wives, and commanding him to obey it. He acknowledged to having married several wives. I told him that was alright. He said he would like a further pledge from me that I would not betray him. I asked him if he wanted me to accept the principle by marrying a plural wife. He answered yes. A short time after this I married two wives in that order of marriage.24

In a second affidavit, dated 11 September 1903, Kelting reported:

I first knew Joseph Smith, the Prophet, in Ohio. I once called upon him afterwards at his residence in Nauvoo, Illinois, and told him I wanted a private interview. We walked up stairs together. His wife, Emma, was down stairs, and he did not wish her to hear what we were going to talk about.

We went into the front room, and he locked the door. I told him it was mooted about that he was teaching plural marriage, and asked him the question, "Are you teaching plural marriage?"

His answer was, "cannot answer you, as you are both a lawyer and sheriff of Hancock County, and it might militate against you as an officer as well as against us."

I said, "Joseph, whatever you tell me as your friend is safe; I came here to find this out, and I assure you upon the square (and we were both Masons) it shall never injure you in any shape."

"I did moot plural marriage," said the Prophet.
"Did you have a revelation to teach this?" I asked.
"I did," he answered.
"Have you more than one wife sealed to you by this authority," I asked.
"I have," said he.

After giving me this information, he referred me to Brigham Young if I wanted any more on this subject, Brigham seeming to be the man he trusted most with this matter, and was putting him to the front.

The Prophet assured me that the revelation was as authoritative and binding as any revelation given through him up to that time; and, in fact, that it was paramount to all the rest.25

Kelting's use of "a short time" in the first affidavit suggests that he married polygamosly prior to Smith's death. As Kelting received both his wife, Elizabeth, and Minerva O. Woods through the vail in the Nauvoo temple when all three received their endowments on 24 December 1845, and were sealed less than a month later on 20

24In B. H. Roberts, Succession in the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Geo. Q. Cannon & Sons Publishing Co., 1900), pp. 119-20; original in LDS Archives.

25Original in LDS Archives.
The Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-1844

Gary James Bergera

[W]e hardly dared speak of it [i.e., plural marriage during Joseph Smith's lifetime]. The very walls had ears. We spoke of it only in whispers.
---Zina Diantha (Huntington) Jacobs Smith Young (1898)

Of course there was things manifestly that the church was not to know,---that they were not to reveal to the church, or were not to be revealed to the church ...
---Wilford Woodruff (1892)

From Joseph Smith's first documented eternal plural marriage in 1841 until his death more than three years later, some twenty-eight men and 105 women (as civil and plural wives) entered the prophet's order of celestial matrimony. Given the secrecy surrounding Smith's controversial (and illegal) practice, the exact number of these earliest polygamists may never be known. However, enough information in the form of diaries, letters, autobiographies, reminiscences, affidavits, statements, and family histories has accumulated since the early 1840s--coupled with reasonable inferences and educated guesses--to enable a compelling, albeit tentative, identification.3

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1Gary James Bergera is managing director of the Smith-Pettit Foundation, Salt Lake City. He is the author mostly recently of Conflict in the Quorum: Orson Pratt, Brigham Young, Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002).

2This number counts Marinda N. (Johnson) Hyde and Mary Ann (Frost) Stearns Pratt once each. In addition, it does not include the deceased civil wives of John E. Page, Parley P. Pratt, Hyrum Smith, and Brigham Young, nor the husbands of women also married plurally to Joseph Smith, nor the men and women involved in John C. Bennett's alternative system of polygamy.

3In early 1994, George D. Smith published the results of his investigations into early plural marriage: "Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841-1846: A Preliminary Demographic Report," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 37 (Spring 1994): 1-72. Smith's analysis included a comprehensive appendix entitled "Nauvoo Polygamous Families" which listed every known--as of 1994--plural husband and wife sealed with Joseph Smith's (and later Brigham Young's) approval, together with dates of birth, marriage, sealing, age at sealing, and total family size prior to mid-1844, from mid-1844 to 1846, and from 1846 on.
THE JUVENILE INSTRUCTOR.

29 (1 May 1894)

A MISSON TO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

(Continued from page 289.)

Here I insert affidavits of Joseph A. Kelting, an old personal acquaintance of the Prophet Joseph, which is positive proof that celestial marriage, including plurality of wives, was introduced by the Prophet Joseph in his life-time. Also affidavit of Gideon Carter, who was a follower of Lyman Wight into Texas just after the death of the Prophet Joseph. He tells how plurality of wives was practiced by Wight and his followers under authority from the Prophet Joseph. These affidavits are obtained as additional testimony to overthrow the false statements of the Josephites and others, that plural marriage was introduced by President Brigham Young:

STATEMENT OF JOSEPH A. KELTING.

For some time previous to the death of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, I lived at Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois. I acted for some years as agent for Bishop George Miller, and was also a deputy sheriff in Hancock County. I heard rumors to the effect that Joseph Smith was practising polygamy; the matter frequently being repeated, especially by William and Wilson Law, and the Higheees. Calling at the house of the Prophet one day, early in the spring of 1844, on some business or other, not now remembered, the Prophet invited me into a room upstairs in his house called the Mansion. After we entered the room he locked the door, and then asked me if I had heard the rumors connecting him with polygamy. I told him I had. He then began a defense of the doctrine by referring to the Old Testament. I told him I did not want to hear that, as I could read it for myself. He claimed to be a Prophet; I believed him to be a Prophet, and I wanted to know what he had to say about it. He expressed some doubts as to how I might receive it, and wanted to know what stand I would take if I should not believe what
he had to say about it. I then pledged him my word that whether I believed his revelation or not I would not betray him. He then informed me that he had received a revelation from God, which taught the correctness of the doctrine of a plurality of wives, and commanding him to obey it. He acknowledged to having married several wives. I told him that was all right. He said he would like a further pledge from me that I would not betray him. I asked him if he wanted me to accept the principle by marrying a plural wife. He answered yes. A short time after this I married two wives in that order of marriage.

On the occasion of Alexander H. Smith, son of the Prophet, visiting me in this country some few years ago, I related to him the above circumstances.

I also know that previous to the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith there was a movement on foot looking to the removal of the Church from Illinois to the west. Joseph Smith was the one who took lead in that matter, and called upon certain brethren to go on an exploring expedition to seek a suitable location for the Church, and I was among the number selected to go.

Joseph A. Kelting
State of California, s. s.
County of San Bernardino.
Subscribed and sworn to before me, a Notary Public, this 1st day of March, A.D. 1894.

D. Johnson
Notary Public in and for San Bernardino County, State of California.

STATEMENT OF GIDEON CARTER.

I am Gideon Carter, son of Gideon H. Carter, named in one of the revelations of the Book of Covenants, and who was killed at Crooked River Battle, between the Mormons and a mob, in the State of Missouri, in 1838. I was born in the State of Vermont, in the town of Rutland, Rutland County, August 9th, 1831. I was thirteen years of age at the time Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, was killed, an event I distinctly remember. At the time I was living in the family of Orange Lyndsatter Wight, the son of Lyman Wight, one of the Twelve Apostles in the Mormon Church. Orange L. Wight had married my sister, Matilda Carter, about a year before the killing of Joseph Smith, and I made my home with them. In the fall of 1844 there was some disagreement between Brigham Young and Lyman Wight, and the latter removed to Prairie La Crosse, at the mouth of Black River. Among others who went with him from Nauvoo was his son, Orange L. Wight; and as I was in his family, I went too. At Prairie La Crosse Lyman Wight and his followers made preparations to go to Texas to find a location for a settlement. Before Joseph Smith's death Lyman Wight had been appointed with others to go in search of a new location for the Church.

Question by B. H. Roberts: Then, according to Lyman Wight's representations to his followers, it was understood before the death of Joseph Smith that the Church would move from Nauvoo westward?

Answer: Yes, sir. Lyman Wight always represented that he had been appointed by Joseph Smith, as others were, to go and look for a location where the Saints could go and live in peace; for such was the opposition arising in Nauvoo that the Prophet was convinced that the Church would have to leave Illinois. Lyman Wight, with Bishop George Miller, was appointed to go to the south-west, near the borders of Mexico, in the region of the Cordillera Mountains, and look for a location for the Church. At Prairie La Crosse preparations were made for the journey, and in the spring of 1845 the journey began. There was about one hundred and fifty all told in the company. We lived on the plan of having all things in common, and in this manner traveled to Texas, settling near Austin, the present capital. From thence we moved into Gillespie County, about one hundred miles west of Austin, where the company stayed about four years.
THE TRUE ORIGIN OF

AFFIDAVIT OF JOSEPH KELTING.

For some time previous to the death of Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, I lived at Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois. I acted for some years as agent for Bishop George Miller, and was also a deputy sheriff in Hancock County. I heard rumors to the effect that Joseph Smith was practicing polygamy, the matter frequently being repeated, especially by Wm. and Wilson Law, and the Higbees. Calling at the house of the prophet one day, early in the spring of 1844, on some business or other not now remembered, the prophet invited me into a room upstairs in his house, called the mansion. After we entered the room he locked the door and then asked me if I had heard the rumors connecting him with polygamy. I told him I had. He then began a defense of the doctrine by referring to the Old Testament. I told him I did not want to hear that, as I could read it for myself. He claimed to be a prophet—I believed him to be a prophet—and I wanted to know what he had to say about it. He expressed some doubts as to how I might receive it, and wanted to know what stand I would take if I should not believe what he had to say about it. I then pledged him my word that whether I believed his revelation or not, I would not betray him. He then informed me that he had received a revelation from God, which taught the correctness of the doctrine of a plurality of wives, and commanding him to obey it. He acknowledged to having married several wives. I told him that was alright. He said he would like a further pledge from me that I would not betray him. I asked him if he wanted me to accept the principle by marrying a plural wife. He answered yes. A short time after this I married two wives in that order of marriage.

On the occasion of Alexander H. Smith, son of the prophet, visiting me in this country some few years ago, I related to him the above circumstances. . . .

STATE OF CALIFORNIA.

County of San Bernardino.

JOSEPH A. KELTING.

Subscribed and sworn to before me, a notary public, this first day of March, A. D. 1894.

D. JOHNSTON.

Notary Public in and for San Bernardino

County, State of California.

MORMON POLYGAMY

AFFIDAVIT OF LUCY WALKER SMITH.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

State of Utah.

County of Salt Lake.

Lucy Walker Smith Kimball, being first duly sworn, says: I was a plural wife of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and was married for time and eternity in Nauvoo, State of Illinois, on the first day of May, 1844, by Elder William Clayton, (see his affidavit, Chapter IV.1. The Prophet was then living with his first wife, Emma Smith, and I know that she gave her consent to the marriage of at least four women to her husband as plural wives, and she was well aware that he associated and cohabited with them as wives. The names of these women are Eliza and Emily Partridge, and Maria and Sarah Lawrence, all of whom knew that I too was his wife.

When the Prophet Joseph Smith mentioned the principle of plural marriage to me I felt indignant, and so expressed myself to him, because my feelings and education were averse to anything of that nature. But he assured me that this doctrine had been revealed to him of the Lord, and that I was entitled to receive a testimony of its divine origin for myself. He counseled me to pray to the Lord, which I did, and therupon received from Him a powerful and irresistible testimony of the truthfulness and divinity of plural marriage, which testimony has abided with me ever since.

On the 8th day of February, 1845, I was married for time to President Heber C. Kimball, and bore to him nine children. And in this connection allow me to say to his everlasting credit that during the whole of my married life with him he never failed to regard me as the wife for eternity of his devoted friend, the Prophet Joseph Smith.

LUCY WALKER SMITH KIMBALL.

Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 17th day of December, 1902.

JAMES JACK, Notary Public.

(Seal.)