

Chapter 9

Eliza Snow Was Not Pushed down the Mansion House Stairs

In an effort to prove that Joseph Smith was the author of polygamy in the Church, members of the LDS Church have proclaimed for over one hundred and fifty years that Eliza R. Snow was one of Joseph's plural wives in Nauvoo—and that Emma Smith in a jealous rage beat Eliza and shoved her down the Mansion House stairs, causing her to give birth prematurely to Joseph's child, who died. This story is false because the Mansion House stairs and hallway are constructed in such a way that the supposed altercation between Emma and Eliza could not have happened the way the story was reported. And even though Eliza lived with the Smiths for a short time at the Homestead, she never lived with them at the Mansion House, and her diary proves that she did not have an altercation with Emma.

In spite of these evidences, Fawn Brodie gave credence to this rumor by including it in her book, *No Man Knows My History*. She wrote:

There is a persistent tradition that Eliza conceived a child by Joseph in Nauvoo, and that Emma one day discovered her husband embracing Eliza in the hall outside their bedrooms and in a rage flung her downstairs and drove her out into the street. The fall is said to have resulted in a miscarriage. (This tradition was stated to me as fact by Eliza's nephew, LeRoi C. Snow, in the Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.) Solon Foster, coachman for the prophet, was present in the Mansion House when the incident occurred. Years later he met Emma's sons, who were then publicly denouncing polygamy in Utah, and reproached them for their attitude: "Joseph, the night your mother turned Eliza R. Snow into the

street in her night clothes you and all the family stood crying. I led you back into the house and took you to bed with me. You said, 'I wish mother wouldn't be so cruel to Aunt Eliza.' You called her aunt, because you knew she was your father's wife. He did not deny it."

C. G. Webb further corroborated the story in an interview with W. Wyl:

There is scarcely a Mormon unacquainted with the fact, that Sister Emma, on the other side, soon found out the little compromise arranged between Joseph and Eliza. Feeling outraged as a wife and betrayed as a friend, Emma is currently reported as having had recourse to a vulgar broomstick as an instrument of revenge; and the harsh treatment received at Emma's hand is said to have destroyed Eliza's hopes of becoming the mother of a prophet's son. (Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 470–471)

Dr. Wilhelm Wyl had published Webb's account in his *Mormon Portraits*, page 58. In 1885 C. G. Webb made the above statement (as quoted by Fawn Brodie) to Dr. Wyl, an author and correspondent from Germany, who spent six months in Salt Lake City interviewing Mormons, including Webb, for a book which he was writing. His account demonstrates that by 1885 the story of Emma throwing Eliza down the stairs at the Mansion House was widespread among the Mormons—and they have been spreading that falsehood ever since. Even in March 1996 Mormon missionaries in the Independence, Missouri, area were trying to convert Saints in the Restoration branches by testifying that the Eliza Snow story was true.

Note that Fawn Brodie states that LeRoi C. Snow told her, "in the Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City," the story that Solon Foster witnessed Emma Smith fling Eliza down the Mansion House stairs. Many heard and believed LeRoi Snow's testimony, not only because he worked at the Church Historian's Office, but because LeRoi was Eliza's nephew, and was the son of the Mormon Church President Lorenzo Snow, who was Eliza's brother.

Apostle Rich's Account Proven False

LeRoi Snow states that Apostle Charles C. Rich of the LDS Church saw Emma and Eliza at the head of the stairs, heard a commotion, then saw Eliza come tumbling down the Mansion House stairs. LeRoi's notes state:

Charles C. Rich called at the Mansion House, Nauvoo, to go with the Prophet on some appointment they had together. As he waited in the main lobby or parlor, he saw the Prophet and Emma come out of a room upstairs and walk together toward the stairway which apparently came down center. Almost at the same time, a door opposite opened and dainty, little, dark-haired Eliza R. Snow (she was "heavy with child") came out and walked toward the center stairway. When Joseph saw her, he turned and kissed Emma goodbye, and she remained standing at the bannister. Joseph then walked on to the stairway, where he tenderly kissed Eliza, and then came on down stairs toward Brother Rich. Just as he reached the bottom step, there was a commotion on the stairway, and both Joseph and Brother Rich turned quickly to see Eliza come tumbling down the stairs. Emma had pushed her, in a fit of rage and jealousy; she stood at the top of the stairs, glowering, her countenance a picture of hell. Joseph quickly picked up the little lady, and with her in his arms, he turned and looked up at Emma, who then burst into tears and ran to her room. Joseph carried the hurt and bruised Eliza up the stairs and to her room. "Her hip was injured and that is why she always afterward favored that leg," said Charles C. Rich. "She lost the unborn babe." (Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 135)

When the stairways at both the Homestead and the Mansion House are examined, it is obvious that the event could not have happened at either place. The stairs in the Homestead are very narrow and they turn sharply near the bottom, so the top of the stairs cannot be seen while standing in the room below.

Neither can the hallway at the top of the stairs in the Mansion House be seen as Charles Rich described it. The stairway is narrow (only three feet wide) and at the top there is only a

small landing three feet square—with a blank wall on the right, a small door straight ahead, and small hallway on the left. When standing at the foot of the stairs, one can only see the small door (see pages 88 and 126). It is straight ahead and it is the door to a small split-level room where the Smith children slept. The door to Joseph and Emma’s room cannot be seen from the bottom of the stairs. No other door is visible, though Rich testified he “saw the Prophet and Emma come out of a room upstairs” and “a door opposite opened and dainty, little, dark-haired Eliza” came out of it. There was no “door opposite.”

The shape of the stairways in both the Homestead and Mansion House makes Charles Rich’s account false.

Foster’s Story about Eliza Was Proven False by Joseph Smith III

The LDS Church’s strongest witness to support their claim that Eliza was Joseph’s plural wife was Solon Foster. In 1885, the year Dr. Wyl was gathering information from Salt Lake City Mormons for his book, *Joseph Smith III* (a son of the Martyr) was also in Salt Lake City obtaining evidence concerning polygamy to prove that his father, Joseph Smith, Jr., was not a polygamist. Joseph III had an interview with Solon Foster, and Solon tried to convince Joseph that he (Solon) had been present at the Mansion House and had seen Emma push Eliza down the stairs. John R. Young, Brigham Young’s son, is said to have stated that he heard Solon Foster give a talk in which Foster told of the meeting between himself and Joseph III. According to John Young, Foster declared that he had told Joseph III that he (Solon) was present when Emma “turned Eliza R. Snow out-doors in her night clothes” (*ibid.*, 134–135).

Joseph III gave an entirely different account of what was said during his interview with Foster. Joseph declared:

Another person who called on me that summer at Brother Warnock’s was a man whom I had known when I was a boy and whom I used to like very well as a young man—a genial, pleasant young fellow. His name was Solon Foster. When he heard that I was in the city, he came as he said from a

distance of one hundred and thirty miles to have a talk with me and *tell me what he knew*. Our conversation was pleasant until he proposed to tell me a good many things about my father's family, speaking as if he, personally, knew all about them. In the earlier part of our conversation I had learned that he was not at Nauvoo for about two years before Father's death. Therefore he could not possibly have known of things happening in 1843 and early in 1844 up to the time of the tragedy.

After he had "borne his testimony," I proceeded to interrogate him. It was but a little while until he was forced to admit that he was repeating *only what he had heard*. For instance, he had stated that my father was a polygamist and had other wives than my mother. I questioned him: "Brother Solon, were you ever present at a marriage ceremony of any kind which occurred between my father and any other woman than my mother, Emma Hale?"

"No; I was not even present at their marriage."

"When you were an inmate of my father's house at occasional stated periods as you have said, did you ever see any woman there whom you knew to be a wife to my father, other than my mother?"

"No, sir."

"Did you ever meet, in social gatherings anywhere in the city of Nauvoo at any time a woman in company with my father, introduced by him or others as his wife, other than my mother Emma?"

"No, sir."

"Did you ever see my father in his own home or elsewhere where people were assembled in a social meeting of any kind, conduct himself in a familiar, intimate, or endearing manner toward any woman other than my mother?"

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I mean this, Solon. You know that husbands and wives sometimes express their affection for each other in the presence of other people, often using endearing terms or putting an arm around one another or offering some caress. Did you ever see a gesture of this kind offered by my father towards any woman whom you understood at the time to be in a position as his wife, to accept such caresses or endearments, other than my mother?"

With flushed face and a suspicion of confusion he said, "Brother Joseph, you have no business to ask me such pointed questions."

At this I said, "Yes, Brother Solon, I have, and a legitimate business, too. I was baptized by my father and confirmed a member of the church he organized. The faith into which I was baptized and confirmed was the faith which was held and taught by the church at that time, and *it included no provision concerning polygamy*. There were no polygamic marriages known to me to exist therein at that time. Now you say you have come down from the mountain to tell me what you know, and if I am to believe what you stated when you first came (before I began to question you), I would be compelled to believe that my father was a scoundrel, unfaithful and untrue to the commands he had received from God, and guilty of dealing treacherously with my mother; that he broke not only the laws of God given to the church through him as Prophet and Revelator but also the vows he had pledged with my mother at the altar in 1827. So I repeat, it is my business to find out the truth even if it should involve the necessity on my part of losing faith in my father's purity of life and conduct and believing him to be a libertine and an evil-minded man!

"However, now that I have questioned you closely, I discover that, like others, you know nothing at all, personally, that would so convict and condemn him, for you say he never taught you the doctrine; you say you never saw him married to any woman other than my mother; you say you never saw him act toward any other woman as though she were his wife, in any form; and that you were never introduced to any other woman who posed or was recognized, either in his house or at the house of anyone else, as his wife.

"I say I have indeed, the right to ask you any question which would either confirm your original statements or refute them. I have the right to bring out the truth from you as to what you really do know and what you have only just heard from others."

He seemed quite abashed at the vigor and earnestness with which I spoke. I told him I did not hold him responsible for that which he had heard, but that he had no business to repeat or to testify to things that had not come within his own

personal knowledge and to the truthfulness of which he could not swear.

I do not know that he ever forgave me for the cross-examination to which I subjected him, but I do know that I had gone to Salt Lake City with the firm intention of examining closely every statement presented to me by anyone which bore upon the differences existing between my church and the one dominant in that western valley and intended to use every means in my power to ascertain and establish either their truth or falsity. Solon Foster was just another specimen of the kind of witness, and his statements the kind of testimony which those people out there were asking me to accept. (*Saints' Herald* 83 [March 24, 1936]: 368)

Joseph Smith III was a primary witness, for he was almost eleven years old when he moved with his mother and father into the Mansion House, and would have known if Joseph were practicing polygamy. His testimony is much more convincing than Fawn Brodie's "persistent tradition" and Solon Foster's claims—for, as previously noted, Eliza *never* lived with Joseph and Emma in the Mansion House.

There is a great difference in the accounts given by Charles C. Rich and Solon Foster. Rich asserts that he saw Joseph carrying Eliza "up the stairs and to her room," while Foster declares that Emma "turned Eliza R. Snow into the street in her night clothes." Both men claim that they saw Eliza tumble down the stairs at the Mansion House—while history shows Emma and Joseph did not move to the Mansion House until *after* Eliza moved away from their home.

Joseph Smith III Declared Eliza Did Not Bear a Child in Nauvoo

As early as the 1850s, the Mormons were spreading their false story about Eliza (see *Saints' Herald* 59 [May 15, 1912]: 465–467). In 1862 Elder Charles Derry and Joseph Smith III discussed the Mormon Church's claim that Eliza Snow had conceived a child by Joseph Smith. Elder Derry had gathered from England to Salt Lake City in 1854 and because of the

apostasy he witnessed there, he left Utah in 1859 (*Journal of History* 1 [July 1908]: 273; *ibid.* [October 1908]: 437). Brother Derry soon joined the Reorganized Church and became one of its most distinguished missionaries. In December 1862 he visited Joseph III at Nauvoo before leaving on a missionary assignment to Salt Lake City. While Joseph was taking Derry the first thirty miles of his journey, the two men discussed the subject of polygamy, including the Mormon claim that Eliza Snow had been pregnant with the Prophet's child. Derry recorded:

Bro. Joseph [III] is taking me out to Colchester [Illinois] in his wagon, the distance of thirty miles. We have some interesting conversation. He does not believe his father ever practiced polygamy, and he gives good reasons for it. He says there were several young women lived at his father's house, but they were destitute of homes. They were not his father's wives. If they had been it is probable some evidence would have been visible, especially as we are told that polygamy was instituted to bring forth a holy seed, and surely no means [of birth control] would have been taken to have prevented this result. But he [Joseph III] knows that none of these females [who lived with Emma and Joseph] had children until 1846, which was nearly two years after Joseph's death.

As for Eliza Snow, it is reported that she had a child by Joseph; but he [Joseph III] knows that she never bore children while she was in Nauvoo, which also was about two years after Joseph's death. (*Journal of History* 2 [April 1909]: 168–169)

Eliza's Journal Proves That the "Altercation" Story Is False

Eliza was born in 1804 to Oliver and Rosetta Snow and had lived with her parents, brothers, and sisters in northern Ohio at the time the Church headquarters was in Kirtland in the early 1830s. The Snows were friends of Sidney Rigdon and belonged to the Disciples of Christ Church (Campbellite) which had recently been formed, with Sidney as one of its founders, along with Alexander Campbell. After Sidney left the Disciples

of Christ and joined the Church, the Snow family joined also. The Snows moved to Missouri with the Saints and suffered the persecutions there. Later they moved to Nauvoo.

Eliza Snow's Nauvoo journal has now been published, which shows the entire altercation story was fabricated. A study of her life and writings reveal the following:

Spring 1838: In the spring of 1838 when Eliza was thirty-four, she moved with her father, mother, brothers, and sister from Kirtland to Adam-ondi-Ahman in Daviess County, Missouri, not far from the Church's headquarters at Far West (see Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *The Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, 12).

December 1838: Eliza was still living with her parents, brothers, and sister in the Far West area (*ibid.*, 12–13).

March 5, 1839: Eliza and her family left Missouri, where they had lived for nine months, and traveled together to Quincy, Illinois. Eliza's parents and her two teenage brothers settled temporarily in Quincy, while Eliza and her sister, Leonora, went to live in nearby Lima, Illinois, and worked as seamstresses (Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Ensign* 9 [June 1980]: 66–67; see also Beecher, *Personal Writings*, 15).

July 16, 1839: On this day Eliza Snow moved from Lima to Commerce (Nauvoo) at the invitation of Sidney Rigdon, her former Church of Christ minister. She lived at the Rigdon home and taught the Rigdon family school (*ibid.*). At that time the Rigdons were living in the James White stone house at the foot of what later became Parley Street. (When that area was flooded by water from the Keokuk Dam, the house was undated.)

October 6, 1839: Eliza was still living with the Rigdons (*ibid.*, 18).

Winter 1839–1840: Oliver Snow came for his daughter,

Eliza, and she moved away from Nauvoo to the home of her parents (*ibid.*).

Spring 1840: Eliza moved with her parents to La Harpe, Illinois, where they lived for one year—until the spring of 1841 (*ibid.*).

Spring 1841: Eliza and her parents moved to Nauvoo, and she lived there in her parents' home until June 20, 1842 (*ibid.*, 52).

June 20, 1842: Eliza's father, Oliver Snow, became so distraught about events connected with Dr. John C. Bennett that he left Nauvoo and the Church, and moved seventy-five miles away to Walnut Grove, Illinois (Beecher, *Ensign* 9 [June 1980]: 67). Eliza's mother and brothers went also, but Eliza chose to stay at Nauvoo even though no other member of her family was living there. Her sister, Leonora, whom Eliza had left in Lima, had become a polygamous wife of Patriarch Isaac Morley and was living in the Morley Settlement at Lima (*ibid.*). (It must be remembered that Brigham Young and others were practicing polygamy in 1842.) Housing was so scarce in Nauvoo that Eliza was desperate to find a place to live.

August 13, 1842: On this date Emma Smith sent for Eliza. Emma was aware of Eliza's sad plight—a thirty-eight-year-old unmarried woman now bereft of family and home. Emma's heart and home were always open to the oppressed and lonely, especially needy women and children. No doubt Emma knew the full story behind Oliver Snow's quick exit from the city, and Emma's heart went out to Eliza—so she invited Eliza to share her home (Beecher, *Personal Writings*, 54).

August 18, 1842: Eliza moved into Emma and Joseph's home (the Homestead) on this date (*ibid.*). Eliza's diary shows that she was treated kindly by Joseph and Emma and there is no evidence of plural marriage or contention. During this time Eliza taught school at the Red Brick Store, and the Smith chil-

dren were some of her pupils.

February 11, 1843: Eliza moved out of the Homestead on this date, after having lived with Emma and Joseph almost six months (*ibid.*, 64). The day after she moved, Eliza taught school as usual, with no evidence of having received a beating or having suffered a fall or a miscarriage. If Eliza had been injured so severely that she suffered a life-threatening miscarriage, she would have had to close her school for the rest of the term—but the records show that she did not miss a single day of teaching (Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 136).

March 17, 1843: This was the last day of school, and Eliza was happy to record in her diary that at her closing school program she had “the pleasure of the presence of Prest. J. Smith, [and] his lady” (Beecher, *Personal Writings*, 66). Her “pleasure” at their presence shows a friendly regard for both the Prophet and Emma, and is another proof that the entire story about Eliza being a plural wife, who had been battered by Emma, is totally false.

Shortly after her school term ended, Eliza moved from Nauvoo to Lima to live with her sister, Leonora (Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Eliza and Her Sisters*, 58). Leonora was still a plural wife of Isaac Morley. Eliza’s journal shows that she never again lived with Emma and Joseph. According to Mormon Church history, Joseph and Emma moved into the Mansion House August 31, 1843, six months after Eliza moved from their home at the Homestead (*LDS History of the Church* 5:556).

Eliza’s diary verifies that she was not married to Joseph, for in it she never alludes to any intimacy toward him. Though she showed respect for him as the Prophet and President, she did not use any term which a wife would naturally use in referring to her husband. Her writings in relation to him were always formal. If she had been his wife, there would have been some reference to the fact in her personal record. Also, the diary proves the charges against Emma to be false, because Eliza’s journal shows that she respected Emma. There is no hint of any ill will between

them, which would have appeared in her journal if Emma had beaten her and pushed her down the stairs. Eliza's journal portrays only a high regard for the beautiful, capable, and kind-hearted Emma, who had given the sad, middle-aged, homeless woman a place to live. Eliza's diary is in itself sufficient proof that Joseph and Eliza were not married.

The question must be asked, Why did Eliza allow the rumor to circulate throughout Utah Mormondom and the world, that Emma had beaten her in the Mansion House? The answer is, because Eliza was a devoted and favored wife of Brigham Young while in Utah and a woman of great influence, and therefore she chose to uphold Brigham's doctrine of polygamy. She was called a " 'priestess' and 'prophetess,' " and "queen among Mormon women" (Beecher, *Personal Writings*, 2, xvii). Her testimony was of tremendous importance in the struggle between polygamy and antipolygamy which raged during the last thirty years of her life. She could have stopped the malicious lies about her being a plural wife of Joseph Smith. Instead, she chose to feed the fires of untruth for over a quarter of a century by not publishing that those stories were false. She supported Brigham Young's false dogma that polygamy was introduced by Joseph the Prophet in order to keep Brigham's Rocky Mountain empire from crumbling.