

A DOCUMENTARY NOTE ON A
LETTER TO JOSEPH SMITH.
ROMANCE, DEATH, AND POLYGAMY:
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SUSAN
HOUGH CONRAD AND
LORENZO DOW BARNES

William V. Smith

In the final year of Joseph Smith's life, he engaged in frequent correspondence with political leaders, Church officers, family members, and others. In this paper I will consider a letter written to Joseph Smith from a Mormon missionary and presiding elder named Jedediah Morgan Grant, headquartered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.¹ Written in August 1843, the letter concerns—among a number of other things—a young female Latter-day Saint then living with her mother and sisters in Philadelphia. The letter is remarkable for several reasons, notably the veiled glimpse it provides into Joseph Smith's practice of polygamy. A complete transcription of the letter is found in the appendix to this article; I will quote it liberally as I flesh out its context. Note that spelling and other

1. Grant (1816–1856) lived to become a counselor in the First Presidency of Brigham Young, taking the place of Willard Richards, who died in 1854. Grant is perhaps best known for his oratorical forge that hammered out a Mormon reform in 1850s Utah. On Grant, see Gene A. Sessions, *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007).

irregularities in quotes from the letter and other sources are found in the originals (unless noted otherwise).

With the Finneys, Beechers, Towles, Campbells, and other luminaries of antebellum American religion stood the anonymous men and women who were followers or advocates of their movements. In the “age of improvement,” Americans seemed to be moving from one idea to another, just as they moved from one place to another. The restless minds of the antebellum Atlantic World were a fertile preaching environment for the Latter-day Saints, and a core of dedicated people made up a missionary cohort that converted thousands, forming Mormonism into a history-making wedge of Americana.² Two such devoted Mormon souls were Lorenzo Dow Barnes (1812–1842) and Susan Hough Conrad (1818–1888). I will first give a short description of Barnes’s and Conrad’s lives as context for the Grant letter. Next, I will discuss how their lives were linked together. Finally, informed by those lives, I will discuss the content of the Grant letter and how it and Conrad figured into Joseph Smith’s marriage project.³

2. On the general picture of antebellum American religion, see Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), chaps. 5, 8, 12; Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Richard T. Hughes and Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630–1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

3. This article is based on and expands work that will appear in chapter 3 of a forthcoming book, William Victor Smith, *Every Word Seasoned with Grace: A Textual Study of the Funeral Sermons of Joseph Smith*. I would like to thank Robin S. Jensen of the Joseph Smith Papers Project and the staff of the LDS Church History Library for help with the documents considered in this work. I also thank Margaret Averill for her careful editorial advice.

Lorenzo Barnes

Lorenzo Dow Barnes's⁴ given names register one of the most famous of American preachers of the previous generation: Lorenzo Dow.⁵ Thousands of American children of the period were named after the spellbinding Methodist itinerant preacher. Born in 1812 in Massachusetts, Lorenzo Barnes and his family were part of the westward expansion. Settling in Ohio, the family came into contact with Latter-day Saints in 1833. Barnes heard and accepted the Mormon millennial message and never looked back. While Barnes tried preaching to his family, it was without success: his parents remained non-Mormon Ohio residents until their deaths.

Almost immediately after joining the Latter-day Saints, Barnes took to the missionary trail, returning to the family home in winter snows to teach school until spring. In 1834, Barnes joined the "Camp of Israel," the hopeful group of Saints led by Joseph Smith who wished to protect those Mormons who had been ejected from their Zion in Jackson County, Missouri, the previous year. The plan, proposed by the Mormons and Missouri's attorney general, was for the men of Zion's Camp to escort the displaced Saints back to the Independence area (now an eastern suburb of Kansas City). Missouri governor Daniel Dunklin rejected this plan because he saw the makings of civil war in the move.⁶

4. Spelled "Barns" in the 1820 US census, as well as in a number of other sources, for example, see *The Elders Journal* (Oct. 1837): 15.

5. See, Lorenzo Dow Barnes, first small journal, page 1, holograph, MS 1436, LDS Church History Library (CHL), Salt Lake City, Utah. See also his second small journal, pages 53, 118. MS 1436, CHL.

6. Dunklin hoped that ongoing negotiations between displaced Mormons and Jackson County residents would resolve the issue without militia action. They did not, but Dunklin's delay left the Camp without its primary purpose. For a brief discussion of the political, religious, and documentary issues of Zion's Camp see Matthew C. Godfrey, Brenden W. Rensink, Alex D. Smith, Max H. Parkin, and Alexander L. Baugh, *Documents, Vol. 4: April 1834–September 1835*,

The expedition was disbanded and Barnes returned to Ohio. In 1835, Barnes, like many other members of Zion's Camp, was given a leadership role in the Church, becoming a member of the first quorum of "Seventy," a group tasked especially with the missionary efforts of the Church.⁷ He was a consistent worker who overcame a speech problem to become one of the most highly regarded Mormon leaders in his field of labor. Sent off to proselytize in the eastern states, Barnes moved through Kentucky and Virginia, and he stayed in the region until 1838, when he followed Church leaders who vacated Ohio for Far West, Missouri.⁸

Barnes didn't spend much time in the community-building efforts before he was again sent east to preach. He remained in missionary service until 1841, when he came to the new Church center of Nauvoo.⁹

vol. 4 in The Joseph Smith Papers series, edited by Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016), 48–96.

7. Similarly named groups in the LDS Church now function as general and regional officers. In these early times, however, it was only the "presidents" of the Seventy that were classed with the general hierarchy of Mormonism in a practical sense, despite the entire quorum having nascent high authority according to an April 1835 revelation. On the revelation see, for example, William V. Smith, "Early Mormon Priesthood Revelations: Text, Impact, and Evolution," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 1–84.

8. On Barnes's early mission work and travels, see Davis Bitton, "Kirtland as a Center of Missionary Activity, 1830–1838," *BYU Studies* 11, no. 4 (1971): 501. Barnes was named a member of the short-lived Adam-ondi-Ahman high council in 1838. See also Andrew Jenson, *Latter-Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1920), 307–08. Also, Lorenzo D. Barnes reminiscences and diaries, 1834–1839, MS 1436, CHL.

9. Barnes was in the Philadelphia region in late 1839. On Barnes's work there see, for example, *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 1 (Nov. 1, 1840): 106–07. Barnes was often working in the Chester County area. See Conference Minutes, *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 14 (May 15, 1841): 412–13; Conference Minutes, Nauvoo, Aug. 16, 1841, *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 21 (Sept. 1, 1841): 521. Barnes was appointed clerk of the Nauvoo conference. Barnes was on occasion a "traveling agent" for the Nauvoo *Times and Seasons*. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker*

Barnes was chosen for missionary service in 1839 to travel to Britain in the wake of the Mormon apostles who began canvassing England that same year.¹⁰ Barnes was slow in taking ship for England, spending considerable time in the Philadelphia region. Barnes became a pillar of Church leadership in Pennsylvania for several years and wrote “licenses” for other Mormon leaders who were passing through the region.¹¹ He returned to Nauvoo in the spring of 1841 and was named clerk for a conference on August 16, 1842.¹² On August 21, a meeting of the Mormon apostles voted that “Barnes proceed on his mission to England without delay.” Church leaders wrote to remind him of the point of his journey, and Barnes finally boarded ship for England in January 1842.¹³

Pratt (New York: Russell Brothers, 1874), 331. See also an amplified version of other texts generating a pseudepigraphal work, “Journal of Don Carlos Smith,” which appears in B. H. Roberts, ed. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902–1912), 4:394–95; Lucy Mack Smith history, 1845, Box 1, fd. 26, MS 2049, CHL. See Dan Vogel, *History of Joseph Smith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: A Source and Text-Critical Edition*, 8 vols. (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2015), 4:390, note 27. The “Don C. Smith journal” appears in the appendix to Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool, England, 1853), 283–88.

10. Lorenzo D. Barnes, Letter to Elijah Malin, Jan. 9, 1842, *Journal History of the Church* 1896–2001, vol. 14, CR 100 127, CHL.

11. The idea of a license was a common tradition among itinerant preachers and in particular, Methodists. It functioned in Mormonism in the same way as a kind of letter of recommendation, but also as a badge of authority. See for example, George A. Smith, Letter to Brigham Young, Feb. 9, 1840, CR 1234 1, CHL.

12. See, Journal of Hayward Thomas, page 1, MS 1434, CHL. John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2012), 65–79.

13. Peter L. Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church*, 3 vols. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1997–2012), 1:165. On the apostles’ encouragement to Barnes, see Journal of Wilford Woodruff, Oct. 29, 1840, MS 1352, CHL; Scott G. Kenny, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 9 vols. typescript (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1983–1985), 1:543.

Lorenzo Barnes was no Parley Pratt, but he did publish some missionary tracts, one of which, titled *References*, was well respected by his fellow missionaries.¹⁴ On the ship to Liverpool, Barnes composed a poem, “The Bold Pilgrim,” about his missionary task, which he published upon his arrival in England.¹⁵

Barnes died in December 1842 after a short illness in Idle, Yorkshire, England, where he was buried. Two years later, Wilford Woodruff visited the gravesite and made arrangements for a headstone and epitaph.¹⁶ The epitaph read:

Sleep on, Lorenzo, but ere long from this
 The conquered tomb shall yield her captured prey.
 Then with thy Quorum shalt thou reign in bliss
 As king and priest for all Eternal Day.¹⁷

When Joseph Smith heard of Barnes’s death via letter from the leader of the Church’s British mission, Parley P. Pratt, he offered remarks in Nauvoo in praise of Barnes but also regarding the matter of his burial in England.¹⁸ Willard Richards reported Smith saying during his remarks:

14. See Crawley, *Descriptive Bibliography*, vol. 1, items 115, 116; *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 1 (Nov. 15, 1841): 529.

15. See Barnes’s report of arrival to Parley Pratt in Roberts, *History of the Church*, 4:569–70. Crawley, *Descriptive Bibliography*, 1:151. “Pilgrim” appeared as a broadside in 1842; it gave Barnes’s faith-history in verse. No publisher was indicated.

16. Woodruff took excerpts from his journal about the incident and put them in a letter to *Times and Seasons* editor John Taylor. Taylor published a version in the May 15, 1845 issue. Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, May 1, 1845, MS 1352, CHL; Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 2:541.

17. Woodruff journal, Apr. 26, 1845, Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 2:540.

18. Editor Thomas Ward noted Barnes’s passing in his January 1843 *Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star* (hereafter *Millennial Star*) editorial and then inserted a long poem about Barnes. Ward noted that Barnes died at 3:15 in the morning (*Millennial Star* 3, no. 9 [Jan. 1843]: 159, 160).

When I heard of the death of our beloved bro Barnes it would not have affected me so much if I had the opportunity of burying him in the land of Zion. I believe, those who have buried their friends here their condition is enviable. Look at Joseph in Egypt how he required his friends to bury him in the tomb of his fathers¹⁹

Passionate about having durable connections to family and friends, Joseph Smith deployed this Hebrew Bible image as background to his own New Testament vision of triumph:

would you think it strange that I relate what I have seen in vision in relation [to] this interesting theme. those who have died in Jesus Christ, may expect to enter in to all that fruition of Joy when they come forth, which they have pursued here, so plain was the vision I actually saw men, before they had ascended from the tomb, as though they were getting up slowly, they took each other by the hand & it was my father & my son . my mother my brother & my sister & my daughter²⁰

Smith's sermon was an impressive one, and it resonated with those who heard its sentiments. Years later, Mormon elders in Britain took up a collection to finance the exhumation of Barnes's body to send it to Utah. It would be buried near his fellow deceased Latter-day Saints.²¹ Barnes died at a time when Joseph Smith's theological ideas and corresponding

19. The source passage probably refers to Jacob, not Joseph. See Joseph Smith Diary, Apr. 16, 1843; Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals, Vol. 2: 1841–1843*, vol. 2 in *The Joseph Smith Papers* series, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 359.

20. *Ibid.*

21. The bodies of Barnes and another Mormon missionary who had died in Britain took the journey to Utah with the first group of emigrants financed by the Church's Perpetual Emigrating Fund (Abraham O. Smoot Company). The group arrived in Salt Lake City, September 3, 1852. Orson Pratt preached a reburial sermon for the two deceased missionaries on September 12, 1852 (Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 4:145–48). George D. Watt captured a shorthand audit of a portion of the sermon. See "Historian's Office Reports of Speeches, 1845–1885," CR 100 317, CHL.

institutions were beginning to reach their zenith. Barnes's death seems to have erased him from a portrait that included most prominent Nauvoo Mormons: the kinship expansions of polygamy and "sealing" and their associated practices.²²

Susan Hough Conrad

Barnes appears to have been unattached until 1841. Sometime during his missionary service in Pennsylvania, he began a romance with Susan Hough Conrad, a young convert whose family was friendly to Mormonism and who may have heard Joseph Smith preach.²³ Smith preached a number of times in Washington and the surrounding area after his 1839–40 interviews with and pleas to Washington power brokers over the losses incurred by Latter-day Saints in Missouri in the 1830s; one of his better-known sermons was recorded in a letter by Matthew L.

22. Woodruff's epitaph suggests his intention of making the Mormon temple blessings available to Barnes, posthumously. There is now a large literature regarding both early LDS temple practice/ritual and doctrines as well as current temple use among Mormons. For an interesting overview from a century ago with historic photographs, see James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1912). For a contextual picture of Joseph Smith's sealing theology, see Samuel Brown, "Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 3–52; also Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as it is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), chaps. 7, 8.

23. Andrew Jackson's designated presidential successor, Martin Van Buren, was in office. Van Buren was above all a political strategist and far less an ideologue than Jackson. Founder of two-party politics in America, Van Buren may have felt sympathy for Mormons in the Missouri violence, but holding Missouri liable for Mormon losses was outside the presidential and congressional Venn diagram. See Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, chap. 10. Indeed, the Age of Jackson saw citizen violence in America reach an apex only superseded by war. On Smith's mission to Washington for redress, see Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 391–402.

Davis, well-known journalist and friend and biographer of Aaron Burr.²⁴ Conrad was not present when Smith preached that sermon, but she may have heard him preach in Pennsylvania in the days following. She related the story of having Smith in her parent's home at this period, and in any case she was impressed by him and became a Latter-day Saint in February or March of 1840.

Both Conrad and Barnes were in Nauvoo in 1841, but their stays may have only briefly intersected there. Conrad stayed in Nauvoo a few months, roughly between April and June. While in Nauvoo, she was befriended by another Latter-day Saint woman from the Philadelphia area, Mary Wickersham Woolley, with whom she exchanged some correspondence, the content of which suggests that Conrad stayed in the Woolley household during her time in Nauvoo.²⁵

One of the more important extant documents detailing Conrad's life is her "Autograph Album." Autograph books were a nineteenth-century fad that often occupied the new-fangled parlors of middle class Americans, where guests might be asked to pen a verse while noting their names and the place and date of signing. Orson Pratt, Parley Pratt, and George Q. Cannon were some of the writers in Conrad's album.

24. Matthew L. Davis letter, Washington, DC to Mrs. Matthew L. Davis, New York City, New York, Feb. 6, 1840, MS 522, CHL.

25. In particular, Susan Conrad, Letter to Mary Wickersham Woolley, Aug. 5, 1844, MS 8081, CHL. The Woolley letter passed through the hands of Mark Hofmann to the LDS church in 1985 but does not appear to be a forgery. However, it has not been subjected to complete forensic analysis. See Richard E. Turley, *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 392 (item 436). See also, Jeffery O. Johnson, "The Document Diggers and Their Discoveries: A Panel," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1986): 55–56. Mary Wickersham grew up in Pennsylvania but her family moved west to Ohio as she reached adulthood. A young man in her circle of West Chester friends came west shortly after, possibly in search of Mary, and Edwin Dilworth Woolley married Mary Wickersham in 1831. See Leonard J. Arrington, *From Quaker to Latter-day Saint: Bishop Edwin D. Woolley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 42, 45–48.

Conrad's movements and encounters can be at least partially accounted for since she took the book with her on several journeys. She seems to have acquired her book in Baltimore in 1837 (the earliest entries date from November 1837). Some of the entries suggest that it was a keepsake in memory of her departure from Baltimore to Philadelphia.²⁶

Within a year of the death of Joseph Smith, Conrad had married, and her first child was born in 1845 or 1846. Only a few entries in the autograph book address Susan as Wilkinson, and up through 1844 she is always noted as Miss Susan Conrad or Susan H. Conrad. Her new husband was a close family acquaintance, William B. Wilkinson (1820–1889).²⁷ Wilkinson's family identified as Anglican/Episcopalian and Wilkinson was christened at Old Trinity Church in Philadelphia. Indeed, Wilkinson's family, as more liberal Protestants perhaps, apparently hosted Joseph Smith during his 1840 visit to the area; Joseph wrote them a short letter on the subject of "Virtue" with reference to their kind service.²⁸ Wilkinson tolerated Mormonism but apparently did

26. See Susan C. Wilkinson autograph album, circa 1837–1844; 1860–1861, MS 3466, CHL. Several Conrad families lived in Baltimore in 1837 as shown by city directories of the time. The Baltimore Conrads did business as grocers and tavern keeps among other things. The November entries have the flavor of separation. Whether Conrad lived there some time or was only visiting is unknown.

27. Conrad, "Autograph Album," entries 61, 39 are signed "William." Conrad's brother, David, had married William Wilkinson's sister Margaret in 1836. See also William's death notice, "Died," *Salt Lake Herald*, Jun. 29, 1889, 8.

28. The January 20, 1840, letter read, "Virtue is one of the most prominent principles that enables us to have confidence in approaching our Father who is in heaven in order to ask wisdom at his hand therefore if thou wilt cherish this principle in thine heart thou mayest ask with all Confidence before him and it shall be poured out upon thine head and thou shalt not lack any thing that thy soul desires in truth and again the Lord shall bless this house and none of them shall fail because they turned not away the servants of the Lord from their doors even so Amen." See *Ensign* (Sept. 1985): 77–78. The idea of virtue generally meant honest unselfish service, performing moral duties out of love

not join the faith for almost two decades. Finally, in 1861, Wilkinson united with Mormonism in Philadelphia.²⁹ The Wilkinsons emigrated to Utah with the James S. Brown wagon train the following year, where they established a household in the Salt Lake City Fourteenth Ward.³⁰

for God and his laws, or out of recognition of human fundamental rights, and it was often used in that way in political discourse. Given Joseph Smith's political frustrations in Washington, it was probably a topic that occupied his mind. He used the same idea in his 1838 letter from Liberty Jail excerpted as Doctrine and Covenants section 121.

29. When George Q. Cannon passed through Philadelphia in December 1860, he noted "I also visited Mr. & Sister Wilkinson." A year later, as missionary John D. T. McAllister passed through Philadelphia he wrote in the Autograph Album, "William B. Wilkinson and Wife, My dear Brother and Sister in the N.[ew and] E.[verlasting] Covenant . . ." showing the Wilkinson was now baptized as a Mormon. (George Q. Cannon journal, Dec. 2–6, 1860, CHL. The Cannon journal was recently digitally published by the *Church Historians' Press* as *The Journal of George Q. Cannon*, www.churchhistorianspress.org/george-q-cannon). For McAllister, see the Conrad Autograph Album, entry 66. I use "entry" rather than page number since the book is not paginated and some pages contain more than one autograph/verse. Other pages are illustrations published with the book. I count these as entries though no handwriting appears on them. Blank pages are not counted.

30. Johnson, "Document Diggers," confuses the Conrad and Wilkinson families, probably assuming that Susan and William were married before Conrad's 1840 Mormon baptism, rather than applying Smith's compliments to William's parents. However, Conrad's records show she was unmarried after Joseph Smith's death. For example, see Conrad, "Autograph Album," entry 8. The narrative is slightly complicated by Susan Wilkinson's death notice: "Her home in Philadelphia was always open for the Elders and in her mother's home she helped entertain the Prophets Joseph and Hyrum Smith" (Death Notice, Susan H. Wilkinson, *Deseret News*, Apr. 11, 1888). Apparently both the Conrad and Wilkinson homes were friendly to Latter-day Saints prior to the marriage of William Wilkinson and Susan Conrad. William's sister Margaret had also married into the Conrad family (she married Susan's brother, David Conrad [1807–1857]). Widowed, Margaret also came with the James S. Brown company with her daughter Tacy. On the Brown company, see "Third Independent Company," *Deseret News Weekly* (Oct. 8, 1862): 113.

With the rejuvenation of local Relief Societies, Conrad-Wilkinson became part the presidency of the Relief Society of the Fourteenth Ward. Records say little of this early period, but Conrad-Wilkinson is noted in reminiscent speeches as active in the work of the Relief Society.³¹ Susan had never been an idle Latter-day Saint and her mother's home—and later her own in Philadelphia—was a frequent stopping place for visiting Church missionaries and authorities. She became personally acquainted with Joseph and Hyrum Smith.³²

Romance

Conrad and Barnes seemingly lived out their lives independent of each other. Barnes's life was cut short at age thirty by pneumonia in England, while Conrad lived a full life. However, below these surface facts, there was a love story.

Three years after Barnes's death, Wilford Woodruff was in Britain and visited the family who cared for Barnes during his final hours. There Woodruff discovered that his hosts had preserved Barnes's effects, among which was a trove of love letters between Lorenzo Barnes and Susan Conrad.³³ Typical of both, they exchanged love poems over the time

31. Jill Mulvay Deer, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Kate Holbrock, and Matthew J. Grow, eds., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2016), 615. The *Fifty Years* volume makes the same error as Johnson in terms of the Conrad and Wilkinson marriage date. United States census records show that Conrad had three children, all of whom migrated to Utah with her and her husband in 1862. See "Probate Court," *Salt Lake Herald*, Jul. 17, 1889. Also see the obituary of Conrad's first child, Robert Morris Wilkinson (1845[6?]-1928), *Salt Lake Telegram*, May 21, 1928, 8.

32. Conrad, Letter to Woolley, CHL. Death notice, Susan H. Wilkinson, *Deseret News*, Apr. 11, 1888.

33. Woodruff boxed up the letters and the rest of Barnes's effects and intended to ship them to Nauvoo for the care of the Church historian. (Woodruff journal, Apr. 23, 1845; Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:538-39). Barnes's papers

of Barnes's work in England. Woodruff referred to Conrad as Barnes's "Lover," a term that did not carry the sexual innuendo of modern usage. She was in effect, Barnes's fiancé. Woodruff wrote,

My feelings were keen and sensitive. As I stood upon his grave I realized I was standing over the body of one of the Elders of Israel of the horns of Joseph of the Seed of Ephraim, one of the members of zions Camp who had travelled more than 1,000 miles in 1834 for the redemption of his persecuted, afflicted brethren. Offered to lay down his life for their sake. One whose fidelity was stronger than death towards his Lover, his brethren eternal truth, & his God.³⁴

Woodruff held Barnes in high regard for a number of reasons, and he found Conrad (then Wilkinson) years later in Salt Lake City to talk about her former fiancé.³⁵ He recorded in his journal:

and property, including his correspondence with Conrad, are largely missing from Church archives.

34. Indeed, Woodruff refers to Susan Conrad as Barnes's "intended." (Woodruff Journal, Feb. 20–22, 1845, MS 1352, CHL; Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:510–16).

35. Barnes's reputation was still strong decades later. George Q. Cannon wrote, "I am perfectly satisfied there are men who will be counted worthy of that glory who never had a wife; there are men probably in this world now, who will receive exaltation, who never had a wife at all, or probably had but one. But what is necessary for such a case? It must be perfection before God, and a proof of willingness on their part, if they had the opportunity. I will instance the case of a man whom you perhaps know by reputation, namely that of Elder Lorenzo D. Barnes. He was a faithful man in the Church, a man of zeal, a man of integrity, a man who did all in his power to magnify his holy Priesthood, and he died when upon a foreign mission before he had one wife. The Lord will judge that man, as he will all others, according to his works and the desires of his heart, because had he lived, and had had the opportunity, I am fully satisfied he would have obeyed that law. I do not doubt that he will receive exaltation in the presence of God." The law Cannon was speaking of was plural marriage (for eternity) (George Q. Cannon sermon, "Difference Between the True Church of Christ and the Churches of the World . . ." Oct. 31, 1880, *Journal of Discourses*, 22:124–25). On Woodruff's subsequent visits

It is a Cold day. I spent a part of the day in the office. I wrote a Letter to G. Q. Cannon. I visited his wife also Sister Susan Conrad or Wilconson. I conversed with her about Elder Lorenzo D Barnes.³⁶

While in England visiting Barnes's grave, Woodruff vowed that the "sealing" priesthood would be used in Barnes's behalf. Perhaps he thought of Conrad as Barnes's eternal spouse, though they were never posthumously sealed (see the conclusion below).³⁷

Polygamy

On March 11, 1843, and again on June 2, 1843, one of Joseph Smith's clerks wrote to Susan Conrad at Philadelphia. The second letter (and likely the first one as well) was penned by William Clayton, a close comrade of Joseph Smith, and a part of his "Kitchen Cabinet" as it were.³⁸ Few people knew more than Clayton about Smith's execution of and beliefs about polygamy in Nauvoo (that does not mean Smith's

with Conrad-Wilkinson, see Journal of Wilford Woodruff, Nov. 26, 1849, Feb. 9, 1864, MS 1352, CHL; Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 3:496, 6:156–57.

36. Ibid. 6:156.

37. D. Michael Quinn discusses Conrad and Barnes in his *Same Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 139. Quinn notes that a Lorenzo D. Barnes married an Amanda Wilson in Ohio, 1841. However, this Barnes and Wilson had a child in 1852. Hence this is not the Lorenzo Barnes of this paper. See Mary Leora Smith death certificate, Jun. 22, 1923, Sunfield, Eaton, Michigan, Division of Vital Records, Lansing, Michigan.

38. A term I borrow from the political discourse surrounding Andrew Jackson. Jackson had a group of confidants outside his presidential cabinet officers. The Kitchen Cabinet often had more to do with government and legislative outcomes than the constitutional one. In some respects, the same was true with Joseph Smith. Ultimately Clayton's letter was destroyed (see below). For the notice of writing the June letter see William Clayton's journal, Jun. 2, 1843, as found in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 107.

polygamy was perfectly known by anyone at the time). Clayton does not mention the subject of the June letter in his journal but notes that presiding elder Jedediah Grant wrote to Joseph Smith from Philadelphia in August.³⁹ While neither the March nor June letters to Susan Conrad are extant, Grant's letter still exists, and it is this letter that forms much of the documentary background of this paper.

Grant's August 17, 1843, letter details his struggles over the contents of the March and June letters, which evidently proposed matrimony between Joseph Smith and Susan Conrad, vouching that funds would be provided for her return to Nauvoo. The religious dynamics in the Conrad family were complicated by several issues: Susan's father had died in 1835, and while Susan, her mother, and sister Ann were active believers in Mormonism, one other sister still living at home was not (probably Mary Conrad).⁴⁰

While Mary tried to intercept Mormon communications to the Conrad home, she apparently did not see the March and June letters from Nauvoo. When Susan and her mother read the letters, their faith was shaken by their contents as Grant noted in his letter. However, another sister, Ann Conrad (1804–1894), prevailed on mother and daughter to ask for a private explanation from Church leaders in Philadelphia. As it happened, several apostles were in the area, including Orson Pratt, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball, and mother and daughter hoped that Pratt could help them understand the meaning of the letters' troublesome ideas. Grant seemed to be reluctant to have Pratt deal with the

39. Grant traveled to Philadelphia in May 1843 after being appointed as the presiding authority in the area during an April 1843 Church conference in Nauvoo. Sessions, *Mormon Thunder*, chap. 4.

40. Genealogical information on the Conrads is available through LDS records accessible online through <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/2:2:SPBP-HGQ>. Generally, such records should be second sourced when possible. I have used census records and personal records (diaries, letters, etc.) whenever possible to build that source structure.

Conrad sisters, likely due to Pratt's difficulties over polygamy. He knew of the blowup that had taken place in Nauvoo over Orson's wife, Sarah Pratt, and so Grant took the task on himself. "I was informed that Elder P. was wanted to explain, &c, as it was not on Mathematical subjects, I, thought it might be difficult for him, to interpet it, and as he was coming back to the City next week, I thought it best to make all things shure."

Grant continued, "so I went to work in the name of the Lord, and after using every argument that I could, they delivered" the March and June letters—under the condition that he was to obtain explanations from Joseph Smith and give those explanations to them. Grant burned the letters in the privacy of his room.⁴¹ Grant wanted to avoid any possibility that the letters might be found by visitors, including other churchmen who often shared his room overnight during their travels. Grant noted in his letter that Kimball had previously introduced him to the idea and practice of polygamy and told Joseph Smith of his pleasure to find that Smith's brother Hyrum (an early opponent of polygamy) "had received the Priesthood, &c." (a euphemism for his acceptance of plural marriage). The letter thus gives early documentation of Grant's introduction to plural marriage.⁴²

Grant seems to have been unsuccessful in his attempt to get Susan Conrad to respond to the letters. "I preached, bore testimony &c, 'will you answer it Miss S,' 'no I cannot think of doing it' . . . Miss S cried like a child when these things was made known to me." Meanwhile, Clayton reported that Joseph Smith "received a letter from Jedediah M. Grant containing information of Conrad's having recd a letter &c." Emma Smith, "heard J[oseph Smith] read it and appeared for a while

41. J. M. Grant, Letter to Joseph Smith, Aug. 17, 1843, Joseph Smith Collection, Box 3, fd. 5, MS 155, CHL. Some spelling and punctuation modernized.

42. Grant's sister may have been the object of a (refused) proposal by Joseph Smith. See D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 527.

to feel very jealous.”⁴³ Grant’s letter likely contributed to Emma Smith’s continuing opposition to polygamy after a brief respite in May 1843.⁴⁴

Conclusion

The March 11 and June 2 letters straddled the day that Barnes’s death became common knowledge in Nauvoo (see Joseph Smith’s funeral address for Barnes delivered on April 16, 1843).⁴⁵ Hence the March 11 letter, if it subtly or explicitly offered plural marriage, would have conflicted with Susan’s understanding of her relationship with Barnes, one that both seem to have kept from public scrutiny. Barnes never signed Conrad’s autograph book, and in his correspondence he only mentioned his affection for the Saints of Pennsylvania generally and “to all who may enquire after me.”⁴⁶ The June letter (at least) probably arrived well after Conrad had news of Barnes’s death in England.

Grant’s letter of August 17 is carefully written so that identities are only indicated by initials in some cases, but the evidence suggests that Clayton made a surrogate proposal of marriage to Conrad on behalf of Joseph Smith and that Conrad’s dismay and tears amounted to a rejection.⁴⁷ Conrad’s August 1844 letter to Mary Woolley (who with her

43. William Clayton journal, Aug. 31, 1843. The original diary is not available for inspection, however the text may be found in the D. Michael Quinn papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. See also, Vogel, *History of Joseph Smith*, 5:669n486.

44. By September, Emma had apparently softened again. See Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 498–99.

45. See Wilford Woodruff’s journal for a report of the circumstances and the sermon. See also Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 2:226, and Smith, *Seasoned with Grace*, chap. 3, forthcoming. See also, “Sermon delivered at Nauvoo temple on Sunday April 16, 1843,” Book of Abraham Project, <http://boap.org/LDS/Parallel/1843/16Apr43.html>.

46. Barnes to Malin, Jan. 9, 1843.

47. It’s highly unlikely that Clayton was acting on his own—he makes no mention of Conrad as a prospect for plural marriage (to himself), something he is very candid about with his other plural wives and prospects. Joseph Smith’s

husband embraced polygamy in the fall of 1843) mentioned above may have made reference to Clayton's letters on behalf of Smith:

I feel tempted to write some thing but I dare not[,] if brother Kimball had passed this way I could have trusted one by him such as I would like to write but it is not so dear sister . . . I heard some things that completely twisted me round that if my life depended on my acting different I could not have done it, I guess Joseph would not think I had much Philosophy about me if he had seen me some times I never was nearer crazy in my life you will know what I mean.⁴⁸

Barnes was not sealed (married) posthumously to Conrad but was eventually sealed to three other women—one dead, two living (at the time of sealing). None of them were women Barnes knew in life. Conrad and her husband, William Wilkinson, did not engage in polygamy after his conversion and their migration to Utah, though they lived through much of the federal polygamy “raid” that marked the 1880s. What Susan Conrad thought of polygamy in later years is unknown, but she maintained a vigorous alliance to the faith, one established by her associations as a young woman.⁴⁹

revelation on polygamy was dictated July 12, 1843. Interestingly, Joseph Smith's proposals and Grant's response letter fall to the before and after sides of the July revelation. For a contextual discussion of the July revelation, see William V. Smith, *Textual Studies in the Doctrine and Covenants: The Plural Marriage Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, forthcoming). Clayton's letters to Conrad may have been written in the same way that Clayton wrote to one Sarah Crooks in his own behalf at Joseph Smith's insistence. Clayton wrote to Crooks having secured passage for her to Nauvoo from England through funds from Smith. When Crooks arrived in Nauvoo, Clayton fully explained his intention to marry her as a plural wife. It is interesting that Clayton's full revelation of his intent to Crooks, something she seems to have been prepared for, took place on the evening of the day Clayton wrote the second letter to Conrad (Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 107). Crooks refused Clayton.

48. Emphasis in the original text.

49. Her obituary and autograph book shows that in her youth Conrad met and conversed with many of the leading lights of early Mormonism like Parley Pratt and Joseph and Hyrum Smith.

While it is unclear whether the romance between Conrad and Barnes was known to Joseph Smith, it is clear that Smith wished to enfold Conrad into his sealing network of Nauvoo and that it was not to be a long-distance relationship. Conrad captured the attention of a number of prominent Latter-day Saints both in Nauvoo and in her mother's home in Pennsylvania, but a search of published literature on Nauvoo polygamy suggests that Conrad's case has not been considered before. Conrad consented to give up Smith's surrogate letters and likely understood that Grant would dispose of them. She and her family, while not fully understanding Smith's practice of polygamy, agreed to keep the letters secret. Her actions placed her in an important group of similar women, women like Sarah Kimball who quietly refused Smith's proposals but remained a Latter-day Saint.⁵⁰ Unlike Kimball, Conrad never seems to have openly discussed those tearful and confusing hours in her mother's Philadelphia home in 1843. Susan Conrad's sorrow over her encounter with Nauvoo polygamy and her loss of Lorenzo Barnes remained bound in the private spaces of her heart until her death.

Appendix

The following is a transcription of the August 17, 1843 letter from Jedediah M. Grant to Joseph Smith. Symbols employed in the transcript are ^insert^ where Grant made interlinear insertions and ~~delete~~ where he canceled text. I use the vertical slash | to indicate line ends in the original. On occasion I use square [brackets] to complete or explain parts of the text. Use of the original letter is courtesy the Church History Library,

50. Sarah Kimball, "Auto-Biography," *Woman's Exponent* 12, no. 7 (Sept. 1, 1883): 51. Others included Lydia Moon, a sister to two of William Clayton's wives (Lydia finally married Clayton's brother, James, after refusing both Smith and Clayton) and Nancy Rigdon, daughter of Sidney Rigdon. Perhaps as many as twenty women refused Smith. Documentation of such incidents is understandably rare. The document discussed in this paper is important for the reason of its contemporary status.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.⁵¹
Original spelling and punctuation preserved.

Philadelphia, A^ugust, 17, ^{or} (18)th[^] 1843,

President. Smith,

Dear Br, in the Lord, | for the first time in the provdece of the Lord, | I
take my pen, that I may communicate to you, some| things, that may
be of some benifit to you, in time | and in Eternity,, I pray the Lord
that these Lines may | reach you, & find you and all yours, in a state of
| prosperity, I have ben trying to do rite ever sence| I parted with you, I
have got a long finely with ^{the} | Church in this City, so fare we have
had peace| in hear in our mitsts & no dificulty whatever, the | Church is
increacing,,, 22 New members have joind | cinse, I came hear, you may
look for a goodly number | to come to Nauvoo this fall, ,!! Br Horris
[Horace] Whitney⁵² | staid with me about ,2, weeks,, he then went into
| Jersey with one of the Elders, to preach in the | Country, he, left his
things with me & said that | he would be back in ,3, weeks. I have hurd
that | he has gone to, CT, to see his Grand Father,!!! | Br Wm, & family,
are in Monmouth County, NJ, he | is preaching, Sister Caroline's⁵³ health
is no better, but | if any thing it is worse than when she lef home,, | Br
Wm, is turning the wourld upside down,, | with his, darling Religion,
. ----- | & Elders, Yong [Young], Kimball, & Page, & GA Smith
| left hear this afternoon for, NY, ,, Elders,, | O, Pratt & Woodruff, left
last, Monday for | Chester, Co., they ^{that is} Elders Y, K, P. & W,[^] staid
heare near, two weeks, they | did not settle any dificulty,, for their was,
none, to | settle, but they have got the Saints, to feel the impotu^{nce}[^]

51. The letter may also be found in *Selected Collections of the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2 vols. (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), vol. 1, disc 20, "Letters Received." A digital image may be found at https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE431511 (images 14–17).

52. Horace K. Whitney, son of Newell K. Whitney.

53. Caroline was Grant's sister, married to William Smith, apostle and Joseph Smith's brother.

| of going to Nauvoo, I think they have performed | a good work in this City,, the Saints all seem to feel | well,, they all, want to see you,, they say when | will, Br, Joseph, come, I tell them that, they | must go where ^you^ are. & then you will tell them | what to do &c----- |

I will now, tell you sumthing about your old | Friends, in this, ^City^ in so doing, I will try to be a wise | servent and as harmeless, as a, dove,,⁵⁴ Sister Bangor, left | the, Church, in April. and has not come back yet, She | is vary friendly, and so is the old gentleman,,, ---- | Br Pawson,, and family, would be glad to see you,, | and in fact all your old friends to numeours to | mention,,. Sister, C[onrad], and. her, daugh^t^ers,, they have | ben tried some what of late,, one of the Girls, | is vary much opposed th to, the doctrin of the Saints, | she will not let the old Lady & the others rest becaus | they are Mormons, She wants to rule the family, she | is not willing that any of the Saints should come to | the House,, if theair should come a Letter to the | Office,, she wants to see it., least it should come | from a Mormon, she wa^t^ches vary close,,!! |

A few days befor the Twelve came to this City, I, | was cauled upon to visit a, family that was sumwhat | troubled in mind., !!! Sum person had given them, ^ (or her)^ a, | few, words of Council,, the first cost the giver, 50, ct, | and the Last cost the Receiver, 25, ct, | March. the 11th ,, & June the 2nd Quincy,, | again, I was cauled upon to explain certin, | mistryes &c., they were unable to comprehend,, | cirten items, made, known, and yet, unknown, | I confesed that it was a grate Mistery that, I, | could not interpet,, ,, altho ^I^ read vary close, | the one out of the Church had not read, | but the, Three in the Church read, and, cept [kept] | reading,, untill, two of the them, was about | to denie, the faith,, Miss S[Susan],, & the | Mother [Elizabeth], !!!, Miss A[Ann?],, has ben the meanes of caping [keeping] | them in the Church,, and sending for, me | to explain,, after reading,, I preached, bore testim | ony,,&c, will you answer it Miss S, no I cannot | think of doing it,, you may write if you will. | so I copied from the March number a few | words thinking to write in a few days,, | but the Twelve coming,, in a day to two, my room, | has ben croded preventing me from writing &c,,--- | last, Munday,,

54. Grant is assuring Smith of his desire to be discreet.

Elder . O. P. was requested, to visit,, but | could not as he had to go to Chester, Co, that Morning | I was to go to the same. House,, with him,, so, I, | went a, Lone,, I was informed that Elder P. was wante^d^ | to explain, &c, as it was not on, Mathematical subjects, I, | thought it might ^be difficult^ for him, to interpet it, and as he | was coming back to the City next week, I thought | it best to make all things shure,, so I went to work | in the, name of the Lord,, and after using evry .. | argument that, I could,, they delivered into my | Hands, all that ^I^ wanted, March, & June, | I am now in ^an^ up^p^er room, I will at this moment light | my Lamp, and offer, a Sacrefice of evry thing | that I have obtained,,,, as a witness befor the| Lord,, that, I will be true to you in time & in | Eternity,, I have made the ofring the Smoke | and flame has assended,, I obtained ^the Lets,,)^ on this | ^condision^ that if I got an ansor,, they or ^She^ Should | see it,, in this mater whatever you say I will do | but if you write, direct to me, if you pleas, as | this is their request,, , they all feel better | (Miss, S, cried. Like ^a^ Child when these things | was made known to me) they think you canot| explain it,, if ^I^ can I will get them all to ^come^ | to Nauvoo, Miss S, was sick and had Brs, | You^n^g, Kimball, lay hands on her,, they said | that she felt quite chearful,, this ^Family^ think it | vary strang that their friend should advise one & not | all,, ,,what did he mean by sending money,, attendan^c^e | &c, and about Matrimony,, and the will of the ^Lord.,^ | Br, K, has,, taught me principle, &c, Br, Y, I found | new [knew] about the matte so I read to them, they said | It should be even as you desired, in the name of the | Lord even so Amen, I told them the care that, I, | ^had^ pursued,, & the one I was going to take, they said it was | rite and the Lord would bless me for so doing | give my love to, Br, Hyrum, I was glad to hear that he had | received the Priesthood, &c, Br Joseph, I have ben tried until, I, have | have allmost desired, to die, I would, have given any thing on Earth to | seen you, & talk^ed^ with you one hour,, but I now feel well and want | to live long on the, Earth,, my health is vary poor : will you | pray your, Heavenly Father ^to^ Bless me,, with health, and the | holy spirit,, if you think best write & I will do as you | say,, I add no more but remain your freend | & Br, in the,, ^new,^ covenant,, |

Preset,, Joseph Smith, Sener,

J. M Grant