, 10 Aug. 1888; 27 Jan., 10 Oct., 13 Nov. 1889; 18, 19 Feb. 1890. Other helpful information is found in references

Ironically, he was a lifelong bachelor. Although Stenhouse vigorously defended polygamy both vocally and in the press after becoming convinced of the truthfulness of Mormonism in 1887, he failed to enter into Utah Mormonism's "peculiar institution" before it was outlawed by both state and church.<sup>2</sup>

Stenhouse, born 21 February 1849 at Edinburgh, Scotland, was the youngest son of a Scottish gentleman, Robert Talbot Stenhouse. He was educated "privately" and then attended the University of Edinburgh, where he apparently failed to qualify for medical school, which he intended to enter (D. Stenhouse 1984). However, twice in his early political career in British Columbia, the *Colonist* refers to him as if he had a medical degree.

It is not known why Stenhouse decided to emigrate to Canada. He sailed from Liverpool to New York City on 1 March 1884, then traveled overland to Puget Sound, probably on the recently opened Northern Pacific Railway, arriving in Victoria aboard the S.S. *North Pacific* on 22 March 1884.<sup>3</sup> Once there, he discovered that the best places to settle were elsewhere and so went on to the Comox Valley, 130 miles to the north, arriving on 16 October (A. Stenhouse 30 Sept. 1887). Although political foes later claimed that he knew nothing about farming, he acquired land that he planned to cultivate. He visited Victoria frequently, associating with the elite of the city, and near the end of January, the *Colonist* reported that he attended the opening of the provincial legislature.

Stenhouse was soon campaigning to take the place of the Comox representative in the Legislative Assembly. When an election was called, he secured a nomination. Although he was accused of being unable to write a decent speech without help, and according to the *Colonist* on 29 July 1886 of failing to give a scheduled address because

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to Stenhouse in the issues of: 23 March 1884; 29 Aug., 8, 30 Oct. 1885; 26 Jan., 12 March, 1, 27 June, 10, 29 July, 10, 11, 16 Sep., 20 Oct. 1886; 9 Jan., 1, 10, 17, 18, 22, 25 Feb., 1, 3, 11, 12, 15, 17, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26, 29 March, 5, 7, 8, April, 9, 10, 24, July, 7 Aug., 25 Sept., 20, 25 Oct., 8, 9, 12, 15, 23, 27, 29, 30 Nov., 4, 6, 21 Dec. 1887; 26 Feb., 12, 21 April, 27 Oct., 5, 8, 19, 29 Dec. 1888; 22 March, 20 June, 4 Aug., 27 Sept. 1889.

<sup>2</sup> Although in U.S. history the term "peculiar institution" is commonly understood to mean slavery, it was applied on at least one occasion in Canada to Mormon polygamy. The *Colonist* on 21 November 1888 stated: "Now they [Charles Ora Card's settlers] are not so strong in their repudiation of their peculiar institution."

<sup>3</sup> The Northern Pacific Railway was opened from Ashland, Wisconsin, to Portland, Oregon, in 1883.

<sup>4</sup> Stenhouse responded by accusing his accuser of being "quite unable to compose a few sentences of decent English" and hence using a ghost writer (*Colonist* 15 Aug. 1886).

“he had forgotten his manuscript and the time since it was written for him was too short to have committed it to memory,” he was elected on 10 July 1886.<sup>4</sup>

No party designations other than “Government” and “Opposition” were in use in British Columbia at this time. Stenhouse sat with the Opposition, which according to the *Colonist* consisted of seven men in a twenty-six member house. His actions in the legislature were generally unexceptional, although he did publicly thank the government for providing very satisfactory appropriations for his district, a most unusual action for a member of the opposition. He worked hard for his constituents, pushing for adequate lighthouses and bridges as well as the extension of postal services (“Journals, B.C.” 5 April 1887). He voted against “hoisting” (indefinitely postponing consideration of) the women’s suffrage bill. When the session closed early in April 1887, Stenhouse returned to Comox, where on 5 July he was accorded a vote of confidence by a group of his constituents. He subsequently refused to accede to demands for his resignation which were published anonymously, probably by government supporters who felt that he had failed as their representative since he had not got for them the roads, bridges, and streets they desired.

The word “Mormon” was first associated with his name in June 1886; he must have made enough private comments about the Mormons for his interest in them to be known locally, for one of his critics wrote in the *Colonist* on 27 June 1886, “He is no more a farmer than he is a Mormon saint.” Sometime earlier, Stenhouse entered into correspondence with leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Utah. His first extant letter to a Church leader is dated 30 September 1887 and addressed to Wilford Woodruff, acting president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>5</sup> In the letter, Stenhouse announced his conversion, which suggests previous contact with, and fairly extensive knowledge of, Mormonism.

Dear Mr. Woodruff

Your letter of the 8th instant on behalf of the Council of the Apostles was one of glad tidings and its message of love and sympathy has confirmed my resolution to forsake all and follow Christ. In seeking communion with His Saints my desire is

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<sup>5</sup> John Taylor died 25 July 1887. Wilford Woodruff acted as president of the Church in his capacity as president of the Twelve until 7 April 1889 when he was sustained as president of the Church.

<sup>6</sup> What prompted Stenhouse to enter into correspondence with the president of the Church is not known. It is unlikely that he had contact with Latter-day Saints in Britain or he

not to bear office among them but rather to follow some secular occupation such as farming. In matters of faith and doctrine I feel myself altogether more competent to follow than to lead and will gladly embrace every opportunity for instruction. . . .

I have taken time to study the books you so kindly sent. Penrose's "Mormon Doctrine" and the "Hand Book of Reference" agree substantially with what I had already learned from other sources. After much prayerful consideration I have decided to make an open profession of the Faith immediately on resigning my seat in the legislature. . . . It is one way in which I may be enabled to serve the Church of Jesus Christ. I have counted the cost. My sole desire is to be a fellow sufferer with His Saints and I have long been aware of the shameful persecution they have now to endure. . . .

Sunday the 16th of October next, which happens to be the third anniversary of my first arrival in Comox, is the day I have appointed for the announcement of my conversion. In that day I hope to be remembered in your prayers that I may receive the Spirit of adoption.<sup>6</sup>

Stenhouse followed through as planned, and the *Victoria Sunday Colonist* of 16 October 1887 carried the headlines: "MR STENHOUSE RESIGNS / The Member for Comox Will Join the Mormons / He Has Become Converted to the Doctrine of a Plurality of Wives and Will Go to Utah to Formally Join the Church." The editor was not critical, but rather slightly incredulous: "It will be a . . . surprise to know that Mr. Stenhouse has resigned his seat simply and solely for the purpose of becoming a . . . Mormon." Although attention immediately focused on the election, which the resignation made necessary, the editor could not resist mild sarcasm:

Vancouver Island is proud to know that she has given a bright and shining light to the Mormon cause; she will follow his fortunes with an anxious eye, and when he has at last wedded many wives and is blessed with bright young faces around his hearthstone, . . . into his "dungeon cell" will gleam a ray of sunlight when it is known that Comox and Victoria maidens would fain gild his cell with bouquets of the choicest flowers. . . . [He] has resigned a proud position to accept martyrdom if necessary; . . . given up all to embrace any number of females. (*Colonist* 20 Oct. 1887)

Nevertheless, the new convert could write to Wilford Woodruff on 23 October:

Your prayers in my behalf have been abundantly answered. The crisis [of announcing my resignation and conversion] is past. God's blessing has followed me and his Spirit has sustained me. There has indeed been some deprecation of my apparent haste in resigning my political charge, but little or no remonstrance on

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<sup>7</sup> The editor was apparently not familiar with the geographic relationship of Lee's Creek and Lethbridge, as he more than once identified Lethbridge as the site of the Mormon settlement.

my conversion has been heard from any quarter except the alien pulpits. . . .

. . . At first there was a feeble attempt to make [political] party capital of my change of faith. Now there seems a settled conviction that my successor in Parliament will be the candidate who may receive my support and that any attempt to work the religious prejudice against me will give an apparent victory to *our* Church. . . . In any case I feel assured that if I had attempted as a convert to retain my seat in the legislature a violent outcry would have arisen against me. . . . Still I think my own case will make it a lot easier in future for others to join us.

Stenhouse spent the next few weeks campaigning on behalf of Thomas Basil Humphreys. He gained considerable notoriety as a result of the publicity surrounding his conversion to Mormonism. While on the campaign trail, the new convert wrote again to President Woodruff on 29 November 1887, making it apparent that he had cast himself in the roles of both defender of the Church and advisor to President Woodruff on Canadian political affairs. He explained that he had written to two prominent political figures who could prevent opposition members in the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa from “carp[ing] at the ‘Mormon’ Colony” to embarrass the government: “I also represented to these hon[ora]ble gentlemen . . . the unwisdom, inconsistency and impolicy of opposing the Settlement of a body of law-abiding Christians of our own and kindred nationalities at a time when swarms of Chinese were allowed an almost unrestricted entry from the West and were propagating their unnatural vices amongst us.”

In the same letter, Stenhouse mentions his intention, following the election, of visiting Charles Ora Card’s settlement in the Canadian Northwest Territories on his way to Utah. His neighbors seem to have misunderstood his intent, for the Victoria newspapers on 27 November reported that Stenhouse was not going to Utah after all, and in fact was not going to leave British Columbia but had concocted the story of his conversion to Mormonism as an excuse for resigning from the legislature. His next letter to President Woodruff reveals that he had given some consideration not only to visiting, but to remaining in the new Mormon settlement on Lee’s Creek: “If I thought I could be of any use to their Settlement I would join it but I must consider my powers and my general circumstances and how they may best fulfill their mission. In such deliberation I hope to have the aid of wisdom from on high” (9 Dec. 1887). By January he had made his decision, and the *Colonist* announced on 18 January 1888 that “Stenhouse . . . will not go to Utah, but will join the Mormon colony at Lethbridge, N.W.T.”<sup>7</sup>

There was at least one Victoria resident who was unwilling to lose Stenhouse to the Mormons without a fight. Captain Arthur Edward

McCallum, described by the *Victoria Daily Times* as being “late of the 42nd regiment, and Liberal candidate for Victoria B.C., at the last [federal] general election,” on 30 January 1888 wrote the Mormon convert a long letter in which he expressed “sincere regard for an earnest and true nature, which I know yours to be.” He disavowed any prejudice against Mormonism, in which, he said, “there is much, very much, socially to admire,” and to which “the world owes . . . a debt for having solved the problem of banishing poverty and wretchedness by cooperation and industrial effort.” However, Captain McCallum wrote,

It is altogether another thing if you should ask me to believe in the truth of any so-called divine revelation to Joseph Smith! . . . All religions alike rest upon the truth or falsity of supernatural or divine revelation. . . . Which of these several revelations are you to accept? . . . I am not prepared to admit the Revelation of Mr. Joseph Smith. . . . The social anarchy existing, . . . both in religious and in secular life, is not to be cured by any modern or ancient “supernatural revelation,” but by the evolution of the people hastened by thoughtful and reflecting leaders at whose lights they may light their torches to see their way. (*Victoria Daily Times* 18 April 1888, cited hereafter as *Times*)

In reply Stenhouse thanked the captain for his interest, then made it very clear that the gentleman’s arguments were not persuasive:

For myself I will at once avow my settled belief in spiritual manifestations . . . Revelation. . . will prove in the fulness of time to be the most natural thing in the world. . . I find no difficulty whatever in accepting the divine (i.e. spiritual) origin of the early Christian church. . . I am not of those who believe that revelation ceased with the perversion of the primitive church. Revelation has languished, . . . and it is only in recent generations that this will-power has revived among us and has begun to seek its final consummation [i.e., among the Latter-day Saints]. . . .

The conclusion I have reached after a very full consideration of the questions raised in your letter is very nearly your own. Almost in your own words I will say that “the social anarchy existing. . . both in religious and in secular life, can only be cured by the spiritual evolution of the people, hastened by thoughtful and reflecting leaders, at whose lights they may light their torches to see their way. (*Times* 18 April 1888)

On 21 April 1888, British Columbia’s first Mormon convert left Vancouver Island on the S.S. *Louise*. On reaching the mainland, he boarded a Canadian Pacific Railway train, transferring at Dunmore, Alberta, to a coach attached to the Alberta Railroad and Irrigation Company narrow-gauge coal train. He reported in a 7 August 1887 letter to President Woodruff that he arrived in Lethbridge on 28 April, where he was met by Charles Ora Card who took him, by horse and buggy, to his home at Lee’s Creek. The reception in the Mormon

settlement was no doubt cordial, as Card's wife Zina, expecting a visit from Stenhouse, explained to her mother that she was "trying to fix with 'the best leg foremost'" (Z. Card 1887). The visitor was suitably impressed: "Despite the somewhat primitive conditions under which we have to live . . . I have been extremely happy. The distinguished and yet winning manners of Mrs. Card have made her quite a favorite with the neighboring Gentiles" (A. Stenhouse 7 Aug. 1888).

In the following weeks, Stenhouse undoubtedly had long discussions with the elders of the little community about the details of Mormon beliefs. Questions were asked and answered apparently to the satisfaction of all concerned, for Anthony Maitland Stenhouse was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on 10 June 1888 by Charles Ora Card ("Record of Members" 1887-90, 39). His written salutations to President Woodruff changed from "Dear Mr. Woodruff," or "Dear Sir," to "Dear Sir and Brother." Back in Victoria the *Colonist* commented on 10 August that "it is said that Maitland has thoroughly convinced himself that the step he has taken is the right one, and will endeavor to become a shining light among the polygamists of the Northwest." A prophetic statement indeed! He was soon to become the best known defender of polygamy in the Latter-day Saint settlement.

The *Colonist* reported on 27 October that the new member had been ordained a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood.<sup>8</sup> The paper soon labeled him "a staunch upholder of the tenets of the body he has joined [and] a zealous and fearless advocate of polygamy" (27 Jan. 1889). He put down roots in the community by purchasing two parcels of land and building a house. The first marriage ceremony in the settlement was performed in that house on 2 April 1889. However, it was not the marriage of the proprietor, but rather that of Heber S. Allen and Amy Louise Leonard ("History of the Alberta Stake" 1889, 156).

To keep in touch with his former home, Stenhouse continued to subscribe to the *Victoria Daily Times*. On 1 October 1888 that paper published a story claiming that a pair of Australian whales had been successfully transported to the Great Salt Lake and were copiously propagating their kind there, thus making possible a whaling industry with much easier access than that of the Arctic. At the same time it printed a sarcastic comment by the little Scot, who could not resist turning to the defense of his co-religionists:

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<sup>8</sup> The exact date is not known, but if one can assume a consistent interval between an event happening at Lee's Creek and being reported in Victoria, the date is approximately the end of August.

This plausible and highly circumstantial narrative has gone unchallenged almost the entire round of the American newspapers, whose editors with all their Yankee cuteness are the very greenest of mortals in their knowledge of Utah. When it is known that one barrel of common salt can be obtained from three barrels of the water of the Great Salt Lake, the absurdity of the whole yarn becomes at once apparent. None but the very lowest forms of animal life, if even these, can exist in the body of the Great Salt Lake. "Intelligent newspaper readers" have here a fine sample of human credulity, and until they have actually seen the now famous whales of Utah, I hope they will accept with many grains of the chief product of the Salt Lake the still fishier and fowler stories which villify the character of an honest and industrious people.<sup>9</sup>

In 1888 the residents of the Lee's Creek district still had to pick up their mail at Lethbridge, some forty miles distant. A request to the Canadian government "that a weekly mail be established between Lethbridge and our colony, that the name of our Post Office be 'Card' and that Mr. A. Maitland Stenhouse be appointed Postmaster" was not granted (Tagg 1963, 140). But the fact that he was nominated for the position indicates the respect with which he was regarded.

Further evidence of his position in the community came in the fall of 1889 when the governor-general of Canada paid a visit to nearby Macleod. The Mormon settlers decided to present a formal address when they were presented to the Queen's representative. Stenhouse was asked to compose the speech. As he was quite recently removed from Britain, he was expected to know the proper form. Also, he was probably in possession of the most extensive formal education of any man in the settlement. Unfortunately, because their watches were not synchronized with the local Macleod time, and because the governor-general left the official reception earlier than scheduled when Macleod residents did not turn out in large numbers to greet him, the Mormons arrived to see the vice-regal party departing. According to Charles Ora Card:

Some of our party felt much crestfallen, especially Bro. A. M. Stenhouse who had written & rewritten 2 or 3 times at my request [an address to the governor-general]. . . .

On the morn[ing] of the 14th inst. Dr. Allen called early and told us that His Excellency would call at our tent and receive our address at 8 O.C[lock]. a.m. We all got ready and formed a Semi-circle in front of our tent. The Gov., his Sec'y. and Sir James Grant, Dr. Allen and his son Edwin, came in front of our Semi-Circle and . . . I . . . read as follows:

To His Excellency The Lord Stanley of Preston, K. G., Her Majesty's Viceroy of the Dominion of Canada, etc.

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<sup>9</sup> Stenhouse was off on his estimate of the salt content of the lake. In normal times it takes closer to four barrels of brine to produce one barrel of salt.



May it Please your Excellency.

We, the Latterday S[ain]ts resident in the North West Territories of Canada, do most cordially unite with our Fellow Settlers of Alberta, in welcoming to the District the representative of that Sovereign power which . . . “has dotted the surface of the Globe with her possessions and military posts, whose morning drum beat following the sun and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of martial airs of England.”

To the Imperial Majesty of Queen Victoria, of whom not a few of us rejoice to be the native subjects,—to Her who, as we fondly hope, is soon to be the Queen of all of us, We desire on this early occasion to make the public profession of our unswerving Loyalty: and anticipate our steadfast allegiance to the Dynasty under which the country of our adoption has prospered and grown great. Our Prophet Joseph Smith discerned that of all the Kingdoms of this world, The British Principalities, by reason of their high integrity and their judicial purity, will be the last to fall; and it is for this reason, as well as from an affectionate admiration of her own womanly virtues, that we invoke the blessings of heaven upon the Sovereign of these vast realms.

Receive also the assurance of our cordial good wishes for the personal welfare of Your Excellency and of the Lady Stanley, and for the success of your unwearied efforts for the more effectual consolidation of the Dominion and the Empire.

Signed by request of the Latter-Day Saints in the Canadian North West.

Charles Ora Card.  
Macleod, N.W.T., 14 October 1889

Stenhouse's pride in being British is apparent (Card 14 Oct. 1889).

For reasons unknown, Stenhouse made a trip back to Vancouver Island in the summer of 1889. This seems to have been his only visit to British Columbia after joining the Card settlement. Two weeks after his return to Cardston, the *Colonist* (10 Oct.) carried an Ottawa dispatch that he was “actively canvassing Alberta with a view to securing a seat in the next Dominion parliament, where, he says, he will endeavor to effect marriage reform and the legalization of Mormonism.” Nothing further was heard of this alleged plan.

Stenhouse visited Utah in the spring of 1890 (*Deseret Evening News* 2 April 1890). He had long harbored the ambition of speaking in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, and he was evidently prepared should the occasion arise. According to Heber S. Allen, a long-time Cardston resident whose wedding took place in Stenhouse's home, “He could often be found in the rear of his house practicing a speech he had written and hoped to deliver there. However, in this ambition he was disappointed in getting an opportunity to address the general assembly of a conference of the church although he was invited to speak at a Women's Relief Society session” (Steele n.d., 2:1).

He returned to Canada sometime after mid-July of 1890 and the following spring cast "the first political vote ever polled at Cardston" (*Lethbridge News* 27 March 1891, cited hereafter as *News*). He remained at the Mormon colony until June of 1891 when he apparently returned to Britain (*News* 12 June 1891). His destination as he left southern Alberta was not entirely clear. He indicated to the *Lethbridge News* reporter that he was headed for Edinburgh but had earlier informed a friend in Victoria that he intended to go to London, England, "to follow letters as a profession, 'and not without a view to the representation of some enlightened constituency in the Imperial House of Commons'" (*News* 16 July 1890). He does not appear to have had any further association with the Church after leaving Card's settlement, and in fact there is no mention of any association with the Mormons in a biographical sketch appearing some twenty years later in which he is identified only as an Anglican (Morgan 1912, 1058).

Until he declared his intention to become a Mormon, Stenhouse had attracted very little attention. But after moving to Card's settlement, he became notorious, mainly because of letters he wrote to editors of newspapers as far afield as his native Edinburgh. Shortly after arriving in the new Mormon colony, he took up his pen to champion the cause of the Saints because he felt that they were being unfairly treated in the editorial columns of the *Lethbridge News*. The Mormon settlers had sent a delegation to Ottawa in the fall of 1888 to ask for concessions from the Canadian government: (1) the privilege of forming hamlets under the Lands Act rather than living on scattered homesteads, (2) water rights on Lee's Creek so that they could build a sawmill, (3) postal service, (4) relief from payment of timber dues, (5) permission to sell surplus livestock which had been imported free of customs duty as settler's effects, and (6) the privilege of bringing from Utah plural wives to whom they were already married (*News* 14 Nov., 12 Dec. 1888). The *News* took the position that so long as the Mormons agreed to obey the law, there was no reason to prevent them from entering Canada, but that they should not be given any special concessions (*News* 14 Nov. 1886). Stenhouse made an issue of the hamlet question while ignoring the other requests. The Mormons, he wrote, "are simply availing themselves of the privileges accorded to other settlers under the Hamlet clause of said Act. . . . Until a Mormon breaks a law, I presume he is entitled to equal privileges with other Canadians?" (*News* 5 Dec. 1888).

The editor's response was that the hamlet clause of the Dominion Lands Act notwithstanding, the Mormons were asking for privileges not normally granted to settlers, such as importing their farm machinery

duty free, but particularly, the right to bring in plural wives whom they had married before coming to Canada. He was particularly adamant in his view that allowing groups such as the Mormons the right to form their own communities retarded assimilation and was bad for the country (*News* 14 Nov., 12 Dec. 1888). This was a commonly held opinion.

Stenhouse countered that if the editor of the *News* disliked the law he ought to campaign to have it changed “instead of expending his ire on a few innocent strangers who were quite unaware of the terrible inequity of the Canadian law.” In making their wants known, he argued, the Mormons had only responded to an invitation to do so, knowing full well that they would not be granted everything that they asked for (*News* 26 Dec. 1888).

At that point, the focus of controversy shifted to polygamy as one of the privileges requested but not expected to be granted, and Anthony Maitland Stenhouse began a resourceful and ingenious defense of Utah Mormonism’s distinctive institution (*News* 26 Dec. 1888). A year earlier, he had stated to a newspaper reporter (as quoted initially) that although he did not intend to enter into the practice he would “firmly maintain it as a doctrine” (*News* 3 May 1888). And maintain it he did!

Maitland’s first line of defense of plural marriage was the practicality of the institution, a defense which must have developed from hearsay rather than practical experience, for Stenhouse was unmarried, and his fellow Mormons at Lee’s Creek had brought but one wife each to Canada. He claimed that polygamy had proved to be “a triumphant success,” for

It secures a husband for every woman that wants one. . . . Under a well ordered system of plural families, marriage would no longer be a lottery where ladies draw a blank, a fool or a husband, according to luck. They would no longer be daily insulted with the alternatives of a fool or none—and thus the law of natural selection, now so grossly outraged, would find its due accomplishment in the survival and perpetuation of the fittest family and the fittest race. It is true that some men would be wifeless, but these would mostly be men whose marriage and multiplication are a curse to the race. (*News* 26 Dec. 1888)

Two years later he was arguing, in the face of anti-polygamy opinion, that polygamy was actually a solution to the problem of women’s rights, that it would give women greater freedom than they enjoyed under monogamy:

Among the ancient barbarians the right of the strongest was alone recognized, and accordingly, marriage was invented for the oppression of women. Some thought polygamy the likeliest instrument of oppression. The more knowing ones, and

among them our ancestors, discovered that monogamy was best adapted to their brutal purpose. . . .

If then, monogamy trammels a woman, . . . how are we to enlarge her scope? . . . In allowing the option of plural marriage under a modern covenant. (*News* 19 Nov. 1890)

His second line of defense was founded on the biblical justification of polygamy.

Celibacy of the clergy and monogamy of the laity are twin superstitions and have a common origin . . . in the time when self-torture, penance and flagellations . . . [were thought] to pave the way to paradise. The great reformers, Luther, Melancthon, Bucer, Zwingli, etc., . . . decided unanimously that polygamy was not contrary to the divine law. . . . Milton also . . . and many others, not less distinguished for their piety than for their genius, have amply proved from the books of the Old and New Testaments the lawfulness of polygamy. (*News* 26 Dec. 1888)

His third defense was based on the civil legality of plural marriage. He asserted that "there is actually no law on the Canadian statute book . . . that could touch Mormon, any more than Mohammedan, polygamy" (*News* 20 Nov. 1889).

But there was a law forbidding bigamy. Stenhouse was well aware of this, and he had no quarrel with the immorality and illegality of this relationship. However, he had his own idea about what made bigamy wrong:

The only criminal element in bigamy is the deception which is practised. . . . Natural rights, both of person and property, demand that any such deception should be severely punished. . . . Absolute freedom of contract in marriage exists at this moment. . . . The monogamous contract is the usual form, and involves in its very essence a prohibition of bigamy. . . . Bigamy, then, is prohibited and punishable in order to enforce the terms of a voluntary contract, and for no other reason.

. . . Indeed, an[y] instrument properly executed defining the rights and obligations of the contracting parties, would be enforced in any British court having jurisdiction . . . [even in a case of] polygamy, where the previous wife is a consenting party. (*News* 20 Nov. 1889)

. . . The sin of polygamy lies in the deceit which usually attends maintaining several wives among civilized nations, while according to the Mormon faith polygamy can be practised only by the formal consent of the women interested and is therefore sinless. . . . (*Buffalo Express* 23 Jan. 1889)

I hold that the existing provisions for the punishment of bigamists are founded on a wrong principle, and that such deceivers on emerging from prison should not be licensed to desert wives whom they have married by fraud. The marriage

contract, whether single, dual or plural, should be held sacred, and should be rigorously enforced in every case. (*Colonist* 20 Oct. 1887)

Stenhouse emphasized his strong belief in “freedom of contract, with due regard to the rights of the weaker parties, [which] is now an accepted maxim of enlightened politics, and only requires time for its complete development” (*News* 5 March 1890, *Vancouver Daily World*, 4 March 1890). He consistently maintained that interested parties agreeable to a polygamous relationship are legally free to enter into it.

The capstone of Stenhouse’s arguments was a proposal to test the law:

There is one case of polygamy . . . whose bearing on the law . . . has [not] yet been ascertained. The case of the bridegroom with two brides is not an impossibility. Nor is it inconceivable that he might, as a bachelor, be duly wedded to both ladies at the same moment, neither of the wives preceding the other. In view of such a case the question arises, . . . would the parties be liable to criminal prosecution?

. . . As an undergraduate in matrimony, I propose to test the law as soon as I have found the ladies. (*News* 20 Nov. 1889)

This letter was immediately widely interpreted as confirming the opinion that the Mormons at Lee’s Creek had no intention of abandoning polygamy (*News* 20 Nov. 1889). The editor of the *Vancouver Daily World* suggested that Stenhouse should familiarize himself with the law, which was correctly cited as stating that “everyone who being married, marries any other person during the life of the former husband or wife, whether the second marriage takes place in Canada, or elsewhere, is guilty of a felony, and is liable to seven years’ imprisonment” (13 Nov. 1889).<sup>10</sup>

This, of course, did not exactly cover Stenhouse’s proposed course of action, for if he married two women “at the same moment” he would not be already married and would therefore not be marrying another “person during the life of the former . . . wife.” Apparently many readers thought that this proposal could not possibly be seriously intended, but the editor of the *Colonist* cautioned on 13 November 1889 that “A. Maitland does not intend this for a joke. He is the kind of man who seldom indulges in pleasantries on solemn subjects.”

Nor were the legislators in Ottawa prepared to take chances by treating his proposal as a joke. On 4 February 1890 Senator Macdonald, from Victoria, British Columbia, presented in the Canadian Senate a bill designed to remove any doubt as to whether bigamy laws applied to

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<sup>10</sup> See also *Acts of the Parliament of the Dominion of Canada Relating to Criminal Law* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1887), pp. 62.

polygamy, and it specifically mentioned the “spiritual or plural marriages” of the Mormons (*Journals, Senate* 1890, 24:22. See also *News* 19 Feb. 1890). It was dropped from the agenda of the Senate on 4 March in favor of similar legislation introduced in the House of Commons on 7 February by Sir John Thompson, minister of justice (*Journals, Senate* 1890, 24:22, 55, 67, 96). His bill covered a wider scope of offenses than the Macdonald proposal, which was largely adopted as section 8 of the proposed legislation (*Debates* 1890, 3173). In explaining his intent, Thompson said:

Section 8 is intended to extend the prohibition of bigamy. It is to make a second marriage punishable . . . whether the marriage took place in Canada or elsewhere, or whether the marriages takes [sic] place simultaneously or on the same day. In [the latter case] . . . the parties were not punishable under the present law. Section 9 deals with the practice of polygamy, . . . which we are threatened with; and I think it will be much more prudent that legislation should be adopted at once in anticipation of the offence, . . . rather than we should wait until it has become established in Canada. (*Debates* 1890, 3162)

This bill was passed by the Commons on 16 April 1890 and became law one month later on 16 May while Stenhouse was still in Utah (*Debates* 1890, 3460; *Journals, H.C.* 1890, 505; *Canada Gazette* 1890, 23:60, 61). It left no doubt that polygamy was illegal in Canada and specifically prohibited the simultaneous multiple marriage scheme proposed by Mr. Stenhouse: “4. . . . every male person who, in Canada, simultaneously, or on the same day, marries more than one woman, is guilty of felony, and liable to seven years’ imprisonment” (see the appendix for the remainder of the act).

It is apparent that Stenhouse can be credited with inspiring the very specific provisions of this act. He had waited too long to take advantage of what he recognized as, and the government admitted to be, a loophole in the law. After 16 May 1890 his proposed simultaneous dual marriage was clearly illegal in Canada.

But perhaps it was just as well that he did not get around to testing the law. Stenhouse’s advocacy of polygamy was not welcome among Latter-day Saint leaders. When news of his intended conversion first reached Card’s settlement, local Saints hoped that he could “do us much good with his influence amongst the officials of this nation” (Z. Card 1887). But his ardor for the cause attracted unwanted attention, and one can only imagine what would have happened had he actually attempted to arrange a simultaneous dual marriage. Less than two years after Zina Card had written so optimistically about his hoped-for influence, and even before his novel proposal attracted attention, the

Salt Lake City *Deseret News* was disassociating the Church in general, and the Mormons in Canada in particular, from Stenhouse's ideas:

Mr. Stenhouse has the right to entertain what opinions he pleases and to publish them if he can get them into print. But he does not speak for the Church to which he belongs, nor for the colony where he resides. They are simply his views and nothing more.

It does not follow that because the gentleman advocates plural marriage that the "Mormons" in Canada practice polygamy. (*Deseret Weekly News* 7 Sept. 1889)

In October 1890 the whole question of Mormons and polygamy in Canada became academic as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced that no further plural marriages would be solemnized (D&C: Official Declaration—1). This must have come as a blow to Stenhouse. He had made defense of polygamy his hobby, the focus of his religious life, and now, within a six-month period, he had seen the practice become illegal in both state and church. To continue to defend it must have seemed futile. His quiet departure for Britain the following spring, his failure to make himself known to the Church in Britain, and his omission of his "Mormon" connection in later biographical sketches indicate loss of interest in, and perhaps a feeling of rejection by and quiet disaffection with, Mormonism.

Nevertheless this hard-of-hearing and diminutive middle-aged Scotsman left a mark in both Mormon and Canadian history. His proclivity for writing letters defending the Latter-day Saints did not influence people in the direction he intended. As the editor of the *Lethbridge News* pointed out in a 26 December 1888 editorial, "Mr. A. M. Stenhouse is once again taking us to task. . . . We regret exceedingly that the errors and enthusiasm of this gentleman should have forced us into a controversy in which we are apparently opposing the Mormons." There is, in fact, no evidence that his ingenious arguments convinced even one person who was not already converted that polygamy was a proper and acceptable marital relationship for Christians.

However, his creative defense of the "peculiar institution" did have national repercussions. He was directly responsible for an amendment to the Canadian criminal law, which is still on the books and which added to the bigamist category anyone who, "on the same day or simultaneously, goes through a form of marriage with more than one person" (Greenspan 1986, 294). There is no doubt that "what among the . . . Mormons is known as spiritual or plural marriage" would sooner or later have been outlawed anyway, but Stenhouse's arguments added urgency to the situation and stimulated earlier legislation than might otherwise have been the case (*Criminal* 1892, 55-56).

It seems ironic that a man who never married, a bachelor “polygamist,” should become the catalyst for the enactment of such specific anti-polygamy laws. But perhaps the proposal of a simultaneous dual marriage was, after all, just a threat, and his real intention was that stated in October 1887: “I have no intention of practising polygamy, but I accept it and will firmly maintain it as a doctrine.” From October 1887 to October 1890 he did just that with significant effect.

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## APPENDIX

53 Vict. Chapter 37. An Act further to amend the Criminal Law.

Offences in Relation to Marriage.

10. Sub-section one of section four of chapter one hundred and sixty-one of the Revised Statutes, intituled "An Act respecting Offences relating to the Law of Marriage," is hereby repealed and the following substituted therefore:—

"4. Everyone who, being married, marries any other person during the life of the former husband or wife, whether the second marriage takes place in Canada or elsewhere, and every male person who, in Canada, simultaneously, or on the same day, marries more than one woman, is guilty of felony, and liable to seven year's imprisonment."

11. The following sections are hereby added to the last cited act:—

"5. Everyone who practices, or, by the rites, ceremonies, forms, rules or customs of any denomination, sect or society, religious or secular, or by any form of contract, or by mere mutual consent, or by any other method whatsoever, and whether in a manner recognized by law as a binding form of marriage or not agrees or consents to practice or enter into —

"(a) Any form of Polygamy; or—

"(b) Any kind of conjugal union with more than one person at the same time; or—

"(c) What among persons commonly called Mormons is known as spiritual or plural marriage; or—

"(d) Who lives, cohabits, or agrees or consents to live or cohabit, in any kind of conjugal union with a person who is married to another, or with a person who lives or cohabits with another or others in any kind of conjugal union; and—

"2. Every one who,—

"(a) Celebrates, is a party to, or assists in any such rite or ceremony which purports to make binding or to sanction any of the sexual relationships mentioned in sub-section one of this section; or—