

Polygamy & Mormon Church Leaders
William B Smith
March 13, 1811
November 13, 1893

*“I did not see them [the plates] uncovered, but I handled them and hefted them while wrapped in a tow frock and judged them to have weighed about sixty pounds.... Father and my brother Samuel saw them as I did while in the frock. So did Hyrum and others of the family.’ When the interviewer asked if he didn’t want to remove the cloth and see the bare plates, William replied, ‘No, for father had just asked if he might not be permitted to do so, and Joseph, putting his hand on them said; ‘No, I am instructed not to show them to anyone. If I do, I will transgress and lose them again.’ Besides, we did not care to have him break the commandment and suffer as he did before.” – **William Smith**, Joseph’s brother, Zion’s Ensign, January 13, 1894, p. 6.*

William was the younger brother of Joseph Smith and the last Smith brother to die. While he followed his older brother into the Church and practiced polygamy, he seemed to have a hard time following rules. Speaking his mind on a number of doctrinal issues got him into a fair amount of trouble and booted from the Church every time, along with having a healthy arrest record. Having been reinstated back into the Church before his brothers’ assassination only lasted a while and he got tossed the last time by none other than Brigham Young.

William’s relationship with his brother was filled with tumultuous events from all indications, caused by William (according to the Church) and in one of those encounters he beat Joseph badly enough that he complained about it up to the time of his death six years later. (LDS Biographical Encyclopedia 1:87)

His admittance into the apostleship wasn’t without its own problems. Originally Phineas Young (Brigham’s younger brother) was installed, but after strong objections by Joseph, Phineas’ name was removed and William became an official apostle of the LDS Church on February 15, 1835.

Smith’s on and off again affiliation with apostates brought him into the fellowship of the Srangites and the Reorganites, but his mouth prevented him from forming any long term relationships and those too wouldn’t last. Wherever Mr. William went he found trouble awaiting his arrival. It’s interesting how that happens with some folks...

He’s listed as one of the original witnesses to the Book of Mormon’s golden plates which he stated he held while they were in a pillow case. He was married to several women (one report said 22) and the father of five, Smith also kept himself busy with the job as editor of the Wasp which gave him the distinction of having his name forever emblazoned in the annals of Mormon history.



His marriages seemed to fare no better than his filial relationships did. One of his first polygamous wives, [Mary Ann Sheffield](#), was sealed to him by Brigham Young while she was still legally married to her husband in England. She later testified that Smith “divorced himself from me”. And then a teenager, Mary Jane Rollins, whom he married after his first wife died, divorced him in August 1845 because of his relationship with Ms. Sheffield who happened to be living with them at the time. She too became one of his wives in 1845. It seems he picked up a rather bad habit from his elder brother Joseph on that one.


Another wife, Roxey, filed for divorce in 1853 and it became a juicy saga for the press at that time. During his escapades [Smith](#) was indicted for highway robbery and rape of one of his teenage brides. After a successful attempt at breaking out of jail, he finally met his comeuppance when they recaptured him and he was incarcerated. With most of the charges


dropped he must not have been there very long. The charges of robbery were most likely for the time he tried to sell the Egyptian mummies.

According to Quinn after he married **Eliza in 1857**, he joined the Army during the Civil War and “apparently adopted middle initial *B* at this time”. (1) George D. Smith (Nauvoo Polygamy Demographic Report) lists Eliza as wife #8.

He joined the RLDS church in 1878 so apparently his criminal background hadn't been checked or it didn't bother anyone there. He was installed as Patriarch of the Church. Tracking who he was really married to and when is somewhat of a cat and mouse game. Because of the secrecy employed in polygamy, lying, changing legal names and naming kids after others in the clan with several variations, it makes it next to impossible to keep track of anyone.

		Wife/age @ marriage (William's age)	Marriage date	Kids	Other info
1		Caroline Grant - 19 (21)	2/14/1833	2	Born 1/22/1814 Died 5/22/1845 In Nauvoo
2		Unidentified Women	1841-1842	0	See #2 in footnotes
3		Ms. Asson	1841-1843	0	Separated in 1845 See #2 in footnotes
4		Mary Ann Covington Sheffield Smith Stratton West- 17 (34)	1843 or 1844	0	Born 3/31/1815 in England Died 10/5/1908 Married when she joined Church in 1841. Left him because he “didn't treat her well”. Married Smith & still married to Sheffield

					in 1843-1844 but wasn't aware of polygamy. Left Smith. Married Joseph Stratton before 1851 & he died. Married West in 1851 for time. Sealed to Smith in 1843-4 then he married Mary Jones, then Priscilla, then Libby sisters. No marriage certificate of her marriage to Smith. Received no letters while he was away, didn't attend church w/ him or seen in public w/ him in 1845.
5		Sarah M. Cooney Clark -	1844	0	Separated in 1844 See #2 in footnotes
6		Mary Jane Rollins - 16 (34)	6/22/1845	0	Born 1829
7		Mary Jones - (34)	Sealed 1845	0	Separated in 1845 See #2 in footnotes
8		Priscilla Mogridge Staines - 22 (34)	8/1845	0	Born 3/11/1823 in Wildbrook, Wiltshire, England Died 1/4/1899 Joined Church in England. Left Smith 2 mos after marrying him when she found he was practicing polygamy.

					Never introduced as his wife. Married a Mr. Lowery then Wm Carter Staines on 10/22/1865. See #3 in footnotes
9		Henrietta Rice – 14	8/1845	0	Separated in 1845
10		Sarah Libby – 26 (34)	8/8/1845	0	Born 5/7/1818 Died 6/12/1851 Sarah & Hannah (sisters) joined the Church and both promptly married William. When he was excommunicated they both left him and again both married his cousin George Albert Smith on 11/20/1845, Sarah's grandson George Albert Smith became prophet.
11		Hannah Maria Libby – 16 (34)	8/1845	0	Born 6/28/1828 Died 9/26/1906 in Provo. See info above about her marriages. Hannah raised Sarah's son John when Sarah died in 1851. Their mother disowned both girls when they joined Church.
12		Elizabeth Weston	1845	0	Separated in 1845 See #2 in footnotes
13		Abeanade E.	1845	0	Separated in 1845

		Archer –			See #2 in footnotes
14		Roxie (Roxey) Ann Grant – 27 (36)	5/18-19/1847	2	Born 3/16/1820 Died 3/30/1900 in Missouri. Sister of Caroline, wife #1. Find-a-Grave reports she was wife #2 & left him in 1850, bitter divorce in 1853 She was sister of Jedidiah Grant & aunt of Heber J Grant, 7 th president.
15		Mrs. ???	1849-1850	0	See #2 in footnotes
16		Eliza Elise Sanborn – 30 (46)	12/11/1858 or 1857	3	Born 4/16/1827 Died 3/7/1889 in Elkader, IA Had 3 kids w/ Smith, 2 boys, 1 girl
17		Rosanna Jewitt (Rosella Goyette) Surprise – 61 (79)	12/21/1891 or 1889	0	Birth 5/16/1830 in Quebec Died 4/6/1923 in Clinton, IA

1. Quinn, *Origins of Power*, 595; Hewett, *Supplement to the Official Records*, Part 2, 14:703–704.

2. Quinn, *Origins of Power*, 594

Quinn lists “unidentified women” that had either married Smith or were sealed to him, but didn’t indicate the number of women. From all indications collected from other resources it’s not unreasonable to believe this number could be upwards of five.

3. In *Lost Legacy*, pgs 203-204 it says two different women named Priscilla were married to Wm. Their names were Priscilla Morgridge and Priscilla Staines.

Also –

Priscilla Mogridge Staines is mentioned in “*The Women of Mormondom*”, pg 285 as being married when she converted to Mormonism at the age of 19. She left England and subsequently moved to Nauvoo immediately thereafter.

