

## REVIEWS

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### *Nauvoo Polygamy: The Latest Word*

George D. Smith. *Nauvoo Polygamy*: “. . . but we called it celestial marriage”. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008, xix, 705 pp. Charts, photographs, appendices, bibliography, index. \$39.95. ISBN: 978-1-56085-201-8

*Reviewed by Brian C. Hales*

In 1994, businessman and Mormon history researcher George D. Smith wrote “Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841–46: A Preliminary Demographic Report” (*Dialogue* 27, no. 1 [Spring 1994]: 1–72), which contained groundbreaking research on 153 men and hundreds more women who were involved with plural marriage in Nauvoo. Recently, his long-awaited follow-up to that article, a 705-page book, has been printed by Signature Books, of which Smith is the publisher. In September 2009, the John Whitmer Historical Association awarded it Best Book of the Year.

Having continued his documentation of Nauvoo polygamy, Smith modified his original list of 153 men, subtracting eight and adding fifty more. In addition, his lists have been supplemented by the names of hundreds of new plural wives, all helpfully compiled in Appendix B. These lists represent a colossal research effort. Through analysis of historical and genealogical records, George Smith has compiled a must-have reference for historians dealing with Nauvoo polygamy that provides birth, death, marriage, and sealing dates for male polygamists in Nauvoo and their known wives and the number of children from the unions. Probably due to errors in the primary sources, a few problems appear in Appendix B.<sup>1</sup> However, for many researchers, this appendix alone, comprising an impressive seventy-two pages of data, will merit the \$39.95 cost of the volume.

The book divides the presentation of evidence into two sections, the first division focusing on Joseph Smith and his wives, and the second including an additional thirty-two men and fifty-four women sealed before Joseph Smith’s death.

George D. Smith asserts that Joseph Smith had thirty-eight plural wives (171, 135, 208, 219), more than the thirty-three posited in Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Jo-*

seph Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997). (See Compton's review of *Nauvoo Polygamy* immediately following this review.) George D. Smith fails to provide new documentation for these marriages (see discussion below) which, in my judgment, lowers the evidentiary bar. Without new historical evidence to support the addition of plural wives, George D. Smith's reinterpretation of the data seems less reliable than Compton's well-documented and more conservative tally.

Smith deserves credit for trying to identify the plural wife whom John C. Bennett identified as "Miss B\*\*\*\*\*". According to Smith, she is Sarah Poulterer (also known as "Sarah Poulter," "Sarah Davis," "Sarah Royson," "Sarah Rapson," and "Sarah Bapson"). His logic is intriguing: "Before Bennett's departure from Nauvoo in early July 1842, [Joseph] Smith apparently married Sarah Poulterer, whose maiden name was Davis or Rapson ("R," not "B")" (135). Unfortunately, George Smith provides no additional evidence to substantiate the claim and continues: "When Bennett referred to one of Smith's wives as Miss B\*\*\*\*\*, this led to speculation about her identity. Later chroniclers seem to have conflated these names to produce "Sarah Bapson." In an apparent reliance on Bennett, the LDS Church accepted the existence of a "Sarah Bapson" who appears in the sealing records for April 4, 1899" (135).

Each plural wife is presented in a two-to-ten-page vignette, providing a handy reference. This section comprises Chapters 2–3, or nearly two hundred pages (53–239). Interspersed are descriptions of pertinent historical events, which sometimes seem distracting but which provide necessary continuity and a more complete picture of Nauvoo happenings.

George D. Smith's biographical information on polygamy participants, in most cases, does not present new historical data, but repackages previously published materials like that found in Compton's *In Sacred Loneliness*. I was grateful for Smith's use of footnotes, which allows instant and clear access to reference materials cited, although the documentation itself is not without problems (see below). In contrast, Compton implemented an unconventional citation system that I find difficult to use. Still, his biographies of Joseph's plural wives, even if the reader stops at Joseph's death, provide more voluminous bibliographical informa-

tion, in-depth research, and analysis on each plural wife than that found in *Nauvoo Polygamy*.

The second category identified in George Smith's data consists of an additional thirty-two men and fifty-four plural wives who were sealed before the Prophet's death, a genuine contribution to our knowledge of Nauvoo polygamy. Additional categories can be extracted from George Smith's data as shown in the table.

TABLE 1  
NAUVOO POLYGAMY, 1839-47

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Joseph Smith</i>	<i>Prior to Joseph Smith's Death (June 1844)</i>	<i>Joseph Death to Nauvoo Temple (December 1845)</i>	<i>Sealed in Nauvoo Temple</i>	<i>Post- Nauvoo Temple before Trek West</i>	<i>Totals</i>
New Male Polygam- ists	1	32	51	108	7	196
New Plural Wives	38	54	135	263	34	524

George Smith follows these polygamists statistically into the Utah period, tracking later polygamous sealings for those men who began their polygamy experience in Nauvoo. Taken together, his documentation constitutes a significant contribution to the understanding of plural marriage as it began on the shores of the Mississippi River in the early 1840s.

In addition, *Nauvoo Polygamy* manifests an impressive writing style and a flowing narration that is easy to read. It supplies twenty-four photographs, several tables, and a fourteen-page index to help readers understand the material presented.

Authors who approach Nauvoo plural marriage are faced with many ambiguities and deficits in the historical record. Joseph Smith dictated only the revelation that is now Doctrine and Covenants 132, never expounded the topic in public except to deny its practice, and does not refer to it explicitly in his personal

writings.<sup>2</sup> The only polygamy insider and journal-writer friendly to the Prophet who left a contemporary record is William Clayton.<sup>3</sup> Four men (John C. Bennett, Oliver Olney, William Law, and Joseph H. Jackson) left contemporary writings, but all were dissenters who had their own, hostile perspectives on Joseph Smith and polygamy. In addition to these five men, a few sources contemporary with the three years between Joseph's 1844 death and the 1847 trek west provide additional, but also limited, insights.<sup>4</sup> Beyond these sources, everything learned about Joseph Smith's polygamy comes from later recollections, which are subject to important limitations.

In dealing with inadequacies in the historical record, chroniclers of Mormon polygamy are forced to either write brief treatises or quote extensively from late reminiscences. The accompanying gaps must be filled in by each writer. As the most recent treatment of Mormon plural marriage, it appears that *Nauvoo Polygamy* implements a predominantly naturalistic view of Joseph Smith's motivations and behavior. While writing *No Man Knows My History* (1943), Fawn Brodie seemed conflicted as she sought to understand Joseph Smith's motivations for introducing plural marriage. Writing to a correspondent, she confessed: "The more I work with the polygamy material, the more baffled I become." Ultimately she decided Joseph Smith was "a mythmaker of prodigious talent" and concluded: "I think polygamy was disguised whoredom. But the disguise was so good that it metamorphosed the system into something quite different."<sup>5</sup> In contrast to Brodie's confessed uncertainty, George Smith's work seems to proceed from a confident and consistent judgment that libido was the exclusive force empowering Joseph Smith's polygamy.

*Nauvoo Polygamy* is comprised of a short introduction and nine chapters. The first chapter discusses pre-Nauvoo polygamy, with only six pages (38–43) devoted to the relationship in Kirtland between Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger. Granted, it is not the focus of George D. Smith's study, but its brevity largely sidesteps two key controversial issues: the chronology of the affiliation, and whether it was a plural marriage or adultery.

On the issue of timing, with the research assistance of Don Bradley, I have found nineteen separate documents referring to that association. The first private writing to mention the episode



was penned in 1838; no reference appeared in print until 1842. Only eight provide a date, four placing the relationship in 1832–33 and another four in 1835–36.<sup>6</sup> George D. Smith places the relationship only in the earlier window: It occurred in “that same year [1832]” (22); “maybe as early as 1832, but certainly from 1833 to 1835” (38); and “Fanny was assumed to have been sealed to Joseph in about 1833” (222). H. Michael Marquardt, another Joseph Smith researcher, leans toward a later date because Oliver Cowdery “discussed the matter with Joseph Smith and others in the summer and fall of 1837.”<sup>7</sup> It seems unlikely that Oliver Cowdery, who viewed the relationship with abhorrence, would have discovered the relationship in 1832 or 1833, but failed to react to it for three to five years. One of the four references pointing to the 1832–33 time period is consistent with an 1833 relationship that was not discovered until 1836. However, *Nauvoo Polygamy* does not discuss this possible reconstruction.

The second controversial point that George D. Smith passes over too quickly is whether Joseph and Fanny’s relationship was a plural marriage or an extramarital affair. He sees it as an affair and does not include Fanny on his list of Joseph Smith’s thirty-eight plural wives: “At first, Joseph did not seek a formal wedding” (38). “It . . . should not be construed to imply that Fanny was actually married to Joseph” (41–42). George Smith relegates Compton’s discussion of Mosiah Hancock’s account describing a wedding ceremony to a footnote (41 note 90). However, Don Bradley has identified new evidence corroborating that a marriage occurred, including Eliza R. Snow’s holograph affirmation on a page also containing Andrew Jenson’s handwritten comments. Snow was a well-placed eyewitness to Kirtland events.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, other evidence exists indicating a marriage relationship and thus making assumptions of adultery less reliable.

Later chapters review historical treatments of polygamy from past decades, as well as the reactions of Church leaders to the suspension of its practice. Perhaps the strongest and best-documented of all of the chapters is the last, “Antecedents and Legacy.” By following the movement of Christian polygamy across Europe starting in the sixteenth century, Smith provides an interesting preamble to Joseph Smith’s introduction of polygamy in Illi-

nois in the 1840s. George D. Smith's discussion of the "legacy" of plural marriage in the LDS tradition reflects balance and insight.

Generally *Nauvoo Polygamy* portrays Joseph Smith's plural marriage using secular language: "Joseph Smith initiated a social system that appealed to deeply held human concerns. People want to be counted among the elite, the initiated few, the chosen of God or, as Joseph promised, to be given the unheard of opportunity to become as gods themselves. Some women yearn to marry powerful men; some men seek the comforts of several women" (407). He describes plural marriage as "the thinly veiled restoration of an ancient patriarchal order" (212), a "marital innovation" (280), and as a "new sexual morality" (359). Plural unions are termed "romantic interests" (261), "adventuresome marital arrangements" (225), "communal relationships" (242), "extracurricular romances" (247), "theological philanderings" (334), and simply, "entanglements" (237).

George D. Smith characterized the revelation on eternal marriage (D&C 132) as either a "message [from] an all powerful being or merely wishful thinking on the part of his earthly servant" (214). In contrast, essentially all Nauvoo polygamists saw it as a revelation as valid as any Joseph Smith had previously dictated. Contrary to most accounts from the pluralists themselves—who were often nearly as distressed by the idea as the women—George D. Smith hypothesizes: "It is easy to imagine that most men who entered polygamy did so in a cursory way" (289).

He also links Nauvoo polygamy's genesis to the widespread cultural influence of Egypt, drawing an explicit comparison between Joseph and Napoleon, whose ardent love letter to Josephine the introduction quotes:

Curiously enough, the way Joseph did this [institutionalize polygamy] was through his passion for ancient Egypt, derived from Napoleon's invasion of that country a few years before Smith's birth. Just as soulful kisses and succor appeased one desire in each of these two men so both men had another inner stirring which was awakened by contact with a forgotten civilization. They showed a fascination with ancient Egypt, especially the hieroglyphic writing that was thought to hold the occult secrets of an unrivaled spiritual and temporal world power. The French adventurer's findings lit a fire in Smith that inspired even the language of his religious prose. . . .

Little did Napoleon dream that by unearthing the Egyptian past, he would provide the mystery language of a new religion. (x–xi)

At times, this naturalistic framework seems to require somewhat strained readings of the evidence. For example, on August 18, 1842, Joseph Smith wrote to Newel K. and Elizabeth Ann Whitney, including their seventeen-year-old daughter, Sarah Ann, in his discreet salutation of “Dear, and Beloved, Brother and Sister, Whitney, and &c.” At the time, he was hiding from Missouri marshals at a home just outside Nauvoo. In his loneliness, Joseph passionately petitioned the trio to pay him a visit:

I take this oppertunity to communi[c]ate, some of my feelings, privetely at this time, which I want you three Eternaly to keep in your own bosams; for my feelings are so strong for you since what has passed lately between us, that the time of my absence from you seems so long, and dreary, that it seems, as if I could not live long in this way: and if you three would come and see me in this my lonely retreat, it would afford me great relief, of mind[.] if those with whom I am alied, do love me, now is the time to afford me succor, in the days of exile, for you know I foretold you of these things. I am now at Carlos Graingers, Just back of Brother Hyrams farm[.] it is only one mile from town, the nights are very pleasant indeed, [and] all three of you can come and See me in the fore part of the night[.] let Brother Whitney come a little a head, and nock at the south East corner of the house at the window; it is next to the cornfield, I have a room intirely by myself, the *whole matter* can be attended to with most perfect saf[e]ty[.] I know it is the will of God that you should *comfort me* now in this time of affliction[.] (143)<sup>9</sup>

On the first page of his introduction (ix), George D. Smith refers to this letter and confidently defines “the matter” and Joseph’s request for “comfort” as a sexual “tryst” with Sarah Ann. *Nauvoo Polygamy* also alludes to this incident in other places (142, 147, 185, 236, 453, 459). On one occasion, George Smith quotes the letter, employing ellipses, to create the appearance that Joseph’s request was to Sarah Ann alone, not to Sarah Ann and her parents: “The prophet then poured out his heart, writing to his newest wife: ‘My feelings are so strong for you . . . now is the time to afford me succor. . . . I know it is the will of God that you should comfort me now’” (53).

While Joseph Smith’s letter’s language is indeed somewhat ambiguous, George D. Smith does not address other possible in-

terpretations. In the text the Prophet also asks the three Whitneys to afford him "relief of mind" and "succor." Neither term has an inherently erotic connotation. If isolated from the context, "comfort" might be considered suggestive. However, I scanned Joseph's journals and discourses looking for other occurrences of "comfort/comforted" and found a total of eleven; none communicates a sexual overtone.<sup>10</sup> In addition, intermixed with Joseph's pleas for a consoling visit are clear references to all three Whitneys. He did not single out Sarah Ann at any time. George D. Smith's interpretation of the Prophet's plea for "comfort" seems unduly narrowed and incomplete.

Todd Compton provided a different view: "There are evidently further ordinances that Smith wants to perform for the Whitneys. This is not just a meeting of husband and plural wife; it is a meeting with Sarah's family, with a religious aspect. . . . Three days later, on August 21, Newel and Elizabeth Whitney were sealed to each other for time and eternity."<sup>11</sup>

George D. Smith comments several times that Joseph Smith had polygamy on his mind in the 1820s, even as a teenager (xiv, 12, 21, 29), but supporting documentation is equivocal. He also provides some psychoanalysis based on limited clinical data, stating that Joseph eventually came "to effectively de-emphasize the feelings of sin and guilt he had once experienced" (21). George D. Smith lays out the following hypothetical reconstruction:

Did young Joseph experience the usual challenges and questions accompanying adolescence? Is there anything to suggest a coming-of-age struggle? A few passages from his autobiography indicate that two years after the family moved to New York State, he confronted some uncertain feelings he later termed "sinful." At a time when boys begin to experience puberty, "from the age of 12 years to 15," or 1817–21, he "became convicted [convinced] of my sins." Seeing his awakened emotions as "sinful" seems to have reflected parental admonitions prior to the age of fifteen or sixteen (1820–22), when he also sought divine assistance for his worries. "I cried unto the Lord for mercy . . . in the 16th year of my age," he wrote. In response to his prayer, a personage he would later identify as Jesus confronted him and said: "Joseph my son thy sins are forgiven thee." Even so, he reported that he again "fell into transgression and sinned in many things . . . there were many things that transpired that cannot be written." These cryptic words echo in his subsequent statements to friend and counselor Oliver Cowdery, leaving us to

suspect that he was referring to the curious thoughts of an intense teenager. . . .

Two years after his initial autobiographical sketch, Smith addressed similar vaguely defined infractions of youth, including “vices and follies,” he wrote. The contemporary definition of “vice” was “every act of intemperance, all falsehood, duplicity, deception, lewdness and the like,” as well as “the excessive indulgence of passions and appetites which in themselves are innocent,” according to Noah Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary. “Folly” was defined as “an absurd act which is highly sinful; and conduct contrary to the laws of God or man; sin; scandalous crimes; that which violates moral precepts and dishonors the offender.” In other words, “vices and follies” implied sins great and small, which conceivably involved sex but were not limited to it. (17-18; brackets George Smith’s)

George Smith reasons that Joseph Smith confessed to “sins great and small, which conceivably involved sex but were not limited to it.” However, the entire quotation, published in December 1834 in the *Messenger and Advocate* is susceptible of a different reading:

During this time, as is common to most, or all youths, I fell into *many vices and follies*; but as my accusers are, and have been forward to accuse me of being guilty of gross and outrageous violations of the peace and good order of the community, I take the occasion to remark, that, though, as I have said above, “as is common to most, or all youths, I fell into *many vices and follies*,” I have not, neither can it be sustained, in truth, been guilty of wronging or injuring any man or society of men; and those imperfections to which I allude, and for which I have often had occasion to lament, were a light, and too often, vain mind, exhibiting a foolish and trifling conversation.<sup>12</sup>

The full quotation therefore lends itself to a self-accusation of silliness and light-mindedness, not sexual sin. George D. Smith also neglects to quote Joseph Smith’s later history: “In making this confession, no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins. A disposition to commit such was never in my nature. But I was guilt of levity, and sometimes associated with jovial company, etc., not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been” (JSH-1:28).

To explain why dozens and then hundreds of other men and women would follow Joseph Smith, entering into plural sealings, *Nauvoo Polygamy* explains that “persuasion was a primary force in acquiring followers” (1-2; see also 229, 331). “Much of the acceptance of celestial marriage relied on Smith’s charisma and the in-

clination of other men to be drawn to the privileges that Smith convinced them were their birthright" (215). "Smith was able to wrap himself in the authority of the Bible and enhance his prophetic aura while persuading the unconvinced" (252). "Joseph Smith's creativity helped in many ways to shape the climate in which plural marriage was introduced. He spoke in coded messages about the "privileges" he said were rightfully a man's" (55). George Smith also explained:

The primary expressed reasons for practicing polygamy were belief in the "revealed word" of God and a demonstration of loyalty to Joseph Smith. By this logic, if it had not been "right," the prophet would not have revealed it. Smith exercised remarkable influence over his followers. He assured them that plural marriage was necessary for celestial-afterlife glory and that there was an urgent need to "raise up seed unto the lord" in this life, promising them a world of spiritual splendor. This caught their imagination and drove them to feats of endurance and devotion. (385–86)

Consistently omitted are reports of spiritual experiences that many participants described as playing a critical role in their decisions to enter plural marriage. In dealing with such supernatural elements, Compton included them "without offering positive or negative judgment so as to reproduce the world view of nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints."<sup>13</sup> George D. Smith apparently judges such reports as subjective and thereby categorically excludes them. Yet in doing so, he provides his readers with a primarily interpretive work, rather than attempting to re-create the social-religious environment that Church members experienced in the early 1840s, the environment that nursed Nauvoo polygamy into existence.

One weakness of virtually all published texts that discuss Joseph Smith's polygamy involves doctrinal issues. Understandably, historians shy away from theological issues, striving instead to explicate historical events. However, at one point, George D. Smith reflects minimal theological research by quoting a 2008 *Salt Lake Tribune* article as an authoritative source of LDS doctrine (412). Particularly problematic is the author's elaboration of a verse from Doctrine and Covenants 132: "Where there was resistance, the prophet inveighed against it, revealing God's rule that 'no one can reject [polygamy] and enter into my glory' (D&C 132:51, 52,

54)" (6; brackets George Smith's). Although he cites verse 51, the quotation appears to be a variation of verse 4. George Smith's bracketed insertion of "polygamy," redefines the "new and everlasting covenant of marriage" as referring strictly plural marriage (55, 409, 412), which is consistent with the views of many twenty-first-century polygamists.

However, polygamy has never been doctrinally equivalent to eternal marriage or celestial marriage. While Church members may have used the terms synonymously during the 1852–90 period when participation in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage demanded plural marriage, official Church teachings still acknowledged a distinction. For example, Church President John Taylor specified in 1883: "God has revealed, through His servant Joseph Smith, something more. He has told us about our associations hereafter. He has told us about our wives and our children being sealed to us, that we might have a claim on them in eternity. He has revealed unto us the law of celestial marriage, associated with which is the principle of plural marriage."<sup>14</sup> This doctrinal position is explicated in Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20, which states that when "a man marries a wife" monogamously in the new and everlasting covenant by proper authority and they live worthy, they receive exaltation. It could be argued that section 132 does not mandate plural marriage, but it does mandate eternal marriage.

Throughout *Nauvoo Polygamy*, George Smith repeatedly points out that the *History of the Church* does not chronicle Joseph Smith's plural sealings at any time, including the daily entries when the ceremonies were performed (82, 88, 99, 117, 128–29, etc.). He seems to imply a coverup; however, the original manuscripts for the *History of the Church* were compiled in the 1850s by men living polygamy in a place and time where plural marriage was legal. While the reasons for their editing choices are not always obvious, the decision to exclude references to Joseph Smith's plurality was not made by a monogamous Church historian attempting to suppress embarrassing details, but by polygamous defenders openly living the principle.

A curious idiosyncrasy of the Smith text involves the use of the word "favor."<sup>15</sup> He writes: "This 'restoration of all things' became, in part, euphemistic for extending the 'favor' of multiple

wives to his selected associates" (45). At numerous points, even a chapter title (241), he uses "favor" as a synonym for a plural marriage (xiii, xv, 45, 47, 217, 241, 244, 245, 410, 453, 473, etc.). However, this usage rests on only one secondhand possible statement by Joseph Smith. On March 7, 1843, William Clayton recorded: "Elder Brigham Young called me on one side and said he wants to give me some instructions on the priesthood the first opportunity. He said the prophet had told him to do so and give me a favor which I have long desired."<sup>16</sup>

Another term with potentially misleading connotations is George Smith's use of "courtship" or "courting" to describe Joseph Smith's interactions with potential brides (54, 70, 73, 116, 117, 159, 184, 185, 205, 207, 230, 264, 274, 275, 326, 441, etc.). George Smith also refers to "romantic overtures" (231) and Joseph's "advances" (232). It is true that John C. Bennett, in his controversial exposé, *History of the Saints*, accused Joseph Smith of trying to kiss Nancy Rigdon and Sarah Pratt in separate encounters and also alleged that Brigham Young attempted to kiss Martha Brotherton.<sup>17</sup> However, Bennett is the only author to make such charges. In her 1892 testimony in the Temple Lot case, Emily Partridge indignantly repudiated questions about premarital physical contact with Joseph Smith :

Q. Did he lay his hand on your shoulder?

A. No sir.

Q. Did he have his arm around you?

A. No sir.

Q. He did not put his arm around you?

A. No sir, nothing of the kind. He just said what he had to say and did not touch me. . . .

Q. Was he in the habit of putting his arm around you?

A. No sir, never. He was a gentleman.

Q. He never put his arm around you?

A. No sir. He never did for he was not that kind of a man. He was a gentleman in every way and did not indulge in liberties like that.

Q. You never saw anything unbecoming in him?

A. Never in my life . . .

Q. You were alone together.

A. Yes sir.

Q. You and Joseph Smith?

A. Yes sir . . .

Q. Did he offer to take your hand then?



A. No sir.

Q. Or put his hand around you?

A. No sir.

Q. At any time or place?

A. No sir, not before we was married.<sup>18</sup>

None of Joseph's wives reported common courting behavior such as walks, buggy rides, the exchange of physical affection, or flirtatious conversations, whether publicly or privately. The only encounters for which records have survived describe Joseph's teaching the principle, sometimes accompanied by an intermediary. Lucy Walker testified that "it was not a love matter" when she was sealed to Joseph Smith.<sup>19</sup> On other occasions, she added: "The Prophet . . . explained it to her, that it was not for voluptuous love"<sup>20</sup> and "Men did not take polygamous wives because they loved them or fancied them or because they were voluptuous, but because it was a command of God."<sup>21</sup> When she agreed to marry Joseph Smith, she recalled: "He led me to a chair, placed his hands upon my head, and blessed me with every blessing my heart could possibly desire."<sup>22</sup> George Smith's use of "court" and "courting" could easily create confusion, unless he is able to document evidence of more traditional courting between Joseph and his prospective wives.

George D. Smith's treatment of polyandry continues to perpetuate the confusion between "ceremonial polyandry" and "sexual polyandry." A woman who ignores a legal marriage in deference to a priesthood sealing with a new husband would be guilty of "ceremonial polyandry." She has experienced two marriage ceremonies, one legal (without a legal divorce) and the second religious marriage as in a priesthood sealing for time and eternity. However, if she discontinued conjugal relations with her legal spouse due to the sealing, she would not be practicing sexual polyandry. Proving the presence of ceremonial polyandry does not justify the assumption of concomitant sexual polyandry. Specific documentation is needed to show that Joseph Smith would blithely defy his own scripture that states that if a woman, "after she is espoused, shall be with another man, she has committed adultery, and shall be destroyed" (D&C 132:63; see also v. 42).

Importantly, evidence supporting sexual polyandry in Joseph Smith's polygamy is at best ambiguous and often sensationalized.

Frequently presented as an example of sexual polyandry has been the Prophet's relationship with Sylvia Sessions Lyons. I found that *Nauvoo Polygamy* failed to accommodate alternative interpretations and contradictory evidences on several points, including this association. For example, he wrote: "He [Joseph Smith] married her [Sylvia Sessions Lyon] on February 8, 1842. . . . Years later, at about fifty, she apparently initiated, but for some reason did not sign, an affidavit that read: "Cylvia Lyon, who was by me sworn in due formal law and upon her oath[,] that on the eighth day of February A. D. 1842, in the City of Nauvoo, county of Hancock[,] State of Illinois[,] She was married or Sealed to President Joseph Smith'" (98–99).

None of the details relating to the unsigned "affidavit" were recorded, so we do not know her level of involvement in its creation or even whether she agreed with its contents. The same collection of affidavits includes another nearly identical document, also unsigned, that gives the same day but a different year: February 8, 1843.<sup>23</sup> On their face, neither document contains any reason for accepting one as more reliable than the other, but George Smith does not mention the existence of the second document nor does he discuss important evidence that indicates a connubial separation or religious divorce that may have occurred between Sylvia and her husband, Windsor Lyons, prior to her sealing to Joseph Smith.<sup>24</sup> It is true that by not obtaining a legal divorce, Sylvia Sessions may have engaged in "ceremonial polyandry." However, the practical dissolution of her civil marriage prior to her sealing to the Prophet would have eliminated any possibility of sexual polyandry. Consecutive sexual matrimonial unions (the first legal, the second religious) would have resulted. George D. Smith does not address these possibilities or the accompanying evidence.

Another debatable position reflected in *Nauvoo Polygamy* deals with John C. Bennett, whom George Smith classifies as "perhaps Joseph Smith's closest confidant" during the inauguration of plural marriage in 1841. "Much of what he reported can be confirmed by other eyewitness accounts" (65). "Bennett was well positioned to know all about any behind-the-scenes transactions" (67). "About that time [September 1840 to July 1842], Smith was courting several women, all while Bennett was still a guest in the Smith home and otherwise accompanied the prophet's every step" (70).

George D. Smith offers two primary pieces of evidence to support the conclusion that John C. Bennett was a polygamy insider. First is the assumption that, since he was sustained as an "Assistant President" in early 1841, it would have been essentially impossible for Joseph Smith to have kept him in the dark regarding the practice of plural marriage (68–69). However, the Prophet successfully concealed the practice from William Law, who was called as a counselor in the First Presidency on January 19, 1841 (D&C 124:126), until 1843.<sup>25</sup> Joseph also kept his own brother Hyrum, who was associate Church president and Church patriarch, in the dark until May of 1843, nearly a full year after Bennett was cut off.<sup>26</sup> It is true that Bennett boarded at Joseph's home and presented himself as unmarried (he had actually abandoned his wife and children) while Hyrum had his own home and family. Yet if Joseph could successfully hide the practice from Hyrum and William Law, who both held higher ecclesiastical positions than Bennett, during the same period and for nearly a year thereafter, he could have also concealed the practice from Bennett. Meanwhile, although there is ample evidence for Joseph's and John's close association during several months in secular things, there is no evidence that Joseph felt particularly motivated to confide in him, discuss new doctrines with him, or seek the kind of spiritually based intimacy that he had had earlier shared with Oliver Cowdery and Sidney Rigdon.

George Smith also offers as evidence for Bennett's involvement his identification of a few of Joseph Smith's plural wives (65, 71). It is true Bennett was positioned to hear rumors and provided seven names (five of them verified) at a time when Joseph Smith was sealed to perhaps a dozen women. But beyond these five names, nothing in Bennett's writings and accusations resembles the teachings of celestial marriage that, according to other sources, Joseph Smith was secretly promulgating. In fact, on October 28, 1843, over a year after his excommunication, Bennett sent a letter to the *Hawk Eye* (Burlington, Iowa), admitting: "This 'marrying for eternity' is not the 'Spiritual Wife doctrine' noticed in my Expose [*The History of the Saints*, printed in October 1842], it is an entirely new doctrine established by special Revelation."<sup>27</sup> Joseph first taught eternal marriage in January 1840.<sup>28</sup> Thereafter, he

never, to my knowledge, taught plural marriage without teaching that those unions could be eternal. I conclude, from Bennett's 1843 admission of ignorance about eternal marriage during his sojourn at Nauvoo, that Joseph never confided to his volatile counselor his secret teachings of eternal and plural marriage.

George Smith asserts: "After his [Bennett's] disagreement with Smith, the record of his celestial marriage was apparently expunged" (119), and Bennett's "marriage record may have been deleted after he had a falling out with Smith" (243, also 263). In fact, there are no contemporary marriage records for even Joseph Smith's plural sealings. Since no such records were kept, there would be no historical basis for asserting that Bennett's record was "expunged." Catherine Fuller, one of Bennett's victims, affirmed that marriage ceremonies were not part of Bennett's seduction techniques. On May 25, 1842, she testified to the Nauvoo High Council:

Nearly a year ago I became acquainted with John C. Bennett, after visiting twice and on the third time he proposed unlawful intercourse being about one week after first acquaintance. He said he wished his desires granted. I told him it was contrary to my feelings he assured me there was others in higher standing than I was who would conduct in that way and there was no harm in it. He said there should be no sin upon me if there was any sin it should come upon himself. . . . John C. Bennett was the first man that seduced me.<sup>29</sup>

There is no record that Bennett ever performed or participated in even a faked ceremony as part of persuading Catherine to share his bed. Apparently he found persuasion alone sufficient for at least a half dozen women he seduced in this way.

I have identified several other problems of documentation and interpretation, of which the nine examples below are representative.

First, George Smith describes Joseph as "pursuing" Helen Mar Kimball (198): "Later when Joseph asked for Heber's only daughter, Helen Mar, the obedient disciple offered his fourteen-year-old girl without question. This occurred on or about May 28, 1843" (302). The footnote for this allegation contains four references, two of which are incomplete, but none of which corroborate this specific interpretation. I am aware of no evidence that Joseph instigated these events; rather, according to Helen Mar's own statement, it was Heber who initiated the union

because he had “a great desire to be connected with the Prophet.”<sup>30</sup> George Smith also refers Helen Mar’s “physical union at age fourteen with a thirty-seven-year-old man” (201); however, to date no evidence has been located from Helen or anyone else that the sealing included sexual intercourse. Stanley B. Kimball, Heber C. Kimball’s biographer, states:

Many years later in Utah she [Helen] wrote a retrospective poem about this marriage from which we learn that it was “for eternity alone,” that is, unconsummated. Whatever such a marriage promised for the next world, it brought her no immediate earthly happiness. She saw herself as a “fetter’d bird” without youthful friends and a subject of slander. This poem also reveals that Joseph Smith’s several pro forma marriages to the daughters of his friends were anything but sexual romps. Furthermore, the poem reinforces the idea that, despite the trials of plurality in mortality, a “glorious crown” awaited the faithful and obedient in heaven.<sup>31</sup>

Second, George Smith states: “During the 1830s and 1840s, Mormon communal practices extended to property as well as to marriage” (11). Again, no evidence is provided to support this allegation. It is true that Latter-day Saints experimented with communitarian economic arrangements in the 1830s in Kirtland and Missouri, arrangements that were not continued in Nauvoo. However, charges of “communal marriage practices” are undocumented and contradicted by all teachings and practices associated with the law of consecration.

Third, George Smith mistakenly writes: “Levi Lewis reportedly told Martin Harris that Joseph had tried to ‘seduce’ one of Emma’s friends, Eliza Winters” (29; also 18, 232).<sup>33</sup> In fact, according to the original source, it was Lewis who reported Harris as making this allegation, not the other way around.<sup>33</sup> This error transforms a second-hand account with significant plausibility problems into a first-hand allegation, providing credibility that is not deserved.

Fourth is the assertion that “Emily Partridge’s autobiographical writings vividly substantiate the intimate relationships he [Joseph] was involved in during those two years” (185). This claim seems to go beyond the evidence. Although Emily’s personal writings establish frequent interactions with Joseph, including his proposal of plural marriage and the resulting conflict with Emma, she never mentions sexual relations or affectionate interchanges

in her writings. She verified sexual intimacy with Joseph Smith only when questioned pointblank concerning the issue while providing a deposition in the Temple Lot case in 1894.<sup>34</sup>

Fifth, the history presented in *Nauvoo Polygamy* is not always consistent with available manuscript evidence. George D. Smith reports: "After Bennett's announcements in 1842 and Emma's confrontations with Joseph in the spring of 1843, the Smith household was unraveling" (237). On the contrary, May of 1843 may well have been Joseph's happiest month. Hyrum, who had been troubled by rumors of plural marriage and had been resistant to hearing more, accepted the principle as taught by Brigham Young by May 26, 1843.<sup>35</sup> Emma's opposition had been formidable; but in a (temporary) change of heart, she approved Joseph's sealings to four plural wives and was present for the ceremonies.<sup>36</sup> On May 28, after Emma had given her consent to these unions, she and Joseph were sealed in eternal marriage.

Sixth, "Rumors may have been circulating already as early as 1832 that Smith had been familiar with fifteen-year-old Marinda Johnson, a member of the family with which Smith lived in Ohio" (44). Though properly phrased as speculation ("may have been"), no footnote is provided for these allegations. In fact, this accusation was first made in 1884, forty years after the Prophet's death, by Clark Braden, a Church of Christ (Disciples) minister, who did not claim first-hand knowledge and did not identify a second-hand source.<sup>37</sup> Knowing these contextual details helps readers put such charges in proper perspective.

Seventh, a footnote is also missing for this claim: "After the Partridge sisters became emotionally involved with Smith, the period of courtship and marriage lasted three or four years, the longest for which we have evidence" (185). Emily herself explained: "The first intimation I had from Brother Joseph that there was a pure and holy order of plural marriage, was in the spring of 1842, but I was not married until 1843."<sup>38</sup>

Eighth, I am also uneasy about the pattern of frequently citing secondary sources rather than primary sources. *Nauvoo Polygamy* contains dozens of references to the *History of the Church*. It is true that the primary sources for citations from the *History of the Church* are not always easily identified, but generally scholars attempt to do so if possible. In addition, multiple notes cite a pri-

mary source, and then add that it is “quoting” or “quoted in” or “cited in” a secondary source (78 note 55, 85 note 73, 87 note 77, 93 note 93, 98 note 107, 132 note 201, 136 note 213, etc.). It is unclear whether Smith verified the primary source.

Nine, a number of footnotes have missing page numbers or are otherwise incomplete (46 note 104, 47 note 109, 99 note 108, 302 note 116, etc.).

To conclude then, I find *Nauvoo Polygamy* susceptible to criticism in two areas. The first is George D. Smith’s near-exclusive naturalistic interpretation. A naturalistic stance is a valid approach; but by excluding possible non-naturalistic explanations, George Smith does not re-create the world of most Nauvoo polygamists, who often reported personal spiritual experiences that profoundly influenced their decisions to participate. Nor does a dedicated naturalistic view allow readers to consider the possibility that Joseph Smith introduced plural marriage in his role as a prophet-restorer, a view that many, if not all, Nauvoo pluralists embraced.

The second area of criticism is deficits in documentation that plague the text throughout. In my opinion, these problems diminish *Nauvoo Polygamy*’s overall authoritativeness, especially in comparison to Todd Compton’s *In Sacred Loneliness*. In addition, *Nauvoo Polygamy* presents numerous issues as though they were conclusively supported by historical research when documentary evidence is, in fact, missing or inconclusive.

In short, scholars and researchers will be grateful for the remarkable detail found in the historical data in Appendix B identifying the numbers of polygamous men and women in Nauvoo and beyond. However, readers seeking an objective, well-documented exposition of Joseph Smith’s polygamy may find *Nauvoo Polygamy* less useful.

### Notes

1. George Smith’s 2008 data also support the inclusion of three men for whom documentation is fragmentary. The first is Thomas Bateman whom Smith includes due to a listing of a (plural) marriage to Elizabeth Ravencroft on March 23, 1843, found in Lyndon Cook, *Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 1839–1845* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1994), 103. However, Cook cites the Nauvoo Marriage Record in the LDS Church History Library, but plural marriages were not usually recorded in the

Nauvoo Marriage Record, because of their secret nature. Beyond this single reference, I have been unable to verify that Bateman was married to Ravencroft. Andrew Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson Historical Co., 1901–36), 2:591, speaks of him only as a monogamist. A second uncorroborated sealing is George Miller to Julia Ann Chapman on July 20, 1843. I have found no confirming sources for this alleged sealing. The third is a plural marriage performed in New York between Ebenezer C. Richardson and Polly Ann Childs in November 1843 which also lacks other verification. The couple's first child was not born until 1848.

2. Two of Joseph Smith's manuscripts deal with plural marriage but in a way that connects to polygamy only in context. The first is the ceremonial prayer that the Prophet dictated by which Newel K. Whitney united him with his daughter, Sarah Ann Whitney. H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 315–16. The second is Joseph Smith, Letter to Nancy Rigdon, April 1842, "Happiness is the object and design of our existence" published in "Sixth Letter from John C. Bennett," *Sangamo Journal* (Springfield Illinois), August 19, 1842; rpt., in John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints: Or an Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842), 243–44.

3. See George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995).

4. Among these are Willard Richards, *Diary*, 19 vols., and Brigham Young, *Diary*, both in LDS Church History Library. See also the Nauvoo Temple Record and Lisle Brown, ed., *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: A Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841–1846* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006).

5. Letter to Claire Noall, quoted in Newell G. Bringham, *Fawn McKay Brodie: A Biographer's Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1999), 88–89; Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), ix.

6. Brian C. Hales, "Fanny Alger and Joseph Smith's Pre-Nauvoo Reputation," *Journal of Mormon History* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 112–90.

7. Michael Marquardt, Letter to Gary J. Bergera, October 19, 1995, Michael Marquardt Collection, Marriott Library, University of Utah; photocopy in my possession; used by permission. See also H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816–1844* (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2005), 451.

8. Copy in my possession; used by permission.

9. The letter's text and signature are unquestionably Joseph's (photocopy of holograph in my possession) and was photographically repro-



duced in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 539–40; emphasis mine.

10. Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 17, 28, 90, 140, 141, 160, 192, 367, 369, 380; and Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 119.

11. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 350.

12. Joseph Smith, Letter to "Brother O. Cowdery," *Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 3 (December 1834): 40; emphasis mine.

13. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, xii.

14. John Taylor, (n.d.) 1883, *Journal of Discourses*, 24:231.

15. This unique utilization also appears in George D. Smith, "Nau- voo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841–46: A Preliminary Demographic Report," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 10.

16. George D. Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 94.

17. Bennett, *The History of the Saints*, 231, 238, 243.

18. Emily Partridge, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent's testimony (part 3), pages 357–58, question nos. 148–54, 179–85, *In the [Ninth] Circuit Court of the United States, Western Division at Kansas City—The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Complainant vs. The Church of Christ at Independence . . . , Respondents*. The depositions were taken between January and November 1892; copies at the Community of Christ Archives and microfilm at the LDS Church History library (hereafter cited as Temple Lot transcript). Emily also testified that she never slept with Joseph Smith prior to her sealing. *Ibid.*, p. 371, question nos. 481–84.

19. Lucy Walker, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent's testimony (part 3), *Ibid.*, Pt. 3, pp. 450, 470, question nos. 29, 528. William Smith's plural wife Mary Ann West also testified that there was no courtship prior to her polygamous marriage. Mary Ann West, Testimony, *ibid.*, 506, question 333.

20. Lucy Walker quoted in "In Honor of Joseph Smith: Anniversary of His Birth Celebrated in the Sixteenth Ward," *Deseret Evening News*, December 25, 1899, 2.

21. Lucy Walker quoted in "Talks of Polygamy," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 24, 1899.

22. Lucy Walker, quoted in Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience* (Logan: Utah Journal, 1888), 48.

23. Brian C. Hales, "The Joseph Smith—Sylvia Sessions Plural Sealing: Polyandry or Polygyny?" *Mormon Historical Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 41–57.

24. George Smith cites "Affidavits on Celestial Marriage, 1869–1870, 62," as his source. These are four affidavit books compiled by Apostle Joseph F. Smith in 1869–1870, which contain two unfinished documents referring to "Cylvia Lyon" (Book 1, p. 60; Book 4, p. 62). The documents are not legal affidavits because they contain no signatures. The text in *Nauvoo Polygamy* uses the 1842 date found in Book 1, p. 60. However, the footnote is confusing because it does not specify which affidavit book is referenced and provides an incorrect page number, "62." However, Book 4, p. 62 contains the second Lyon document, which lists the 1843 date that Smith did not mention. The affidavit books have been digitized and are available at the LDS Church History Library, MS 3423, fd. 5.

25. Affidavit dated July 17, 1885, quoted in Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 1914), 126.

26. George D. Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 106; see also Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the Mormon Succession Question" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), 56–60.

27. John C. Bennett, "Letter from General Bennett," October 28, 1843, *Hawk Eye* (Burlington, Iowa), December 7, 1843, 1; emphasis in original.

28. Parley P. Pratt Jr., ed., *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt: One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985 printing), 259–60. The context of Pratt's report mentions only monogamy.

29. Catherine Fuller, Testimony before the Nauvoo High Council, May 25, 1842; photocopy of holograph in Valeen Tippetts Avery Collection, Merrill Library Special Collections, MSS 316, Box 24, fd. 14, Utah State University, Logan.

30. "Helen Mar Kimball Whitney 1881 Autobiography," LDS Church History Library; typescript and copy of holograph reproduced in Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, eds., *A Woman's View: Helen Mar Whitney's Reminiscences of Early Church History* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1997), 482–87.

31. Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 98.

32. This error also appears in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 4:346; and Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 178.

33. Whether the original quotations were taken from an interview