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A Response to Denver Snuffer's Essay on Plural Marriage, Adoption, and the Supposed Falling Away of the Church Part 1: Ignoring Inconvenient Evidence

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A RESPONSE TO DENVER SNUFFER'S ESSAY ON PLURAL MARRIAGE, ADOPTION, AND THE SUPPOSED FALLING AWAY OF THE CHURCH

PART 1: IGNORING INCONVENIENT EVIDENCE

Brian C. Hales

Abstract: Denver Snuffer posted an essay entitled “Plural Marriage” on March 22, 2015.¹ It is apparently a transcription of a recent talk he had given and provides his followers with his views on Joseph Smith and plural marriage. Snuffer’s basic conclusion is that the Prophet did not practice polygamy. He alleges that the historical evidences that support Joseph’s participation should instead be attributed to John C. Bennett’s activities in Nauvoo in 1840–1842 or blamed on Brigham Young’s behaviors and teachings after the martyrdom. This article provides references to dozens of documents that counter this conclusion and shows plainly that Snuffer is in error. On page 28 of the transcript, Snuffer shifts away from the subject of plural marriage, touching on several themes he has written on before. Part 2 of this response will specifically address those twenty pages of Denver Snuffer’s claims.

Multiple Ironies

In his essay “Plural Marriage,” Denver Snuffer provides his followers with an analysis and conclusions regarding reports that Joseph Smith was married to more than one wife. Snuffer, an author of multiple books, some of which discuss plural marriage, explains to his audience why he chose to address the topic at this time:

This is a subject I address sooner than I would have liked. It is driven by recent events that necessitate addressing the subject now. I should not put this off for another 18 months or more while I work on so many other projects given to me. There are so many former polygamists who had recently been

¹ Denver Snuffer, “Plural Marriage,” accessed June 19, 2015, <http://denversnuffer.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Plural-Marriage.pdf>.

rebaptized that there is a need to clarify some of our history and underlying teachings to address the subject so people do not lapse back into the mistake of polygamy again. Therefore, this is been driven by the current needs, and not necessarily by whether I want to address this subject now. It needs to be done and so I am going to do it. (p. 1)

Apparently some of his followers were polygamists before embracing his teachings. Having then been “rebaptized” by him or under his direction, they sought his advice on the status of their plural unions, as well as his beliefs regarding Joseph Smith’s involvement in polygamy. Doubtless, those that were living in plural relationships were anxious to learn how his counsel might affect their polygamous families. Other followers might have wondered what the future held concerning Snuffer’s teachings on exaltation and plurality.

Because Snuffer chose to single out my *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: History and Theology* as a primary reference for his ideas, I felt it might be useful to address his assertions. They not only call into question my interpretations but also mirror a trendy reconstruction gaining traction on the Internet and elsewhere that seeks to deny the nature of Joseph’s actual involvement in the practice. Concerning my attempt to lay out a timeline of Joseph Smith’s interactions with polygamy, Snuffer writes: “I take issue with the *speculative chronology* in these books” (italics mine). Indeed chronology is very important. A *speculative chronology* would not be one based upon historical evidence but instead upon opinion and conjecture. Snuffer and I agree that such would not be useful to seekers desiring the truth.

In his essay, Snuffer brings nothing new to the discussion of plural marriage. In fact, Snuffer’s interpretations regarding the Prophet and polygamy are ironic in several ways:

- Snuffer declares: “I am only interested in addressing one thing: What did Joseph Smith understand, teach, and do related to the subject of the plurality of wives” (p. 2). Yet, he quotes very few people who heard Joseph Smith teach, even though such references are readily available in multiple published and primary sources.
- Early in Snuffer’s speech, he explains his own interpretation of Joseph Smith’s teachings and behaviors regarding plural marriage, but nowhere does he address the plain evidences that contradict his position. It is similar to a courtroom battle where

- only the prosecution is allowed to testify.
- While classed with Mormon fundamentalists in many of his views, Snuffer rejects modern polygamy and invites contemporary polygamists to desist from their plural behaviors: “Those who are in polygamy now being baptized to leave it [*sic*], need to end the practice with them” (p. 42).
 - Though sometimes subtle, throughout the text Denver Snuffer portrays himself as a new guiding visionary to readers. This relevance to plural marriage is not obvious.

The focus of the article shifts away from polygamy on page 28, devoting most of the last twenty pages to other topics including severe condemnation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, even though the Church condemns the earthly practice of plural marriage among members. These pages will be covered in Part 2 of my response.²

Defending Joseph Smith against Charges of Adultery

Throughout the essay Denver Snuffer positions himself as a defender of Joseph Smith's moral integrity with many supportive statements:

I would not want to attribute to Joseph Smith sexual indiscretions. (p. 2)

My theory of what happened, taking Joseph Smith's claim he was not guilty of any great or malignant sins at face value. (p. 10)

None of us should want to attribute to Joseph Smith sexual sins. (p. 10)

I would be careful of the accusations you make against Joseph. (p. 12)

We are forced to choose between circumstantial proof, often from witnesses telling their tale decades after the events, compounded by the conjecture of the witness or the audience

² He even mentions that at one point I had offered to co-author a book on polygamy with him, but my reasons for making the offer were perhaps less than obvious: I simply hoped that my involvement in such a project would prevent him from misrepresenting the historical record as I knew he had done in the past regarding other topics.

who heard the witness, to support the proposition that Joseph Smith was a vile hypocrite. (p. 14)

Despite these declarations, Snuffer also alleges “there is some proof” that Joseph had improper relations with a woman (p. 45). *Proof* is a strong word for an attorney and sends a subtle and conflicting message.

Regardless, Snuffer’s defenses of the Prophet are paradoxical. He approaches plural marriage by implying such relationships would have been adulterous and then affirms that Joseph Smith never engaged in such associations:

It would be bigamy to marry another woman for this life while having an existing wife. I do not believe Joseph Smith was ever involved in adultery or bigamy. Joseph Smith had a wife. If he added others, it was for the afterlife and not for bigamy. (p. 2)

Of course Snuffer is entitled to his opinion but his response piles two faulty speculations on top of each other in order to advance his interpretation.

Plural Marriage was Not Adultery

Snuffer asserts that polygamy would have been adultery. This is inaccurate according to modern-day revelation. Joseph Smith’s first inquiry regarding Old Testament polygamy was to discover how such behaviors had been *justified*. That is, how could Abraham and Jacob practice plural marriage without committing adultery?

The question was most likely raised in 1831 as he was translating the Bible. Nauvoo polygamist Joseph B. Noble recalled in 1883:

The Prophet Joseph told him that the doctrine of celestial marriage was revealed to him while he was engaged on the work of translation of the scriptures [the Joseph Smith Translation or JST], but when the communication was first made the Lord stated that the time for the practice of that principle had not arrived.³

3 Joseph B. Noble speaking at a quarterly stake conference held at Centerville, Davis Co., Utah, June 11, 1883. Quoted in Andrew Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 232–33. See Brigham H. Roberts’s introduction to volume five of the history of Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret

Records show that the Prophet was working with Genesis in February and March of 1831.⁴ There he would have encountered the accounts of polygamous patriarchs like Abraham (Genesis 16:1–6) and Jacob (Genesis 29:30).⁵

Verse one of the revelation (now D&C 132) begins with this question about how polygamy was not adultery:

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines.

Portions of the remaining revelation discuss how ancient patriarchs entered into plural unions and had children by polygamous wives without committing sin. For example, Abraham's wife Sarah bore Isaac and his other wife Hagar bore Ishmael. Concerning Abraham's other children, the Old Testament reads: "Unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away" (Genesis 25:6). Abraham's grandson Jacob had twelve sons by four women (Genesis 35:23–26).

According to Latter-day Saint canonized doctrine, none of the fathers and mothers in these polygamous families committed sin in their marital behaviors. The divinely sanctioned practice of Old Testament polygamy needs to be addressed if any author (including Denver Snuffer) is going to assert that latter-day polygamy is inherently adulterous. Nowhere in D&C 132 does the Lord condemn authorized polygamy. Using Old Testament language where men were considered to have ownership of their wives and children, verse 61 states plainly that if a man espouse a second wife by proper authority, "then is he justified; *he cannot commit adultery* for they are given unto him; for he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else" (*italics added*).

Book, 1960), 5:xxix; see also Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft Co., 1889), 161–62.

4 Mark Staker, *Hearken O Ye People: The Historical Setting for Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009 [2010]), 117n22.

5 Snuffer writes: "I have dated the first portion of Section 132 in 1829" (p. 7), claiming that Oliver Cowdery sought to enter plurality at that time. Snuffer is undoubtedly in error. Oliver was unmarried in 1829. To enter polygamy he would have needed to marry two women.

In short, asserting that Church-authorized plural marriages in Joseph Smith's day were adultery is not substantiated by any known scripture or teachings from that period.

Joseph Smith Sought to “Multiply and Replenish” with his Plural Wives

The next assertion advanced by Snuffer is that Joseph did not consummate his plural marriages because they were only spiritual (not physical) marriages. This idea contradicts one of the reasons for plural marriage that is plainly declared in the revelation. Verse 63 states: “for they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment ... that they may bear the souls of men.” The language is unambiguous. To “multiply and replenish the earth” requires sexual relations.

Also, the Lord stated in the Book of Mormon that one reason plural marriage might be commanded was to “raise up righteous seed unto the Lord” (see Jacob 2:30, D&C 132:63).⁶ This could not be done if celibacy was maintained in plural relationships. Helen Mar Kimball, one of Joseph's plural wives, explained, “It was revealed to him [Joseph Smith] that there were thousands of spirits, yet unborn, who were anxiously waiting for the privilege of coming down to take tabernacles of flesh, that their glory might be complete.”⁷

Concerning Joseph Smith's plural wives, Denver Snuffer intimates they left no record of their marriages to the Prophet: “The women involved left us nothing” (p. 27). In reality, they left dozens of letters, statements, affidavits, and declarations that affirm that some of the marriages were consummated. For example, three of Joseph Smith's wives were questioned in the Temple Lot trial in 1892. All declared under oath that they experienced sexual relations as Joseph's plural wife. Undoubtedly they were mortified to make their intimate relations with the Prophet public. Yet, when asked: “Did you ever have carnal intercourse with Joseph Smith?” Emily Partridge answered plainly, “Yes sir.” When the prodding follow-up question “How many nights?” was

6 Apostle Erastus Snow taught: “God has reserved to Himself this right to command His people when it seemeth to Him good and to accomplish the object He has in view — that is, to raise up a righteous seed, a seed that will pay respect to His law and will build up Zion in the earth.” Erastus Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, 24:165 (June 24th, 1883).

7 Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884), 7.

posed, she responded, "I could not tell you."⁸ Similarly, Malissa Lott was asked: "Did you ever room with Joseph Smith as his wife?" She responded, "Yes sir." When the inquirer sought more specific information by asking, "Did you cohabit with him as his wife?" the answer was the same: "Yes sir."⁹ Malissa reiterated her involvement in 1893 when questioned by Joseph Smith III. He inquired, "Were you married to my father?" She answered, "Yes." Seeking more clarity, the Prophet's son asked precisely: "Was you a wife in very deed?" The answer was affirmed.¹⁰ Lucy Walker's response to the Temple Lot prosecutor's question: "Did you live with Joseph Smith as his wife?" was a little more ambiguous. She responded, "He was my husband sir."¹¹ But several other sources corroborate that Lucy had conjugal relations with Joseph.¹²

In addition to these plain admissions are multiple secondary sources that support that Joseph Smith consummated other plural unions. Joseph B. Noble, the brother-in-law of polygamous wife Louisa Beaman, also testified in the Temple Lot litigation. When asked: "Do you know whether Joseph Smith ever lived with Louisa Beaman as his wife?" he answered, "I know it for I saw him in bed with her ... they did sleep together."¹³ Also, Benjamin Winchester corroborated conjugality in a statement regarding Louisa Beaman. When asked "Did they sleep together?" he replied, matter-of-fact, "Yes they did."¹⁴

Almera Johnson's brother Benjamin F. Johnson penned this reminiscence:

The Prophet with Louisa \Beaman/ and my Sister Delcena,
had it agreeable arranged with Sister Almara and after a little

8 Emily Dow Partridge Young, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Part 3, pp. 371, 384, questions 480–84, 747, 751–62.

9 Malissa Lott, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Part 3, pp. 97, 105–6, questions 87–93, 224–60.

10 Melissa Lott Willes, statement, August 4, 1893, CHL.

11 Lucy Walker, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent's Testimony, Part 3, pp. 450–51, 468, 473, questions 29–30, 463–74, 586.

12 See Angus Cannon, "Statement of an Interview with Joseph Smith III, 1905, Regarding Conversation on October 12, 1905." MS 3166, CHL; D. H. Morris, untitled typed statement, June 12, 1930. Text begins: "The following was given by Judge D. H. Morris of St. George, Utah ..." Marriott Library, Vesta P. Crawford Papers, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, MS 125, Box 1, fd. 5.

13 Joseph B. Noble, deposition, Temple Lot Case, Part 3, pp. 396, 426–27, questions, 52–53, 681–704.

14 Benjamin Winchester, testimony to Joseph Smith III, Council Bluffs, Iowa, November 27, 1900.

instruction, She Stood by the Prophets Side and was Sealed to him as a wife by Brother Clayton. After which the Prophet asked me to take my Sister to occupy Room No 10 in his Mansion home dureing her Stay in the City. But as I could not long be absent from my home & Business We Soon Returned to Ramus, whare on the 15th of May Some three weeks later the Prophet again Came and at my house ocupied the Same Room & Bed with my Sister.¹⁵

Additional evidence supporting sexuality can be identified in the historical record regarding other plural wives including Eliza Maria Partridge, Almera Woodard Johnson, Maria Lawrence, Sarah Lawrence, Olive Frost, and Mary Heron.

Children from Joseph Smith's Plural Wives?

Snuffer bolsters his case for non-sexual plural unions by observing that no children have been documented through DNA testing:

In the effort to identify children of Joseph Smith born by a plural wife, DNA testing has not proven a single child to be Joseph's. The only woman who bore him children was his wife, Emma. There are those complain some of the DNA testing cannot prove one way or the other. The test is equivocal. But to admit that is to concede the point there is no proof of his paternity. So in the absence of proof, I would be careful of the accusations you make against Joseph. (p. 12)

The verbiage chosen by Snuffer is unfortunate. Offspring from one of Joseph Smith's plural unions would not be surprising and would not constitute an *accusation*. Regardless, it is true that DNA testing of available candidates has not produced a single uncontestable positive. However, Josephine Lyon, daughter of Sylvia Lyon, is positive but as Ugo Perego explains: "In light of the multiple familial relationships shared by both Josephine Lyons and Joseph Smith's descendants, it is clear that a lot of 'genealogical noise' is also present."¹⁶ The result is inconclusive, not negative.

15 Dean R. Zimmerman, ed., *I Knew the Prophets: An Analysis of the Letter of Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs, Reporting Doctrinal Views of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1976), 43–44.

16 Ugo A. Perego, "Joseph Smith, the Question of Polygamous Offspring, and DNA Analysis," in *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of*

There are reports of children born to Joseph's polygamous wives. Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner stated: "I know he [Joseph Smith] had three children. They told me. I think two are living today [1905] but they are not known as his children as they go by other names."¹⁷ On another occasion she declared, "I don't know about his having children, but I heard of three that he was the father of."¹⁸

Multiple sources support a child was born to Joseph Smith's plural wife Olive Frost that did not live long or may have miscarried.¹⁹ Joseph E. Robinson wrote: "During the afternoon I called on Aunt Lizzie. ... [S]he knew Joseph Smith had more than two wives. Said he married ... Olive Frost [and] had a child by him and that both died."²⁰ Some evidence has been found supporting the birth of a third child, a son to the Prophet and one of his plural wives may have been raised by the Dibble family.²¹

A second-hand account from Lucy Meserve Smith,²² wife of Apostle George A. Smith, recalls that what while living in Nauvoo her husband, "related to me the circumstance of calling on the Prophet one evening about 11, o'clock, and he was out on the porch with a basin of water washing his hands, I said to him what is up, said Joseph one of my wives has just been confined and Emma was midwife and I have been assisting her. He said she had granted a no. of women for him."²³

Mormon Polygamy, eds. Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster (Independence, Mo.: John Whitmer Books, 2010), 255.

17 Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, "Remarks," given at Brigham Young University, April 14, 1905, Harold B. Lee Library, Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, MSS 363, fd. 6, 5. Mary Ann Barzee Boice stated in her "History," that "some" of Joseph Smith's plural wives "had children." Quoted in D. Michael Quinn Papers — Addition — Uncat WA, MS 244 [Accession:19990209-c], Box 1.

18 J. D. Stead, *Doctrines and Dogmas of Brighamism Exposed* (Lamoni, Iowa: RLDS Church, 1911), 218.

19 See James Whitehead, interview conducted by Joseph Smith III, April 20, 1885. Original in possession of John Hajicek. Olive Frost died October 6, 1845.

20 Joseph E. Robinson, autobiography, recounting October 26, 1902, MS 7866, CHL.

21 Transcript in D. Michael Quinn Papers — Addition — Uncat WA, MS 244 [Accession:19990209-c], Box 1.

22 For a history of Lucy Meserve Smith (1817–1892), see Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr, *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982), 261–71.

23 Lucy Meserve Smith, statement, Wilford Wood Collection of Church Historical Materials, Microfilm at CHL, MS 8617, Reel 8, Internal reference within collection — 4-N-b-2. For a very similar handwritten statement dated May 18,

Hopefully these brief documentary references show plainly that asserting, as Snuffer does, that plural marriage would have been adultery in light of the theology taught by Joseph Smith and that the Prophet did not practice it is contradicted by multiple reliable evidences. If Snuffer wishes to successfully advance his unique interpretation, he should also address these evidences rather than hope that this audience will not be aware of them.

Focusing on Fanny Alger

The weaknesses of Snuffer's arguments do not mean that he fails to provide a case in support of his position. He promotes several evidences that might validate his views. But as shown below, the historical topics he chooses to discuss do not directly defend his interpretation, but are more akin to diversions away from the pertinent primary documents.

Snuffer spends pages 6–10 discussing whether the plural marriage between Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger included sexuality and concludes:

Fanny Alger may well have been Joseph Smith's first plural wife but whatever else that may have involved there was no "malignant sin" or adultery involved with the relationship. ... With Fanny and Joseph in the prime of their reproductive years, together they produced no children. (p. 9)

Unfortunately for his readers, Snuffer's discussion regarding Fanny Alger is like beating a dead horse. I have accumulated the twenty known historical manuscripts referring to the incident.²⁴ A couple of them could be used to support the existence of sexual relations, but, as both Denver and I agree, the evidence is inconclusive.

The observation that no children are documented arising from the union is not particularly meaningful. For several reasons, manuscript evidence of a child might not have persisted in the historical record. Neither do we know how long after the marriage ceremony was performed that the union was discovered by Emma and was practically dissolved when Emma sent Fanny away. It could have been months or years, but it also could have been just weeks.

1892, and signed by Lucy M. Smith, see copy of holograph in Linda King Newell Collection, Marriott Library.

24 Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2013), 2:369–78 (Appendix D).

Snuffer's observations regarding Fanny Alger are not particularly thorough or applicable to the question of whether Joseph consummated any of his plural marriages. Regarding such questions, Fanny is a poor example and hardly worth mentioning because the available evidences describing their interactions are so sparse and contradictory.

Extended Discussion about John C. Bennett

Snuffer spends a number of pages (14–23) reviewing John C. Bennett's activities among the Latter-day Saints between late 1840 and June of 1842, the time of his departure from Nauvoo. Bennett was an adulterer before arriving in Nauvoo and he continued his debaucheries there seducing multiple unsuspecting women. Sometime in early 1842 he heard rumors of plural marriage, but there is no evidence that Joseph ever taught him anything about it.²⁵

Denver's multi-page discussion about John C. Bennett is puzzling unless an author is attempting to shift rumors of Nauvoo polygamy onto Bennett and his adulterous activities. In fact, it appears Snuffer is making that very assertion:

Those who have grappled with the subject of polygamy must look back through a lens that has been distorted by John C. Bennett. Whether you accept Bennett's account, or suspect it may have some truth, or you reject it altogether, you must nonetheless at least confront it as one of the earliest hints of what was happening in Nauvoo during Joseph Smith's lifetime. To measure Joseph's public statements you need to be acquainted with the sexual mischief going on in his city and the public clamor Bennett was attracting for Nauvoo's citizens and Joseph Smith as their leader. It was against this backdrop that Joseph's public statements and private conduct must be interpreted. (p. 21)

There are multiple problems with such an interpretation, primary among them is the timeline. Available evidence indicates that at the time Bennett became estranged from Joseph (April–May of 1842), the Prophet may have been the only authorized polygamist in Nauvoo. By that date he had been sealed to perhaps seven women (Louisa Beaman, Zina

25 See also Brian C. Hales, "John C. Bennett and Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Addressing the Question of Reliability," *Journal of Mormon History* 41/2 (April 2015): 131–81.

Huntington, Presendia Huntington, Agnes Coolbrith, Mary Elizabeth Rollins, Patty Bartlett, and Marinda Johnson), most of whom were plausibly nonsexual, eternity-only sealings. The bulk of Joseph Smith's plural marrying occurred well after Bennett was out of the picture.

			Probable Marriage Type			
<i>Joseph Smith's Plural Wives</i>	<i>Ceremony Date</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Time Only</i>	<i>Time & Eternity</i>	<i>Eternity Only</i>	
1. Fanny Alger		1835?	X			
2. Louisa Beaman	Apr. 5	1841		X		
3. Zina Huntington	Oct.				X	
4. Presendia Huntington	Dec. 11				X	
5. Agnes Coolbrith	Jan. 6	1842	X			
6. Mary Elizabeth Rollins	Feb.				X	
7. Patty Bartlett	Mar. 9				X	
8. Marinda Nancy Johnson	Apr.				X	
BENNETT LEAVES NAUVOO						
9. Delcena Johnson	<Jul.			X		
10. Eliza R. Snow	Jun. 29				X	
11. Sara Ann Whitney	Jul. 27				X	
12. Martha McBride	Aug.		X			

			Probable Marriage Type		
<i>Joseph Smith's Plural Wives</i>	<i>Ceremony Date</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Time Only</i>	<i>Time & Eternity</i>	<i>Eternity Only</i>
13. Sylvia Sessions	Early	1843		X	
14. Ruth Vose	Feb.				X
15. Flora Ann Woodworth	Spring			X	
16. Emily Dow Partridge	Mar. 4	1843		X	
17. Eliza Maria Partridge	Mar. 8			X	
18. Almera Johnson	April			X	
19. Lucy Walker	May 1			X	
20. Sarah Lawrence	May			X	
21. Maria Lawrence	May			X	
22. Helen Mar Kimball	May			X	
23. Hannah Ells	mid-year			X	
24. Elvira Annie Cowles	Jun. 1				X
25. Rhoda Richards	Jun. 12				X
26. Desdemona Fullmer	Jul.			X	
27. Olive G. Frost	Summer			X	
28. Malissa Lott	Sep. 20			X	
29. Fanny Young	Nov. 2				X

			Probable Marriage Type			
<i>Joseph Smith's Plural Wives</i>	<i>Ceremony Date</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Time Only</i>	<i>Time & Eternity</i>	<i>Eternity Only</i>	
30. Lucinda Pendleton	Unknown				X	
31. Nancy Winchester				X		
32. Elizabeth Davis						X
33. Sarah Kingsley						X
34. Esther Dutcher						X
35. Mary Heron					X*	

*Poorly documented.

As shown in the chart, the vast majority of the Prophet's plural marriages for time and eternity occurred after John C. Bennett had moved east away from the Saints.

A similar timeline is found among sealing dates of other Nauvoo polygamists. While Vinson Knight, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball each married one plural wife in undated ceremonies before the summer of 1842, their sealings appear to have been a reaction to an "early February" angelic visit to Joseph Smith commanding him and other LDS men to practice plural marriage.²⁶ These three men *might* have been involved with plural marriage while Bennett was in Nauvoo, but it is plain that the remaining twenty-six who entered polygamous unions before the martyrdom did so after Bennett's exit.

²⁶ See Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, letter to Emmeline B. Wells, Summer 1905, MS 282, CHL.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Date of First Plural Sealing</i>	<i>Total Plural Wives</i>	
1 Heber C. Kimball	1842	early	1	
2. Brigham Young		June 14	4	
3. Vinson Knight		pre-July 31	1	
BENNETT LEAVES NAUVOO				
4. Willard Richards	1843	January 18	3	
5. William Huntington		February 5	1	
6. Orson Hyde		February	2	
7. Lorenzo Dow Young		March 9	1	
8. Joseph Bates Noble		April 5	2	
9. William Clayton		April 27	1	
10. Benjamin Johnson		May 17	1	
11. James Adams		July 11	1	
12. Parley P. Pratt		July 24	1	
13. William Felshaw		July 28	1	
14. Hyrum Smith		August 11	4	
15. John Smith		August 13	2	
16. John Taylor		December 12	4	
17. Isaac Morely		December 19	2	
18. William Sagers		December	1	
19. Edwin D. Woolley		?	2	
20. Theodore Turley		1844	January	3
21. Erastus Snow			April 2	1
22. William Smith	April-May		1	
23. Ezra T. Benson	April 27		1	
24. Joseph Coolidge	?		1	
25. Howard Egan			1	
26. Joseph A. Kelting			2	
27. John E. Page			1	

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Date of First Plural Sealing</i>	<i>Total Plural Wives</i>
28. Lyman Wight	1844	?	3
29. Renolds Cahoon			1
		Total	50

These charts demonstrate that the majority of Nauvoo plural unions were sealed well after Bennett had left Nauvoo, and his friendship with Joseph had been severed. Coupling that detail with the multiple evidences that Joseph Smith did not teach Bennett about eternal plural marriage demonstrates that Snuffer’s extended examination of John C. Bennett is not helpful in discerning any of the important details of Joseph Smith’s introduction of polygamy because that expansion occurred well after Bennett had left the picture.

Blaming Brigham Young

Toward the last few pages of the essay, Snuffer returns to the topic of plural marriage and advances an additional theory. He blames Brigham Young for polygamy as it was practiced after the martyrdom labeling it a “vast wasteland of adulterous relationships unapproved by God, unsanctioned by Him” (p. 41). Snuffer is very critical of Brigham:

Access to sex partners was the purpose Brigham Young practiced. That was done was in error. The perpetuation of it is an error. (p. 42)

Brigham Young wanted to breed, and wanted to establish it as a “fundamental part of his religion.” (p. 45)

It is time to throw away the detour Brigham Young imposed on Mormonism. (p. 45)

Separating Joseph Smith’s teachings from those of Brigham Young and other later Church leaders is paramount for any theory that alleges that the Prophet did not practice or authorize plural marriage. Snuffer explains: “Joseph Smith was not Brigham Young. Brigham Young did not comprehend the things Joseph comprehended” (p. 45). However, an uncomfortable truth for Snuffer is that multiple evidences support

that men like Brigham Young learned of plural marriage right from Joseph's own mouth. Between December 13, 1841, and May 18, 1842, the Prophet's diary contains 21 references to Brigham Young, 15 to Heber C. Kimball, and 13 to Willard Richards (who became a polygamist January 18, 1843).²⁷

The context of these encounters varies from Joseph teaching Brigham regarding the building of the temple on December 11, to a group meeting with Brigham, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, and John Taylor on December 27 "instructing them in the principles of the kingdom."²⁸ Is there any evidence that marriage doctrines were taught during these meetings? Yes. An October 23, 1843, reference in Brigham Young's journal states plainly: "With Elder H. C. Kimball and George A. Smith, I visited the Prophet Joseph, who was glad to see us. ... He taught us many principles illustrating the doctrine of celestial marriage, concerning which God had given him a revelation."²⁹

Joseph Smith Taught the Apostles about Plural Marriage

Seven apostles returned from their mission to England in 1841 (Orson Pratt, Willard Richards, Heber C. Kimball, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, and Brigham Young). Multiple documents exist describing how at least five were personally taught by Joseph Smith about the restoration of polygamy. Heber C. Kimball's daughter Helen Mar Kimball vividly recalled her father's homecoming:

On the 1st day of July my father with President Young and Brother John Taylor arrived home from their mission. ... The Prophet and many more were there ready to greet and welcome them home again, Joseph would have them go home with him to dinner. ... [W]e thought this almost an unkindness for it seemed so long a time to us who were waiting and watching with impatience to see him. ... My mother felt the presence of others at such a time almost an intrusion, but Brother Joseph seemed unwilling to part with my father; and from that time

27 Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Journal, 1832–1842*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 2:335–84. In addition, John Taylor was mentioned eight times, Wilford Woodruff six, Newel K. Whitney five, William Marks four, and Orson Pratt three.

28 Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Journal, 1832–1842*, 2:345.

29 Eldon J. Watson, *Manuscript History of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Smith Secretarial Service, 1969), 154. See also *Journal History*, CHL, for date.

kept the Twelve in council early and late, and she sometimes felt nearly jealous of him but never dreamed that he was during those time revealing to them the *principles of celestial marriage* and ... *they* little realized the meaning of his words when he said “he was rolling off the kingdom from his own shoulders onto the shoulders of the Twelve.”³⁰

In a discourse delivered on the tenth anniversary of the martyrdom, Apostle John Taylor recalled those early days when the Prophet introduced the principle to them:

I remember being with President Young and Kimball and I think one or two others with Brother Joseph soon after we had returned from England. He talked with us on these principles and laid them before us. It tried our minds and feelings. We saw it was something going to be heavy upon us. it was not that very nice pleasing thing some people thought about it. It is something that harried up our feelings. Did we believe it? Yes we did. I did. The whole rest of the brethren did but still we should have been glad to push it off a little further. We [would have] been glad if it did not come in our day but that somebody else had something to do with it instead of us.³¹

Years later on October 14, 1882, President John Taylor again recalled the event:

When this principle was first made known to us by Joseph Smith, it was in Nauvoo, and many of you will remember the place very well. We were assembled in the little office over the brick store, there being present Brs B. Young Heber C Kimball, Orson Hyde & myself. Br Willard Richards may have been present too, but I am not positive. Upon that occasion [sic], Joseph Smith laid before us the whole principle pertaining to that doctrine, and we believed it. Having done this, Joseph felt, as he said, that he had got a big burden rolled

30 Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, “Scenes and Incidents in Nauvoo,” *Woman’s Exponent* 10 (August 15, 1881): 42; emphasis hers.

31 John Taylor, “Sermon in Honor of the Martyrdom,” June 27, 1854, Papers of George D. Watt, MS 4534, Box 2, Disk 2, images 151–52, CHL. Sermon not in *Journal of Discourses* or in CR 100 317. Transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth, September 1, 2009. Used by permission. Terminal punctuation and initial capitals added.

off his shoulders. He felt the responsibility of that matter resting heavily upon him. Notwithstanding, however, that we received the principle & believed it, yet we were in no great hurry to enter into it.³²

During an 1892 deposition taken in the Temple Lot litigation, Wilford Woodruff recounted his feelings upon returning from England on October 5, 1841, from the apostolic mission:

Joseph Smith of course taught that principle while in Nauvoo, and he not only taught it, but practiced it too. ... I heard him teach it — he taught it to the quorum of twelve apostles, and he taught it to other individuals as they bear testimony. I know he taught it to us. ... In his addresses to the quorum of twelve apostles, when he visited us, he would teach that. ... It was nearly six months, and he spoke of it frequently. ... He taught it to us as a principle amongst other things.³³

Apostle George A. Smith also remembered this period. “At one of the first interviews” he had with Joseph after returning from his mission to England on July 13, 1841, he “was greatly astonished at hearing from his lips that doctrine of Patriarchal marriage, which he continued to preach to me from time to time. My last conversation with him on this subject occurred just previous to my departure from Nauvoo (May 9, 1844) in company with Elder Wilford Woodruff, to attend Conference in Michigan. ... He testified to me and to my father [John Smith] that the Lord had given him the keys of this sealing ordinance, and that he felt as liberal to others as he did to himself.”³⁴

Warren Foote, whose niece was one of George A. Smith's plural wives, recorded a conversation in which George A. related his struggle in accepting the revelation:

32 John Taylor, quoted in *Minutes of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1835–1893* (Salt Lake City: Privately Published, 2010), 342 (October 14, 1882).

33 Wilford Woodruff, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent's Testimony, Part 3, pages 10, 58, questions 62–64, 573–80. Woodruff's recollection of a six-month teaching period fits quite well with the documented meetings from August 1841 to March 1842, with the most intense period being in the late fall and winter of 1841–42.

34 George A. Smith, letter to Joseph Smith III, October 9, 1869, Journal History.

[1846 January] 23rd. ... After receiving our endowments, I and my wife went down to Bro. George A. Smith's who had married my sister Betsey's daughter Nancy for his third wife, Bro. Smith was at home. He related to us what a trial it was to him to receive the revelation on plural marriage. It was first made known to him by the Prophet Joseph. He did not feel at first at though he could receive it as from the Lord. But again he knew that Joseph was a prophet of God, and he durst not reject it. Thus he reasoned with himself, until he obtained a testimony from the Lord for himself.³⁵

Brigham Young returned to Nauvoo July 1, 1841, and immediately assumed a privileged position as Joseph Smith's confidante. Speaking at the Third Ward Meeting House in Salt Lake City when he was seventy-three, he recalled his own spiritual preparation for Joseph Smith's disclosures:

We came to Nauvoo, and the Twelve went to England. While we were in England, I think, the Lord manifested to me by visions and his spirit, things that I did not then understand. I never opened my mouth to any persons concerning them, until I returned to Nauvoo. Joseph had never mentioned this, there had never been a thought of it in the Church that I knew anything about at that time. But I had this for myself, and I kept it to myself, and when I returned home and Joseph revealed these things to me, I then understood the reflections that were upon my mind while in England. But this was not until after I had told him what I understood. I saw that he was after something by his conversation, leading my mind along, and others, to see how we could bear this. This was in 1841; the revelation was given in 1843, but the doctrine was revealed before this, and when I told Joseph what I understood which was right in front of my house in the street, as he was shaking hands and leaving me, he turned round and looked me in the eyes, and says he: "Brother Brigham, are you speaking what you understand, — are you in earnest?" Says I: "I speak just as the Spirit manifests to me." Says he: "God bless you, the Lord has opened your mind," and he turned and went off.³⁶

35 Warren Foote (1817–1903), autobiography and journal, MS 1123, 3 vols., 1:83, CHL.

36 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 18:241 (June 23, 1874).

Notwithstanding these intuitions, Brigham related in 1855 his initial anguish with the practice: "My brethren know what my feelings were at the time Joseph revealed the doctrine; I was not desirous of shrinking from any duty, nor of failing in the least to do as I was commanded, but it was the first time in my life that I had desired the grave, and I could hardly get over it for a long time. And when I saw a funeral, I felt to envy the corpse its situation, and to regret that I was not in the coffin."³⁷

Of all of the apostles, Brigham Young was apparently singled out by Joseph Smith to teach selected individuals regarding the principle. Joseph A. Kelting learned of plural marriage directly from Joseph Smith, but after this introduction, Kelting recalled that he "referred me to Brigham Young if I wanted any more on this subject, Brigham seeming to be the man he trusted most with this matter, and was putting him to the front."³⁸ Even Brigham could not teach doctrines independent of Joseph. Wilford Woodruff recalled that the Prophet "taught the principle to certain individuals. ... There was no one teaching it only under his direction."³⁹

Denver Snuffer attempts to dismiss these testimonies:

This will not be an attempt to explain what Brigham Young, John Taylor, George Cannon⁴⁰ or Orson Pratt thought, believed or taught. They and their contemporaries have gone on the record and elaborated on this subject. You have all their material in front of you if you want to know what they believed it is available to you. (p. 1)

Why would any truth seeker ignore the teachings of men and women who were personally taught by Joseph Smith?

Joseph Smith Taught Other Church Members about Plural Marriage

The apostles were not the only Latter-day Saints taught by Joseph Smith concerning plural marriage. Cyrus Wheelock recalled that he first learned the principle of plural marriage from the Prophet at Joseph Noble's home

37 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:266 (July 14, 1855).

38 Joseph Kelting, affidavit, September 11, 1903, CHL.

39 Wilford Woodruff, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent's Testimony, Part 3, pp. 56 question 536; sentence order reversed.

40 George Q. Cannon was not personally taught by the Prophet. He converted and joined the Saints after Joseph's death.

in 1841.⁴¹ He reported that such teachings were subsequently shared with others on a “rainy and chilly” day in a forest setting about a mile west of Montrose, Iowa. There Joseph taught a small group of men regarding plural marriage:

Joseph had to be on the run to keep out of the way of his enemies, and some times he would go out in the country to one of our neighbors, for he felt that he could trust anyone that lived in the woods or forest down the river, and we would go out in the timber to talk under the trees about the principles of the church, amongst other principles that of baptism for the dead was discussed and the building of the temple and all those things together. It was at this time, amongst others, that he taught us the principle of plural marriage, but his teaching was not specially directed to me, but to all who were in the company. We talked about it as we might here or any brother qualified and having authority to do so will discuss principles when he gets along with his brethren in friend and confidential discourse.⁴²

Samuel W. Richards remembered: “I heard him [Joseph Smith] teach it [plural marriage] privately to quite a number at different times — that is, in the aggregate, to quite a number, but not to many at a time. And I never did hear him preach it or teach it in what could be called a public manner.”⁴³ Similarly Joseph C. Kingsbury recounted: “Joseph Smith taught me the principle of polygamy. He gave me to understand it with his own mouth that he had married wives more than one. Now in conversation with him, he told me that.”⁴⁴ Another Nauvoo resident, Nathan Tanner, affirmed: “In the Spring of 1844 at Montrose, lee County, Iowa, he heard President Joseph Smith ... teach the doctrine of Celestial Marriage or plurality of wives.”⁴⁵

In 1894, Joseph Kelting recalled his meeting with the Prophet:

41 Cyrus Wheelock, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent’s Testimony, Part 3, p. 538, question 78.

42 Ibid., p. 539, question 80. See also questions 107, 136, 139, 142.

43 Samuel W. Richards, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent’s Testimony, Part 3, page 572, question 129.

44 Joseph Kingsbury, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent’s Testimony, Part 3, page 178, question 18.

45 Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, MS 3423, fd. 51:76, CHL.

Calling at the house of the prophet one day, early in the spring of 1844, on some business or other not now remembered, the prophet invited me into a room up stairs in his house, called the Mansion. After \we/ entered the room he locked it \the door,/ and then asked me if I had heard the rumors connecting him with polygamy. I told him I had. He then began a defense of the doctrine by referring to the Old Testament. I told him I did not want to hear that as I could read it for my self.

He claimed to be a prophet — I believed him to be prophet — and I wanted to know what he had to say about it. He expressed some doubts as to how I might receive it, and wanted to know what stand I would take if I should not believe what he had to say about it. I then pledged him my word that whether I believed his revelation or not I would not betray him.

He then informed me that he had received a revelation a revelation from God which taught the correctness of the doctrine of a plurality of wives, and commanding him to obey it. He then acknowledged to having married several wives. I told him that was all right. He then said he would like a further pledge from me that I would not betray him. I asked him if he wanted me to ex accept the principle by marrying a plural wife. He answered yes. A short time after this I married two wives in that order of marriage.⁴⁶

Elsewhere Kelting recalled asking Joseph Smith during the interview: “Have you more than one wife sealed to you by this authority”? The Prophet answered directly: “I have.”⁴⁷

Joseph Smith acted as an intermediary organizing a few plural marriages. Mary Ann Covington (Sheffield Smith Stratton West) was sealed to William Smith in the spring of 1844. She remembered:

I went to live at Orson Hyde's and soon after that time Joseph Smith wished to have an interview with me at Orson Hyde's. He had the interview with me, and then asked me if I had ever heard of a man's having more wives than one, and I said I had not. He then told me that he had received a revelation from God that man could have more wives than one, and that men

46 Joseph A. Kelting, “Statement,” Joseph Smith Affidavits, images 11–16a, CHL.

47 Joseph Kelting, affidavit, September 11, 1903, CHL.

were now being married in plural marriage. He told me soon after that his brother William wished to marry me as a wife in plural marriage if I felt willing to consent to it. ... He said that there was power on earth to seal wives in plural marriages.⁴⁸

Another Nauvoo Latter-day Saint, Mercy Rachel Fielding Thompson, explained in 1892 that her plural marriage was arranged by the Prophet:

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught me that principle himself, both publicly and domestically, or privately. ... The Prophet himself told me it was a true principle, and was taught in the bible — in the old bible, and I believed it of course, because I could read it for myself in the Bible and see that it was practiced in those days, and the Lord approved of it and sanctioned it, and I believed it was right of course, and believed what the Prophet taught me, and he taught me that. ... He was the one that introduced it to me, and he was the one that taught that principle of plural marriage to me first, and I heard him teach it to others. He taught it to me I know, and he must to others, for my sister was the first one that came to me and spoke to me about being sealed to Hyrum Smith.⁴⁹

In a letter to Joseph Smith III, Mercy Rachel explained how she was sealed to Hyrum and that children were expected to be born from that plural marriage:

The time was appointed with the consent of all parties your Father [the Prophet Joseph Smith] seald me to your Uncle Hyrum for time in Sisters Room with a covenant to deliver me up in the Morning of the Resurection to Robert Blashel Thompson with whatever ofspring should be [born] of that union. At the same time counciling your Uncle to build a Room for me and have move over as soon as convenient which

48 Mary Ann West, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent's Testimony, Part 3, pages 495–96, 504, questions 13, 272. According to her testimony, this was the only time she discussed plural marriage with the Prophet. See *ibid.*, page 503, questions 264–65.

49 Mercy Rachel Thompson, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent's Testimony, Part 3, pages 238–40, 263–64, questions 23–31, 512, 522.

he did and I remaind there as Wife the same as my Sister to the day of his Death All this I am ready to testify to.⁵⁰

Mercy Rachel Thompson stated that she was privileged to keep the written revelation “some four or five days. Something like that.”⁵¹ She also recalled: “I saw that revelation on polygamy, and had it in my hands — saw what kind of paper it was written on. It was written on foolscap paper.”⁵² Writing in 1886 she added that Hyrum “put it into my hands and left it with me for several days. I had been sealed to him by Brother Joseph a few weeks previously.”⁵³

Aroet L. Hale left a report describing how the Prophet promoted plural marriage for very practical, family-related reasons:

Another incident that occurred in my hearing that I never shall forget: The Prophet Joseph was at our house at Nauvoo on a visit. Uncle Henry Harriman, wife, & others was there. In the evening Joseph was talking on the Order of Celestial Marriage. All at once he turned towards Uncle Henry Harriman: Says he, Brother Henry, your wife Clarisa is barren & will never have any children. You must take another wife. Without posterity your name will be lost. You are of the seed of Joseph, & the only one of the Harriman family that is of that lineage & the only one that will join the Church. The Prophet commanded Uncle Henry to rise up and take heed to this command that he had made of him. He then turned to Aunt Clarisa. Says he, Clarisa, if you will assist Henry in doing as I have commanded, the God of Heaven will bless you and you share these blessings in common with your husband.⁵⁴

50 Mercy R. Thompson, letter to Joseph Smith III, September 5, 1885, copy forwarded to Joseph F. Smith, Joseph F. Smith Collection, MS 1325, fd. 12, CHL. See also “Letter from Mercy R. Thompson,” September 5, 1885, *The Saints Herald*, 8/12 (June, 1886): 641–42.

51 Mercy Rachel Thompson, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent’s Testimony, Part 3, page 250, questions 244.

52 Undated quotation in Joseph Smith III, “Plural Marriage in America,” *The Arena* 23/5 (May 1903): 460.

53 “An Important Testimony,” letter of Mercy R. Thompson to A. M. Musser, January 31, 1886, *Deseret News*, Salt Lake City, February 6, 1886.

54 Aroet L. Hale, “Reminiscence,” (ca. 1882), MS 1509, 28–29, CHL; spelling and punctuation standardized. See also Aroet L. Hale, “Journal of Aroet L. Hale,” typescript, USHS A 554, pages 8–9.

Henry was sealed to Eliza Elizabeth Jones polygamously on January 16, 1846, in Nauvoo and together they had ten children. Nauvoo Church member Charles Lambert recounted:

The Prophet used to hold meetings in a Log house of his sometimes twice a week I donot [*sic*] remember missing one when I had a chance at one of these he said he wished he had a people that he could reveal to them what the Lord had shown to him but one thing I will say there are thousands of Spirits that have been waiting to come forth in this day and generation their [*sic*] proper channel is through the Priesthood a way has to be provided but the time has come and they have got to come anyway and thus left me in a fix. Some time after this Wm Clayton told me if I would come down into the basement of the Temple he wanted to show me something and that I might bring Stephen Hales⁵⁵ with me we went into a little place boxed of[f] for a paint shop for Wm Pitt he been present there Br Wm C. read unto us the Revelation on Plural Marriage. This explained the above I believed it yet did not obey the same until 1872. I think it was on or about the 6th of May 1844 the Prophet Joseph came up to the Temple and clasping his arms arround [*sic*] me and lifted me of[f] my feet then said the Lord bless thee and I bless thee.⁵⁶

Malissa Lot testified:

Q. Did you read that revelation [discussing plurality of wives] when you were at Nauvoo? ...

A. Yes sir.

Q. Where did you get it?

A. I got it from Joseph Smith.

Q. Now you are sure of that?

A. I am.

Q. Was it in print, or was it in manuscript? Just answer that question?

55 This is the author's great-great-great-grandfather or his great-grand uncle.

56 Charles Lambert, "Autobiography [ca. 1885]," typescript, MS 1130, Folder 1, page 16, CHL.

A. Well it was in writing — it was in manuscript.⁵⁷

In addition, Lucy Walker testified that she saw the revelation “at the Nauvoo Mansion” where she was living.⁵⁸

In a limited way, Snuffer acknowledges that evidences like those presented above exist (pp. 4–5), but his willingness to ignore them is surprising. It is true that late, secondhand narratives are not as reliable as contemporaneous firsthand accounts. However, thorough scholars investigate all pertinent evidences to evaluate them based upon their individual credibility and validity. Thereafter, researchers may not agree at their significances, but eliminating an entire category of evidence simply based upon one characteristic is seldom, if ever, justified. In this case, Snuffer essentially ignores anything but firsthand accounts, which are very few in number. This approach is inherently less effective in discovering historical truth, but may be useful if an author is driven by a specific agenda that would not be better served by casting a wider evidentiary net.

Declarations from dozens of Nauvoo polygamists are available in documents posted at MormonPolygamyDocuments.org and are charted in “Yes, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph Smith Practiced Polygamy.”⁵⁹ Denver Snuffer might claim that the available testimonies describe *non*-physical spiritual unions, but in doing so he would be manifesting ignorance of the statements themselves. These witnesses declared they practiced plural marriage like Abraham and Jacob in the fullest sense. They agree Joseph Smith taught plural marriage, practiced plural marriage, and authorized others to do so.

Historical Reality or Unreality?

Denver Snuffer's treatment of Joseph Smith and plural marriage suffers from two primary weaknesses. First, his scholarly treatment is inadequate. He examines three historical considerations to defend his interpretation, initially by discussing Fanny Alger, but she is a tangential issue at best. Next he implies that Nauvoo polygamy rumors were

57 Malissa Lott, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent's Testimony, Part 3, page 101, questions 165–69.

58 Lucy Walker, deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent's testimony, Part 3, page 452, questions 66–68.

59 See also Brian C. Hales, “Yes, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph Smith Practiced Polygamy,” accessed June 19, 2015, <http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/yes-abraham-jacob-and-joseph-smith-practiced-polygamy/>.

traceable to John C. Bennett. Lastly, he tries to pin the responsibility for later polygamy squarely on Brigham Young. There is no way to get to the heart of the issue through such tactics.

The second problem involves the volume of evidences he ignores, evidences that contradict his reconstruction. In 1770, John Adams observed: “Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.”⁶⁰ By largely ignoring the available manuscripts, Snuffer frees himself to take the storyline in his own direction, largely unfettered by historical data. But in doing so, he risks creating, not documented history but rather historical fiction. He may like it and his followers may believe it, but it will not constitute truth, which Joseph Smith defined as “things as they really are” (Jacob 4:13; see also D&C 93:24).

Hopefully these evidences demonstrate plainly that Denver Snuffer’s theory that “It would be bigamy to marry another woman for this life while having an existing wife” and that “If he added others, it was for the afterlife and not for bigamy” (p. 2) are incomplete. The references quoted above and others that could be provided demonstrate undeniably that Joseph was the initial source of all teachings regarding eternal plural marriage. While some of his sealings were non-sexual, eternity-only unions, most were time-and-eternity plural marriages. It is also clear that the Prophet facilitated time-and-eternity plural marriages for Latter-day Saints of the Nauvoo period. It appears the only way to sustain Denver Snuffer’s position on Joseph Smith and plural marriage is to *deny* the evidence. In its place Snuffer has substituted an alternate reality that removes polygamy as an historical reality, instead relegating it to rumors of John C. Bennett or adulteries of Brigham Young.

As we will see in Part 2 of my response, this process repeats itself in other historical interpretations promoted by Snuffer. He embraces selective manuscript details to produce a new historical reconstruction that opens the way for his authoritative voice. Clearly in Snuffer’s world, the restoration sputtered and needs a jumpstart, and he seems to have positioned himself as the man to accomplish this perceived work. The problem is that if he is working from a foundation of half-truths (as is seen in his treatment of plural marriage), then he has bound himself to things unreal. And false teachings do not lead to truth.

60 John Adams, John Adams Quotes, accessed June 19, 2015, <http://www.thefederalistpapers.org/founders/john-adams>.

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