
44. Fanny Alger, Levi Hancock’s niece, moved to Indiana and never confirmed or denied her association with Joseph. The Church Records of the Lima, Ill., Branch (1830–45) list several Algers (Samuel, Clarissa, John, Alva, Samuel, Jr., Thomas, and another Clarissa) and directly following them is a Fanny Carter, which in old handwriting was probably “Custer.” Thomas Milton Tinney, in his “The Royal Family of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Junior: First President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (typescript, 1963; USHS and Univ. of U.), states that Fanny Alger married Solomon Custor, as do other family and church sources.

45. OC to Warren Cowdery, 21 January 1838, original in Huntington Library. Oliver copied a letter he had written to Joseph Smith on this same day into this letter to Warren Cowdery. After Oliver left the church, Brigham Young commented on 26 July 1872 that Oliver had taken a plural wife named Annie Lyman, but at the present we can find no documentation that supports this. Brigham Young’s remarks are repeated in a number of sources such as the Charles L. Walker journal, 8:18 (or p. 444 of the typescript in the BYU library). George Q. Cannon reprinted the comment in “History of the Church,” Juvenile Instructor 16, No. 18 (15 September 1881):206.

46. Statement of Mrs. Warner Alexander, Microfilm of original, Stanley B. Kimball Collection, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, Illinois. Polly Beswick “made her home with her sister, Mrs. John Tanner, who lived next door to ours,” reported Mrs. Alexander. Her statement is an example of the gossip circulating in Kirtland. In the LDS D & C 90:28–31 and RLDS D & C 87:7 a revelation dated 8 March 1833 states in part, “Vienna Jacques should receive money to bear her expenses, and go up to the land of Zion,” a commandment that she should leave Kirtland and go to Missouri. As an old woman in Utah, Vienna Jacques seemed to have been recognized as a plural wife of Joseph Smith, but a 20 July 1869 affidavit to that effect is unsigned by her. One source linking her marriage to Joseph is a 28 March 1858 sealing date, fourteen years after Joseph’s death. Brodie, No Man Knows My History, p. 486, claims that descendants of Vienna Jacques’s neighbors in Utah maintain “that the marriage took place while the prophet was alive.”

47. ES to JS, 25 April 1837, and ES to JS, 3 May 1837, Joseph Smith letterbooks, Joseph Smith collection, LDS Archives. Italics added.

48. HC 2:246–47; RLDS D & C 111:4b. This statement is no longer in the LDS edition.


50. Hepsibah Richards to Willard Richards, 18 January 1838, LDS Archives.


52. Journal of Caroline Barnes Crosby, USHS. Hepsibah Richards to Friends, 23 March 1838, LDS Archives.

53. Hepsibah Richards to Willard Richards, 19 January 1838, LDS Archives.

CHAPTER 5


2. Ibid.

3. Vesta Crawford notes, Univ. of U.
Preface to
the Second Edition

When *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* appeared in the fall of 1984, research and publication flourished about the historical events contributing to the growth of the two major churches born of the early Mormon movement. For the first time in the 150 years since its founding in 1830 many factors essential to the successful historical interpretation of Mormonism converged. Of those, several assumed critical importance. First, a sufficient number of scholars interested in both the western Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and the midwestern Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) created a climate conducive to objective, carefully researched publications. Through the professionalism of the Mormon History Association, historians successfully breached the barriers of bitter calumny that had formerly divided these two churches. The cordial association and mutual respect of previously suspicious scholars brought new cooperation to their combined search for the historical past.

Second, previously untapped sources in public and private collections contributed new data to the general body of research materials, thus providing more complete interpretive manuscript sources. Archival holdings became more accessible to researchers, who in turn shared information about documents in unusual locations. Some private papers found their way into public archives and public perusal, enriching the general body of knowledge.

Third, publishers and editors realized the potential for the successful marketing of Mormon history to a public eager to read it. Major journals accepted articles about the Mormon historical past, and several new journals appeared whose publication policy addressed Mormon history. Perhaps the establishment of the David Wooley Evans and Beatrice Cannon Evans Award for excellence in western biography, defined at its founding in 1983 as circumscribing “Mormon country,” signaled the maturity of the Mormon history field. The scholars, the research collections, the publishers, and public acceptance of objective, nonpolemical histories combined to provide a healthy climate for Mormon history scholars.

*Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* appeared during this “Camelot” period of Mormon historical writing. It met with favorable reviews in major newspapers and journals across the United States. They praised its interpretation of Emma Smith’s life and noted its careful documentation. The *Chronicle*
of Higher Education listed it for university presidents' summer reading, and the Books for the Blind Program selected it to be recorded. Six months after its first publication, the book won the Evans award for western biography in the spring of 1985, followed by best book awards from both the Mormon History Association and the John Whitmer Historical Association. The biography reached a wide readership. Six printings ran sales of the first edition to 30,000 copies by 1992, when work on this second edition began.

Since publication of Mormon Enigma, many new works have fleshed out the founding period of the Mormon movement. These include biographies of Emma Smith's associates, analytical narrative histories, essays, and articles. A number of these publications acknowledge Emma Smith's historical influence and cite Mormon Enigma as being helpful in interpretation and content.

But the book offended the leadership of the LDS Church in Utah. In June 1985, a month after it received the Evans award, newspaper headlines of the Los Angeles Times announced, "Mormons Forbid Female Biographers of Smith's Wife to Address Church." We were prohibited from speaking about any aspect of religious or church history in any LDS Church-related meeting or institution. Church leaders took this action without reading the book in its entirety or informing us of their decision, and it remained in effect over ten months. In the wake of the national publicity caused by the ban, the sales of the book tripled, but the church's speaking ban was detrimental to all concerned—it took its toll on us, our families, and on the public perception of the church itself. After a ten-month stalemate, Linda Newell successfully petitioned church leaders to reconsider the prohibition. On April 24, 1986, she was informed that the restrictions the church had placed on us were no longer in effect. A little over a week later, the Mormon History Association named Val Avery its president-elect. While the story of the lifting of the ban appeared in newspapers throughout the United States through both the Associated Press and the United Press International wire services, it never appeared in the church-owned Deseret News. This omission gave the unmistakable message to faithful church members that both the book and its authors were still suspect. While LDS Church leaders criticized our interpretation of Joseph Smith as being "a non-traditional view," a marked increase in accounts of Emma Smith began to appear in church instructional materials and other church publications. Emma Smith has finally become a three-dimensional historical figure.

Our depiction of Joseph Smith, Jr., was an issue for some readers of the book. Accustomed to viewing Joseph Smith as the heroic figure in early Mormonism, these readers found difficulty with his being secondary in a biography of his wife. This habit of viewing Joseph as the primary figure left even some seasoned professionals puzzled. "Why did you treat Joseph so marginally in your book?" asked a colleague, himself a member of the LDS Church and active in writing Mormon history.
"Because the book is Emma's biography, not Joseph's."

He was silent a few moments, then commented that he would have to recall his review of the book from an editor and rewrite it. The published review was balanced and excellent, but the incident highlighted a common perspective of many Mormon readers: the personality of Joseph Smith and the legendary descriptions of his life overshadow his associates, and especially his wife. Many accounts of Joseph's activities were peripheral to Emma and were not included in the manuscript in a conscious decision to focus on her experiences. Because we, too, shared an abiding interest in the activities of the Mormon prophet, we were sometimes tempted to allow Joseph's story to eclipse Emma's. That we did not succumb irritated some who wanted Joseph to have equal emphasis in his wife's biography. For succinct and varied interpretations of Joseph Smith's life we refer the reader to the many biographies of him presently available, particularly Donna Hill's *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon*.

When we were preparing the original manuscript for publication, the editors asked us to reduce the one-thousand-page manuscript by one third. (A note to that effect and a list of archives holding the longer manuscript appear on page 311.) We accomplished this reduction through careful editing and tightening of sentence structure. Occasionally we eliminated an already well-known account that might have added information about the larger context of Emma Smith's times but that had no direct bearing on the particular events of her life. For example, surely the nineteenth-century movement of American women into the public arena of societal reform affected Emma, but the constraints of length precluded a chapter on that larger post–Civil War era.

Soon after *Mormon Enigma* appeared, a tragedy began to unfold in the larger community of Mormon scholarship. With increasing regularity documents of unusual importance to Mormon history surfaced through the efforts of Salt Lake City document dealer Mark Hofmann. Historians and buffs eagerly traded information contained in the most recent document in a sincere attempt to include current scholarship in their work. Then, in October 1985, three bomb blasts and two murders brought the document resurgence to an abrupt and tragic end. Mark Hofmann, professing to be a buyer and seller of old manuscripts, had been forging documents and selling them to private collectors and to the LDS Church. Fearing exposure and seeking to deflect a tightening trail of irregular financial transactions, Hofmann set two homemade bombs that killed businessman Steven F. Christensen and housewife Kathleen W. Sheets. A third bomb exploded prematurely, nearly ending Hofmann's own life.

While Hofmann subsequently pled guilty to murder and was sentenced to life in prison in early 1987, his incarceration did little to repair the damage to morale and professionalism in the Mormon scholarly community. His forgeries were so well done that seasoned document dealers “authenticated” them through paper and ink samples, and an accurate and complete list of all the
forged documents will probably never be available. Also, his historical acumen was so exacting that most of his forgeries merely provided the “smoking gun” for conclusions to which authentic sources led us and many others. To further complicate the problem, Hofmann traded forgeries for genuine documents and then further traded or sold those legitimate records. Thus, every document that passed through Mark Hofmann’s hands was not a forgery, but every document connected with him remains suspect.

The LDS Church hierarchy reacted to the Hofmann episode by removing from circulation scores, perhaps hundreds, of manuscript collections they believed might further embarrass the church in some way. Many scholars who had worked for years on major projects were, and still are, denied access to their sources. If we were writing Mormon Enigma today, we would not have access to many of the documents that were so valuable in our portrayal of Emma, including the Joseph Smith, Jr., Collection, the Brigham Young Collection, the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes, and many, many others.

Fortunately for us, most of the Hofmann-tainted documents either had no bearing on our work because his interests lay in places other than Emma Smith’s life or because they came to light after Mormon Enigma had gone to press. Several exceptions, however, warrant mention here. One is the forgery Hofmann titled “A blessing given to Joseph Smith, 3rd, by his father, Joseph Smith, Junr. on Jan’y. 17, 1844,” usually referred to as the “Joseph Smith III Blessing.” The existing historical evidence that such a blessing took place is so persuasive that Hofmann had only to put his imagination to work on the wording. His date of 17 January 1844 was also fiction. Emma placed it in the spring of 1844 (note 19, p. 341). We removed all references to this Hofmann document from the text and the notes of this edition. We then rearranged the events of chapter 12, with some minor changes and additional information, to place the historical evidence for such a blessing in its chronological context.

The second Hofmann document with particular impact on our interpretation of events in Emma’s life appeared in chapter 13. It was a forged letter purportedly from Joseph Smith to Maria and Sarah Lawrence dated 23 June 1844. We deleted all references to the forged letter in the text and notes, modified the narrative in chapter 13 accordingly, and added some new material about Joseph’s last evening at home.

In the years since this book was first published we have been alert for newly found documents or any we might have missed in our initial research. Where possible we have made small additions to the narrative to include these. A few others are important enough to discuss here.

When Emma’s adopted daughter, Julia Murdock Smith Dixon Middleton, was twenty-seven, she received a letter from one of her brothers, John Riggs Murdock, written in June 1858 from Florence, Nebraska. He was a teamster whom Brigham Young sent east each year to help new immigrant
companies traverse the plains and mountains to Salt Lake City. Julia was ill at the time and did not answer the letter for five months. She dated her reply “Near Nauvoo, November 2, 1858,” and sent it to her brother. John Riggs Murdock gave the letter to their father, John Murdock, who then wrote to his daughter and copied both Julia’s letter and his response into his own journal. These entries add several poignant insights into Julia’s sometimes tragic life and her relationship with Emma.

After John Murdock’s wife Julia died giving birth to twins, Julia and Joseph, the Smiths took the infants to raise in Kirtland in 1831. Emma extracted a promise from John Murdock that he would not tell them he was their biological father. “She wanted to bring the children up as her own and never have them know anything to the contrary that they might be perfectly happy with her as a mother,” he explained to Julia in his 1858 letter. “This was a good thought yet selfish and I was sensible it could not always remain so... I have always held my peace upon the subject knowing there was no freedom of access between me or my family and you and Br. Joseph’s family upon the subject; and I resolved to wait till time and providence should divulge the matter.”

Others were not so careful. When Julia was only five years old, a Mrs. Walker told her she was not a Smith, “and she done it through spite,” Julia believed. “From that hour I was changed,” the letter continued, revealing the sting she experienced from other children’s taunts that she was adopted and from insinuations of adults who claimed that her birth mother had been Joseph’s “consort” and that Emma had taken Julia and her twin brother to prevent a scandal. She revealed her own struggle with feelings of abandonment and separation from her heritage and, in turn, expressed her love and devotion to Emma. “I was bitter even as a child... Why was it... that I could not have been raised with my own blood and kin and not with strangers and bear a name I had not claim to. I shunned you and my own father and why? Because I had dread of being taken from those I was raised with and loved with the same love that should have been yours.” Julia pondered how her birth mother might view the situation. “If she has seen the way her family have been divided and estranged she must feel unhappy I think.”

In his response, Murdock invited her to join him in Utah, explaining, “The only way I know for us to be properly acquainted and united in all things,... having one faith, one baptism, one God and Father... and so be prepared to dwell together in the Celestial Kingdom of God: Will be for you to come here that we may all be taught together in the principals of salvation and attend to the ordinances of the house of God that we may be one in every deed.” Beyond these two letters, no other correspondence is available between Julia and the Murdocks. With her adopted Smith family, she had already rejected what they called “Brigham Young’s brand of Mormonism.” And moving even further from what her biological father proposed, Julia had
embraced the faith of her husband by joining the Catholic church. She never went to Utah and most likely never told Emma about this brief interlude with her estranged family.

An interesting footnote can be added to Emma’s struggle with plural marriage. In chapter 4 we have given the background for a section of both the LDS and RLDS Churches’ *Doctrine and Covenants* that first appeared in the 1835 edition. It said in part: “we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.” The passage remained in subsequent editions—and is still in the RLDS volume—until 1874, when LDS Church officials removed it and added what is now known as section 132. (This revelation on celestial, or plural, marriage is discussed in detail in chapter 10.)

On July 7, 1878, four years after the publication of section 132 and ten months before Emma’s death, Mormon Apostle Joseph F. Smith delivered an unusual sermon in Salt Lake City in which he suggested that the revelation concerning polygamy should not have been published—at least not in its present form. “When the revelation was written, in 1843, it was for a special purpose, by the request of the Patriarch Hyrum Smith, and was not designed to go forth to the church or to the world. It is most probable that had it been then written with a view to its going out as a doctrine of the church, it would have been presented in a somewhat different form.” Referring then to the last fifteen verses that both command and chastise Emma, he continued: “There are personalities contained in a part of it which are not relevant to the principle itself, but rather to the circumstances which necessitated it being written at the time” (George D. Watt, ed., *Journal of Discourses*, 20:29). The 1874 publication of section 132 came at a time when Emma’s sons were traveling to Utah on missions for the RLDS Church, and therefore should be viewed in the context of other statements of that period that were calculated to defame Emma and thereby undermine her sons’ effectiveness. We discussed these issues in chapter 21.

On another topic, we now know that Louis Bidamon threatened to leave Emma. The incident took place in the heat of an argument between Bidamon and Emma’s adult son, Joseph Smith III. Joseph clearly understood that late Victorian attitudes about the double standard of sexuality and women’s sphere would have deemed divorce a castigation of Emma rather than of Louis Bidamon. He told his stepfather he was “absolutely against such a step” and reminded him of an earlier incident where the “honor of [his] mother and the good of the family” had been concerned. The reference was to Bidamon’s affair with a local widow, which resulted in an illegitimate son. Years later when Joseph wrote about the episode in his memoirs he concluded, “I still believe that what I did was for the best, for its final result was that the difficulty between my mother and her husband was adjusted, even though it had some rather ill effects upon us boys.” He did not elaborate on what those difficulties
might have been, but when Emma took Louis’s illegitimate son to raise, the gossip about town surely affected her children.

A number of other minor errors inevitably occurred in the initial printing of *Mormon Enigma*. Thanks to the keen eyes of some of our readers, and their willingness to point these out to us, they have also been corrected in the text.

Throughout our association with Mormon history we have benefited from the friendship, assistance, and good offices of many people whose support has proven invaluable. For this second edition we add Associate Director Elizabeth G. Dulany’s name to all the rest, for her specific help with this publication and for her far-sighted conviction years ago that steered the University of Illinois Press into an extensive publication program in Mormon history.

Our work on the Emma Smith biography moved each of us into professional arenas unimagined before that research and writing experience. Val Avery is a member of the Department of History at Northern Arizona University and maintains her research and writing efforts. Linda Newell is an independent writer, editor, and researcher whose work centers in biography and family and community history. Both continue to publish historical articles and essays, and each has other books in progress. Over the ensuing years our children have grown and our families changed. The Averys’ marriage did not survive; the Newells’ did. But it was our friendship with a remarkable nineteenth-century woman named Emma Hale Smith that profoundly changed both our lives—for the better.