

Polygamy

by Kathryn Daynes

[*Editor's note:* This is a transcription of a graphics-rich presentation. This transcript does not include slides from the presentation, and includes some artifacts that are natural to verbal presentations.]

It's with some trepidation when I start to talk about polygamy. Everyone 'knows' about polygamy right? (Laughter) So you know that's one of the problems that I have is that everyone 'knows' something, everyone has a story to tell and every time I've talked about plural marriage one of the things that I found is, when I have talked about plural marriage as a part of society and larger trends and patterns, that everybody has their one story that they want to tell and that is what they know about plural marriage.

For example, we have those people who are very selfless, people like Ruth Paige Rogers who had no children of her own but contributed what she earned to the support of all of her husband's family, she herself taught the children of the other wife; just very selfless.

And then I always have somebody who tells me another story, something like Emma Lynette Richardson who, in her two plural marriages, was apparently so unhappy she didn't really talk about them when she came to writing her autobiography and said (inaudible) just so you know that my first children were legitimate and just passed over, didn't want to talk about those. She's a great sorrow to me.

And then there are people like the elder from Iron County who really felt that he ought to go into plural marriage and with some trepidation asked his wife, 'Don't you think we really ought to...I've had a revelation that I am now supposed to take a plural wife.' And she wasn't so sure about this and she said, 'Well let me think about it.' The next morning she comes to her husband, she says, 'Hmm, I too have had a revelation and it is to shoot any plural wife you bring in the door.' (Laughter)

So with those kinds of individual stories, there are all these kinds of stories that we have.

But what I want to talk today about is not so much these individual stories except as they illustrate to us some patterns--some larger patterns in the society--talking about a marriage system: the rules and practices to govern, establish and continue and dissolve marriages. Today, in the interest of time, I'm going to talk mainly about establishing marriages and the practices that went along with those.

Everybody's heard about plural marriage in Nauvoo and certainly it was established there. The doctrines were articulated there. But I call it protopolygamy. Proto means 'ancestral to.' It's not really the kind of plural marriage that we know in Utah. After all, when you look at a sampling, the wives don't take their husbands names in Nauvoo; they didn't live with their husbands or sometimes if they did, they moved out to keep the secrecy of their marriage and they weren't known in the community as husband and wife. So by

everything we know about marriage, all the markers of marriage, these are not marriages in Nauvoo. They're 'ancestral to' what we see in Utah.

Plural marriage was announced in 1852 by Orson Pratt, but before it was announced it was openly practiced in Utah and so I'm going to be talking about all of Utah even before 1852.

Gentiles who came into Salt Lake before this time talked about there being plural marriage; it was openly practiced. So in spite of this late announcement, (inaudible) plural marriage was practiced before then.

Stresses and Strains

What thing we need to be aware of as we talk about this is just how great were the stresses and strains that the Latter-day Saint society was going through in these early years of practice.

Just think of what happened as they moved from Nauvoo; you're taking an entire society and moving it from one location to another. Under the best of circumstances that has to be difficult, and the circumstances the Saints had were hardly the best of circumstances.

Beyond that this was a society that had to incorporate into--was privileged to incorporate into--itself thousands of immigrants that are coming. So as it's trying to establish itself it is also incorporating into itself these people, some of whom may have a different language, different customs and so you have a society that is building itself in these early years.

Moving to Utah

A number of specific crises took place in the late 1840s and 1850s that characterized and set apart this early period of pioneering in Utah. Just leaving Nauvoo, for example--just think about it, here they are crossing the ice, certainly in the cold they had to endure that, but leaving their possessions, their houses, everything behind that they had built.

Crossing Iowa. This depicts the quails coming into the "Poor Camp" some people found that they didn't have quite the means in order to move on but even those people who did it was very difficult--the mud of Iowa was just incredible.

A rule of thumb in moving in early America was to move in the late winter. That way it wasn't too cold but the ground was still frozen so that you can skim across the top of it. Once the spring rains came, the roads in early America just (inaudible) and there weren't roads across Iowa anyway and so you just kind of sank in mud and people who had saved some possessions, kind of like one of John Taylor's wives who--a musician--wanted to bring her piano and they just got not very far into Iowa and guess what, you know, the wagon just sinks down into that mud and that piano had to go. So just getting across Iowa was no small thing.