Esther Dutcher – Joseph Smith's Thirty-Fourth Plural Wife?

May 5, 2009
by Brian C. Hales

It appears that Michael Marquardt may have identified a thirty-fourth plural sealing for Joseph Smith. He notified me of a letter sent by Daniel H. Wells to Joseph F. Smith dated June 25, 1888, which speaks of Albert Smith, whose wife, Esther Dutcher, died in 1856. The last few lines of the second page and the first few lines of the third page of the letter read:

> [page 2]
> …he [Albert Smith] also much afflicted with the
> loss of his first wife. It seems that she was
> sealed to Joseph the Prophet in the days of
> Nauvoo, though she still remained his wife,
> and afterwards nearly broke his heart by
> telling him of it, and expressing her intention
> [page 3]
> of adhering to that relationship. He however got
> to feeling better over it, and acting for Joseph, had
> her sealed to him, and to himself for time.

The rest of the third page is darkened on the *Selected Collections* version (MS1325_16_9_6.jpg). I pulled page four (blank) into Photoshop and flipped it left-to-right and changed the contrast. There was enough bleed-through to read the following (with Michael Marquardt's help):

> [page 3] now
> comes the saddest part of the story. It transpired
> that not long before her death, she committed
> adultery, the old gentleman is sadly grieved over
> this, and desires to know what can be done for her,
> he considers that she was destroyed in the flesh for
> her crime, and hopes that his and her daughter,
> may be permitted to be baptized for her, and have
> her former Charges considered as finished as she
> was an er[r]ing though not a bad woman and still
> be saved with Joseph as Josephs wife, all of which
> is herewith submitted, and hope that you will
> send me your conclusion after consulting with
> Bro. Woodruff, in which case it will not be
> necessary for me to write to him in relation to this case.

While additional research needs to be performed, it appears the sealing was for "eternity" only, as there is no indication that she was actually the "wife" of the Prophet in Nauvoo. Also, Albert was apparently unaware of the sealing when it occurred.

The only author to list Esther Dutcher Smith as a plural wife of Joseph Smith was Stanley Ivins in his private notes. She is wife number 56 with the note: "Esther Dutcher Smith, wife of Albert Smith. Born in Cherry Valley, New York, February 15, 1811. She married Albert Smith in 1826. (Pion. & Prom. Men of Utah, p. 1165). On Oct. 10, 1851 she was sealed to Joseph Smith, her husband standing proxy for the prophet. She died in Manti, Utah, Sept. 17, 1856."[1] This sealing was performed by Brigham Young in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City.[2] Despite Ivin's inclusion of Dutcher, it is unlikely that he knew of a sealing in Nauvoo. Ivin's list includes many women who were sealed vicariously after the martyrdom, which is the only sealing reference that he mentioned for Esther..

[1] Stanley S. Ivins collection, USHS, bx 12, fd 1, no. 56.
[2] Thomas Milton Tinney, *The Royal Family of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.* Salt Lake City: Tinney-Greene Family Organization, 1973, 13.

Rec'd June 1888
Answered July 4 - "

Maui Temple, 25th June 1888.

Elder Joseph F. Smith,

Dear Brother,

I was more than pleased the other day when informed by Bro. Woodruffs letter of your return, and hope that in the revolutions of the near future that you may fetch up somewhere in this vicinity. I apprehend that you also were glad in once more beholding our Mountain home, and the faces of your friends and loved ones at home, Changes also, as you are aware have taken place with me since you left, and so as you see have landed me up here in Maui, at work as of yore when you and I spent so many happy hours and days in laboring in the Endowment House, hours and days never to be forgotten, Bless that old Temple, though not aspiring to the dignity of a Temple, yet within its humble walls and lowly and spireless roof, many a soul was made happy and made to rejoice in the deliverances wrought out for them through the Ordinances of the House of God, but now the facilities for this Great work are enlarged and I am correspondingly

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happy that it has fallen to my lot to again participate in this Glorious work of the redemption of the dead, I write you now however in regard to a matter of business, a brother Albert Smith, who with his son Azariah Smith were in the Mormon Battallion, and are now living here in Manti, desires to be adopted into the family of Father Joseph Smith the Patriarch, As there was no one here representing your family, I told him that I would write to you in relation to this matter, Brother Smith is quite aged and feeble, but an old and staunch member, and was acquainted with the Patriarch, and has a large Genealogy, some 400 or 500 names on his list I believe, and is now with his son engaged in getting them baptized for and endowed, I trust that you will arrange for this adoption, as it is a matter that has long lain near his heart, and will give him much joy, he is also much afflicted with the loss of his first wife, It seems that she was sealed to Joseph the Prophet in the days of Nauvoo, though she still remained his wife, and afterwards nearly broke his heart by telling him of it, and expressing her intention

of adhering to that relationship. She however got to feeling better over it, and acting for Joseph, had her sealed to him, and to himself for time, [redacted]

[redacted]

hoping and praying the Lord will continue to bless and preserve you and Bro Woodruff + Bro Cannon to whom I wish to be kindly remembered, as all the other brethren of the Quorum, I remain most cordially your friend and brother in the Gospel of Christ.

Daniel H Wells

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