

Appendix to Eight Essays

Denver C. Snuffer Jr.

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The most often discussed issue in Mormon history is polygamy. It is in the center of on-going controversy, and continues to be publicly debated. A library of conflicting material has been written to imagine how it started. Therefore, polygamy is a useful topic to illustrate the challenge of reconstructing accurate history.

Mormons who followed Brigham Young were told that Joseph Smith introduced polygamy and intended to have it continue. Splinter groups from followers of Young likewise attribute its introduction and necessity to Joseph Smith. The RLDS rejected this idea. They trusted Smith's widow, Emma Smith, who denied that Joseph ever practiced polygamy. The renamed Community of Christ has, in recent years, begun to concede the point polygamy was Joseph Smith's creation.

Three documents are in this Appendix. They involve determining what events should be used for retelling history. These were written by eye witnesses who lived through the events described in the letters, and were composed in 1853, 1859 and 1879. The first two were written by William Marks, the stake president of Nauvoo at the time Joseph and Hyrum were killed. Both of his letters address polygamy. Both show Joseph Smith was opposed to the practice and intended to eliminate it in Nauvoo. These two letters raise as many questions as they answer, but clearly show Joseph Smith was intent on eliminating polygamy or plural wives.

The third letter is by William B. Smith, one of the church's twelve apostles and the brother of Joseph and Hyrum. He explains in his letter to Joseph's son what William understood caused the death of his father and uncle. William Smith believed there was a conspiracy among leaders in Nauvoo to kill Joseph and Hyrum. He also accuses Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Willard Richards of teaching secretly abominable doctrines involving the "plural wives system."

Even though the Nauvoo events and Carthage killings happened in the 1840s, we do not yet have an undisputed truth to tell. There are too many economic and ecclesiastical interests threatened by one story or the other. These three documents allow readers to reflect on how they should influence understanding events.

Should these sources be trusted? Did the stake president have a good opportunity to observe and report? Did he have any motivation to lie about the events? Did the brother and church apostle have a good opportunity to observe and report? Did he have any motivation to lie about the events? Should his suspicions be trusted? Does his description of those leading the LDS church as "reveling in the spoils of the Church robbed from the innocent and unsuspecting saints" betray any jealousy or envy of their wealth and power? Or does it instead justify his conclusion that ambitious men benefitted by killing his brothers?

As a thought experiment, consider these three letters as reliable and ask yourself: Do they change the way you understand the restoration? If so, in what way do they change your understanding? Then consider them as unreliable and ask yourself: Why should they be ignored? Are there any parts that should be considered, even if their overall message is unreliable? Does that change your understanding of the restoration? If so, in what way do they change your understanding? Are they consistent with scripture and prophecy?

Every document, letter, newspaper article, journal entry and note that has been written by any of the eye-witnesses need to go through that same sifting. Almost all of the restoration histories were written by advocates without disclosing how they sifted their sources. They may not even have a criteria to test reliability. If they start with a premise in mind, they may cull through material to support their premise, ignoring and dismissing all contrary proof. This is how I wrote Passing the Heavenly Gift: I started with the premise that prophecy foretold what would happen. Then I looked to see if there was proof consistent with prophecy. That may not be what an impartial historian would do, but I believe it is the only likely way to find the truth.

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Epistle of Wm. Marks, Chief Evangelical Teacher in the School of Faith, to all the Traveling Teachers, Quorums and Classes of said School, in Jehovah's Presbytery of Zion, Greeting:

Beloved Brethren:

Having been chosen and ordained chief Evangelical Teacher of the Schools of Faith in Jehovah's Presbytery of Zion, it becomes my duty, to say something by way of encouragement, and also by way of instruction to those who are placed under my care, and supervision, and first, by way of encouragement let me state what I know in reference to the work in which we are engaged, in order to do this I must of necessity refer to my experience in the church. I was a member of the church some ten years before the death of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. I was appointed President of the Stake in Kirtland, Ohio in 1837, and continued in that office at Kirtland until the fall of 1838, when I was called by Revelation to Far West, Mo.; but before I arrived there, the Saints were ordered to leave the State; and when the Stake was organized at Nauvoo in the fall of 1839, I was appointed President thereof and continued in that office up to the death of Joseph the prophet. I always believed the work was of Divine origin, and that Joseph Smith was called of God to establish the church among the Gentiles.

During my administration in the church I saw and heard of many things that was practiced and taught that I did not believe to be of God; but I continued to do and teach such principles as were plainly revealed, as the law of the church, for I thought

that pure and holy principles only would have a tendency to benefit mankind. Therefore, when the doctrine of polygamy was introduced into the church as a principle of exaltation, I took a decided stand against it; which stand rendered me quite unpopular with many of the leading ones of the church. I was also witness of the introduction (secretly) of a kingly form of government in which Joseph suffered himself to be ordained a king, to reign over the house of Israel forever; which I could not conceive to be in accordance with the laws of the church, but I did not oppose this move, thinking it none of my business.

Joseph, however, became convinced before his death that he had done wrong; for about three weeks before his death, I met him one morning in the street, and he said to me, "Brother Marks, I have something to communicate to you, we retired to a by-place, and set down together, when he said: "We are a ruined people." I asked, how so? He said: "This doctrine of polygamy, or Spiritual-wife system, that has been taught and practiced among us, will prove our destruction and overthrow. I have been deceived," said he, "in reference to its practice; it is wrong; it is a curse to mankind, and we shall have to leave the United States soon, unless it can be put down and its practice stopped in the church. Now," said he, "Brother Marks, you have not received this doctrine, and how glad I am. I want you to go into the high council and I will have charges preferred against all who practice this doctrine, and I want you to try them by the laws of the church, and cut them off, if they will not repent and cease the practice of this doctrine; and" said he, "I will go into the stand and preach against it, with all my might, and in this way we may rid the church of this damnable heresy."

But before this plan could be put into execution, the mob began to gather and our attention necessarily, was directed to them.

I again met Joseph when he was about to start for Carthage. He said to me, "Bro. Marks, I have become convinced since I last saw you, that it is my duty to go to Carthage, and deliver myself up as a lamb to the slaughter."

I mentioned the circumstances of these conversations with Joseph to many of the brethren, immediately after his death, but the only effect it had was to raise a report that Brother Marks was about to apostatize; and my statement of the conversation in reference to the practice of polygamy was pronounced false by the Twelve and disbelieved; but I now testify that the above statements are verily true and correct.

When I found that there was no chance to rid the church of that abominable sin, as I viewed it, I made my arrangements to leave Nauvoo, and I did so firmly believing that the plans and designs of the great Jehovah in inspiring Joseph to bring forth the book of Mormon would yet be carried out in his own time, and in his own way. Well brethren I have lived to see the foundation, and the platform laid, the principles revealed, and the order given whereby the great work of the Father, can, and will be accomplished. There is no doubt resting on my mind in reference to this work of

Baneemy being the work of God, for I am fully convinced that it is the work it purports to be, the work of the Father, spoken of in the book of Mormon to prepare the way for the restoration of his covenants to the house of Israel. Now all who are convinced of this fact ought to move forward and take a decided stand to labor for Jehovah and the benefit of mankind.

I intend from this time henceforth to labor in the cause, and give my influence and substance to speed the work. Now, I call upon you my brethren, one and all, who have been ordained and set apart to teach, and gather up the remnant seed of the church, to use all diligence and perseverance to gather them up to the place of preparation, (which place will be made known through the Harbinger and Organ, in the sub-committee's report) that we may be prepared, and receive the necessary instructions, to bear the kingdom to Israel.

It is necessary that all should bear in mind that the school of works in its first department will be opened at the next Solemn Assembly; and all should be prepared to send up an offering of sufficient magnitude to entitle them to receive a large blessing. The present impoverished condition of the Lord's treasury and the urgent necessity of obtaining a printing Press, and the removing of the Chief teacher to the place of gathering, and other contingent expenses, appeal forcibly to us to bring a large offering to the next Solemn Assembly to meet the present requirements of the work. A printing Press, we must have, and Brother Thompson must be removed, which will require means to accomplish and all should have the privilege of contributing their gift oblations, for the accomplishment of so desirable an object. The gathering should be taught and all who have means to remove and to sustain themselves through the winter should be to the place of gathering this fall, so as to get the necessary instructions, for the work hereafter to be assigned to them. I expect to be at the Solemn Assembly in August and to go from thence to the place of gathering, there to remain during the winter, and I want the Chiefs of the different Quorums of Traveling Teachers to report to me as often as once in a month, that I may know of their whereabouts and what they are doing that I may communicate to them such information as they need in reference to their mission, and that of their Quorums.

Signed, Wm. MARKS
St. Louis, June 15, 1853.

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OPPOSITION TO POLYGAMY,
BY THE PROPHET JOSEPH.

BROTHER Sheen-

I feel desirous to communicate through your periodical, a few suggestions made manifest to me by the Spirit of God, in relation to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. About the first of June, 1844, (situated as I was at that time, being the Presiding Elder of the Stake at Nauvoo, and by appointment the Presiding Officer of the High Council) I had a very good opportunity to know the affairs of the Church, and my convictions at that time were, that the Church in a great measure had departed from the pure principles and doctrines of Jesus Christ. I felt much troubled in mind about the condition of the Church. I prayed earnestly to my Heavenly Father to show me something in regard to it, when I was wrapt in vision, and it was shown me by the Spirit, that the top or branches had overcome the root, in sin and wickedness, and the only way to cleanse and purify it was, to disorganize it, and in due time, the Lord would reorganize it again. There were many other things suggested to my mind, but the lapse of time has erased them from my memory. A few days after this occurrence I met with Brother Joseph. He said that he wanted to converse with me on the affairs of the Church, and we retired by ourselves. I will give his words verbatim, for they are indelibly stamped upon my mind. He said he had desired for a long time to have a talk with me on the subject of polygamy. He said it eventually would prove the overthrow of the Church, and we should soon be obliged to leave the United States, unless it could be speedily put down. He was satisfied that it was a cursed doctrine, and that there must be every exertion made to put it down. He said that he would go before the congregation and proclaim against it, and I must go to the High Council, and he would prefer charges against those in transgression, and I must sever them from the Church, unless they made ample satisfaction. There was much more said, but this was the substance. The mob commenced to gather about Carthage in a few days after, therefore there was nothing done concerning it. After the Prophet's death I made mention of this conversation to several hoping and believing that it would have a good effect, but to my great disappointment, it was soon rumored about that Brother Marks was about to apostatize, and that all that he said about the conversation with the Prophet was a tissue of lies. From that time I was satisfied that the Church would be disorganized, and the death of the Prophet and Patriarch tended to confirm me in that opinion. From that time I was looking for a re-organization of the Church and Kingdom of God. I feel thankful that I have lived to again behold the day, when the basis of the Church is the revelations of Jesus Christ, which is the only sure foundation to build upon. I feel to invite all my brethren to become identified with us, for the Lord is truly in our midst.

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THE DEATH OF THE TWO MARTYRS.

Joseph; Dear Nephew: -- Several times I have taken pen to write you on the subject of this caption, the death of the two Martyrs, and the principal causes that led to their death. But the causes have been so misunderstood and I have felt so diffident about writing the facts in the case as I understand them, that I have refrained from

the task, for fear that the circumstances I have to name might throw a [black] influence upon the character of the man whom we all esteem as the prophet of God; and the longer I have put this matter off the more and more I have felt it impressed upon my mind that I should write. The history and the circumstances connected with the death of your father, and your Uncle Hyrum, are events that transpired, for the greater part while I was residing in Philadelphia in 1842-3-4, having charge of the Church in the east. But the links in the chain of circumstances that I am about to relate were occurrences that took place while I was on a visit to Nauvoo, for the purpose of attending the April Conference in 1844.

After attending the Conference held by the Church at that time, and also several of the political caucuses to nominate candidates for President of the United States, and business matters of this sort having been disposed of, (in which Lyman Wight, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Willard Richards, and H. C. Kimball were the principal speakers), I began to arrange matters to return to my family who were, as I have before stated, residing in the City of Philadelphia; and on the morning previous to my leaving Nauvoo, I called on your father and took breakfast with him. While seated at the table a conversation was had participated in by your mother, concerning some things that she had learned in the discharge of her mission among the Saints as one of a committee appointed by the Female Relief Society, to visit the Saints and look after the interest of the poor of Church; to enquire after their occupation and financial prospect for food and means of support. In relating her report she said that some complaint had been made to her by females whom she had visited, that John Taylor, Willard Richards, and Brigham Young had been teaching some doctrines among the Saints privately that was going to ruin the Church, unless there was a stop put to it, as it was contrary to the law and rules governing the Church. Your father remarked that he would attend to the matter as soon as he got through with his troubles with the Laws and Fosters. But mark you their conversation took place only a few days previous to your father's death. What that private teaching might have been, that those persons whom your mother named, were circulating in a clandestine manner, (since there has been so much said about a doctrine called the plural wife doctrine on this subject), I leave the reader to judge.

One other point I wish to notice in the conversation that took place while I was eating at your father's table, and that was, as the conversation turned upon Brigham Young, your father remarked that with regard to the charge brought against these brethren, that he expected that he would have trouble with Brigham Young, especially, and added that "should the time ever come that this man B. Young should lead the Church that he would lead it to hell." And these words I remember as plainly as though they were spoken but yesterday; as at this time I had not known that there could have been a charge of fault brought against the man. My association with this man Brigham Young for near three years previous, had been very limited, in consequence of our different localities and fields of labor.

These matters that I have thus named do not comprise the whole ground of the causes that led to your father's death; although in part it did, as this secret evil that had crept into the Church, by means of this private teaching, gave food and material for the Expositor press to pour out its vials of wrath upon the head of the prophet, making him responsible for the conduct and teachings of these secret and clandestine teachers. What fixes the stain of guilt upon these parties named in this letter making them more criminally murderous, is the part that the City Council at Nauvoo took in getting up the ordinance which resulted in the destruction of the Expositor press. And I wish here to name the fact that the principal instigators in getting up that ordinance were men who feared the revelations that this organ (Expositor) was about to make of their secret and ungodly doings to the world. The persons who were most conspicuous in the work, and were the means of bringing on the scenes that finally resulted in the bloody tragedy which took place at Carthage Jail were no other than John Taylor and Willard Richards, who by constant importunities prevailed upon your father to sign his own death warrant by placing his name to that accursed ordinance which resulted in his death and the death of your Uncle Hyrum.

To these importunities of Richards and Taylor I was a witness, and was present when Richards brought in the book containing the ordinance and asked for your father's signature to make it a law in the City of Nauvoo. I remonstrated with Richards at the time, against my brother Joseph putting his name down in such a place, as it would most certainly result in his death. Richards, failing to secure your father's name at this time, both he and Taylor called on your father the next morning, with feigned tears of desperation, expatiating upon the great necessity of having that Expositor removed, as a means to the further growth and prosperity not only of the City of Nauvoo, but of the cause of the Church abroad. Thus these men, with the sophistry of their lying tongues, like wolves in sheep's clothing, ensnared the prophet from off his watch tower, and led him as a lamb to the slaughter, they promising, also, to be his assistants in case he should fall into trouble, as a result of his name being placed to that ordinance. This accounts for the whys and the wherefores, that Taylor and Richards were both in the jail at the time your father and your uncle Hyrum were murdered. The principal reasons why these conspirators against your father's life did not suffer the same fate that your father and your uncle Hyrum did, are because, like cowards they hid themselves away -- Taylor under a bed that was in the room where the prisoners were confined and Richards behind the door. Thus you see, by the secret workings and secret doings of these men for years gone by, the Church was robbed of her prophet and patriarch, by a most hellish plot that had been in vogue for not only months, but years previous to the time of their deaths. When I see men whose finger stains show positive signs of their guilt in the death of the martyrs, now reveling in the spoils of the Church robbed from the innocent and unsuspecting saints, I cannot restrain my pen from writing the facts and incidents that I do know before God and man were the means of your father and uncle Hyrum's death.

There is one more fact I will notice and that is, that however strange or great the testimony that might be brought against these men, John Taylor and others, in this murderous affair, the Utah Mormons would not credit it though one rose from the dead to bear witness of it, and as for the redemption of any from their blindness, who have willingly given their names in support of this great apostasy, I am in much doubt that there are many who will be saved or forsake the great error they have fallen into.

And especially do I believe this in regard to the remnants of the Smith family in Utah, whose chances for knowing the erroneous position they are in, and with ample proof from the Word of God that their whole system of church organization is founded in corruption and fraud; and still they persist in their unholy alliance with that apostate and God-forsaken people. "There are none so blind as those who will not see."

This then, is the end of this epistle, and I conclude with many good wishes to you and to all good saints.

Your brother in bonds of love.

Wm. B. Smith.
Kingston, Caldwell Co., Mo.,
March 25th, 1879