Brian Hales' *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History*
Vol. 1

Comments on 1 January 2009 draft #5
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Brian:

Thank you for the opportunity to read through this manuscript, it was a delight, and very informative. Your research has clearly been extensive, and the compilation of so many important primary sources on this topic in one place provides a great service. Please take my comments below as you will. I have not made any attempts to sugar-coat them, but please know that they are intended only in a spirit of good will. The few comments below reference page numbers in draft 5 of your work. My apologies if this was not the most convenient or clear way to mark their places.

Regards,
Alex

P.S. I have not take the time to alter these comments after we met on 23 April, so please forgive all of the redundancy (particularly dealing with page 14, which section you mentioned you might remove altogether).

Page 6, first partial paragraph, phrase: “no journal entries address the practice.” If by “address” you mean “describe,” this is probably true. If by “address” you mean “refer to,” or “acknowledge,” or “imply,” this is not true. There are entries in Joseph’s own Nauvoo journal that specifically relate to plural marriage, including one of his own. Just finesse

Page 7, first partial paragraph, last sentence (dealing with Appendix C): This also relates to a problem with your three source-notes at the top of Appendix C itself. Saying that “three sources for William Clayton’s journal can be found” is not accurate. Saying that Appendix C “contains all of his pertinent diary entries” is potentially inaccurate. I recognize that there are access issues with the original manuscripts of his journals, but they can certainly be “found.” And there are numerous Nauvoo journal entries in them that do not appear in any of the three published sources you cite for Appendix C (which largely copy from each other and are based on the same source texts). There are possibly journal entries not published in those works, from Clayton’s journal, that deal with plural marriage. At the very least, the wording should be more precise in both locations.

Page 13, second full paragraph, last sentence: “Interestingly, justices of the peace were never authorized to perform any plural marriages.” This may be accurate, but it might be helpful to talk
to Gordon Madsen and get his take on this. My (possibly wrong) impression is that he disagrees with this in regards to Nauvoo.

Page 14, chart (and attending text): Categorizing JS as either a “prophet-restorer” or a “womanizer,” and sources that deal with plural marriage as supporting one or the other of these is so simple and artificial as to be unhelpful at best and comes across as informal.

Page 14, last paragraph, comments about Brodie: “In fact, most of Joseph’s closest followers were too perceptive to be easily deceived and too devout to be co-conspirators. Readers may wonder: ‘Is it possible that Brodie and other modern authors today possess sensitivities that are so much keener than those of early Latter-day Saints, that these writers can discern immoral behaviors Joseph Smith’s friends and followers could not detect?’” While your analysis is compelling, this does not correspond comfortably with the note you just made about how little pro-JS information was available at the time. How many of Joseph’s “friends and followers” knew anything at all about the situation at this time?

Page 14, fn 65 (D&C quotation). The footnote provides only a scriptural citation, which does not enlighten your text. Not only informal, but not necessary. Please consider deleting this note.

Page 17, first partial paragraph, last sentence: “The described impropriety would have occurred at least six years earlier than the published report.” This requires explanation. There is no footnote support, and you have not (unless I am missing it) provided a rationale in the previous or following paragraphs.

Page 18, footnotes 79 and 80 (email correspondence with Harper and Nelson): I understand that sources are limited, and that these are both fine scholars, but I would avoid quoting and citing email correspondence if at all possible. Maybe it cannot be avoided here, though both of these quotations are quite speculative in nature anyway.

Page 19, first paragraph (Bushman quote): No need for this. It just repeats what you have already said. Either you or Bushman should be sufficient.

Page 19, third paragraph, second sentence: “He recalled . . .” Please identify “He”. You have said “Joseph Smith’s non-Mormon attorney to Nauvoo,” but this doesn’t exactly narrow it down. Additionally, your Times and Seasons citation for this quote in the footnote doesn’t identify the subject.

Page 19, fourth paragraph (beginning “Available historical”): Please consider deleting this sentence.

Page 24, first two paragraphs: Continue the quotation by Mark Staker through the block quote and then cite Staker, along with a note that Staker is quoting from XXX. This will retain proper attribution while still informing the reader of the primary source.

Page 24, fourth paragraph and footnote 117, dealing with Rigdon being the primary target. I would hesitate to take anything in Van Wagoner’s biography at face value, particularly on a
point as crucial as this. If you choose to retain it, please check his citations and verify that you believe there is compelling evidence.

Page 25, Vienna Jacques section, paragraph beginning “Research suggests that . . .” This paragraph and the following are extremely unconvincing to me. First, what “research” is suggesting this? You must allow the reader to judge. Second, you write: “It is probably that the transcriber copying the original hand-written statement misread “Nancy” as “Warner.” In any normal situation, this would be extremely improbable. Nothing about these two words would lead them to be possibly mistaken from each other normally—simply not the usual transcription errors or handwriting hiccups. Is there some reason why this is an exceptional case? Third, your argument in the next paragraph is based on this seemingly weak case—that you’ve correctly identified Nancy Alexander. If you feel very strongly about these two paragraphs, it may be worth rewording your argument. As it stands now, I remain wholly unconvinced.

Page 44, first full paragraph: Quoting Compton as saying the Mosiah Hancock narrative is “generally reliable” does not help. Your own statement earlier in the paragraph that the source is “not without its problems” is even an understatement. Mosiah Hancock’s seems to be in many instances entirely fictitious—at least, that’s the only way that I can make sense of some of his tall tales.

Page 45, entirety (quoting transcription by Don Bradley of Jenson’s notes from Eliza Snow, and Bradley’s commentary): With full appreciation for Bradley’s work transcribing all of these Jenson notes, his commentary strays into untenable assertions regularly. While acknowledging his substantial work throughout your volume is both generous and just, I would recommend against quoting his commentary on the Eliza Snow, Fanny Alger notes. “Eliza R. Snow’s testimony” and “she expressed . . .” should raise huge flags. This approaches irresponsible source interpretation, and incorporating this commentary in your book will only weaken your argument and turn off antagonists. The reality is that internal evidence from this document is insufficient to tell us how much of what we are reading is Eliza and how much is Andrew, and any intellectual attribution that we may want to make is purely speculative. For what it is worth, I believe that Fanny was a plural wife, and she would make it onto the list if I were to compile one. That being said, this source and the Mosiah Hancock one on the previous page need to be very carefully handled. With Fanny, in my mind, the greatest strength of the argument that she was a plural wife is not any one particular source, but rather the preponderance of evidence (though...Eliza’s list is the strongest source to me).

Page 125, chart based on Compton’s research identifying 8 additional wives during the first half of 1842: Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde’s marriage is here given by Compton as April 1842. You include a note about her, but no note regarding the controversy in her marriage date. Compton is getting April 1842 from Thomas Bullock’s list written on one of the blank pages at the back of the second of four small books Willard Richards used to record Joseph’s journal in between Dec 1842 and June 1844. Marinda’s own affidavit in the Joseph F. Smith collection, however, gives May 1843 as the time of the marriage. An early 1842 marriage date helps explain Orson’s and Oliver Olney’s testimonies that Marinda joined Joseph in explaining the doctrine of plural marriage to Nancy Rigdon, but anticipate the valid rebuttal that Marinda is a better source for her
own marriage date than Bullock. Similarly, the chart on page 151 does not question the Marinda Johnson marriage date.

Page 222, Intro paragraph: First, your bracketed note “published in November 1842” may not be accurate. Andrew Smith, whose research in his Bennett bio is generally flawless, says “late October.” Unless you have compelling evidence for a November date, I would change to October (which makes more sense given surrounding context anyway). Either way, a late October or November publication of Bennett’s History hardly explains a gap in new marriages for six months, half of which predate the book’s publication anyway. This is a nitpick, as Bennett’s Sang Journal articles and the Bennett situation at large may very well have been part of the drop in marriages, but the precision may help. Additionally, by the time Bennett’s book appears in late fall 1842, there is a far more simple and plausible explanation for a lack of new marriages. Joseph was in hiding from arrest attempts both in and out of the city for much of the year from 8 August onward. Keeping in contact even with those closest to him was problematic, let alone any attempts to court new wives.

Page 222, 223, footnotes 1194 (beginning “William D. Morain”) and 1205 (beginning “Quoting Wilhelm”): The information contained in both of these footnotes is false. I cannot really understand the need to include them, even if you make it clear that you don’t believe the information in them (which you do make clear). If you feel you must include these sources for the sake of completeness of the source-record you are compiling, it might be helpful to put your disclaimer at the beginning of the notes. Having said that, I still don’t understand using these sources. They do not help you argument, they are incorrect, and there are many more reputable sources dealing with the John C. Bennett situation that you do not cite. If you are being selective anyway, what rationale explains including these?

Page 224, second and third paragraphs: Forgive me, but I disagree with everything in these paragraphs. First, Bennett’s position did make him part of the “formal” First Presidency (and D&C 107:22 does not preclude that). He was sustained as such, and for what it’s worth, the church, even today, officially recognizes Bennett as a past member of the First Presidency. Second, Bennett’s position was not one of supporting Rigdon, but rather temporarily replacing him. Third, I have found no evidence (even if Rigdon was ordained on 1 June) that Bennett’s position lasted only two months. In fact, all evidence is to the contrary. Fourth, with respect to Andrew Smith’s fine work, the statement that Bennett was “asked to do little or nothing in an ecclesiastical role” is entirely unsustainable. Again, the weight of evidence is to the contrary.

Page 225, final paragraph (beginning “The fact that Bennett”): Your reasoning is based on the false dichotomy that if Bennett exploited a public teaching by JS he could not have heard the same instruction in private. In fact, Bennett’s History of the Saints gives evidence that Bennett likely was privilege to private instruction on this by JS (and not just taking Bennett’s statements to that effect at face value).

Page 232, paragraph with Lawrence Foster’s suggestion that Sarah possibly made advances to Joseph. Unlikely.
Page 234, first full paragraph: Bennett was disfellowshipped on 11 May 1842, not 25 May. Correct dating of the disfellowship becomes significant in properly understanding the Bennett chronology.

Page 234: It is unfair of me to criticize something that you didn’t choose to include in your book, but the absence here becomes a little too shocking. On page 225 you write of Joseph, earlier in 1841, evidently choosing “patience and mercy” in regards to Bennett’s shortcomings. This is certainly true, but eventually Joseph may have gone to the other extreme with the Extra printed in the T&S office. He was, in fact, criticized by at-the-time by non-member friend James Arlington Bennet for exposing John C. Bennett to fully and publicly. Bennett’s escalation in anti-Mormon/anti-Joseph writings might likely have been in part a reaction.

Page 239, first sentence: Again, change publication date of Bennett’s book from November to October unless you have more compelling evidence than the advertisement in the Sang Journal that you cite in the footnote.

Page 240, chart of events in Bennett’s life: Oddly, you provide October for the month of Bennett’s book publication here.

Pages 240-241, quotation of Flanders: Flanders’ Nauvoo is a truly superb work, and one of my favorites, but this speculative passage is not helpful. You don’t state whether you agree or disagree with Flanders, leaving the reader to imply that you do. I find it extremely improbable that Bennett “stumbled onto a developing religious principle” and developed his own spiritual wifery ideas in isolation from Joseph’s plural marriage teachings. This is another instance where the far simpler theory is more likely the right one.

Page 241: There is a simple response to why Joseph may have shared some of the principle of plural marriage with Bennett before sharing it with his brother Hyrum. You are not giving weight to your opposition by ignoring it. I know that you would not argue that Hyrum, as Joseph’s “own brother, Associate Church President and Church Patriarch” learned of plural marriage before anyone else...

Page 243, third full paragraph: The Ehat quote is not compelling.

Page 243, first paragraph in the section titled “Evidence Indicates John C. Bennett Knew Nothing about Eternal Marriage”: The two Andrew Smith quotes in the first paragraph immediately raise flags for the reader. They do nothing to support your claim that Bennett knew nothing about eternal marriage. No evidence that Joseph sanctioned Bennett’s affairs or that Bennett was officially involved in Nauvoo plural marriage is a far stretch from “knew nothing about eternal marriage.” They are entirely unrelated statements. While I disagree with the thesis of this section, I should at least say that your second and third paragraphs are much more compelling than the first. Recommendation: delete, or at least move. The Smith quotes are indeed good ones, just not helpful in this section.

Pages 243-245: The direction of this while section comes across as apologetic. I don’t know that any of your readers, even your worst critics, would disagree with you that Bennett’s philandering
was an entirely different animal than Joseph’s plural marriage. It seems like a long argument against a straw man. In particular, the chart on page 245 seems unnecessary and argumentative. Also, you may want to avoid wording like “Bennett was essentially clueless regarding Joseph . . .” The informal language adds to the feeling that you’re itching for a fight. Your argument will appear stronger if it does not seem like you are anticipating a rebuttal at every turn.

Pages 246-247, conclusion: Regarding your second point/paragraph, please remember that the “media nightmare for Church leaders” was partially, and maybe even largely, their own doing. Also, you might be careful to describe as a “media nightmare” publicity which undoubtedly led to some interest and possibly even conversions. The old “all publicity is good publicity” idea. Regarding your third point, again, I would argue that the slow-down in plural marriage during the second half of 1842 had little to do directly with John C. Bennett’s publications. Indirectly, you could argue that John C. Bennett was entirely responsible for Joseph’s situation during the second half of 1842—but that’s another (long) story. Also, please note the inconsistency between dubbing the expansion of celestial marriage as “secret” in the final paragraph on page 246, but then listing “secret” as a feature of Bennett’s spiritual wifery and not of Joseph’s plural marriage in your chart on the previous page. Finally, again note the date of Bennett’s book publication here. I keep mentioning this not to “flog a dead horse”, but to identify the locations where I see it come up in case you choose to go back through and catch them all.

Chapter 18 (John C. Bennett) general comments:
A source comment: I note that in the one hundred and fifty-one footnotes to this chapter, Bennett’s letters to the Sangamo Journal are cited only twice, both in passing (a third reference to the paper is just an advertisement), and Joseph’s own Nauvoo journals are not cited, quoted, or mentioned once. These are arguably the two most important sources for understanding the relationship between Bennett and Joseph during 1842. Bennett’s book, for instance, significant as it is, pales in comparison to the series of letters in terms of effect on the citizens of Nauvoo generally.
You probably want to revisit this chapter.

I apologize, but I have not thoroughly reviewed the subsequent chapters.