

# UTAH

HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

SUMMER 2005 • VOLUME 73 • NUMBER 3



SUMMER 2005

• UTAH HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

VOLUME 73 • NUMBER 3



WIDTSOE COLLECTION, UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## That “Same Old Question of Polygamy and Polygamous Living:” Some Recent Findings Regarding Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Mormon Polygamy

By B. CARMON HARDY

**O**ne hundred years ago, in 1904, Utah and its Mormon population once again became the object of renewed national attention. Newspaper editors, pamphleteers and outraged clergymen across the country charged that Utah was breaking promises made to the nation when statehood was granted less than a decade earlier. Allegations of continued polygamy after the Manifesto of 1890 led Congress to deny B.H. Roberts his seat in the House of Representatives in 1900.<sup>1</sup> In the words of one writer at that time, the Mormon church had “buncoed” the nation

*Joseph F. Smith, president of the LDS church shown here with his wives and children.*

B. Carmon Hardy is Professor Emeritus of History, California State University at Fullerton. This address was given on September 23, 2004, at the 52nd Annual Meeting of the Utah State Historical Society held in the Salt Lake City Public Library.

<sup>1</sup> “Special Committee on the Case of Brigham H. Roberts, *Case of Brigham H. Roberts of Utah*,” House Report 85, 2 pts. (56-1) 1900, Serial 4021.

by reneging on its agreement to bring all plurality to an end.<sup>2</sup> Then, in 1904, with the Roberts case yet fresh in their memory, a similar controversy arose concerning Utah's recently elected Senator Reed Smoot.

Charges of "new polygamy" were heard on all sides. Proposals for a constitutional amendment that would outlaw polygamy everywhere and establish monogamy as the nation's only approved form of marriage acquired widespread support. Democrats, yet remembering how Republicans had, a half century earlier, stolen a march on them with the "twin relics" plank now rushed to include in their 1904 platform a call to expunge polygamy forever from American life.<sup>3</sup> All that had been laid at Mormonism's door since the 1850s, especially its attachment to the "barbarous," "Asiatic" practice of polygamy, was given voice with renewed energy. And the plea raised during the 1880s by Mormons that, inasmuch as monogamy and polygamy existed together in the Bible, democratic, Bible-believing America should grant them an equal measure of tolerance, received no more consideration during Smoot's ordeal than when first made twenty years earlier.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the three-year long hearings, it was the Mormon church more than Reed Smoot that was on trial. Smoot himself was convincingly shown to be a monogamist. But had Mormonism or had it not set aside the practice of plurality?<sup>5</sup> Seeking to answer that question in the affirmative and thereby secure the trust of the American people, church leaders set themselves on a course of retrenchment that by the time of World War I, and certainly with the death of President Joseph F. Smith in 1918, largely ended the long career of approved plural marriages in the church, both public and covert.

This reformation was dramatic both for the speed with which it occurred and the degree to which it affected the church's view of its own historical past. By the mid-twentieth century, the official church had become a warrior for the monogamous ethic and an unyielding enemy of any seeking to revive the plural marital practices of their Mormon forbearers. More than this, a cloak of silence fell on what B.H. Roberts, in a moment of impatience with its persistent return, called that "same old question of polygamy and polygamous living."<sup>6</sup> While formal discussion of polygamy did not entirely disappear, inattention to it, especially in church

<sup>2</sup> A. Theodore Schroeder, "Polygamy in Congress," *Arena* 23 (February 1900): 115.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Bruce Johnson and Kirk H. Porter, comps., *National Party Platforms, 1840-1972* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 133.

<sup>4</sup> Charles W. Penrose, "Monogamy and the Home," *Deseret Evening News*, December 5, 1885, 2.

<sup>5</sup> The hearings can be read in U.S. Congress, Senate, *Proceedings before the Committee on Privileges and Elections of the United States Senate in the Matter of the Protests against the Right of Hon. Reed Smoot, a Senator from the State of Utah, to Hold His Seat*, 59th Cong., 1st sess., Doc. No. 486, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1906).

<sup>6</sup> This when describing the magazine crusade against Mormon polygamy in the second decade of the twentieth century. Brigham H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 6: 413.



UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Stanley Snow Ivins, author and early historian who researched the issue of Mormon polygamy.**

publications, sermons and teachings, is striking. This undoubtedly arose from what Gary Topping recently described as a need “to present a positive image of Mormon history that would show Mormonism as an inherently American phenomenon.”<sup>7</sup> When the subject was addressed, plural marriage was generally characterized, in formal discourse, as a relatively insignificant part of the church’s past. No more than 1 to 5 percent of church members, it was said, ever practiced polygamy. Most followed the lead provided by James Talmage who said that plural marriage was never an “essential” but only an “incident” in Mormon history and life.<sup>8</sup> The shadowed status of the topic was not confined to church members and their leaders. Non-Mormon writers and historians, with few exceptions, seldom gave the subject more than a brief review.

Inasmuch as the Mormon experience with plurality, in terms of the numbers of those involved between 1840 and 1910, undoubtedly amounted to some tens of thousands of people, it could well constitute, excepting only religiously prescribed celibacy, the largest departure from traditional, western monogamous marriage in Euro-American history since the Renaissance. What a treasury of religious and human drama it surely contains!

Currently, work on the history of this fascinating social experiment is undergoing an exciting revival. To be sure, it is not entirely sudden nor without precedent. There were, for example, works like those of Fawn Brodie, Kimball Young and Stanley Ivins in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>9</sup> But books and articles addressing the subject have come on in flood-like proportions since the early 1980s and into the present. Some of this is undoubtedly owing to the burst of Mormon historical scholarship that occurred generally during these same years. A vital part of this reenergized activity is due to the helpful, welcoming spirit displayed in recent years by

<sup>7</sup> Gary Topping, *Utah Historians and the Reconstruction of Western History* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 21.

<sup>8</sup> James Edward Talmage, *Story of “Mormonism” and the Philosophy of “Mormonism”* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1914), 89.

<sup>9</sup> Fawn McKay Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 297–308, 344–47; Kimball Young, *Isn’t One Wife Enough?* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1954); and Stanley Snow Ivins, “Notes on Mormon Polygamy,” *Western Humanities Review* 10 (Summer 1956): 229–39.



stewards of the church's archives. In league with collections such as those held by the Utah State Historical Society and others, work on the topic is rapidly going forward.

One of the things that is happening throughout the historical profession generally is the application over the last twenty or so years of methodologies used by social scientists in other



UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

fields. And none of these approaches have provided more interesting results than simple counting or the application of quantitative inquiry into the Mormon polygamous past. Larry Logue and Ben Bennion, following the lead provided by people such as Dean May, James E. Smith and Phillip R. Kunz, by reconstituting families and bringing the tools of demography to bear, have shown that in the Utah period the number who lived in plural households was considerably larger than previously believed. During the 1880s, Mormon representatives in testimony before Congress stated that no more than 1 or 2 percent of the church's membership was polygamous.<sup>10</sup> Church authorities in their sermons, missionaries abroad, and guides on Temple Square almost to the present time have repeated these figures. We now know, owing to work by Logue, Bennion and others, that the actual number, depending on the years and location, likely averaged between 15 and 30 percent.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, in some

**George Q. Cannon, center, member of LDS Church First Presidency, visits with Arthur Pratt Jr., (left) son of Utah Territorial Prison Warden Arthur Pratt, prison guards C. H. Wilken, 2nd left and F. G. Hudson seated 2nd right. E. M. Genney standing, attorney Franklin S. Richards, seated 1st right. Photograph taken September 1888 while Cannon was incarcerated for unlawful cohabitation.**

<sup>10</sup> Franklin S. Richards, *Admission of Utah. Arguments in Favor of the Admission of Utah as a State...Made before the Committee on Territories of the United States Senate, First Session Fiftieth Congress, Saturday, February 18, 1888* (Wash. D.C.: GPO, 1888), 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Larry Logue, "A Time of Marriage: Monogamy and Polygamy in a Utah Town," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 9-13; the same author's *Sermon in the Desert: Belief and Behavior in Early St. George, Utah* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 44-71; and all of Lowell "Ben" Bennion, "Incidence of Mormon Polygamy in 1880: Dixie versus Davis Stake," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 27-42. Other studies arriving at similar percentages include the early inquiry of Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," 230-32; Dean L. May, "People on the Mormon Frontier: Kanab's Families of 1874," *Journal of Family History* 1 (1976): 172; James E. Smith and Phillip R. Kunz, "Polygyny and Fertility in Nineteenth-Century America," *Population Studies* 30 (November 1976): 468-71; and Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 100-101.



UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Heber C. Kimball (1801-1868)**  
**boasted that polygamous marriages increased the number of children men could have.**

**Kimball's families consisted of 43 wives, 65 children, and 300 grandchildren.**

areas the percentage of practitioners was smaller. But, conversely, in other communities, it was considerably larger.

While both Logue and Bennion emphasized that their findings were greater than traditional church estimates and that polygamy played a more significant role in Mormon society than previously believed, one might still question the importance of the practice since, on average, no more than between a sixth and a third of the church's membership lived in plural households. In other words, couldn't one say that inasmuch as a majority remained monogamous, polygamy must have been relatively unimportant? This would seem to be reinforced by Professor Kathryn Daynes who found that, in the community of Manti after 1860 the percentage of those living in polygamy steadily declined from 43.1 percent in that year to 7.1 percent in 1900.<sup>12</sup> Even with the larger numbers now accepted as constituting the polygamous sector of the nineteenth-century

church, the fact that it yet remained not only a minority but also a dwindling minority naturally leads us to ask if these declining numbers mean that without federal coercion plural marriage would have eventually died anyway? Not surprisingly, some have concluded that if left to itself Mormonism would have given up the practice voluntarily.<sup>13</sup>

There is also the question of how to weigh polygamy when writing Mormon history. Inasmuch as a strong majority of Mormons in the nineteenth century were not polygamous and since a near unanimous majority of church members today do not practice polygamy, can we say that James Talmage was correct, that polygamy was but an "incident" and not an "essential" in the Mormon story? Such a configuration also then leaves the famous 1890 Manifesto as less a turning point in the Latter-day Saint past than it has usually been assumed to be. By crediting the "pew" as deserving a more defining role than the "pulpit," to use Grant Underwood's aptly chosen language, Mormonism presents us with a more constant and less aberrant historical course than many have assumed it had.<sup>14</sup>

My own response in this matter is that the posture and preaching of

<sup>12</sup> Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 101, table 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," 239; and Klaus Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 176.

<sup>14</sup> Grant Underwood's insightful article on this issue is: "Re-visioning Mormon History," *Pacific Historical Review* 55 (August 1986): 403-26.

the leadership of the church, and especially that of a church so emphatically hierarchical as Mormonism, was and remains preeminently important. The urgings and teachings of the leaders must, in my view, always be reckoned as central to what the church is about. For this reason I remain impressed by the fact that insistence by church authorities on the importance of polygamy up to and beyond the time of the 1890 Manifesto was uncompromising and did not decline. Church spokesmen and spokeswomen through these years were steadfast in contending that plural marriage was required if one wished the highest blessings of heaven in the hereafter. While there are many examples of this, none, perhaps, better illustrate the continuing priority attached to the Principle than the public statement in 1875 by Daniel H. Wells, a member of the church's First Presidency, that anyone failing to live in plural marriage "would be under condemnation, and would be *clipped in their glory* in the world to come."<sup>15</sup> Church leaders were immovable in their commitment to plurality and remained overwhelmingly polygamous themselves until the turn of the century.<sup>16</sup> George Q. Cannon said in 1884 he could not lift his hand to sustain anyone in a position of authority in the church who "had not entered into the Patriarchal order of marriage."<sup>17</sup>

If, on average, only a third or less of the members lived in polygamous homes in those years, it was a circumstance not unlike today where those who are full tithe payers or regular temple goers probably constitute a minority of the church's full membership. Those who are most faithful in all churches are commonly an elite, a fraction of the larger body of adherents. But they also commonly play a defining role in terms of standards, expectations and policy. While we clearly need greater understanding of the



UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Lion House, 63 East South Temple, built between 1854-1856, to house Brigham Young's large family, later used for LDS Church administrative offices, classrooms and dormitory of LDS University**

<sup>15</sup> "The Reynolds Trial," *Deseret News* [Weekly], December 15, 1875, 732.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, D. Gene Pace, "Wives of Nineteenth-Century Mormon Bishops: A Quantitative Analysis," *Journal of the West* 21 (April 1982): 49-57.

<sup>17</sup> As quoted in A. Karl Larson and Katharine Miles Larson, eds., *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 2 vols. (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1980), 2: 629, April 26, 1884.

dynamics at work between the broad membership of the church and their leaders, at this point I am unconvinced that declining numbers of polygamists meant that the Principle was on its death bed and would have become entirely moribund if left alone—as indeed it did not as evidenced by the number of approved post-Manifesto marriages and the even larger number of unapproved fundamentalist unions occurring yet today.

Another topic now receiving attention concerns the number of children produced in polygamous homes. One of the reasons given for entering such marriages was that it would increase births, thereby augmenting one's power and glory. It would also build up the Kingdom of God on earth more quickly. Heber C. Kimball once boasted that in seven years he would have enough offspring to make a city. And in twenty-five years, he said, he and Brigham Young together would have more descendants than then existed in the entire territory: that is, in 1857 when he made the remark, about seventy-five thousand people.<sup>18</sup>

The difficulty with this is that, from at least as early as the eighteenth century, writers discussing polygamy said that polygamous wives tend to fall behind monogamous wives in the number of children they have.<sup>19</sup> Anthropologists and others writing about non-Mormon polygynous peoples in the twentieth century, confirmed this, finding that, as a generality, plural marriage actually depresses the fertility of additional wives in such homes.<sup>20</sup> This led some to suggest that Mormon patriarchs would have collectively enlarged the kingdom more rapidly had they remained monogamous.<sup>21</sup> For years, based on this information, individuals like myself were quick to correct those who said one of polygamy's accomplishments was that it fostered natural increase among the saints. Rather, we said if numbers of children were what Mormon leaders wanted they should better have told all to marry only in monogamy.

But now, in just the last few years, evidence is emerging that in some communities, specifically St. George and Cedar City, polygamous wives displayed a fertility pattern fully on a par with and in some instances greater than that of their monogamous neighbors.<sup>22</sup> And Professor Daynes, in her

<sup>18</sup> See, respectively: "Discourse by President Heber C. Kimball, April 6, 1857," *Deseret News* [Weekly], April 22, 1857, 52; and "Remarks by Prest. Heber C. Kimball...Feb. 8 1857," *ibid.*, February 25, 1857, 405.

<sup>19</sup> William Paley, *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, 2 vols., ninth ed. rev. (London: R. Faulder, 1785), 1: 320-21.

<sup>20</sup> H.V. Muhsam, "Fertility in Polygamous Marriages," *Population Studies* 10 (July 1956): 3-16; Remi Clignet, *Many Wives, Many Powers: Authority and Power in Polygynous Families* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 28-31; Phillip R. Kunz and James E. Smith, "Polygyny and Fertility: Establishing a Focus," in *Selected Papers in Genealogical Research*, ed. Phillip R. Kunz (Provo, Utah: Institute of Genealogist Studies, 1973), 97-103.

<sup>21</sup> Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," 236-37; and Phillip R. Kunz, "One Wife or Several? A Comparative Study of Late Nineteenth-Century Marriage in Utah," in *The Mormon People: Their Character and Traditions*, edited by Thomas G. Alexander, Charles Redd Monographs in Western History No. 10 (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 59.

<sup>22</sup> Logue, *Sermon in the Deseret*, 76-80; and, Lowell C. Bennion, "Polygamy's Contribution to 'Utah's Best Crop' in Cedar City, 1860-1880," unpublished paper presented at the Western History Association Conference, Fort Worth, Texas, October, 11 2003.



study of nineteenth-century Manti, shows that because polygamy was encouraged, numbers of marginalized women who would likely never have married at all became polygamous wives and mothers thus further enlarging the census beyond what it otherwise would have been. These findings are preliminary and we will need to await completion of the massive survey that Ben Bennion and Kathryn Daynes are overseeing before drawing final conclusions.



SHIPLER COLLECTION, UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

But we can say at this point that, if *Lion House Nursery, March 1909*. Brother Heber and Brother Brigham were excessive in describing their reproductive powers, some of the rest of us were also off the mark and perhaps in error by categorically contending that Mormon polygamy had a depressing effect on the number of children produced by those who lived it.

Research of the last few years is also bringing other things into clearer view. I have been especially interested in arguments adduced by nineteenth-century defenders claiming that plural marriage brought both hygienic and eugenic blessings to participants. As unlikely as it may seem today, we are learning that champions of Mormon plural wifery promised those who entered the order and lived it as they were told that they would have better health, would live longer and would produce healthier, more intelligent children than those in monogamy. While historians have sometimes referred to these claims, until recently they have never been given more than cursory attention. We now know that such promises were of enormous significance in the minds of nineteenth-century believers in the polygamous way. George Q. Cannon once said that the physiological advantages brought by polygamy constituted the most important argument in its favor.<sup>23</sup>

Drawing on popular theories of the time such as acquired characteristics and the importance of spermatic continence, church leaders said that if sexual intercourse was employed only for reproductive purposes and if male and female partners could purge themselves of sensuous motivations both they and their offspring would be healthier and more long lived. It was the

<sup>23</sup> George Q. Cannon, Oct. 9, 1869, *Journal of Discourses by Brigham Young, President of the Church...and Others...*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: 1855-1886), 13: 206.



UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Gottlieb Ence family, Richfield, Utah. Ence Swiss Mormon convert. Back row: Alma James, John Henry, Charles, Walter Heliman, Arthur, Wilford; middle row: Bessie, Elizabeth (wife), Gottlieb, Caroline (wife), Mary; front row: George, William, Joseph Albert, and Lehi.**

presence of lustful desire and accompanying sexual excess, Apostle Orson Hyde said, that accounted for the birth of so many cripples and idiots, “a puny set, a race of helpless, scrubby children.” On the other hand, he said, if men and women would restrain themselves and procreate only with pure and holy intent they would produce a noble, long-lived and god-like race.<sup>24</sup> Because it was believed that nature endowed men with greater sexual capacity than women, they were capable of marrying several wives and, while confining themselves to reproductively purposed sexual relations, yet remain within the bounds prescribed by nature for a healthy and salubrious life. These contentions were a vital part of the justifications employed in behalf of Mormon polygamy.

One enthusiastic supporter asked how anyone could doubt the health-giving effects brought by their system of plurality when, as he put it, “we daily meet boys [on the streets of Salt Lake City, the product] of such unions, weighing 200 pounds and their parents perhaps not over 150.”<sup>25</sup> And Joseph F. Smith, contrasting polygamy and monogamy, said: “Our system of marriage promotes life, purity, innocence, vitality, health, increase and longevity, while... [monogamy] engenders disease, disappointment, misery and premature death...”<sup>26</sup> The amount of writing and preaching devoted to the rapid, physically improving consequences of polygamy, once one begins to look for it, is quite astonishing. And having begun to do so, both articles and lengthy passages in books addressing the matter over the last decade are now available.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Orson Hyde, as reported in Luke William Gallup, *Reminiscences and Diary*, Springville, Utah, February 11, 1857, 193-95, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereinafter cited as LDS Archives.

<sup>25</sup> William R. May, “Mormon Polygamy from a Philosophical Standpoint,” *Deseret News*, February 15, 1881.

<sup>26</sup> “Discourse by President Joseph F. Smith,” *Deseret News*, February 24, 1883.

<sup>27</sup> B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 84-104; idem and Dan Erickson, “Regeneration—Now and Evermore!: Mormon Polygamy and the Physical Rehabilitation of Humankind,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 (January 2001): 40-61.

It was, in part, because of such promises that we can better understand the last example of recent findings that I will discuss. This is the surprising extent to which new plural unions were approved and entered into after the Manifesto of 1890. Again, the performance of a few plural marriages after the Woodruff Manifesto had long been admitted. But these were always described as no more than “sporadic”



UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

and as but the work of a few mavericks unwilling to bow to the determination of church leaders to end the practice.<sup>28</sup>

We now know that, in fact, hundreds of new plural unions were performed by church officials and with church approval for twenty or more years after 1890. The polygamous marriages concerned involved bishops, stake presidents and apostles. At least seven members of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, and possibly President Woodruff himself, took new plural companions after the Manifesto. The evidence for this is overwhelming and, again, is to be read in articles and books published in recent years.<sup>29</sup> The significance of the discovery that so many post-Manifesto plural marriages occurred and were approved resides less in the dissimulation and false statements used to hide them than in the strong indication they provide as to the continued importance of polygamy in the minds of leaders and others at the time. Closely associated with this was the impetus it provided for the rise of contemporary Mormon fundamentalism.

Polygamous stalwarts of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s were keenly aware of nineteenth-century arguments made for plurality: revelatory, scriptural and biological. And given the efforts made to perpetuate polygamy secretly after the 1890 Manifesto, involving as it did hundreds of respected Latter-day Saints, fundamentalists naturally assumed they could do the same. The co-opting influence of leaders at that time is also important, as in the case

**Lion and Beehive Houses.**

**Beehive House, constructed**

**1854-1856, served as Brigham**

**Young's office, later residency for**

**LDS Church presidents Lorenzo**

**Snow and Joseph F. Smith.**

<sup>28</sup> For discussion and documentation of this view, see Victor W. Jorgensen and B. Carmon Hardy, “The Taylor-Cowley Affair and the Watershed of Mormon History,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48 (Winter 1980): 23n.33; and Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 265–66, 389.

<sup>29</sup> D. Michael Quinn, “LDS Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890–1904,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Spring 1985): 9–105; and all of Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*.



UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**William Jennings Family about 1868. Jane Walker (wife) seated left bore 11 children, Priscilla Paul (wife) seated right had 14 children.**

of Apostle Abraham O. Woodruff, who would shortly take a post-manifesto wife of his own, and who prophesied in 1900 before a church audience in the name of Jesus Christ that plural marriage would never be discontinued until the Second Coming of the Savior.<sup>30</sup> However few their number relative to the entire membership of the church, their deep commitment to plurality and their willingness to take risks to keep it alive provided both momentum and precedent on which fundamentalists could build.

There are other findings concerning Mormon polygamy that I have not mentioned that are as interesting as those which I have discussed. Professor Lawrence Foster, for example, has shown that we can more fully comprehend the church's early practice of polygamy by the use of anthropological models dealing with group identity, hierarchical confirmation and ritual.<sup>31</sup> There have been other studies revealing the surprising extent of divorce in plural unions.<sup>32</sup> There are inquiries into the often-exaggerated portrayals used by law enforcement officials, cartoonists and novelists of the late nineteenth century to caricature and destroy Mormon patriarchal marriage.<sup>33</sup> Todd Compton's work on the Nauvoo period has put human faces on the women who entered plural unions with Mormonism's first prophet.<sup>34</sup> Owing to the work of Dr. Leo Lyman we now appreciate the political

<sup>30</sup> Apostle Abraham O. Woodruff, as quoted by conference clerk Joseph Charles Bentley, in *Journal and Notes*, Manuscript Record, November 18-19, 1900, 61, LDS Archives.

<sup>31</sup> Foster was especially skilful with the employment of Victor Turner's concepts of "liminality" and "communitas." Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), 3-18, 123-28, 226-47.

<sup>32</sup> Eugene E. and Bruce L. Campbell, "Divorce among Mormon Polygamists: Extent and Explanations," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46 (Winter 1978): 4-23; Kunz, "One Wife or Several?" 68-69; Irwin Altman and Joseph Ginat, *Polygamous Families in Contemporary Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 469-70; and Daynes, *More Wives than One*, 162-63.

<sup>33</sup> For a few of many studies dealing with journalistic and political exploitation of Mormon sexual practices, see all of Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Graphic Image, 1834-1914: Cartoons, Caricatures, and Illustrations* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983); Terry L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Sarah Barringer Gordon's attention to legal humiliations imposed on Mormon plural wives by prosecutors in her, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 164, 166.

<sup>34</sup> Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997).



complexities of negotiations surrounding polygamy as they related to the acquisition of statehood for Utah.<sup>35</sup>

The fascinating roles played by women, both for and against polygamy, and Utah's pioneering step in allowing women to enter polling booths are generating large amounts of writing and research.<sup>36</sup> There is the question asked some time ago by Professor Klaus Hansen, yet relevant and debatable, whether polygamy was the primary objective of those involved in the anti-Mormon crusade of the 1870s and 1880s or whether plurality was only a convenient and more flammable issue used to mask the crusaders' greater goal: destruction of the theocratic power of the Mormon priesthood.<sup>37</sup> And one must not overlook the work of people like Martha Sonntag Bradley, Kenneth Driggs, Michael Quinn, and Marianne T. Watson with their contributions to our understanding of the rise and mentalité of polygamous Mormon fundamentalism.<sup>38</sup> Investigation into all these questions is alive and well, attracting so much scholarly activity that those interested in the topic can barely keep abreast of what is being said and written.

When the vote on whether or not Reed Smoot should be permitted to enter Congress came before the United States Senate in 1907, the prospects were not encouraging for the Mormon Apostle turned politician. The investigating committee that conducted hearings into his case for nearly three years recommended against his being given a seat in the senate chamber. Though Smoot was shown not to be a polygamist himself, there was yet strong prejudice in the country, as well as the Congress, that linked Smoot with Mormonism and its polygamous past, believing that though he had only one wife, he belonged to a culture that permitted other men to have many. For a variety of reasons, when the full vote in the Senate was taken, the two-thirds majority required to expel Smoot failed. He was then welcomed as a senator, reelected to the office for thirty years and became one of the most powerful politicians on Capitol Hill.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Leo Lyman, *Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

<sup>36</sup> Again, as only a few examples, see Lola Van Wagenen, "Sister-Wives and Suffragists: Polygamy and the Politics of Woman Suffrage 1870-1896," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1994); both the introduction to and selected essays from Carol Cornwall Madsen, ed., *Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman's Suffrage in Utah, 1870-1896* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997); and Joan Smyth Iverson, *Antipolygamy Controversy in U.S. Women's Movements, 1880-1925: A Debate on the American Home* (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967), 161-90.

<sup>38</sup> Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Kidnapped from that Land: the Government Raids on the Short Creek Polygamists* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993); Kenneth David Driggs, "'This will Someday Be the Head and Not the Tail of the Church': A History of the Mormon Fundamentalists at Short Creek," *Journal of Church and State* 43 (Winter 2001): 49-80; idem, "Twentieth-Century Polygamy and Fundamentalist Mormons in Southern Utah," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24 (Winter 1991): 45-58; D. Michael Quinn, "Plural Marriage and Modern Fundamentalism," *ibid.* 31 (Summer 1998): 1-68; and Marianne T. Watson, "John W. and Lorin C. Woolley: Archangels between Nineteenth-Century Mormon Polygamy and Twentieth-Century Mormon Fundamentalism," unpublished paper presented before the Mormon History Association, Provo, Utah, May 19-23, 2004.

One reason explaining the vote was the liberality of sentiment, often quoted, and apocryphally attributed to Senator Boies Penrose of Pennsylvania who urged that his colleagues accept a polygamist who didn't "polyg" considering they had such tolerance for monogamists among themselves who didn't "monog."<sup>39</sup> Using humor, Senator Penrose appealed to his fellow senators to look at themselves and their colleagues with their contradictions, failings and differences, as reason for justifying a more tolerant view of Reed Smoot. It is chiefly in that spirit that I am heartened by the growing research into Mormon polygamy—both that of the nineteenth century and that of today.

Not only is the shadow that earlier fell across the subject rapidly melting away, but the projects and ideas discussed here, both individually and all together, reveal the extraordinary importance of polygamy in the early church. It *was* a major tenet, central to Mormonism's conceptual image of itself, and one for which large, personal sacrifices were made. But most importantly, by illuminating the expectations and trials of those involved in the church's polygamous passage, we more clearly see how and in what ways they resemble us: their capacity for religious and emotional aspiration; their need for self assurance; their contradictions; their triumphs and their failures. The study of Mormon polygamy shows it to have consisted overwhelmingly of good men and women who partook of common, human sensibilities. And to recognize that, as Senator Penrose seems to have done, makes toleration of and compassion for human differences possible.

<sup>39</sup> The earliest reference I have found to this wonderful anecdote is from a reminiscence by Francis T. Plimpton, reported in the *Readers' Digest* 72 (June 1, 1958): 142. Variations of the statement appear in O.N. Malmquist, *The First 100 Years: A History of the Salt Lake Tribune 1871-1971* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1971), 229; and Kathleen Flake, *Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 146.