

Chapter 6

Joseph's Anti-Bennett Crusade

In the last chapter it was mentioned that Joseph Smith called for a special conference to be held in Nauvoo on August 29, 1842. At that time 380 elders volunteered to travel nationwide to distribute a broadside (a two-paged newspaper) filled with affidavits and certificates in a massive effort to convince the public, among other things, that Dr. John Bennett had lied and that the Prophet was not a polygamist. Joseph spearheaded this endeavor to set forth the truth, which was one of his greatest efforts to prove himself innocent of practicing plural marriage. It was such a tremendous undertaking and was promoted with such zeal that it can rightly be called a crusade. The information derived from that crusade is still important and beneficial to the Saints of today as they seek to understand what happened at Nauvoo in regard to polygamy. Bennett made charges other than those of polygamy against Joseph and the Saints, and those charges were also addressed in the affidavits. However, the majority of the contents of the affidavits were directly connected to Bennett's polygamy allegations.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Joseph was arrested on August 8 by Missouri officials on charges that he had been an accomplice in the attempted assassination of former Missouri governor, Lilburn Boggs. The Prophet was released the same day of his arrest by the Nauvoo Municipal Court. He then went into hiding—first in Iowa, and then in Nauvoo, most of that time hiding in his own home. Nevertheless, on Friday, August 26, the Prophet met with some of the Church leaders in the upper room of his Red Brick Store and planned the massive campaign to counteract Bennett's falsehoods. Under that date the history

records concerning Joseph:

At home all day. In the evening, in council with some of the Twelve and others. I gave some important instructions upon the situation of the church, showing that it was necessary that the officers that could should go abroad through the States, and, inasmuch as a great excitement had been raised through the community at large by the falsehoods put in circulation by John C. Bennett and others, it was wisdom in God that the elders should go forth and deluge the States with a flood of truth, setting forth the mean, contemptible, persecuting conduct of ex-Governor Boggs, of Missouri, and those connected with him in his mean and corrupt proceedings, in plain terms, so that the world might understand the abusive conduct of our enemies, and stamp it with indignation.

I advised the Twelve to call a special conference on Monday next, to give instructions to the elders, and call upon them to go forth upon this important mission; meantime, that all the affidavits concerning Bennett's conduct be taken and printed, so that each elder could be properly furnished with correct and weighty testimony to lay before the public. (RLDS *History of the Church* 2:613; LDS *History of the Church* 5:131–132; see also Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith* 2:443–444)

The LDS history reports for Saturday the twenty-seventh:

In the assembly room with some of the Twelve and others, who were preparing affidavits for the press. (LDS *History of the Church* 5:132)

Joseph and the others prepared over twenty affidavits and certificates, which helped prove that Dr. Bennett's allegations against Joseph were false. The affidavits and certificates filled both sides of the broadside. The paper was given the title *Affidavits and Certificates Disproving the Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters*.

On Monday, August 29, a vast crowd of concerned Saints gathered at the Grove near the Temple for the conference. As noted in the previous chapter, the conference opened with Hy-

rum Smith, a member of the First Presidency, presiding:

President Hyrum Smith introduced the object of the conference by stating that the people abroad had been excited by John C. Bennett's false statements, and that letters had frequently been received inquiring concerning the true nature of said reports; in consequence of which it is thought wisdom in God that every elder who can, should go forth to every part of the United States, and take proper documents with them, setting forth the truth as it is. . . . They must go wisely, humbly setting forth the truth as it is in God, and our persecutions, by which the tide of public opinion will be turned. (*LDS History of the Church* 5:136)

Near the close of Hyrum's address, Joseph, who had not been seen in public for three weeks, walked up onto the Stand and sat down. Joseph's sudden appearance was a great surprise, for there was speculation among the Saints that he had gone to Washington or Europe, while others believed he was still in Nauvoo. A great wave of joy passed through the audience. After Hyrum concluded speaking, Joseph addressed the throng. In doing so, he provided the spark of leadership which only he could give. He referred to the affidavits and certificates which he had been busily preparing, by giving both a plea and a prophecy when he proclaimed:

Let the Twelve send all who will support the character of the Prophet, the Lord's anointed; and if all who go will support my character, I prophesy in the name of the Lord Jesus, whose servant I am, that you will prosper in your missions. (*LDS History of the Church* 5:139)

After the Prophet spoke, 380 elders volunteered to go on missions to spread the *Affidavits and Certificates* throughout the nation (see Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith* 2:447). It must have been a dramatic moment in the history of the Church to see so many men volunteer to leave their families, homes, and jobs to travel thousands of miles to distribute the *Affidavits and Certificates*—and to give their own testimonies that Joseph was not a polygamist.

The Documents Published in the Broadside

The affidavits and certificates are of great importance because they provide insights into the distress of the Church at Nauvoo and of Joseph's innocence.

Joseph issued the following statement as an introduction to the *Affidavits and Certificates* broadside:

The whole of these affidavits are given by gentlemen of the first respectability, of unquestionable character, and of known reputation and veracity, and can of course be relied upon; and what light do they represent Bennett in, but that of a perjured wretch, a graceless vagabond, and a mean, vacillating, unprincipled villian, and a disgrace to human society; and if their testimonies, and the testimony of the City Council, cannot be relied upon, then indeed are we in a poor case;—corrupt, fallen, and dishonored,—But John C. Bennett is not the man to prove us so; we must have different testimony to his, and that of his partners in crime, to convict us of evil.

As John C. Bennett and the Sangamo Journal have called upon several persons, in this city, to come out and make disclosures, relative to the things about which they have been writing; they have responded to the call, and publish the following:—[.] (*Affidavits and Certificates Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters*, Nauvoo, Illinois, August 31, 1842)

Here are the documents, or excerpts from them, which were published in the broadside:

1. Affidavit of the City Council.

We the undersigned, members of the city council of the City of Nauvoo, testify that John C. Bennett was not under duress at the time that he testified before the city council May 19th 1842 concerning Joseph Smith's innocence, virtue, and pure teaching—his statements that he has lately made concerning this matter are false . . . Joseph Smith asked him if he knew any thing bad concerning his public, or private character; he then delivered those statements contained in the testimony voluntarily, and of his own free will, and went of his own

accord as free as any member of the council.

We do further testify that there is no such thing as a Dan-ite Society in this city nor any combination, other than the Masonic Lodge, of which we have any knowledge.

Wilson Law, John Taylor, W. Woodruff, Vinson Knight, H. C. Kimball, John P. Green, William Marks, Geo. A. Smith, Geo. W. Harris, N. K. Whitney, Brigham Young, Charles C. Rich, Orson Spencer.

Note that this document was signed by five apostles (Taylor, Woodruff, Kimball, Smith, and Young); by William Marks, the Nauvoo Stake President; and by Bishops Whitney and Knight.

2. Affidavit of Hyrum Smith.

John C. Bennett endeavored to seduce them [certain women] and accomplished his designs by saying it [polygamy] was right; that it was one of the mysteries of God, which was to be revealed when the people was strong enough in the faith to bear such mysteries . . . that their was such revelations and such commandments [received by Joseph], and that it was of God. . . . he also wished an interview first with Br. Joseph; at that time Brother Joseph was crossing the yard from the house to the store, he immediately come to the store and met Dr. Bennett on the way; he reached out his hand to Br. Joseph and said, will you forgive me, weeping at the time; he said Br. Joseph, I am guilty, I acknowledge it, and I beg of you not to expose me, for it will ruin me; Joseph replied, Doctor! why are you using my name to carry on your hellish wickedness? Have I ever taught you that fornication and adultery was right, or polygamy or any such practices? He [Bennett] said you never did.

3. Affidavit of [President] Wm. Law.

I told him [Bennett] we could not bear with his conduct any longer—that there were many witnesses against him, and that they stated that he gave Joseph Smith as authority for his illicit intercourse with females. J. C. Bennett declared to me before God that Joseph Smith had never taught him such

doctrines.

Wm. Law.

4. Affidavit of Daniel H. Wells.

I hereby certify that on the 17th day of May last John C. Bennett subscribed and swore to the affidavit over my signature of that date . . . in my presence, in the office where I was employed in taking depositions of witnesses. The door of the room was open and free for all or any person to pass or repass. . . . During all this time if he was under duress, or fear, he must have had a good faculty for concealing it, for he was at liberty to go and come when and where he pleased, so far as I am capable of judging. I know that I saw him in different parts of the city, even after he had made these statements, transacting business as usual. . . . I never heard him say any thing derogatory to the character of Joseph Smith, until after he had been exposed by said Smith, on the public stand in Nauvoo.

Daniel H. Wells.

5. Certificate of Elias and F. M. [Francis] Higbee.

I am and have been for a long time the personal friend of Joseph Smith; and I will here say that I have never yet seen or known any thing against him that I should change my mind. It is true many reports have been and are put in circulation by his enemies for political or religious effect, that upon investigation are like the dew before the morning sun, vanish away, because there is no real substance in them.

Could Dr. Bennett expect any man acquainted with all the circumstances, and matters of fact which were developed both here and from abroad, respecting his conduct and character, previous to his leaving this place, for one moment to believe him—I answer NO! he could not. And all his affidavits, that came from any person entitled to credit, (I say entitled to credit, because some there are who are not entitled to credit, as Dr. Bennett very well knows) are in amount nothing at all, when summed up, and render no person worthy of death or bonds.

F. M. Higbee's knowledge concerning the murder of a prisoner in Missouri [which Dr. Bennett alleged], I am authorized to say, by F. M. Higbee that he knows of no such thing—that no prisoner [held by the Saints as Bennett claimed] was ever killed in Missouri, to the best of his knowledge. And I also bear the same testimony, that there never was any prisoner killed there, neither were we ever charged with any such thing, according to the best of my recollection.

Elias Higbee.

This is to certify that I do not know of the murder of any prisoner in Missouri, as above alluded to.

F. M. Higbee.

6. Stephen H. Goddard's Letter to Orson Pratt.

Mr. Orson Pratt, Sir:—Considering a duty upon me I now communicate to you some things relative to Dr. Bennett and your wife, that came under the observation of myself and wife. . . .

I took your wife into my house because she was destitute of a house, Oct. 6, 1840, and from the first night, until the last, with the exception of one night, it being nearly a month, the Dr. was there as sure as the night came, and generally two or three times a day—on the first three nights he left about 9 o'clock—after that he remained later, sometimes till after midnight; what their conversation was I could not tell, as they sat close together, he leaning on her . . . whispering continually or talking very low—we generally went to bed and had one or two naps before he left.

After being at my house nearly a month she was furnished with a house by Dr. [Robert] Foster, which she lived in until sometime about the first of June, when she was turned out of the house and came to my house again, and the Dr. [Bennett] came as before. . . . they went over to the house where you now live and come back after dark. . . . We went over several times late in the evening while she lived in the house of Dr. Foster, and were most sure to find Dr. Bennett and your wife together, as it were, man and wife. Two or three times we found little Orson lying on the floor and the bed apparently

reserved for the Dr. and herself. . . .

There are many more things which she [Mrs. Pratt] has stated herself to my wife, which could go to show more strongly the feelings, connexion, and the conduct of the two individuals.

Stephen H. Goddard.

7. Testimony of Mrs. [Stephen] Goddard.

Dr. Bennett came to my house one night about 12 o'clock, and sat on or beside the bed where Mrs. Pratt was and cursed and swore very profanely at her; she told me the next day that the Dr. was quick tempered and was mad at her. . . . I concluded from circumstances that she had promised to meet him somewhere and had disappointed him; on another night I remonstrated with the Dr. and asked him what Orson Pratt would think, if he could know that you were so fond of his wife, and holding her hand so much; the Dr. replied that he could pull the wool over Orson's eyes. . . .

My husband and I were frequently at Mrs. Pratt's and stayed till after 10 o'clock in the night, and Dr. Bennett still remained there with her and her little child alone at that late hour. . . . he was in the habit of sitting on the bed where Mrs. Pratt was lying and lying down over her.

I would further state that from my own observation, I am satisfied that their conduct was anything but virtuous, and I know Mrs. Pratt is not a woman of truth, and I believe the statements which Dr. Bennett made concerning Joseph Smith are false, and fabricated for the purpose of covering his own iniquities, and enabling him to practice his base designs on the innocent.

Zeruiah N. Goddard.

8. Affidavit of J. B. Backenstos.

Personally appeared before me Ebenezer Robinson acting Justice of the Peace . . . J. B. Backenstos, who being duly sworn . . . deposeth and saith, that some time during last winter [1841-1842], he accused Doctor John C. Bennett, with having an illicit intercourse with Mrs. Orson Pratt, and

some others, when said Bennett replied that she made a first rate go, and from personal observations I should have taken said Doctor Bennett and Mrs. Pratt as man and wife, had I not known to the contrary.

J. B. Backenstos.

9. Affidavit of J. McIlwrick.

I do know that the sister of my wife, Martha Brotherton, is a deliberate liar, and also a wilful inventor of lies; and that she has also to my certain knowledge at sundry times, circulated lies of a base kind, concerning those whom she knew to be innocent of what she alleged against them. She has also stooped to many actions which would be degrading to persons of common decency. . . .

And I further state that I am acquainted with Gen. Joseph Smith, President Brigham Young, and Elder Heber C. Kimball, having had the privilege of being intimate with the latter gentleman for several months in England. And I believe them to be men who lead holy and virtuous lives, and men who exhibit a philanthropic spirit to all the human family without respect of persons: and I also know for a truth that the fore-named Martha Brotherton has wickedly endeavored to injure the character of these gentlemen; and besides myself can testify that the statements which she has reported in different places are quite contrary to those she related here.

John McIlwrick.

We Elizabeth Brotherton, and Mary [Brotherton] McIlwrick, sisters of the said Martha Brotherton, concur in the above sentiments.

Elizabeth Brotherton.

Mary McIlwrick.

10. Affidavit of Brigham Young.

I do hereby testify that the affidavit of Miss Martha Brotherton that is going the rounds in the politics and religious papers, is a base falsehood, with regard to any private intercourse or unlawful conduct or conversation with me.

Brigham Young.

11. Affidavit of H. C. Kimball.

Heber C. Kimball, who being duly sworn according to law, deposeth and saith that the affidavit of Miss Martha Brotherton, which has been published in sundry newspapers is false and without foundation in truth, and further this deponent saith not.

Heber C. Kimball.

12. Affidavit of Vilate Kimball.

Personally came before me, Ebenezer Robinson, a Justice of the Peace . . . Mrs. Vilate Kimball, wife of Heber C. Kimball . . . and saith that the conversation said to have taken place between her and her husband in presence of Martha Brotherton is false: that nothing of the kind as stated in the affidavit of the 13th July 1842, made by the said Martha Brotherton at St. Louis, ever occurred, but is a base fabrication.

Vilate Kimball.

13. Affidavit of J. C. Bennett as Given May 17, 1842.

Personally appeared before me, Daniel H. Wells, an Alderman of said city of Nauvoo, John C. Bennett, who being duly sworn according to law, deposeth and saith: that he never was taught any thing in the least contrary to the strictest principles of the Gospel, or of virtue, or of the laws of God, or man, under any occasion either directly or indirectly, in word or deed, by Joseph Smith; and that he never knew the said Smith to countenance any improper conduct whatever, either in public or private; and that he never did teach me in private that an illegal illicit intercourse with females was, under any circumstances, justifiable, and that I never knew him so to teach others.

John C. Bennett.

14. Affidavit of Wm. Clayton.

Personally appeared before me Daniel H. Wells, an alderman of said city of Nauvoo, William Clayton, who being duly sworn according to law deposeth and saith; that he saw John C. Bennett write the affidavit signed by said Bennett,

and dated 17th day of May A.D. 1842, and further that he was present and saw and heard the oath administered to said Bennett by Daniel H. Wells upon said affidavit, and that he is confident that said Bennett made the affidavit of his own free will, and that no influence whatever from any person was used over said Bennett at the time.

William Clayton.

15. Affidavit of C. L. Higbee.

Personally appeared before me Daniel H. Wells, an alderman of said city, C. L. Higbee, who being duly sworn according to law, deposeth and saith, that he never was taught anything in the least contrary to the strictest principles of the gospel or of virtue, of the laws of God or of man, under any circumstances or upon any occasion, either directly or indirectly, in word or deed by Joseph Smith, and that he never knew said Smith to countenance any improper conduct whatever, either in public or in private, and that he never did teach me in private or public that an illicit intercourse with females was under any circumstances justifiable and that he never knew him so to teach others.

16. Affidavit of Stephen Markham.

Personally came before me, Ebenezer Robinson, a Justice of the Peace in and for said county, Stephen Markham, who being duly sworn according to law deposeth and saith, that on the—day of—A.D. 1842, he was at the house of Sidney Rigdon in the city of Nauvoo, where he saw Miss Nancy Rigdon laying on a bed, and John C. Bennett was sitting by the side of the bed, near the foot, in close conversation with her: deponant also saw many vulgar, unbecoming and indecent sayings and motions pass between them, which satisfied deponant that they were guilty of unlawful and illicit intercourse, with each other.

Stephen Markham.

17. Sidney Rigdon's Letter.

Nauvoo, Aug. 27th, 1842

Editor of the *Wasp*.

Dear Sir: I am fully authorized by my daughter, Nancy, to say to the public through the medium of your paper, that the letter [the "Essay on Happiness"] which has appeared in the *Sangamo Journal*, making part of General Bennett's letters to said paper, purporting to have been written by Mr. Joseph Smith to her, was unauthorized by her, and that *she never said to Gen. Bennett or any other person, that said letter was written by said Mr. Smith, nor in his hand writing, but by another person, and in another person's hand writing. . . . I would further state that Mr. [Joseph] Smith denied to me the authorship of that letter.*

Sidney Rigdon.

P. S. I wish the *Sangamo Journal* and all papers that have copied Bennett's letters to copy this also, as an act of justice to Miss Rigdon. S. R.

President Rigdon wrote the above letter in response to Dr. Bennett's request that Elder Rigdon and Nancy respond publicly and declare that Joseph was the author of the letter printed in Bennett's infamous Sixth Letter. It is known today as the "Essay on Happiness."

18. Certificates of William and Henry Marks.

Inasmuch as John C. Bennett has called upon me through the *Sangamo Journal* to come out and confirm the statements which he has made concerning Joseph Smith and others, I take this opportunity of saying to the public, that I know many of his statements to be false, and that I believe them all to be the offspring of a base and corrupt heart, and without the least shadow of truth, and further that he has used my name without my permission. I believe him to be a vile and wicked adulterous man, who pays no regard to the principles of truth or righteousness, and is unworthy the confidence of a just community. I would further state that I know of no Order in the Church which admits of a plurality of wives, and do not be-

lieve that Joseph Smith ever taught such a doctrine, and further, that my faith in the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and in Joseph Smith, is unshaken.

William Marks.

[Certificate of Henry Marks]

Inasmuch as the Sangamo Journal has called upon me to come out and make an expose against Joseph Smith; this is to certify that I know nothing derogatory to the character of Joseph Smith, neither in a religious or a moral point of view; and that Doctor Bennett and the Journal used my name without my knowledge or consent; and further that I believe Doctor Bennett to be a bad man and unworthy of public confidence.

Henry Marks.

19. Certificate of Sidney Rigdon.

As there seems to be some foolish notions that I have been engaged with J. C. Bennett, in the difficulties between him and some of the citizens of this place [Joseph Smith and others], I merely say in reply to such idle and vain reports that they are without foundation in truth.

Sidney Rigdon.

20. Certificate of Miss Pamela M. Michael.

Inasmuch as J. C. Bennett has referred the people to me for testimony against Pres. Joseph Smith, I take this opportunity to state before the public that I know nothing derogatory to his character, either as a christian, or a moral man.

Mr. Bennett made use of my name without my knowledge or consent.

Pamela M. Michael.

21. A Statement by W. P. Rowell.

Being called on for what I know in regard to Dr. J. C. Bennett's and [his] wife's character, I give it as follows:—

I knew them in Hocking City, Athens County, Ohio. I lived in the neighborhood with them about one year—the year

of 1837. I consider Bennett a very bad character, and not worthy the name of a gentleman; and on the other hand, I consider his wife very respectable. . . . she left him in consequence of his ill treatment of her at home, and his intimacy with other women.

W. P. Rowell.

The broadside ended with the following statement, which reflected the Prophet's feelings about publishing the affidavits and certificates:

The foregoing documents are made public to rebut and disprove the many slanderous reports that are constantly sickening the public mind, from a perusal of Bennett's letters. There are some things among these statements that necessity, for our reputation as a religious society, has compelled us to make public, which decency and humanity would have gladly dropped with the rest of their infamy into their proper receptacle.

LDS Historians Neglected to Report Joseph's Crusade

There is an important factor that the Saints and the public have not known concerning the story of Joseph's anti-polygamy crusade. It is that the LDS historians purposefully neglected to tell about the importance of the *Affidavits and Certificates* and Joseph's tremendous effort to have them spread nationwide. Although the majority of those affidavits were quoted in the *Times and Seasons*, the LDS historians did not list them together and explain their significance in the fight against polygamy. They did not relate that the special August 29 conference was specifically for the purpose of raising a large missionary force to take the *Affidavits and Certificates* broadside throughout the land, nor the fact that Joseph had them printed and circulated to prove that he was not involved in polygamy. Their early historians, who knew the facts, only alluded to the certificates as being produced to dispel Bennett's falsehoods, without mentioning that they were a part of Joseph's anti-polygamy crusade.

They did not give the broadside the emphasis it deserved.

The lack of emphasis on Joseph's crusade by early LDS writers was no doubt a purposeful omission of the facts, because they did not want to publish anything that would show that Joseph had fought against polygamy. They wanted the Saints and the world to believe that he was a polygamist. This is another example of their changing history in order to perpetuate their polygamy theology.

Conclusion

The nationwide crusade of distributing the *Affidavits and Certificates* was successful in quelling Bennett's lies as far as members of the Church and many fair-minded nonmembers were concerned. Those documents were especially helpful for the Church missionaries, who were meeting with opposition because of Bennett's published falsehoods.

It has been shown that the Prophet did everything within his power to convince those within and without the Church that he was innocent of practicing polygamy. However, the LDS Church alleges that Joseph married several plural wives during the summer of 1842—at the very time he was fighting Bennett's polygamous allegations so strenuously. Since the entire city of Nauvoo was alerted to the polygamy rumors, it would have been impossible for Joseph to have practiced it that summer without it becoming widely known. Further, it is absurd to believe that a righteous and bold Prophet would deliberately lie to mislead the Saints and the public by denying polygamy, at the very time he was marrying a number of plural wives. The LDS claim staggers the imagination!

The *Affidavits and Certificates* are extremely valuable today as evidence of the brave stand which Joseph made while he was in hiding, a prisoner in a cramped, underground, brick compartment at his own home.

The Prophet published a number of the affidavits not once, not twice, but four times—(1) in the *Affidavits and Certificates* broadside, (2) the *Times and Seasons* 3:869–875, (3) the *Wasp Extra* for July 27, 1842, and (4) the *Wasp* for September 3, 1842, which is more proof of his innocence. The affidavits and

certificates of the leading Church and civic officials of Nauvoo, properly sworn to before justices, are additional testimonies of Joseph's monogamy. Those testimonies are as true today as they were in 1842.

And, as Apostle William Smith published:

In fact, until the whole City Council of Nauvoo are *impeached*, the Doctor [John C. Bennett] must stand before the public as a perjured man. (*Wasp Extra*, July 27, 1842)

Joseph's anti-Bennett crusade is another convincing evidence that he was not a polygamist—but that he fought against the doctrine.