

or affidavit is unclear. No affidavits as described have been located. Excerpts quoted in "Mormonism," *Susquehanna Register, and Northern Pennsylvanian* (Montrose, Pennsylvania) 9 (May 1, 1834): 1; quoted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:346.

34. Emily Dow Partridge Young, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent's testimony (part 3), pp. 371, 384, question nos. 480–84, 747, 751–62. George Smith also mistakenly wrote: "Emily Dow Partridge left home in 1846 with her son, who was fathered by Amasa Lyman" (228). This statement confuses the two Partridge sisters. After Joseph Smith's death, Emily married Brigham Young; it was her sister Eliza, also one of Joseph's plural wives, who married Amasa Lyman.

35. George D. Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 106; see also Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances," 56–60.

36. Emily Dow Partridge Young, "Incidents in the Life of a Mormon Girl," holograph, n.d., 186, Ms 5220, LDS Church History Library.

37. E. L. Kelley and Clark Braden, *Public Discussion of the Issues between the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Christ (Disciples) Held in Kirtland, Ohio, Beginning February 12, and Closing March 8, 1884 between E. L. Kelley, of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and Clark Braden, of the Church of Christ* (St. Louis: Clark Braden, 1884), 202. See also Wayne A. Ham, "Truth Affirmed, Error Denied: The Great Debates of the Early Reorganization," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 7 (1987): 8.

38. Emily D. Partridge, "Autobiography of Emily D. P. Young," *Woman's Exponent* 14, no. 5 (August 1, 1885): 37–38.

The Beginnings of Latter-day Plurality

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

Reviewed by Todd M. Compton

George D. Smith's *Nauvoo Polygamy*: "... but we called it celestial marriage" is an extremely important contribution to the history of polygamy and to Mormon history. Carefully written and the result of exhaustive research, it provides many significant insights into the beginnings of Mormon polygamy.

Nauvoo Polygamy has been compared to my *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature

Books, 1997) but in some ways it is broader in scope, covering Nauvoo polygamists from Joseph Smith to the last Mormon who married plurally in the Nauvoo Temple before the Mormons left for the West. In addition, my book was consciously written to tell the stories of Smith's plural wives, to write from the viewpoint of women. *Nauvoo Polygamy* tends to look at early Mormon polygamy from the viewpoint of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other early Mormon male leaders. This focus is not a matter of right or wrong; both perspectives are entirely valid. We should look at early polygamy from a variety of angles.

George Smith, then, follows Fawn Brodie, Donna Hill, and Richard Bushman in looking at the earliest Mormon polygamy largely from the viewpoint of Joseph Smith. But the comparison of Bushman's treatment of Joseph Smith's polygamy and George D. Smith's is enlightening. Bushman spends about eighteen pages on the subject;¹ George Smith spends approximately 200 pages on it. Clearly, Joseph's polygamy was not a main focus of interest for Bushman. In what I think is clearly a serious lacuna in Bushman's otherwise superb biography, he doesn't even mention many of Joseph Smith's plural wives, one of whom, Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, left an important memoir describing her marriage to the Mormon prophet. Helen Mar was Joseph's youngest wife and the daughter of Apostle Heber C. Kimball; her marriage to Smith constitutes an important example of dynastic linking in his polygamy.

Therefore, if one is seriously interested in Joseph Smith's polygamy in the context of his life and doctrine, or in Joseph Smith's Nauvoo years, after reading Bushman's few pages, one must turn to George Smith and to my *In Sacred Loneliness*. However, although Joseph Smith is a major figure in my book, I see him only through the lens of his thirty-three plural wives, which leaves much of his life out of the picture. *Nauvoo Polygamy* provides much more of the broader context of Joseph's life when he was practicing plural marriage.

Reading this book often left me with an overwhelming impression of how busy Joseph Smith was—the sheer multifaceted nature of his life, including the demands of sacred leadership of a people and church, of “secular” and military leadership of Nauvoo, of evading legal harassment and imprisonment, of caring for his public family, including a strong-willed first wife who disliked

polygamy intensely, despite moments when she reluctantly gave her husband permission to practice it. Yet despite all of the projects he was juggling in the Nauvoo years, he constantly took time to court and marry plural wives—sometimes two or three per month. (In May 1843, he married four plural wives.) Clearly, polygamy was extremely important to him.

George D. Smith, in *Nauvoo Polygamy*, examines each plural marriage date for Joseph Smith carefully and often simply quotes the official *History of the Church* for that date. I found this juxtaposition of the public versus the private record extremely enlightening at times, aside from the support it gave for the validity of the marriage date. Doing this allows one to see how Joseph Smith's marriages fit into the context of his daily life.

In addition, Joseph Smith was not just marrying his own plural wives; he was also introducing other people to "the Principle." Much of this material simply wasn't applicable to my book, but it's central to George D. Smith's book. And it's fascinating material. I especially enjoyed Chapter 6, "How Plural Marriage Worked," which gives many of the human interest stories behind a number of these early Nauvoo polygamists.

As George D. Smith turns from Joseph Smith to the rest of the Nauvoo polygamists, he makes a major contribution by demonstrating conclusively that the argument that Nauvoo polygamy (at least, later Nauvoo polygamy) was a limited phenomenon is wrong. Many Mormons wanted to form and seal their plural families in the Nauvoo Temple before the trek west. As a result, late Nauvoo is really the foundation of what I call practical polygamy in Mormonism. Plural marriage became a virtually open secret in the Mormon community in late Nauvoo, as opposed to its general *sub rosa* nature while Joseph Smith lived. One tends to think of polygamy's entrance into the mainstream of Mormonism occurring in Utah, but this book shows that it was solidly launched in the late Nauvoo period.

I was impressed, as I read *Nauvoo Polygamy*, with the importance of Brigham Young in providing polygamy with a solid practical foundation in Nauvoo. Joseph Smith never lived openly with any of his plural wives; Brigham Young, as leading apostle of the Church, did—setting up households and openly providing for his plural wives in Nauvoo. As in so many other areas, Brigham Young

continued what Joseph did and raised it to another level. Depending on how one views polygamy, Young's actions may be entirely praiseworthy or a major wrong turn in religious praxis, but Young's historical impact and influence in this area are undeniable.

Contrast how nineteenth-century Mormon history might have unfolded if the anti-polygamous William Marks (who had a strong legal claim to lead the Church after Joseph's death) had succeeded to the presidency, rather than Brigham Young with his eventual fifty-six wives.² Plural marriage might have died in Nauvoo (with perhaps some break-off polygamous groups); the major cultural conflict between Mormonism and America might have been averted; and many Mormon genealogies would have been infinitely simplified.

But clearly Brigham Young (and other key apostles, such as Heber C. Kimball, eventual husband to forty-five wives)³ had been thoroughly converted to plurality by Joseph Smith—and not just to the idea of polygamy, but to the concept that the more wives one married, the greater one's exaltation in the hereafter. This doctrine continued to have major impact throughout the Utah period of Mormon polygamy.

Nauvoo Polygamy includes a magnificent, extensive, wonderfully detailed, appendix of Nauvoo polygamists, listing the full marriage history of each male polygamist who started his plural family in Nauvoo, but also including wives added after Nauvoo. It is even footnoted. It has already been of great use to me in research I have been doing on age at marriage in Mormon polygamy and will be a valuable resource for Mormon historians for generations to come.

No book is perfect, and this book certainly has limitations. I accept Fanny Alger as a well-documented plural wife of Joseph Smith, based on the autobiography of Alger's cousin, Mosiah Hancock, as well as on other supporting evidence, but George D. Smith does not include her in his list. Also, in the case of Helen Mar Kimball, Joseph's youngest wife, I believe that there is no evidence, pro or con, that she and Joseph physically consummated their sealing. Given the lack of evidence either way, I believe that, based on plural marriage patterns involving younger wives in Utah, it is unlikely that Helen Mar had marital relations with Joseph. George Smith offers no additional evidence but portrays

the marriage of Helen Mar and Joseph Smith as including physical relations. This book would have been improved if Smith had included a fuller discussion of these two issues, including an analysis of the Mosiah Hancock document.

I number thirty-three plural wives for Joseph Smith, while George D. Smith counts thirty-seven. George D. Smith actually has a strong case for including those additional wives. I may have erred on the side of caution when I did not include them as “well-documented wives” in *In Sacred Loneliness*, though I did include most of them in my “possible wife” category.

One could argue that Chapters 7 (dealing with secrecy in Nauvoo polygamy and in the subsequent Mormon historical record), 8 (on Mormons looking back at Nauvoo polygamy), and 9 (discussing antecedents to Mormon polygamy in the Reformation) of *Nauvoo Polygamy*, about 140 pages, have some passages that extend beyond the chronological compass of this book’s central theme, and that might have been summarized or compressed. Chapter 9 on “Protestant polygamy” especially detracts from the unity of a book about Nauvoo polygamy. On the other hand, it is a useful and interesting chapter. It’s an important subject that has not been written about sufficiently. Much work remains to be done on the close and distant non-Mormon ancestors of Mormon polygamy in “mainstream” Christianity in Europe and in early American culture.

As some reviewers have already noticed, Smith does not write this book from the perspective of conservative or traditional Mormon histories.⁴ But I believe that Mormon history is enriched when responsible non-Mormons or liberal Mormons (as well as moderate Mormons or conservative Mormons) are involved in it. I think the best way for conservative Mormons to respond is not by attacking the motives or character of the historian with whom they disagree or by demanding that non-Mormons or liberal Mormons write conservative history. Rather, I would urge such historians to research and write in the same field, producing an account of Nauvoo polygamy written from a conservative perspective that embodies the highest ideals of scholarship—thoroughness, honesty, balance, respect for primary sources, and relevant modern scholarship, just to name a few—as they do so.

As in any major work of scholarship, many details and interpretations in *Nauvoo Polygamy* will be debated and perhaps modified in the future. A book about a secret practice that later became a taboo subject in Mormon culture will necessarily deal with many under-documented and debatable facts. But there is no denying the enormous contribution this book has made to our understanding of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Nauvoo polygamy.

Notes

1. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 323–27, 437–46, 490–96, 498–99.

2. Jeffery Ogden Johnson, “Determining and Defining ‘Wife’: The Brigham Young Households,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20 (Fall 1987): 70. The article identifies fifty-five wives, but Johnson has confirmed by email that Amanda Barnes Smith, the fifty-sixth wife, was also sealed to Brigham Young in Utah.

3. Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), Appendix A, 307–16.

4. I realize that one could write at length on the many gradations of “conservative,” “moderate,” “centrist,” “liberal,” and “radical” within Mormonism. I use the term “conservative” as descriptive, not negative. In fact, any historian is by nature a conservative in one important sense, as he or she seeks to conserve knowledge of and the experience of the past. However, the process of choosing what to conserve as most important and what to regard as less important in any tradition is a matter of moral insight, not a mechanistic process. The twentieth century has seen a gigantic shift in official statements about what constitutes the “traditional” view of Mormon polygamy—including denials that it ever involved more than 2 or 3 percent and insistence that the 1890 Manifesto stopped authorized plural marriages—to a less defensive and more nuanced view. No doubt this process will continue. I tend to disagree with conservatives who look on religious texts, principles, persons, events as absolute—as all good or all bad. This perspective leads to what Leonard J. Arrington has called the “theological marionette” bias in LDS history. “The Search for Truth and Meaning in Mormon History,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3 (Summer 1968): 61.