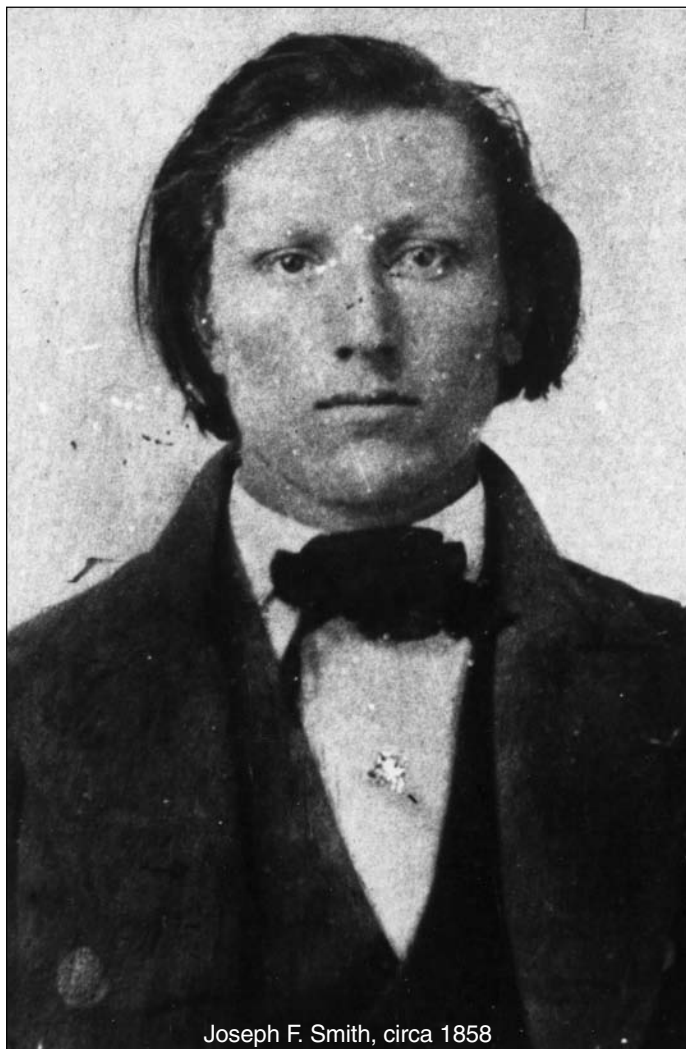


*By birth and temperament, Joseph F. Smith was destined for prominence. He was of the “royal lineage”—nephew of the Prophet Joseph and son of the Patriarch Hyrum—and his zeal for the Restoration never wavered. Whatever privileges may have accrued to him from his parentage were surpassed in spades by the trials he suffered as a young man. Combined, they produced a complex and very human being.*

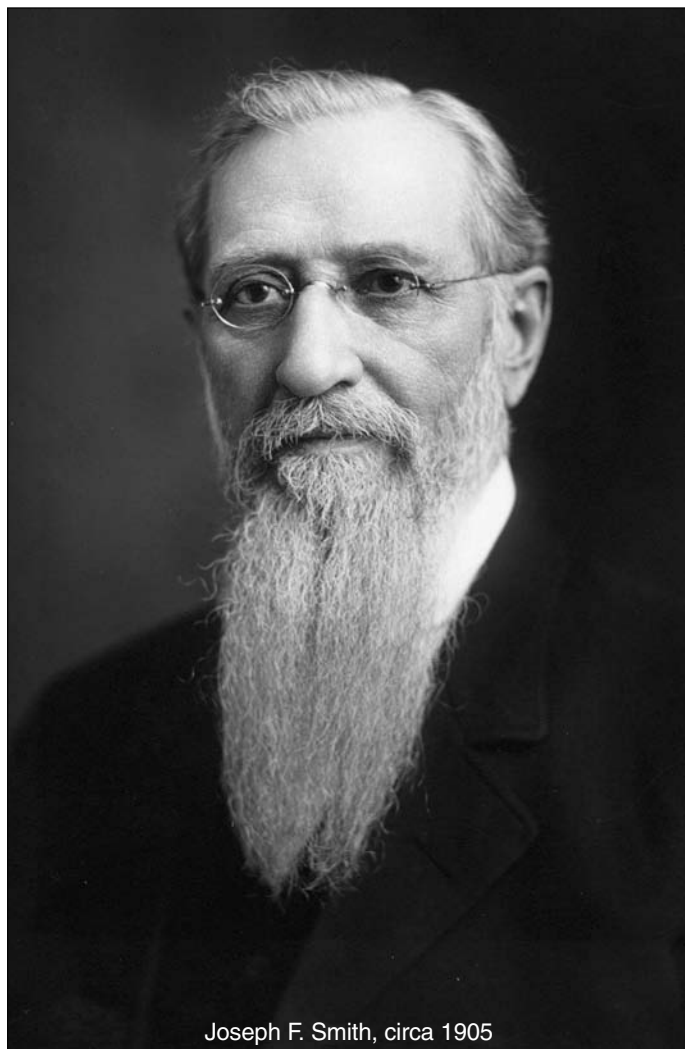
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## BEFORE THE BEARD: TRIALS OF THE YOUNG JOSEPH F. SMITH

*By Scott G. Kenney*



Joseph F. Smith, circa 1858



Joseph F. Smith, circa 1905

**H**E IS THE MAN WITH THE LONG BEARD WHOSE face we have been looking at for the past two years on the cover of the 2000–01 Priesthood and Relief Society manual. He is Joseph F. Smith, son of Hyrum and Mary Fielding Smith, sixth president of the Church (1901–18), and the father of the tenth, Joseph Fielding Smith. He was born in Far West, Missouri, two weeks after the Haun's Mill massacre, and he died in Salt Lake City eight days after the end of World War I.

President Smith's accomplishments are remarkable. He husbanded five large families and steered Mormonism into a safe and uncontested position in American culture. He defined the nature of Mormonism *sans* theocracy, cooperatives, and polygamy. He is truly the father of modern Mormonism.

But his many triumphs cannot be appreciated without understanding in like measure the trials and inner struggles he endured. I hope this portrayal will be a step toward an honest and empathetic portrait of the young Joseph F. Smith, of the man before the beard.

*“ . . . stupified with horror ”*

**E**ARLY IN THE morning, five-year-old Joseph heard tapping at his mother's bedroom window, then a man's voice from outside. His father was dead. Uncle Joseph, too. A mob had rushed the jail and shot them. Mary screamed in anguished denial, then began to sob uncontrollably.

As word spread, friends and relatives began to call—among them, B. W. Richmond, a non-Mormon staying at the Mansion House.<sup>1</sup> He described the scene:

[Mary] had gathered her . . . children into the sitting room and the youngest about four years old sat on her lap. The poor and disabled that fed at the table of her husband, had come in and formed a group of about twenty about the room. They were all sobbing and weeping, each expressing his grief in his own peculiar way. Mrs. Smith seemed stupified with horror.

Joseph recalled, “It was a misty, foggy morning. Everything looked dark and gloomy and dismal.”<sup>2</sup>

About three in the afternoon, two wagons bearing the martyrs reached the outskirts of town. Eight to ten thousand distraught mourners lined the streets. When the wagons reached the Mansion House, the rough pine coffins were unloaded and carried into the dining room. The families were asked to wait outside until the bodies could be cleaned. When they were allowed in,

[Mary] trembled at every step, and nearly fell, but reached her husband's body, kneeling down by him,



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clasped her arms around his head, turned his pale face upon her heaving bosom, and then a gushing, plaintive wail burst forth from her lips: “Oh! Hyrum, Hyrum! Have they shot you, my dear Hyrum—are you dead, my dear Hyrum!” She drew him closer and closer to her bosom, kissed his pale lips and face, put her hands on his brow and brushed back his hair. Her grief seemed to consume her, and she lost all power of utterance.

Her two daughters and two young children clung, some around her neck and some to her body, falling prostrate upon the corpse, and shrieking in the wildness of their wordless grief.<sup>3</sup>

At 7 the next morning, new coffins lined with fine white linen and covered in black velvet were ready. The bodies were laid inside, and protective squares of glass covered the faces. Then the coffins were put into pine boxes and set on tables for the public viewing.<sup>4</sup>

In late June, on the banks of the Mississippi River, the fog lifts early, and temperatures rise rapidly. In the Mansion House, decomposing flesh generated putrid gases, and the corpses swelled. By noon, Hyrum's face was nearly unrecognizable, his neck and face forming one bloated mass. Although the gunshot wounds had been filled with cotton, blood and other fluids oozed out, trickling down to the floor and puddling across the room.

“Kneeling in a pool of the comingling dripping gore of the Martyrs on the floor,” Dan Jones wrote, Mary, Emma, several of the children in their care, and Lucy turned to one another alternately crying, “My husband, my husband too.’ ‘My father

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too.” “My  
father in  
blood.”  
“And my  
father is  
dead too,”  
and  
“My Sons,  
my sons.”**

STYLE NOTE : Paragraphing has often been added to quotations; punctuation has been standardized; original spelling has been retained except all sentences begin with a capital letter and names are consistently capitalized. Underlined or all-caps words denoting emphasis are italicized instead. Interlinear additions are enclosed in slashes (/.../).

in blood.' 'And my father is dead too,' and 'My son, my sons.'"<sup>5</sup>

A mixture of tar, vinegar, and sugar was kept burning on the stove lest the stench overwhelm the visitors, who, "tracking their feet in the prophet's blood" passed through the apartments "from morning till night . . . and in the house for the live-long day the lament of sorrow was heard."<sup>6</sup>

At 5 P.M., the doors finally closed, and the families took their final farewells. Mary lifted Joseph up to look upon the faces of his father and the Prophet, for the last time.<sup>7</sup> Peering through the glass, he saw faces once so familiar, now distended and ashen, their jaws tied shut, cotton stuffed into the bullet hole at the base of his father's nose.

Joseph retained few memories of his father, but his mother's lifting him to see Hyrum's body was one of them. At five, he could not fully understand the meaning of death. The anguish in his mother's voice, the sight of his father's and Uncle Joseph's barely recognizable bodies, the stench—it was no doubt a traumatic day. And not only on that day, but for many days following, the sorrow, anger, and fear of the entire community reinforced the horrendous nature of his father's murder. How could the experience *not* have a lasting effect?

When he was twenty-one, Joseph returned to Nauvoo for the first time and recalled how as a young boy, he had hidden when strangers came to town, fearing he, too, would be "taken to prison."<sup>8</sup>

It was a sorrowful visit. His companions wanted to visit Carthage jail, but it was too much for Joseph. He would wait for them a short distance

away. As he told the Twelve many years later, while the others were gone, he

met a man who said he had just arrived five minutes too late to see the Smiths killed. Instantly a dark

cloud seemed to overshadow Bro. Smith and he asked how this man looked upon the deed. Bro. Smith was oppressed by a most horrible feeling as he waited for a reply. After a brief pause the man answered, "Just as I have always looked upon it—that it was a d----d cold-blooded murder." The cloud immediately lifted from Bro. Smith and he found that he had his open pocket knife grasped in his hand in his pocket and he believes that had this man given his approval to that murder of the prophets, he would have immediately struck him to the heart.<sup>9</sup>

*" . . . I felt mighty big about it, I tell you"*

**A**FTER THE MARTYRDOM, Hyrum's widow, Mary Fielding, was the sole care-giver and provider. His oldest child had married four days before the murders, but Hyrum's brother Samuel H. died on July 30. His pregnant wife, Levira, needed help, so Mary took in three of his five children.<sup>10</sup> It is little wonder that Joseph's sister Martha Ann recalled their mother "seldom smiled," and getting her to laugh was "quite a feat."<sup>11</sup>

Emma, Mother Smith, and many of the Smith family remained in Nauvoo; but Mary, her older brother, Joseph Fielding, and younger sister, Mercy, decided to follow Brigham Young. When William, the only surviving Smith brother, learned that Mary had permitted her step-son, John, to join the vanguard in February, he furiously berated her for siding with Young against the rest of the family. Listening upstairs, Joseph "longed for age and maturity in order that he might defend his helpless mother from such unwarranted and bitter assaults."<sup>12</sup> At eight, he felt keenly it was his role to protect his mother and family.

The family left Nauvoo in September 1846, crossing the Mississippi just hours before the cannonading of Nauvoo commenced. Then Joseph drove a team three hundred miles to Winter Quarters. "I never got stuck once and I never tipped the wagon over, I never broke a tongue or reach or wreched a wheel," he crowed. "I got through the journey just as well as the old men who drove the teams and I felt mighty big about it, I tell you."<sup>13</sup>

Two horrid winters followed at Winter Quarters. Joseph witnessed more than a boy's share of suffering and death. Six hundred men, women, and children died before Mary's family got out in the spring of 1848.<sup>14</sup>

Joseph left a detailed account of the trek west (discussed below). Suffice it to say for now that the young boy believed driving a heavily loaded wagon for a thousand miles and performing all the chores done by the men, except night guard duty, demonstrated he was almost a man.

In the valley, Mary selected a spot on Mill Creek. Before the snows came, there was time only to build a ten by twelve shelter, primarily for cooking, but where she also taught Joseph to read.<sup>15</sup> They lived in the wagons. The winter was cold. Food was in short supply. Bread was rationed. Some boiled leather for soup. Mary's family dined on parched corn

**"He found that he had his open pocket knife grasped in his hand in his pocket and he believes that had this man given his approval to that murder of the prophets, he would have immediately struck him to the heart."**

and corn-meal, milk and butter, supplemented with nettle greens, thistle roots, and sego lily bulbs.<sup>16</sup>

In the spring of 1849, Mary moved the family a mile west, where they began construction of an adobe house, fourteen by twenty-two, that would house eight persons.<sup>17</sup> Crickets destroyed much of the first three years' crops, but the harvest of 1851 was successful, and prospects for the Smith family finally began to improve.<sup>18</sup>

*“ . . . like a comet or fiery meteor ”*

**I**N THE SUMMER of 1852, Mary fell ill. She had always been small and frail; only her indomitable will had carried her through fifteen years of deprivation. But this time it was different. She was taken to Heber C. Kimball's home.<sup>19</sup> To prevent their possible infection, the children not allowed to visit. Eight weeks later, she died.

When Joseph heard the news, Martha Ann recalled, he passed out.<sup>20</sup> He was thirteen. Through the chaos of his short life, his mother had been the only stabilizing force. He remembered the hardships she had endured and the times he had disappointed her,<sup>21</sup> concluding that no one had rendered her the service she deserved.<sup>22</sup> In death, he idealized—if not idolized—Mary as

the refined, pure gold of womanhood and motherhood—wise, intelligent, faithful, and indomitable. . . . Her faith in God and the holy gospel was implicit, boundless, sublime. Her patience in trials, her unwavering fidelity to her husband's family through all the persecutions and drivings, her endurance in poverty and hardships, and her perfect integrity to every good word and work were beyond anything I have ever seen in womankind.<sup>23</sup>

Hers was a model no mere mortal could ever supplant. Joseph later described the year and a half after Mary's death as “perilous times. . . . I was almost like a comet or fiery meteor, without attraction or gravitation to keep me balanced or guide me within reasonable bounds.”<sup>24</sup>

In the winter of 1853–54, schoolmaster D. M. Merrick called Joseph's little sister, Martha Ann, to the front of the class to be disciplined. As she approached, he pulled out a leather strap and directed her to hold out her hand. “Don't whip her with that!” Joseph suddenly exclaimed. Merrick turned “and was going to whip me; but instead of whipping me, I licked him, good and plenty.”<sup>25</sup>

A “good and plenty” licking went beyond purely defensive intervention. Nor was this likely an isolated incident. Joseph was expelled from school.<sup>26</sup> As one acquaintance discreetly put it, Joseph was “quick with his temper and not afraid to let his fists fly.”<sup>27</sup>

*“My temper was beyond boiling . . .”*

**I**N EARLY 1871, Joseph prepared a reminiscence for publication in the *Improvement Era* that reveals the depth and persistence of his childhood rage.<sup>28</sup> The narrative begins

with Joseph's genealogy back to his paternal grandparents. Next, in rapid succession, he tells of his mother's conversion and move to Kirtland, her marriage to Hyrum, the massacre at Carthage, Winter Quarters, and the trek to Utah. Chronologically, the next subject would be pioneer life in the Valley and Mary's death. But Joseph doesn't go there. Instead, he backtracks to early 1839. He reports his mother took him to Liberty Jail shortly after his birth and discusses how their home in Far West was ransacked and a mattress was thrown on top of him—he barely escaped death—events he only could have known from his mother or, perhaps, Aunt Mercy. But all that is prelude to a conversation he overheard between his mother and Harlow Redfield, second counselor in the Provo bishopric and a member of the Provo City Council.<sup>29</sup> In 1839, Redfield had been visiting the Smith home when the looters invaded. Joseph wrote:

I well remember when in 1851 or 2 he came to Utah, he came to my mother and endeavored to explain matters, saying that he endeavored to pick the lock, so that the mob should not break it. However satisfactory this explanation was to himself, my mother could not swallow it, as she plainly told him.

My own opinion is that bro. Redfield was caught (as he supposed at least) in a tight place, as it seems he was at my Fathers house when the mob came, and knowing that opposition was perilous, and would be inadequate to deter the mob from their purpose, he concluded that a quiet submission, and a seeming willingness for the mob to search the house &c. was the best policy, therefore took a part, as though he was one of the mob.

As bro. Redfield died in the church I should like to think well of him, but this I must say, however pure his motives, my mother would never *acknowledge* /his explanation/ of the deed.<sup>30</sup>

Originally Joseph wrote, “Mother would never acknowledge a *forgiveness* of the deed,” but he then crossed out *forgiveness* and replaced it with “his explanation.” Forgiveness was not lightly bestowed.<sup>31</sup>

Next, Joseph proceeds to two Winter Quarters incidents in

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which Mary's intuition/inspiration prevents a band of rustlers from stealing her cattle, and nine-year-old Joseph outmaneuvers a band of Indians until help arrives.

Then in the spring of 1848, desperate to get her family out of Winter Quarters, Mary presses young and untrained animals into service pulling wagons. It takes three days to get to the staging ground at Elk Horn, a prohibitively slow rate of travel. At that point, "a circumstance occurred *I shall never forget and have not yet even forgiven.*" Captain Cornelius P. Lott,<sup>32</sup> to whose company they are assigned, examines their wagons and animals, and declares it is

folly for "Widow Smith" to attempt the Journey, and said he, "Go back to Winter Quarters and remain till

**For Joseph,  
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rage.**

another year so that you can get assistance,<sup>33</sup> for if you start out in this manner, you will be a burden on the company the whole way, and *I* will have to carry you along or leave you on the way."

To this disconsolate harangue Mother calmly replied, "Father Lott, I will beat you to the valley and will ask no help from you either." At this he seemed quite nettled and said sharply, "You can't get there without help, and the burden will be on me," and

turned on his heel and went away.

I was then a little boy, and I felt greaved and hurt at the harsh and disencouraging manner of "Father Lott," and the cold rebuff he gave my mother.

Mary contracts for additional oxen, so when the company rolls out, she is ready. "All went smoothly," Joseph continues, until they reached the north fork of the Platte where they spot another company of Saints in the distance. It is the company of Jane Wilson's mother. Jane, "a subject of charity" traveling with the family, goes off to join her mother, expecting the two groups will camp together that night.

But Lott decides to stop at noon and calls everyone together. "Is all right in the camp?" he calls. All reply affirmatively. "When Mother spoke he exclaimed, 'All is right, is it, and a poor woman lost!'" Mary "very mildly" explains Jane "has gone to see her mother and is quite safe." Enraged, Lott exclaims, "I rebuke you widow Smith, in the name of the Lord! She is lost and must be sent for at once." So Joseph's older stepbrother John is sent to overtake the company ahead "travelling

in the night through droves of ravenous wolves." As expected, Jane is fine.

Next, mid-way across Wyoming, he describes the now-famous blessing of the oxen. Interestingly, however, the crux of the story as told here is not the power of faith, prayer, or priesthood, but Lott's fuming about Mary's sick oxen, the irony of hers being healed and his dying, and his suspicion that Mary had poisoned his animals.

One of our best oxen laid down in the yoak as if poisoned, and all supposed he would die. Father Lott now blustered about as if the world was about at an end. "There" said he "I told you /you/ would have to be helped, and that you would be a burden on the company." But in this he was mistaken, for after praying for the ox, and pouring oil upon him he got up and we drove along only detaining the company a very short time. But we had not gon far when another fell down like the first. But with the same treatment he got up, as the other. I believe this was repeated the 3rd time, to the astonishment of all who saw and the chagrin of Father Lott.

Farther down the trail, one of Mary's oxen dies of old age; then three of Lott's ablest oxen and his best mule die.

This was a sore trial to the old man, and a very great loss, as he was obliged to get help in order to proceed. I heard him say, "It looks Suspicious that 4 of my best animals should lie down in this manner all at once, and die, and everybody's cattle but mine escape!" and insinuated that Somebody had poisoned them through Spite, all of which was said in my presence and for my especial benefit, which I perfectly understood, altho' he did not address himself directly to me.

Now the climax:

It was well for Father Lott I was only a stripling of 10 /9/ years of age, and not a man. Even four years latter [the year Mary dies], Such an occurrence would have cost the old man dearly, regardless of his age, and perhaps been a cause of regret to myself.

My temper was beyond boiling, it was "white hot," for I knew his insinuation was directed or aimed at my mother. . . .

At this moment I resolved on revenge for this and the many other insults and abuses this old fiend had heaped upon my mother, and should most certainly have carried out my resolution had not death come timely to my releaf and rid the earth of so vile and despicable an incumbrance while I was yet a child.

Providentially, Lott dies before Joseph is old enough to act on his murderous intent, and all ends well.<sup>34</sup>

Joseph recalls Lott was also spiteful because Mary would not allow Joseph to stand guard at night "and performe all the duties of a man to which she had no objections, and which I did faithfully in the day time, for I yoked, un-yoked and drove my own team and took my turn of day guard with the men, and was equal to the best, which was more than reason could demand or than any /other/ child in camp of my age did."<sup>35</sup>

For the Church, the trek to Utah became a spiritual as well as temporal journey—the recapitulation of ancient Israel—exodus, travail in the wilderness, and finally, emergence into the promised land. For Joseph, it became a downward spiral into the hell of uncontrollable fury and murderous rage. I suspect the “white-hot” feelings actually emerged from his mother’s death. As he tried to make sense of it all, perhaps it helped him find an outlet for the overwhelming sense of loss and helplessness to focus his anger on someone like Cornelius P. Lott who, as Joseph remembered, had so contemptuously sneered at the one now risen to beatification.

That hatred lasted a long time.<sup>36</sup> Twenty-three years after the fact, one senses Joseph was indeed furious as he committed the story to paper.

**“ . . . tell it to no body ”**

**A**FTER MARY’S DEATH, Joseph was nearly inconsolable. For a year and a half, he ran wild, without effective guidance or discipline. He beat up the schoolmaster and likely took up drink and tobacco.<sup>37</sup>

When he was only fifteen and a half, he was called on a Church mission to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands. His father’s seventy-four-year-old uncle, Silas Smith, was also called and would be his first companion. They served together in the Kula region of Maui, a beautiful setting on the hillside of Mount Haleakala. But Joseph missed his friends. The food was strange and often scarce. The customs were foreign, and he could not understand the language. Other missionaries received mail routinely, but for six months, none came for him. Finally a letter arrived from George A. Smith, the first communication from home since he had arrived. Joseph replied:

With Joy and Gratitude I Recieved your Letter . . . It mead my hart rejoice when I Saw it for It was the first Letter that I had resieved from the valleys of the mountains. You must exkuse all the mistakes. As you well know, I am A new beginner. I am young and yet have time to Learn.

After reporting his travels and the welfare of the missionaries, Joseph asked that he be remembered in family prayers that I may holde out faithful and bair off my calling with honour to myself and the cause in which I am ingaged. I had rather die on this mission than to disgrace myself ore my calling. These are the Sentiments of my hart. My prairs is that we may holde out faithful to the end, and evetually be cround in the kingdom of god with those that have gon before us.<sup>38</sup>

Life on the islands was humbling. After four months, he felt he had learned a great deal. He wrote Martha Ann:

I could give you much council, that would be benifisial to you as long as you live upon this earth. . . . Be Sober and prayerful, and . . . never feel down harted but be merry /in your hart/ and p[r]ay[er]ful and keeps a prayorful hart and a thoughtful mind and the Lord will bless you . . . only be kind to your Sisters and mind what they say to you and never [il-

legible word] above them, for they are your older Sisters, and it is for them to give council and also for our older Brothers. You be kind to them and do what they [say], and do not get cross. And study your books . . . and think more of Joy in your Hart, than Sorrow in your mind, and keepe it all to your Self, and tell it to no body, and you Shall be blessed.<sup>39</sup>

At the time, Joseph himself was quite “down harted,” but he followed his own counsel and kept it to himself.

**“ . . . and but fiew are exceptionable ”**

**H**IS LETTERS WERE always cheerful, expressing gratitude to the Lord and his servants, and determination to fulfill his calling honorably. He worked hard to learn Hawaiian, and, according to President Francis A. Hammond, at April conference, he was able to address the congregation in the native tongue, “causing all the saints to rejoice exceedingly. He has only been here 6 months. The Lord has been with him in getting hold of the language. He spoke very feelingly & I was rejoiced much to hear his voice in the native language.” Unfortunately Joseph had “a few hard words” with another elder the next evening, and Hammond was obliged to give them “some good hints . . . about giving way to their evil passions.”<sup>40</sup>

But when Hammond was transferred to Lanai, Joseph was made president of the Maui-Molokai conference. At age sixteen, he was responsible for 1,253 Saints in forty-one branches plus three Utah Elders—one of whom suffered paranoid delusions.

It was a challenging assignment. Hawaiian culture was in shambles. Hawaiians outside of Honolulu lived in filthy squalor. Many were addicted to liquor; and traditional sexual promiscuity brought syphilis to virtually every village.

Those who joined the Church were disillusioned when priesthood blessings did not save their families in the smallpox epidemic of 1853. In addition, they had raised funds to purchase a printing press, but when it arrived, President Young directed it be sent to San Francisco where George Q. Cannon would use it to print a newspaper.<sup>41</sup> By the time Joseph arrived, there was little enthusiasm for the Church.

A gathering place had been designated at Palawai on Lanai, where Saints could be free of corrupting influences. The

**“I had rather die on this mission than to disgrace myself ore my calling. These are the Sentiments of my hart.”**

### “Websters unabridged was very providentially beyond your reach”

Joseph estimated the extent of his schooling at three years and three months,<sup>42</sup> so as part of a self-education regimen, he would often use large words to build and practice his vocabulary. One of his favorite targets for his philological perambulations was J. C. Rich. An example from a 27 July 1861 letter to Rich:

“Humbly deprecatingly and appologetically imploring your Extreem leniency and benevolent paliation of my unpardonable inadvertancy in procrastinating to such an incorrigible extention, my feeble essay to expaciate in acknowledgement of your eloquential acrafampthical but brief, curt, communication of the 13th inst. I assume . . . .”

On a separate occasion, Rich teasingly responded:

Your ‘vocabulary arrangement’ was duly received this morning and if nothing interferes with my phrenological developments I <opine> that I can digest its contents in about 3 days! Language is entirely incapable of expressing my thankfulness and gratitude that Webster’s unabridged was very providentially beyond your reach at the time you penned your ‘unassuming missive;’ because I’ve got to ransack 759 pages of the Dictionary now before I can fully comprehend the details.”<sup>43</sup>

strongest members were called as pioneers—leaving many branches without leadership. The people grumbled about constant pleas for donations for the colony, in addition to tithing and feeding and housing the missionaries. Worms ate the colony’s first crops, then there was drought, problems with the cisterns, and so on. The pioneers returned to their homes poorer than when they left and spreading dissatisfaction.<sup>44</sup>

Under these conditions, the number of baptisms barely outpaced the number of deaths. After a year, he was transferred to the Big Island. The living conditions were wretched, and despite his resolve not to be a grumbler, on occasion he just had to let it out:

I have seen many things since I have been on the islands, and some of them are apalling. I have seen whol famelies who ware one sallid [illegible] of scabes (having the itch) and every stich or rag they had about them or on their premisis, war alive with the itch. I have slept in these circonstances, I have shaken hands with those whos body and handes ware a scab! I have eaten food mixed up like unto batter with such handes, and I never was so hearty, but I cannot say strong, in my life. My body has been cler of diseas of all kindes, until now, and now I perceive that I have a slight touch of the cantagian, but I must thank God for his goodness . . . . I entered a house where several persons was eating and there was a large dog stood with his head over [a] calabash of poi, his mouth and eyes ware drooling and running watter matter &c. He had some fiend here upon him, but scabes, running sores, lame skin, no flesh, bones &c. being the most prevalent. Whether any of the dog was amalgamated with the poi or not I shan’t say but the poi was given

for us to eat.

Syphilis and other sexually-transmitted diseases ran rampant throughout the islands. Like most haoles, including Mormon missionaries, Joseph attributed these conditions to wickedness. “The fact of it is, their nation is roten, and stink because of, and with their own wickedness, and but fiew are exceptionable.”<sup>45</sup>

Occasionally, they didn’t seem so bad—they could even be enticing. One evening on Maui, “We seen a sight that was worth all other ‘sights’ that I ever seen. It was composed of 3 native girls engaged in a Hawaiian dance. It is more than I can describe.” A year later, the maturing teenager observed, “My thoughts have been curious a long back.”<sup>46</sup>

Joseph’s final assignment, as president of the Molokai conference, was especially challenging. Over a hundred members had been excommunicated in

the previous twelve months—nearly half of the membership on the island.

On enquiring for a place to stop, no one knew. On asking for the president, we were informed he had left the church. We suseded in geting a Mormon to lead us to the meeting house. This we found transmorgriefied into a carpenter’s shop and was full of rubbish, boards, tools &c. We soon prevailed in geting it cleaned out. I sent for the prest. of the branch, asked him his reasons for leaving the church. He said because the rest were leaving, and his mind changed &c. I gave him a good preaching to warning him of his perrilous situation, his forfeiture of all blessings &c. but it seemed wors than throwing words away to talk with him.<sup>47</sup>

Finally Joseph let loose in his diary:

I have ate enough dirt and filth, put up with anough inconveniencies slept sufficiently in their filth, muck and mire, lice and everything else, I have been ill treated, abused, and trod on by these nefarious ethnicks just long anough. I believe it is no longar a virtue, if they will not treat me as I merit, if they will not obey my testimony, and my counsels, but persist in their wickedness, hard heartedness and indifference, their lyings, decietfulness, and hard hearted cruilty as regards the servants of the Lord, I will not stay with them, but leave them to their fait. I believe to the bottom of my soul the Lord Allmighty does not require any one to put up with what we have to put up with among a portion of this people.<sup>48</sup>

In five months, he and his companion baptized three and excommunicated thirty-six. Colleagues on other islands also

reported net losses. From July 1855 to October 1857 mission membership fell nearly 25%, from 4,200 to 3,200. Brigham Young decided to abandon the mission.<sup>49</sup>

Joseph had arrived in the islands a lonely, contrite, anxious boy. Three years later, he departed a confident preacher of the gospel.

*“. . . they have changed to something stronger . . .”*

**H**E REACHED THE Salt Lake Valley on 24 February 1859 and enlisted the next day in the militia—most likely in Orrin Porter Rockwell’s new Mill Creek company. He was now also free to turn to romance. Prior to his mission, Joseph had taken an interest in Jane Fisher, the sister of one of his old Mill Creek chums. Apparently, he even proposed to Jane while on his mission but told her she was not to make the engagement public. When he returned, however, things were different. On 26 June, Jane wrote:

You said you would be happy to hear from me, every month, and I was vain enough to think you ment what you said. . . . Everybody thinks you and I are engaged. Now dont think yourself insulted and trample the letter under your feet till you have finished. . . . Joseph I swear by all I hold dear that I never wronged you so much. Never did such an expression pass my lips. . . . When you return, people will find they were mistaken, and pitty me. For that I do not care. I scorn their pitty, as I have their scoffs, but you too would pitty and despise me for daring to aspire to your affection. . . . But allow me to give you the same advice you did me. Do not marry the hand alone but be Sure She has a heart.”<sup>50</sup>

Uncertain of their feelings, Joseph

*“I could have shrunk out of existence . . .”*

**W**HEN JOSEPH RETURNED from his mission, he brought with him two things he probably never intended to acquire: a love of liquor and an addiction to tobacco.

During this period, many faithful Latter-day Saints drank wine and other alcoholic beverages. Many men chewed tobacco, including at least half of his missionary companions.<sup>51</sup> Joseph picked up both habits,<sup>52</sup> but tobacco was the bigger problem:

From my childhood—for twenty years and upwards I chewed the filthy weed. I never saw the moment during the whole time that I was not inwardly ashamed of it, insomuch I endeavored to keep it to myself, using great caution. One day I went into the president’s office. He whispered to me, I was obliged to whisper back. He smelt my breath, and started in surprise. “Do you chew tobacco?” I could have shrunk out of existence, or annihilated myself from very shame, and he saw I was ashamed of myself, and pitying me said, “Keep it to yourself!” When I went out I was resolved that I who so hated hypocrisy—now thoroughly hating myself—would conquer my appetite for tobacco or know the reason why. I tried with it in my pocket, but it was no use. My hand would involuntarily find and put it in my mouth, and it seemed when at last it was all gone, and I vowed I would not touch again, and all my friends were dead or gone on a journey, *everybody* was cross and crabbed, including my *amiable* wives and loving children, and I had no very definite purpose in life!<sup>53</sup> President Young had told the Saints, I have my weakness . . . [but] I will not make my wrong a means of leading others astray.

Many of the brethren chew tobacco, and I have advised them to be modest about it. Do not take out a whole plug of tobacco in meeting before the eyes of the congregation, and cut off a long slice and put it in your mouth, to the annoyance of everybody around. . . . If you must use tobacco, put a small portion in your mouth when no person sees you, and be careful that no one sees you chew it. I do not charge you with sin. You have the “Word of Wisdom.” Read it.<sup>54</sup>

Later, when Joseph left on a mission to England, President Young was still using tobacco. But Joseph held himself to a higher standard. Trying to quit nicotine made him “cross and crabbed,” but being unable to quit was infuriating. Finally, after more than twenty years of use,

I conquered—and now, when I think of it, I feel ashamed that I was so weak, and strange to say the appetite, though still with me and perhaps as strong as ever, it is at my command. It is no longer the master, but a subdued, conquered enemy ever on the alert to revolt, but daily growing weaker and more faint.<sup>55</sup>

Thirteen years later, he spoke of his struggle with alcohol. At an 1883 meeting of the School of the Prophets, he acknowledged “he had used tobacco, and he loved liquor,” but he had quit and believed anyone who wanted to could do the same.<sup>56</sup> References to his drinking are not extensive, nor do they suggest excess. For example, in 1862, his missionary associates wrote him they were “lonely when you left so we downed the bottle of wine you forgot when you left.” A few months later, he was presented with a gift of “3 bottles of wine;” in 1873, he received a bottle of champagne and “treated my folks;” when he left for England the next year, he was given a bottle of wine, and once there, he was “treated very respectfully to wine and cake.”<sup>57</sup>



and Jane continued to see each other through the summer, fall, and early winter. Apparently they broke up in December, about the time Joseph went to Fillmore as sergeant-at-arms for a legislative session. Two months later, Jane's indignant father wrote him:

You have been keeping company with my Daughter ever since your return from your Mishion & from the testimony before me you solicited her to be your wife before you returnd whitch indirectly was granted. I will here state that before the Move south you could have had my consent & from that time untill two

**“It is a taske to me to delineate the feelings of my beating heart. . . . Since I saw you first the admiration and respect I first conceived for you have daily grown.”**

Months ago you Could have had it grudgeingly & since that time you could not have it at all. I told her at least two months ago to not have anything more to Doo with you for it was my opinion that she would lead a Miserable life. . . .

I beleive she would have maried you & Dragd out a few miserable years in broken hearted wretchedness under the tyranical influence jelousy & self importance . . .

You have stood in the way for the last 8 or 9 months when she could have Bettered herself 2 to 1 with out any trouble but your covetynes and jelous disposition would not give her

up . . .

You say your folks are all against you. So much the more you are to be pitied for not haveing a mind of your own . . . You also state that you seen Brother kimble [Heber C. Kimball] & he has Counsald you to do as you have done.<sup>58</sup>

Three days after this rebuke, Joseph began pursuing his cousin, Levira. Trying to appear as sophisticated as he possibly could, Joseph wrote:

It is with feelings of true emotion that I attempt to address you a few lines this morning. It is not however without embarishment & difidence that I engage in this taske. I say taske because it is a taske to me to

delineate the feelings of my beating heart, in writing. Still 'twould be a plesurable taske, Could I but penetrate the future, and see therein, the completion and fulfillment of my ardent hope, but like the divinity of a Cato's Immortality, "Shadows, Clouds and darkness hang about it." I would that it was otherwise, but this is not the point. . . . I am aware that our acquaintance has been short, to you, I do not know how pleasant, but allow me to say, that since I saw you first the admiration and respect I first conceived for you have daily grown, till they have changed to something stronger and more fervent. . . . Not knowing therefore; the state of your feelings, It becomes a duty that I owe myself, to simply aske you, cousin how you feel toward *me*, what you think of "Cousin Joe," or whether it is agreeable to you or not that I should encourage farther my desires, or scese to know or hope, or dream of thee, as something nearer, dearer, and more Chois than just a Cousin and a friend.<sup>59</sup>

Six weeks later, on 5 April 1859, Brigham Young married the two in his office.<sup>60</sup> Joseph was twenty, Levira almost seventeen.

*“the throbbings of the heart that loves”*

THE YOUNG COUPLE seemed very much in love when, after barely a year of marriage, Joseph left on a mission to England. "Levira, I think of you all the time," he wrote en route to New York. "I pray for you, and more—. But enough. You know the throbbings of the heart that loves." He also had a word of counsel: "Remember Vira, your duties to your God, and to your mother. Do not give way to too much hilarity and rudeness. Be a woman! Respect age and take good council, though it be from a fool."<sup>61</sup>

Taking counsel was a virtue Joseph had cultivated since he had been sent on a mission. It was a virtue he expected of his wife. Levira tried, but she was by nature an independent-minded woman. She was also fun-loving, which might have been the perfect antidote to Joseph's serious personality. When he encouraged her to cultivate sobriety, she teased, "I am getting so sober that I can hardly know how to take a joke, so you must not joke me a great deal."<sup>62</sup> To which he replied, "I do admire sobriety in you dear. I admire it in any one." Then, speaking more of himself than anyone else, he added:

There is a state of sobriety verging upon melancholy that I do not like. You must avoid that above all things for it will make you disagreeable both to yourself and your friends. . . . I do not want you to get disheartend, nor downcast. Keep chearful, yet be sober i.e. not wilde!<sup>63</sup>

When he had been gone four months, Levira rather apprehensively mailed him a photo of herself.

I almost fear that you will give me a downright real good scolding for daring to be so presumptuous as to do such a thing without being requested so to do. But notwithstanding, however, I think I am going through a process that is calculated to harden me in time, so

that I can take a scolding and not hurt my feelings not the least either, but never from you. No. Five words from you either cross or pleasant would have more weight upon my mind than five times five would from any other being that lives on the earth.

You may perhaps think that I don't mean one word of it, but I do mean every word and a great deal more. It has ever been so. Cross words from you have fell like ice upon my heart, and yet I have fained to care nothing about them. . . .

I never could keep such a smooth face again, no never, and I hope from this time forth and forever I may never do or say anything that will cause you to disregard my feelings. There is a long lifetime before us I hope, and my earnest and constant prayer is that we may live it according to the best of our knowledge.<sup>64</sup>

In the second autumn of Joseph's absence Levira became depressed. Mail arrived in Salt Lake three times a week, but there had been nothing from Joseph for six weeks. "I could not endure for one year to come what I have endured during the past time of your absence from home," she wrote in exasperation.

One look at my poor, pale face and wasted form would convince you of that. Oh! Joseph, I would give all I possess in this world if I could only see you, be clasped to your bosom, hear from your lips the comforting words I so much stand in need of at this present time, and you would have them for me. I know you would! There are but precious few men in this world who possess human hearts and feelings, and I thank God that he has given me one, and by his [illegible] I will strive to become worthy of him . . . the adversary has exerted his powers to destroy me, but I have fought against him. It has been a hard struggle but he has not been permitted to overcome."<sup>65</sup>

Joseph replied:

"My time is fully occupied one way and another . . . nearly always so that I have to snatch an opportunity

to write whenever circumstances will permit. I am not exactly my own master, as duty is always to me binding. My desire is to do my duty. . . . You say you do not wish to disturb my mind with your sorrows. . . . And which is most likely to disturb my mind, to know the wors, and be able to sympathize with you and perhaps be able to suggest a remedy, or be

warned of danger and be kept in ignorance as to where or what it is, or how to meet it, and thus be compelled to endure the worst fears and suspense? . . . Should we not be one? I have never kept anything from you, that you should know. All my thoughts are yours. Let yours be mine.<sup>66</sup>

Then, heightening Joseph's alarm, came word that Levira was "some better but unable to do anything yet." Brigham had sent a carriage to transport her to George A.'s home where she could be cared for.<sup>67</sup> As it turned out, Levira had fallen ill. In January, Martha Ann wrote that Levira "has been very low for a long time and she is very low yet but she is much better than she has been. . . . She has been low spirited some of the time."<sup>68</sup> Levira also spent five weeks at Brigham Young's home.<sup>69</sup>

On 1 March 1862, he wrote, "You must cheer up, Levira, and learn (if you have not already) to take things as they come, which we cannot control." He had been feeling low himself, and didn't write often "because I have had no heart to write to anyone scarcely and even now, if you catch my spirit, I fear it will fail to enliven you. It takes but little to make me sad. I am very sensitive and rather melancholy inclined besides I scarcely ever have time to sit down, quiet and unquestioned long enough to follow out a link or two of thought, say nothing of a 'chain of thought.'"

The good news: "I expect to arrive in Great Salt Lake City in about six weeks! or about the time this letter reaches you!!!"<sup>70</sup>

As it turned out, Joseph's release was postponed. After a six-month hiatus, Levira finally wrote again. The letter arrived on 5 July. She was still sick and weak, but hearing from her lifted Joseph's spirits:

Your letter has done me a vast amount of good. Do you know the Devil tried to weigh me down with the thoughts & fears that you were worse, and I do not



Levira Annette Smith

**“There are but  
precious few men  
in this world who  
possess human  
hearts and  
feelings, and I  
thank God that  
he has given  
me one.”**

know what else! but to Judge from my feelings, Dreams &c. Something Sorrowful, but your letter has done much to dispell the cloud, and to restore Sunshine.

Referring to letters from friends he had received in the past six months he joked, "It has been this, 'Levira is mending, I have been to see Levira and she is improving' . . . and all the time Since, that I really began to think you 'mended wors'!!"<sup>71</sup>

In June, Levira complained of "a beating on the brain." In August, she wrote, "since I have been sick I am so nervous that it is imposible for me to write." She was living again at George A.'s home, where she expected to remain "the remainder of the summer & perhaps untill you come home."<sup>72</sup> No one knew that was still more than a year away.

In February 1863, Joseph was beset by another episode of depression: "After meeting I was seized with a sorrowful, dejected feeling that hung like a weight upon my mind. I could not get rid of it." He went to bed at midnight and arose the next morning "very sad." He gave vent to his feelings "in prayer and tears."<sup>73</sup>

The following month, mission president George Q. Cannon wrote Joseph that his departure would have to be postponed again—his organizational and clerical services were required for the upcoming season of emigration.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, on 24 June 1863, he sailed for New York, docking on 6 July, and, after a brief side trip to Nauvoo, arrived in the valley on 4 October. He had been away three years and five months

*"these death dealing, love destroying things—angry words"*

**L**EVIRA WAS AT George A.'s home. Joseph took her back to her mother's boarding house, but her condition worsened to the point that George A. feared "the prospects of her recovery are not very brilliant."<sup>75</sup>

For six weeks, Joseph rarely left her side and had not a single hour of uninterrupted sleep.<sup>76</sup> Levira described it as

"that terrible spell of sickness, six weeks, [during which] I never slept a wink, and my nerves were completely unstrung, so that I could not hold a pin, and was sometimes out of my mind."

Everything we know of those weeks is contained in Levira's 1867 letter to Brigham Young and Joseph's response.<sup>77</sup> In her letter, Levira accused Joseph of using "cruel expressions. . . . Said I ought to have a hole, bored in the top of my head and some manure put into it for brains." Joseph responded that it was only "a joke," that

in her wanderings she was sometimes more jocular than ever at any other time. And at such times I would joke with her. It was at such a time she was complaining of her brain feeling 'muddled,' &c. I said, 'I have sometimes thought that if a hole were bored into your head, and some manure put into it, it might be an improvement, but never mind, you are getting better now.' I am confident she perfectly understood me and knew it was in jest, but has since argued herself into the belief that I meant to insult her, or pretends to so believe to throw blame upon me and excuse her own conduct.

Recalling a separate incident, Levira described how one evening Joseph went out to help her mother build a chicken coop, but warned her

if I heard anything unusual, not to get up or look out. They had been out a long time. It seemed two hours to me, and I was very tired, and anxious for someone to come in. Just then a band of music came along and stopped to play in front of our house. So I raised one corner of the blind and looked out of the window. Joseph . . . immediately came in with a rope, which he doubled four or five times, and struck me five or six times across my back notwithstanding I begged of him not to strike



Joseph F. Smith in Liverpool, England, circa 1861

**"Should we not be one? I have never kept anything from you, that you should know. All my thoughts are yours. Let yours be mine."**

me and said I was sorry that I had disobeyed him.<sup>78</sup>

Joseph countered that Levira was, “to all intents and purposes, insane or possessed, and I had to treat her as I would a wilful and disobedient child. There was no one but me that could do anything with her.” He defended himself, saying that sometimes he had to use force “to prevent her doing herself injury, and to compel her to take medicine and food.” On the evening in question, he left to stow away some vegetables in the cellar, charging her strictly to lie still,

for I knew that at the least noise she did not understand, and often at imaginary noises, she would jump out of bed and more than likely run out of doors in her night clothes, as she had many times attempted to do.

After only a few minutes, he heard her get up, cross the room, and open the window. He rushed back to find her looking out the window at a band playing “Dixie” in front of Gilbert & Company’s boarding house across the street. To get her back into bed he struck her—only twice—not with a rope, but with “a peach limb not as large around as the butt of an office pencil.”

Joseph was only twenty-three, trying to care for a highly agitated young wife whom he hardly knew (and certainly not in this condition) who was sometimes, by her own admission, out of her mind, other times more “jocular” than he had ever seen her, but always so high-strung and erratic that he dared not, or could not, sleep. Considering his hot temper, and his tendency toward depression, his was a herculean effort, emotionally and physically.

After these episodes, the couple had three peaceful, albeit financially strapped months. Brigham Young had publicly proposed that the Saints donate \$1,000 to help Joseph get started in life. Brigham himself contributed \$50; others donated small amounts, molasses, a parlor stove, and a pony. Joseph sold the pony and used the cash to help defray the expense of his next mission.<sup>79</sup>

This time, Joseph, with three other veterans, was to assist Elders Ezra T. Benson and Lorenzo Snow in retaking the Hawaiian Mission from adventurer Walter Murray Gibson.<sup>80</sup> President Young suggested Levira might go too, if she thought the change in climate might be good for her.<sup>81</sup>

Joseph left on 2 March 1864.<sup>82</sup> For reasons unknown, Levira did not accompany him. But her mother’s sister, Derinda (or Dorinda), visited Salt Lake in the summer and offered to take Levira to San Francisco where she and her husband Hazen Kimball would look after her. Brigham and Heber C. Kimball (no relation to Hazen) blessed Levira, and she arrived in San Francisco in September.<sup>83</sup>

Completing his brief mission in the islands, Joseph returned to San Francisco on 5 November 1864 and went to the Kimball home, only to learn that Levira was visiting her uncle, Derinda’s brother, in the country.<sup>84</sup> She did not return for a week. By then, Joseph was in no mood to be trifled with:

If you had felt right, or enjoyed the good spirit . . . you would have said, Now Joseph, you know I am weak, and I would like to spend a little time here, but

whatever you say do, that is right, and that will do! Was it so? No ‘Vira you knew better than I did what was right, you did not ask my counsel, I took the liberty to counsel as I thought it was my right, you were offended, my advice was not welcome, you did not offer to be one, & united with me, regarded coming home as untimely and at last consented in anger, after it had been put off to the latest moment.<sup>85</sup>

On 24 November, they boarded a Salt Lake-bound train in Sacramento. But sixty miles later, at Dutch Flats in the high Sierras, they were snowed in for two or three days. Levira became ill and wanted to go back. “I saw you did not want to come and I was determined you should have your own way /at the sacrifice of my own feelings/,” Joseph wrote, so he arranged for her return.<sup>86</sup>

Before parting, he urged her to stay with her aunt, Agness Coolbrith Pickett and her daughter Ina, rather than the Kimballs.<sup>87</sup> But after a few weeks there, Levira decided she could not abide Mr. Pickett’s anti-Mormon tirades and moved back to the Kimballs. She had some teeth pulled and cavities filled, then began to complain of neuralgia, kidney problems, and bronchitis, and chronic nervousness. A doctor diagnosed an “ulcerated womb” that hemorrhaged in March 1865. It might, he thought, have been a miscarriage. For several months thereafter, Levira suffered heavy, debilitating menstrual flows. Three successive doctors variously prescribed whiskey and water (three times a day); electric charges; nerve tonic and pills; morning walks, light meals, and tepid baths.<sup>88</sup>

In Salt Lake, Joseph was hired to do clerical work in the

**“I am confident she perfectly understood me and knew it was in jest, but has since argued herself into the belief that I meant to insult her, or pretends to so believe to throw blame upon me and excuse her own conduct.”**

Church Historian's Office.<sup>89</sup> He wrote Ina asking her to keep tabs on his wife. Ina thought Levira was a "hypochondriac." Despite Levira's illnesses, Ina wrote, she had been seen at various places of amusement and attended "common balls . . . to which *anyone* who paid their dollar was admitted."<sup>90</sup>

When Joseph suggested to Levira that her protracted stay might be due to something other than ill health, she became irate:

You insinuate that I have other and private reasons for desiring to remain here which heavens knows my heart I have not, and it is unkind

of you to imagine so base and cruel a thing of me, and to upbraid me for circumstances and afflictions which I am powerless to avoid. Oh! If I should accuse you in the same manner, what would you say? and how would you feel, to think I had no more confidence in you.<sup>91</sup>

Joseph's misgivings may have been reinforced by her insistence that her mother not come to California, that it would be a needless expense, and she would be home "soon."<sup>92</sup>

Joseph had taken a job as a clerk in the Church Historian's Office working six days a week compiling Church history for 1852-53, and recording Endowment House ordinances.<sup>93</sup> We do

not have his letters to Levira for this period, but from her letters, it appears he was anxious about her attitude about returning to Salt Lake. He missed her and was feeling blue. On 16 June, she wrote:

You want me to talk plainly to you. What shall I say to you? that I am true to my husband? Yes, in all truth and sincerely, I say it. That I am not fascinated with the illurements of the world? No I am not. You may think otherwise but I care nothing about the worldly minded foolish people, here or anywhere else unless they are good and that is not often the case tho there are some good kind hearted people. The people here are very free hearted and good to the poor, make presents to friends and acquaintances, and seem very liberal, more so than at home. . . . I would like to be comfortable, and see my friends so and live to improve the minde and body. One should not be ne-

glected more than the other. I believe in improvement. So do you, so does the world. So far I like it, for I like everything good.

Now I want you to cheere up, as much as possible. Take good care of yourself and grow young, not old, for if you frightened yourself by looking in the glass, I fear you'll frighten me. I want you to look well, and feel well when I come. Go out and get livened up a little, it will do you good. I fear you stay at home so much and do so much writing [at work] you get blue and brood over all [your] trouble. You must not write steadily. It is hurtful and if a little hurts me a good deal must injure you. If I were you [I] wouldnt do it for any body. If you make yourself old and ugly, morose and cross, I will not love you so look out, I give you warning.

You lead the life of a hermit, "see nobody, care for no body, go no where." You do yourself injustice. When friends invite you out why don't you go? I do not want you to stay at home in loneliness, because I am not there. When I *am* there if not able to go out, then I will want you to bear me company and we'll have good times "you bet."

You do your Parents injustice when you say "you are a fool" for they were intellectual both of them, and you are a "chip of the old block," and have no need to be ashamed of yourself.

I know whats the matter, and what you want, and what will do you good, and me too. If you had come for me and we could travel together I would have felt better and you to, a change of scenery and lively company is what you want with a contented, happy, minde.

I hope you may feel better when I come home, and if you don't I'll get Martha Ann to help me whip you, she used to be pretty strong, and if you are *sick*, we can manage you I guess, so look out, for a flogging and all sorts of tricks, and don't think you know a "heap" when you don't know anything. If you get the "big head" what will I do with you? I cant imagine unless—by-the-by, I shower your head in cold watter. Maby you'd like it, and then again maby you wouldn't.

Now drive away those dreary thoughts.

Levira will not from thee part.

Levira will not break thy heart,

My Joseph dear, my Joseph dear.<sup>94</sup>

Two months later, Levira returned. She had been in San Francisco almost a year and had changed. She had discovered a fashionable world of comfort and entertainment, and she liked it. Joseph was focused on his Church and civic responsibilities. He had been elected to the city council and territorial House of Representatives, and served on the stake high council. Levira became easily bored. They argued frequently. After one stormy confrontation, Levira wrote:

You were very angry this morning. You said I made

**"Now drive away those dreary thoughts. Levira will not from thee part. Levira will not break thy heart, My Joseph dear, my Joseph dear."**

you so, true I did talk unwise to you for which I am sorry and I ask you to forgive me for all I said this morning and for every other offence that I ever gave you in my life. I would to heaven that I never had given you any offence that no angry or unkind word had ever escaped from my lips to you Joseph that no hard feelings had ever arisen between you and me and from this time I say let us drop them forever and indulge no more in these death dealing, love destroying things—angry words. In the name of Levira I will from this very hour try to improve in word and deed, and subdue my quick and impulsive nature.<sup>95</sup>

But when the snow began to melt in 1866, Levira was anxious to get out of the house. “Through her importunities, and continual teasing for a carriage and carriage riding,” Joseph recalled, he agreed to buy a third interest in a second-hand carriage. “After this I heard nothing but ‘buggy,’ ‘Take me out,’ ‘I need to ride.’ ‘You’ve got a carriage take me out,’ &c. &c.” Exasperated, Joseph exclaimed he “wished the carriage was smashed,” and accused her of harboring “ideas above her station.”

“I am sorry to have to say I have been under the necessity of setting my foot down very firm at times,” Joseph confessed, “generally allowing her to have her own way, as she always felt that I had no right to dictate. And she never once, to the best of my recollection, cheerfully obeyed my counsel. More especially since my return from England, but particularly after her Aunt Derinda visited her from California. Our troubles date from that visit, as our letters will show.”<sup>96</sup>

*“he will learn to love me”*

WHILE CLERKING IN the Church Historian’s Office (George A. Smith’s home), Joseph made the acquaintance of Bathsheba Smith’s eighteen-year-old niece, Julina Lambson. Julina’s parents, who lived just two blocks away, were unable to support four children, so she lived mostly with her aunt.

For some time, apostle Erastus Snow had been urging Joseph to take a plural wife,<sup>97</sup> so when Julina returned from a six-month visit to relatives in Fillmore, “he [Joseph] did not lose any time . . . in finding out whether or not I had found a

companion for life. . . . President Young had advised him [to get a wife] and he had told him a number of times, so he thought he should obey. I have always thought that the President would have liked him to marry one of his [Brigham Young’s] girls. And I know he could have had any girl he knew for the asking.”

Julina’s reply to Joseph’s proposal was, “Ask my mother and Uncle George. I would not marry the best man living without his consent.” George A. readily gave his blessing, but Julina’s mother “knew how much he [Joseph] thought of his wife Levira: ‘Julina, Joseph has a wife whom he loves and he is not marrying you for love.’ I answered, ‘Mother, I love him and if I am good he will learn to love me. He is the only man I have ever seen that I could love as a husband.’”<sup>98</sup>

After years of angry confrontation, “Joseph has a wife whom he loves,” was an astute observation. Joseph would never be attracted to another woman the way he was to Levira, and Julina wisely recognized the difference in his feelings. He was passionate about Levira, but Julina was the better match—and learn to love her he did.

Julina and Joseph were married on 5 May 1866. Levira, Joseph acknowledged, “performed her whole duty most nobly and good, for which I am thankful,” then added, “far more on her own account than on mine. I have had no other object in view than to obey counsel and benefit ‘Vira as much or more than myself.”<sup>99</sup>

Two months later, on 1 July 1866, he was ordained an apostle.<sup>100</sup> (The ordination was not made public, there not being a vacancy in the Council of the Twelve.)

*“You are to be pitied, and I forgive you”*

ON 24 JULY, he set off with traveling bishop A. M. Musser on a two-week tour of the southern settlements, followed by a month in the north, then back south for three weeks.<sup>101</sup> Levira, ever restless and seemingly bent on irritating her husband whenever possible, moved back to her mother’s. For several months, she had lacked the energy to make her bed or clean the room, but while Joseph was gone, she attended the lectures of cousin Alexander H. Smith, son of Joseph Smith, Jr. Alexander was visiting Salt Lake on behalf of the RLDS Church.

When Joseph returned in late September, he discovered Levira was not at home, but he waited until the next day to go



Julina Lambson Smith

**“He is the only man  
I have ever seen  
that I could love as  
a husband.”**

to her mother's. Levira "received me with marked disrespect and discourtesy in the presence of my brother John, S. H. B. Smith, and William Pierce. I subsequently called several times and her conduct toward me was most petulant and disrespectful."

On his way to city council meeting on 4 October, Joseph stopped by to retrieve his keys from Levira. The house was

**"I considered it unbecoming and disgraceful, and . . . I would not allow it. And if ever I caught a stranger and a gentile in her bedroom again . . . there would be blood shed if I swung for it."**

quite dark except for one candle by which he saw her sitting close to a Mr. Harris. (Levira said he had been reading to her, to which Joseph retorted if that were so, "it was from a book with raised letters and he had read by *hand*.") Joseph flew into a rage. According to Levira, he called her

a d--n whore. A little stain'd illegitimate whore and a liar, and if he ever caught a man in my room again there would be blood shed if he had to swing for it. He threw my chair back against the stove, and opened the front door so that passers-by could hear, and said, madam, if you want a divorce I'll give you one. When I said, very well, I'll take it, this

evening. So he left the house.

In his own defense, Joseph explained,

I was now almost choked with anger and humiliation, and could not contain my rage. I was therefore not responsible for what I said or did. Still, I remember everything distinctly. I do believe that if I had been armed I would have done violence to him, and I told him so. I told her plainly her conduct was 'whorish and illegitimate.' I did not call her a whore. I asked her if she was not ashamed of herself, and if she thought such conduct was becoming a married woman. And furthermore, whatever she thought of it, I considered it unbecoming and disgraceful, and so long as she was my wife, I would not allow it. And if

ever I caught a stranger and a gentile in her bedroom again under such circumstances, there would be blood shed if I swung for it.

Joseph was "not responsible for what [he] said or did" because he was filled with passion.<sup>102</sup>

That night he agreed to give Levira a divorce. But the next day, he returned seeking reconciliation. She insisted he apologize to Mr. Harris.

To this every feeling in me revolted. Nevertheless, after considering the matter, I wrote a studied apology to Mr. Harris, as non-compromising as I could word it, regretting that I had lost my temper and had spoken so harshly to my wife in the presence of a stranger.

Levira accepted the apology, "and things went on again as before, although a weight was upon my mind that almost disheartened me, for I saw where her course would lead her to."<sup>103</sup>

Eight months later, they separated for the last time. But the emotional attachment had not dissolved. He wrote:

I do not want your things . . . nor do I wish to deprive you of one grot that is yours. Neither do I begrudge aught that I have done for you, tho' you have requited me heartlessly, evil for good. I blame others [Derinda Kimball] and pitty you.

As for the items she believed to be hers, Joseph, hurting deeply, continued:

I will simply say, you are welcome to your conviction, and your conscience /will/ never accuse you of having told the truth! . . . I am astounded at the brazen impudence manifested in two lines of your note, that in relation to "your cow cherry"!! Contemplating the deliberate affrontery intended, the unparalleled impertinence of such ideas, I do not wonder that you claim blankets and anything else that is not yours!! But words are futile. You are to be pitied, and I forgive you.<sup>104</sup>

Joseph did not acknowledge any responsibility for the break-up. When it became known that Levira had gone to California and obtained a divorce on grounds that Joseph had taken a concubine,<sup>105</sup> questions arose in Salt Lake, to which he replied,

My first wife \* \* \* [asterisks in original] was intimately acquainted from her childhood with the young lady who became my second wife, and it was with their [sic] full knowledge and consent that I entered into plural marriage, my first wife being present as a witness when I took my second wife, and freely gave her consent thereto. Our associations as a family were pleasant and harmonious. It was not until long after the second marriage that my first wife was drawn from us, not on account of domestic troubles, but for other causes. In eight years of wedded life we had no children. She constantly complained of ill health and was as constantly under a doctor's care. She concluded to go to California for her health and before

going procured a separation. This all occurred previous to 1868.<sup>106</sup>

The reasons Joseph gives above gloss over the issue of Levira's jealousy, which, from time to time, he indicated had been a factor. In remarks to Hawaiian missionaries in 1886, he confided that he "had paid so much attention to his first wife that she was unwilling to share his affections with his second wife. He advised the missionaries to avoid his trouble by 'bestowing no more love upon one wife than can be given equally to several.'<sup>107</sup>

That jealousy might have been a strong factor is also hinted at in a letter Levira wrote to RLDS president Joseph Smith III in 1880. In it, she intimated that polygamy had been the source of her troubles with Joseph. Summarizing her complaints President Smith replied, "when [Joseph] married others you were dissatisfied and after finding the condition to be unendurable . . . you left him."<sup>108</sup>

Joseph's relationship with Levira had been complex and painful. The fact that Levira moved out twelve weeks after Joseph married Julina suggests that their "associations as a family" were probably not "pleasant and harmonious." However he finally sorted it out in his own mind, the failure of his eight-year marriage was a tragedy—one of the greatest trials of his life.

#### *"essentially a domestic man"*

THE MARRIAGE TO Julina was blessed, as, for the most part, were the marriages to his succeeding wives. In each relationship, the parties had to deal with the jealousies, personality conflicts, and misunderstandings that naturally arise in plural families, but considering all the stresses, Joseph was remarkably successful as a husband and father.

"I am essentially a domestic man," he wrote. "I lack cosmopolitan qualities. I could burrow in the sacred precincts of my home and be content to dwell forever in the society and hearts of my family, and no more go out from them."<sup>109</sup>

On 14 August 1866 (eleven days before Joseph completed his response to Levira's charges), Julina blessed Joseph with his first child, Mercy Josephine. In 1869, Julina and Joseph's next wife, Sarah Ellen Richards, both bore daughters. Sarah's infant lived only six days. Julina's daughter, Mary Sophronia, survived, but Josephine remained the apple of her father's eye.

Then in the spring of 1870, Josephine became ill. Joseph stayed up with her several nights in a row. On 5 June, he wrote in his diary, "I have no appetite. My sympathy and solicitude for my darling little Josephine has greatly bowed my spirit, notwithstanding I think I have received a testimony that she will not die. Still she is a sensitive, delicate and tender little creature, and loves her 'papa.'"

She died the next day. Joseph grieved for a long time. "It is one month yesterday since my little loved, cherished, darling Josephine died. . . . O! that I could have saved her to grow up to womanhood. I miss her every day, and I am lonely. My heart is sad. God forgive my weakness, if it is wrong to love my little ones as I love them and especially my first darling babe."<sup>110</sup>

Joseph married Julina's sister, Edna, on 1 January 1871, and on 30 January, Sarah delivered another daughter, Leonora. Edna brought the first son, Hyrum Mack, into the family on 21 March 1872.

#### *" . . . the veritable traitor [who] has poisoned your peace"*

IN THE FALL of 1872, James and Mary Ann Fielding McKnight moved into the house next door. If ever there were a man who would test Joseph's patience, it was James McKnight. He had married one of Joseph's cousins, but treated her shabbily, and he had the irritating habit of turning his animals into the Smith corn patch at night where they did considerable damage.<sup>111</sup>

On New Year's Day 1873, Joseph went to "have a settlement" with McKnight. "He insulted me, and would give me no satisfaction. I struck him three times with my cane. I then went and complained of myself to [Justice Jeter] Clinton, for breaking the peace, explaining the whole matter." Then, he returned to see how McKnight, ten years his senior, was faring. The next day, Joseph "apologized for losing my temper, and asked his forgiveness for striking him." McKnight accepted the apology.<sup>112</sup>

Naturally, word that an apostle of the Lord had clubbed his neighbor with a cane provided fodder for titillating conversation in Salt Lake. At April conference, according to the *Tribune*, Joseph said he "did not claim to be perfect, as he had many weaknesses; he was a passionate man, and had sometimes been, to a certain extent, overcome by it, but had not done anything criminal in that respect. The gospel kept him at peace with his neighbors and his brethren, with whom he never had any quarrels that is, said Mr. Smith, but to a very limited extent."<sup>113</sup>

A year after the incident, McKnight wrote Joseph that his injuries were permanent and painful. Some doctors, he said, even believed his life would be shortened. Then, he added,

Your life-long plea of inherent and uncontrollable frenzy at the sight of some hobgoblin the heart of your temper has personified as the veritable traitor whose grim visage has poisoned your peace for a

**"Your  
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temper has  
personified  
. . . is worn  
thread-  
bare."**



quarter of a century past, is worn thread-bare. It cannot any longer screen moral and mental imbecility. The drunkard who murders another under the plea that his minor madness will relieve the crime of its monstrosity, exposes his predisposition to commit the crime.<sup>114</sup>

Setting aside the incendiary rhetoric, the core of McKnight's 1874 accusation is consistent with Joseph's defense in his and Levira's 1866 divorce proceedings: he sought to explain—and perhaps justify—outrageous behavior and language on grounds that he was overcome with rage. What McKnight adds is the interesting detail that these outbursts had “poisoned [his] peace for a quarter of a century past”—roughly since 1850. (The Smith family journeyed to Utah in 1848; Mary died in 1852.) For eighteen months after his mother's death, Joseph reported he was out of control—“like a comet or fiery meteor.” But neither the passage of time, nor missions to the islands and England, nor a calling to the apostleship had extinguished the fires of rage in his heart.<sup>115</sup>

*“... the question is could I do better”*

**A** MONTH AFTER McKnight's letter, Joseph was called to preside over the European Mission. Back in England, he found himself reflecting on his life. At thirty-six, he had three wives and nine living children. On 21 January 1875, he wrote Julina:

I have had some little time for sober reflection on my past experience, and can see many crooked ways that might with greater wisdom have been straight . . . not intentionally wrong, but ridiculous, foolish, the result of impatience and nothing more, but bad enough to leave a lasting regret that they ever occurred. Then I deeply regret many foolish, wrong, impetuous actions . . . but the question is could I do better to pass thro the same ordeals again. I hope so but I do not know.

. . . It is when we forget to love each the other, and cease to cultivate that divine plant (which may shoot up with remarkable vigor and make rapid growth in courtship, . . . but needs mutual nurture in the stern realities of connubial life) that distances grow up between man and wife, and one

outgrows the other (mainly in imagination). Then comes sorrow.<sup>116</sup>

On the same day, he wrote Edna, “I notice in myself a propensity to find fault or grumble, or to be dissatisfied with as many things as I can. I am sorry for it and I am glad I can see it to some extent and I hope to overcome it.”<sup>117</sup> The maturing Joseph hadn't conquered his weaknesses, but he had begun to see them more clearly.

In 1904, Joseph endured three days of intense questioning by the Senate committee investigating the election of Reed Smoot, which was really an investigation of the Church and allegations of post-Manifesto polygamy. In 1905, Frank J. Cannon, son of George Q. Cannon, Joseph's mentor and colleague for forty years, launched a sustained and personal attack on President Smith in the *Salt Lake Tribune*. By then, he had learned an important lesson. “My greatest difficulty,” he wrote his son Alvin, “has been to guard my temper—to keep cool in the moment of excitement or trial. I have always been too quick to resent a wrong, too impatient, or hasty. I hope you will be very careful, my son, on these points. He who can govern himself is greater than he who ruleth a city.”<sup>118</sup> ☞



Joseph F. Smith, Liverpool, England, 1874

**“It is when we forget to love each the other . . . that distances grow up between man and wife, and one outgrows the other (mainly in imagination). Then comes sorrow.”**

#### NOTES

NOTE ON SOME OF THE SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THIS ARTICLE. The Joseph F. Smith papers, including correspondence, diaries, account books, and miscellaneous papers, are in the LDS Church Archives. Shortly after they were delivered to the Historical Department in 1975, Church Historian Leonard J. Arrington invited me to go through them, suggesting I might prepare a biography. Unfortunately, the collection has since been closed.

1. B. W. Richmond's account is the only eye-witness description of Smith family activity in Nauvoo on 28 June 1844. Originally published in the *Chicago Times*, the account was reprinted under the headline “The Prophet's Death!” in the 27 November 1875 *Deseret News*. In its introduction, the *News* stated that the account “is in the main correct as concerning the tragedy

which is the burden of the article.” According to the *Times*, Dr. Richmond was not a member of the Church, but he was sympathetic to the prophet, having known him in Palmyra, New York. He had also visited him in Ohio.

2. Joseph F. Smith, “Boyhood Recollections,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 7 (April 1916): 58.

3. Richmond.

**“My greatest difficulty has been to guard my temper. . . . I have always been too quick to resent a wrong, too impatient, or hasty.”**

4. *History of the Church* (hereafter *HC*) 6:627.
5. Dan Jones, “The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith and His Brother Hyrum,” trans. (from Welsh) Ronald D. Dennis, *BYU Studies* 24 (winter 1984): 108.
6. Richmond.
7. Preston Nibley, *The Presidents of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1941), 229.
8. Joseph was not alone in his fears. His cousin Mary Jane Fielding recalled, “One time our enemies threatened to raid Nauvoo while the men were away. My Mother and Auntie were alone with us children so they began planning to defend our home. They brought the pitchfork, the hoe and the rake and the across into the house, and filled everything on the stove with water to heat. They also placed the cayenne pepper on the table ready to use and waited for the enemy, but they did not come.” Rachel Fielding Burton reminiscence, LDS Church Archives.
9. Abraham H. Cannon diary, 6 December 1889. Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
10. Samuel H. Smith’s first wife, Mary Bailey, left him with four children when she died in January 1841: Lucy, Suzannah, Mary, and Samuel H. B. His second wife, Levira, had a daughter, Levira (who would later marry Joseph F. Smith) and was pregnant with another child when Samuel died. She and young Levira went to live with relatives until she delivered; Lucy went to live with her grandmother Lucy Mack Smith; Suzannah, Mary, and Samuel H. B. moved in with Mary’s family. A few months later, eight-year-old Susanna moved to live with an aunt, Hannah Brown, in Wisconsin, and seven-year-old Mary moved to another household; five-year-old Samuel H. B. remained about a year before being taken in by his father’s cousin, Elias Smith. Ruby K. Smith, *Mary Bailey* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1954), 188–90; Samuel H. B. Smith diary, 1, LDS Church Archives, MS 4672.
11. Pearson H. Corbett, *Hyrum Smith: Patriarch* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 426n6, indirectly quoting Mary [sic] Ann Smith Harris, Message to My Posterity (centennial letter) written 2 March 1881, opened 6 April 1930.
12. Susa Young Gates, “Mothers in Israel,” *Relief Society Magazine* 3 (March 1916): 131.
13. Joseph F. Smith, “Boyhood Recollections,” 59.
14. Over 350 deaths due to consumption (tuberculosis), scurvy, canker, cholera, scarlet fever, typhus, and other causes in Winter Quarters and nearby Cutler’s Park from 1846 to 1848 are documented in Conrey Bryson, *Winter Quarters* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1986), 131–63.
15. Joseph Fielding diary, 144; B. F. Cummings Jr., “Shining Lights: How They Acquired Brightness,” *Contributor* 16 (January 1895): 165.
16. Joseph F. Smith diary, 13 November 1860; Gates, 132. Regarding the home, see Frank T. Matheson, *The Mary Fielding Smith Adobe Home* (Boulder, Colorado: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1980), 62. The home, completed in 1850, stood on what is now the southwest corner of 27th South and Highland Drive.
17. Living with Mary were her children Joseph and Martha Ann, stepchildren John, Jerusha, and Sarah, and two elderly persons, George Mills and Hannah Grinnells, who had been with the family for many years.
18. Joseph Fielding Smith to James E. Talmage, 28 October 1908. At the October 1851 conference, President Young exulted, “Tithing is coming in so fast their will not be room to receive it . . . Our graineries & store House are full of wheat & good things.” Scott Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal* (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 4:72.
19. Joseph F. Smith to Solomon F. Kimball, 23 September 1898. Mary married her old friend Heber C. Kimball in 1846, which, in her case, meant only that she could call on him for assistance. Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 122–23.
20. Martha Ann Smith Harris, Message to My Posterity (centennial letter) written 2 March 1881, opened 6 April 1930. Cited in Don C. Corbett, *Mary Fielding Smith: Daughter of Britain* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1974), 265.
21. Joseph F. Smith, “The Love of Mother,” *Improvement Era*, 13 (1910): 276–280.
- When I was a child, somewhat a wayward, disobedient little boy, not that I was wilfully disobedient, but I would forget what I ought to do; I would go off with playful boys and be absent when I should have been at home, and I would forget to do things I was asked to do. Then I would go home, feel guilty, know that I was guilty, that I had neglected my duty and that I deserved punishment.
- On one occasion I had done something that was not just right, and my mother said to me: “Now, Joseph, if you do that again I shall have to whip you.” Well, time went on, and by and by, I forgot it, and I did something similar again; and this is the one thing that I admired more, perhaps, than any secondary thing in her; it was that when she made a promise she kept it. She never made a promise, that I know of, that she did not keep.
- Well, she had a little rawhide, already there, and while she was talking or reasoning with me, showing me how much I deserved it and how painful it was to her, to inflict the punishment I deserved, I had only one thought and that was: “For goodness’ sake whip me; do not reason with me,” for I felt the lash of her just criticism and admonition a thousand fold worse than I did the switch.
22. Heber C. Kimball was an exception. “With the exception of the attentions, kindness and care bestowed by [Heber C. and Vilate Kimball] upon my mother in her last illness, for which I have ever felt to bless them, and which was accidental, she having been stricken down while attending meeting in this city, she received no support from either the church or any human being, while on the other hand she contributed largely to the support of others besides supporting her own family.” Joseph F. Smith to Solomon F. Kimball, 23 September 1889.
23. Joseph F. Smith to Susa Young Gates, 26 May 1890.
24. Joseph F. Smith to Samuel L. Adams, 11 May 1888, in “Courage: Joseph F. Smith Letters,” Joseph Fielding McConkie, comp., 2. Excerpts from Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybook in private possession. LDS Church History Library.
25. Charles W. Nibley, “Reminiscences,” *Improvement Era*, 22 (January 1919): 191–203; Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1966), 229. Teacher and pupil apparently reconciled shortly thereafter, however. On 5 May 1854, “in company with D. M. Merrick, bound for the Sandwich Islands. . . . In a day or so we joined some 18 of our brethren who were bound for the same place.” Joseph F. Smith diary. Merrick was not a Sandwich Islands missionary. His purpose in traveling with the missionaries, and how far they journeyed together, is not known. Later, Joseph said he had learned more under Merrick than any of the other five teachers he recalled. Cummings, “Shining Lights,” 174.
26. In 1867, George A. Smith said of Joseph, “His father and mother left him when he was a child, and we have been looking after him to try and help him along. We first sent him to school, but it was not long before he licked the schoolmaster, and could not go to school. Then we sent him on a mission, and he did pretty well at that.” Nibley, “Reminiscences,” 191.
27. Nibley, *The Presidents of the Church*, 236.
28. This publication is the beginning of a family myth—a story based on fact but serving a different purpose. It contains time-honored themes of persecution, exodus, inspiration, and betrayal. The manuscript was judiciously revised and expanded for Joseph F. Smith, “Recollections,” *Juvenile Instructor* 6 (March–June 1871): 37, 87, 91, 98–99.
29. In March 1851, Brigham Young reorganized the Provo Ward with Elias H. Blackburn as bishop, William Young and Harlow Redfield as counselors. The following month, Redfield was elected to the first city council. Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Co. and Andrew Jenson Memorial Association, 1901–1936), 1:491; [Dale L. Morgan] *Provo: Pioneer Mormon City*, (Portland: Binford & Mort, 1942, compiled under the auspices of the Workers of the Writers’ Program of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Utah), 63.
30. Harlow Redfield was accused of helping William McLellan and others plunder Joseph Smith’s house in Far West in 1839. The incident was reported in the *Deseret News* on 2 February 1854, which was publishing a history of the Church. No mention was made of Hyrum’s home or possessions. Redfield responded with a letter published in the 16 March issue of the paper:

**“Once stern and unrelenting, he has mellowed as the years go on, until he sees but the good in humanity and forgives men their trespasses.”<sup>119</sup>**

I was at Hyrum Smith's house, rather by accident than design, in company with McLellin and Burr Riggs, at a time when they took some books, etc., but was not with them when they went to Joseph's. Soon after the rumor got afloat; I explained the matter before the Council in Missouri satisfactorily, as I supposed, but some time after, an enemy, in my absence, again agitated the subject before the Conference in Nauvoo, which led to an inquiry before the High Council in presence of Joseph and Hyrum, and the subject appearing its true light, Joseph instructed the council to give me a certificate of acquittal, that would close every man's mouth.

The certificate indicated that no one was brought, “nor did an implication appear, nor do we believe that a charge could be sustained against Elder Redfield. He volunteered confession of certain inadvertent, imprudent [but] no evil meaning acts, that he greatly sorrowed for, and asked forgiveness for his folly in such acts.” Redfield was “forgiven” and his standing was to be “the same as if no evil insinuation had ever been brought against him.” Redfield concluded, “I will only add that I had before heard how that ‘poor Tray’ got whipped for being in bad company, and it ought to have been a sufficient warning for me, and I trust it will be for the future.” HC 3:287.

Redfield's admission of “inadvertent, imprudent [but] no evil meaning acts” may refer to breaking Hyrum's lock. If so, the high council, Joseph, and Hyrum himself accepted his explanation. But Mary did not. Instead, she passed on the accusation to Joseph and perhaps others. The episode leaves several questions unanswered: Was Mary the “enemy” who agitated the matter in Nauvoo? If so, why didn't she lodge a complaint before the high council? What motives might she have to pass on such a story to her young son? Did she hold a grudge against Cornelius P. Lott as well, and did she share it with Joseph in a way that affected his recollection of the trek to Utah?

31. “We must ‘pray for them that hate us and despitefully use us,’ and . . . I pray that my enemies and those who do evil be cursed with the Sting of their own inequity, and receive the reward due for their demerits. This is as good as I can feel towards them.” Joseph F. Smith to Levira Annette Smith, 8 July 1862.

“In all cases where charity can cover as a mantle a sin or even a multitude of sins without harm accruing to others, the mantle of charity is the right thing. Your grandfather [Hyrum Smith] won the title of a ‘merciful man’. No man will go farther than I to forgive a truly repentant sinner . . . Always lean towards mercy, but remember there is no forgiveness or remission of sin without repentance.” Joseph F. Smith to Alvin F. Smith, 22 July 1905.

32. Lott (1798–1850) had managed Joseph Smith's farm three miles from Nauvoo. Rhea Lott Vance, *Descendants of Cornelius Peter Lott: 1798* (Providence, Utah: n.p., 172), 7, 16. He and his wife, Permelia, were among the few who received their temple endowments prior to the opening of the Nauvoo temple. They also received their second anointings during the Prophet's lifetime. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 114–16, 139, 494–98; David John Buerger, *Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 36, 64–65. Also HC 7:541; Joseph Fielding diary, 75. LDS Church Archives, MS 7617.

33. This is the only incident in Joseph's account supported by other witnesses. His uncle, Joseph Fielding, recorded, “One said it was great Folly to attempt to go as we were fixt.” Joseph Fielding diary, 195.

34. In the valley, Lott managed Brigham Young's Forrest Dale farm, four miles southeast of Temple Square, and one mile northwest of the Mary Fielding Smith farm. He died 6 July 1850, at the age of 51. Rhea Lott Vance, *Descendants of Cornelius Peter Lott*, 16. Other than Joseph's recollection, I have seen no derogatory remarks about Brother Lott.

35. In 1884, Joseph wrote Mary would not let him do night duty. He “was, therefore, frequently sneered at as being ‘petted by his mother,’ which was a sore trial to him.” “A Noble Woman's Experience,” *Heroines of “Mormondom,”* Noble Women's Lives Series, Vol. 2, (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1884): 27.

In the final incident of the manuscript, Lott comes to the large carriage where Mary, Martha Ann, and Joseph are sleeping, and urgently whispers “Indians,

Indians! Get up quick widow Smith! We'r beset by Indians' Mother replied, ‘Why don't you arouse the men, I don't see what I can do, father Lott.’ At this he went to the next wagon where some of the family were asleep, shaking it rather milder, and sneaked off, not wishing to carry the alarm any farther.”

36. When he was age 21, Joseph wrote John, “The hardest thing for me to forgive is wraped in the memory of C. P. Lott! Yet even that I forgive, tho' I never will forget it.” Joseph F. Smith to John Smith, 20 January 1861.

37. Just when Joseph began using tobacco and liquor cannot be definitely stated, but in 1875, he wrote, “From my childhood—for twenty years and upwards I chewed the filthy weed,” suggesting the early 1850s. Joseph F. Smith to J. D. T. McAllister, August 23, 1875.

Evidence for dating the early use of liquor is speculative. As noted in the text (sidebar, page 51) and below (notes 52–57), in 1883, he announced that he loved liquor but had overcome his problem with it. In 1903, an unattributed essay including the following lines appeared in the *Improvement Era*:

I had a good friend who told me, when I was fourteen years of age, that if I would refuse strong drink for the next six years there would be little fear that I would ever thereafter care for liquor, or become a drunkard. At that time, I was very fond of liquor, and, in one of my serious moments of reflection, I saw where it might lead me, and told such friend that I feared the results. It was then he told me how to avoid danger. I followed his advice, and liquor is no temptation to me now. But my habit was not formed without severe training of my will, without strict and frequent repetitions of self-denial.

Three circumstances suggest President Smith's authorship. First, he was the editor of the publication and there is no other indication of authorship; second, of the eighteen months he described as “perilous times for me . . . from Sept 21<sup>st</sup>, 1852 to April, 1854,” twelve were while he was fourteen; and third, as discussed in the text, though we have found no indication of excessive drinking, it was many years before he was able to give it up completely.

38. Joseph F. Smith to George A. Smith, 20 October 1854.

39. Joseph F. Smith to Martha Ann Smith (Harris), 28 January 1855, Joseph Smith Sr. Family Papers, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Vault MSS 775.

40. Hammond diary, 8–10 April 1855.

41. Scott Kenney, “Mormons and the Smallpox Epidemic of 1853,” *The Hawaii Journal of History* (1997): 9–26.

42. Joseph wrote that when he started as a missionary in 1854, “I was 15 years old and had never written a letter in my life, and did not know how to write a duzen words, but I began to feel the need of education so I studied and practiced and prayed and tried to learn and have been learning at a disadvantage ever since, until now I can just write to be understood.” Joseph F. Smith to Robert B. Taylor, 9 March 1875.

43. Joseph F. Smith to J. C. Rich, 27 July 1861.

44. Hammond diary, 27, 30 December 1854; 9–10 April, 9 June, 5 July 1855.

45. Joseph F. Smith diary, 4 July 1856.

46. Joseph F. Smith diary, 1 May 1856; 30 April 1857.

47. Joseph F. Smith diary, 22 April 1857.

48. Joseph F. Smith diary, 4 May 1857.

49. President Young later withdrew the remaining missionaries from all missions to defend Utah against an advancing federal army, but he had virtually given up on the Sandwich Islands mission before that decision was implemented: “The reports from the Sandwich Islands have for a number of years agreed in one thing,” Brigham Young wrote mission president Henry Bigler 4 September 1857, “and that is that the majority of the Saints on these islands have either been dead or are dying spiritually. It would appear that they occasionally, spasmodically resuscitate for a moment, only to sink lower than they were before. . . . You had better wind up the whole business and return with most of the Elders as soon as possible.” Minutes of the Honolulu Hawaii Mission, 16 October 1857. LDS Church Archives.

50. Jane Fisher to Joseph F. Smith, 26 June 1859.



This 1893 photo of women temple workers captures at one moment several important women in Joseph's life.  
 (Seated L-R) Bathsheba Smith (wife of George A. Smith), Julina Lambson Smith (wife), Mercy R. Thompson (aunt),  
 Zina D. H. Young, Lucy Bigelow, Minerva Snow. (Seated on floor) Edna Lambson Smith (wife), Christina Willardson.  
 (Standing) \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, Adeline H. Barber, Ellen Roy Metheny.  
 (Esther Parkinson, Frances Cann Brown are in picture, but unidentified)

51. "I was surprised to learn that so many of the new brethren [in Joseph F. Smith's group] were in the habit of using tobacco. The majority of the 18 have used it more or less ever since they left their homes." Hammond diary, 28 July 1855.

52. In 1883, Joseph acknowledged to the Salt Lake School of the Prophets that "he had used tobacco, and he loved liquor," but he had quit and believed anyone who wanted to could do the same. *Salt Lake School of the Prophets: Minutebook 1883*, Merle H. Graffam, comp., (Palm Desert, California: ULC Press), 81. For the evolution of Word of Wisdom teachings and practice, see Thomas G. Alexander, "The Word of Wisdom: From Principle to Requirement," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14 (fall 1980): 78–87.

53. Joseph F. Smith to J. D. T. McAllister, 23 August 1875.

54. Eugene E. Campbell, *Establishing Zion: The Mormon Church in the American West, 1847–1869* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 176. In the 1870s, Brigham Young and George A. Smith in particular urged young men not to take up the habit. Joseph noted George A.'s comments about chewing tobacco: "It was a sin to chew tobacco, an unpardonable sin to spit tobacco juice on the floor, and total depravity to make a spittoon of a linen shirt bosom." Joseph F. Smith diary, 27 June 1871.

55. Joseph F. Smith to J. D. T. McAllister, op cit.

56. *Salt Lake School of the Prophets*, 81.

57. William W. Cluff to Joseph F. Smith, 26 September 1862; Joseph F. Smith diary, entries for 29 January 1863, 4 July 1873, 28 July 1874, 1 April 1874.

58. Joseph Fisher, Sr. to Joseph F. Smith, 23 February 1859.

59. Joseph F. Smith to Levira Annette Smith, 26 February 1859.

60. Journal History, 5 April 1859. Levira (29 April 1842–18 December 1888) was the daughter of Samuel H. Smith (1808–1844), and Levira Clark (1815–1893).

61. Joseph F. Smith to Levira Annette Smith, 14 June 1860.

62. Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 23 July 1860.

63. Joseph F. Smith to Levira Annette Smith, 5 September 1860.

64. Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 14 August 1860.

65. Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 3 November 1861.

66. Joseph F. Smith to Levira Annette Smith, 17 December 1861.

67. Mary Jane Thompson Taylor in David Taylor's letter to Joseph F. Smith, 1 December 1861.

68. Martha Ann Harris to Joseph F. Smith, 12 January 1862.

69. Joseph F. Smith diary, 9 April 1862, citing letter of Zina D. H. Young.

70. Joseph F. Smith to Levira Annette Smith, 1 March 1862.

71. Joseph F. Smith to Levira Annette Smith, 8 July 1862.

72. Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 29 June 1862, cited in Joseph F. Smith diary, 16 October 1862; Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 10 August 1862.

73. Joseph F. Smith diary, 8, 9 February 1863. Joseph did not record his feelings again until the diary entry of 27 April: "We had a little wine and spent the evening very agreeably, Samuel [H. B. Smith], Parley [P. Pratt, Jr.], and myself."

74. George Q. Cannon to Joseph F. Smith, 29 March 1863.

75. George A. Smith to John L. Smith, 29 August 1863, and to John Smith, 10

## The Joseph F.



This family portrait was taken close to the time Joseph F. Smith succeeded  
 with whom he had no children, Joseph had five other wives and  
 Mary Taylor Schwartz (married, 1884, seven children); Edna Lambson (mar  
 including Joseph Fielding Smith—top row, center); Sarah Ellen Richards (mar

# Smith Family



ed Lorenzo Snow as Church president in October 1901. Besides Levira,  
 d forty-eight children. His wives are (L to R seated by Joseph):  
 married 1871, ten children); Julina Lambson (married 1866, thirteen children,  
 married 1868, eleven children); Alice Ann Kimball (married 1883, seven children).

October 1863, Historian's Office Letterpress.

76. Joseph F. Smith to Brigham Young, 25 August 1864, Brigham Young collection, LDS Church archives; Joseph F. Smith to B. H. Watts, 12 August 1875.

77. Both documents are in the Brigham Young incoming correspondence, reel 74. Levira's letter is not dated; Joseph's (which follows immediately) is dated 25 August 1867. A note on the back of his letter indicates it was received 18 September 1867.

78. In an 1864 letter to Joseph, Levira made a similar complaint. For three and a half years, she had "patiently waited for one kind true friend to return to me to whom I could tell all my troubles and sufferings, and who would listen to sooth, comfort, and dispell all those clouds and sorrows from my heart." Instead, Joseph "could or did not comfort me. You acted as tho you hated me because I was sick and helpless. You tormented me, laughed at me, and Oh! I blush to say it, struck me. The act did not wound my body, but my feelings and pride . . . I must learn to bow to you, however inconsistent you might be even if it cost my life." Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith, incomplete letter, n.d.

79. Cummings, 170.

80. Gwynn Barrett, "Walter Murray Gibson: The Shepherd Saint of Lanai Revisited," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 40 (1972): 142–162; and R. Lanier Britsch, "Another Visit with Walter Murray Gibson," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46 (1978): 65–78.

81. Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball to Joseph F. Smith, W. W. Cluff, and John R. Young, 10 November 1864, typescript, Brigham Young collection, 346–348; George A. Smith to William W. Cluff, 27 January 1864, Historian's Office Letterpress Copy Books, LDS Church Archives, CR 100 / 38.

82. *Deseret News*, 1 June 1864.

83. "Blessing upon the head of Levira Smith, previous to starting for the Sandwich Islands given by Presidents Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, in G. S. L. City, Aug. 4, 1864." On Thursday, 6 August 1864, J. C. Rich wrote Joseph that Levira planned to leave Salt Lake with Dorinda "next Tuesday," which would have been 9 August. "I am in a sort of quadery," Joseph wrote Levira's half-brother in mid-September, that he still did not know whether Levira was in San Francisco or not. Joseph F. Smith to Samuel H.B. Smith, 14 September 1864, Samuel H. B. Smith papers.

84. Joseph F. Smith diary, 5 November 1864.

85. Joseph F. Smith to Levira Annette Smith, 14 March 1865.

86. Joseph F. Smith to Levira Annette Smith, 14 March 1865.

87. Agnes Moulton Coolbrith was the widow of Don Carlos Smith (Joseph and Hyrum's brother), who died 7 August 1841. Their daughter Josephine Donna was Joseph's favorite childhood cousin. Joseph F. Smith to Lucy W. Kimball, 6 March 1884. After Agnes married William Pickett and moved to California, Josephine took the name Ina Coolbrith to disassociate herself from Mormonism. Though they held divergent views of the Church, Joseph and Ina remained good friends, sometimes corresponding five or six times a year until his death. A gifted poet and Oakland city librarian, Ina was named California Poet Laureate in 1919. Josephine DeWitt Rhodehamel and Raymund Francis Wood, *Ina Coolbrith: Librarian and Laureate of California* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1973), 317. Unfortunately, Ina's biographers do not appear to have known of her relationship with Joseph.

88. Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith 8, 21, 25 December 1864; 2, 6, 19, 21 January, 13, 19 March, 7, 10, 14, 23, 29 April 1865, and an undated letter beginning, "I did not get this done in time to go last night."

89. Historian's Office Journal, 22 January 1865. LDS Church Archives, CR 100 / 1.

90. Ina Coolbrith to Joseph F. Smith, 3 January, 21 June 1865. Maureen Ursebach Beecher generously shared Ina's letters to Joseph F. Smith with me in the 1970s, before they became part of the Joseph F. Smith papers.

91. Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 24 January, 7 April 1865.

92. Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 10, 16 April 1865, and an undated letter to Brigham Young.

93. Historian's Office Journal, 22 January 1865 and following entries.

94. Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 16 June 1865.

95. Levira Annette Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 20 November 1865.

96. Joseph F. Smith to Brigham Young, n.d.

97. Erastus Snow "was one of the most persistent and strenuous advocates of the doctrine to me personally in the days of my youth, and by whose urgent appeals I entered into its practice much sooner than I otherwise would; and to whom I owe directly my good fortune of marrying, when I did, my wife Julina." Joseph F. Smith to Susa Young Gates, 1 August 1889.

98. Leonard J. Arrington and Susan Arrington Madsen, *Mothers of the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1987): 152–153, 157.

99. Joseph F. Smith to Samuel H.B. Smith, 13 June 1866, Samuel H.B. Smith papers.

100. Untitled document beginning "On Sunday afternoon July 1, 1866, President Brigham Young . . ." in the Brigham Young collection.

101. Historian's Office Journal, 24 July 1866; Joseph F. Smith to George Nebeker, 24 December 1866.

102. In making such a bold statement, Joseph may have also had in mind the successful defense argument made by George A. Smith in the 1851 murder trial of Howard Egan, who had killed James Monroe, the seducer of his wife: "In this territory it is a principle of mountain common law, that no man can seduce the wife of another *without endangering his own life*. . . . The man who seduces his neighbor's wife must die, and her nearest relative must kill him! . . . If Howard Egan had not killed that man, he would have been damned by the community for ever, and could not have lived peaceably, without the frown of every man." *Journal of Discourses* 1:97; Michael W. Homer, "The Judiciary and the Common Law in Utah Territory," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21 (spring 1989): 155; Edwin Brown Firmage and Richard Collin Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 217; B. H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 2d ed., (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 4:135–36n58.

103. These statements, and all other information about Joseph's and Levira's lives from her move back to her mother's through his apology to Mr. Harris, is drawn from their 1867 letters to Brigham Young, op cit.

104. Joseph F. Smith to Levira Annette Smith, 21 June and 18 July 1867.

105. Joseph and Levira signed the form for non-contested divorces on 10 June 1867. Levira initiated the California divorce in 1868 after establishing the requisite six months' residency. Joseph apparently did not comply with the California summons, and the divorce was finalized 10 July 1869. The Utah form did not use the word divorce: "Know all men by these Presents:—That we the undersigned . . . do hereby mutually *covenant, promise, and agree* to dissolve all the relations which have hitherto existed between us as *husband and wife*; and to keep ourselves *separate and apart* from each other, from this time forth." For a discussion of divorces in the Brigham Young period, see Firmage and Mangrum, 322–26.

106. Joseph Fielding Smith, added that the divorce was due to "interference on the part of relatives," and his father's "continued absence . . . in mission fields and in ecclesiastical duties." Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 230–31.

107. Fredrick Beesley journal, 11 April 1886. LDS Church Archives, F 408 #3.

108. Joseph Smith III to Levira Annette Smith, 3 February 1880, Joseph Smith III Letterbook vol 2, 486, RLDS Church Library-Archives. Notes courtesy of Buddy Youngreen.

109. Joseph F. Smith to Julina Lambson Smith, 21 January 1875.

110. Joseph F. Smith diary, 7 July 1875.

111. Mary Ann was Joseph Fielding's daughter by his second wife and was McKnight's fourth wife. Mary Ann McKnight to Joseph F. Smith, 9 June and August 1875; Joseph F. Smith diary, 31 December 1873; Mercy R. Thompson to Joseph F. Smith, 14 May 1875. When Joseph's barn burned to the ground in 1875, it was widely believed that McKnight was responsible. L. John Nuttall to Joseph F. Smith, 21 June 1875. After the fire, Julina informed Mary Ann that Joseph had come to regret his earlier advice that she stay with McKnight. Julina Lambson Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 6 June 1875.

112. Joseph F. Smith diary, 1, 7 January 1873.

113. *Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 May 1873.

114. James McKnight to Joseph F. Smith, 25 January 1874.

115. Julina understood that Joseph's anger stemmed from childhood. In 1875, when Brigham Young was briefly jailed for polygamy, she wrote to Joseph in England, "I have felt thankful lately that you were in England. If you had been here the night the President was sent to prison I think it would have riled that feeling you had born in you." Julina Lambson Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 14 March 1875.

Learning Joseph might be captain of a company crossing the plains in 1863, a British Saint wrote to him: "If such is true, I shall pray for your *poor temper*, and not your '*poor feet*.' Now pray do forgive me saying so. It was yourself who first told me about your *short temper*." M. A. Cook to Joseph F. Smith, 9 May 1863.

116. Joseph F. Smith to Julina Lambson Smith, 21 January 1875.

117. Joseph F. Smith to Edna Lambson Smith, 21 January 1875.

118. Joseph F. Smith to Alvin F. Smith, 8 June 1905.

119. Charles C. Goodwin (*Goodwin's Weekly*, 8 April 1916), cited in HC 6:477–78. Goodwin was editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune* from 1883–1903.



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