

Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy

How Men Nearest the Prophet Attached Polygamy to His Name
in Order to Justify Their Own Polygamous Crimes

By Richard and Pamela Price

“What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one”—Joseph Smith (LDS History of the Church 6:411).

Chapter 36

The Harrison Sagers Case

Joseph continued to battle polygamy throughout 1843. One of the struggles in Joseph’s fight against polygamy that year involved an elder in Nauvoo named William Harrison Sagers. Sagers, who was born in 1815, was baptized in 1833 and served as a successful traveling missionary. There is evidence that Sagers became involved in plural marriage as early as 1841, which was during the time that Dr. John C. Bennett was teaching and practicing that doctrine at Nauvoo. When Joseph became aware of Sagers’ polygamy, he did not keep the matter secret, but tried him publicly for the crime in two courts—the Church’s High Council and the Nauvoo Municipal Court. Even though Joseph tried Sagers in 1843, the wayward elder continued his polygamous activities in 1844.

Sagers’ Legal Wife Announced He Had Deserted Her

One evidence of Harrison Sagers’ infidelity to his legal wife, Lucinda Sagers, is found in an advertisement in 1844 in the first and only issue of the infamous *Nauvoo Expositor*. Lucinda used this unusual method to announce to the public that Harrison, whose polygamous connections had already created a scandal, had deserted her. Lucinda’s advertisement stated:

One Cent Reward.

WHEREAS my husband, the Rt. Rev. W. H. Harrison Sagers, Esq., has left my bed and board without cause or provocation, this is to notify the public not to harbor or trust him on my account, as I will pay no debts of his contracting. . . . LUCINDA SAGERS. June 7,

1844. (*Nauvoo Expositor*, June 7, 1844, 3)

Lucinda’s advertisement shows that Harrison was a married man in 1844. This was also confirmed by a statement in the *Warsaw Signal* by a man who published under the name of “A Traveler.” Lucinda’s advertisement also shows that Harrison had separated from her by June 7, 1844, even though LDS genealogical documents, found so far, have not listed Sagers as having been married during the 1841–1844 period. LDS historians have not dealt with the fact that Sagers began his polygamous seductions as early as 1841.

Joseph Tried Sagers before the High Council

Harrison Sagers was charged for seduction on November 25, 1843, before the Church’s Standing High Council. Although the account in the *LDS History of the Church* calls the charge which Joseph brought against Sagers “seduction,” other accounts identify his crime as that of teaching his sister-in-law the doctrine of “spiritual wifery.” Sagers had seduced Lucinda’s sister by teaching her that Joseph Smith had stated that it was right. This is the same ruse that Dr. Bennett, Chauncey Higbee, and Brigham Young used in their seductions.

The LDS historians reported that Joseph placed in his journal under the date of November 25, 1843, the following:

In the evening the High Council sat on the case of Harrison Sagers, charged with seduction, and having stated that I had taught it was right. Charge [by Sagers against Joseph was] not sustained.

I was present with several of the Twelve, and gave an address tending to do away with every evil, and exhorting them [the Twelve] to practice virtue and holiness before the Lord; told them that the Church had not received any permission from me to commit fornication, adultery, or any corrupt action; but my every word and action has been to the contrary. If a man commit adultery, he cannot receive the celestial kingdom of God. Even if he is saved by any kingdom, it cannot be the celestial kingdom. I did think that the many examples that have been made manifest, such as John C. Bennett’s and others, were sufficient to show the fallacy of such a course of conduct. I condemned such actions *in toto*, and warned the people present against committing such evils; for it will surely bring a curse upon any person who commits such deeds. (LDS History of the Church 6:81)

Of importance is the fact that Joseph used Sagers’ hearing before the Church’s High Council to publicly warn several of the Twelve present at the hearing who were already practicing polygamy secretly, that he had not given Sagers, or any other individual, authority to practice polygamy.

It is significant that “several of the Twelve” were present, since by this date Apostles Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, Heber C. Kimball, and Orson Hyde had already married plural wives. Therefore, Joseph’s words of warning were directed to the members of the Twelve as well as others. But even after this warning by Joseph, members of the Twelve continued that practice, and used Joseph’s name as