Counting Polygamists:
A Review of George D. Smith's Identification
of the Earliest Mormon Polygamists

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In the spring of 1994, George D. Smith published his ground-breaking investigation into the origins of Mormon plural marriage entitled "Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841-1846: A Preliminary Demographic Report" (Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 37, no. 1). His analysis covered thirty-six pages and featured seven tables. Perhaps his most impressive accomplishment was the thirty-six-page appendix "Nauvoo Polygamous Families" which listed every known plural husband and wife sealed with Joseph Smith's (and later Brigham Young's) approval, together with dates of birth, marriage, sealing, age at sealing, and total family size prior to mid-1844, from mid-1844 to 1846, and from 1846 on. The essay, and the research underlying it, was of monumental significance. Never before had such careful, painstaking scrutiny been brought to bear on the men and women surrounding Joseph Smith who not only shared his views on the controversial doctrines of eternal marriage and plurality of wives, but fully embraced their practice.

What I hope to undertake in this presentation is to reexamine George's identification of the thirty husbands who married plurally with Joseph Smith's approval prior to the latter's death on 27 June 1844. Representing more of an inquiry than a critique, I would like to review George's documentation, point out some additional sources, and offer where appropriate some tentative recommendations for consideration. I am certain that George would be the first to acknowledge that his essay was an initial attempt at a very thorny subject. Not only are the documentary sources few, but often they are confusing and occasionally contradictory. In fact, I know that he has continued to refine both his identifications and analysis and that, with luck, we should be able to read his work following its publication in book-form in the not-too-distant future.

In his published essay, George identified thirty men as having contracted plural marriages with Joseph Smith's approval during his lifetime. Of these thirty men, based on my own review of the sources (discussed below), I agree with the identification in twenty instances, question the identification in ten, and recommend nine additions, for a revised tentative total of twenty-nine.

Recommended Deletions

The men whose status as early Mormon polygamists I question, and my reasons for doing so, are as follows:

John T. Bair
John T. Bair, baptized LDS in 1834, married Lydia Regester on 29 August 1829; they divorced (according to John's "Individual Record" at www.familysearch.org) or separated, probably by the early 1840s, since their last child was born in Ohio on 8 December 1839. John then married Lucinda Owen Tyler civilly on 19 October 1843 (according to Lyndon Cook's Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 107). According to the brief manuscript narrative entitled "John Bair" (no author, LDS church archives): "He [John] must have loved the [LDS] Church very much as he left his first wife [Lydia] and seven of his children back East because as she would have nothing to do with his religion and would not come with him." Because John and Lydia were not living together, for whatever reason, as husband and wife at the time of his civil marriage to Lucinda, I don't believe John should be counted as an early Mormon polygamist.

James Bird

James Bird married Jane Mott Carpenter about 1831. (George Smith specifies 25 February 1831.) According to his "Individual Record" (www.familysearch.org), James then supposedly married Sophia Alcester Fuller on 5 May 1843. James was endowed in the Nauvoo temple on 3 February 1846, Jane three days later, at which time both were presumably sealed to each other. The Nauvoo temple record contains no reference to Sophia Alcester Fuller.

However, according to Susan Easton Black (Membership, s.v. "Fuller, Sophina Alcesta"), Sophina Alcester Fuller was born on 5 May 1843, married James Bird on 15 March 1857 (she was not quite fourteen), but soon thereafter divorced him because she married George Washington Gee on 4 May 1862. She died on 26 December 1930. (Interestingly, in her entry for James Bird, Susan Easton Black does not identify Sophina as one of James's wives.) Because a Bird family descendant evidently confused Sophina's birth date for a marriage date, I believe James Bird should be dropped as an early Mormon polygamist.

Thomas Bullock

Thomas Bullock married Henrietta Rushton on 25 June 1838 in England. They were sealed in the Nauvoo temple on 23 January 1846, the same date Thomas was sealed to Lucy Caroline Clayton (sister of William Clayton). Thomas's journal entry for this date reads, in part: "At dusk I, Henrietta and Lucy went to the Temple, dressed, sat in the Cel Room, and shook hands with B[righam]. Young, H[eber]. C. Kimball, O[rsen]. Hyde, P[arlcy]. P. Pratt, A[ma]. Lyman. Went into the President's room when I and [the?] two others were sealed up to eternal life, throu' time to come forth in the morn of the resurrection, and throu' all eternity. Were sealed up against all sin except the sin against the Holy Ghost and the shedding of innocent blood by A. Lyman. I praise the Lord for this
great manifestation of his love and mercy towards me and grant that
the happiness which I now enjoy may last for all eternity. And may
my whole soul continually praise his holy name. Amen" (Thomas
Bullock, Journal, 23 Jan 1846, reprinted in BYU Studies 31 [Winter
1991]: 45 [the portion in italics is omitted from the BYU Studies
publication]). That this was a marriage sealing and not a fullness
of priesthood--or second anointing--ordinance is evident in that
Thomas is not listed in the "Book of Anointings" (LDS church
archives) as having received his second anointing in Nauvoo.

However, Thomas's "Individual Record" at www.familysearch.org
reports that he and Lucy Clayton married on 23 January 1843; and
Andrew Jenson's L.D.S. Biographical Encyclopedia's entry for
"Bullock, Thomas" says that "His second wife, Lucy Clayton was
married to him in 1843" (2:599). Thomas and Henrietta did not
arrive in Nauvoo from England until 31 May 1843, so his "Individual
Record" cannot be accurate and no doubt represents a misreading of
1843 for the correct year, 1846, since the month and day are
otherwise the same. One of his grandchildren later wrote in an
undated, untitled biographical sketch of Thomas: "When the trek
across the plains was being planned, Grandfather's wife, Henrietta[,] was expecting another child, and didn't feel that she
was able to take the long journey, so Brigham Young said that he
knew a young lady who would be glad to help with the children, so
after being duly introduced, Thomas Bullock took Lucy Clayton, my
Grandmother, for his second wife, receiving their endowments in the
Nauvoo Temple on January 23, 1846" (LDS church archives).

While Thomas, who acted as a secretary to Joseph Smith and was
familiar with the doctrine of plural marriage, could have married
polygamosly before Smith's death and been sealed/resealed to both
of his wives on 23 January 1846, I am personally persuaded (for the
present, at least) that he entered plural marriage after Joseph's
death and should not be identified as an early Mormon polygamist.

Dominicus Carter

Dominicus Carter married Lydia Smith on either 11 or 21 May
1828 (Carter's "Individual Record" at www.familysearch.org;
Coleman, Carter Pioneers, 93). After Lydia died on 23 October 1838,
Dominicus married, according to Carter family history (Coleman,
Carter Pioneers, 90), Sylvia (or Sophronia) Babcock by December
1838. Three months later, however, he also married Sylvia Ameretta
Meacham on 28 March 1839. (Both of these marriages are according to
Coleman, Carter Pioneers, 90.) Dominicus took a fourth wife, Mary
Durfee, on either 1 or 2 January 1844 (Coleman, Carter Pioneers,
94; Dominicus Carter "Individual Record").

However, according to Dominicus's handwritten diary from 1843-
45 (microfilm at LDS church archives), he married first Mary Durfee
and then Sophronia Babcock as his plural wives on 26 January and 15
November 1845, respectively. (In an undated entry, he wrote: "Mary
Durfee joined the grand Lodge on the 26 of January 1845" and "Saphronia Babcock joined the grand Lodge on November the 15 1845." Dominicus and Mary Durfee, not his legal wife Sylvia Meacham, were endowed in the Nauvoo temple on 22 December 1845 (they were members of the same endowment company or session), and Sophronia Babcock was endowed on 10 January 1846; whereas Sylvia Meacham, his legal wife, was not endowed until 21 January 1846. Assuming Dominicus employed the term "grand Lodge" as a euphemism for plural marriage, and accurately identified the dates of these two marriages, his marriage history should read as follows: he married Lydia Smith on 11 or 21 May 1828; Lydia died in 1838; he then married Sylvia Ameretta Meacham on 28 March 1839; he married Mary Durfee as a plural wife on 26 January 1845; and he married Sophronia Babcock as a plural wife on 15 November 1845. This being the case, Dominicus should not be considered an early Mormon polygamist.

Henry Lyman Cook

Henry Lyman Cook married Nancy P. Bingham about 1828. Nancy apparently died about 1841-42, and Henry married Mary Hoag civilly on 13 June 1842 (in Cook, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 101). However, their marriage quickly proved disastrous; he soon complained that she "would shamefully misuse his children & set bad examples before them, use very indecent language to them & also would abuse & insult him without a cause and entirely refuse to be subject to him or be under his control, boasting that she would be governed by no man and threaten to use violence on him and his children and that she would go off and say she would leave him ..." Hoping to "bring her to her duty," he "whipped her pretty severely" (qtd. in "Nauvoo High Council Minute Book," 21 January 1843, LDS church archives). Henry and Mary separated less than five months after their marriage, and Mary married John Wells Taylor civilly on 27 November 1842 (in Cook, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 101). Taylor reportedly told John C. Annis, who performed their civil marriage, that he had purchased Mary from Henry "for her weight in cat-fish." Annis was later charged by the Nauvoo Stake High Council with having married John and Mary while Mary was still legally wed to Henry and without the proper authority. Annis confessed his error before the high council and was forgiven (see "Nauvoo High Council Minute Book," 21 January 1843).

John and Mary (who by now was dubbed the "cat-fish woman") were also brought before the Nauvoo Stake High Council and were both excommunicated on 28 January 1843. Henry subsequently married Lovina Thayes civilly on 5 November 1843 (in Cook, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 107); they were endowed in the Nauvoo temple on 29 January 1846. Predictably, the incident involving Cook, Hoag, and Taylor took on a life of its own, and nearly forty-five years later Wilhelm Wymetal, in his anti-Mormon exposé Mormon Portraits (1886),
commented publicly on the sensational story: "[T]here was a great deal of swapping and exchanging done in Nauvoo as to wives. Old Cooks sold his wife for a load of catfish, and from that time on he was always called 'Catfish Cooks!'" (68).

Given Henry and Mary's divorce or separation prior to Henry's civil marriage to Lovina in late 1843, I don't believe Henry should be identified as an early Mormon polygamist.

Jonathan H. Holmes

Jonathan H. Holmes married Marrietta Carter on 13 August 1837. However, Marrietta died ca. August-October 1840 (according to Cook, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 19; her "Individual Record" at www.familysearch.org says 20 August 1840). Jonathan then married Elvira A. Cowles civilly on 1 December 1842, with Joseph Smith officiating (in Cook, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 102). On 1 June 1843, Elvira was sealed to Joseph Smith as his plural wife but apparently continued to live with Jonathan. According to Elvira's obituary (rpt. in Journal History, 10 March 1871, LDS church archives): "She arrived in Nauvoo, in the Fall of 1839, and in the Spring following became a member of the family of the Prophet Joseph Smith, where she remained a happy inmate till the 1st day of December, 1842, when she was married to Jonathan H. Holmes." Because Jonathan's first wife had died prior to his marriage to Elvira, he should not be counted as an early Mormon polygamist.

John D. Lee


In his diary for 1844-45, Lee wrote that he married Nancy Bean in February 1844, ostensibly making him an early Mormon polygamist. However, as Brooks pointed out, Lee himself clarified this point in his published autobiography: "My second wife, Nancy Bean, ... came to Nauvoo and stayed at my house three months, and grew in favor and was sealed to me in the winter of 1845" (qtd. in ibid., 66). Because he did not marry his first plural wife until 1845, John D. Lee should not be considered an early Mormon polygamist.

Amasa M. Lyman

Amasa M. Lyman's first plural wife, according to his grandson Albert R. Lyman (Amasa Mason Lyman, 124, 293), was seventeen-year-old Caroline Ely Partridge, whom he married on 6 September 1844,
and not Dionitia Walker. Furthermore Dionitia (also Diontha, Dionetia) Walker, who Lyman's "Individual Record" (at www.familysearch.org) alleges married Lyman in July 1843, actually became Amasa's fourth plural wife in July 1845 and was sealed to him on 16 January 1846 (Lyman, Amasa Mason Lyman, 133). If his grandson is to be believed, and I find no reason to conclude differently, Amasa Lyman was not an early Mormon polygamist.

Benjamin T. Mitchell

Benjamin T. Mitchell married Sarah Jane Triesback on 26 April 1835. They must have either separated or divorced (as was the case with John Bair), or Sarah died, by 1843, because Benjamin married Lovinia Buckwalter civilly on 10 October 1843, with Charles C. Rich officiating (in Cook, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 108), and Benjamin was never brought before the Nauvoo Stake High Council for bigamy. However, Susan Easton Black (Membership, s.v., "Mitchell, Benjamin Thomas") says that Benjamin married Caroline Conrad eight months earlier on 7 January 1843. The only entry in Lyndon Cook's Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages for Caroline (assuming this is the same person) shows her marrying Elihu B. Adams on 6 March 1844 (97; Elihu was born on 14 January 1822 and endowed in the Nauvoo temple on 3 February 1846). I assume that Benjamin first married Sarah, who then either died, divorced, or was separated from him. He then married Caroline, but divorced her, and finally married Lovinia civilly. I don't believe he should be identified as an early Mormon polygamist.

Orson Pratt


Recommended Additions

The men who, I believe, should be considered for inclusion on George Smith's list of early polygamists are as follows:
George F. Adams

According to Charlotte Haven, a non-Mormon living in Nauvoo, Illinois, writing on 8 September 1843: "A month ago or more one of the Apostles [actually a Seventy], [George J.] Adams by name, returned from a two years' mission in England, bringing with him a wife and child, although he had left a wife and family here when he went away, and I am told that his first wife is reconciled to this certainly at first unwelcome guest to her home, for her husband and some others have reasoned with her that plurality of wives is taught in the Bible, that Abraham, Jacob, Solomon, David, and indeed all the old prophets and good men, had several wives, and if right for them, it is right for the Latter Day Saints. Furthermore the first wife will always be first in her husband's affection and the head of the household, where she will have a larger influence" (Charlotte Haven to "My Dear friends at home," Nauvoo, Illinois, 8 Sept. 1843, first published in "A Girl's Letters from Nauvoo," Overland Monthly [San Francisco] 16 [December 1890]: 635-36).

Earlier that year, Adams had been summoned to Nauvoo, presumably because of rumors of a plural liaison. According to Joseph Smith, Adams "come to me and make acknowledgment, perfect satisfaction." Joseph suspended Adams's preaching license and told the twelve apostles, "Bro Adams will has now started anew,--and let all present hold their tongues and only say that Elder Adams has started anew" (American Prophet's Record, 27 May 1843). Less than four months later, the Nauvoo High Council, which had not been informed of Adams's status, tried him for, in part, adultery. Adams denied the charge and "read a document from the first Presidency and objected to any thing being brought up previous to the date thereof [i.e, 5 June 1843]." As a result, the charge against him "was not sustained." The next week, Adams asked the high council to publish a statement attesting to his innocence and good character. They agreed. (See Nauvoo Stake High Council Minutes, 1 and 7 September 1843, typescript; original in LDS church archives.) Charolette Haven's letter, quoted above, was written the next day.

Howard Egan

Sometime in early 1844, according to John D. Lee, Hyrum Smith told him (Mormonism Unveiled, 288) that Howard Egan had been "sealed to Mrs. Clawson [widow of Zephaniah Clawson], and that their marriage was a most holy one; that it was in accordance with a revelation that the Prophet had recently received direct from God. He then explained to me fully the doctrines of polygamy, and wherein it was permitted, and why it was right." Later, LDS Church Historian George A. Smith, writing to Joseph Smith III, on 9 October 1869, corroborated this early plural marriage. (His letter is reprinted in the Journal History, under date, LDS church archives.)
Joseph A. Kelting

In 1894 Joseph A. Kelting testified: "Calling at the house of the prophet one day, early in the spring of 1844, ... He [Joseph Smith] then informed me that he had received a revelation from God, which taught the correctness of the doctrine of a plurality of wives, and commanding him to obey it. He acknowledged to having married several wives. I told him that was alright. He said he would like a further pledge from me that I would not betray him. I asked him if he wanted me to accept the principle by marrying a plural wife. He answered yes. A short time after this I married two wives in that order of marriage." (Affidavit dated 1 Mar. 1894, reprinted in B. H. Roberts, Succession in the Presidency of the Church... 2nd ed. [Salt Lake City: Geo. Q. Cannon & Sons, 1900], 119-20.) Kelting's use of "a short time" suggests that he probably married polygamously by the time of Joseph Smith's death on 27 June 1844.

Vinson Knight

On 23 June 1843, William Clayton recorded in his diary: "This A.M. President Joseph took me and conversed considerable concerning some delicate matters. Said [Emma Smith] wanted to lay a snare for me. He told me last night of this and said he had felt troubled. He said [Emma] had treated him coldly and badly since I came ... and he knew she was disposed to be revenged on him for some things. She thought that if he would indulge himself she would too. He cautioned me very kindly for which I felt thankful. He said [Robert] Thompson professed great friendship for him but he gave away to temptation and he had to die. Also Brother [Vinson] Knight he gave him one [i.e., a plural wife] but he went to loose conduct and he could not save him. Also B[righam] Y[oung] had transgressed his covenant and he pld with the Lord to spare him this end and he did so, otherwise he would have died. B[righam] denied having transgressed. He said if I would do right by him and abide his council he would save my life while he lived. I feel desirous to do right and would rather die than lose my interest in the celestial kingdom ..." Thus, according to Clayton, Vinson Knight married polygamously before his unexpected death on 31 July 1842.

Both Knight's Individual Record (at familysearch.org) and Susan Easton Black record only one marriage for Knight prior to his death, that to Martha McBride on 6 July 1826 (Easton Black reports the marriage date as 26 July 1825 or 1826). However, both Todd Compton and D. Michael Quinn (Origins of Power, p. 559) report that Knight married Philinda Clark Eldredge (Myrick) in 1842. According to Easton Black, Philinda had previously married Levi Newton Myrick on 18 November 1827. Levi died in the Haun's Mill Massacre on 31 October 1838 (his last name is spelled Merrick in the History of the Church). Philinda then married Daniel Hutchinson Keeler civilly
on 1 February 1843, six months after Knight's death (Levi Hancock performing the civil ceremony) (Cook, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, p. 103, confirms this). Together, Philinda and Daniel had two children, the first born in 1844, the second in 1848. Philinda received her temple endowment on 17 January 1846 and was sealed (for eternity?) to Levi Myrick on 6 February 1846. Daniel Keeler was endowed on 17 January 1846 and sealed (for time?) to Philinda on 6 February 1846.

According to Knight family history, "It is said that Martha [McBride Knight] was the first woman to give her consent for her husband to enter Plural Marriage. She knew some thing was wor[y]ing her husband and he couldn't seem to tell her about it. One evening as she was sitting in the grape arbor behind the house Vinson returned home carrying a basket. He explained to her that he had taken some fruit and vegetables to the widow, Mrs. Levi Merrick, whose husband had been killed at Haun's Mill, Mo. He also explained to her that he had been told to enter Plural Marriage. That if he had to, this Sister Merrick would be the one he could help best. He must have been greatly relieved when Martha replied, 'Is that all!'" (Della Belnap, "Martha McBride Knight," typescript, LDS church archives; courtesy Todd Compton).

John E. Page

According to Joseph Fielding Smith: "That John E. Page practiced 'polygamy' I have the testimony of his wife, Mrs. Mary Eaton of Independence, who told me and others, in August 1904, that she gave her husband, John E. Page, other wives" (Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage, 49-50; emphasis in original). In a fuller statement, Smith reported that Page apparently married polygamously during Joseph Smith's lifetime: "In 1904 I went to the World's Fair in St. Louis. James G. Duffin was presiding over the Central States Mission at that time, and I went with him to see Mary Page Eaton, wife of John E. Page. She was an aged woman, and I was introduced to her. The two of us sat there and talked and I questioned her about plural marriage. I asked her, 'Did John E. Page have wives other than you?' She replied, 'Yes.' I said, 'How did he get them?' She said, 'I gave them to him.' I said, 'How come you did that?' She said, 'Well, he wanted them and I gave them to him.' I said, 'Well, that was in the days of the Prophet Joseph Smith.' She said, 'Yes, it was!'" (in Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of the Twelve, the Patriarch to the Church, the Assistants to the Twelve, the First Council of the Seventy, and the Presiding Bishopric, 5 May 1954, LDS church archives). According to Michael Quinn, John Page married Nancy Bliss as a plural wife in 1844; they separated in 1845; he then married Rachel Judd as a plural wife in 1845, they separated in 1846, after which John remained a monogamist (Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power, 567).
William Sagers

On 25 November 1843, William Henry Harrison Sagers (spelled "Sagars" in the Nauvoo High Council Minute Book, LDS church archives) was charged by Joseph Smith before the Nauvoo High Council with "trying to seduce a young girl, living at his house by the name of Phoebe Madison ... [and] using my name in a blasphemous manner, by saying that I tolerated such things in which thing he is guilty of lying &c. &c." The council, however, decided not to find Sagers guilty, since "it appeared that he had taught false doctrine which was corrected by President Joseph Smith, ... and the defendant was continued in the church." (Not quite three months earlier, Hyrum Smith had read to the high council his brother's revelation on the plurality of wives.) By the following spring, Joseph Smith had apparently taught "the doctrine of Celestial Marriage or plurality of wives" to Sagers and others (Nathan Tanner, Affidavit, 28 Aug. 1869, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, LDS church archives). In early April 1844, however, Sagers's wife, Lucinda (who was apparently unaware of the prophet's teachings), formally brought charges against her husband before the First Presidency and Twelve, alleging: "Inasmuch as you have declared officially that you will deal with all persons who teach or have taught the abominable doctrine of Spiritual wives. This is to notify you that Harrison Sagars is guilty of that said sin, which thing can be proven by credible witnesses, and if he is not chastised for it by the church the law of the land will be enforced against him. H. Sagars left his family in December last since such time he has not provided for them in any way what ever. The cause of the innocent demand[s] action immediately and you are the ones to take the matter in hand." The matter was referred to the Nauvoo High Council, which on 13 April 1844 "decided that as the first part of the charge had been brought before the Council before ... and he tried on it; that the Council had no right to deal with him on that item. And that the Second part was not sustained and therefore that he should remain in the Church." Thus, it appears that Sagars was married polygamously, at least for a period, to both Lucinda Madison and Phoebe Madison (who may have been sisters) with Joseph Smith's approval.

John Smith

John Smith, Joseph Smith's uncle, married Clarissa Lyman on 11 September 1815. Clarissa died in 1854. According to Jesse Nathaniel Smith, John married his mother, Mary Aikens, on 13 August 1843 (Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith, 7). According to Benjamin F. Johnson, John also married his mother, Julia Ellis Hills, about this same time: "My mother having finally separated from my father, by the suggestion or counsel of the Prophet [Joseph Smith] she accepted of and was sealed by him to father John Smith. In this I
felt not a little sorrow, for I loved my father and knew him to be naturally a kind and loving parent, a just and noble spirited man. But he had not obeyed the Gospel, had fought it with his words; and as I knew a stream must have a fountain and does not rise above it, so I consoled myself, assured by the Prophet's words that a better day would come to my father" (My Life's Review: Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Johnson [Provo, UT: Grandin Book Co., 1997], 88-89). Parenthetically, Joseph Smith had previously married Julia's daughter, and Benjamin's sister, Almera Woodward Johnson in April 1843.

Lyman Wight

According to Wight family history (Jermy Benton Wight, The Wild Ram of the Mountain: The Story of Lyman Wight [Afton, WY: Afton Thrifty Print/Star Valley Llama, 1996], 236): "At this time, September of 1844, many things were probably going through Lyman Wight's mind. He was now in Prairie, La Crosse County, Wisconsin with his family and four wives. Three of them recently acquired. There was Jane Margaret Ballantyne, 25 year old daughter of John and Janet Ballantyne, Scottish emigrants with the company. Jane was pregnant and expecting a child in late winter. Then there was Mary Hawley, 22 year old daughter of Pierce and Sarah Hawley, Vermonters with the company. The next was Mary Ann Hobart, 17 year old daughter of Otis and Sophronia Hobart. ... There, of course, was the ever faithful Harriet, now age 44 and at the end of her childbearing years. Harriet was old enough to be the other wives' mother. Harriet appears to stoically accept the new and everlasting covenant of plural marriage or perhaps she welcomed the company. We have no record of her opinion." If Lyman were married polygamously by September 1844, and especially if one of his wives were due to give birth by March 1845 at the latest, the plural marriages would have been performed before Joseph Smith died in late June 1844. Interestingly, Wight was initiated into the prophet's special Anointed Quorum on 14 May 1844, according to Willard Richards's diary. Perhaps he also married polygamously around this same time.

In addition, it is possible that Lyman's son Orange was also an early Mormon polygamist, although I find the evidence to be insufficient. According to Orange's "Individual Record" (at www.familysearch.org), he married both Sarah Hadfield and Matilda Carter on 6 February 1844. However, according to Wight family history (in Wight, Wild Ram of the Mountain, 239, 445, 501), he married first Matilda on 6 February 1844, then Sarah the following year on 7 February 1845. In his own narrative, Orange was not specific: "[I] loved a companion in other places and where I could be more sure [of finding one], I was not [now] called on a mission to go up the river 5 or 6 hundred miles to make lumber for the Nauvoo house and Temple. Their was a number of families to go among which were one of the Bird Family and the Hadfield Famely
sister Bird wanted a Girl to [go] with her as one of the Famely. I told her I knew of a Girl that I thought I could induce to go she was over in Ioway across the river I went over in a skiff found the Girl and she agreed to go at once, she was a Daughter of Gideon Carter that was killed in the Crooked River battle in Missoury she had neither Father or Mother. So I thot maby I had the right one this time. Then we all borded a steamboat and started for Black river Wisconsin. Long before we reach our destination I got aquainted with the Hadfield Famely. Their were two young Girls. I had them away where I thought I could induce them to take up with me. Now it remains to see how I succeeded. I at once commenced keeping company with Miss Sarah Hadfield and at the same time paid close attention to Miss Matilda Carter. Now it would be uninteresting to you to relate all the ups and downs I had in my courtship, so I will mearly say I succeeded in marrying both of them" (Untitled reminiscences, by Orange Lysander Wight, 1903, ms 405, LDS church archives).

Finally, Orange, in his autobiographical reminiscence, may have identified another early Mormon polygamist: "At first the Doctrine [of plural marriage] was taught in private. The first I knew about it was in John Hignies family he lived close to us and being well aquainted with him and family I discoverd he had two wives." Assuming Orange spelled John Hignies's name correctly, or correctly enough, additional research is needed to identify and confirm the marital status of this possible early Mormon polygamist.

(Since publication of his essay, George has tentatively identified another early Mormon polygamist, Isaac Morley, who should be added to his list.)

The Problem of Sources

A final consideration, as it relates to the problem of sources, regards the early plural marriage of Theodore Turley. According to Turley family history as well as Turley's "Individual Record," Theodore married Mary Clift as his first plural wife sometime in 1842 (see The Theodore Turley Family Book, p. 56). Mary gave birth to a son, Jason, the following 20 October. It turns out, however, that Jason was actually fathered by Gustavus Hills, to whom she was not married. Her affidavits before the Nauvoo Stake High Council in late August and early September 1842 regarding Hills's apparent seduction attest to this. Hills was subsequently ruled by the Nauvoo Municipal Court to be Jason's legal father and agreed to pay Mary $200 plus $20 a year for three years if Jason survived. Sadly, Jason died the next year on 26 October. Hills blamed John C. Bennett for his actions and was disfellowshipped. However, he was soon restored to fellowship, and on 6 October 1843 served as the clerk of a special churchwide conference. Sometime after Jason's death, Theodore Turley married Mary Clift as his
plural wife--perhaps at or around the same time he married her sisters Eliza and Sarah Ellen on 6 March and 26 April 1844, respectively. The Turley family's subsequent antedating of Theodore and Mary's marriage no doubt reflects the family's desire to provide Jason with a legitimate parentage. However, it also further confused an already complicated situation.

Conclusion

The foregoing review of George Smith's identification of the earliest Mormon polygamist husbands is, like George's original essay, tentative at best. We are forced to rely on sources that appear to be reliable until we begin to question them closely. The Individual Records at www.familysearch.org are only as trustworthy as are the materials--unidentified to us--accessible to the submitters. The same may be said of Susan Easton Black's massive but incomplete compilation of early Mormons, as well as of most descendant-written biographies and family histories. Obviously, first-person eyewitness accounts would be the most helpful; unfortunately, they are also the rarest. Even then, they can be problematic.

Still, the challenge remains, and George's research--both in terms of the breadth of its sources and judiciousness of its conclusions--sets the highest standard yet.
The Earliest Mormon Polygamist Husbands

Original
List
James Adams
John T. Bair
Ezra T. Benson
James Bird
Thomas Bullock
Reynolds Cahoon
Dominicus Carter
William Clayton
Henry Lyman Cook
William Felshaw
Jonathan H. Holmes
William D. Huntington
Orson Hyde
Heber C. Kimball
John D. Lee
Amasa M. Lyman
Benjamin T. Mitchell
Joseph Bates Noble
Orson Pratt
Parley P. Pratt
Willard Richards
Ebenezer Richardson
Hyrum Smith
Joseph Smith
Erastus Snow
John Taylor
Theodore Turley
Edwin D. Woolley
Brigham Young
Lorenzo Dow Young

Recommended
Deletions
John T. Bair
James Bird
Thomas Bullock
Dominicus Carter
Henry Lyman Cook
Jonathan H. Holmes
John D. Lee
Amasa M. Lyman
Benjamin Mitchell
Orson Pratt

Recommended
Additions
George F. Adams
Howard Egan
Joseph A. Kelting
Vinson Knight
Isaac Morley
John E. Page
William Sagers
John Smith
Lyman Wight

Revised
List
George F. Adams
James Adams
Ezra T. Benson
Reynolds Cahoon
William Clayton
Howard Egan
William Felshaw
William D. Huntington
Orson Hyde
Joseph A. Kelting
Heber C. Kimball
Vinson Knight
Isaac Morley
Joseph Bates Noble
John E. Page
Parley P. Pratt
Willard Richards
Ebenezer Richardson
William Sagers
Hyrum Smith
John Smith
Joseph Smith
Erastus Snow
John Taylor
Theodore Turley
Lyman Wight
Edwin D. Woolley
Brigham Young
Lorenzo Dow Young
6 June 2002

Go to: George may add to his list Samuel Brannan and John S. Higbee etc.