

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL ORIGINS OF
THE MORMON HIERARCHY, 1832-1932:
A PROSOPOGRAPHICAL STUDY

by

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confusion & disorder out of the church, the President being supported by the prayr & united faith of the rest of the 12 and church no foul Spirit can mislead our head, this duty then involves then upon you Brother Young as head & revelater to receive revelations from Joseph for the government of the church the next in order is the Patriarch of the Church this Singular Personage stands as father to the whole church as a patriarch can be a prophet & revelater not to the Church as government but to the Church as his children in Patriarchal Blessings upon their heads . . .²²

Young acknowledged William Smith's right to be the Presiding Patriarch at the October conference of the church in 1844, but neither on that occasion nor during the conference of April, 1845, was Smith's name voted upon as the new Presiding Patriarch.²³ The obvious reason for this was Smith's absence from Nauvoo, while he visited branches of the church in the eastern states from April, 1844, to May, 1845. Less obvious, but perhaps a more compelling reason for the delay, was the fact that during William Smith's sojourn in the eastern states, he was entering into and performing plural marriages.²⁴ Polygamy was risky enough in Nauvoo, and the apostles took a dim view of jeopardizing the church by introducing the practice in the scattered settlements of the church.²⁵ Samuel Brannan had been disfellowshipped from the church by the apostles in April, 1845, because he had entered into a polygamous marriage in New York. On May 24, 1845, Brannan and William Smith met with the rest of the apostles. Smith had performed the plural marriage for Brannan and each of them achieved a reconciliation with the Quorum of the Twelve. Brannan was reinstated and Smith was ordained Presiding Patriarch to the church.²⁶

Within days after his ordination, however, William Smith started making expansive claims about his powers as Presiding