Thomas Guymon’s Horse Mill And
"The Notorious Case of Aaron Lyon."

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Introduction

In stark contrast to what was shortly to befall them, the Mormons living in Caldwell County, Missouri during the Spring of 1838, were finally enjoying some measure of peace. Eight miles east of their principal city of Far West, a small community called Guymon’s Mill had been well established as the first permanent settlement in the county. In mid-March of 1838, the small settlement entertained their Prophet-leader Joseph Smith overnight as he prepared to make his official entrance back among the Missouri Saints. A little more than a month later, Joseph Smith became involved again with this small group of Mormons. They had stripped away the membership rights of their leading High Priest in a local Elder’s Church court and the case was appealed to the Far West High Council and Joseph Smith himself. Some of these same Saints were called upon to testify at the trial about the events that led to the downfall of their former leader.

This study critically examines the Aaron Lyon case in April 1838, for both the insights that can be gained as a snapshot on conditions in the Mormon Church at Far West, as well as the religious life and group dynamics of remote Mormon settlements during this period of LDS history. Also included is an outline of the spiritually abusive offence that led to Aaron Lyon’s trial. In the context of other period High Council meetings, serious irregularities become apparent in relation to the Lyon case that put Joseph Smith in position to defend Aaron. We will argue that the incident which brought this case to light, was the logical trigger that prompted Joseph Smith’s practice of polyandry. This case also brought to light an earlier than expected Mormon theological innovation. More than three years before Joseph Smith’s funeral sermon for Seymour Brunson introducing the doctrine of salvation for the dead, the residents of Guymon’s Mill were
nonchalantly using of the phase "died and preaching to the spirits in prison."

The Offence

Aaron C. Lyon was a man of property and influence among his local brethren, but for over a year he had been without a wife. Roxanna Lyon had died in late August of 1836, shortly after they moved from Willoughby, Ohio to the new county named Caldwell. Leaving "the partner of her youthful days, a family of children and a circle of friends to deplore her loss," they laid her to rest on a peaceful hillside overlooking Shoal Creek.

Undeterred, Aaron and his sons Windsor P. and Charles continued to acquire and develop property in and around what would become known as Guymon's Mill branch. Non Mormons had originally developed the area as early as 1831, but sold out to the Saints as part of an agreement reached by the Missouri State Legislature which made Caldwell county the new Mormon homeland.

In November of 1837, the community of Saints at Guymon's Mill became unsettled as the "word of the Lord" began flowing through Aaron Lyon. Sarah Jackson and her husband had recently converted to the Mormon faith while living in Alton, Illinois. Her husband sent Sarah to Missouri and promised to join her there when he was able. Why sister Jackson chooses to settle in, the Guymon's Mill area is not known. She resided in the home of a Brother Best. Five months after arriving in Missouri and with no word of her husband, Sarah took it upon herself to seek out the village seer. "I, believing Elder Lyon to be a man of God, asked him to inquire of the Lord concerning my husband and what was the cause of his not coming." Not long afterwards, Aaron organized a prayer meeting which they held at Brother [John] Wheeler's house. This
meeting became a forum for Lyon to prophesy publicly as he had done on previous occasions, including the death of his own wife. Lyon rose with power and declared that “some one now in the room shall be led to mourn before three weeks unless there was a speedy repentance, & who it was he did not know.” Aaron knew the prophecy would come true as he would become the source of the grief for the unnamed individual. He also knew perfectly well the one to mourn was going to be the young and attractive Sister Jackson.

The groundwork having been laid, Aaron moved quickly to phase two of his plans. It will be shown later that several statements made by witnesses at his Church trial that clearly Aaron had predetermined to find a new wife and he had fixated on Sarah Jackson. According to Sarah, “... on returning from the meeting, he told me, that he had inquired of the Lord, and that my husband was dead and preaching to the spirits in prison, and that I was the one that should be led to mourn.” Now with her husband out of his way, Aaron Lyon wasted no time slipping the noose around Sarah. The next morning he came to her and told her “that the Lord had appointed him a wife, by revelation, and he knew her name, and if he did not have her in less than six months he would never prophesy in the name of Jesus again.” The final phase, came soon after when he told her ‘the whole of his mind.’ She was the appointed one to be his wife. “Lord is it so?” she exclaimed. Aaron’s answer was quick and with absolute authority, “Yes for I know all things.” He told her that he had gone twice to the Lord on the matter and when she was presented to him he cried out “Why Lord she won’t have me.” “Yes she will” was the divine response, “and if she don’t I’ll place another in her stead that shall be more beautiful to the eye than she is.”

The snare was complete, but the game was still struggling, so Aaron played his reserve card. He told her he was a “man of truth” (in a prophetic sense) and if she failed to yield to the Lord’s
will, she would be forever miserable. Lyon related to her how Joseph Smith himself had once warned him to beware of whom he cursed as it could result in the death of that individual. He then added that he was in the “same spirit” that inspired him toward her that he once had when he cursed a man who did die and when he saw the death of his wife. The implied threat, having been issued, his tone turned to a plea, “I would not tell you anything to injure you, for them that are ordained to this high authority are ordained of God and you have as much right to believe me as to believe Paul; yes, and better right for it is not handed down so far.”* Broken by grief, trodden down by spiritual abuse, and confirmed by personal testimony, Sarah Jackson at long last consented to become Aaron’s wife.

The leadership model prevailed, a prophecy had been given to one in authority, the one intended had received a testimony of truthfulness, and finally, obedience to council was given. So, what went wrong? Simply put, Sarah’s husband showed up at Guymon’s Mill looking for his wife and he had not been preaching to the spirits in prison. His prophecy having failed, the local Priesthood in his branch, cut him off from the Church. Lyon’s only hope for redemption in the Mormon Kingdom, was to appeal his case to the Far West High Council and Joseph Smith himself.

**Pre-Trial Irregularities**

Unlike the first three gospels in the New Testament, the three documentary accounts relating to the Far West High Council’s trial of Aaron Lyon, posed no synoptic problem. The three accounts were: a signed affidavit by Sarah Jackson written the day before the case was heard in
the High Council and read at the proceedings, the official minutes of the Far West High Council kept by the Ebenezer Robinson during the trial, and finally the diary of Joseph Smith as recorded by his scribe George W. Robinson (hereafter called the “Scriptory Book”) who was also an eyewitness. All three of these accounts represent independent views and significantly, were all recorded at the time of trial. It is interesting to note the excommunication of Oliver Cowdery only two weeks before this case filled less than a page in the Scriptory Book, while the Lyon trial took up four times that many. This made the Aaron Lyon case one of the best documented events in official records during the Far West, Missouri period.

As outrageous as the events that caused the hearing before the High Council seemed, a close examination of the trial itself raises even thornier issues. The irregularities began with the sitting of the High Council that Saturday morning in April 1838. George W. Robinson began his account by stating Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and himself were invited to attend the High Council. As the meeting was about to start, it was determined that vacancies needed to be filled for two council members. As no other High Priests were readily, available, Smith and Rigdon “were strongly solicited” either to act as councillors or replace presidents (Thomas B. Marsh and David W. Patton) pro temp. so they could be freed up to sit as councilors. Uncharacteristically (and contrary to an earlier revelation19), Joseph opted not for leadership on this occasion, but for him and Sidney to act in the lesser role of councilors. “The Council was organized” with Rigdon as number five and Smith in the sixth position, however, strangely, it was voted that they “act in the places of NO. 9 & 10.”11 Despite being asked to only temporarily fill in, Joseph and Sydney were, nevertheless, immediately pressed into service. Joseph was appointed along with his friend and current house host, George W. Harris to speak in favor of Aaron Lyon and Sidney was paired
with George M. Hinkle to act as prosecutors.

It is hard to believe Joseph got up that Saturday morning with nothing else to do and just happened to get right in the middle of this “difficult” case by accident. Beyond citing overt coincidence, however, the following procedural abnormalities also lead us to conclude that Joseph Smith engineered himself a place on the Aaron Lyon defense team. To begin with, the vacant seats Joseph and Sydney filled were for council members nine (George M. Hinkle) and ten (George W. Harris) who were in fact, present and also participated in the case. The following instructions for how High Councils were to be organized are contained in section five of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants.

Whenever a high council of the church of Christ is regularly organized, according to the foregoing pattern, it shall be the duty of the twelve counsellors to cast lots by numbers, and thereby ascertain who, of the twelve, shall speak first, commencing with number 1; and so in succession to number 12.12

By being appointed councillor numbers nine and ten, Joseph and Sydney were not supposed to be in line to speak in the case. While the practice of drawing lots was consistently used in the Kirtland High Council13, beginning in August of 1837, in Far West the formality was discontinued without explanation. Except when filling either temporary or permanent vacancies in the quorum, the same positions were occupied by their respective members (a statistically impossible feat if lots were actually being drawn). Also, suspended was a strict adherence to selection of counsellors to speak according to lot drawn order.14 In all cases, however, whichever councillor who was selected on the even side spoke for the accused and was paired against the corresponding odd numbered prosecutor.

This was significant because the Far West Record states that Smith and Rigdon were to “act in
the places of NO. 9 & 10.” If Joseph Smith was in the ninth position, then he should not have been speaking for the accused. This was clearly indicated in the following verse, “Those counsellors who draw even numbers, . . . are the individuals who are to stand up in the behalf of the accused, and prevent insult or injustice.” The most striking atypical action taken on Joseph’s part, however, was his decision to act as a councillor and not preside over the meeting. Section 5, verse six of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants states,

The president of the church, who is also the president of the [High] council, is appointed by revelation, and acknowledged, in his administration, by the voice of the church; and it is according to the dignity of his office, that he should preside over the high council of the church . . .

President Smith attended five High Council meetings (four of which involved membership courts), after his mid-March 1838 return to Far West from Ohio, up to and including the April 28 case of Aaron Lyon. Joseph, as proscribed, presided at all of them except, the Lyon’s case.

Lastly we are faced with the question of why Joseph? Four other potential councillors who were available that morning. Yet, it was Joseph along with George W. Harris whom they assigned to defend Lyon. Concluding that this situation was at the behest of Smith, we are left to wonder why the Prophet went so far out of his way to defend a man accused, of among other things, trying to marry another man’s wife?

Damage Control

Joseph Smith’s removal to Far West from Kirtland was much the same as an admiral being forced to change flag ships in the middle of battle. Kirtland was sinking fast, and it became necessary for Joseph and his remaining loyalists to reestablish his command elsewhere. Upon arriving in the new promise land, however, Smith found that some of his Ohio enemies had similarly decided to gather to Far West as well.
The leading antagonist was his once “Second Elder,” and close associate Oliver Cowdery. With Oliver came dark rumors from Kirtland involving Joseph’s extramarital involvement with Fanny Alger. Somehow, widespread circulation of this disastrous development had been largely confined to Kirtland, but now the news was about to be leaked in Far West. Only two weeks before the Lyon case, Oliver Cowdery was excommunicated from the LDS Church. During his trial, a graphic picture was painted respecting what was termed the “adultery scrape.” Testifying against Cowdery, Joseph reportedly “gave a history respecting the girl business” to the assembled High Council members. It was not clear what spin Smith put on the story as the specifics were omitted. As no mass apostasy followed, however, it can be assumed that whatever was necessary was said to mitigate the possible concerns of the Missouri faithful. As damaging as full disclosure of the Fanny Alger incident might have been to the progress of Mormonism in Missouri, Joseph Smith had only recently pushed the envelope even farther.

Moving beyond polygamy, shortly after his arrival in Far West, Joseph Smith entered a polyandrous relationship with his good friend George W. Harris’ wife Lucinda. Lucinda and her first husband (William Morgan), lived in upstate New York where as a dissenting Mason, he was abducted and presumably murdered for publishing the secrets of the craft. Lucinda next married one time Mason George W. Harris and together they converted to Mormonism in 1834. It was into the Harris home that Joseph and his very pregnant wife Emma moved into when they came to Far West in March 1838. They lived with the Harris’ for a couple of months until a home was provided for Joseph and his family within the Far West town plat.

It was while in route to Far West that Joseph would have probably first heard of Aaron Lyon’s failed attempt at seducing the already married Sarah Jackson. On February 24, 1838, a joint
committee consisting of Edward Partridge, George W. Harris, and Isaac Morley was tasked with seeing to it that someone was sent to Huntsville, Missouri to meet Joseph Smith and Sydney Rigdon and provide them with adequate money and transportation to conclude their journey to Far West. John P. Barnard, a resident of Guymon’s Mill, was the person selected to fulfill the assignment.20 Huntsville was a good three day journey from Far West, so John Barnard (a later witness in the Lyon case) would have had more than enough time to inform Joseph Smith about the situation in his settlement. Even if the conversation never turned toward that topic during their trip, Joseph and his party stayed the night at Barnard’s house in Guymon’s Mill before proceeding on to Far West the next day.21 It would stretch the bounds of reason to believe an event so devastating to such a community would not have been mentioned to Joseph given the number of opportunities presented.

It has long been recognized that questions relating to current events surrounding his life preceded many, if not most, of Joseph Smith’s religious innovations. We would argue that his contact with the Lyon/Jackson incident was the trigger that prompted him to first consider the merits of (in Joseph’s case) sharing another man’s wife. We would agree with LDS historian Andrew Jenson who in listing the plural wives of Joseph Smith, placed Lucinda (Morgan) Harris next after Fanny Alger, and stated that she was “one of the first.”22

The problem that confronted Joseph in late April 1838 was this, “his bosom friend” Oliver Cowdery, while having been excommunicated only two weeks previously, was still in town and mad. Joseph said at Oliver’s trial, concerning the Fanny Alger episode in Kirtland, “he intrusted him with many things.”23 Besides that, Joseph had clandestinely entered yet another even more daring relationship since moving to Far West with Lucinda (Morgan) Harris. The Lyon case
(which had triggered his polyandrous actions) was now coming to trial and if his involvement with Lucinda was leaked simultaneously, it would have been a disaster. The Saints might ask, "what is the difference between Aaron Lyon and Joseph Smith, both were seeking the favors of another man’s wife?" We conclude, therefore, that Joseph being paired with Lucinda’s husband George W. Harris to defend Aaron Lyon before the High Council, was a skillfully (and successfully) engineered effort to achieve damage control in the face of a potential public relations powder keg.

The Notorious Case of Aaron Lyon

Both trial accounts refer to the case as being an appeal. No extant records exist about the original trial held in the local district. The Far West Record references minutes being read of an “Elder’s meeting” from which the “case had been tried, also the charges and the appeal.” Since it was an appeal, assuming Lyon did not prevail is safe. Interesting questions are raised about this first trial, for example, if Lyon was the branch leader, by what authority were the Elders organized? This community was never designated a Stake, so in the absence of standing local High Council, the Elders apparently had a functioning quorum. It does appear, that depending on how far a branch was from Far West determined what degree of autonomy with which they functioned. The C.C. Rich branch, for example, was less than half the distance from headquarters as Guymon’s Mill was and they attended meetings every Sunday in Far West as opposed to locally.24

After the charges had been read, the accused made confession to five of the eleven counts. Some discussion took place on whether the witness should be allowed to testify along with Sarah
Jackson’s written statement. It was concluded that they should hear them. At this point the Council adjourned for one hour. This allowed Joseph Smith who would be defending Lyon against the great orator Sidney Rigdon, time to prepare his defense.

Upon reconvening the meeting, the hymn “This earth was once a garden place” was sung and President David W. Patton offered a prayer. Peter Dustan replaced Jared Carter following the adjournment as the number two High Councilor. After they transacted a quick matter of old business, what George W. Robinson labeled “the notorious case of Aaron Lyon” was begun in earnest.

To understand the hostile tone of the Scriptory Book account of this trial, recognizing the background of its scribe George W. Robinson is important. Within two months after this trial, Robinson would become a Danite Colonel and actively involved in the intolerant expulsion of Mormon dissenters.25 While being very close to his Prophet leader, he was also a son-in-law of Sydney Ridgon. Later in Nauvoo, George would become a dissenter himself largely because of Joseph Smith’s advances toward his sister-in-law, Nancy Ridgon and later attempts to defame her character.26 George W. Robinson proved in Missouri and later in Nauvoo, to be a bitter opponent of plural marriage in any form. It did not matter whether it was a local branch leader like Aaron Lyon or the Prophet himself. Little wonder then, that George began his account of the trial with a scathing attack on Lyon. He wrote: “Now as to this man Lyon, it is a well known <fact> and without contradiction, that he has been in transgression <ever> Since he first came into Kirtland, which is some four, or five years since . . . ”27 In reviewing available Kirtland, Ohio sources, only items that represented Aaron Lyon in positive terms have been identified and none adversely.28 It is, therefore, concluded that George W. Robinson’s ad hominem arguments against
Lyon for his pre-Missouri activities were baseless. The *Far West Record* was kept by Ebenezer Robinson (no relation to George W. Robinson). While Ebenezer’s later membership in the RLDS Church signified a similar disapproval of plural marriage, his account of the Lyon trial was much less bias than the *Scriptory Book*.

After naming the witnesses which were to testify, the *Scriptory Book* explained that her husband sent Sarah Jackson from their home in Alton, Illinois, “as he himself could not come, at that time.” Brother Jackson’s final departure from Illinois in November 1837, may have been linked to the tragic murder of abolitionist and journalist, Rev. Elijah Lovejoy. A martyr to freedom of expression in our new republic, Lovejoy was first warned out of St. Louis before relocating across the Mississippi River to establish his press at Alton. Slavery was illegal in Illinois, but tolerance for abolitionism was not very high among the mostly southern extracted populace. That is not to say that all people in Illinois opposed him. After a mob threw his press into the river for a second time, future “Mormon benefactor,” Isaac Galland of Commerce, Illinois, wrote Lovejoy that,

> It is truly mortifying to the feelings of every honorable minded American citizen to learn that any portion of this community are so lost to every sense of propriety and self-respect, as to disgrace themselves by such acts.

Upon his third attempt to set up a press in Alton, a mob shot and killed him the evening of November 7, 1837. Sarah’s overdue husband would have left Alton just after the death of Lovejoy. According to Historian (and former Senator) Paul Simon,

The [economic] panic of 1837 had already hit Alton when the news of the Lovejoy slaying spread everywhere. Alton became known as a town of lawlessness. River traffic went to St. Louis and other towns. Instead of passing St. Louis in growth, as seemed likely, Alton started losing ground . . . Real estate values plunged. One twenty-five-thousand-dollar piece of property soon sold for two thousand dollars. Overnight, Alton changed from being almost the largest city in the.
Midwest to a town losing its population and its economic base. If economic conditions did indeed change overnight in Alton following Lovejoy’s death, it may well have facilitated Brother Jackson’s departure for Missouri. In a morbid sense, Lovejoy’s murder probably saved the Jackson’s marriage!

After reading the written statement of Sarah Jackson, Aaron Lyon’s neighbors were called upon to testify against their former ecclesiastical leader. First on the stand was Brother Best who had been Sarah Jackson’s host during her time at Guymon’s Mill. His account was the longest of all the witnesses and agreed with Sarah’s written statement. His version does show that Aaron and Sarah were more familiar with one another than her story would suggest. Best said he “was knowing to Lyons walking to and from meetings with her, both in night and day time, as she lived at his house.” We are also indebted to Best for providing the information that allows us to date the events. The length of time Brother and Sister Jackson were separated was “about five months, but he returned soon after, which was sometime in November last [1837].

Next to speak was Shadrach Roundy. He suggests that Lyon’s alleged revelation was merely a self-fulfilled prophecy. Lyon had shared with Roundy his belief that the Lord was going to give him a wife “by revelation . . . with whom he could live in peace.” This maybe the way Shadrach viewed the situation in hindsight, but at the time he did not question his branch High Priest’s actions. Roundy further testified that,

At another time Lyons told him that he enquired of the Lord respecting a companion, when Sister Jackson was presented before him, when he to the Lord “She is pregnant by another man;” when the Lord replied “wait my time & it will all come right”

Interestingly, mention of her being with a child was not included in Sarah’s statement and her husband stated at the end of the testimony that she “was not pregnant when he returned.” If she
had been pregnant, she would have been well into her second trimester at the time of Aaron’s advances on her. This coupled with the stress of worrying about the welfare of her missing husband, may have induced a miscarriage.

John P. Barnard agreed with Shadrach Roundy’s comment that “Lyons generally took the lead of meetings in that branch” and added, “when he [Lyon] spoke in the name of the Lord, the brethren had great confidence in it.” Barnard’s testimony, along with most of the others, illustrated how comfortable Lyon was speaking in the name of the Lord, especially in the first person. It should be recalled, that this John Barnard, was the man who went to meet Joseph Smith in Huntsville, Missourí and charged to convey him to Far West in March of 1838.

Thomas Guymon (for whose Mill they most often referred to the branch) testified next. He stressed the fear Sarah Jackson had of Lyon and his warnings of curses if she did not submit to his (or rather, the Lord’s) will. He told of the faint hope she held that her husband might yet be alive. She even continued to ask the members of the branch to pray for his return. Over time, however, she lost faith and “expressed her fears that he was dead & was inclined to think she had a testimony to that effect.” Guymon also related that Lyon had “told him that Brother Best had given him liberty to come to his house and see Sister Jackson.”

The testimony of all these witnesses all points to the fact that the community was well informed of the actions of Aaron Lyon toward Sarah Jackson and it was perfectly acceptable to them until Brother Jackson arrived. The crucial point was they believed in his revelations and therefore did not question his motives until they failed. What if Brother Jackson had died in Alton? Would that have justified Aaron Lyon’s behavior toward Sarah? Little doubt exists that a marriage between them would have occurred if her husband would not have returned. If this had
happened, the Saints at Guymon's Mill, would have enjoyed their lives as if all was well. When word did come of Brother Jackson's death, they would have praised God for the Prophet in their midst.

A Brother Benjamin was the last witness called before the appointed High Councillors took a center stage. Although short, Brother Benjamin's statement was extremely intriguing from a theological issue. He testified that, "Calvin Reed, a boy of about 15 years of age, said he had a revelation or vision, in which he saw, Br Jackson dead or preaching to the spirits in prison."

Several aspects of his testimony warrant further examination before we continue.

**Preaching to the Spirits in Prison**

Sarah Jackson's written statement already mentioned above, contained a reference to Aaron Lyon's revelation about her husband's other worldly mission. Young Calvin Reed's vision was taken as a confirmation and validation of Lyon's claim. Here were two individuals, who supposedly had visions relating to a dead man they had never met, and yet were each able positively to identify him as Mr. Jackson. Clearly, young Reed was caught in the enthusiasm of the moment, probably during one of the groups' "prayer meetings" which they held in the branch. The use of the phrases "dead" in conjunction with "preaching to the spirits in prison," was quite significant, especially when it came as early as 1837.

In 1879, William Smith (Joseph Smith's younger brother) as a member of the Reorganized Church, preached a sermon on baptism for the dead, at the Far West Temple site. On that occasion, he observed that, ...this ordinance would again be restored to the Church. It was for this reason also, that these
Saints of latter days build temples, in order to prepare a place for the administration of ordinances that belong in the order of the holy priesthood. And it was for this object also, that this corner stone was planted in this town of Far West, under the direction and superintendency of Joseph, the Martyr in 1836-37 [1838].

This maybe simply a case of revisionist history by William Smith, but he may not have been too far the mark after all. In a question first posed in November of 1837, the issue was raised, “If the Mormon doctrine is true what will become of all those who have died since the days of the Apostles?” The answer printed in the July 1838 edition of the Elder’s Journal printed in Far West, was, “All those who have not had an opportunity of hearing the gospel, and being administered to by an inspired man in the flesh, must have it here after, before they can be finally judged.”

Speaking of the gap that existed between Joseph Smith’s 1836 vision of his unbaptized brother Alvin in the Celestial kingdom, and the August 1840 funeral sermon for Seymour Brunson, Historian M. Guy Bishop noted “We have been left with scant evidence of how Joseph Smith formulated the Mormon plan of baptism for the dead.” It was not a quantum leap that occurred in those intervening years. Rather, it was an evolutionary process. By 1840, Joseph’s plan finally crystalized, but (as with the Saints at Guymon’s Mill) it was only after the subject had been widely discussed throughout the Church.

The notion of preaching to the departed, was not isolated to those at Guymon’s Mill. In December of 1836, Lorenzo Snow in a Joseph Smith, Sr. given Patriarchal Blessing was told, “Thou shalt have power to translate thyself from one planet to another; and power to go to the moon if thou so desire; power to preach to the spirits in prison.” When Zebedee Coltrin ordained Wilford Woodruff a Seventy in January 1837, he remembered being told he “... should
visit COLUB[Kolob] & Preach to the spirits in prison . . . 736 The idea, and the phrase were most likely carried down to Missouri and cross-pollinated into the local branch by Aaron Lyon when he left Kirtland in 1836. Considering this, it is interesting that, in at least William Smith’s memory, it was the Far West Temple where ordinances for the dead were to be first preformed and not Nauvoo.

**Mercy Robs Justice**

The last portion of the trial was the statement made for and against Lyon by of the selected high councillors. *The Far West Record* provided more information on the testimony of the witnesses and only summarized the words of the councillors as “some lengthly remarks” with “very good instruction given by counsellor Smith.” *The Scriptory Book*, on-the-other-hand, amalgamated the testimony of the witnesses and provided a greater detail on what Smith/Harris and Rigdon/Hinkle said. Because of the two perspectives, we fortunately have a more comprehensive picture of the trial.

As the testimony of the Guymon’s Mill residents concluded, George Robinson launched into a tirade of metaphors that seem to spring straight off the pages of *The Arabian Nights*. 37

But, alas. to[o] late for the old man, the testimony, being closed, and the S<word>ord of Justice, began to be unsheathed, which fell upon the old man like a scourge of ten thousand lashes, wielded by the hand of President S. Rigdon & George M. Hinkle, inspired by the spirit of justice, accompanied with a flow of eloquence, which searched for the feelings, like the sting of so many scorpions, which served to atone for past iniquity.

After Rigdon and Hinkle had completed probing and exposing all the intimate details of the incident, it was Joseph Smith’s turn to speak. Again the literary style of George Robinson, After justice had ceased to wield <its> sword, Mercy then advanced to rescue it victim, which
inspired the heart of President J. Smith Jr, & Geo W. Harris who, with profound eloquence with 
<br>deep & sublime thought, with clemency of feeling, spoke in favour of the defendant.

Joseph had been persuasive, but each side was given another chance to plead their side of the 
debate. With his closing comments, Rigdon,

...leveled a volley of darts, which came upon the old man, like a hurricane upon the mountain tops, 
which seemingly, was about to sweep the victim entirely out of the reach of mercy, but amidst 
the clashing of the sword of justice, mercy still claded the victim.

Robinson extolled the greatness of repentance, and the fact that Lyon could yet “be saved in 
the Kingdom of our God.” Saved yes, trusted as a future Priesthood holder, not likely. His 
licence was revoked as a High Priest “in consequence of his being considered not capable of 
dignifying that office.”

Thus, concluded the “notorious case of Aaron Lyon.” Joseph Smith would not attempt 
contracting any new plural marriages for several more years. When his attentions did again turn 
to polyandry later in Nauvoo, however, one of his chosen wives was Sylvia (Sessions) Lyon. She 
was the wife of Aaron’s son Windsor P. Lyon. It would have been interesting to know Aaron’s 
thoughts on Joseph’s relationship with his daughter-in-law, but that was not to be. Aaron Lyon 
died in Hancock County, Illinois, at the age of fifty-eight, only a year and five months following 
his trial.

Thomas Guymon’s son, Thomas Noah and his wife Mary Dickerson (Dudley) named their 
second child born in September 1840 Lucinda Harris. After the surrender of Far West, Some of 
those who lived in the branch returned to their lands until the next spring when the bulk of the 
Mormons relocated to Illinois. Several were arrested and taken to Richmond, but were released 
several days later. Most of them likewise returned to their farms at Guymon’s Mill. Dissenting
Mormons like Samuel Richey and others tried to continue the branch as a town following the exodus, but this failed due to the growth of Kingston. The mill and a store along with a blacksmith shop operated for sometime even after the establishment of Kingston only a mile away. All that remains today are some stone foundations and potsherds in an area the locals call "Salemtown."

ENDNOTES

1. Obit M&A vol III no. 4 Jan. 1837

2. Cannon and Cook identify "Br. Best" as Henry Best, see Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook ed., The Far West Record, (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1983). p. 186n4. Although Henry Best was a Far West era Mormon, he did not live at Guymon’s Mill. According to his Missouri Redress petition he lived in Daviess County during his entire stay in the State. See Clark V. Johnson ed., Mormon Redress Petitions, (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992). p. 420. We have, however, not yet been able to identify the real Br. Best.

3. Far West Record. p. 206

4. Far West Record. p. 186 speculates this was referring to Wheeler Baldwin, however, original land entries for Caldwell County has a John Wheeler owning property near the settlement.

5. Far West Record. p. 206. Br. Best testified that the prophecy was “that some one would be heard to mourn.” Far West Record. p. 184


8. All of these quotations for from Sarah Jackson’s written account of Aaron Lyon’s actions prepared the day before the Far West High Council met to consider the case. Far West Record. p. 206-207.


11. FWR, p. 183.


13. Kirtland Council Minute Book, typescript Lyndon W. Cook. The instructions for the organization for the Kirtland High Council was given on February 17, 1834 see page 32-35. The practice was followed throughout the remainder of the recorded meetings in Kirtland ending on November 30, 1837.

14. During the two month period between February 24th and April 28, 1838, the High Council met a total of eight times to consider Church membership cases. In all but two of these meetings, the councillors chosen to speak for and against the defendants were not properly selected according to verse 7 of Doctrine and Covenants section 5 (1835 edition). Only on March 10, 1838 (excommunication of W.W. Phelps and John Whitmer) and again on April 12, 1838 (excommunication of Oliver Cowdery) were the correct numbered councillors used. See Far West Record, pp. 141-183.


16. This statement is supported by the following sources: “Lucinda Harris, also one of the first plural women sealed to the Prophet.” Andrew Jensen, The Historical Record, vol. 6. p. 233. See Todd Compton, “A Trajectory of Plurality: An Overview of Joseph Smith’s Thirty-Three Plural Wives,” Dialogue, Summer 1996, vol. 29. no. 2. pp. 2, 22, 28 and 32. Wyl’s 1886 interview with Sarah Pratt involving Joseph Smith’s 1842 advances towards her, establishes the 1838 date for Lucinda’s involvement with the Prophet. “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 unbosom 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!’” Wyl, Mormon Portraits (Salt Lake City, UT: Tribune Printing and Publishing, 1886). p. 60. What has not been pointed out previously, was the fact that neither Lucinda or her husband George were included as members of Joseph Smith’s elite “Anointed Quorum” or among those listed as having been “endowed” before the completion of the Nauvoo Temple. This is significant because many of his other plural wives were included on one or both of these lists. Because these secret ceremonies were often used to initiate women into polygamy, Lucinda not being included, strongly indicates a pre-1842 relationship with Smith. Compare Compton, pp. 2-3 with Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question,”


19. Mormon Enigma, p. 70.

20. FWR, pp. 139-140.


22. Andrew Jenson, Historical Record, vol. 6, p. 233.

23. FWR, p. 168.

24. Kenneth W. Godfrey, Women’s Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints 1830-1900, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company), 1988, p. 98. Charles C. Rich (for whom the branch was named) served as the president of the High Priest’s quorum in Far West.


28. See for example, Kirtland High Council Minute Book, pp. 98, 127, 193, 195, 216, and 218. DHC vol 2, p. 205 & 207. where was among those being blessed for working on the Kirtland Temple. Messenger and Advocate, June 1836, p. 335. Included in list of “Ministers of the Gospel.” Note that the date of Aaron Lyon’s first land entry in Caldwell County, Missouri was in August of 1836, only two months after his inclusion on the list of ministers. Robinson’s comments about Lyon’s Kirtland reputation were completely unfounded.

29. For information on Galland and the Mormons, see Lyndon W. Cook, “Isaac Galland-Mormon Benefactor,” BYU Studies, Spring 1979, vol. 19, no. 3.

31. Reid’s Brochure of a Notable American City: Alton Illinois (St. Louis: James Allan Reid, Book Maker, 1912). p. 84.

32. Simon, p. 140.


35. Patriarchal Blessing of Lorenzo Snow, given by Joseph Smith, Sr., December 15, 1836.

36. Wilford Woodruff Journal Vol. 1. p. 119. We are indebted to Michael Marquardt for providing us with the Snow and Woodruff citations.

Thomas Guymon's Horse Mill And
"The Notorious Case of Aaron Lyon."

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Introduction

In stark contrast to what was shortly to befall them, the Mormons living in Caldwell County, Missouri during the Spring of 1838, were finally enjoying some measure of peace. Eight miles east of their principal city of Far West, a small community called Guymon's Mill had been well established as the first permanent settlement in the county. In mid-March of 1838, the small settlement entertained their Prophet-leader Joseph Smith overnight as he prepared to make his official entrance back among the Missouri Saints. A little more than a month later, Joseph Smith became involved again with this small group of Mormons. They had stripped away the membership rights of their leading High Priest in a local Elder's Church court and the case was appealed to the Far West High Council and Joseph Smith himself. Some of these same Saints were called upon to testify at the trial about the events that led to the downfall of their former leader.

This study critically examines the Aaron Lyon case in April 1838, for both the insights that can be gained as a snapshot on conditions in the Mormon Church at Far West, as well as the religious life and group dynamics of remote Mormon settlements
during this period of LDS history. Also included is an outline of the spiritually abusive offence that led to Aaron Lyon's trial. In the context of other period High Council meetings, serious irregularities become apparent in relation to the Lyon case that put Joseph Smith in position to defend Aaron. We will argue that the incident which brought this case to light, was the logical trigger that prompted Joseph Smith's practice of polyandry. This case also brought to light an earlier than expected Mormon theological innovation. More than three years before Joseph Smith's funeral sermon for Seymour Brunson introducing the doctrine of salvation for the dead, the residents of Guymon's Mill were nonchalantly using of the phase "died and preaching to the spirits in prison."

The Offence

Aaron C. Lyon was a man of property and influence among his local brethren, but for over a year he had been without a wife. Roxanna Lyon had died in late August of 1836, shortly after they moved from Willoughby, Ohio to the new county named Caldwell. Leaving "the partner of her youthful days, a family of children and a circle of friends to deplore her loss," they laid her to rest on a peaceful hillside overlooking Shoal Creek.

Undeterred, Aaron and his sons Windsor P. and Charles continued to acquire and develop property in and around what would become known as Guymon's Mill branch. Non Mormons had originally developed the area as early as 1831, but sold out to the Saints as part of an agreement reached by the Missouri State Legislature which made Caldwell county the new Mormon homeland.

In November of 1837, the community of Saints at Guymon's Mill became unsettled as the "word of the Lord" began flowing through Aaron Lyon. Sarah Jackson and her husband had recently converted to the Mormon faith while living in Alton, Illinois. Her husband sent Sarah to Missouri and promised to join her there when he was able. Why sister Jackson chooses to settle in, the Guymon's Mill area is not known. She resided in the home of a Brother Best. Five months after arriving in Missouri and with no word of her husband, Sarah took it upon herself to seek out the village seer. "I, believing Elder Lyon to be a man of God, asked him to inquire of the Lord concerning my husband and what was the cause of his not coming." Not long afterwards, Aaron organized a prayer meeting which they held at Brother [John] Wheeler's house. This meeting became a forum for Lyon to prophesy publicly as he had done on previous occasions, including the death of his own wife. Lyon rose with power and declared that "some one now in the room shall be led to mourn before three weeks unless there was a speedy repentance, & who it was he did not know." Aaron knew the prophecy would come true as he would become the source of the grief for the unnamed individual. He also knew perfectly well the one to mourn was going to be the young and attractive Sister Jackson.

The groundwork having been laid, Aaron moved quickly to phase two of his plans. It will be shown later that several statements
made by witnesses at his Church trial that clearly Aaron had predetermined to find a new wife and he had fixated on Sarah Jackson. According to Sarah, "... on returning from the meeting, he told me, that he had inquired of the Lord, and that my husband was dead and preaching to the spirits in prison, and that I was the one that should be led to mourn." Now with her husband out of his way, Aaron Lyon wasted no time slipping the noose around Sarah. The next morning he came to her and told her "that the Lord had appointed him a wife, by revelation, and he knew her name, and if he did not have her in less than six months he would never prophesy in the name of Jesus again." The final phase, came soon after when he told her "the whole of his mind." She was the appointed one to be his wife. "Lord is it so?" she exclaimed. Aaron's answer was quick and with absolute authority, "Yes for I know all things." He told her that he had gone twice to the Lord on the matter and when she was presented to him he cried out "Why Lord she won't have me." "Yes she will" was the divine response, "and if she don't I'll place another in her stead that shall be more beautiful to the eye than she is."

The snare was complete, but the game was still struggling, so Aaron played his reserve card. He told her he was a "man of truth" (in a prophetic sense) and if she failed to yield to the Lord's will, she would be forever miserable. Lyon related to her how Joseph Smith himself had once warned him to beware of whom he cursed as it could result in the death of that individual. He then added that he was in the "same spirit" that inspired him toward her that he once had when he cursed a man who did die and when he saw the death of his wife. The implied threat, having been issued, his tone turned to a plea, "I would not tell you anything to injure you, for them that are ordained to this high authority are ordained of God and you have as much right to believe me as to believe Paul; yes, and better right for it is not handed down so far." Broken by grief, trodden down by spiritual abuse, and confirmed by personal testimony, Sarah Jackson at long last consented to become Aaron's wife.

The leadership model prevailed, a prophecy had been given to one in authority, the one intended had received a testimony of truthfulness, and finally, obedience to council was given. So, what went wrong? Simply put, Sarah's husband showed up at Guymon's Mill looking for his wife and he had not been preaching to the spirits in prison. His prophecy having failed, the local Priesthood in his branch, cut him off from the Church. Lyon's only hope for redemption in the Mormon Kingdom, was to appeal his case to the Far West High Council and Joseph Smith himself.

Pre-Trial Irregularities

Unlike the first three gospels in the New Testament, the three documentary accounts relating to the Far West High Council's trial of Aaron Lyon, posed no synoptic problem. The three accounts were: a signed affidavit by Sarah Jackson written the day before the case was heard in the High
Council and read at the proceedings, the official minutes of the Far West High Council kept by the Ebenezer Robinson during the trial, and finally the diary of Joseph Smith as recorded by his scribe George W. Robinson (hereafter called the "Scriptry Book") who was also an eyewitness. All three of these accounts represent independent views and significantly, were all recorded at the time of trial. It is interesting to note the excommunication of Oliver Cowdery only two weeks before this case filled less than a page in the Scriptry Book, while the Lyon trial took up four times that many. This made the Aaron Lyon case one of the best documented events in official records during the Far West, Missouri period.

As outrageous as the events that caused the hearing before the High Council seemed, a close examination of the trial itself raises even thornier issues. The irregularities began with the sitting of the High Council that Saturday morning in April 1838. George W. Robinson began his account by stating Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and himself were invited to attend the High Council. As the meeting was about to start, it was determined that vacancies needed to be filled for two council members. As no other High Priests were readily, available, Smith and Rigdon "were strongly solicited" either to act as councilors or replace presidents (Thomas B. Marsh and David W. Patton) pro temp. so they could be freed up to sit as councilors. Uncharacteristically (and contrary to an earlier revelation), Joseph opted not for leadership on this occasion, but for him and Sidney to act in the lesser role of councilors. "The Council was organized" with Rigdon as number five and Smith in the sixth position, however, strangely, it was voted that they "act in the places of NO. 9 & 10." Despite being asked to only temporarily fill in, Joseph and Sidney were, nevertheless, immediately pressed into service. Joseph was appointed along with his friend and current house host, George W. Harris to speak in favor of Aaron Lyon and Sidney was paired with George M. Hinkle to act as prosecutors.

It is hard to believe Joseph got up that Saturday morning with nothing else to do and just happened to get right in the middle of this "difficult" case by accident. Beyond citing overt coincidence, however, the following procedural abnormalities also lead us to conclude that Joseph Smith engineered himself a place on the Aaron Lyon defense team. To begin with, the vacant seats Joseph and Sydney filled were for council members nine (George M. Hinkle) and ten (George W. Harris) who were in fact, present and also participated in the case. The following instructions for how High Councils were to be organized are contained in section five of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. Whenever a high council of the church of Christ is regularly organized, according to the foregoing pattern, it shall be the duty of the twelve counsellors to cast lots by numbers, and thereby ascertain who, of the twelve, shall speak first, commencing with number 1; and so in succession to number 12.
By being appointed councillor numbers nine and ten, Joseph and Sydney were not supposed to be in line to speak in the case. While the practice of drawing lots was consistently used in the Kirtland High Council, beginning in August of 1837, in Far West the formality was discontinued without explanation. Except when filling either temporary or permanent vacancies in the quorum, the same positions were occupied by their respective members (a statistically impossible feat if lots were actually being drawn). Also, suspended was a strict adherence to selection of councillors to speak according to lot drawn order. In all cases, however, whichever councillor who was selected on the even side spoke for the accused and was paired against the corresponding odd numbered prosecutor.

This was significant because the Far West Record states that Smith and Rigdon were to "act in the places of NO. 9 & 10." If Joseph Smith was in the ninth position, then he should not have been speaking for the accused. This was clearly indicated in the following verse, "Those counsellors who draw even numbers, . . . are the individuals who are to stand up in the behalf of the accused, and prevent insult or injustice." The most striking atypical action taken on Joseph's part, however, was his decision to act as a councillor and not preside over the meeting. Section 5, verse six of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants states, The president of the church, who is also the president of the [High] council, is appointed by revelation, and acknowledged, in his administration, by the voice of the church; and it is according to the dignity of his office, that he should preside over the high council of the church . . .

President Smith attended five High Council meetings (four of which involved membership courts), after his mid-March 1838 return to Far West from Ohio, up to and including the April 28 case of Aaron Lyon. Joseph, as proscribed, presided at all of them except, the Lyon's case.

Lastly we are faced with the question of why Joseph? Four other potential councillors who were available that morning. Yet, it was Joseph along with George W. Harris whom they assigned to defend Lyon. Concluding that this situation was at the behest of Smith, we are left to wonder why the Prophet went so far out of his way to defend a man accused, of among other things, trying to marry another man's wife?

Damage Control

Joseph Smith's removal to Far West from Kirtland was much the same as an admiral being forced to change flag ships in the middle of battle. Kirtland was sinking fast, and it became necessary for Joseph and his remaining loyalists to reestablish his command elsewhere. Upon arriving in the new promise land, however, Smith found that some of his Ohio enemies had similarly decided to gather to Far West as well.

The leading antagonist was his once "Second Elder," and close associate Oliver Cowdery. With Oliver came dark rumors from Kirtland involving Joseph's extramarital involvement with Fanny Alger. Somehow, widespread circulation of this disastrous
development had been largely confined to Kirtland, but now the news was about to be leaked in Far West.

Only two weeks before the Lyon case, Oliver Cowdery was excommunicated from the LDS Church. During his trial, a graphic picture was painted respecting what was termed the "adultery scrape." Testifying against Cowdery, Joseph reportedly "gave a history respecting the girl business" to the assembled High Council members. It was not clear what spin Smith put on the story as the specifics were omitted. As no mass apostasy followed, however, it can be assumed that whatever was necessary was said to mitigate the possible concerns of the Missouri faithful. As damaging as full disclosure of the Fanny Alger incident might have been to the progress of Mormonism in Missouri, Joseph Smith had only recently pushed the envelope even farther.

Moving beyond polygamy, shortly after his arrival in Far West, Joseph Smith entered a polyandrous relationship with his good friend George W. Harris' wife Lucinda. Lucinda and her first husband (William Morgan), lived in upstate New York where as a dissenting Mason, he was abducted and presumably murdered for publishing the secrets of the craft. Lucinda next married one time Mason George W. Harris and together they converted to Mormonism in 1834. It was into the Harris home that Joseph and his very pregnant wife Emma moved into when they came to Far West in March 1838. They lived with the Harris' for a couple of months until a home was provided for Joseph and his family within the Far West town plat.

It was while in route to Far West that Joseph would have probably first heard of Aaron Lyon's failed attempt at seducing the already married Sarah Jackson. On February 24, 1838, a joint committee consisting of Edward Partridge, George W. Harris, and Isaac Morley was tasked with seeing to it that someone was sent to Huntsville, Missouri to meet Joseph Smith and Sydney Rigdon and provide them with adequate money and transportation to conclude their journey to Far West. John P. Barnard, a resident of Guymon's Mill, was the person selected to fulfill the assignment. Huntsville was a good three day journey from Far West, so John Barnard (a later witness in the Lyon case) would have had more than enough time to inform Joseph Smith about the situation in his settlement. Even if the conversation never turned toward that topic during their trip, Joseph and his party stayed the night at Barnard's house in Guymon's Mill before proceeding on to Far West the next day. It would stretch the bounds of reason to believe an event so devastating to such a community would not have been mentioned to Joseph given the number of opportunities presented.

It has long been recognized that questions relating to current events surrounding his life preceded many, if not most, of Joseph Smith's religious innovations. We would argue that his contact with the Lyon/Jackson incident was the trigger that prompted him to first consider the merits of (in Joseph's case) sharing another man's wife. We would agree with LDS historian Andrew Jenson who in listing the plural wives of Joseph Smith, placed Lucinda (Morgan) Harris next after Fanny Alger, and stated
that she was "one of the first."

The problem that confronted Joseph in late April 1838 was this, "his bosom friend" Oliver Cowdery, while having been excommunicated only two weeks previously, was still in town and mad. Joseph said at Oliver's trial, concerning the Fanny Alger episode in Kirtland, "he intrusted him with many things." Besides that, Joseph had clandestinely entered yet another even more daring relationship since moving to Far West with Lucinda (Morgan) Harris.

The Lyon case (which had triggered his polyandrous actions) was now coming to trial and if his involvement with Lucinda was leaked simultaneously, it would have been a disaster. The Saints might ask, "what is the difference between Aaron Lyon and Joseph Smith, both were seeking the favors of another man's wife?" We conclude, therefore, that Joseph being paired with Lucinda's husband George W. Harris to defend Aaron Lyon before the High Council, was a skillfully (and successfully) engineered effort to achieve damage control in the face of a potential public relations powder keg.

The Notorious Case of Aaron Lyon

Both trial accounts refer to the case as being an appeal. No extant records exist about the original trial held in the local district. The Far West Record references minutes being read of an "Elder's meeting" from which the "case had been tried, also the charges and the appeal." Since it was an appeal, assuming Lyon did not prevail is safe. Interesting questions are raised about this first trial, for example, if Lyon was the branch leader, by what authority were the Elders organized? This community was never designated a Stake, so in the absence of standing local High Council, the Elders apparently had a functioning quorum. It does appear, that depending on how far a branch was from Far West determined what degree of autonomy with which they functioned. The C.C. Rich branch, for example, was less than half the distance from headquarters as Guymon's Mill was and they attended meetings every Sunday in Far West as opposed to locally.

After the charges had been read, the accused made confession to five of the eleven counts. Some discussion took place on whether the witness should be allowed to testify along with Sarah Jackson's written statement. It was concluded that they should hear them. At this point the Council adjourned for one hour. This allowed Joseph Smith who would be defending Lyon against the great orator Sidney Rigdon, time to prepare his defense.

Upon reconvening the meeting, the hymn "This earth was once a garden place" was sung and President David W. Patton offered a prayer. Peter Duscan replaced Jared Carter following the adjournment as the number two High Councilor. After they transacted a quick matter of old business, what George W. Robinson labeled "the notorious case of Aaron Lyon" was begun in earnest.

To understand the hostile tone of the Scriptorry Book account
of this trial, recognizing the background of its scribe George W. Robinson is important. Within two months after this trial, Robinson would become a Danite Colonel and actively involved in the intolerant expulsion of Mormon dissenters. While being very close to his Prophet leader, he was also a son-in-law of Sydney Rigdon. Later in Nauvoo, George would become a dissenter himself largely because of Joseph Smith's advances toward his sister-in-law, Nancy Rigdon and later attempts to defame her character. George W. Robinson proved in Missouri and later in Nauvoo, to be a bitter opponent of plural marriage in any form. It did not matter whether it was a local branch leader like Aaron Lyon or the Prophet himself. Little wonder then, that George began his account of the trial with a scathing attack on Lyon. He wrote: "Now as to this man Lyon, it is a well known fact and without contradiction, that he has been in transgression ever Since he first came into Kirtland, which is some four, or five years since . . ." In reviewing available Kirtland, Ohio sources, only items that represented Aaron Lyon in positive terms have been identified and none adversely. It is, therefore, concluded that George W. Robinson's ad hominem arguments against Lyon for his pre-Missouri activities were baseless. The Far West Record was kept by Ebenezer Robinson (no relation to George W. Robinson). While Ebenezer's later membership in the RLDS Church signified a similar disapproval of plural marriage, his account of the Lyon trial was much less bias than the Scriptory Book.

After naming the witnesses which were to testify, the Scriptory Book explained that her husband sent Sarah Jackson from their home in Alton, Illinois, "as he himself could not come, at that time." Brother Jackson's final departure from Illinois in November 1837, may have been linked to the tragic murder of abolitionist and journalist, Rev. Elijah Lovejoy. A martyr to freedom of expression in our new republic, Lovejoy was first warned out of St. Louis before relocating across the Mississippi River to establish his press at Alton.

Slavery was illegal in Illinois, but tolerance for abolitionism was not very high among the mostly southern extracted populace. That is not to say that all people in Illinois opposed him. After a mob threw his press into the river for a second time, future "Mormon benefactor," Isaac Galland of Commerce, Illinois, wrote Lovejoy that, It is truly mortifying to the feelings of every honorable minded American citizen to learn that any portion of this community are so lost to every sense of propriety and self-respect, as to disgrace themselves by such acts.

Upon his third attempt to set up a press in Alton, a mob shot and killed him the evening of November 7, 1837. Sarah's overdue husband would have left Alton just after the death of Lovejoy. According to Historian (and former Senator) Paul Simon, The [economic] panic of 1837 had already hit Alton when the news of the Lovejoy slaying spread everywhere. Alton became known as a town of lawlessness. River traffic went to St. Louis and other towns. Instead of passing St. Louis in growth, as seemed likely, Alton started losing ground . . . Real estate values plunged. One
twenty-five-thousand-dollar piece of property soon sold for two thousand dollars. Overnight, Alton changed from being almost the largest city in the Midwest to a town losing its population and its economic base.

If economic conditions did indeed change overnight in Alton following Lovejoy's death, it may well have facilitated Brother Jackson's departure for Missouri. In a morbid sense, Lovejoy's murder probably saved the Jackson's marriage!

After reading the written statement of Sarah Jackson, Aaron Lyon's neighbors were called upon to testify against their former ecclesiastical leader. First on the stand was Brother Best who had been Sarah Jackson's host during her time at Gyunon's Mill. His account was the longest of all the witnesses and agreed with Sarah's written statement. His version does show that Aaron and Sarah were more familiar with one another than her story would suggest.

Best said he "was knowing to Lyons walking to and from meetings with her, both in night and day time, as she lived at his house." We are also indebted to Best for providing the information that allows us to date the events. The length of time Brother and Sister Jackson were separated was "about five months, but he returned soon after, which was sometime in November last [1837].

Next to speak was Shadrach Roundy. He suggests that Lyon's alleged revelation was merely a self-fulfilled prophecy. Lyon had shared with Roundy his belief that the Lord was going to give him a wife "by revelation . . . with whom he could live in peace." This maybe the way Shadrach viewed the situation in hindsight, but at the time he did not question his branch High Priest's actions. Roundy further testified that, At another time Lyons told him that he enquired of the Lord respecting a companion, when Sister Jackson was presented before him, when he to the Lord "She is pregnant by another man:" when the Lord replied "wait my time & it will all come right"

Interestingly, mention of her being with a child was not included in Sarah's statement and her husband stated at the end of the testimony that she "was not pregnant when he returned." If she had been pregnant, she would have been well into her second trimester at the time of Aaron's advances on her. This coupled with the stress of worrying about the welfare of her missing husband, may have induced a miscarriage.

John P. Barnard agreed with Shadrach Roundy's comment that "Lyons generally took the lead of meetings in that branch" and added, "when he [Lyon] spoke in the name of the Lord, the brethren had great confidence in it." Barnard's testimony, along with most of the others, illustrated how comfortable Lyon was speaking in the name of the Lord, especially in the first person. It should be recalled, that this John Barnard, was the man who went to meet Joseph Smith in Huntsville, Missouri and charged to convey him to Far West in March of 1838.
Thomas Guymon (for whose Mill they most often referred to the branch) testified next. He stressed the fear Sarah Jackson had of Lyon and his warnings of curses if she did not submit to his (or rather, the Lord's) will. He told of the faint hope she held that her husband might yet be alive. She even continued to ask the members of the branch to pray for his return. Over time, however, she lost faith and "expressed her fears that he was dead & was inclined to think she had a testimony to that effect." Guymon also related that Lyon had "told him that Brother Best had given him liberty to come to his house and see Sister Jackson."

The testimony of all these witnesses all points to the fact that the community was well informed of the actions of Aaron Lyon toward Sarah Jackson and it was perfectly acceptable to them until Brother Jackson arrived. The crucial point was they believed in his revelations and therefore did not question his motives until they failed. What if Brother Jackson had died in Alton? Would that have justified Aaron Lyon's behavior toward Sarah? Little doubt exists that a marriage between them would have occurred if her husband would not have returned. If this had happened, the Saints at Guymon's Mill, would have enjoyed their lives as if all was well. When word did come of Brother Jackson's death, they would have praised God for the Prophet in their midst.

A Brother Benjamin was the last witness called before the appointed High Councillors took a center stage. Although short, Brother Benjamin's statement was extremely intriguing from as a theological issue. He testified that, "Calvin Reed, a boy of about 15 years of age, said he had a revelation or vision, in which he saw, Br Jackson dead or preaching to the spirits in prison." Several aspects of his testimony warrant further examination before we continue.

Preaching to the Spirits in Prison

Sarah Jackson's written statement already mentioned above, contained a reference to Aaron Lyon's revelation about her husband's other worldly mission. Young Calvin Reed's vision was taken as a confirmation and validation of Lyon's claim. Here were two individuals, who supposedly had visions relating to a dead man they had never met, and yet were each able positively to identify him as Mr. Jackson. Clearly, young Reed was caught in the enthusiasm of the moment, probably during one of the groups "prayer meetings" which they held in the branch. The use of the phrases "dead" in conjunction with "preaching to the spirits in prison," was quite significant, especially when it came as early as 1837.

In 1879, William Smith (Joseph Smith's younger brother) as a member of the Reorganized Church, preached a sermon on baptism for the dead, at the Far West Temple site. On that occasion, he observed that, ... this ordinance would again be restored to the Church. It was for this reason also, that these Saints of latter days build temples, in order to prepare a place for the administration of ordinances that belong in the order of the holy priesthood. And it was for this object also, that this corner
stone was planted in this town of Far West, under the direction and superintendence of Joseph, the Martyr in 1836-37 [1838].

This maybe simply a case of revisionist history by William Smith, but he may not have been too far the mark after all. In a question first posed in November of 1837, the issue was raised, "If the Mormon doctrine is true what will become of all those who have died since the days of the Apostles?" The answer printed in the July 1838 edition of the Elder’s Journal printed in Far West, was, "All those who have not had an opportunity of hearing the gospel, and being administered to by an inspired man in the flesh, must have it here after, before they can be finally judged."

Speaking of the gap that existed between Joseph Smith’s 1836 vision of his unbaptized brother Alvin in the Celestial kingdom, and the August 1840 funeral sermon for Seymour Brunson, Historian M. Guy Bishop noted "We have been left with scant evidence of how Joseph Smith formulated the Mormon plan of baptism for the dead." It was not a quantum leap that occurred in those intervening years. Rather, it was an evolutionary process. By 1840, Joseph’s plan finally crystallized, but (as with the Saints at Guymon’s Mill) it was only after the subject had been widey discussed throughout the Church.

The notion of preaching to the departed, was not isolated to those at Guymon’s Mill. In December of 1836, Lorenzo Snow in a Joseph Smith, Sr. given Patriarchal Blessing was told, "Thou shalt have power to translate thyself from one planet to another; and power to go to the moon if thou so desire; power to preach to the spirits in prison." When Zebedee Coltrin ordained Wilford Woodruff a Seventy in January 1837, he remembered being told he "...should visit COLUB[Kolob] & Preach to the spirits in Prison...." The idea, and the phrase were most likely carried down to Missouri and cross-pollinated into the local branch by Aaron Lyon when he left Kirtland in 1836. Considering this, it is interesting that, in at least William Smith’s memory, it was the Far West Temple where ordinances for the dead were to be first preformed and not Nauvoo.

Mercy Robs Justice

The last portion of the trial was the statement made for and against Lyon by of the selected high councillors. The Far West Record provided more information on the testimony of the witnesses and only summarized the words of the councillors as "some lengthy remarks" with "very good instruction given by councillor Smith." The Scriptory Book, on-the-other-hand, amalgamated the testimony of the witnesses and provided a greater detail on what Smith/Harris and Rigdon/Hinkle said. Because of the two perspectives, we fortunately have a more comprehensive picture of the trial.

As the testimony of the Guymon's Mill residents concluded, George Robinson launched into a tirade of metaphors that seem to spring straight off the pages of The Arabian Nights. But, alas, to[o] late for the old man, the testimony, being closed, and the
word of Justice, began to be unsheathed, which fell upon the old man like a scourge of ten thousand lashes, wielded by the hand of President S. Rigdon & George M. Hinkle, inspired by the spirit of justice, accompanied with a flow of eloquence, which searched for the feelings, like the sting of so many scorpions, which served to atone for past iniquity.

After Rigdon and Hinkle had completed probing and exposing all the intimate details of the incident, it was Joseph Smith's turn to speak. Again the literary style of George Robinson, After justice had ceased to wield its sword, Mercy then advanced to rescue it victim, which inspired the heart of President J. Smith Jr, & Geo W. Harris who, with profound eloquence with deep & sublime thought, with clemency of feeling, spoke in favour of the defendant.

Joseph had been persuasive, but each side was given another chance to plead their side of the debate. With his closing comments, Rigdon, ... leveled a volley of darts, which came upon the old man, like a hurricane upon the mountain tops, which seemingly, was about to sweep the victim entirely out of the reach of mercy, but amidst the clashing of the sword of justice, mercy still clad the victim.

Robinson extolled the greatness of repentance, and the fact that Lyon could yet "be saved in the Kingdom of our God." Saved yes, trusted as a future Priesthood holder, not likely. His licence was revoked as a High Priest "in consequence of his being considered not capable of dignifying that office."

Thus, concluded the "notorious case of Aaron Lyon." Joseph Smith would not attempt contracting any new plural marriages for several more years. When his attentions did again turn to polyandry later in Nauvoo, however, one of his chosen wives was Sylvia (Sessions) Lyon. She was the wife of Aaron's son Windsor P. Lyon. It would have been interesting to know Aaron's thoughts on Joseph's relationship with his daughter-in-law, but that was not to be. Aaron Lyon died in Hancock County, Illinois, at the age of fifty-eight, only a year and five months following his trial.

Thomas Guymon's son, Thomas Noah and his wife Mary Dickerson (Dudley) named their second child born in September 1840 Lucinda Harris. After the surrender of Far West, Some of those who lived in the branch returned to their lands until the next spring when the bulk of the Mormons relocated to Illinois. Several were arrested and taken to Richmond, but were released several days later. Most of them likewise returned to their farms at Guymon's Mill. Dissenting Mormons like Samuel Richey and others tried to continue the branch as a town following the exodus, but this failed due to the growth of Kingston. The mill and a store along with a blacksmith shop operated for sometime even after the establishment of Kingston only a mile away. All that remains today are some stone foundations and potsherds in an area the locals call "Salemtown."