

9

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 mooting 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 polygamously prior to Smith's death. As Kelting received both his wife, Elizabeth, and Minerva O. Woods through the veil 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 Bergera¹

[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 105² 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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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.