my [ ] ce. I would have been glad to have [ ] forever in silence if it could have been so and been just.

I took your wife into my house because she was destitute of a house, Oct. 6, 1840, and from the first night, until the last, with the exception of one night, it being nearly a month, the Dr. was there as sure as the night came, and generally two or three times a day—on the first three nights he left about 9 o'clock—after that he remained later, sometimes till after midnight; what their conversation was I could not tell, as they sat close together, he leaning on her, whispering continually or talking very low—we generally went to bed and had one or two naps before he left.

After being at my house nearly a month she was furnished with a house by Dr. Foster, which she lived in until sometime about the first of June, when she was turned out of the house and came to my house again, and the Dr. came as before.

One night they took their chairs out of doors and remained there as we supposed until 12 o'clock or after; at another time they went over to the house where you now live and come back after dark, or about that time. We went over several times late in the evening while she lived in the house of Dr. Foster, and were most sure to find Dr. Bennett and your wife together, as it were, man and wife. Two or three times we found little Orson lying on the floor and the bed apparently reserved for the Dr. and herself—she observing that since a certain [ ] he had rather sleep on the floor than with her.

I am surprised to hear of her crying because Bro. Joseph attempted to kiss her as she stated, even if he did do it; for she would let a certain man smack upon her mouth and face half a dozen times or more in my house without making up the first very face. I will not mention his name at present.

There are many more things which she has stated herself to my wife, which could go to show more strongly the feelings, connexion, and the conduct of the two individuals. As to the lamb which Dr. Bennett speaks of, I killed it, and kept a hind quarter of it for my own use, and saw the Dr. and Mrs. Pratt eat of the balance; The (Dr.) told me he would like to have me save enough blood to make a French puddking, which I believe Mrs. Pratt spoke of afterwards and said it looked so that she could not eat it. I had not instructions to save the entrails to be sacrificed, and the Dr. was not present to sacrifice them himself, consequently his statements that he burned them on twelve stones is a falsehood, for the hogs eat them.

Your friend
Stephen H. Goddard

I certify that the above statement of my husband is true according to the best of my knowledge.
Zerulah N. Goddard. Sworn to before me July 23d 1842.
Geo. W. Harris, Alderman of the City of Nauvoo. (Affidavits and Certificates, August 31, 1842)

Testimony of Mrs. Goddard

Mrs. Goddard was more explicit in her testimony than her husband in explaining the conduct of Dr. Bennett and Sarah Pratt.

Dr. Bennett came to my house one night about 12 o'clock, and sat on or beside the bed where Mrs. Pratt was and cursed and swore very profanely at her; she told me next day that the Dr. was quick tempered and was mad at her, but I have no other reason. I concluded from circumstances that she had promised to meet him somewhere and had disappointed him; on another night I remonstrated with the Dr. and asked him what Orson Pratt would think, if he could know that you were so fond of his wife, and holding her hand so much; the Dr. replied that he could pull the wool over Orson's eyes.

Mrs. Pratt stated to me that Dr. Bennett told her, that he could cause abortion with perfect safety to the mother, at any stage of pregnancy, and that he had frequently destroyed and removed infants before their time to prevent exposure of the parties, and that he had instruments for that purpose &c.

My husband and I were frequently at Mrs. Pratt's and stayed till after 10 o'clock in the night, and Dr. Bennett still remained there with her and her little child alone at that late hour.

On one occasion I came suddenly into the room where Mrs. Pratt and the Dr. were: she was lying on the bed and the Dr. was taking his hands out of her bosom; he was in the habit of sitting on the bed where Mrs. Pratt was lying and lying down over her.

I would further state that from my own observation, I am satisfied that their conduct was anything but virtuous, and I know Mrs. Pratt is not a woman of truth, and I believe the statements which Dr. Bennett made concerning Joseph Smith are false, and fabricated for the purpose of covering his own iniquities, and enabling him to practice his base designs on the innocent.

Zerulah N. Goddard (Ibid.)

When the above affidavits and Bennett's ridiculous tale of the sacrificed lamb are considered, it becomes apparent that Bennett concocted the entire story of Joseph seeking Sarah for a plural wife, in order to destroy Joseph and to shield himself from public disgrace and Orson Pratt's wrath.

Since he had been intimate with Sarah, and since she did not want to risk her marriage by telling Orson the truth, he felt safe in using Sarah's name and declaring falsely that Joseph had made an attempt to seduce her.

Joseph Smith III's Interview with Sarah Pratt

Joseph Smith III, son of the Martyr, interviewed Sarah Pratt on one of his visits to Salt Lake City. That interview was published in two issues of the Saints' Herald. Joseph Smith III reported:

I was visiting in the home of a retired physician named Benedict. ... In conversation with him and his wife, I mentioned Elder Orson Pratt, then deceased, and asked them if they knew the woman who was his wife when he lived in Nauvoo, and whether or not she were still living.

They said, "Why, yes; she lives with some sons of hers only about two blocks from here, and we know her well."

For certain reasons which I believed to be good, I was desirous of having a talk with Mrs. Pratt, whom I had known at Nauvoo. So I asked Doctor Benedict if he would go with me to call upon her. He consented to do so, and after lunch we repaired to the house and I was presented to the lady. ... The latter part of my conversation with her revolved around the matters I had had

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spoke 35 Mins G A Smith 10, L Snow 51 E. T. Benson Dismissed. Afternoon. F D Richards prayed. E T Benson spoke 30 Mins G Q Cannon 20, F D Richards 26, Presidet B Young 13 Mins. He said that this people are the best people that Ever dwelt upon the Earth. They have advanced far more in the same time than the people of Enoch did. G Q Cannon dismissed. We drove to Parwan & spent the night. I stoped at C Fremans. 20. We held a Meeting in the Evening. F. D. Richards spoke 47 Mins E T Benson 7, G Q Cannon 12. L Snow dismissed.

23d We drove to Bever & Spent the night with John Mathews. 35 M.


Presidet Young spoke 40. He spoke his Feelings in great plainness Concerning O. Pratt & his publicatioms. He said Orson Pratt would go to Hell. Joseph Smith said he would when Orson said that he would believe his wife Sarah before he would Joseph Smith. He will go to Hell as Joseph Said. He would Sell this people for gold. What would I give for Such an Apostle? Not much and yet we hold him in Fellowship in the Church.

I will also say to those who have taken the advantage of the Brethren in the South in there poverty and oppressed them they will go to Hell, and God will bless those who obey Council, have gone South, & done there duty if they are poor. Where is the man that has got property by asking the Lord for it that when he obtains it, asks the Lord For wisdom to dispose of it? I have saved my land warants so as to secure my land if they Come into Marked. Have any of you done the Same? He dismissed the M[eaeting].

I visited Bartons New Mill. The bottom stone runs 340 revolutions per minutes insted of the top

G A Smith Dismissed the Meeting.

Sept 18 The Militia met this morning. I spent the fore part of the day in St George visiting. In the Afternoon I drove to Harmony Washington, & Harrisburgh & spent the night. 15 Mils.

19 Broth Samuel Gould is 80 year old & the smartest man I ever saw of his Age. He told me to day he had Cradled 10 Acres of grain in a day. He Cradled 5 Acres of heavy wheat in a day for Charles Parker in Parwan. Had mowed 4 Acres of grass in a day in New York. Could now Cradle two Acres of wheat in a day at 80 years of Age. Presidet Young passed through Harrisburgh to day to Tokerville.


Meeting was held at Washington at 4 o'clock. /18 [in?]. Br Mussner prayed. L Farr spoke 20 Minutes L Snow 20, G Q Cannon 15 dismissed.

20 We rode through the Sand & uphill to Harmony. 30 M. We held a Meeting. L Snow prayed W Woodruff spok 12 Mins G. A. Smith 31, G Q Cannon 15 E D Woolley 10, Presidet Young 9. He said build together. Get a place that will not wash away. GAS dismissed.

Sept 21 1865 We drove from Harmony to Cedar. We had a public dinner & a dance in the Evening. 22 Miles.

22 We held a Meeting at 10 o'clock. W Woodruff
May 21, 1886, I had a fresh interview with Mrs. Sarah M. Pratt, who had the kindness to give me the following testimony additional to the information given by her in our interviews in the spring of 1885. "I want you to have all my statements correct in your book," said the noble lady, "and put my name to them; I want the truth, the full truth, to be known, and to bear the responsibility of it.

"I have told you that the prophet Joseph used to frequent houses of ill-fame. Mrs. White, a very pretty and attractive woman, once confided to me that she made a business of it to be hospitable to the captains of the Mississippi steamboats. She told me that Joseph had made her acquaintance very soon after his arrival in Nauvoo, and that he had visited her dozens of times. My husband (Orson Pratt) could not be induced to believe such things of his prophet. Seeing his obstinate incredulity, Mrs. White proposed to Mr. Pratt and myself to put us in a position where we could observe what was going on between herself and Joseph the prophet. We, however, declined this proposition. You have made a mistake in the table of contents of your book in calling this woman 'Mrs. Harris.' Mrs. Harris was a married lady, a very great friend of mine. When Joseph had made his dastardly attempt on me, I went to Mrs. Harris to unbother my grief to her. To my utter astonishment, she said, laughing heartily: "How foolish you are! I don't see anything so horrible in it. Why, I am his mistress since four years!"

"Next door to my house was a house of bad reputation. One single woman lived there, not very attractive. She used to be visited by people from Carthage whenever they came to Nauvoo. Joseph used to come on horseback, ride up to the house and tie his horse to a tree, many of which stood before the house. Then he would enter the house of the woman from the back. I have seen him do this repeatedly.

"Joseph Smith, the son of the prophet, and president of the re-organized Mormon church, paid me a visit, and I had a long talk with him. I saw that he was not inclined to believe the truth about his father, so I said to him: 'You pretend to have revelations from the Lord. Why don't you ask the Lord to tell you what kind of a man your father really was?' He answered: 'If my father had so many connections with women, where is the prophesy? I said to him: 'Your father had mostly intercourse with married women, and as to single ones, Dr. Bennett was always on hand, when anything happened.'

"It was in this way that I became acquainted with Dr. John C. Bennett. When my husband went to England as a missionary, he got the promise from Joseph that he should receive provisions from the tithing-house. Shortly afterward Joseph made his propositions to me and they enraged me so that I refused to accept any help from the tithing house or from the bishop. Having been always very clever and very busy with my needle, I began to take in sewing for the support of myself and children, and succeeded soon in making myself independent. When Bennett came to Nauvoo Joseph brought him to my house, stating that Bennett wanted some sewing done, and that I should do it for the doctor. I assented and Bennett gave me a great deal of work to do. He knew that Joseph had his plans set on me; Joseph made no secret of them before Bennett, and went so far in his impudence as to make propositions to me in the presence of Bennett, his bosom friend. Bennett, who was of a sarcastic turn of mind, used to come and tell me about Joseph to tease and irritate me. One day they came both, Joseph and Bennett, on horseback to my house. Bennett dismounted, Joseph remained outside. Bennett wanted me to return to him a book I had borrowed from him. It was a so-called doctor-book. I had a rapidly growing little family and wanted to inform myself about certain matters in regard to babies, etc.,—this explains my having borrowed that book. While giving Bennett his book, I observed that he held something in the left sleeve of his coat. Bennett smiled and said: "Oh, a little job for Joseph, one of his women is in trouble." Saying this, he took the thing out of his left sleeve. It was a pretty long instrument of a kind I had never seen before. It seemed to be of steel and was crooked at one end.
heard afterwards that the operation had been performed; that the woman was very sick, and that Joseph was very much afraid that she might die, but she recovered.

"Bennett was the most intimate friend of Joseph for a time. He boarded with the prophet. He told me once that Joseph had been talking with him about his troubles with Emma, his wife. He told me that he wanted to get out of the trouble. 'What should I do,' he asked me, and I said, 'this is very simple. Get a revelation that polygamy is right, and all your troubles will be at an end.'"

"The only 'wives' of Joseph that lived in the Mansion House were the Partridge girls. This is explained by the fact that they were the servants in the hotel kept by the prophet. But when Emma found out that Joseph went to their room, they had to leave the house.

"I remember Emma's trip to St Louis. I begged her to buy me a piece of black silk there.

"You should bear in mind that Joseph did not think of a marriage or sealing ceremony for many years. He used to state to his intended victims, as he did to me:

'God does not care if we have a good time, if only other people do not know it.' He only introduced a marriage ceremony when he had found out that he could not get certain women without it. I think Louisa Beeman was the first case of this kind. If any woman, like me, opposed his wishes, he used to say: 'Be silent, or I shall ruin your character. My character must be sustained in the interest of the church.' When he had assailed me and saw that he could not seal my lips, he sent word to me that he would work my salvation, if I kept silent. I sent back that I would talk as much as I pleased and as much as I knew to be the truth, and as to my salvation, I would try and take care of that myself.

"In his endeavors to ruin my character Joseph went so far as to publish an extra-sheet containing affidavits against my reputation. When this sheet was brought to me I discovered to my astonishment the names of two people on it, man and wife, with whom I had boarded for a certain time. I never thought much of the man,

but the woman was an honest person and I knew that she must have been forced to do such a thing against me. So I went to their house; the man left the house hurriedly when he saw me coming. I found the wife and said to her rather excitedly: 'What does it all mean?' She began to sob. 'It is not my fault,' she said. 'Hyrum Smith came to our house, with the affidavits all written out, and forced us to sign them. 'Joseph and the church must be saved,' he said. We saw that resistance was useless, they would have ruined us; so we signed the papers.'"

"Let us introduce now a statement as to the reliability of Mrs. Pratt. She is well known in Salt Lake City and all over Utah as possessing all the virtues of an excellent wife and mother; but outsiders may wish to know of Mrs. Pratt's standing in this community, and I take pleasure in giving a testimonial:

SALT LAKE CITY, May 1886.

We, the undersigned, cordially bear witness to the excellent reputation of Mrs. Sarah M. Pratt. We feel well assured that Mrs. Pratt is a lady whose statements are absolutely to be depended upon. Entire frankness and a high sense of honor and truth are regarded in this community, where she has dwelt since 1847, as her ruling characteristics.

CHARLES S. ZANE,
Chief Justice Utah Territory.
ARTHUR L. THOMAS,
Secretary Utah Territory.
REV. J. W. JACKSON,
U. S. A. Chaplain, Fort Douglas.

I could very readily augment this testimonial with many others were it deemed worthy.
If Sarah Pratt and John C. Bennett were sexually involved, why is her name never mentioned in the Nauvoo High Council Minutes, which extensively detail John C. Bennett's "spiritual wifery" relationships? Why were charges against her membership not filed by Joseph Smith or anyone else? If the alleged 1840-41 Bennett/Sarah Pratt affair was as public as the Goddard account implies, why did Joseph Smith appoint John C. Bennett assistant president of the Church in April 1841? Why did Smith not link Sarah Pratt's name with Bennett's until after he was confronted by Orson Pratt? And what of the January 1841 revelation that declared of John C. Bennett, "I have seen the work he hath done, which I accept if he continue and will crown him with blessings and great glory" (D&C 124: 17).

Nauvoo High Council Minutes. 15 December 1839. Elijah Abel was paid for "making the coffin."
the 11th of May, 1843, by Elder James Adams. Emma was present. She gave her free and full consent. She had always, up to this time, been very kind to me and my sister Eliza, who was also married to the Prophet Joseph with Emma's consent. Emma, about this time, gave her husband two other wives--Maria and Sarah Lawrence.


Reported Orson Pratt, one of the 12 missing. All the citizens turned out in search of him.

37. The Orson Pratt Journals, by E. J. Watson, p. 177, 561. [See also Brigham Young Papers; Ms f 219 #103.] Letter of Brigham Young to Parley P. Pratt in England concerning the difficulties that Orson Pratt was having.

City of Nauvoo,
July 17, 1842

Beloved Brother Pratt:
I set down to write a few words to you. Many things happen in the last days, and especially in Nauvoo. As a general thing all goes first rate. The temple goes on finely and will be a splendid orifice when completed. The brethren are very spirited about it. Doct. John Cook Bennett is turned out of the Church, and report says gone to Mo. to raise a mob to come to drive us from our homes--I guess General Joab has got a hard stint on hand.

Br. Orson Pratt is in trouble in consequence of his wife. His feelings are so wrought up that he does not know whether his wife is wrong, or whether Joseph's testimony and others are wrong, and do lie, and he deceived for 12 years or not; he is all but crazy about the matters. You may ask what the matter is concerning Sister P. It is enough, and Doct. J. C. Bennett could tell all about himself and his *** enough of that. We will not let Br. Orson go away from us. He is too good a man to have a woman destroy him.

38. The Orson Pratt Journals, by E. J. Watson, p. 178. [See also Times & Seasons 3:869.] July 22, 1842. Minutes of a public meeting held in Nauvoo:

At a meeting of the citizens of the city of Nauvoo held in said city at the meeting ground, July 22nd, 1842.
Orson Spencer Esq. was called to the chair, and Gustavus Hills was appointed clerk.
The meeting was called to order by the chairman, who stated the object of the meeting to be to obtain an expression of the
Under scrutiny, however, Orson Pratt’s 1842 excommunication is more complex than the accepted explanation.11 Available evidence suggests that if he was excommunicated, it was not legal; furthermore, the action seems intended, not to deprive him permanently of his membership in


Although the case of Orson Hyde is beyond the scope of this essay, here is a summary. In mid-October 1838 Hyde withdrew from the Church because of the violent responses of some zealous Saints to their non-Mormon neighbors in Missouri (see Stephen C. LeSeure, The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987)). At the time Hyde wrote unequivocally, “I have left the Church called Latter Day Saints for conscience sake, fully believing that God is not with them, and is not the mover of their schemes and projects” (in Thomas B. Marsh and Orson Hyde to Brother and Sister Abbot, ca. 25 October 1838, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives; see also Hyde to Brigham Young, 30 March 1839, in Brigham Young, Diary, LDS Church Archives). With another disillusioned apostle, Thomas B. Marsh, Hyde signed an affidavit denouncing what he saw as the Church’s excesses; Missouri officials used this document in charging Joseph Smith and other LDS leaders with treason. The following January, the First Presidency instructed Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball to fill this double vacancy (see Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, and Hyrum Smith to Kimball and Young, 16 January 1839, Joseph Smith Papers). Two months later the Church excommunicated a number of apostates, including Marsh (Times and Seasons 1 [November 1839]: 15), but Hyde was not among them. He had already contacted some Church officials about returning to the fold. When Joseph Smith tried to excommunicate Hyde in early May 1839, Hyde’s supporters intervened and Smith instead suspended Hyde pending a satisfactory explanation, an action apparently sanctioned by the general membership. Hyde subsequently “made his confession and was restored to the Priesthood… in full fellowship by a full vote of the Council” (Scott H. Faulring, An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith [Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1987], 237; Woodruff 1:340–41; see also Minutes, 5 October 1839, Joseph Smith Papers). Ironically, the man chosen to replace Hyde had died in late January without having been ordained to apostolic office. In short, it appears that Hyde was never officially excommunicated or excommunicated, as has been suggested (see Howard H. Barron, Orson Hyde [Salt Lake City: Utah Horizon Publishers, 1977], 105–7; Talbot, Acts of the Modern Apostles, 46, 53). Rather, he physically removed himself from the main body of Mormons by moving away from Church headquarters, then returned before a permanent replacement for him had been found and before formal action against him had been taken. Unlike Pratt, however, Hyde at the time considered himself to have left Mormonism entirely, and his official suspension was never later declared to have been illegal.

GARY JAMES BERGER/The 1875 REALIGNMENT OF ORSON PRATT

either the Church or the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, but as a temporary disciplinary device to quell his disagreements with Joseph Smith and other Church leaders over the secret practice of plural marriage in Nauvoo. When Pratt stopped resisting, he was reinstated. Thus, restructuring the Quorum of the Twelve thirty-three years later cannot be adequately explained by Pratt’s excommunication and reinstatement alone.12

Like other controversial events, attempts to understand Pratt’s excommunication, reinstatement, and ex post facto realignment are hindered by conflicting reports of what happened, a tendency to interpret mid-nineteenth-century terms and events in the light of later definitions and practices, and the lack of or inaccessibility to possibly crucial documents. The following discussion represents a tentative analysis and some conservative conclusions that, I believe, can be generally supported by the available sources.

NAUVOO POLYGAMY

According to John Taylor’s 1881 account, the story began sometime in early 1842 after the “introduction of the Celestial Order of Marriage.”13

11 After Taylor’s Succession in the Priesthood (1881), the earliest attempt to chronicle Pratt’s and Hyde’s realignment grew out of Taylor’s plan in late 1883 to begin a new “Book of the Law of the Lord,” the revival of a special history kept by Joseph Smith. Responding to Taylor’s request for recommendations, Elder Franklin D. Richards, later Church historian, wrote, “Here would seem to be the proper place for a complete and accurate statement of the reasons why you were, at that time, President of the Twelve Apostles instead of Elders Orson Hyde and Orson Pratt, both of whom were then alive; and the former had been sustained and published as the President of the Twelve for a number of years” (Richards to Taylor, 26 December 1883, LDS Church Archives; see an allusion to an investigation by Richards and Wilford Woodruff in early 1883 in Woodruff 8:225). The “Book of the Law of the Lord” is kept in the First Presidency vault and is closed to researchers.

12 Taylor, Succession in the Priesthood, 18. The best introduction to the Mormon practice of plural marriage is Van Wagoner, Mormon Polygamy. However, Pratt and Joseph Smith had two earlier altercations. The first case was a disagreement over the pronunciation of a Hebrew word in 1835 4C: 2:56; England, Orson Pratt, 44). In the second, Pratt apparently co-signed a letter addressed to the Church’s bishop in Kirtland, Ohio, in mid-1837 charging Smith with “lying & misrepresentation—also for extortion—and for speaking disrespectfully against his brethren behind their backs” (in Elder J. Watson, comp. and ed., The Orson Pratt Journals [Salt Lake City: Editor, 1975], 531; England, Orson Pratt, 50–51; Taylor, Succession in the Priesthood, 13). Pratt shortly afterwards reported publicly that his actions had been based on hearsay and that he had no personal knowledge of any wrongdoing by Smith (see Mary Fielding to Mercy Fielding Thompson, 8 July 1837, LDS Church Archives). During that period, criticisms of Smith’s involvement in real estate speculation and the ill-fated Kirtland Safety Anti-
Two and a half years earlier, in August 1839, Pratt, then twenty-eight and among the first group of apostles chosen by Joseph Smith, had gone to England with other apostles. During Pratt’s sixteen-month absence, Smith began secretly marrying additional wives as part of the “restoration of all things.” Smith’s first recorded polygamous marriage, or sealing, was to Louisa Beaman in early April 1841. By mid-August 1842 he had married at least another twelve women in addition to his first wife, Emma Hale. Five had living husbands who were away on missions, were non-Mormons, or from whom they were estranged; but Smith considered void all contracts not sanctioned by priesthood authority. Although it has been argued that these “celestial” marriages were to be consummated only in the next life, he was sexually intimate with several of his plural wives, including one or two already married women. Rumors of the prophet’s unconventional marital arrangements would probably not have distinguished marriages for time from those for eternity nor have stressed that existing marriages were invalid according to the new laws of God.

Upon his return to Nauvoo in mid-July 1841, Orson Pratt began peddling a number of religious pamphlets he had printed abroad and conducted a few sporadic classes in elementary mathematics under the auspices of the fledgling University of Nauvoo. By November he had been elected to the city council, where he joined other Church leaders. At both locales, he encountered the charismatic newcomer to Mormonism and opportunist John C. Bennett. Arrived in Nauvoo the previous summer, Bennett had

Banking Company were comparatively common. Smith made no known reference to either event, nor, later, did Brigham Young. Thus, neither seemed related to Pratt’s relationship with other Church presidents.


35 Van Wagoner, Mormon Polygamy, 7, gives the date as 6 April 1842, Andrew F. Bhat as the day before (“Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question,” M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), 102).

36 Daniel W. Buchanan, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage before the Death of Joseph Smith” (M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975), 353–56. These women and the dates of their sealing to Joseph Smith are Zina Huntington Jacobs, 27 October 1841; Priscilla Huntington Buell, 11 December 1841; Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, February 1842; Marinda Johnson Hyde, February 1842; and Patty Bartlett Sessions, 9 March 1842. For Smith’s attitude toward civil marriages, see pp. 124–36.

37 Ibid., 156–42.

become chancellor of the university, mayor of the city, and assistant president and intimate confidant to Joseph Smith. Ambitious and sophisticated, Bennett had used his political and oratorical skills to ingratiate himself to Smith and, presumably, to most Church members. He had helped supervise draining the swamp lands adjoining Nauvoo and had successfully steered the far-reaching Nauvoo city charter through the Illinois legislature. Impressed with Bennett’s talents and show of friendship, Smith and other Church leaders, for a time, willingly overlooked his equally dramatic shortcomings.

Pratt left no contemporary account of his first impressions of Bennett, but the issue of polygamy quickly became paramount. It is difficult to determine the extent of Orson Pratt’s knowledge of polygamy before mid-1842. Joseph Smith reportedly taught the new doctrine to many of the apostles following their return from England, for both Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball married additional wives before August 1842 with Smith’s permission. John Bennett also seems to have been aware of Smith’s teachings. After his disaffection, he published specific details only an insider would have known. Meanwhile, rumors of polygamy were surfacing in meetings of Nauvoo’s Female Relief Society. Pratt’s calling should have brought him into Smith’s inner circle; but it seems clear that for at least nine months, he was unaware that plural marriage had been reestablished among some of the Saints is part of the “restoration of all things.” When he finally did learn of the new doctrine and its place in the Church, it was apparently

35 In 1878, Pratt reported that he had learned from an associate, probably before 1838, that Joseph Smith had “made known . . . as early as 1831, that plural marriage was a correct principle . . . but that he had not come to teach or practice it in the Church but that the time would come” (“Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” Millennial Star 49 [16 December 1878]:788, also “Orson Pratt’s Testimony,” in Historical Record 6 [May 1887]: 230). If Pratt’s recollection is accurate, his behavior in 1842 nonetheless suggests that he was unprepared for its practice among the Saints.


37 England, The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt, 77, believes that Bennett was “fully aware” of Smith’s new doctrine. Bennett’s anti-Mormon writings, which first appeared in the Sanguine Journal, are most accessible in The History of the Saints; Or an Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism (Boston: Leland and Whiting, 1842), especially p. 256.

38 Van Wagoner, Mormon Polygamy, 47–59.

not from Smith or from his colleagues in the Twelve but from his wife of nearly six years, Sarah Marinda Bates.

ORSON PRATT’S DILEMMA

According to Sarah Pratt’s third-person 1884 reminiscence, Smith, accompanied by Bennett, invited her to become his plural wife in the fall of 1840. Orson was in England, and she, then twenty-three, was alone in Nauvoo “dependent for means of support as well as companionship.” Smith “appeared much interested in her affairs and brought Dr. John C. Bennett once or twice with him when he called.” Initially, the prophet’s “calls were made upon her in her home where she was living with another family,” then, following her move to “a little house by herself,” Smith’s “attentions became more frequent.” One time he even told her that his own wife Emma “had become jealous of her.” Sarah immediately assured Emma “of the folly of such an idea” and stressed that she was “thoroughly bound up in her husband . . . and had no thought for any one else.”

A short time later, Smith called again on Sarah and told her “he knew she must be lonely now that her husband was away, and that it was not at all necessary that it should be so. She needed the company of some man,” he continued, “and he would stay with her when she wished it; that there was no sin in it as long as she kept it to herself, that the sin was wholly in making it known herself to her husband or any one else.” Indignant, she rejected Smith’s proposal, telling him “she loved her husband most devotedly.” Reportedly, Smith, fearing exposure, threatened that “if she told of it he had it in his power to ruin her character.”

Deeply troubled by the “insult” from “one who was almost as a god to her” and ignoring Smith’s warning, Sarah confided in an older friend, “in whose virtue and faithfulness as a wife . . . she had implicit confidence,” fully expecting “to receive her hearty sympathy.” Much to Sarah’s surprise, her “old and tried friend” said, “You must think nothing of that; why I myself have been his mistress for the past four years.” Soon afterwards Smith “saw

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24 No author given, “Workings of Mormonism related by Mrs. Orson Pratt, Salt Lake City, 1884,” LDS Church Archives. Although no doubt reflecting Sarah’s beliefs, as well as being accurate in most of its details that can be checked, this document should be used with caution. It is retrospective; Sarah Pratt by 1884 was a critic of Mormonism; the chronology of the last three paragraphs is confused; and the anonymous author misidentifies Sarah twice as “Mrs. Orson Hyde.”

25 If true, this would date this woman’s plural union with Smith to 1837 or 1838, three or four years before his sealing to Louisa Beaman.
his associates' faithfulness. Counselor in the First Presidency Jedediah M. Grant explained in 1854 after the Mormon practice of plural marriage had been publicly announced:

When the family organization was revealed from heaven—the patriarchal order of God, and Joseph began, on the right and on the left to add to his family, what a quaking there was in Israel. Says one brother to another, "Joseph says all covenants are done away, and none are binding but the new covenants; now suppose Joseph should come and say he wanted your wife, what would you say to that?" "I would tell him to go to hell." This was the spirit of many in the early days of this Church. . . . Did the Prophet Joseph want every man's wife he asked for? He did not but in that thing was the grand thread of the Priesthood developed. The grand object in view was to try the people of God, to see what was in them. . .

If Grant's memory is correct, then Pratt was not alone in his angry response nor in accepting his wife's version rather than Smith's. Certainly, he would be more inclined to see such an invitation as an attempt on his wife's virtue if he knew of other clandestine proposals, especially those Smith had consummated.

Within a few weeks, on 15 June 1842, came the first public indication of Pratt's difficulties with Smith. When the Twelve announced Joseph's excommunication/disenrollment for courting women while he was still married to his first wife, Pratt's name was conspicuously absent from the published document. Bennett claimed that Pratt refused to sign the an-

33 JD 2:13–14.
35 "Notice [dated 11 May 1842]," Times and Seasons 5 (15 June 1842): 850; see also William Clayton's mention of Bennett's excommunication in George D. Smith, ed., An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1991), 533. Three of the apostles whose names appeared on the statement were out of town at the time: Lyman Wight, William Smith, and John E. Page. Bennett alleged that he had formally withdrawn from Mormonism prior to this notice but that church authorities had intended the notice to make it appear he had been disciplined first (Bennett, History of the Saints, 41). Smith had, in fact, been informed of Bennett's marital status twice, once in late 1840 and again about ten months later (see "To The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, And To All The Honorable Part of Community," Times and Seasons 5 [1 July 1842]: 839–40). Bennett's separation had occurred when his wife had returned to her home to comfort her grieving father after the death of her mother. When Bennett found work in Illinois, she refused to join him. Their subsequent divorce, in late 1842, stipulated that she had deserted him (see Frederick C. Waite to Ralph V. Chamberlin, 15 May 1948, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; hereafter Lee Library).

nouncement because "he knew nothing against me."34 The absent signature certainly seems deliberate: Pratt's name had appeared with those of the other apostles the previous month on a flyer. Two months later, it would be included among the other apostles' on a general notice. If he believed Joseph Smith's charge that Bennett, not himself, had actually made advances to Sarah, it seems probable that he would have sustained the action against Bennett.

From this point, Pratt was in open disagreement with Smith as the Church attempted to discredit Bennett. Pratt evidently stopped associating socially with members of the Twelve, refused to join the Freemasons, and held back on becoming a member of the elite endowment council, or Holy Order.35 In the meantime, a deeply embittered Bennett, offended by Smith's treatment of him, left Nauvoo and began publishing in the nearby Sangamo Journal a lurid exposé of life among the Mormons.36 Never before had Smith and his Church been subject to such an overt and explicit attack on their privacy. In the 15 July 1842 issue, Bennett gave his account of Joseph Smith's proposals to Sarah Pratt. "Sister Pratt," Bennett quoted Smith as saying, "the Lord has given you to me as one of my spiritual wives. I have the blessings of Jacob granted me, as God granted holy men of old, and as I have long looked upon you with favor, and an earnest desire of conubial bliss, I hope you will not repulse or deny me." "I care not for the blessings of Jacob," Sarah countered, "I have one good husband, and that is enough for me." "Sister Pratt," Smith later replied, "you will not expect me; for if I suffer, all must suffer; so do not expect me. Will you promise me that you will not do it?" "If you will never insult me again," she promised, "I will not expose you, unless strong circumstances should require it."37 Smith responded to the growing controversy by not only attacking Bennett but Sarah and Orson as well, reportedly going so far as to publicly brand Sarah a "—— — [whore?] from her mother's breast."38 "The man who
promises to keep a secret and does not keep it (and reveals truths that were to remain hidden)," Smith later told the assembled Nauvoo City Council in January 1844, "is a liar and not to be trusted. When a man becomes a traitor to his friends or country . . . who is innocent, it is right to cut off his influence." These statements help explain Smith's attitude toward the Pratts in the summer of 1842.

Clearly pained over the public exposure, as well as the terrible conclusions he must draw from believing either his wife or his prophet, Pratt tried to capture his conflicting emotions on paper. Seated in the Church's printing office on the evening of 14 July 1842 and in the presence of George W. Thatcher, and perhaps others, Pratt, racked with doubt, wrote:

I am a ruined man! My future prospects are blasted! The testimony upon both sides seems to be equal. The one in direct contradiction to the other—how to decide I know not whether it matter for let it be either way my temporal happiness is gone in this world if the testimonies of my wife and others are true then I have been deceived for twelve years past—my hopes are blasted and gone as it were in a moment—my long toils and labors have been in vain. If on the other hand the other testimonies are true then my family are ruined forever. Where then is my hope in this world? It is gone—gone not to be recovered!! Oh God, why is it thus with me! My sorrows are greater than I can bear! Where am I henceforth it matters not.48

Reportedly, William Felschaw found the document the following morning lying on Munson Street east of Heber C. Kimball's house. When word spread throughout the city that the distraught apostle was missing, Smith ordered an immediate search for him, then delivered a stinging public attack on Bennett.49 A visibly shaken Pratt returned to town that night, presumably accompanied by members of the search party. Ebenezer Robinson, publisher of the Church's Times and Seasons periodical, later recalled:

I remember well the excitement which existed at the time; as a large number of the citizens turned out to go in search for him, fearing that he had committed suicide. He was found some 5 miles below Nauvoo, sitting on a rock, on the bank of the Mississippi river, without a hat. He recovered from his insanity,

48 Nauvoo City Council Minutes, 2 January 1844, LDS Church Archives.
49 This document, apparently in Pratt's hand, is in the uncatalogued Orson Pratt Papers, LDS Church Archives. It has been in the possession of the LDS Historical Department since at least the early 1970s when historian D. Michael Quinn examined it there.
50 Alexander Neibuhr, Journal, 15 July 1842, LDS Church Archives; HC 5:60-61; that and Cook, Words of Joseph, 126.

but at the next conference, when the vote was called to sustain Joseph Smith as President of the Church, he alone voted, No. He could not at that time conscientiously sustain him in that position.50

Two days later, Brigham Young wrote to Pratt's older brother, Parley, then on a mission in England. After noting that Bennett had been "turned out of the Church," he wrote:

Br Orson Pratt is in trouble in consequence of his wife, her feelings are so rough that he does not know whether his wife is wrong, or whether Joseph's testimony and others are wrong and due Ly and he decided for 12 years or not; he is all but crazy about matters, you may ask what the matter is concerning Sister P—it is enosh, and doc. J. C. Bennett could tell all about himself & hir —— — enosh of that—we will not let Br Orson goe away from us he is to good a man to have a woman destroy him.51

INCREASING PRESSURES

As an avowed enemy of the Church, Bennett could be officially condemned and distanced. However, Orson and Sarah could not be dismissed as readily. One week to the day after Pratt's alleged suicide attempt, Smith convened a public meeting to counter Bennett's charges. Pratt voted against a resolution attesting to Smith's good character—one of only two or three negative votes out of a thousand. Annoyed, Smith demanded, "Have you personally a knowledge of any immoral act in me toward the female sex, or in any other way?" According to the Times and Seasons account, Pratt responded, "Personally, toward the female sex, I have not."52 "We do not know what course will be pursued by Mr. Pratt," the Sangamo Journal, which had been serializing Bennett's exposé, editorialized on 29 July. "If he sinks under the denunciations and schemes of Joe Smith—if he fails to defend the reputation of himself and of the woman he has vowed to protect before high heaven—he will fix a stain upon his character which he can never wash out, and carry to the grave the pangs caused by the gnawings of the worm that never dies."

Less than a week later, Smith lashed out at Pratt and other "apostates" as he addressed a Monday morning meeting of the Saints:

50 "Items of Personal History of the Editor," The Return 2 (November 1890), 11. Going bareheaded in the summer was not a nineteenth-century norm for reasons of practicality and comfort. Thus, Pratt's hairlessness suggests that he may have lost his headgear in the river or that he had distractedly left it behind him when he wandered out.
51 Young to Pratt, 17 July 1842.
52 [unidentified], Times and Seasons 3 (1 August 1842): 869. The History of the Church 5:70–71 erroneously reports the voting as "unanimous." This could be the "no" vote Ebenezer Robinson remembered Pratt casting.
Orson Pratt has attempted to destroy himself and caused all the city almost to go in search of him.46 O. Pratt and others of the same class caused trouble by telling stories to people who would betray me, and they must believe those stories because his Wife told him so! I will live to trample on their ashes with the souls [sic] of my feet. I prophecy in the name of Jesus Christ that such shall not prosper, they shall be cut down in their plans... I have the whole plan of the kingdom before me, and no other person has. And as to all that Orson Pratt, Sidney Rigdon, or George W. Robinson can do to prevent me, I can kick them off my heels, as many as you can name, I know what will become of them... To the Apostates and enemies, I will give a lashing every opportunity and I will curse them.47

The Church's next development was to discredit Sarah by publicly identifying her as Bennett's paramour, arranging in late August for the publication of three sensational statements.48 In the first statement, Stephen H. Goddard announced that he and his wife "went over several times late in the evening while she [Sarah Pratt] lived in the house of Dr. Foster [as a boarder during Pratt's mission to England], and were most sure to find Dr. Bennett and your wife together, as it were, man and wife."49 In the second statement, his wife, Zeruiah N. Goddard, alleged, "On occasion I can suddenly into the room where Mrs. Pratt and the Dr. [Bennett] were, she was lying on the bed and the Dr. was taking his hands out of her bosom; he was in the habit of sitting on the bed where Mrs. Pratt was lying, and

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46 Pratt's descendant "feel that Orson Pratt did not get so depressed as to attempt to take his own life and that Joseph Smith is in error as far as this particular statement is concerned" (Watson, Orson Pratt Journals, 525 note 2).
47 Ibid.
48 Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 128-29; see also JCS 5:137–39. Pratt, Rigdon, and Robinson had refused to sign the 20 July resolution attesting to Smith's good character—Pratt because of Smith's attentions to Sarah, Rigdon and his son-in-law Robinson because of Smith's proclivities to their daughter and son-in-law Nancy. See note 44.
49 In publishing these documents, Church leaders explained, "There are some things among these statements that necessity, for our reputation as a religious society, has compelled us to make public, which decency and humanity would have gladly dropped with the rest of their infamy into their proper receptacle." Church leaders adopted similar tactics with other women who rejected Joseph Smith's plural marriage proposals, especially Jane Law, wife of William Law, second counselor to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency, and Nancy Rigdon, daughter of Sidney Rigdon, first counselor to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency. See Van Wagoner, Mormon Polygamy, 50–52, 63–66; Stephen Markham, affidavit, 28 August 1842, in Affidavits and Certificates, Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters, broadside, published in Nauvoo, 31 August 1842, LDS Church Archives.
50 Stephen H. Goddard to Orson Pratt, 23 July 1842, in Affidavits and Certificates. Although presented as a letter, Goddard's statement was more probably created for inclusion in this particular publication. Sarah Pratt later asserted that the Goddards were forced to sign this and the second statement (Wyl, Mormon Portraits, 62–63).
forbearance and long-suffering." Joseph Smith then "requested us to ordain bro. Amasa Lyman in bro. Orson's stead. After receiving these instructions," Young continued, "we met bro. Orson near my house and continued to labor with him. He said to us, there is brother Amasa Lyman in your house, brother Young, he has been long in the ministry, go in and ordain him in my stead." Finally, on 20 August, the three apostles "cut [Pratt] off from the church, and according to the Prophet's direction, . . . ordained bro. Amasa Lyman in his stead." It is not clear from Young's history whether Joseph Smith personally called for the action against Pratt, if Amasa Lyman's ordination merely preempted Pratt's right to office, or the extent, if any, to which Joseph Smith, in hiding at the time from Missouri state officials but also courting other potential plural wives, was involved in the proceedings. Significantly, no action is reported against Sarah Pratt. Soon afterwards, some 380 men, including Lyman, Young, Kimball, and George A. Smith, were called on a mission to preach against the charges of John C. Bennett. It is possible to speculate that Smith wanted Pratt to go on the same mission; if Pratt had refused, such resistance would certainly have intensified his differences with Smith.

While Pratt apparently acceded to his punishment, not functioning actively in his office, he seems not to have considered himself cut off from the Church, in a strict sense. Not quite two weeks later, he responded to public allegations that he had left Nauvoo and Mormonism by publishing this statement in The Wasp:

Neither have I renounced the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, but believe that its doctrine . . . is pure and according to the scriptures of eternal truth, and merite the candid investigation of all lovers of righteousness. . . . The lustre of truth cannot be dimmed by the shadows of error and falsehood. Neither will the petty difficulties existing among its votaries weaken its influence or destroy its power. Its course is onward to accomplish the

ironically, Pratt had earlier converted Lyman to Mormonism.

"History of Brigham Young," Deseret News, 17 March 1858, [1]. This first printing of Brigham Young's history does not differ significantly from any of the three manuscript drafts. History of the Church 5:120 reports Lyman's ordination without commenting on the circumstances.

England believes that Smith "assented to Orson Pratt's excommunication" but provides no source for this conclusion (The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt, 81). Donna Hill documents Smith's courtship of other plural wives during this time, Joseph Smith: The First Mormon (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1977), 313-14.

See HC 5:153, 160-61, 185, 194.

purposes of its great Author in relation to the happiness and salvation of the human family."

On 1 October 1842, again in response to Bennett's allegations that Pratt and Sarah were preparing to leave Mormonism, Orson published a second, more emphatic, statement: "We intend to make Nauvoo our residence, and Mormonism our motto." He had evidently been able to successfully separate human frailties from the divine mission of the Church in his own mind; but of his exact emotional and mental state during this trying period, Pratt remained silent, recording only, "I remained in Nauvoo about one year, during a portion of which I had the charge of a mathematical school."

Orson Pratt's Reconciliation

So matters stood for the rest of the fall and beginning of winter in 1842. Then, in January 1843, Sidney Rigdon, a member of the First Presidency and deeply troubled over Smith's proposal of plural marriage to his unmarried daughter Nancy, received a letter from Bennett addressed jointly to him and Pratt, asking for their support in Bennett's battle against Mormonism. It seems unlikely that Bennett would have tried to enlist their aid if he was guilty of improprieties with Rigdon's daughter or Pratt's wife—unless, of course, either or both had conspired with Bennett to conceal the truth. Apparently uncertain what to do with the letter, Rigdon gave it to Pratt, who immediately turned it over to Smith. By this time, Pratt had apparently decided that Bennett could not be trusted, especially since many of the rumors regarding his and Sarah's "disassociation" could be traced to Bennett. Pratt's action confirmed to Joseph Smith that Pratt had "had no correspondence with Bennett, and had no fellowship for his works of darkness." Five days later, on 20 January 1843, Smith, Pratt, and other Church officials met at Brigham Young's residence to reconsider Orson's standing. Sarah was not present.

Unlike Pratt's excommunication, four accounts of his reinstatement exist—the official minutes, Joseph Smith's diary, Wilford Woodruff's diary,
and Brigham Young’s manuscript history.42 According to the minutes, Smith announced that Pratt was “still a member” of the quorum and had not been “legally cut off” because a majority, or quorum, of apostles had not been present when action was taken against him.43 Since ordination to office did not require a quorum majority, Amasa Lyman remained an apostle.44 Pratt said that “he had rather die than go to preach in any other standing than he had before.” “Let him have the same calling that Paul had,” Smith pronounced. “Let him have the keys to the Jews. [First unto the Gentiles, then unto the Jews.] He explained that “Orson by transgression laid himself hable to have another ordained in his stead” (emphasis mine). Brigham Young commented that “all he had against Orson was when he came home he loved his wife better than David,” a possible allusion to the Old Testament story of Uriah who loved King David more than he loved his own wife Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11–12). If true, Young may have been suggesting that Pratt (Uriah) should have remained loyal to Joseph Smith (King David), even if Smith had in fact been sexually intimate with Sarah (Bathsheba).45 At this point, the minutes continue, Joseph Smith again told Pratt that

43 See D&C 107:27–29, 28 March 1835. Smith had further instructed the Twelve months after this revelation. “When the twelve are all together or a quorum of them in any church [branch], they have authority to act independently of the church and form decisions and those decisions will be valid, but where there is not a quorum of them together, they must transact business by the common consent of the church or the segregation of the church will cease.” (Minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 20 January 1843: “History of Brigham Young,” Deseret News, 17 March 1858, 1.)

At the time, Joseph Smith and his wife “had lied about me. I never made the offer which she said I did.” Turning to the Twelve, he added, “I will not advise you to break up you[r] family—unless it were asked of me. Then I would counsel you to [get] a bill of divorce from you[r] wife & marry a virtuous woman & raise a new family but if you do not do it [I] shall never throw it in your teeth. . . . Orson,” Smith promised, “I prophesy in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that it will not be 6 months before you learn things which will make you glad you have not left us. . . . Orson the latter part of your life shall be made joyful thru the former.”

An hour later Orson and Sarah both were rebaptized—even though Sarah had not been officially disciplined—as a manifestation of their recommitment to the Church, a relatively common practice in Nauvoo at the time. In the same meeting, Orson “received the priesthood & the same power & authority as in former days.”46 Smith evidently considered the matter closed, declaring at a general conference less than three months later, on 6 April, “I do not know any thing against the Twelve. If I did I would present them for trial.”47 Orson received his temple endowments December and his second anointing the following January. Sarah, however, was unable or unwilling to participate in either rite until after Smith’s death in mid-1844.48

44 Minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 20 January 1843, Joseph Smith’s journal for that day adds: “all the authority of his former office” (Faulring, An American Prophet’s Record, 293, emphasis mine). Wilford Woodruff recorded: “Joseph then . . . ordained Orson Pratt to the apostleship & his former standing wht the church” (Remarks, 2:212, emphasis Woodruff’s). Brigham Young’s manuscript history says: “Joseph Pratt . . . had confounded his sins and manifested deep repentance, which resulted in his baptism and re-ordination by the Prophet to his formal / old standing in the Quorum of the Twelve” (“History of Brigham Young,” Deseret News, 17 March 1858, 1 (emphasis mine). T. Edgar Lyon argues that Young thought Pratt did not need to be rebaptized since he had not been legally excommunicated (“Orson Pratt—Early Mormon Leader,” M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1932, 160–62). However, no contemporary source nor Young’s manuscript history supports this assertion. See also D. Michael Quinn, “The Practice of Repudiation at Nauvoo,” Brigham Young University Studies 18 (Winter 1978): 226–32. Quinn notes, “Surviving certificates of baptism from Nauvoo indicate that from 1843 to 1844 many members of the Church in good standing were rebaptized for Remission of Sin” (p. 229).

45 Faulring, An American Prophet’s Record. 544. In contrast, Heber C. Kimball told friends and associates in March that “Olson” Pratt was still and had to be east of the [porter’s] wheel and [mass] lyman put on it” (in Smith, An Intimate Chronicle, 94).

context and organizational ambiguities

The actions taken against Orson Pratt in August 1842 and in January 1843 underscore the still evolving role and function of the Church's disciplinary tribunals and punishments. In the early 1830s, most cases involving charges of misconduct against members had been argued before a court of elders, usually called a bishop's council, or a group of high priests. With the organization of a stake high council in 1834 in Ohio, however, jurisdictional lines shifted; and tribunals convened by stake high councils began to take the place of elders' and high priests' courts. In 1838, as an example of jurisdictional ambiguity, the presiding bishop of the Church argued that charges against the stake presidency in Missouri should be brought before the entire stake, not the high council only. The high council, although divided, overruled him. Shortly afterwards, the high council excommunicated two members of the Missouri stake presidency and later excommunicated the president, over his objection that the council did not have authority to do so. When this proposal was put to a vote of the general congregation, one member abstained, explaining that he doubted the council had such authority, and was disfellowshipped "for speaking against the authorities of the Church." Joseph Smith subsequently approved the high council's actions.

Lines of proper authority were equally ambiguous in the related case against Oliver Cowdery. Cowdery, assistant president to Smith and counselor to the First Presidency, was tried in April 1838 for his membership in the Church before a joint bishop's council and high council, a meeting which Smith attended but did not conduct. Only three months earlier, a revelation had specified that the First Presidency could be tried by a stake high council but that its decision would be valid only within that stake. For a ruling against the First Presidency to be binding throughout the Church, it must be made by either a majority of the stake high councils of the Church or by a majority of the general membership of the Church. Smith's conclusions with Cowdery's excommunication can be variously explained: he may have felt that Cowdery was not a formal member of the First Presidency and that the recent revelation did not apply; that the joint council met all the requirements of the revelation since the majority of the Church was now in Missouri; or that he was willing to suspend the rules in Cowdery's case.

By the early 1840s, more and more cases were being heard by the Nauvoo Stake high council, and the argument could be made that it, not the Twelve, would have been the appropriate council to try Pratt, particularly if excommunication from the Church were a possibility. The Twelve, it is possible to argue, may have had authority only to strip Pratt of quorum membership. In fact, prior to Pratt's case, the Twelve acting as a solitary priesthood quorum had never disciplined one of its members. However, by this time Joseph Smith apparently believed that some extraordinary cases could—and should—be determined by the Twelve alone. Four months after Pratt's reinstatement when Brigham Young recommended that a particular case be turned over to the high council, Smith ruled that a stake high council was to try only those cases that concerned the stake directly. This is not a completely satisfactory answer in Pratt's case, since the charges against him centered on his activities in Nauvoo.

And what of Joseph Smith's assurance to Orson Pratt that Sarah had lied? It is, of course, possible that Smith was lying, since he had not yet introduced everyone at the meeting to the secret teachings on marriage—most notably his own older brother and official Church patriarch, Hyrum—and he felt he could not risk exposure. It is more likely, however, that

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60 For elders' courts, see HC 1:354, 355, 469; 2:2, 218, 228; 3:327. High council courts are recorded in HC 2:225, 235, 276, 442, 444.
61 Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds, Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 158-39, 140 note 6, 147, 149, 151, 176-78.
62 Ibid., 162-70.
63 Unpublished revelation to Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Vinson Knight, and George W. Robinson, 12 January 1838, Kirland, Ohio, in "Revelations Collection," LDS Church Archives.
64 See Minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 27 May 1843, Brigham Young Papers, HC 5:410. The previous month Smith seemed to suggest that charges against the Twelve could only be resolved by the entire Church membership. See note 67.
65 Pratt's disciplining by a committee of the Twelve thus seems to be an organizational irregularity. Similarly, John C. Bennett was never tried before the Nauvoo high council either but was disfellowshipped or excommunicated by action of the First Presidency, a majority of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric. Interestingly, Smith's actions toward Pratt took the form of his promise several months later to William Clayton, then involved in a plural marriage, that, if he were found out, Smith would give him "an awful accouping and probably cut you off from the church and then I will baptise you and set you ahead as good as ever" (in Smith, An Intimate Chronicle, 122).
66 For Hyrum Smith's reluctant acceptance of plural marriage, see Van Wagenen, Mormon Polygamy, 52-55. Evidently, Hyrum Smith did not accept his brother's practice of polygamy until mid-1843.
Smith was telling the literal truth: He had not made the precise proposal to Sarah Pratt that she and Bennett were accusing him of. Although this scenario is speculative, Smith probably told Orson Pratt sometime after August 1842 but before late January 1843 that he had in fact invited Sarah to become his plural wife during Pratt’s absence to England but only to “test” her virtue.

Negative evidence also weakens the accusations of an affair between Sarah and Bennett. As Richard Van Wagoner has pointed out, Sarah’s name was not mentioned in any of the Nauvoo high council meetings that investigated polygamy and specifically investigated reports of Bennett’s misbehavior. Nor was any disciplinary action of any kind ever initiated against her. Joseph Smith received a revelation in January 1841, while Bennett was supposedly involved with Sarah, praising Bennett: “I have seen the work which he [Bennett] hath done, which I accept if he continue, and will crown him with blessings and great glory” (D&C 124:17), and Smith appointed Bennett assistant Church president three months later in April. Finally, no record of the time links Sarah’s name with Bennett until after Orson had confronted Smith. The whatever the truth, the following year Pratt wrote to a cousin that “J. C. Bennett has published lies concerning myself & family & the people with which I am connected. His book I have read with the greatest disgust. No candid honest man can or will believe it. He has disgraced himself in [the] eyes of all civilized society who will despise his very name.” Thirty-five years later, and only three years before his death, Orson Pratt publicly declared that he (Pratt), had “got his information from a wicked source, from those dissatisfied, but as soon as he learned the truth he was satisfied.”


Pratt, postscript, in Farley P. Pratt to John Van Cott, 7 May 1843, Farley P. Pratt Papers, LDS Church Archives. On the other hand, Sarah Pratt later testified: “[I] know that the principle statements in John C. Bennett’s Book on Mormonism are true” (undated statement, quoted in Arthur B. Demming to C. F. Gunther, Mormon Collection, Chicago Historical Society). See also Sidney Rigdon’s account of his interview with Pratt in “Tour East,” Messenger and Advocate of the Church of Christ 2 (December 1845): 401. According to Rigdon, Pratt came to believe that Sarah had lied about Smith’s propositions to her.

“Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” 788; see also “Orson Pratt’s Testimony,” in Historical Record 6 (May 1887): 250. By “a wicked source,” Pratt probably meant John C. Bennett, but may have included Sarah as well; the couple were separated by this time. Unquestionably the strongest reason given for Pratt’s reversal is the apocryphal story that Bennett tattooed “the mark of the beast” on the abdomen of the women he seduced and that when Pratt found this mark on his wife, he knew Smith had been telling the truth (Nels B. Lundwall to T. Edgar Ivo, 9 April 1947, microfilm, Lundwall Papers, Special Collections, Lee Library).

See also England, The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt, 78, who attributes this story to “Pratt family legend.” Presumably, however, Pratt would have found the mark almost immediately and been reconciled with Smith much sooner.


Original rough draft notes to Manuscript History of the Church, LDS Church Archives; see also Brigham Young, Diary, 22 December 1845, LDS Church Archives; Howard C. Searle, “Willard Richards as Historian,” Brigham Young University Studies 31 (Spring 1991): 47–48.


Ibid., 472.

Gary James Bergera/ The 1875 Realignment of Orson Pratt

Was Orson Pratt in fact excommunicated? The record is not clear. The original notes and subsequent drafts D-1 and D-2, based on those rough notes, of Joseph Smith’s “Manuscript History of the Church,” as well as the first published versions, based on these rough and final drafts, in the Desert News and the Millennial Star, all describe Pratt as being “cut off.” This term usually meant “excommunicated” but could also refer to the lesser punishment of “disfellowshipment” in the nineteenth century, although it usually did not describe being dropped from a position or priesthood quorum. These same sources also agree that Smith subsequently pronounced the action illegal during the reinstatement meeting. The earliest of the official histories and hence the most contemporary—the original rough notes—was composed by apostle and Church historian Willard Richards, probably in December 1845. It records that Pratt had been cut off from the Quorum (“of the Twelve” added interlinearly) for neglect of duty and Amasa Lyman had been ordained an apostle in his place. [Joseph Smith] told the council that there was not a quorum present when Orson Pratt’s case came up before, that he was still a member that he had not been cut off legally, and that I would find some other place for Amasa Lyman (“to which the council agreed” added interlinearly). President [Brigham] Young said there were but three present when Amasa was ordained. I [Joseph Smith] told them that was legal when no more could be had.

The earlier of the two manuscript accounts based on the rough notes, Book D-1, was recorded primarily by Church scribe Thomas Bullock, evidently with some involvement from George A. Smith, before 15 January 1846. The second manuscript version (D-2) is an edited version of Book D-1, made under George A. Smith’s direction in the mid-1850s; by then he was Church historian. To Thomas Bullock’s sentence in D-1, George A.
Minutes of the Quorum of the 12 [B. Young Collection] Jan 20, '43

The Quorum of the Twelve assembled at the house of Elder Brigham Young — present viz. B. Young H. C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, W. Woodruff, John Taylor Geo. A. Smith, & W. Richards. — also President Joseph Smith, & Hyrum Smith of the first presidency also Orson Pratt. — the meeting having been called to investigate his case. —

President Joseph Smith remarked that as there was not a quorum when Orson Pratts case came up before that he was still a member he had not legally been cut off.

0. Pratt remarked that he had rather die than go to preach in any other standing than he had before.

Joseph. — Let him have the same calling that Paul had. let him have the keys to the Jews. first unto the Gentiles, then unto the Jews.

Paul held the keys of gathering (?) that is when the Gentiles have heard all they will, it shall be given to the Jews.

Orson by transgression laid himself liable to have another ordained in his stead. — & brought Jacob & Esau were brought for example
Young said there was but 3 present when Amasa was ordained —
Joseph said that was legal when no more could be had. —
Young — said all he had against Orson was when he came home he loved his wife better than David.
Joseph — She lied about me — I never made the affair (offer ?) which she said I did. —
I will not advise you to break up your family — unless it was asked of me, then I would council you to get a bill from your wife & marry a virtuous woman & raise a new family but if you do not do it shall never throw it in your teeth (?)

3 o'clock adjourned to Presidt Joseph
4 o'clock orson Pratt, Sarah Marrinda Pratt & Lydia Granger were Baptized in the River by Pr. Joseph Smith — & confirmed in the Court (Council ?) Room — Orson received the priesthood & the same power & authority as in former days.

W Richards

B Young
her provided for on one condition, and that was, the sacrifice of virtue! . . . Mrs. Pratt, however, by the assistance of a few humane individuals, and her persevering industry, was enabled to support herself and little boy, until the return of her husband . . .

"Joe Smith told me, confidentially, during the absence of her husband, that he intended to make Mrs. Pratt one of his spiritual wives, . . . for the Lord had given her to him as a special favor for his faithfulness and zeal; and, as I had influence with her, he desired me to assist him in the consummation of his hellish purposes; but I refused compliance, and told him . . . he must attend to it himself, for I should never offer her an inducement. 'Well,' I said he, 'I shall approach her, for there is no harm in it if she submits to be closeted, and if her husband should never find it out; and if she should expose me, as she did Bishop Knight, I will blast her character; so there is no material risk for so desirable a person,' I then called upon Mrs. Pratt, and apprized her of Joe's contemplated attack on her virtue, in the name of the Lord, and that she must prepare to repulse him, in so infamous an assault, by opposing revelation to revelation. She replied, 'Joe cannot be such a man; I cannot believe it until I know it for myself, or have it from his own lips; he cannot be so corrupt.' I told her that she would see, unless he changed his mind, for he was an unprincipled libertine, unequalled in the history of civilized man. Accordingly, in a few days, Joe proposed to me a visit to Ramus, which I accepted, and we started from his house, in an open carriage, about 4 o'clock, P.M., rode into the prairie a few miles, and returned to the house of Captain John T. Barnett, in Nauvoo, about dusk, where we put up the horse, with Barnett's permission. Joe pretended we were looking for thieves. After perambulating for an hour or two, we proceeded to the residence of Mrs. Pratt, and found her at home, and alone, with the exception of her little boy, who was then asleep in bed. We were hospitably received, and our situation rendered as comfortable and agreeable as the tenement would admit of. After considerable desultory conversation, Joe asked her if she would keep a secret for him; to which she assented. 'Do you pledge me your honor,' I said to her, 'that you will never tell without my permission?' She replied in the affirmative. He then continued, 'Sister Pratt, the Lord has given you to me as ONE OF MY SPIRITUAL WIVES. I have the blessings of Jacob granted me, as God granted holy men of old; and as I have long looked upon you with favor, and an earnest desire of connubial bliss, I hope you will not repulse or deny me.' She replied, 'And is that the great secret that I am not to utter? Am I called upon to break the marriage covenant, and prove recreant to my lawful husband? I never will. My sex shall not be disgraced, and my honor deme.'

THE SARAH PRATT AFFAIR. In his book, The History of the Saints, John C. Bennett stated:

"This lady is the wife of Orson Pratt, A.M., Professor of Mathematics in the University of the City of Nauvoo, and is one of the most elegant, graceful, amiable, and accomplished women in the place. . . . This noble and lovely woman was marked out by Joe as a victim. Her husband was sent to Europe to convert the heathen, under a solemn promise that his family should be honorably provided for by the Church; but, as Mrs. Pratt was a beautiful and charming woman, Joe's real object was to CONVERT HER in another way — from virtue. . . . Vice, . . . but the fowler's trap was broken, and the intended victim saved. Mrs. Pratt is a highly-educated lady, and had always been used to living well; but no sooner had her husband crossed the ocean, than Joe ordered the
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gave Joe a SEVERE REBUKE. Joe observed, 'I did not desire to kiss her; Bennett made me do it!' ...

"Joe lied to Colonel Pratt afterwards, IN THE NAME OF THE LORD. This shook his faith, and he told the Prophet to his face that he was a liar, AN INFAMOUS LIAR; and his noble voice has since been heard thundering against that Uncircumcised Philistine, the fell Monster of Iniquity, and that at the very portals of the Temple." (History of the Saints, by John C. Bennett, 1842, pp. 226-232)

In an affidavit dated July 23, 1842, Stephen H. Goddard admitted that he had killed a lamb, but he claimed that the entrails were not offered in sacrifice:

"As to the lamb which Dr. Bennett says leaks of, I killed it, and kept a quarter of it for my own use, and saw the Dr. eat it, and kept the rest of the meat and the balance; the Dr. told me he would like to have me give him enough blood to make a French pudding, which I believe Mrs. Pratt spoke of afterwards and said it looked so that she could not eat it.

"I had no instructions to save the entrails, and the Dr. was not present to say to them himself, consequently his statements that he burned them on twelve Calves is a falsehood, for the hogs eat them."

(Affidavits and Certificates, Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters, Nauvoo, Aug. 31, 1842, Original in the L.D.S. Church Historian's Office, very rare.)

Although the following information does not necessarily prove Bennett's statement to be true, it is interesting to note that Joseph Smith did believe in animal sacrifice. In the History of the Church, Vol. 4, page 211, we find the following statement by Joseph Smith:

"It will be necessary here to make a few observations on the doctrine set forth in the above quotation, and it is generally supposed that sacrifice was entirely done away when the Great Sacrifice was offered up, and that there will be no necessity for the ordinance of sacrifice in future: but those who assert this are certainly not acquainted with the duties, privileges and authority of the priesthood, or with the Prophets.

"These sacrifices, as well as every ordinance belonging to the Priesthood, will, when the Temple of the Lord shall be built, and the sons of Levi be purified, be FULLY RESTORED and attended to in all their powers, ramifications, and blessings." (History of the Church, Vol. 4, page 211)

In the journal of Wandle Mace the following is found:

"JOSEPH told them to go to Kirtland, and cleanse and purify a certain room in the Temple, that they MUST KILL A LAMB AND OFFER A SACRIFICE UNTO THE LORD which should prepare them to ordain Willard Richards a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles." (Journal of Wandle Mace, page 32, microfilmed copy at the Brigham Young University)

In a letter to John C. Bennett, Emeline White stated:

"I called on Mrs. Pratt this morning, in order to learn where to address you; and she and Mr. Pratt dined at father's to-day. We had a long talk with them about the troubled waters, the present attitude in which they are placed, and the ultimate issue... I was much pleased to see them so happy, and firm in the advocacy of truth. Mr. Pratt has publicly defended her, from the stand, against the foul aspersions attempted to be cast upon her irreproachable reputation by her interested persecutors. She is certainly one of the best of women, above reproach, of noble bearing, and greatest moral excellence; and Mr. Pratt will ever SUSTAIN HER IN EXPOSING CORRUPTION AND FRAUD... They are your unwavering friends, and cannot be driven from the truth by your enemies." (History of the Saints, 1842 Ed., page 233)

The Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt evidently believed that Joseph Smith had tried to seduce his wife. The Mormon writer Ivan J. Barrett stated:

"His most trying difficulty was over the introduction of plural marriage, and yet when he fully understood it he became its foremost advocate. He arrived home from England in July 1841, and had not been informed by the Prophet or any Church official that plural marriages were being contracted. Rumors and his WIFE'S ACCUSATION of the PROPHET JOSEPH, based on John C. Bennett's lies about the Prophet of God wanting to take her (Orson's wife) as his SPIRITUAL WIFE, shocked and AFFECTED THE MIND of Orson Pratt for over one year estranging him from the Prophet Joseph Smith. He was so agitated by what he had heard that at times he contemplated SUICIDE." (More Remarkable Stories of How We Got the Revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, by Ivan J. Barrett, Extension Publications Brigham Young University, page 40)

The Mormon writer John J. Stewart admitted that Orson Pratt denounced Joseph Smith, but he claimed that it was because of stories that John C. Bennett had seduced his wife by authorization from Joseph:

"Orson Pratt, one of the most scholarly members of the Quorum of Twelve, had returned to Nauvoo in August from a mission assignment, only to be confronted with stories that Bennett had seduced his wife upon authorization from the Prophet Joseph. Crazed with shock and grief, Pratt
wandered up and down the Mississippi, denouncing the Prophet and contemplating suicide." (Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet, by John J. Stewart, page 180)

According to the Mormon writer T. Edgar Lyon, however, Mrs. Pratt told that it was Joseph Smith who tried to seduce her:

"At the time Orson Pratt returned to Nauvoo from England in July, 1841, he had not been informed by the Prophet or any other Church official, that plural marriages were being contracted. When he heard the rumors afloat in the city, he was naturally astonished, but WHEN HIS WIFE TOLD HIM THAT DURING HIS ABSENCE, JOSEPH SMITH HAD ATTEMPTED TO SEDUCE HER, HE WAS GREATLY AGITATED. She said that Bennett had told her to beware of Joseph, as he planned to make her his spiritual wife." (Orson Pratt—Early Mormon Leader, M.A. Thesis by Thomas Edgar Lyon, University of Chicago, June, 1932, page 25 of typed copy)

On page 28 of the same thesis T. Edgar Lyon stated:

"The summer of 1842 was a trying one for the professor of mathematics. With no session of school to occupy his mind, he worried over the moral situation of the Prophet and the Church. Had he really attempted to SEDUCE his WIFE? Was Bennett telling the truth about Joseph, or had Bennett really deserved to be excommunicated? Or had both Bennett and the Prophet become liber- ting? If the Prophet was GUILTY as Bennett claimed, WAS HE STILL A PROPHET?

These and many other questions raced through his mind. In this mental and emotional struggle he was trying to harmonize the conception of a Prophet of God, as he had always viewed Joseph, with that of the libertine Bennett had convinced him Joseph really was. In despair, his MIND COLLAPSED, and he wandered away from Nauvoo. Even the Prophet realized the seriousness of his MENTAL condition, and fearing SUICIDE, acted accordingly.

On July 15, 1842 Orson Pratt was reported as "missing." The following is recorded in Joseph Smith's History of the Church:

"[Friday, 15.---It was reported early in the morning that Elder Orson Pratt was missing. I caused the Temple hands and the principal men of the city to make search for him. After which, a meeting was called at the Grove, and I gave the public a general outline of John C. Bennett's conduct." (History of the Church, by Joseph Smith, Vol. 5, pp. 60 & 61)

Under the date of August 29, 1842, Joseph Smith wrote:

"Orson Pratt has attempted to destroy himself, and caused almost all the city to go in search of him. I have the whole plan of the kingdom before me, and no other person has. And as to all that ORSON PRATT, Sidney Rigdon, or George W. Robinson can do to prevent me, I can kick them off my heels, as many as you can name; I know what will become of them, to the APOTATES and enemies, I WILL GIVE A LASHING EVERY OPPORTUNITY, AND I WILL CURSE THEM." (History of the Church, Vol. 5, pp. 138 & 139)

T. Edgar Lyon gives us this information:

"Ebeneser Robinson, an associate editor of the Times and Seasons, said Pratt was found five miles below Nauvoo, in a state of FRENZY, sitting on the bank of the Mississippi River.

His fellow Apostles then took up his case and endeavored to win back his allegiance to the Prophet. Brigham Young's Journal has this entry, for August 8, 1842:

"Assisted by Elders H. C. Kimball and Geo. A. Smith, I spent several days laboring with Elder ORSON PRATT, whose MIND BECAME SO DARKENED by the influence and statements of HIS WIFE, that he came out in REBELLION AGAINST JOSEPH, REFUSING TO BELIEVE HIS TESTIMONY OR OBEY HIS COUNSEL. He said he would BELIEVE HIS WIFE IN PREFERENCE TO THE PROPHET, Joseph told him if he did believe his wife and followed her suggestions, HE WOULD GO TO HELL.

But Pratt was NOT convinced, even though the prophet had threatened him with hell and on August 30th, Brigham Young recorded: '...Brother Orson Pratt was cut off from the Church. The notice of his excommunication was not given the usual widespread publicity, however, and he continued to reside in Nauvoo, again occupied with teaching duties." (Orson Pratt—Early Mormon Leader, M.A. Thesis by Thomas Edgar Lyon, University of Chicago, June, 1932, page 29)

In footnote number 5 on page 27 of his thesis, T. Edgar Lyon admitted:

"Joseph's conduct throughout this entire case does NOT appear to be admirable."

In another footnote on page 29, T. Edgar Lyon stated:

"Smith's attitude throughout this entire affair is strange and without explanation. He did not appear to desire a reconciliation sufficiently to go to the bottom of the trouble with Pratt." A meeting of citizens of Nauvoo was held July 22, 1842, Joseph Smith said that "The object of the
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meeting was to correct the public mind relative to false reports put in circulation by Bennett and others...

"Resolved, That having heard that John C. Bennett was circulating many base falsehoods respecting a number of the citizens of Nauvoo, and especially against our worthy and respected Mayor, Joseph Smith, we do hereby manifest to the world, that so far as we are acquainted with Joseph Smith, we know him to be a good, moral, virtuous, peaceable and patriotic man, and a firm supporter of law, justice and equal rights; that he at all times upholds and keeps inviolate the constitution of this state and the United States."

Joseph Smith's history as it is published today assures us that this resolution was adopted by a unanimous vote:

"This resolution was adopted UNANIMOUSLY by the numerous assembly." (History of the Church, by Joseph Smith, Vol. 5, page 70)

In doing research on Joseph Smith's history, however, we found that the word "unanimously" was interpolated by later historians, and that it did not appear in Joseph Smith's history as it was first published in the Millennial Star. In the Millennial Star this statement read as follows:

"... which resolution was adopted by the numerous assembly." (Millennial Star, Vol. 10, p. 615)

Further research in the Mormon newspaper, The Wasp, has revealed the fact that the Mormon leaders made this change to cover up the fact that Orson Pratt and one or two others voted against the resolution. In the July 23, 1842, issue of The Wasp, we read as follows:

"Resolved—That, having heard that John C. Bennett was circulating many base falsehoods respecting... Joseph Smith, we do hereby manifest to the world that so far as we are acquainted with Joseph Smith we know him to be a good, moral, virtuous, peaceable and patriotic man...

"A vote was then called and the resolution adopted by a large concourse of citizens, numbering somewhere about a thousand men. Two or three, VOTED IN THE NEGATIVE.

"ELDER ORSON PRATT then rose and spoke at some length in explanation of HIS NEGATIVE VOTE." (The Wasp, July 23, 1842, page 3)

Orson Pratt and his wife later returned to the church. According to John J. Stewart, Orson Pratt "became chief spokesman for the Church in defense of the principle of plural marriage." (Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet, page 180, footnote 21) His wife, on the other hand, became a bitter enemy to polygamy. According to T. Edgar Lyon, Orson Pratt was not able to convince her that polygamy was from God:

"She apparently believed that all of the dogmas of the ecclesiastical organization were divine revelations but viewed polygamy as a religious cloak, devised by Joseph Smith, under which he could give divine sanction to his profanity. With all of Pratt's teachings on overcoming jealousy and his efforts to act impartially, he was not able to persuade her that the institution was of God."

(Orson Pratt — Early Mormon Leader, M.A. Thesis by T. Edgar Lyon, University of Chicago, June, 1932, page 107)

In 1886, over forty years after the events in Nauvoo, Sarah Pratt still maintained that Joseph Smith had tried to seduce her:

"It was in this way that I became acquainted with Dr. John C. Bennett. When my husband went to England as a missionary, he got the promise from Joseph that I should receive provisions from the tithing-house. Shortly after we had made these PROPOSITIONS to me and they enraged me so that I refused to accept any help from the tithing house or from the bishop. Having been always very clever and very busy with my needle, I began to take in sewing for the support of myself and children, and succeeded soon in making myself independent. When Bennett came to Nauvoo Joseph brought him to my house, stating that Bennett wanted some sewing done, and that I should do it for the doctor. I assented and Bennett gave me a great deal of work to do. He knew that Joseph had his plans on me, Joseph made no secret of it. In his impudence he would ask me, "What would you like to do?"

"You should bear in mind that Joseph did not think of a marriage or sealing ceremony for many years. He used to state to his intended victims, as he did to me: 'God does not care if we have a good time, if only other people do not know it.' He only introduced a marriage ceremony when he had found out that he could not get certain women without it. I think Louisa Beean was the first case of this kind. If any woman, like me, opposed his wishes, he used to say: 'Be silent, or I shall ruin your character. My character must be sustained in the interest of the church.' When he had assailed me and saw that he could not seal my lips, he sent word to me that he would work my salvation, if I kept silent. I sent back that I would talk as much as I pleased and as much as I knew to be the truth, and as to my salvation, I would try and take care of that myself.

"In his endeavors to ruin my character Joseph went so far as to publish an extra-sheet containing affidavits against my reputation." (Statement by Sarah Pratt, quoted in Mormon Portraits, by Dr. W. Wyl, 1886, pp. 61 and 62)

The affidavits Mrs. Pratt speaks of are found in Affidavits and Certificates, Disproving The Statements
And Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters. Nauvoo, Aug. 31, 1842. Stephen H. Goddard's statement is in the form of a letter to Orson Pratt. In this letter he stated:

"Orson Pratt, Sir — Considering duty upon me I now communicate to you some things relative to Dr. Bennett and your wife that came under the observation of myself and with... I took your wife to my house because she was destitute... the Dr. was there as sure as the night came, and generally two or three times a day. The first two or three nights he left about 9 o'clock — after that he remained in the house, sometimes till after midnight; what he said I could not tell, as he sat close together, he leaning on her... We went over several times late in the evening while she lived in the house of Dr. Foster, and were most sure to find Dr. Bennett and your wife together, as it were, MAN AND WIFE. Two or three times we found little Orson lying on the floor and the bed apparently reserved for the Dr. and herself... I am surprised to hear of her crying because Dr. Joseph attempted to kiss her. She stated, even if he did do it; for she would let a certain man smack upon her. She and face half a dozen times or more in my house without making up the first wry face,..." In an affidavit dated August 28, 1842, Mrs. Goddard stated:

"Dr. Bennett came to my house one night about 12 o'clock, and sat on or beside the bed where Mrs. Pratt was... on another night I remonstrated with the Dr. and asked him what Orson Pratt would think, if he should know that you were so fond of his wife, and holding her hand so much; the Dr. replied that he could pull the wool over Orson's eyes.

"Mrs. Pratt stated to me that Dr. Bennett told her, that he could cause abortion with perfect safety to the mother, at any stage of pregnancy, and that he had frequently destroyed and removed infants before their time to prevent exposure of the parties, and that he had instruments for that purpose, &c.

"My husband and I were frequently at Mrs. Pratt's and stayed till after 10 o'clock in the night, and Dr. Bennett still remained there with her and her little child alone at that late hour.

"On one occasion I came suddenly into the room where Mrs. Pratt and the Dr. were; she was lying on the bed and the Dr. was taking his hands out of her bosom; he was in the habit of sitting on the bed where Mrs. Pratt was lying, and lying down over her.

"I would further state that from my own observation, I am satisfied that their conduct was anything but virtuous, and I know Mrs. Pratt is not a woman of truth, and I believe the statements which Dr. Bennett made concerning Joseph Smith are false, and fabricated for the purpose of covering his own iniquities, and enabling him to practise his base designs on the innocent."

(Affidavits and Certificates, Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters. Nauvoo, Aug. 31, 1842)

It is almost impossible to believe that the Mormon leaders would publish such a defamatory attack against the wife of one of their own apostles, but the affidavits speak for themselves.

Mrs. Pratt made this statement concerning these affidavits:

"When this sheet was brought to me I discovered to my astonishment the names of two people on it, man and wife, with whom I had boarded for a certain time. I never thought much of the man, but the woman was an honest person and I knew that she must have been forced to do such a thing against me. So I went to their house; the man left the house hurriedly when he saw me coming. I found the wife and said to her rather excitedly: 'What does it all mean?' She began to sob. 'It's not my fault, I said she, 'I am not a party to this. I have lived in your house, with the AFFIDAVITS ALL WRITTEN OUT, AND FORCED US TO SIGN THEM. I, JOSEPH AND THE CHURCH MUST BE SAVED,' I said he. We saw that resistance was useless, they would have ruined us; so we signed the papers.""

(Mormon Portraits, by Dr. W. Wyl, 1886 Ed., pages 62-53)

Mrs. Pratt also made this statement concerning Joseph Smith:

"He had a terrible influence over women," says Mrs. Pratt. "Many pure and good women, who never would have fallen, became his victims THROUGH HIS PROPHECIT PRETENSIONS, and I myself [with a slight shudder at the remembrance] was perhaps only saved from his clutches through my devoted love for my husband who at that time was my all, and his..."

(Mormon Portraits, by Dr. W. Wyl, 1886 Ed., pages 62-53)