

Secret Prayers:  
Olive Grey Frost Smith  
and Mary Ann Frost Stearns Pratt (Smith, posth.)

On April 12, 1843, the apostle Parley P. Pratt, his wife Mary Ann, and his sister-in-law, Olive Frost, returned to Nauvoo after a long missionary stay in England. With them were the Pratts' five children, including a new daughter who had been recently born on the steamship sailing up the Mississippi. The Pratts were given a royal welcome when their steamship, the *Maid of Iowa*, docked in Nauvoo. A large crowd awaited them on the wharf, among them Joseph Smith. Willard Richards wrote that Joseph was the first to board the steamer, and he "appeared Melted in tenderness when he met Sister Pratt...and her little daughter only 3 or 4 days old." Mary Ann Stearns Winters, Mary Ann's oldest daughter, remembers that the prophet took Parley Jr. and Nathan, six and four, upon his knees. Parley Sr. remarked, "We took away three children and have brought back five."

Joseph answered, "Well, well, Brother Parley, you have returned bringing your sheaves with you." Tears streamed down his face, and the crowd surrounding the Pratts became hushed.

Parley replied, "Why, Brother Smith, if you feel so bad about our coming home, I guess we will have to go back again."

The surrounding group erupted into laughter. "This broke the spell," writes Winters, "smiles returned, and joy unbounded filled every heart."

Though Joseph had married some twenty women by the time Olive, Parley and Mary Ann arrived in Nauvoo, he had not yet taught them the principles of plural marriage, for they had been in England when he had begun introducing polygamy in earnest. But Parley received his first hint of these new doctrines when he and a number of other Nauvoo residents (among them Joseph Smith) took a pleasure cruise on the *Maid of Iowa* a month later. At one point, Joseph Smith and Parley Pratt leaned against the railing, looked out over the grey expanse of the Mississippi, and talked of things of the kingdom. Mary Ann Pratt and Olive Frost had wandered off together, perhaps surrounded by a group of little Pratts.

Joseph pointed to the two sisters and remarked, "It is the will of the Lord that those two sisters should never be parted," meaning, Parley understood, that they should both belong to one man.

Parley, certainly, was taken aback by this pronouncement. Then, perhaps, the conversation shifted to

questions on [the] principle I told them I did not know much and I rather they would go to those that had authority to teach." But Parley "seamed unwilling to wate." She however told him that "these were sacred things and he better not make a move until he got more instruction."

On June 30, Joseph returned to Nauvoo; according to Ehat's reconstruction of these events, he was upset when he discovered that Mary Ann had been sealed to Parley (perhaps because he felt that Mary Ann and Olive were to be sealed to the same man--himself, in Ehat's reconstruction.) The eternal marriage of Parley and Mary Ann was then annulled, in Ehat's view, though this is speculative. We know that Joseph once annulled a marriage that Hyrum performed; but we do not know if this is the marriage referred to. On July 24, 1843, according to Parley's family record, he married Elizabeth Brotherton as his first plural wife.

However, we are now faced with a blunt historical discrepancy, for on January 21, 1844, Joseph Smith suggested that Mary Ann had been sealed for eternity to Nathan Stearns, not to Parley, and that Parley had not been sealed to anyone for eternity. Wilford Woodruff wrote, on that date,

Joseph said Concerning Parley P. Pratt that He had no wife sealed to him for Eternity and asked if their was any harm for him to have another wife for time & Eternity as He would want a wife in the Resurrection or els his glory would be Cliped. Many arguments He used upon this subject which were rational & consistant. ~~Br Joseph said now what will we do with Elder P P Pratt? He has no wife sealed to him for Eternity. He has one living wife but she had a former Husband and did not wish to be sealed to Parley for Eternity. Now is it not right for Parley to have another wife that can [blank]?"~~

According to all other historical records, of course, Parley had already been married to three women for eternity. This passage remains a complete puzzle.

Soon after this, Mary Ann helped Pratt propose to a plural wife. On August 20, 1843, William Clayton wrote in his journal, "I also had a talk with M[ary] Aspen who is in trouble. P P. P [Pratt] has through his wife made proposals to her but she is dissatisfied. Sister P [Pratt] is obstinate. When P [Parley] whent away Sister P. cautioned A. against me and said the Twelve would have more glory than me &c. I tried to comfort her and told her what her privilege was." Thus Mary Ann actually acted as Parley's

messenger in relaying a proposal to Mary Aspen; her argument is purely hierarchical, showing that women were marrying men because of their high priesthood status. The woman linked to a man higher in the church hierarchy will have greater glory in the hereafter than a woman married to a lower level leader, or a non-leader.

One is left to wonder what Joseph's statement that Mary Ann and Olive should be married to the same husband meant. Andrew Ehat suggests that Joseph was considering marrying both women. If we follow this interpretation, it is the only hint of evidence that Joseph married Mary Ann in his lifetime. However, the statement by Joseph on January 21, 1844, suggests that Mary Ann was sealed for eternity to her first husband, Nathan Stearns. Other evidence suggests that she was sealed to Parley for eternity. Possibly Joseph married Olive, and was considering marrying Mary Ann polyandrously, but dropped the idea. Then Mary Ann was sealed to Stearns, or Parley, for eternity. This seems the likeliest explanation.

## XII.

Also in the summer of 1843, toward the end of June, Aaron and Susannah Frost, along with two more Frost sisters, Sophronia and Huldah, arrived in Nauvoo. This must have been a joyful reunion for both Olive and Mary Ann. Soon the Pratt store and residence was ready, a fine large brick structure with white stone trimmings on twenty-seven windows; four-foot pillars, supporting a stone cornice, marked the front of the store.

On July 29, 1843, Olive and Mary Ann called on Patty Sessions; Olive now claimed her as a sister-wife. In 1843, Olive joined the Nauvoo Female Relief Society, and was an active participant in it. Mary Ann wrote, "She was very zealous in soliciting aid for and in visiting those who were needy and in distress. Her heart was always tender towards suffering of every kind, and it gave her unbounded joy and satisfaction to be able to relieve it." Mary Ann's statement is supported by two references in the Nauvoo Relief Society minutes that show Olive's concern for the sick. On August 14, 1843, "Sis Olive Frost represented a sick family whom the Com<sup>tee</sup> had overlooked a Br Burgess & family". And a week later, "Miss Frost spoke of the sick said Mrs Burgess & family were distressd".

1843 ended with tragedy for Mary Ann and Parley, as their firstborn, Nathan Pratt, age five, died on December 21, "of fever on the Brain." A month later, a poem of sympathy for Mary Ann appears in Eliza