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Dating Joseph Smith's First Nauvoo Sealings

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DATING JOSEPH SMITH'S FIRST NAUVOO SEALINGS

Brian C. Hales

Abstract: In the October 2015 issue of The Journal of Mormon History, Gary Bergera presents a richly illustrated article, "Memory as Evidence: Dating Joseph Smith's Plural Marriages to Louisa Beaman, Zina Jacobs, and Presendia Buell" (95–131). It focuses on a page from the "Historian's Private Journal," which Bergera dates to "specifically September or thereabouts" of 1866 (99). Wilford Woodruff's handwriting on that page describes Joseph Smith's plural marriage sealings and dates his marriage to Louisa Beaman to "May 1840," to Zina Huntington on "October 27, 1840," to Presendia Huntington on "December 11, 1840," and also to Rhoda Richards on "June 12, 1843." The first three dates on the historian's document are important, as Bergera explains: "If accurate, Woodruff's record not only pushes back the beginnings of Joseph Smith earliest Nauvoo plural marriage by a year but it also requires that we reevaluate what we think we know — and how we know it — about the beginnings of LDS polygamy" (95–96). The key question is whether the information on that page can be considered "accurate" in light of other available documents dealing with these plural sealings. During the remaining thirty-four pages of the article, Bergera presents an argument that 1840, not 1841, is the most reliable year for the Prophet's earliest Nauvoo plural unions. This essay examines why his analysis of the records appears to be incomplete and his conclusions problematic.

Within a couple of years of the Saints' settling in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1839, Joseph Smith began secretly teaching celestial and plural marriage. The traditional timeline holds that by the end of 1840, a small number of Church members had been privately advised, and on April 5, 1841, Joseph himself was sealed to his first plural wife in Nauvoo,

Louisa Beaman. The specific chronology of this period is probably not that important. However, researchers who attempt to reconstruct the unfolding of plural marriage are wise to account for all existing historical data.

In his 2015 article, Gary Bergera advocates an 1840 sealing for Joseph Smith and his first three plural wives. His primary evidence is found on a page in the “Historian’s Private Journal.”¹ This new interpretation should not be dismissed out of hand but deserves scrutiny and evaluation for validity, and important questions emerge: How reliable is the documentation supporting 1840? What does Bergera say about the existing documents that support 1841? Does his research include all available manuscripts pertinent to this discussion?

Discounting Joseph F. Smith’s 1869 Affidavits

Multiple documents have been used to support 1841 as the year of Joseph’s first Nauvoo plural marriages. Among them are Joseph F. Smith’s 1869 affidavits, which Bergera acknowledges on several pages (105–07, 114–18, 121).² Within this collection are four affidavits signed by Joseph B. Noble attesting to his role as the officiator in 1841 in Joseph Smith’s sealing to Louisa Beaman.³ In addition, two affidavits were signed by Dimick Huntington — who performed the ceremonies for his sisters Presendia and Zina — in addition to two from Fanny (Dimick’s wife), who served as a witness to both. Furthermore, Zina and Presendia each signed two affidavits.

Firsthand legal attestations by participants and eyewitness are less commonly available to researchers seeking to document the timing of historical events. Nevertheless, Bergera is less impressed, alleging that Joseph F. Smith may have “pressured” (129) the participants into signing them and may have even “composed” the text himself (128). These charges are based solely upon Bergera’s speculation. In 1869–1870, Joseph F. Smith compiled over fifty-eight affidavits and signed

1 This document became available to me in 2012, prior to publishing *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: History and Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013). For reasons discussed in this article, the alternative dates provided were not considered reliable, and since it provided no new information, it was not included. In retrospect, it should have at least been integrated into Appendix B, which lists evidence for the individual plural sealings.

2 See scans of originals at (accessed December 30, 2015, https://archive.org/stream/AffidavitsOnCelestialMarriage/MS_3423_5-6#page/n3/mode/2up).

3 Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 4 vols. MS 3423. LDS Church History Library.

testimonies, and none of the participants left any hint that the apostle composed their statements or pressured them.

Overlooking Important Records Regarding Presendia Huntington

When dealing specifically with Presendia Huntington's sealing date, Bergera declares that besides the 1869 affidavits and an 1881 letter penned by Presendia specifying 1841, "there are no other sources for specifying a December 11, 1841, date for Presendia's plural marriage to Joseph Smith" (128). This is incorrect. Apparently unknown to Bergera is a historical source from 1848, at least eighteen years earlier than the Woodruff document. On "Monday, Dec 11th, 1848," Zina Huntington recorded in her journal: "This morning My sister Presendia moved ... 7 years ago to day since Presendia was sealed to Joseph Smith."⁴ Seven years back from 1848 is 1841. This record is the earliest dating for any of the three sealings and is from a credible source. If trustworthy, it contradicts the "Historian's Private Journal" and may cast doubt on the other 1840 dates recorded by Woodruff. It also counters the suggestion that Joseph F. Smith "pressured" Zina, since this private journal was not written under the influence of anyone but Zina herself.

Within the historical documents supporting a plural sealing between Presendia and the Prophet are seven that provide a year. One (the Historian's Private Journal) lists 1840 and the remaining six specify 1841:

Year	Source	Marriage date	Comments
1842	Bennett, <i>The History of the Saints</i> , 256, lists as one of Joseph's wives "Mrs. B****." Presendia married Norman Buell.	No date	
1846	Nauvoo Temple proxy marriage to Joseph Smith, February 4, 1846. Brown, <i>Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings</i> , 285.	No date	

4 Zina D. H. Young Diary, 1848, in Zina Card Brown Family Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, Monday, December 11, 1848. For a transcript of the entire entry, see <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/JS0694.doc>.

Year	Source	Marriage date	Comments
1848	Zina Huntington Young, Journal, December 11, 1848.	On “Monday, December 11, 1848,” Zina Huntington recorded in her journal: “This morning My sister Presendia moved ... 7 years ago to day since Presendia was sealed to Joseph Smith.”	Earliest of any dates
1866?	Wilford Woodruff, “Historian’s Private Journal.”	“December 11, 1840”	Source unknown
1869	Presendia L. Huntington, Affidavit, May 1, 1869, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:7, 4:7.	December 11, 1841	Firsthand-participant
1869	Dimick Huntington Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:19, 4:19	December 11, 1841	Firsthand-eyewitness
1869	Fanny Huntington Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:21, 4:21	“fall of the year 1841”	Firsthand-eyewitness
1881	Presendia L. Huntington, “Autobiographical Sketch,” 1881, MS 742, CHL.	“in 1841 I entered into the new & everlasting Covenant was sealed to Joseph Smith the Prophet & Seer”	Firsthand-participant
1883	Oliver Huntington, Journal, February 18, 1883.	No date	
1883	Wells, “A Venerable Woman: Presendia Lathrop Kimball,” <i>Woman’s Exponent</i> 11 (April 1, 1883): 163.	No date	

Year	Source	Marriage date	Comments
1887	Malissa Lott dictation to Jenson, "First list of wives," Document #1, Andrew Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.	No date	
1887	Jenson, "Plural Marriage," 233.	December 11, 1841	First published date
1888	Orson F. Whitney, <i>Life of Heber C. Kimball</i> , 1888, 418–19.	No date	

Andrew Jenson's 1887 *Historical Record* Article

Another important source that is underutilized by Bergera is a July 1887 article written by Andrew Jenson entitled "Plural Marriage," which was published in his independent periodical the *Historical Record*.⁵ Bergera mentions it only once in a footnote (105fn20) and seems unaware that it provides specific dates for the sealings of Louisa, Zina, and Presendia — all in 1841.

Might Bergera have assumed that Andrew Jenson used Joseph F. Smith's 1869 collection of affidavits to write his 1887 article, so Jenson's dates would be duplications rather than independent attestations? Multiple observations support that Jenson in 1887 had no access to — and probably no knowledge of the existence of — the Joseph F. Smith collection of affidavits. I here review six such evidences.

First, a June 22, 1887, letter from Zina D. H. Young to Mary Elizabeth Lightner demonstrates that Jenson had approached her directly to learn of her plural marriage experience with the Prophet, rather than relying on the 1869 affidavits. She wrote to Mary: "Brother Andrew Jenson, the historian was in yesterday. He is making quite a success in getting up the ^brief record of^ the wives of President Joseph Smith."⁶ Accordingly, Zina's sealing date and probably all three 1841 dates published by Jenson should be treated as independent verifications coming eighteen years after the 1869 affidavits but providing the same consistent information.

5 Andrew Jenson. "Plural Marriage." *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 222–40.

6 Zina Diantha Huntington Young, Letter to Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, 22 June 1887, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner Collection, MSS 363, Perry Special Collections, Item 13, p. 2. The text marked with carat symbols (^) represents an interlineal handwritten addition in the letter.

Second, Andrew Jenson was not set apart as an “Assistant Historian in Zion” until 1892 and thus had limited access to items in the Church Historian’s Office before that time. This makes it less likely that he would have seen the Smith affidavits.

Third, Jenson included only nine documents in his *Historical Record* article that are found in the Joseph F. Smith collection. However, all of those had been published in “Joseph the Seer’s Plural Marriages” (*Deseret News*, October 19, 1879, 604–05, and October 22, 1879, 12) except one (by David Fullmer) that was printed in the June, 1886, issue of *The Saints’ Advocate*. In other words, all the 1869 affidavits Jenson included had been published before. In fact, the first pages of Jenson’s article follow the 1879 *Deseret News* article almost verbatim.

Fourth, Jenson failed to include information found in the affidavit books that contained more important details than some of the later testimonials that he did include.

Fifth, a July 8, 1869, affidavit signed by Martha McBride Knight affirms her sealing to Joseph, but her name is missing from Jenson’s final list of Joseph’s plural wives. His private notes indicate that he had heard of a “Mrs. Knight” but did not know her first name or her actual status.⁷ Access to the Joseph F. Smith affidavits would have resolved that question and supported her inclusion on the list.

Last, Jenson’s personal journal contains no references to the affidavit books or a time when he visited either the Church Historian’s Office or Apostle Joseph F. Smith to view them.⁸

Documenting Zina Huntington’s Sealing Date

When addressing the sealing date of Zina Huntington, Bergera writes: “The case for the traditional date of October 27, 1841, for Zina’s marriage to Smith rests entirely on Zina’s, Dimick’s, and Fanny’s [Huntington’s] May 1, 1869, affidavits. There are no other known statements from Dimick and/or Fanny” (121), and “All of Zina’s other reminiscences are phrased more generally and tentatively” (118). These statements are also incorrect. As demonstrated, Zina spoke with Jenson in 1887 and is the probable source of the October 27, 1841, sealing date he published in the *Historical Record*.⁹

7 See Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 2:36, 3:36 and Andrew Jenson, “Second revised list of wives,” Document 9, Andrew Jenson Papers (ca. 1871–1942), MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.

8 Andrew Jenson journal for 1886–1887, Church History Library.

9 Andrew Jenson. “Plural Marriage.” *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 233.

Among the historical sources supporting a plural sealing between Joseph and Zina are five that provide a date: one provides an 1840 date (the Historians Private Journal) and four list the year as 1841.

Year	Source	Marriage Date	Comments
1846	Nauvoo Temple proxy marriage to Joseph Smith, February 2, 1846, in Brown, <i>Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings</i> , 284.	No date	
1852	William Hall, Hall, William. <i>The Abominations of Mormonism Exposed</i> ; Cincinnati, OH: I. Hart, 1852, 43–44.	No date	
1866?	Wilford Woodruff, "Historian's Private Journal."	"October 27, 1840"	Source unknown
1869	Zina D. Huntington Affidavit, May 1, 1869, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:5, 4:5,	October 27, 1841	Firsthand-participant
1869	Dimick Huntington Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:19, 4:19	October 27, 1841	Firsthand-eyewitness
1869	Fanny Huntington Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:21, 4:21	"fall of the year 1841"	Firsthand-eyewitness
1877	John D. Lee, <i>Mormonism Unveiled</i> , Edited by W. W. Bishop. St. Louis: Bryan, Brand & Co., 1877, 132.	No date	
1880	Joseph Smith III, Letter to Bro. E. C. Brand, n.d., [likely early 1880s] Letter Press Book 4, 63–67.	No date	
1881	Emmeline B. Wells, "A Distinguished Woman, Zina D. H. Young." <i>Woman's Exponent</i> 10 (December 1, 1881), 99.	No date	
1883	Oliver Huntington, Journal, February 18, 1883, October 27, 1887.	No date	
1887	Malissa Lott, "First list of wives," Document #1, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.	No date	

Year	Source	Marriage Date	Comments
1887	Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 233.	October 27, 1841	First Published date
1892	Jane Wilkie Hooper Blood, <i>Autobiography and Abridged Diary</i> , edited by Ivey Hooper Blood Hill, 241, July 22, 1892.	No date	
1898	John Wight, interviewer, “Evidence from Zina D. Huntington Young, October 1, 1898,” <i>Saints Herald</i> 52 (January 11, 1905): 28–30.	No date	

Discounting Joseph B. Noble

When specifically discussing Joseph Smith’s sealing to Louisa Beaman, Bergera identifies one additional manuscript that supports an 1840 year — a secondhand account from Charles L. Walker’s diary. He also spends four pages quoting from Noble’s Temple Lot deposition in 1892 (108–11). While the testimony is interesting, devoting such space to reproduce the transcription is surprising, since Noble consistently places the sealing in either 1841 or 1842, but never in 1840.

Perhaps Bergera included it as evidence that Noble’s memory was not clear in 1892: “Noble was unable to specify consistently the year of his performing Smith’s plural marriage” (111). However, an unclear memory in 1892 says nothing of Noble’s ability to accurately recall details decades earlier, including his 1869 signed affidavits stating that the union occurred in 1841.

Unfortunately, Bergera’s transcription of Noble’s Temple Lot testimony skips questions 617–642 (111). In question 627 Noble is asked: “Do you mean that it [the plural sealing] was performed in Nauvoo?” and he answers, “Yes Sir.” Question 628 poses: “At whose house?” to which Noble responds: “At mine.” While Noble is unable to recall exactly the date he moved to Nauvoo, Bergera’s research discloses that he “moved his family, including presumably Louisa, to Nauvoo sometime after September 1841” (112). So if the ceremony occurred at Noble’s house in Nauvoo, it would of necessity have been in 1841 or later.¹⁰

10 Franklin D. Richards recorded that the sealing occurred “in May — I think the 5th day in 1841 during the evening under an Elm tree in Nauvoo. The Bride disguised in a coat and hat.” (Franklin D. Richards Journal, January 22, 1869, MS 1215, LDS CHL.)

A May 1840 sealing date is also inconsistent with Bergera's reconstruction of the chronology surrounding Louisa Beaman's move into the Noble household. He dates her change in domicile as "August 29 or September 29, 1840" (112). Noble's biography states:

A young, intelligent woman by the name of Louisa Beman, a sister of Elder Noble's wife, *was at that time living in the family*. To her the Prophet paid his attentions with a view of yielding obedience to the principle of plural marriage. The girl, after being convinced that the principle was true, consented to become the Prophet's wife, and on April 5, 1841, she was married to him, Elder Noble officiating.¹¹

If Louisa was not taught about plural marriage until she was living with the Nobles, she could not have been sealed on the date found on the Woodruff's document.

Bergera concludes: "Noble's memory (beginning some twenty-five-plus years after the event) shifts between 1840 and 1841 as the year of Nauvoo's first plural marriage." Claiming that Noble experienced a "memory shift" goes beyond the available evidence. My research has identified twenty-six documents that could be first- or secondhand accounts verifying the Smith-Beaman plural marriage; fourteen provide a date for the ceremony. Of these, two (including the "Historian's Private Journal") place it in 1840, nine list 1841, one mentions 1841 or 1842, and two identify the "fall of 1840" as the first time Noble *learned* of plural marriage from Joseph Smith (precluding a May 1840 sealing).¹² Eight of the documents supporting an 1841 year were recorded in private records composed before the first publication in 1887 of Louisa's name and the sealing date, which was recorded by Jenson in the *Historical Record*. It is impossible to tell how many of these eight records quoted Noble directly, but there is a remarkable consistency in the year recorded in these documents:

Year	Source	Marriage Date	Comments
1842	Bennett, <i>The History of the Saints</i> , 256: "Miss L***** B*****."	No date	

11 Andrew Jenson. "Plural Marriage." *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 239; emphasis added.

12 See <http://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Noble-Recollections.pdf>.

Year	Source	Marriage Date	Comments
1843?	[Oliver Olney?], uncatalogued and untitled manuscript, Western Americana MSS, Beinecke Library, Yale University, folder labeled "Nauvoo Female Society." Some of the writing on the document is dated October 18, 1843.	No date	
1866?	Wilford Woodruff, "Historian's Private Journal"	"May 1840"	Source unknown
1869	Franklin D. Richards, Journal, January 22, 1869.	"Br. Joseph B. Noble being the master of ceremonies was present and During the visit related he performed the first sealing ceremony in this Dispensation in which he united Sister Louisa Beman to the Prop[h]et Joseph in May I think the 5th day in 1841"	Earliest account directly quoting Noble
1869	Joseph B. Noble, quoted in Scott G. Kenney, ed., <i>Wilford Woodruff's Journal</i> , 6:452, February 22, 1869.	"Joseph B. Nobles said that he performed the first Marriage Ceremony according to the Patriarchal order of Marriage ever performed in this dispensation By sealing Eliza Beman to Joseph Smith on the 6 day of May 1841."	
1869	Joseph B. Noble, Affidavit, June 26, 1869, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:3.	"fifth day of April A.D. 1841"	Firsthand-eyewitness

Year	Source	Marriage Date	Comments
1869	Joseph B. Noble, Affidavit, June 26, 1869, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 4:1.	"fifth day of April A.D. 1841"	Firsthand-eyewitness
1869	Joseph B. Noble, Affidavit, June 26, 1869, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:38	"in the fall of the year A.D. 1840 Joseph Smith, taught him the principle of Celestial marriage or a 'plurality of wives'"	Firsthand
1869	Joseph B. Noble, Affidavit, June 26, 1869, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 4:38	"in the fall of the year A.D. 1840 Joseph Smith, taught him the principle of Celestial marriage or a 'plurality of wives'"	Firsthand
1869	George A. Smith, Letter to Joseph Smith III, October 9, 1869.	"5 th day of April, 1841"	
1874	William Clayton, Affidavit, February 16, 1874.	No date	
1876	Ann Eliza Webb Young, <i>Wife No. 19</i> , 72.	No date	
1878	Orson Pratt, quoted in "Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith." <i>Millennial Star</i> 40, no. 49 (December 9, 1878): 769–74; continued in 40, no. 50 (December 16, 1878): 785–89; page 788. Date of sealing given but Louisa's name not provided.	"April 5 th , 1841"	First published date
1880	Joseph B. Noble, quoted in Karl A. Larson and Katherine Miles Larson, eds., <i>Diary of Charles Lowell Walker</i> , 2:515.	"sealed Louisa Beeman to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1840"	

Year	Source	Marriage Date	Comments
1880s	Joseph Smith III, Letter to E. C. Brand, n.d. [likely early 1880s] Letter Press Book #4, pp. 63–67.	“sealed April 5, 1841”	
1883	Almera Johnson, Affidavit, August 1, 1883.	No date	
1883	Joseph Noble, Address, June 11, 1883, at Centerville, Utah, stake conference, in Andrew Jenson “Plural Marriage,” <i>Historical Record</i> , 233.	No date	
1883	Erastus Snow, St. George Utah Stake [Conference], General Minutes, Sunday, June 17, 1883, 2 p.m., LR 7836 11, Reel 1.	No date	
1883	Erastus Snow, quoted in Karl A. Larson and Katherine Miles Larson, eds., <i>Diary of Charles Lowell Walker</i> , 2:610.	No date	
1887	Eliza R. Snow, “First list of wives,” Document #1, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.	No date	
1887	Erastus Snow, Affidavit, in Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 232.	“April 5, 1841”	
1887	Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 239; biography of Joseph B. Noble.	“April 5, 1841”	
1892	Joseph Bates Noble, Testimony at the Temple Lot Case, Part 3, pp. 432, 436, questions 793, 799, 861; sentence order reversed.	1841 to 1842 with emphasis on 1841	

Year	Source	Marriage Date	Comments
1900	Benjamin Winchester, Testimony to Joseph Smith III, Council Bluffs, Iowa, November 27, 1900, Community of Christ Archives.	No date	
1900	Nauvoo Temple Proxy Marriage to Joseph Smith, January 14, 1846. Brown, <i>Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings</i> , 281.	No date	
1905	Johnson, <i>My Life's Review</i> , 96.	No date	

Accepting the Woodruff Document Information Uncritically

Bergera uncritically promotes the reliability of the dates found on the Woodruff document in contrast to overwhelming evidence for the alternative dates. He acknowledges that Woodruff's source or sources of information regarding the 1840 year are unknown but assures his readers, "Woodruff was historically conscious and well-positioned regarding the need to record significant events in LDS History as any LDS Church member" (99).

Woodruff was not present for any of the original four sealings, so he had no firsthand knowledge of the ceremonies. Yet, nowhere does Bergera address the question regarding who might have shared accurate information with Woodruff in 1866 (or sometime before) regarding these sealings. Perhaps members of the Huntington family could have provided accurate dates for Zina and Presendia, but it is less certain that they would have known of Louisa Beaman. Joseph B. Noble could have provided Louisa's date but probably not the Huntington's.

A review of Woodruff's personal journal shows that he heard Noble speak on September 19, 1865, for ten minutes and again on November 25 1866.¹³ The second date is later than the one Bergera proposes for the record, but the earlier date would have required only Woodruff's memory regarding the Louisa Beaman sealing to be correct a year later. Woodruff also held conversations regarding Indian affairs with

13 Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898*. Typescript, 9 vols., Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–85, 6:248 and 6:303.

Dimick Huntington on January 1, 1862.¹⁴ The next reference to Dimick is May 24, 1868, when he spoke in a church meeting.¹⁵ Woodruff records a visit with Zina Huntington Young in gathering with several other people on April 9, 1861, but does not mention her again until September 6, 1877.¹⁶ Fanny Huntington and Presendia Huntington Buell Kimball are not referenced.

These are the only participants in the first three sealings who were still living in 1866, so if Woodruff received accurate information, it would have had to come from another source or in a conversation that he did not mention in his journal. Beyond the participants, one might postulate that Brigham Young or Heber C. Kimball would have known of the plural unions, but it is less certain they would have known the exact day and year. The inclusion of Rhoda Richards's 1843 ceremony as the last item on the document is fodder for additional inquiry, but none of this is discussed in Bergera's article.

The Unreliable Date of 1866

As already noted, Bergera dates the information supporting 1840 sealings to "specifically September or thereabouts" of 1866 (99). This dating is based partially on the observation that the information regarding the four plural wives is written in the Historian's Private Journal immediately after — and on the same page — as an entry dated July 1, 1866. Regrettably, Bergera does not tell us of the date of the entry immediately *after* the recording of the four sealing dates. Starting on the following page is a transcription in different colored ink dated November 18, 1874.

Based, then, on the surrounding entry dates, the information penned by Woodruff regarding Joseph Smith's plural wives was written sometime between July 1, 1866, and November 18, 1874. There is no way to know exactly when, but Bergera theorizes: "Woodruff's record may have been prompted by the visits to the Salt Lake Valley of three proselytizing missionaries — including one of Joseph Smith's own sons — of the recently formed Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS)" (99). This is indeed a possibility.

However, a more probable hypothesis is that it was not written in 1866 because there is no record of anyone in that year inquiring about the identities of Joseph's plural wives and the dates when the

14 Ibid., 6:4.

15 Ibid., 6:408.

16 Ibid., 5:565, 7:375.

sealings occurred. However, if we fast-forward three years, we find the affidavit books being compiled by Joseph F. Smith and filled with all of this information for all four women, except that the sealing year for Louisa, Zina, and Presendia is 1841. Joseph B. Noble's statement regarding Louisa Beaman is recorded on page 3 of affidavit book 1, Zina Huntington's signed statement is on page 5, and Presendia's is on page 7. On May 1, 1869, Rhoda Richards signed an affidavit on page 17 identifying June 12, 1843, as the date of her sealing to the Prophet.¹⁷

In contrast to Bergera's reconstruction, it seems likely that Woodruff (or his informant) viewed the affidavit book and simply misremembered the year of the first three sealings when that information was recorded (or conveyed), which may have been any time before the 1874 entry.

Discounting Recollections

Bergera admonishes his readers to "consider more carefully our reliance on human memories as primary historical sources" (96). This is wise counsel but is surprising in light of his willingness to accept with little scrutiny what he believed to be an 1866 source. No official record of these early 1840s sealings was made at the time they were performed, so an 1866 record would not be contemporaneous. Instead it would rely on a human memory as a primary historical source. It is unclear what other options Bergera advocates to document the chronology of these sealings.

In summary, multiple historical records discuss the sealing year of Joseph Smith to plural wives Louisa Beaman, Zina Huntington, and Presendia Huntington. The "Historian's Private Journal" highlighted by Gary Bergera contains an entry from an unknown source scribed by Wilford Woodruff at an unknown time and specifying 1840. One additional secondhand account places the Beaman marriage in that year. In contrast, all other known sources — including an 1848 journal entry by Zina regarding Presendia and affidavits from the participants themselves — support 1841 as the first year of Joseph Smith Nauvoo plural sealings. Observers are left to decide for themselves the year that is best supported by available historical data.

Brian C. Hales is the author of six books dealing with polygamy, most recently the three-volume, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History and*

17 Rhoda Richards, Affidavit, May 1, 1869, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:17, 4:17, published in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage*, 75.

Theology (Greg Kofford Books, 2013). *His Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto* received the “Best Book of 2007 Award” from the John Whitmer Historical Association. He has presented at numerous meetings and symposia and published articles in *The Journal of Mormon History*, *Mormon Historical Studies*, and *Dialogue* as well as contributing chapters to *The Persistence of Polygamy* series. Brian works as an anesthesiologist at the Davis Hospital and Medical Center in Layton, Utah, and has served as the President of the Utah Medical Association.

