

## Chapter 4

### Brigham Young The Father of Mormon Polygamy

The LDS Church, which has its headquarters in Utah, has taught for over a century that Joseph Smith was the author of Mormon polygamy—and the religious public has been eager to believe the story. But the truth is that Brigham Young and his family and friends were the ones who brought polygamy into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and made it a cardinal doctrine. All of the writings of Joseph Smith (published during his lifetime) condemn polygamy, but after his death Brigham and the other polygamist apostles published polygamist documents which they ascribed to Joseph. As evidence of Joseph's innocence, he had no children by polygamist wives (even though the purpose of practicing polygamy—according to LDS authorities—was to have many children born of polygamy). Brigham had a total of fifty-six children (John J. Stewart, *Brigham Young and His Wives: And the True Story of Plural Marriage*, 82).

It would take volumes to tell the complete story of Brigham's involvement in polygamy and how he was instrumental in bringing it into the Church. Part of that story is the account of how he requested to travel alone on missions, met a married woman, Augusta Cobb, who was acquainted with members of the Cochrane sect and their teachings, and later took her to Nauvoo and married her as his polygamist wife—before Joseph's death. When Joseph discovered the polygamist practices of Brigham Young and others, he sought to bring them to trial, but was assassinated before he could do so. The polygamist party under Brigham Young then took control of the Church, which assured the success of polygamy as a doctrine among the Utah Saints.

### Brigham's Cochranite Connections

Brigham Young had a thorough knowledge of Cochranism, for he made several missionary journeys through the “Cochranite territory” from Boston to Saco, and later married Augusta Cobb as previously noted. He attended the 1835 Church conference in Saco. Brigham chose to travel alone in Cochranite territory instead of going with another elder, “two by two” as the Scriptures direct (see RLDS DC 52:3c; 60:3a; 61:6b; and 75:5c–d; also LDS DC 52:10; 60:8; 61:35; 75:30–36).

The High Council met at Kirtland on February 20, 1834, and its record states:

The council also decided that Elder Brigham Young should travel alone it being his own choice . . . and that there should be a general conference held in Saco, in the state of Maine, on the 13th day of June, 1834. (*Times and Seasons* 6 [November 1, 1845]: 1022–1023; *RLDS History of the Church* 1:434–435)

Why did Brigham insist upon traveling alone in an area where adulterous temptations were sure to befall any lonely elder?

The report for the June 1834 Church conference at Saco stated that “a numerous concourse had assembled” (*Evening and Morning Star* 2 [August 1834]: 181). Although Brigham did not go to the 1834 conference, he was on a mission to the eastern states from May to September 1835 (Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses*, Appendix A, 413).

Brigham continued to work in that area and he reported that he also had been to a conference in Maine on August 12, 13, and 14, 1836, where fifty-two members of the Saco Branch attended (*Messenger and Advocate* 2 [September 1836]: 381–382). Brigham's presence in and around Saco during the Cochranite era is another evidence that he was very familiar with Cochranite polygamy.

### Brigham's Polygamous Revelations in England

The Church opened its mission in England in 1837 by send-

ing apostles and elders to conduct missionary work there. The brethren were there for long periods of time without their wives. The mission was very successful and thousands joined the Church. The apostles were idolized by their new followers, and temptations naturally followed. To make matters worse, polygamy was a common topic of discussion in both England and America at the time, and was being practiced in both countries. Under these circumstances, Brigham declared “the doctrine” of polygamy was revealed to him in a vision and revelations while in England:

While we were in England, (in 1839 and 40), I think the Lord manifested to me by vision and his Spirit things [concerning polygamy] that I did not then understand. I never opened my mouth to any one concerning them, until I returned to Nauvoo; Joseph had never mentioned this; there had never been a thought of it in the Church that I ever knew anything about at that time, but I *had this* for myself, and I kept it to myself. And when I returned home, and Joseph revealed those things to me, then I understood the reflections that were upon my mind while in England. But this (communication with Joseph on the subject) was not until after I had told him what I understood—this was in 1841. The revelation [Section 132 in the Utah Doctrine and Covenants] was given in 1843, but the doctrine was *revealed* before this. (*The Messenger of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* 1 [June 1875]: 29; *Deseret News*, July 1, 1874)

This statement by Brigham is very important because:

1. He admits that polygamy was not a doctrine of the Church before 1839 or 1840: “There had never been a thought of it in the Church.” This destroys the LDS Church’s teachings that polygamy was even thought of as a Church doctrine as early as 1832 in Kirtland;
2. According to Brigham, Joseph had never even mentioned polygamy as a doctrine before 1841;
3. It was Brigham Young who first developed the dogma of polygamy—and that he claimed he did so by Divine mani-



festations and by a vision.

Apostle Jason Briggs of the Reorganized Church, editor of the *Messenger*, made the following observations concerning Brigham's statement quoted above:

This is lifting one of the early disguises,—an uncovering of *his* [Brigham's] *trail* so long obscured. Here is an acknowledgment that the doctrine of polygamy was first revealed to him. He "had it for himself" before "Joseph or the Church" even thought of it. Well done, Brigham! Why didn't you tell the people this in the start, that polygamy was introduced through your revelation? The only answer to this is, it was thought essential to the success of this doctrine, that it should have the sanction of Joseph. (*ibid.*, 29)

### **Stafford's Testimony Concerning Brigham's Adulterous Activities**

Seventy Thomas Stafford, who knew Brigham Young in both England and Nauvoo, testified that he had personal knowledge of Brigham's misconduct. Stafford's family lived in England in 1837 in the city of Stockport, when they first heard the gospel preached and became acquainted with Apostle Brigham Young (*Autumn Leaves* 1 [June 1888]: 245). They joined the Church, moved to Manchester, and sailed for America on May 1, 1841 (*ibid.* [July 1888]: 299). The family arrived at Nauvoo in the summer of 1842 (*ibid.* [August 1888]: 354). At Nauvoo, Thomas and his brother, Edwin, were "school-mates" and friends of Joseph Smith III (*The Saints' Herald* 81 [December 4, 1934]: 1545; *ibid.* 82 [December 10, 1935]: 1588). Both Thomas and Edwin later became ministers in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

On August 24, 1891, Seventy Thomas Stafford wrote a letter to Seventy Gomer R. Wells telling of improper conduct which he had witnessed on the part of Brigham Young, both in England and in Nauvoo. Stafford wrote:

But I am fully convinced, as I was then, that Brigham (Young), was in adultery in Manchester, England, in the fall, winter and spring of 1840 and 1841. Elizabeth Mayer is the person with whom Brigham was then committing adultery. My reasons are these: We lived next door to her, under the same roof. . . . This Elizabeth Mayer had a father and a brother who were gardeners; they took their dinners, as they worked a long piece from home. After they had left for work, Brigham would step into the house, she would then lock the door and pull down the blinds and curtains, which to me was strange. He never came to see our folks, although not five steps apart; and when he left he was always in a hurry, and she never came to the door with him when he was leaving.

This same thing occurred in Nauvoo with a woman and Brigham. Her name was Greenough; her son was about my age, was always driven out when Brigham came, the door was shut and the curtains lowered. I was puzzled to know why he acted so, if he had a good heart, and was engaged in the business of teaching the truth, why drive the boy out? Why not come also and see my mother, only a few steps apart?

I am now, and was then, satisfied that he was in adultery, in Manchester, England. The seeds of polygamy was sown, and Brigham the sower. . . . I was present at a meeting in a grove [at Nauvoo], about three weeks before Joseph and Hyrum were murdered, when Joseph made a public statement in the presence of three thousand people, that polygamy was being practiced secretly by some; that it had crept into the church secretly and must be put down speedily or the church would be driven from Nauvoo.

I am satisfied that Joseph was not in favor of it (polygamy) at all. Would swear to all I have stated. (R. C. Evans, *Autobiography of Elder R. C. Evans*, 334–335)

### **Brigham Married a Woman Who Was Acquainted with Cochranism**

Between 1834 and 1844, Brigham Young made a number of journeys into the Boston area, where the Cochranite doctrine was prevalent. During this time he met Augusta Adams Cobb. Augusta was baptized on June 29, 1832, by Samuel Smith, as noted in a previous chapter (see *Missionary Journal of Samuel*

*Harrison Smith—1832*, and *Journal of Orson Hyde*). Both journals show that Augusta Cobb requested baptism at a meeting where at least two Cochranites were present. This establishes the fact that Augusta was familiar with the doctrines of the polygamous Cochranites when she met Apostle Young. Augusta was an educated woman from a well-known Boston family, married and living in luxury with her husband of twenty-one years—Henry Cobb. According to Augusta’s great granddaughter, Mary Cable, Augusta and Henry were the parents of seven children (*American Heritage* 16 [February 1965]: 50). In the fall of 1843 Augusta deserted her husband and all of her children but the two younger ones—Charlotte, six, and Brigham, only a few months—and went with Brigham Young to Nauvoo to become his plural wife (*ibid.*, 52).

While on the journey to Nauvoo the infant, Brigham, became ill and died at Cincinnati, Ohio. “She [Augusta] had it put in a tin box and took it with her” to Nauvoo (*ibid.*, 54). A Nauvoo newspaper, the *Nauvoo Neighbor* of November 8, 1843, announced the death of Brigham Cobb, age five months and twenty days. By this time Brigham and Augusta were secretly married.

Brigham Young was already a polygamist at the time he married Augusta on November 2, 1843 (Stewart, *Brigham Young and His Wives*, 86; *Saints’ Herald* 105 [August 11, 1958]: 16). He took his first plural wife in June 1842, when he married twenty-year-old Lucy Decker Seely, wife of William Seely. Lucy had borne Mr. Seely three children (Stewart, *Brigham Young and His Wives*, 85; Kate B. Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage* 16 [1973]: 187–189). In spite of the fact that some of the LDS Church’s historical references state that Lucy was a widow, she was not. Official church archive records in the Genealogical Society Library in the LDS Church’s headquarters building in Salt Lake City show that William Seely did not die until May 20, 1851. Further, references in the dozens of records give no concrete evidence that Lucy and William Seely were ever divorced. Therefore, Brigham was guilty of polygamy and Augusta and Lucy were both guilty of polyandry—the having of plural husbands.



## Henry Cobb Sued Augusta for a Divorce

In 1847 Henry Cobb sued Augusta for a divorce. This action and her polygamous marriage to Brigham received nationwide publicity through the newspapers.

High Priest George J. Adams, a popular missionary during the lifetime of Joseph the Prophet, was a witness for Henry Cobb. Adams was a noted preacher in the eastern states, including the Boston area. He had been a close consultant and advisor to Joseph Smith during the last few months of Joseph's life, and had labored fervently to free Joseph and Hyrum from the last legal charges against them before they were assassinated. Adams had served as a missionary in England and other European countries, along with members of the Twelve. Although Adams became entangled in the web of polygamy himself, he asserted that Brigham Young, and not Joseph Smith, brought that doctrine into the Church. He testified under oath as a witness for Henry Cobb that Joseph "did not teach the doctrine of spiritual wives."

The following account of the Cobb divorce case was printed in the *Boston Post* and reprinted in the *Quincy (Illinois) Whig* for December 22, 1847, page 2:

Supreme J. Court—Boston. [Cobb Divorce Case]

*Divorced from a Woman who had become the "Spiritual Wife" of a Mormon Leader.*—Henry Cobb vs. Augusta Cobb. This was a libel alleging crim con on the part of the respondent [Augusta Adams Cobb] with Brigham Young, in Nauvoo, in August, 1844, and December, 1845. After living 21 years in good repute with her lawful husband, the respondent became led away with Mormonism, leaving her husband, went to Nauvoo, and joined the church there. After a year's trial of the system she returned to Boston, but not being able to content herself here, she made another trip to Nauvoo; returned to Boston again, and again went off, and she is now supposed to be in California [Utah Territory] with Young.

Her conduct in Nauvoo was fully described in the deposition of George J. Adams, better known under the name of "Elder Adams," who testified that he knew Mrs. Cobb, when she lived in the house of Brigham Young, at Nauvoo. We give the follow-

ing extracts from the deposition:

“In the fall of 1844 after her return from Nauvoo to Boston, Mrs. Cobb said she loved Brigham Young better than she did Mr. Cobb, and, live or die, she was going to live with him at all hazards. This was in the course of a conversation in which she used extravagant language in favor of Mr. Young and against Mr. Cobb. Mrs. Cobb went out again to Nauvoo, the second time, and lived with Mr. Young, and their living together, and their conduct, was the subject of conversation in the society [of the Church] and out of the society. The subject of conversation, to which I have alluded, was that persons had a right to live together in unlawful intercourse [polygamy], and Mrs. Cobb avowed her belief in this doctrine, and said it was right.

“In conversation with Mrs. Cobb on the subject of spiritual wives, I [Adams] told her such doctrines would lead to the devil; and she said if it did she would go there with Brigham Young. The Mormons were so incensed with me for my opposition to this doctrine that they attempted to take my life in various ways. I think Mrs. Cobb was originally a woman of good feelings and good principles, but I do not think so of her now. I think she was led away by religious frenzy.

“She said, I never will forsake brother Young, come life or come death. She said that the doctrine taught by Brigham Young was a glorious doctrine; for if she did not love her husband [Cobb], it gave her a man she did love.”

In the cross examination, Mr. Adams stated that he performed on the stage when he was a young man; that he was a merchant tailor in extensive business before he joined the Mormons; that he has, since he withdrew, performed at the National Theatre in this city, *that Joseph Smith the founder of Mormonism, did not teach the doctrine of spiritual wives* (italics added); that Brigham Young, in assuming to be president of the church, had usurped authority, and that he, Mr. Adams, opposed the usurpation.

The testimony of Mr. Adams was corroborated by a widow lady, who had been to Nauvoo. . . . Judge Wilde decreed a full divorce from the bonds of matrimony.

The LDS Church in Utah has taught throughout the world that it was Joseph Smith who brought the doctrine of polygamy into the Church, but there is an abundance of evidence that



Joseph and Hyrum did not teach nor practice it. Instead, it was Brigham Young and his large family and loyal friends who secretly began the practice even before Joseph's death. Catharine V. Waite best described the power of the elite group surrounding Brigham Young, which made the polygamy doctrine succeed. Mrs. Waite was a lawyer and the wife of Judge Charles B. Waite, a justice appointed by the Federal Government to the Territory of Utah. She had an excellent opportunity to observe the inner workings of this elite polygamous hierarchy while she lived in Salt Lake City during the 1860s. She wrote:

It is worthy of remark, that all of Brigham's family became Mormons. . . . His brothers are all at Salt Lake, and are the devoted followers and satellites of the Prophet [Brigham].

Through the plurality system, the Youngs have formed connections so numerous, that almost half the people at Salt Lake are in some way related to the ruling dynasty. This is striking evidence of Brigham's ingenuity in consolidating and perpetuating his power. (Mrs. C. V. Waite, *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem; or, An Authentic History of Brigham Young, His Numerous Wives and Children*, 2)

Joseph and Hyrum fought a losing battle against the doctrine of polygamy because of Brigham's influence and power in Nauvoo. Brigham, and not Joseph, was the father of Mormon polygamy.

