

**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 phrase “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,”¹ 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.² 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.”³ Not long afterwards, Aaron organized a prayer meeting which they held at Brother [John] Wheeler’s⁴ 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.”⁵ 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.”⁶ 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.”⁷ 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