

Martha Brotherton Affidavit

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(historical-source)

Background

First published [in the St. Louis American Bulletin on July 16th](#), Martha's affidavit would go on to be published in other local newspapers like the [Quincy Whig, August 6, 1842](#) and finally in [Bennett's History of the Saints expose](#).¹

The account in the St. Louis American Bulletin is prefaced by a salutation to Bennett and an explanation of the context behind the affidavit:

Gen. John C. Bennett.

DEAR SIR: – I left Warsaw a short time since for this city, and having been called upon by you, through the “Sangamo Journal,” to come out and disclose to the world the facts of the case in relation to certain propositions made to me at Nauvoo, by some of the Mormon leaders, I now proceed to respond to the call, and discharge what I consider to be a duty devolving upon me as an innocent, but insulted and abused female. [the affidavit text follows]

The rest of the text in the St. Louis American Bulletin is exactly the same as the one published in Bennett's with only minor spelling and punctuation differences between the versions.

Persuitte notes that after the proposition ([pg 246](#)):

She [Martha] reported the matter to her parents, who angrily spread the story around Nauvoo before they and Martha left for St. Louis in a huff.

“Uncle Dale” (from Uncle Dale's readings in Early Mormon History) notes:

*John C. Bennett solicited the statement of Miss Martha Brotherton during the second week of July, while he was visiting St. Louis. Miss Brotherton's statement was originally intended for publication in the prestigious, high-circulation Missouri Republican. In its issue of [July 15, 1842](#) the Republican stated that Bennett's expose materials were not printed, due to lack of space. They were instead published in the July 14 and 16, 1842 issues of the Native American Bulletin. The Brotherton statement was widely reprinted in many other U. S. newspapers; see, for example, the Warsaw Signal of [July 23, 1842](#), the Louisville Journal of [July, 25, 1842](#); the New York Herald of [July 25, 1842](#); the Alton Telegraph of [July 30, 1842](#), and the Quincy Whig of [Aug. 6, 1842](#). It was through the wide circulation of this statement that the secret Mormon polygamy at Nauvoo first received nation-wide attention. Bennett supplies essentially the same information from Brotherton on pp. 236-240 of his 1842 book, *History of the Saints*.*

Affidavit

The below is taken from John C, Bennett, History of the Saints, 236–240.

St. Louis, Missouri, July 13, A.D. 1842.

I had been at Nauvoo near three weeks, during which time my father's family received frequent visits from Elders Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, two of the Mormon Apostles; when, early one morning,

they both came to my brother-in-law's (John McIlwrick's) house, at which place I then was on a visit, and particularly requested me to go and spend a few days with them. I told them I could not at that time, as my brother-in-law was not at home; however, they urged me to go the next day, and spend one day with them. The day being fine, I accordingly went. When I arrived at the foot of the hill, Young and Kimball were standing conversing together. They both came to me, and, after several flattering compliments, Kimball wished me to go to his house first. I said it was immaterial to me, and accordingly went. We had not, however, gone many steps when Young suddenly stopped, and said he would go to that brother's, (pointing to a little log hut a few yards distant,) and tell him that you (speaking to Kimball) and brother Glover, or Grover, (I do not remember which,) will value his land. When he had gone, Kimball turned to me and said, "Martha, I want you to say to my wife, when you go to my house, that you want to buy some things at Joseph's store, (Joseph Smith's,) and I will say I am going with you, to show you the way. You know you want to see the Prophet, and you will then have an opportunity." I made no reply. Young again made his appearance, and the subject was dropped. We soon reached Kimball's house, where Young took his leave, saying, "I shall see you again, Martha." I remained at Kimball's near an hour, when Kimball, seeing that I would not tell the lies he wished me to, told them to his wife himself. He then went and whispered in her ear, and asked if that would please her. "Yes," said she, "or I can go along with you and Martha." "No," said he, "I have some business to do, and I will call for you afterwards to go with me to the debate," meaning the debate between yourself [Dr. Bennett] and Joseph. To this she consented. So

Kimball and I went to the store together. As we were going along, he said, "Sister Martha, are you willing to do all that the Prophet requires you to do?" I said I believed I was, thinking of course he would require nothing wrong. "Then," said he, "are you ready to take counsel?" I answered in the affirmative, thinking of the great and glorious blessings that had been pronounced upon my head, if I adhered to the counsel of those placed over me in the Lord." Well," said he, "there are many things revealed in these last days that the world would laugh and scoff at; but unto us is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom." He further observed, "Martha, you must learn to hold your tongue, and it will be well with you. You will see Joseph, and very likely have some conversation with him, and he will tell you what you shall do."

When we reached the building [Joseph's store], he led me up some stairs to a small room, the door of which was locked, and on it the following inscription: "Positively no admittance." He observed, "Ah! brother Joseph must be sick, for, strange to say, he is not here. Come down into the tithing-office, Martha." He then left me in the tithing-office, and went out, I know not where. In this office were two men writing, one of whom, William Clayton, I had seen in England; the other I did not know. Young came in, and seated himself before me, and asked where Kimball was. I said he had gone out. He said it was all right. Soon after, Joseph came in, and spoke to one of the clerks, and then went up stairs, followed by Young.

Immediately after, Kimball came in. "Now, Martha," said he, "the Prophet has come; come up stairs." I went, and we found Young and the Prophet alone. I was introduced to the Prophet by Young. Joseph offered me his seat, and, to my astonishment, the moment I was seated, Joseph and Kimball walked out of the room, and left me with Young, who arose, locked the door, closed the window, and drew the curtain.

He then came and sat before me, and said, "This is our private room, Martha." "Indeed, sir," said I, "I must be highly honored to be permitted to enter it." He smiled, and then proceeded—"Sister Martha, I want to ask you a few questions; will you answer them?" "Yes sir," said I. "And will you promise not to mention them to any one?" "If it is your desire, sir," said I, "I will not." "And you will not think any the worse of me for it, will you Martha?" said he. "No, sir" I replied. "Well," said he, "what are your feelings towards me?" I replied, "My feelings are just the same towards you that they ever were, sir." "But, to come to the point more closely," said he, "have not you an affection for me, that, were it lawful and right, you could accept of me for your husband and companion?"

My feelings at that moment were indescribable. God only knows them. What, thought I, are these men, that I thought almost perfection itself, deceivers!" and is all my fancied happiness but a dream? 'Twas even so; but my next thought was, which is the best way for me to act at this time? If I say no, they may do as they

think proper; and to say yes, I never would. So I considered it best to ask for time to think and pray about it. I therefore said, "If it was lawful and right, perhaps I might; but you know, sir, it is not."

"Well, but," said he, "brother Joseph has had a revelation from God [not yet written down] that it is lawful and right for a man to have two wives; for as it was in the days of Abraham, so it shall be in these last days, and whoever is the first that is willing to take up the cross will receive the greatest blessings; and if you will accept of me, I will take you straight to the celestial kingdom; and if you will have me in this world, I will have you in that which is to come, and brother Joseph will marry us here to-day, and you can go home this evening, and your parents will not know any thing about it."

"Sir," said I, "I should not like to do any thing of the kind without the permission of my parents." "Well, but," said he, "you are of age, are you not?" "No, sir," said I, "I shall not be until the 24th of May." "Well," said he, "that does not make any difference. You will be of age before they know, and you need not fear. If you will take my counsel, it will be well with you, for I know it to be right before God, and if there is any sin in it, I will answer for it. But brother Joseph wishes to have some talk with you on the subject—he will explain things—will you hear him?" "I do not mind," said I. "Well, but I want you to say something," said he. "I want time to think about it," said I. "Well," said he, "I will have a kiss, any how[?]", and then rose, and said he would bring Joseph. He then unlocked the door, and took the key, and locked me up alone.

He was absent about ten minutes, and then returned with Joseph. "Well," said Young, "sister Martha would be willing if she knew it was lawful and right before God." "Well, Martha," said Joseph, "it is lawful and right before God—I know it is. Look here, sis; don't you believe in me?" I did not answer. "Well, Martha," said Joseph, "just go ahead, and do as Brigham wants you to—he is the best man in the world, except me." "O!" said Brigham, "then you are as good." "Yes," said Joseph. "Well," said Young, "we believe Joseph to be a Prophet. I have known him near eight years, and always found him the same[?]" "Yes," said Joseph, "and I know that this is lawful and right before God, and if there is any sin in it, I will answer for it before God; and I have the keys of the kingdom, and whatever I bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever I loose on earth is loosed in heaven, and if you will accept of Brigham, you shall be blessed—God shall bless you, and my blessing shall rest upon you; and if you will be led by him, you will do well; for I know Brigham will take care of you, and if he don't do his duty to you, come to me, and I will make him; and if you do not like it in a month or two, come to me, and I will make you free again; and if he turns you off, I will take you on."

"Sir," said I, rather warmly, "it will be too late to think in a month or two after. I want time to think first." "Well, but," said he, "the old proverb is, 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained;' and it would be the greatest blessing that was ever bestowed upon you." "Yes," said Young, "and you will never have reason to repent it—that is, if I do not turn from righteousness, and that I trust I never shall; for I believe God, who has kept me so long, will continue to keep me faithful. Did you ever see me act in any way wrong in England, Martha?" "No, sir," said I. "No," said he; "neither can any one else lay any thing to my charge." "Well, then," said Joseph, "what are you afraid of, sis? Come, let me do the business for you." "Sir," said I, "do let me have a little time to think about it, and I will promise not to mention it to any one." "Well, but look here," said he; "you know a fellow will never be damned for doing the best he knows how." "Well, then," said I, "the best way I know of, is to go home and think and pray about it." "Well," said Young, "I shall leave it with brother Joseph, whether it would be best for you to have time or not."

"Well," said Joseph, "I see no harm in her having time to think, if she will not fall into temptation." "O, sir," said I, "there is no fear of my falling into temptation." "Well, but," said Brigham, "you must promise me you will never mention it to anyone." "I do promise it," said I. "Well," said Joseph, "you must promise me the same." I promised him the same. "Upon your honor," said he, "you will not tell[?]" "No, sir, I will lose my life first," said I. "Well, that will do," said he; "that is the principle we go upon. I think I can trust you, Martha," said he. "Yes," said I, "I think you ought." Joseph said, "She looks as if she could keep a secret." I then rose to go, when Joseph commenced to beg of me again. He said it was the best opportunity they might have for months, for the room was often engaged. I, however, had determined what to do.

“Well,” said Young, “I will see you tomorrow. I am going to preach at the school-house, opposite your house. I have never preached there yet; you will be there, I suppose.” “Yes,” said I.—

The next day being Sunday, I sat down, instead of going to meeting, and wrote the conversation, and gave it to my sister, who was not a little surprised; but she said it would be best to go to meeting in the afternoon. We went, and Young administered the sacrament. After it was over, I was passing out, and Young stopped me, saying, “Wait, Martha, I am coming.” I said, “I cannot; my sister is waiting for me.” He then threw his coat over his shoulders, and followed me out, and whispered, “Have you made up your mind, Martha?” “Not exactly, sir,” said I; and we parted. I shall proceed to a justice of the peace; and make oath to the truth of these statements, and you are at liberty to make what use of them you may think best.

Yours, respectfully,

Martha H. Brotherton.

Sworn to and subscribed before me, this 13th day of July, A. D. 1842.

Du Bouffay Fremon,

Justice of the Peace for St. Louis County.

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1. josephsmithpolygamy.org: “Martha H. Brotherton, Affidavit dated July 13, 1842, Native American Bulletin 1 (July 16, 1842), St. Louis. It was also republished in the Sangamo Journal 10 (July 22, 1842), Springfield, Illinois; the Warsaw Signal, July 23, 1842; New York Herald, 8 (July 25, 27, 1842); and John C. Bennett, The History of the Saints: Or an Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842), 236–40.” ↵

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