

# Martha Brotherton and the Five Ironies

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[VERY ROUGH DRAFT]

## Introduction

Five individuals—Joseph Smith, Heber C. Kimball, Elizabeth Brotherton, Parley P. Pratt, and Brigham Young—each besmirched the character of Martha Brotherton in relation to her claim that she was propositioned for a polygamous marriage by Brigham Young, aided by Heber C. Kimball and Joseph Smith. However, the actions of these five individuals—who either were practicing polygamy at the time of their denunciations or would go on to participate in polygamy—would ultimately vindicate the substance of Martha’s story and hence her character. This document presents the denunciations and the events which would later prove those denunciations misinformed, hollow, or even highly ironic.

## Background

Sometime early in 1842 (or possibly [in late 1841](#)), Martha Brotherton was, according to [the affidavit that would be published in mid 1842](#), propositioned for marriage by Brigham Young.

The affidavit laid out the series of events leading up to and comprising the proposition. The following key points are made:

1. Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young were acting in concert with Joseph Smith to arrange Young's proposition of Martha.
2. Before sharing the nature of the proposition, Martha was made to promise that she would not share the nature of the questions (regarding the proposed marriage and polygamy) that she would be presented with.
3. She was informed that Joseph Smith had received a revelation from God justifying a man in taking two wives, and that "as it was in the days of Abraham, so it shall be in these last days".
4. Accepting the offer to be made a plural wife secured one's place in the celestial kingdom.
5. The marriage would be performed without the knowledge of her parents (Fanny Alger, Partridges, Lucy Walker, etc..??).
6. Pressure was applied to accept the proposition immediately.

Every one of these six points is consistent with the general nature of others of Joseph Smith and other leaders' propositions.

Potentially controversial aspects:

- The purported statement of Brigham Young "I will have a kiss, any how".
- The idea that Martha was locked into the room by Brigham Young as he went to get Joseph.

Neither of these seem beyond the general character of Brigham Young.

*I say, woe to you Eves if you proclaim or entertain feelings against this doctrine! Woe to every female in this Church who says, "I will not submit to the doctrine that God has revealed." You will wake up by and by and say, "I have lost the crown and exaltation I might have gained had I only been faithful to my covenants and the revelations which God gave. I might have been crowned as well as you, but now I must go to another kingdom." Be careful, O, ye mothers in Israel, and do not teach your daughters in future, as many of them have been taught, to marry out of Israel. Woe to you who do it; you will lose your crowns as sure as God lives. Be careful! JOD*

*Emily, if you will not betray me, I will tell you something for your benefit. ' Of course I would keep his secret...he asked me if I would burn it if he would write me a letter. I began to think that was not the proper thing for me to do and I was about as miserable as I ever would wish to be...I went to my room and knelt down and asked my father in heaven to direct me...[At Joseph's insistence] I could not speak to any one on earth...I received no comfort till I went back...to say I could not take a private letter from him. EmilyAndEliza*

Of the marriages, Emily said, "neither of us knew about the other at the time, everything was so secret."

"in early 1842 Heber C. Kimball apparently married his first plural wife." [Hales, The Prophet Secretly Teaches Polygamy](#) (accessed 2018-07-15) "Heber C. Kimball was likely the second authorized polygamist in Nauvoo" [Hales, Other Mormon Leaders Practice Polygamy](#)

Sometime after the proposition event, a rumor began circulating that Martha had been "shut in a room for several days" and that "[various brethren of the 12] had endeavored to induce her to believe in having two wives...".

Joseph Smith would [denounce the rumors](#):

*Pres't. J. Smith spoke upon the subject of the stories respecting Elder Kimball and others, showing the folly and inconsistency of spending any time in conversing about such stories or hearkening to them,*

*for there is no person that is acquainted with our principles would believe such lies, except Sharp the editor of the "Warsaw Signal."*

With the help of John C. Bennett (initiated by him?), Martha prepared [an affidavit which would be published in a number of newspapers](#). Although the affidavit was prepared with the help of John C. Bennett, it seems to have been a truthful telling, [at least in contour](#)<sup>1</sup>

## The Character Assassination

[detail the affidavit against Bennett focusing on Brotherton]

### Heber C. Kimball

[need to discuss]

### Elizabeth Brotherton

To counteract the material that would be published in Bennet's Exposé in late 1842, affidavits undermining the credibility of Martha Brotherton and others were gathered [and published](#).

Among those whose testimony was enlisted to besmirch Martha's character was Elizabeth Brotherton. Elizabeth would sign her name to the testimony of John McIlwrick, husband of Martha and Elizabeth's other sister, Mary (emphasis added):

*I do know that the sister of my wife, Martha Brotherton, is a deliberate liar, and also a wilful inventor of lies; and that she has also to my certain knowledge at sundry times, circulated lies of a base kind, concerning those whom she knew to be innocent of what she alleged against them. She has also stooped to many actions which would be degrading to persons of common decency, such as lying on the top of a young man when he was in bed, and seeking Aristotle's work from a young seaman's box.*

...

Of course, the various LDS leaders had vigorously denied accusations of polygamy and seemed to have completely dismissed the rumors spread about the Brotherton proposition, so it seems reasonable for Elizabeth to side with Church leaders in calling Martha a liar.

### Parley P. Pratt

Later in the same year Parley P. Pratt would write a scathing article condemning Brotherton in the Millennial Star (he doesn't mention her by name, but it's clearly referring to her) as a liar and talking about how it was such a lie that the Brethren would be practicing polygamy. Within 2 years, Elizabeth would become PPP's plural wife, and in 1870 Elizabeth would stand in proxy for Martha to be sealed to BY as a plural wife for eternity. So, Martha was the only person who had been telling the truth, but her name had been dragged through the mud by everyone, including her sister who, at least at the time, didn't know any better. Eventually her sister and PPP had to eat major crow in both entering into a polygamous marriage with one another. And BY comes off looking like a liar and a long-distance sexual predator when he ends up sealing himself to Brotherton in the end anyway. You couldn't make this stuff up. [I have links to all the first hand sources on all this if needed]

### Joseph Smith

As mentioned, Smith denounced the rumours and then was responsible for the spreading of the affidavits against Brotherton's character. Smith had [X] wives by the time the affidavits against Bennett were published.

## Brigham Young

Brigham Young would testify in [the affidavits against Bennett](#) (emphasis added):

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

[would eventually seal Brotherton to himself]

## Vindication

I'm unaware of anyone ever apologizing to Martha Brotherton.

1. Hales indicated that at least the general contours of the affidavit were believable since it was consistent with the proposition pattern that would emerge. In another communication he indicated that we don't know how much of Brotherton's affidavit is accurate (which seems fair to say) but [he did not respond for clarification](#) on *how* Martha's affidavit may have been inaccurate. In general, Martha's affidavit exhibits a level of restraint and lack of embellishment that is not consistent with much of the rest of Bennett's work, so I also think we have little reason to doubt the basic outline of the story. Regardless, the main point of her affidavit was that she was propositioned to take part in a polygamous marriage, and there is little reason to doubt that this actually occurred. ↩

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Resources, research, and thoughts related to the truth-claims, teachings, and culture of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (aka the Mormon Church).