

John C. Bennett and Abortion. Three References:

Bennett's biographer, Andrew Smith summarized:

Bennett was also charged with performing abortions, or "embryo infanticide," a charge that was likely true. Hyrum Smith alleged Bennett seduced women with the promise "that he would give them medicine to produce abortions, providing they should become pregnant." Zeruah Goddard claimed Bennett told Sarah Pratt "that he could cause abortion with perfect safety to the mother at any stage of pregnancy, and that he had frequently destroyed and removed infants before their time to prevent exposure of the parties, and that he had instruments for that purpose." Pratt amplified these comments years later in Salt Lake City. According to Dr. Wilhelm Wymetal, Pratt related that when Joseph Smith had intercourse with women, "Dr. Bennett was always on hand, when anything happened." Bennett had a long instrument that was made "of steel and was crooked at one end" that he used for inducing abortions.. (Andrew F Smith, *The Saintly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997, 113.)

Affidavit of Hyrum Smith, the second affidavit published in *Affidavits and Certificates, Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters*. Nauvoo, Illinois, August 31, 1842. These affidavits have been listed as an "Extra" either to *The Wasp* (more common) or *The Times and Seasons*. It was printed as a single, two-sided sheet apparently not associated with either newspaper. Also republished as "Affidavit of Hyrum Smith, *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 Aug. 1842):870-72.

AFFIDAVIT OF HYRUM SMITH

On the seventeenth day of May, 1842, having been made acquainted with some of the conduct of John C. Bennett, which was given in testimony under oath before Alderman G. W. Harris, by several females, who testified that John C. Bennett endeavored to seduce them and accomplished his designs by saying it was right; that it was one of the mysteries of God, which was to be revealed when the people was strong enough in the faith to bear such mysteries that it was perfectly right to have illicit intercourse with females, provided no one knew it but themselves, vehemently trying them from day to day, to yield to his passions, bringing witnesses of his own clan to testify that their was such revelations and such commandments, and that it was of God; also stating that he would be responsible for their sins, if there was any; and that he would give them medicine to produce **abortions**, providing they should become pregnant. One of these witnesses, a married woman that he attended upon in his professional capacity, whilst she was sick, stated that he made proposals to her of a similar nature; he told her that he wished her husband was dead, and that if he was dead he would marry her and clear out with her; he also begged her permission to give him medicine to that effect; he did try to give him medicine, but he would not take it—on interrogating her what she thought of such teaching, she replied, she was sick at the time, and had to be lifted in and out of her bed like a child. . . (Bold added.)

The Testimony of Mrs. Zeruah Goddard, the seventh affidavit published in *Affidavits and Certificates, Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters*. Nauvoo, Illinois, August 31, 1842.

TESTIMONY OF MRS. GODDARD.

Dr. Bennett came to my house one night about 12 o'clock, and sat on or beside the bed where Mrs. Pratt was and cursed and swore very profanely at her; she told me next day that the Dr. was quick tempered and was mad at her, but gave no other reason. I concluded from circumstances that she had promised to meet him somewhere and had disappointed him; on another night I remonstrated with the Dr. and asked him what Orson Pratt would think, if he should know that you were so fond of his wife, and holding her hand so much; the Dr. replied that he could pull the wool over Orson's eyes.

Mrs. Pratt stated to me that Dr. Bennett told her, that he could cause **abortion** with perfect safety to the mother, at any stage of pregnancy, and that he had frequently destroyed and removed infants before their time to prevent exposure of the parties, and that he had instruments for that purpose, &c.

My husband and I were frequently at Mrs. Pratt's and stayed till after 10 o'clock in the night, and Dr. Bennett still remained there with her and her little child alone at that late hour.

On one occasion I came suddenly into the room where Mrs. Pratt and the Dr. were; she was lying on the bed and the Dr. was taking his hands out of her bosom; he was in the habit of sitting on the bed where Mrs. Pratt was lying, and lying down over her.

I would further state that from my own observation, I am satisfied that their conduct was anything but virtuous, and I know Mrs. Pratt is not a woman of truth, and I believe the statements which Dr. Bennett made concerning Joseph Smith are false, and fabricated for the purpose of covering his own iniquities, and enabling him to practice his base designs on the innocent.

ZERUIAH N. GODDARD.

Subscribed before me one of the alderman of the City of Nauvoo, and sworn to this 28th day of August 1842.

GEO. W. HARRIS,

Alderman of the City of Nauvoo.

Sarah Pratt quoted in Wyl, W[ilhem]. [pseud. for Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal]. *Mormon Portraits, or the Truth about Mormon Leaders from 1830 to 1886, Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and His Friends: A Study Based on Fact and Documents*. Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing and Publishing Co., 1886, 59 (see also 128).

Mrs. P. [Sarah Pratt]: "You hear often that Joseph had no polygamous offspring. The reason of this is very simple. *Abortion was practiced on a large scale in Nauvoo*. Dr. John C. Bennett, the evil genius of Joseph, brought this abomination into a scientific system. He showed to my husband and me the instruments with which he used to "operate for Joseph." There was a house in Nauvoo, 'right across the flat,' about a mile and a-half from the town, a kind of hospital. They sent the women there, when they showed signs of celestial consequences. Abortion was practiced regularly in this house." (Italics in original.)

Bennett was also charged with performing abortions, or "embryo infanticide," a charge that was likely true. Hyrum Smith alleged Bennett seduced women with the promise "that he would give them medicine to produce abortions, providing they should become pregnant." Zeruiah Goddard claimed Bennett told Sarah Pratt "that he could cause abortion with perfect safety to the mother at any stage of pregnancy, and that he had frequently destroyed and removed infants before their time to prevent exposure of the parties, and that he had instruments for that purpose." Pratt amplified these comments years later in Salt Lake City. According to Dr. Wilhelm Wymetal, Pratt related that when Joseph Smith had intercourse with women, "Dr. Bennett was always on hand, when anything happened." Bennett had a long instrument that was made "of steel and was crooked at one end" that he used for inducing abortions.. (Smith, Andrew F. *The Saintly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

"too indelicate for the public eye or ear" and was "revolting, corrupt, and disgusting." Samuel W. Taylor concluded that the only charge that was worse than what was already published was sodomy. Taylor presumed that Higbee was with Bennett on the floor. Since Bennett never denied the charge, perhaps he was a bisexual. Circumstantial evidence suggests that Bennett did have a passionate relationship with Pierce B. Fagen a few years later.⁴⁴

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In late August 1842 Joseph Smith called on many elders in Nauvoo "to go on missions and rebut Bennett's lies and disabuse the public mind." More than three hundred elders fanned out from Nauvoo, "heavily laden with such certificates to rebut the statements of Bennett." The elders tried to encourage editors to insert these statements and affidavits into their newspapers. Few succeeded, but many newspapers mentioned that these anti-Bennett certificates had been published in the Mormon press.⁴⁶

The elders had disparate experiences while trying to combat Bennett's allegations. Howard Coray was gone about six months "without accomplishing much, as it was a time of heavy persecution." James Flanigan reported in his journal that "Brethren who had not been Sturdy enough to Stem the currents of Persecution & to withstand the torrents of Slanders & lieing Statements of John C. Btt but when the Sun [of persecution] came out it Scorched them & they withered & died." He preached three times in one neighborhood, "but the Prejudice of the People is still more alarmed than ever on account of Bennett & his dogmas." Brigham Young and the Mormon elders Heber Kimball and Amasa Lyman held a conference at the Quincy courthouse in which they "exposed the course of Bennett and the mobocrats, and disabused the public mind, to some extent, of the prejudices recently imbibed." Governor Carlin even attended one session.⁴⁷

Lyman Wight reported from Dayton, Ohio, that after traveling five hundred miles, he had not located any enemies and had never seen less persecu-

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