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Dear Sister Comfort,

Your patience is much appreciated in waiting for me to give more than surface answers. My flood of deadlines is over, and I’m in control once more—I’m very sorry to have kept you waiting on details. My note says you called at the end of last November, but I’m really answering the questions you asked last September 5. I realize your own reading puts you ahead considerably, but these were your concerns then, which I’m addressing.

I’ve had time in this past week to review my own files, and if you have additional questions, I will give you prompt and honest answers, as far as we have data. This is actually 50% of the problem, since everyone who writes honestly has to remark on how little is known behind the scenes. Sealing dates are known, and in many cases some comments of Joseph Smith wives on how they took this step, and their feelings then and afterward. Quite a bit is known about Emma, but even then there are big blanks in the record, as far as a consecutive story. As I review your questions, so much turns on the meanings an author reads into the documents—and the premises a writer begins with.

One of your questions is about the background of the authors of the Mormon Enigma (abbreviated to “ME” in this letter, quoting the page of the first edition, with notation if the position taken is different in the second edition). My understanding is that Linda Newell is active, and I assume that she is somewhat near the liberal Mormon position of her husband. When the Hofmann forgeries threw doubt on the Moroni story, Val Avery was quoted in the newspapers as saying Mormon missionaries could no long use that. By hearsay only, I understand Val is not now a church member. In the preface to their second edition, they state they do not intend to comment much on Joseph Smith, and on p. xvi of the second edition, they downgrade the revelatory force of D&C 132 by using a Joseph F. Smith quotation, saying that the revelation would have been written differently if not given in the midst of conflict. However, they are misrepresenting him, since he definitely did not mean the doctrine would have been different if given under different circumstances. I mention this to show they have taken a clear position of skepticism on this revelation through the Prophet.

My own position is that of a believer in the Prophet’s mission and his revelations. I am sure in mind and soul that he told the truth about the First Vision and the coming of Moroni. Therefore I find no reason to doubt his revelation on the plurality of worlds and how they are populated. Plural marriage is part of this overall doctrine. There is a breathtaking beauty in the concepts of
eternal growth and truly celestial relationships. Joseph Smith said the same thing about his vision of the three degrees of glory, and I deeply agree. Yet strangely, D&C 76 tried the faith of many early Saints who saw God’s justice as eroded by allowing rewards in some measure for all. Brigham Young was one of these, and he said he put the doctrine on the shelf until he could understand it better, which he came to do. Lincoln spoke of the Bible to a friend who visited him in the White House: “Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a happier and better man.” I think we can do this with the revelations of the Prophet, including D&C 132.

Judging God’s ethics is not a human area of expertise. The scriptures contain apparent contradictions in conduct that I’m sure will be better understood in the future. Indeed, the premise of the restored gospel is that we are here to learn to use faith, sometimes against rational odds. Analogies help me greatly. Parents tell full truths to their children in a step by step process and over a long period of time. God may give a revelation and not allow its knowledge to go out all at once, as in the case of the transfiguration experience of the key apostles (Matt. 17:9). The concept of national security is a valid one, where diplomatic or military tactics are not disclosed in the interest of preserving the safety of citizens. This comes close to the Nauvoo situation, as we discussed on the phone, where hostility and prejudice were so prevalent in the region that responsible Mormons feared the very breakdown in public order that took place after the martyrdom. Joseph Smith went to Carthage to stave off armed and enforced demands that his people leave the state. Even as he taught polygamy and the temple ceremonies to trusted leaders, he was acutely aware that he was risking his life and the safety of church members in a society that had made bigamy a punishable crime. He was forced to limit knowledge of the practice in order to avoid legal prosecution by his enemies. When he said an angel commanded him not to delay further, that makes sense because he had but a few years left to teach concepts of marriage and the temple. His integrity is shown by active plans, documented in journals of associates, to leave Illinois and settle in the west where Mormon beliefs could be practiced without violating state laws.

I postponed writing you mainly because I did not have the time to go back to individual folders and check out generalizations on the Prophet’s plural wives. However, I’ve had time to review my conclusions and be confident of overall patterns, which I’ll state first before going to your specific questions. By now you know Bachman as well as I do, so I can refer to his approaches without documentation. Now there is book by Todd Compton, which I have very mixed feelings about. He writes a preface that communicates two things—skepticism of the plural marriage revelation and admission of the limited knowledge we have on the relationships of the Prophet with his sealed wives. This is followed by detailed biographical chapters on each of the wives, detailed enough to include unreliable as well as reliable evidence. His interpretations suggest sexual contact in excess of the evidence, and he pursues a Victorian theme of the victimized woman—hence the editorialized title, In Sacred Loneliness. My files on each woman are very detailed, so I respect the effort it took to compile the biographies, but some of his judgments I do not respect. Furthermore, Bachman’s work was very important, and Compton virtually ignores it. So I do not recommend this new work for its interpretations.
Resuming the statistical overview, I find 29 live sealings of women to Joseph Smith that satisfy me historically--Bachman judged 31 and Compton 33. Those who go further rely on compounded hearsay. My percentages are based on the 29 cases I consider proved. There were 18 sealings to never-married women (62%) and 2 to single widows (7%), making over two-thirds (69%) of the sealings to women without husbands. This means the Prophet was sealed to 9 women who were married, and I read the evidence as 5 whose husbands were faithful to the Church, plus 4 whose husbands were non-members or non-faithful. The five faithful husbands came west and died believing Joseph Smith was a Prophet--two were apostles.

A look at the above 29 women and 9 men tells me that we are dealing with a religious sealing for eternity, not primarily multiple sexual relationships. None of the women went public with any resentment or expose of Joseph Smith. Fanny Alger, evidently sealed to Joseph at Kirtland, married and stayed in the midwest, and Sarah Lawrence became bitter in later life, perhaps losing her faith. However, the 27 other women remained loyal to the Church and revered the Prophet until their deaths. This tells me that religious conviction was the basis of every relationship.

There is direct or indirect evidence for sexual relations in perhaps seven of Joseph Smith’s sealings. You mention four cases of alleged children, but this comes down to three. Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner spoke at Brigham Young University and said she knew of three--and there is the statement of the daughter of Sylvia Sessions Lyon that her mother said Joseph was father to the daughter. This case was known in late Utah and would be included in Mary Lightner’s statistic of three. This is the only known case of Joseph having relations with a married woman, and Sylvia’s daughter said her mother told her she was conceived when Sylvia was sealed to the Prophet and “Mr. Lyon was out of fellowship with the Church.” At two known points in 1843, Emma was cooperative with plural sealings, and that would coincide with Emily Partridge’s statement that she had relations with Joseph once or twice. In this year Emma insisted that Emily and Eliza Partridge move from the mansion house, as well as Eliza Snow. Apparently the Prophet had no sexual relations with these women after that time.

There is a present trend to characterize the Prophet’s sealings to married women as “polyandry,” which means a woman has two or more husbands at one time. That might not even describe the case of Sylvia Lyon, if she terminated physical relationships with Windsor Lyon for a time--we know little of the circumstances. As far as the other married women, we simply know there is an eternal sealing to Joseph and the continuation of the earthly marriage to their previous husbands, who at some point were aware and acknowledged the eternal sealing to the Prophet. This is not qualify for the definition of “polyandry.” Some women said their marriages to Joseph were “for time and eternity,” but that may repeat ceremonial language and does not necessarily imply sexual relationships with Joseph. As we discussed over the phone, the Prophet said it was revealed that certain women were given to him as eternal companions before this life. There are many women today living faithfully in one marriage that are sealed to another eternal companion.

The age of single women is sometimes stated in a prejudicial fashion. For instance, Compton essentially divides his 33 base figure into thirds--one group 20 and under, another 21-30, and
another 31 and older. He states the first third as “14 to 20,” but there is but one known case of a
girl of 14, which is Helen Mar Kimball, and the case for a sexual relationship there is based on
faulty evidence and faulty reasoning. Compton includes Nancy Winchester, whom I dispute as
being sealed to the Prophet—but her age is in question anyway. Figures then seem to skip age 15
and go as follows: 2 at 16, 3 at 17, 3 at 19, and 1 at 20. As a factual matter, journals indicate
that a girl of 16 was generally considered eligible for marriage.

An outstanding example of ME’s misinformation here is the sentence you cite (p. 65) stating that
Mary Elizabeth Lightner said she was 12 in 1831 when Joseph told her God commanded him to
take her as a plural wife. The error is repeated (p. 100), saying that in 1831 Joseph suggested she
would become his wife, and in 1834 he “approached” her again. She was born in 1818, so she
would be 13 and 15 when these conversations happened, according to the ME version. But the
source they refer to (Mary to Emmeline Wells, Feb. 8, 1902, at BYU) actually says, speaking of
Elizabeth Ann Whitney: “It was at her house that the Prophet Joseph first told me about his great
vision concerning me. He said I was the first woman God commanded him to take as a plural
wife <in 1834>. He was very much frightened about [it] until the angel appeared to him three
times. It was in the early part of Feb., 1842 that he was compelled to reveal it to me.” What is in
pointed brackets is written above the line in the same pencilled handwriting. The 1831 date
comes out of thin air, evidently by assuming that Joseph first talked to Mary when he received the
first plural marriage revelation in 1831. The 1834 date reverses the document, which says Joseph
anguished over whether to propose from 1834 to 1842, and in 1842 he finally did--Mary was then
23.

Before going to your “page number” questions about ME, let me spontaneously respond to your
“cult” probings. The organizations you mention are of the dictator-follower model, engaging in
mind control and ending in violence when its premises are attacked. The Church is based on
conversion of the individual member and his/her use of agency. Its leadership is given checks and
balances in the system of counselors and group approval. If anyone thinks sustaining of today’s
prophet is just a ritual, he needs to visit randomly with church members all over the world, who
love their leader and approve of how well President Hinckley is doing his job. In one Nauvoo
conference, Joseph announced he would not accept Sidney Rigdon as a counselor, the conference
voted against dismissing him after Hyrum publicly asked another chance for Sidney.

In spite of not knowing much personal detail on Nauvoo polygamy, there is a distinct pattern of
Joseph’s discussing proposed sealings with family members, including the parents of Sarah Ann
Whitney and Helen Mar Kimball. The Lott family Bible shows that the Prophet sealed the parents
for eternity at the same time that he was sealed to Melissa Lott. D&C 132 commands the Prophet
(132:64—“who holds the keys of this power”) to teach his wife the principle; then only if she
rejects it in disbelief is he “exempt from the law of Sarah,” who gave Hagar to Abraham. We
briefly discussed how Emma clearly knew about Fanny Alger in Kirtland, a situation Joseph
explained in the High Council minutes in 1838. Yet the Prophet did not have another sealed to
him until 1841, which tells me he was patient with Emma and her wishes for years until (as he
said) an angel commanded him not to wait longer. Even then, after Emma cooperated and then
became hostile, rejecting D&C 132 that Hyrum brought to her, the Clayton journal says of the following day (July 13, 1843): “This A.M. Joseph sent for me and when I arrived he called me up into his private room with E and there stated an agreement they had mutually entered into. They both stated their feelings on many subjects and wept considerable. O may the Lord soften her heart that she may be willing to keep and abide by his Holy Law.”

This agreement evidently included property security for Emma, and evidently some type of commitment from Joseph about limiting further wives. In terms of specific dates, Joseph is known to propose to one woman and be sealed to only two women after this time: Melissa Lott, Sept. 20, 1843, and Fanny Young, Brigham’s spinster sister, Nov. 2, 1843. These may be related to the Clayton journal entry of Oct. 19, 1843, which indicates Joseph and Emma had received their highest temple ordinances: “After we got on the road he began to tell me that E was turned quite friendly and kind.” My point is that Joseph did work with Emma’s feelings and permissions and did in fact honor some kind of agreement on wives after July, 1843. This is all part of the larger framework for the entry you mention in ME 158, Clayton’s journal of Aug. 16, 1843, which states Emma raged and Joseph had to agree “he would relinquish all for her sake,” but he added “he should not relinquish anything.” As just indicated, this was the period in which the Prophet virtually stopped any further sealings. What does “relinquish” mean for Joseph? Terminating seeing existing wives? Canceling existing sealings? Taking no further wives not already discussed? There are too many questions to know what Joseph would not relinquish. I would guess that Joseph said to Emma that he would do anything to keep her if she insisted, but that she could not demand that the revelation be changed or existing sealings changed. I see this source as sustaining the Prophet’s integrity in receiving revelation in this matter.

I’m glad you responded positively to my indication that the Prophet and priesthood leaders asked women (and men) to resolve their doubts in prayer. This meant that plural marriage was not forced on to anyone. In fact, in Utah, Brigham Young gave divorce papers to any woman asked for them, after checking with her bishop first. On the point of divine confirmation, I am enclosing some examples and will be glad to go into further detail. As far as those who received testimonies before being sealed to the Prophet, there is Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, a highly spiritual woman who received a visit of an angel (ME 101, 3/4 down the page). ME quotes Desdemona Fullmer on a dream about Emma threatening her, but does not mention that she also described a divine being who verified that plural marriage was of God. ME quotes from Lucy Walker’s manuscript autobiography but does not mention that her intense prayers were answered: “My room became filled with a heavenly influence. . . . My soul was filled with a calm, sweet peace that I never knew . . . and I received a powerful and irresistible testimony of the truth of the marriage covenant called ‘celestial or plural marriage,’ which has been like an anchor to the soul through all the trials of life.” Two of the enclosed examples are assurances given to the Kimballs and the Whitneys, who in turn permitted their daughters to be sealed the Prophet. And I’ve included Helen Mar Kimball’s own recollections of her family and their conversion to plural marriage. This involves what I feel is an exception to the rule of consulting the first wife, for Heber C. Kimball was told to be sealed to another wife before he told his first wife, Vilate, and the daughter Helen explains that the Prophet justified this in terms of the danger he was in if his
enemies got hold of this information. In addition to the testimony that Helen reports from her mother, in later life Vilate said the principle was difficult but brought a depth of love she could have learned in no other way. The daughter, Helen, married Horace Whitney after the martyrdom, so she is telling of her second relationship at the end of the quotation material. Her close friend was Sarah Ann Whitney, who was also sealed to the Prophet about a year before Helen was.

The rest of this letter is detail, not perspective, answering your specific questions in your letter to me of Sept. 5, 1987, unless my above materials addressed them. Most of these refer to ME, with pages repeated here:

ME 65-66: McLellin’s accusation of “an act” with “Miss Hill.” This comes from a very bitter letter of Mc. in 1872 trying to convince Joseph III that his father was capable of practicing plural marriage. Mc. is an important but slippery source, sometimes repeating stories and sometimes putting his spin on his own recollections. In this case he is citing Fred. Williams, and who knows how the story changed from mouth to mouth. I cannot find a possible “Miss Hill” in Kirtland, nor is there any verification of this story. What Emma said to Mc. is problematical. This sounds like an expanded version of the known involvement of Joseph with Fanny Alger.

ME 66: McLellin’s story of sealing in the barn. The quotation here blends the Salt Lake Tribune reporter and the Mc. version in the above letter to Jos. III. Mc. admits he got the story by rumor and claims that Emma validated it. I want to know exactly what Emma said. The reporter clearly sensationalizes one step beyond Mc.’s letter. There are multiple sources on the Fanny Alger sealing, a term which her parents and brother used in Utah. The family would not have been faithful if they saw Fanny as exploited. We know exactly nothing about when Joseph discussed this with Emma. The Wyl book, preserving hand-me-down information, is a collection of the worst stories this journalist could find from dissidents in Salt Lake City in the later nineteenth century. Benjamin Johnson confirms the relationship with Fanny in the mid 1830’s, which he saw as the Prophet’s first attempt to live plural marriage, probably revealed as a doctrine during the 1831 translation of Genesis, as the opening of D&C 132 suggests.

ME 143: Your questions that are grouped around the Partridge sisters. After Kirtland, we know of no more sealings until three in 1841. In the July 12, 1843 revelation, dictated to be given to Emma, v. 65 says Joseph may take other wives without the consent of Emma if she will not give that consent, insomuch as he is obeying God’s commandment. To me this implies much discussion prior to that time. Orson Pratt (Journal of Discourses 13:193) said Emma “was embittered against Joseph, her husband, and at times fought against him with all her heart; and then again she would break down in her feelings, and humble herself before God and call upon his holy name, and would then lead forth ladies and place their hands in the hands of Joseph, and they were married to him according to the law of God.” This refers to Emma’s participation in the Partridge-Lawrence sealings during May, 1843, so Orson Pratt is saying there were many discussions prior to that time. When the revelation was given on July 12, it referred to Emma’s knowledge of prior sealings, probably all of them: “And let mine handmaid, Emma Smith, receive
all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph” (D&C 132:52). As you say, before this
time Emma seems not to know of the Partridge sisters, based on the Emily source (quoted on ME
143) that Joseph had the ceremony repeated to avoid antagonizing Emma. She became angry at
this, and D&C 132 was dictated in the midst of this situation, explaining at the end (v. 65) that
Joseph was authorized to go ahead if Emma was asked to consent but refused. To me this
explains to her why he had been sealed to the Partridge sisters and others at the time when she
opposed this principle. The revelation says again and again that God has directed Joseph, and he
is justified in what he has done. The message to her seems to be that Joseph was forced to marry
others without her permission because she made permission impossible. From the point of view
of divine foreknowledge, remember that Joseph was martyred one year from this revelation. If he
had waited indefinitely for Emma’s conversion, plural marriage would not have been instituted
during his lifetime.

ME 125: “This letter clearly indicates that Emma was unaware of Joseph’s marriage to Sarah
Ann.” More accurately, the letter indicates that Emma would not approve of Joseph visiting the
Whitneys, an attitude that might result from not knowing, or knowing that a sealing had taken
place. However, ME misses the stated content and the important context of this letter of Aug.
18, even after quoting the key sentence: “One thing I want to see you for, is to get the fulness of
my blessing sealed upon our heads.” In his recent book (350), Compton sees the point: “There
are evidently further ordinances that Smith wants to perform for the Whitneys. This is not just a
meeting of husband and plural wife; it is a meeting with Sarah’s family, with a religious aspect.”
This is reinforced by a document from Bishop Newel K. Whitney in LDS archives, noting “other
blessings now added” on Sunday, Aug. 21, 1842, with additional language that appears to be the
eternal sealing of Newel and Elizabeth Ann, parents of Sarah Ann. Newel also adds special
blessings the following Sunday that appear to be given by the Prophet. The letter is relevant for
your question regarding family ties in the case of sealings of women from the Young, Kimball,
and Whitney families. The Prophet expresses his great love for the parents and Sarah Ann, and all
ordinances of sealing pertain to the continuation of present friendships into the celestial
organization in eternity.

ME 99: “He [Joseph Smith] told some of these men to keep plural marriages a secret from their
first wives.” That was not the rule, and the example given is a bad case of folk legend posing as
history. The footnote is given as “Ida Blum, Nauvoo, Gateway to the West, p. 63.” I have the
library copy of this book in my hand, and it is written by a non-Mormon local historian at Nauvoo
who gathered all she could learn about the Mormons. However, it was published in 1974, and she
mixes fairly good information with some misinformation and humor, mostly not stating where she
got her data for the short sketch on polygamy. The story of Brigham Young’s wife is in the
unidentified category, simply starting with, “It is said.” No responsible historian will rely on a
vague story circulating a century and a half after the fact. These authors obviously worked it in
because it fit their view of polygamy as victimizing women. It isn’t even relevant to their point,
which is keeping “plural marriages a secret from their first wives.” In the story, Brigham is
hearing the principle for the first time, while Mary Ann accidentally listens to the conversation
through a window, but nothing is said between Brigham and Joseph on telling first wives.
ME 114-115: Emma’s comments that those teaching immorality pretended to quote Joseph. These comments are from 1842 Relief Society minutes, written in the midst of the exposure of John C. Bennett, who had falsely claimed to represent the Prophet in setting up temporary sexual affairs that were unrelated to sacred, eternal covenants made with priesthood sealing. The Prophet disassociated himself from Bennett in this same period and took church action against those who rationalized unmarried relationships.

ME 128-29: *Times and Seasons*’ refutation of Bennett’s claims. There are two problems discussed here, and the first contains the statements of the stake president of Nauvoo, William Marks. ME does not quite get the point of part of his refutation—he said there was “no order in the Church” that taught a “plurality of wives.” This is colored by John C. Bennett’s nationally circulated book of 1842, *History of the Saints*, in which Bennett claimed there were “three distinct orders” of women who were free with their sexual favors, and Bennett went on to fictionalize their official organizations and discipline. Marks was accurate in saying no organized, recognized order existed that taught plural marriage. The second problem is the denials that ME describes on pp. 128-29. Eliza Snow tells that she signed the printed statement in order to oppose Bennett’s claims about Mormon marriage (ME, 129). At that time the printed article on marriage (ME 128) appeared in the D&C—and one can note the technicality that it said a wife should have “but one husband,” while a husband “should have one wife.” I personally think the real issue is that the Church did not publicly teach plural marriage, nor did it require its members to practice it. Its regular system of marriage was that then printed in the D&C, though on a selective basis Joseph Smith was introducing a new one. But there had not yet been a modification of doctrine for the Church as a whole. Ebeneezer Robinson was active in Nauvoo and later left the Church, partly on the basis of polygamy. He later said he and his wife signed this document because they only heard rumors about plural marriage in 1842, but had no certain knowledge, which is my point—the Church as a church had not yet changed its system. Bennett’s book was verbal sewage, and this public statement has to be understood in this light—a general denial of promiscuity, not addressing perhaps four dozen sealings in a city of about 15,000.

ME 101: Joseph’s dialogue with Mary Elizabeth Lightner. The question on whether she would be a “traitor” is an issue often mentioned in the women’s recollections. Joseph was concerned that their discussions would be personal and not move to public accusation, which would have subjected him to legal action under the bigamy statute, if not lynching, and be a major incitement for violence against his people. The dialogue here shows that he gave Mary Elizabeth a choice to seek an answer and accept, or reject with no earthly consequence. She was not called a “traitor” for rejecting—that is not the context in any remembered conversation. “Salvation” is the term of ME 101—he did mean exaltation, but we frequently use “salvation” in sense of higher glory, even today. He offered her a celestial sealing and the rewards mentioned in D&C 132:19-20. Her husband was a non-member, not interested in joining, and could not offer her these blessings in eternity.

ME 111-12: The Nancy Rigdon proposal. There are few direct sources here, and they do not agree in details. John W. Rigdon, who was twelve when Joseph came to resolve the matter with
the family, says the proposal did take place, which fits evidence from more hostile sources. John came to Salt Lake City and joined the Church in 1905, showing that he was not disillusioned with the Prophet. You ask whether Joseph denied the letter and then admitted he wrote it. That depends on how the conversation went, and we don’t have transcripts. John made an affidavit to support the reality of plural marriage at Nauvoo, in which he said of the Prophet’s first visit to attempt a reconciliation: “The feelings manifested by our family on this occasion were anything but brotherly or sisterly, more especially on the part of Nancy, as she felt that she had been insulted” (Joseph Fielding Smith, Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1905 for 1st ed.], p. 84). Did Joseph open up the subject cautiously and then face Nancy’s verbal attack? Specifically what did he say that was considered a denial by the family—how broad was his language? The ME authors engage in a slight coverup themselves here, citing the letter of George W. Robinson (Rigdon’s son-in-law) from Brodie, but its real source is John C. Bennett, History of the Saints, on the whole the most untrustworthy book ever written about the Mormons. The Robinson letter does not say that Joseph denied writing the letter on God’s commands and happiness, but that the letter was discussed as convincing proof of Joseph’s marriage proposal. On that point Robinson says: “Smith attempted to deny it at first,” but after Nancy “told the facts with so much earnestness,” producing the letter, “he then and there acknowledged that every word of Miss Rigdon’s testimony was true” (Bennett, p.246). I come back to the question of whether Joseph was given much of a chance to speak before the Rigdon family emotions erupted. I do not see the proposal itself as immoral. Although Joseph’s pattern was to get prior approval of a family member, Nancy was 20, and Joseph possibly felt that her approval would be the key to persuading her rigid father of the revelation on plural marriage. As stated above, the younger brother apparently felt no hostility to the Prophet when he later joined the Church in Utah—and in Nauvoo the Prophet brought a reconciliation of feelings with Sidney Rigdon, who afterward spoke eloquently from the pulpit of his faith in the Prophet’s mission and the truth of the vision of glories they had received.

ME 144: The Lawrence estate. Of course there were many cases of bringing plural wives into a family because of their financial needs—the Twelve felt an obligation to do that for all of the wives of the Prophet, including the Lawrence sisters. Your question is whether Joseph exploited the Lawrence estate, as the bitter ex-Mormon William Law accused him of doing. I just spent an evening looking over an unpublished paper by Gordon Madsen, brother of Truman and a retired attorney who is studying various legal issues in the Prophet’s history. He found the estate papers in Illinois, and they show that William Law badly exaggerated the business transactions of the estate. Court papers show the assets were originally inventoried at a figure of about $3,800, with land and contracts, not “gold,” and Joseph made regular reports and paid out the required interest to the interested parties. Near the martyrdom he sought to substitute another trustee, but his management of the estate was approved by supervising judges. ME 144 does a hatchet job on quoting the History of the Church entry of June 3, 1843. The ME quotation is as follows: “accounts of the Lawrence estate were presented to the probate judge, to which he made objection.” That leaves a totally wrong impression, since the balance of the quotation adds: “when a new account was made out by William Clayton, which we made oath to, when the accounts were accepted by the probate judge” (History of the Church 5:418). I have checked the
Clayton journal on this, and the content is the same. The final fate of the estate is confused in the expulsion of the Mormons from Nauvoo, but Joseph Smith is shown to have managed it according to statutory requirements, and he did not charge the estate for the years that Maria and Sarah Lawrence lived in his home.

ME 159-60: “Joseph Smith’s physical abuse of others.” I would not use that label, inasmuch as the incident at the end of the paragraph (top of p. 160) is given full detail in the History of the Church and is a case of self-defense, which ME simply edits out. Vol. 5, p. 524 speaks of words between Joseph and tax-assessor Bailey, who had sold one of Joseph’s lots for taxes without giving him notice. Joseph said the man picked up a rock to throw at him, at which point Joseph attacked him. Two other cases are given, but they are the same incident, kicking Josiah Butterfield out of his house. I could give detail on the dispute, but Joseph had been called a liar in his house and would not tolerate the insult. ME 159 is fudging by saying Joseph’s “manner had begun to change” and “he now lost his temper more frequently.” This chatty conclusion is drawn from the two episodes, one on Mar. 28 and the other Aug. 1, 1843. Instead of a trend, there are two unrelated provocations. I’m enclosing the comments of President Joseph F. Smith on the Butterfield incident. President Smith was a little boy when he saw it happen, and he was not shocked as he thought about it later, partly because the male culture of a century ago used physical tactics far more often to settle disputes. When Joseph F. Smith was about 15, he used force to stop a schoolmaster from giving corporal punishment to his little sister. Joseph Smith fought neighbors who shot his dog, and a husband who had beaten his wife. On the other hand, we can document more cases of forbearance than personal attacks. Lucy Smith’s history tells how a man had pirated chapters of the Book of Mormon before its publication, and Joseph caught him in the act of using this type for his satirical paper. When Joseph demanded he stop this publication, the man became furious and sought a fight—and Joseph simply laughed and said he would go to law to enforce his copyright. William Law tells how he called Joseph names on a street in Nauvoo, telling the Prophet that polygamy was wrong—the Prophet said nothing and walked away, declining even a verbal confrontation with an enemy. The Savior used force to drive the money changers from the temple. Whether or not the Prophet was justified in any case is a matter between him and God. Several of the Nauvoo apostles said Joseph had human weaknesses, but they nevertheless had firm testimonies that he taught by the Holy Ghost. In fact, the Prophet’s discourses repeatedly say he is but an imperfect man trying to live worthy of his calling. Isn’t that true of every prophet who ever lived?

ME 185: Destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor. You say this seems a “control issue” in the book, but I’m not quite sure what you have in mind. I’ll simply say that Joseph Smith and those around him had a no-win situation. They could destroy the press and terminate the harmful public relations, with the result that happened—inflaming the northwest counties. Or they could allow the press to expose Mormon polygamy, and bring the same result. This was not simple censorship. Terminology of extermination and plans to march on Nauvoo (ME, 181-82) had been talked about for months in anti-Mormon meetings before the Expositor press was destroyed. The U.S. supreme court allowed dissent against the government to be curtailed in World War I on the ground of “clear and present danger,” reasoning that irresponsible speech, even if true, might
cause civil unrest. Elder Dallin Oaks did an article some years ago showing that legal sources of the time permitted governmental regulation of the press. My point is that the Prophet and his Nauvoo associates had a very hard choice, hoping to defuse an intense situation. That is why the Prophet sought to go west soon afterward, thinking that rational relations would return when emotions were not at a high pitch.

ME 176: Offering Emma a “substitute for him, by way of compensation for his neglect of her.” This page bounces between two irresponsible sources, as far as reconstructing Joseph Smith’s language. One is Joseph Jackson, who was a later and less talented John C. Bennett--after quoting him, ME 178 correctly calls him “the unprincipled Jackson.” The other source is William Law, writing over 40 years after he broke with Joseph Smith, at which time he considered his connections with Mormonism a nightmare and said he had tried to forget them. He probably is not quoting Joseph Smith very closely. The most accurate source on this point is D&C 132:51, which says Emma must “partake not of that which I commanded you to offer unto her.” The Clayton diary verifies that the talk of divorce, which is the most responsible interpretation of that verse--Emma was evidently offered that freedom to leave a situation she felt at times was intolerable. As far as Joseph’s “neglect of her,” my studies would show the opposite—that he personally waited on her at every major sickness and sought her comfort and listened to her feelings. You also quote the language of the Clayton journal given in ME 178, given on the wrong date in the footnote. Emma expressed her resentment in a threat--she could do the same if “he would indulge himself.” That is the most cynical view of what was going on, and that is how Emma saw the principle in her darkest moods. She had times of greater insight, as did the women whose experiences are xeroxed and enclosed.

ME 164: The poisoning accusation against Emma. The text and footnotes of ME gives medical testimony that Joseph could not have been poisoned and that he suffered from ulcers. This is wildly guessing--no one can say that his symptoms were or were not poisoning. The authors are on stronger ground admitting that Joseph did make the accusation, for Brigham Young was in Nauvoo and was prominent in the prayer circle of about two dozen church leaders and their wives, where ordinances were given in 1843-44 before the Nauvoo Temple was completed. This is the setting for Brigham’s 1866 recollection (ME 163), closing with the statement that there were “witnesses all around,” namely several other Nauvoo leaders that were sitting near the podium in the bowery when Brigham Young gave his blunt report about Emma. ME 165 quotes Joseph’s plural wife Desdemona Fullmer as troubled over a dream of Emma trying to poison her, and after she told Joseph, he agreed Emma was capable of that act. But the authors negligently suppress Desdemona’s additional comments in this same document, for she adds that she heard Emma had tried to poison the Prophet, and when she asked him, he said it was true. So the question comes down to whether Joseph was accurate in claiming Emma had tried to poison him. There is no precedent of his severely rebuking her in this manner, and never in a meeting where others were present. I would say he knew whether a foreign substance had entered his stomach, causing him to throw up, or whether this was a regular, chronic condition. I personally assume that Emma was overwrought and angry, and possibly planned a dose to cause terrible discomfort but not death.
ME 179: Accuracy of Marks’s version of Joseph recanting plural marriage. You focus on the Marks’ testimony, which I want to do also. But in passing, I’m commenting on a couple of other sources that are given on the same point. RLDS minutes are quoted for Hugh Herringshaw, claiming he heard Joseph tell the Twelve “they must abandon polygamy,” but they determined to ignore him and take their own course. I failed to find my notes on that source from my last trip to Independence, since I think I checked this out in RLDS minutes. However, the idea that Brigham ever ignored what the Prophet taught is on its face ridiculous. For a sample of his total commitment to the Prophet, see our current priesthood/Relief Society manual, top of p. 5. He felt that anyone who contradicted a doctrine the Prophet taught by revelation was cutting himself off from God. See also the quotations of ch. 47 of the same manual—what Joseph taught, Brigham attempted to apply with all his heart. If Joseph wanted to reverse plural marriage, all he had to do was tell Brigham and the project would have been started immediately. In his statements, Marks said Joseph tried to get him to move in this direction, but he dragged his feet. Who really loved Joseph and represented him correctly? The other source that claims a turnabout of the Prophet is “Joseph’s niece” (p. 179), which sounds a bit authoritative until you realize she was seven at the martyrdom, and her father (Samuel) lived 25 miles from Nauvoo and was not much in touch with Nauvoo. Mary B. Norman had a very hard life, was a bit neurotic, and repeated lots of rumors in her letters. It is interesting that the ME authors don’t believe these versions of the Prophet changing his mind on polygamy, a point which they make clear in their second edition. They first accepted a fraudulent letter that Hofmann invented—the letter has Joseph writing just before the martyrdom Joseph to Maria and Sarah Lawrence to travel to Cincinnati, where he would join them. The first edition of ME (p. 180) says this letter proves Joseph had not abandoned the “practice” of polygamy. Revising this sentence to avoid the fraudulent source, the second edition (p. 180) says Joseph did not abandon the practice of polygamy because he continued to teach it in private, “and to authorize new marriages.” The authors do not pursue the point with data—we could probably find authorized sealings quite close to the martyrdom. But their footnote here repeats the reference to Brigham Young’s unpublished discourse of Oct. 8, 1866, given spontaneously as part of the semi-annual conference, in which Brigham said (as quoted by ME), “I never knew that he [Joseph] denied the doctrine.” Brigham explained in this discourse how deeply convinced Joseph was of the doctrine, though the Prophet could not yet share it from the pulpit because of the dangers of igniting further persecution:

He often said to me when speaking upon polygamy: 'I shall die for it, and I would as leave die for it as not. It is the work of God, and he has revealed this principle, and it is not my business to control or dictate it—to say it shall or shall not be’”

(Elden J. Watson, Brigham Young Addresses, vol 5, Oct, 8, 1866, p. 1).

ME 179 says Joseph possibly reversed his position on the subject to cool down Marks’ opposition. Sometimes the Prophet did role-play to test the degree of commitment of some Saints, but the lines had been drawn in the high council meeting of Aug. 12, 1843, when Hyrum read D&C 132, which was accepted by most of these stake leaders but opposed by three, one of which was Marks, the stake president (ME 158 summarizes the meeting from affidavits). It makes no sense that Joseph had the conversation Marks records, for he claims Joseph gave him
blanket authority to hold excommunication hearings on all those sealed in plural marriage. This would have disrupted every leading family in Nauvoo, bringing resentment against the Prophet from his strongest supporters. And it would have created the very publicity about polygamy that church leaders were intensely trying to avoid. If Joseph wanted to turn the doctrine around, the safest method was individual, personal teaching, the same method that established the practice in the first place. However, I find no sign the Prophet ever thought of such a move—Marks either invented an impossible conversation or imagined the Prophet said what Marks wanted to hear. The strategy in the Marks conversation was two-pronged—the stake president would hold hearings and demand the termination of polygamy, while Joseph would “preach against it with all my might” (quotation of Marks’ 1853 letter, ME 179). Marks said this conversation took place June 1, 1844. But the theme of Joseph’s May discourses was different: “I never told you I was perfect, but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith 368). And this is the theme of the June 16 doctrinal discourse, insisting his revelations on the Godhead were strictly correct—Joseph directly attacked the former Mormons who had just published criticisms of his teachings on many Gods and multiple wives in the Nauvoo Expositor. My point is that the evidence shows the Prophet was not backing down on any doctrine or on the civil rights of the Latter-day Saints in his June discourses.

Marks further claimed (ME 179) that unless polygamy was terminated, “we shall have to leave the United States soon.” But instead of a terrible possibility, that was the Prophet’s plan, actively in place from February, 1844, when he instructed the Twelve to send out an exploring party to California or Oregon “and find a good location where we can remove after the temple is completed and build a city in a day and have a government of our own in a healthy climate.” This quotation from the Prophet’s official journal is transcribed in History of the Church 6:222. The strangeness of LDS beliefs had caused persecution in three states. Like religious exiles before him, the Prophet planned to take the restoration program to a place where, as he said, Mormons would be the first settlers and have freedom to practice their religion. Marks puts a contingent twist on the Prophet’s actual plans to terminate conflict not by changing doctrine, but by changing locations.

ME 167: Law expresses a true principle that one should obey God and not man, but that slogan can also be a rationalization for believing past revelations and not accepting further ones. Again, we are at the point of asking whether Joseph is a prophet, and whether his instructions from the Lord included D&C 132. If they did, then Law is obeying man, not God. As a strong believer in the Prophet’s full mission, I see Law’s comments as self-righteous. A major theme of Joseph’s 1843 discourses was criticism of those who “set up stakes,” who say to God, “Go only this far, and do not disturb our comfortable positions” (my paraphrase of language included with your xeroxes). Devout Mormons know that God challenges, pushes, and demands commitments that finally expand our minds, souls, and abilities. You go to the heart of the problem by asking where agency ends and blind obedience begins. Our leaders and scriptures echo Moroni 10:4 and practical Mormonism ever since. We are told to give the leaders the benefit of the doubt, but seek through prayer to verify their teachings and their callings for us. This is the testimony of the pioneers in polygamy in the enclosed xerox materials. This is the message of Brigham Young’s
impressive teachings in chapter 6 of our present study manual. We can know that our leaders are carrying out God’s program because it is verified through our prayers and intelligent obedience.

As you say, William Law, counselor to Joseph Smith, was being true to himself, but he was holding on to a static self, being true to the status quo. We all choose how far we go in God’s kingdom, and we may draw lines of not going further. Eternal progression means eternal learning and growth. Perhaps we’ll all be happy with our choices and the level of effort we’re willing to give to bring about the results we want. According to D&C 76, God does love us all and has places of glory for all but the totally rebellious. If Mormonism was just another easy religion, it would not have a lifelong impact even on people who leave it. Quite a bit does not ring true in William Law’s words about choosing the path of God’s holiness over the deception of Mormonism and polygamy. In the Nauvoo Expositor, he claimed the Book of Mormon was true. Later in life he wrote to a correspondent of the Salt Lake Tribune, saying “it is exceedingly painful to me to try to remember anything connected with Mormonism” (July 3, 1887). And when this reporter visited him, William’s lawyer-son said, “Nobody can cure him of this idea that Mormonism has ruined his career” (Tribune, July 31, 1887). If Law was truly a moral hero by leaving, why try to erase the whole thing from his mind? In my view, his conscience tore him apart because he knew part of it was true, and he had violently rejected the whole thing.

The other leading opponent of plural marriage at Nauvoo was William Marks, the Nauvoo stake president, who rejected polygamy but held on to the revelations he had known before that. By stopping at that point, he allowed the kingdom to pass him up, and he is something of a tragic figure trying to find where it went. The following summation of his career comes from two sources, the survey of Marks’ life from the older RLDS short history (Inez Smith Davis, The Story of the Church (7th ed., 1964), and from the survey of Marks’ life in the RLDS detailed history, co-edited in this period by Joseph Smith III (The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, vol. 3, (1896), pp. 721-726). At the first conference after the martyrdom, “a large majority” voted not to sustain Marks as Nauvoo stake president, “because he would not endorse the measures” of Brigham Young and the Twelve. At that time, and for a time, Marks supported Sidney Rigdon, “but soon became satisfied that his claims were erroneous, and renounced them.” From about 1846 William Marks was named as a counselor to James J. Strong, who claimed succession from Joseph Smith, though Strang’s publications warned Marks to be more faithful. Up to 1850 he was listed as counselor on Strangite documents. Then in the early 1850s Marks affiliated with Charles B. Thompson, who claimed revelation to revive Mormonism and select a gathering place. Next Marks expressed disillusionment in Thompson and banded with a small group, including ex-apostle John E. Page, “but this was of short duration.” While experimenting with this connection in 1855, he wrote a letter to James M. Adams, saying he was dropping back to teaching only the first four principles of the gospel because “I have been long wandering in darkness and following false prophets until I have become tiresome and weary.” After this he picked up on the pre-RLDS movement in 1859, and the next year helped set apart Joseph III as president of the Reorganization. Joseph III called him as a counselor in 1863, and Marks served in that office until his death nine years later. But his own ethics were compromised in these years. As discussed above, the statements Marks gave in 1853
and again in 1859 said he opposed plural marriage when it was introduced into the Church in Nauvoo, and Joseph confessed to Marks that he had been deceived in teaching it (ME 179). But for the last nine years of his life, Marks served as a counselor to Joseph III, saying nothing publicly on the subject while Joseph III made it a major teaching that his father never taught or practiced polygamy. Whether on D&C 132 or on other issues, Marks and David Whitmer are outstanding examples of the futility of saying Joseph Smith is a prophet while claiming the wisdom to select which of his revelations came from God.

In closing this long letter, I should apologize for developing such detail, but history is a matter of what happened--evidence, not debating skill should settle who Joseph Smith was and what he taught. You can see that I am outlining positions that I will take as I write up Dear Joseph, Dear Emma next calendar year, if the Lord will keep me alive and mentally acute in that time. Again, I apologize for keeping you waiting so long, but my own conscience demanded that I take time to go through a number of very fat files before summarizing what I have gathered. I feel more in control of my time and my subject now, should you want to ask further questions. My timetable on my Emma book is writing during 1999, with production no doubt taking the better part of the awesome next year, which I never thought of seeing. I’m planning a fairly complete rewrite of a manuscript that was in existence before the publication of ME. For my own record, since I don’t think I ever wrote it down, one of the authors consulted with me before starting major research, and I said candidly that I didn’t their book was needed because I was so far along on an Emma biography already. The answer was, “I think I have a point of view.” As I’ve explained, I hope to maintain a double perspective, probably borrowing another author’s subtitle (with credit): “The Biography of a Marriage.”

In fairness to any author, an accurate biography is a most difficult achievement, with the publisher limiting space, with sources that are self-serving and contradictory, and with the terrible personal pressure to use interesting anecdotes and impose your own subjective thinking on your subjects. One of the ME authors told me that she “knows how Emma thinks.” That is more disturbing than assuring.

Whether or not it works out in practice, my law school professors insisted that an attorney has a duty to his client and a duty to the truth, and I intend to be sensitive to both duties as I rewrite my manuscript on Joseph and Emma. What I love about the Prophet is his commitment, the same thing I love about the Savior in the Gospels. Their lives say to me that they were in touch with the Father because they taught and acted with an assurance explainable to me only by contact with the world beyond. My testimony that Joseph Smith is a Prophet does not bring the corollary that he did everything perfectly—he denied that connection time and again, while insisting that he struggled hard to righteous. I believe God gives us true principles and full agency to apply those principles, but we are responsible for the rough edges. But I also know that Christ and other moral models of mine, as Lincoln and Socrates, were slandered and brought to death by false charges. As President Hinckley reminds us, it is astounding that Joseph Smith’s name should go to the world--the intensity of controversy found in his life and in his biographies is evidence to me that the forces of evil targeted him. There is a difference between an evil person and a righteous
person falsely charged with evil, a difference captured in part by the Lord’s assurance to Joseph: “Thy people shall never be turned against thee by the testimony of traitors” (D&C 122:3). Those at Nauvoo who knew Joseph best stood by him most firmly. I discern a purity of soul in the power of his teachings, as written by the Nauvoo scribes and preserved in the various books on Joseph Smith’s discourses. I see his constant sacrifices for his people, including knowingly giving his life at the end to preserve Nauvoo from attack and plundering. My mind and heart testify that he is certainly a prophet sent from God.

Accept my prayers and good wishes in all of your studies and in your busy efforts to serve many.

Sincerely,
Dawn Comfort  
5432 Dalrymple Cres. NW 
Calgary, Ab T3A 1R3

Dear Sister Comfort,

Saturday morning I sent a long letter with some xeroxed materials, to try to answer your letter of last fall. I feel like Rip Van Winkel coming alive at last—I hope the materials still are still relevant to your concerns.

This short follow up adds that I reviewed my evidence, and there is one person that I definitely am subtracting from the list. She is married, older, was sealed to the Prophet in 1846, but that does not prove she was sealed to him while living. I had misjudged a piece of family information. Neither Bachman nor Compton think she was sealed to the Prophet during his lifetime. I had made my own judgment, but today I see proof is lacking.

So this changes percentages a little. Would you please delete the first two full paragraphs at the top of page 3, and substitute the following:

Resuming the statistical overview, I find 28 sealings that satisfy me historically—Bachman judged 31 and Compton 33. Those who go further rely on compounded hearsay. My percentages are based on the 28 cases I consider proved. There were 18 sealings to never-married women (64%) and 2 to single widows (7%), making over two-thirds (71%) of the sealings to women without husbands. This means the Prophet was sealed to 8 women who were married, and I read the evidence as 4 whose husbands were faithful to the Church, plus 4 whose husbands were non-members or non-faithful. The four faithful husbands came west and died believing Joseph Smith was a Prophet—one was an apostle.

A look at the above 28 women and 8 men tells me that we are dealing with a religious sealing for eternity, not primarily multiple sexual relationships. None of the women went public with any resentment or expose of Joseph Smith. Fanny Alger, evidently sealed to Joseph at Kirtland, married and stayed in the midwest, and Sarah Lawrence became bitter in in later life, perhaps losing her faith. However, the 26 other women remained loyal to the Church and revered the Prophet until their deaths. This tells me that religious conviction was the basis of every relationship.

I hope all is well with you and yours,
Scott Faulring

Re: Additional issues for Compton Review

Dear Scott,

There are two issues I think should be noted in addition to the epistle I already sent. The first is signaled by the front leaf of the dust jacket, speaking of the JS wives: “Most were claimed by the twelve apostles, who fathered their children but proved unreliable as husbands, resulting in more than one divorce.” The other issue is the implication of dishonesty of JS re the Lawrence estate.

The first issue is more than an exaggeration on the dust jacket, since Compton explains his average wife theory through his Emily Partridge summary (432). She is “a classic example of the central pattern examined in this book,” etc. C says a good deal about depression throughout his book, and Emily is not the norm but the extreme, fighting discouragement one day and being up the next. I don’t know whether BY “demanded that she support herself” or whether she often did not ask and then blamed him for not knowing her needs. Maybe there is some of both, but he definitely did not leave her without a home and resources. Calling him “one of the noblest of men” (431) after his death had basic truth, for Emily was highly intelligent.

As far as the cover comment, I find 15 JS wives sealed to apostles (I am not counting Durfee and Cleveland as proved wives). On any count, barely half come into this category, which is not “most.” Of this number, a few were sealed to apostles in Nauvoo but disregarded the relationship (e.g. Sylvia Sessions) or did not leave Nauvoo when sent for (e.g. Agnes Smith). But almost all the rest were supported in coming west, if they survived to come west, and were taken care of for life, unless they chose to live with relatives (e.g. Rhoda Richards, Martha McBride part of the time) or with a husband for time (e.g. Mary Elizabeth Lightner). I agree the Partridge sisters express more problems, though part of this is the apostasy of Amasa Lyman and the fact that Eliza left him then. But Brigham gets top marks for consistent support of Louisa Beaman, Zina Huntington, and Eliza Snow, with Heber the same for Sarah Ann Whitney, Lucy Walker, and Presendia Huntington, who moved a lot but was settled to her satisfaction where she wanted to be. As far as Sarah Lawrence, Heber supported her until here divorce.

In explaining that Heber favored his first wife, Compton adds: “He tried to treat his other wives well” (466), and on the next page quotes Lucy Walker as implicitly satisfied with the relationship: “The contract on the part of Mr. Kimball was that he would take care of me during
my lifetime.” C pictures wives living together in the early pioneering period, but providing individual homes afterward as the goal he worked toward and realized (468). There is a typescript statement of Lucy regarding one of his last lucid conversations with her. (From C, I gather that he spoke in Provo, not Salt Lake, before his final stroke, passing away at her home in Provo.) Heber said: “What can you tell Joseph when you meet him? Cannot you say that I have been kind to you as it was possible to be under the circumstances?” (Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball* [Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Ill. Press, 1981], p. 296.) Probably there is no point in going in the full detail above, but something to temper the slam at the Twelve should be said. C did not go this far, but his tone supports that negative comment.

On the Lawrence estate, it is discussed in the book on pp. 474-75 and pp. 478. It would take an article to correct C’s misconceptions, which is odd because he says Gordon Madsen has discovered new documents (475) and cites Madsen’s MHA paper in the notes. Gordon was good enough to send me a copy of the paper, and it is carefully done, giving his accurate legal judgments on the meaning of the accounts on file in the Illinois probate records and in Joseph Smith accounts. I’ve read it twice and am more impressed with its accuracy on second reading. Of course I’ll share, but I would like to get letter of to Madsen this morning, asking for his own critique of C. Perhaps we should say part of the following.

C says JS was appointed legal guardian of the estate, but “this guardian relationship is not fully understood” (475). M carefully explains the guardian was the financial manager of an estate left by a deceased parent, making periodic accounting to the probate court. Nothing is mysterious about his appointment and duties. C has a general idea that Josiah Butterfield and his new wife, the former Margaret Lawrence, had conflict with JS over her interest in the estate, but claiming the estate could be transferred to them for the benefit of the two girls misses the point of M’s paper—the will gave the widow the right to interest on 1/3 of the estate until all the children (about 5) reached majority. P. 478 speaks of Maria and Sarah, saying “there was apparently money due them.” The above will was locked in, however, and they could not get their share until their mother died. They could get support payments, which M shows by Joseph’s books that they were getting in terms of items and supplies they needed.

In the notes section, C gives the full Law comment on the estate (742-43), with some tempering points that M made in his paper. However, C allows the Law statement to stand on Joseph charging the estate $3,000 for support of Maria and Sarah. One of M’s main points is that the JS books show no such charge against the estate. C cites a document at BYU (p. 478) reciting a suit on Sept. 1, 1845 on behalf of the Lawrence children for $7,750. In his paper, M shows this action was not pursued, but then was refiled, and judgment was obtained against the JS estate for $4,275.88 on behalf of the Lawrence children at the date of May 22, 1846. This makes the BYU document meaningless. The point here is that the judgment is approximately the right figure in the estate accounting papers.

Some of the above may be too technical to explain in a review, but the following might be understood. Law accused JS of “fraudulently taking possession of the Lawrence estate” (478). M has shown that Law was wide of the mark on what happened. But by featuring Law, C seems to agree with part of his charges. On the other hand, M clearly shows that JS was legally
appointed, that he paid the proper interest to the widow each year from 1841 to 1844, that his accounts were in order, and that the estate never had the excessive amount that Law alleged, and that the estate assets were in real estate and notes, not the “English gold” that is in Law’s verbal indictment. M also shows that a guardian in that day did not have to segregate accounts and could use funds provided his assets equaled the amount he was managing for the estate. Had he lived, in which case his Nauvoo property would have retained its value, he would have preserved the assets in accountable form until the widow died and they could be distributed to the children. Law also signed as bondsman and claimed he paid the estate in full out of his Nauvoo assets. But M looked carefully and said no transfers from Law to the estate were made--and that the above legal action could not have been filed if the money had already been paid.

Thanks for your many hours of research on this, and writing up the final draft. If I can help in any way, let me know. I even raised the possibility that I could help by letting you write what you want without bothering with my views. I appreciate how hard you work, and under much pressure so many times.

In friendship,