

Chapter 12

Militant Nonmembers Launched a Third Conspiracy against Joseph

In the previous chapter it was learned that M. G. Eaton and A. B. Williams made affidavits on March 27, 1844, warning of a second conspiracy to libel and murder the Smiths. These were published in the Church's official paper (see *Times and Seasons* 5 [May 15, 1844]: 541–542). The raging charges of the first two conspiracy groups so inflamed public sentiments that yet a third conspiracy group soon formed. This third group, comprised of militant nonmembers, was eager to overthrow Joseph and all he represented. They hoped for a chance to fight Church members until Joseph's followers were either all dead or were forced to abandon Nauvoo.

M. G. Eaton swore in his affidavit that he had heard Dr. Robert D. Foster declare that Joseph had come to Foster's home while the doctor was away. He had eaten a meal with Mrs. Foster and had preached "the spiritual wife system to her [and] had endeavoured to seduce her" (*ibid.*, 542).

After Joseph heard of Foster's allegations against him, he was incensed and quickly went to question Dr. and Mrs. Foster on March 23. He took two witnesses with him—William Clayton and Alexander Neibaur—to the Foster home.¹ Upon arriving at the Foster residence, Joseph and his witnesses were informed that Dr. and Mrs. Foster were not at home. They were told that Dr. Foster had gone to Appanoose, a village in the northern part of Hancock

1. Dr. Foster and his wife, Sarah, owned a spacious three-story brick building located on the northeast corner of Mulholland and Bluff (Woodruff) Streets, on the block directly east of the Temple. The large structure evidently served as both home to Dr. and Mrs. Foster, and as a hotel, just as the Mansion House served Joseph and Emma (see Richard N. Holzapfel and T. Jeffery Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo 1839–1846*, 41–42).

County, and that Mrs. Foster had gone to visit a Mrs. Gillman, in the vicinity of Nauvoo.

**Joseph Interviewed
Doctor Foster's Wife, Sarah**

According to William Clayton, he, Joseph, and Alexander Neibaur then went to the Gillman home and found Mrs. Foster. They were able to converse with her about the slanderous plural marriage charges her husband was making against Joseph. The following “extract from William Clayton’s journal” is found in the official history published by the Utah LDS Church. It states:

President Smith's Interview With Mrs. Foster.

We went down there and saw her, [Mrs. Foster]. President Joseph asked Sister Foster if she ever in her life knew him [to be] guilty of an immoral or indecent act. She answered, “No.” He then explained his reasons for asking; which were, he had been informed that Dr. Foster had stated that Joseph made propositions to his wife calculated to lead her astray from the path of virtue; and then asked if ever he had used any indecent or insulting language to her. She answered, “Never.” He further asked if he ever preached anything like the “plurality of wife” doctrine to her other than what he had preached in public [condemning it]? She said, “No.” He asked her if he ever proposed to have illicit intercourse with her, and especially when he took dinner during the doctor’s absence. She said, “No.” After some further conversation on the subject, we left. Mrs. Gillman was present all the time. (LDS *History of the Church* 6:271)

There are two important points in the above extract that need to be discussed. The first point is that Joseph asked Mrs. Foster “if he ever preached anything like the ‘plurality of wife’ doctrine to her other than what he had preached in public [condemning it]?” The second point is the propriety of Joseph dining at the Foster’s home while Dr. Foster was not present.

Point Number One—Mrs. Foster Contradicted Her Husband’s Claims. According to William Clayton, Joseph explained to Mrs. Foster his reason for calling upon her. Note that Joseph questioned her in the presence of three witnesses—Mrs. Gillman, William Clayton, and Alexander Neibaur. Joseph asked Mrs. Foster “if he ever preached anything like the ‘plurality of wife’ doctrine to her other than what he had preached in public?” Mrs. Foster answered, “No.”

Mrs. Foster’s answer is very revealing. No sermon by Joseph printed during his lifetime even remotely suggested that he was in favor of plural marriage. In fact, he was noted for his denunciation of that false doctrine. Thus, Mrs. Foster’s above reply of “No” to Joseph indicates he did not preach plurality of wives to her and that Dr. Foster’s charges against him to the contrary were slanderous fabrications.

Point Number Two—Joseph’s Meal at the Foster Residence. Joseph did not deny that he ate a meal at the Foster’s. However, like Joseph and Emma, Dr. and Mrs. Foster lived in their hotel. Therefore, Joseph would have eaten that meal at the Foster’s hotel (see Richard N. Holzappel and T. Jeffery Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo 1839–1846: Historic Photographs and Guide*, 41, 42). According to one author it was the custom in Illinois in that day for three or four meals a day to be served at hotels such as the Mansion House and the Foster Hotel. It is written:

The Mansion House, incidentally, was a fine lodging for travelers in early Illinois. . . . Quincy [Illinois] boasted a hotel four stories high. . . . The cost of lodging in such hotels in the late 1830s in Illinois was around two dollars per week, which included four meals per day: breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper. (George W. Givens, *In Old Nauvoo: Everyday Life in the City of Joseph*, 49)

Persons who were not renting rooms often ate at such hotel dining tables. For a fee, anyone could go to a hotel and eat. For instance, Joseph (who lived on the “flat” down by the river) often rode his horse the mile or so to upper Nauvoo, to the top of the

hill where the Temple was under construction. Joseph frequently went there to observe progress on the Temple, which was being built next door to Dr. Foster's impressive three-story hotel that was one block east of the Temple. It would not have been out of the ordinary for Joseph to have eaten at the Foster Hotel while he was overseeing work on the Temple or, as mayor, visiting any of the other city offices in upper Nauvoo.

In spite of Mrs. Foster's reassurance to Joseph that he had not taught polygamy privately to her (as her husband claimed), Dr. Foster continued to circulate false plural marriage charges against Joseph. The *LDS History of the Church* records that on April 13, 1844, Joseph took legal action against Foster. The *History* records:

I preferred the following charge before the High Council against Dr. Robert D. Foster "for unchristianlike conduct in general, for abusing my character privily, for throwing out slanderous insinuations against me, for conspiring against my peace and safety, for conspiring against my life, for conspiring against the peace of my family, and for lying."
(*LDS History of the Church* 6:333)

Joseph and Emma Regarded the Threats against the Smith Family as Being Very Serious

A. B. Williams stated in his affidavit that he had heard Joseph H. Jackson say that "he should not be surprised if in two weeks there should be not one of the Smith family left in Nauvoo" (*Times and Seasons* 5 [May 15, 1844]: 541; see also *LDS History of the Church* 6:278). Joseph and Emma had been through too much persecution to take Joseph Jackson's prediction lightly. The statement that within two weeks the entire Smith family could be killed must have brought back frightening memories of what mob persecution had already cost their family.

Joseph and Emma's adopted infant son, Joseph, had died as a result of the kidnapping of Joseph by an angry mob. The baby had died in March 1831 while Joseph and Emma and their adopted twin babies, Joseph and Julia Murdock Smith, were living with the John Johnson family in Hiram, Ohio. One cold, wintry night, when the babies were ill with measles and Joseph and Emma were

overly tired and sleeping, a mob invaded their bedroom. Joseph awoke as they were dragging him through the open doorway and tried to fight off his attackers. They subdued him and carried him outside where he was dragged and dropped upon the frozen, icy ground. He was then beaten, a tooth was broken, and he was covered with hot tar and feathers. The mobbers had come into the bedroom through an outside door that led into the room. Before the door could be closed, frigid air rushed into the room. Their sick baby boy was exposed to the cold, which caused a relapse, and he died a few days later (see Inez Smith Davis, *The Story of the Church*, 155).

Still vivid also in Joseph and Emma's memories was a scene of horror that they were forced to witness in November 1838 at Far West, Missouri. They watched their little children abused, and they were powerless to interfere as soldiers used swords to separate their little ones from Joseph, who was a prisoner. He, with other Church men, had been sentenced to be shot the morning of November 2.

When the time came for him to be shot, the order was never issued, but some soldiers stationed near the prisoners nevertheless cruelly fired their guns so the prisoners' families would think they had been killed. Emma was only a few blocks away in their home with the children—four-month-old Alexander; Julia, who was seven years old; Joseph III, who was almost six; and Frederick, who was almost two and a half.

When Emma heard the gunshots, she began to weep, for she thought that Joseph had been shot and killed. She was later surprised to see a wagon stop in front of her home and Joseph climb out. Armed soldiers surrounded Joseph as they came to the door and entered the house. Joseph later recalled:

We were taken to the town, into the public square, and before our departure from Far West, we, after much entreaty, were suffered to see our families, being attended all the while with a strong guard. I found my wife and children in tears, who expected we were shot by those who had sworn to take our lives, and that they should see me no more. When I entered my house, they clung to my garments, their eyes

streaming with tears, while mingled emotions of joy and sorrow were manifest in their countenances. I requested to have a private interview with them a few minutes, but this privilege was denied me. I was then obliged to take my departure, but who can realize my feelings which I experienced at that time, to be torn from my companion, and leaving her surrounded with monsters in the shape of men, and my children too, not knowing how their wants would be supplied; to be taken far from them in order that my enemies might destroy me when they thought proper to do so. My partner wept, my children clung to me, and were only thrust from me by the swords of the guards who guarded me. I felt overwhelmed while I witnessed the scene, and could only recommend them to the care of that God whose kindness had followed me to the present time, and who alone could protect them, and deliver me from the hands of my enemies, and restore me to my family. I was then taken back to the camp, and then I with the rest of my brethren . . . started off for Independence . . . under a strong guard commanded by Generals Lucas and Wilson. (*Millennial Star* 16:525; RLDS *History of the Church* 2:258–259)

Lyman Wight was a prisoner with Joseph and others, who were being transferred by wagon from Far West to Independence, Missouri. Wight saw the guards take Joseph from the wagon and into his home. When Joseph was returning to the wagon, little Joseph III was holding onto him and crying. Wight told how he witnessed one of the guards mistreat Joseph's son. Apostle Wight swore under oath:

When passing his [Joseph's] own house, he was taken out of the wagon and permitted to go into the house, but not without a strong guard, and not permitted to speak with his family but in the presence of his guard and his eldest son, Joseph, about six or eight years old, hanging to the tail of his coat, crying father, is the mob going to kill you? The guard said to him, "you damed [*sic*] little brat, go back, you will see your father no more." (*Times and Seasons* 4 [July 15, 1843]: 268)

Emma closely guarded her children because she was ever aware of a possible attack by a mob or a kidnapping by law officers upon her husband. If that should happen, she did not want her children to be in harm's way. Joseph III revealed that he and his sister and brothers always slept near their parents. He wrote:

The sleeping room I shared with my brothers was never more than a door away from where Father and Mother slept. Because of the great love and concern Mother had for her children she never wanted us far from her, in order that she might be on hand to take care of us herself in case of necessity. (Mary Audentia Smith Anderson, *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III (1832–1914)*, 35)

Joseph III stated that his mother always kept the children close until after their father was killed. He said under oath:

The children slept in the room adjoining their mother and father's sleeping room. They were adjoining rooms with an open door between. . . . My mother never allowed us to sleep away from her very far until after father's death. (*The Temple Lot Case*, 486, 488)

After all the persecution Joseph and Emma had endured, Joseph Jackson's prediction that "in two weeks there should be not one of the Smith family left in Nauvoo" was taken very seriously by them—for they knew him well. However, they were determined not only to guard their children from physical harm, but they were committed also to guard the Church from the threat of false doctrine brought on by the apostate doctrine of polygamy.

Mob Mentality of Nonmembers Worsened

In chapter 11 it was revealed that M. G. Eaton and A. B. Williams had made affidavits that a second group of conspirators planned to harm the entire Smith family. Thomas Sharp, editor of the nearby *Warsaw Signal*, used that news to fan the flames of prejudice against the Church. Sharp's inflammatory editorials helped generate the third conspiracy against Joseph by encourag-

ing a mob mentality among the nonmember populace. He wrote:

FROM THE HOLY CITY.—We have rumors of war from the city of the saints; but our information is too indefinite to allow us to risk a detail. It is said however that a difficulty originated some time since between the Prophet and some of his most conspicuous followers, in relation to the doctrine of spiritual wives. These persons of course became odious to his excellency [Joseph Smith], and to quiet them, two individuals [M. G. Eaton and A. B. Williams] were induced to make oath that they [the Laws, Fosters, Higbees, and others] were joined in conspiracy to poison [murder] the Prophet. This of course has created quite a sensation, but what it will end in, we are unable to conjecture. (*Warsaw Signal* [April 3, 1844], 3)

As the storm against the Church quickly gathered, Editor Sharp published his intentions to vex Joseph Smith and the Church as much as possible:

As heretofore, the *Signal* will take a decided stand in opposition to the encroachments of the fanatical band [of Mormons], located in our midst. Believing that the head of the Mormon Church [Joseph Smith], is capable of any outrage, which can procure for him supremacy over our county—believing that the only check upon his presumption, is continued vigilance, and the only safeguard of our liberties, is determined resistance; we will faithfully expose his usurpations, and undauntedly rebuke them. (*ibid.* [April 10, 1844], 7)

William Law and his conspirators furnished plenty of articles for publication in Sharp's newspaper to further defame Joseph so that they could topple him and the apostles and maneuver themselves into power. Their articles accused Joseph of polygamy and many other crimes. Editor Sharp, true to his promised intentions to harm Joseph, published many articles which had been written to destroy Joseph Smith and the Church. The articles caused more

and more nonmembers to view Church members with fear and suspicion. There was even talk of a military-style extermination campaign to drive the Church members out of Nauvoo.

Word spread across the nation that serious problems existed between the Saints at Nauvoo and their nonmember neighbors. An example of this is found in an article republished in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* from the *New York Sun*:

The Mormons—Horrible Conspiracy!

There are serious difficulties growing up between the people of Illinois and the Mormons, and knowing the exciteable and irritable tempers in that region of country, and their propensity to take the law into their own hands, we have great apprehension for the results. We recently noticed the fact that a large meeting had been held at Carthage. . . . The Warsaw Message [edited by Thomas Gregg] holds forth the following language:—

“We see no use in attempting to disguise the fact that many in our midst contemplate a total extermination of that people [the Mormons]; that the thousands of defenceless women and children, aged and infirm, who are congregated at Nauvoo, must be driven out, aye, driven, scattered, like leaves before the autumn blast.” But what good citizens, let us ask, what lover of his country and his race, but contemplates such an event with horror!—N. Y. Sun. (*Nauvoo Neighbor*, April 10, 1844)

**Another Preposterous Slander
against Joseph Fans the Flames**

No rumor accusing Joseph of wrongdoings was too ridiculous to be printed in the *Warsaw Signal*. An example of Sharp’s rush to print unsubstantiated claims is an article that stated that Joseph had cast Emma out of their home. Editor Thomas Sharp published:

The Last from Nauvoo.—We learn direct from Nauvoo, that Jo Smith, on Friday last [April 12] turned his wife out of doors. “Sister Emma’s” offence was, that she was in conversation with Mr. E. [Ebenezer] Robinson, and

refused, or hesitated to tell the Prophet on what subjects they were engaged. The man of God, thereupon, flew into a holy passion, and turned the partner of his bosom, and the said Robinson into the street—All of which was done in broad day-light, and no doubt in the most approved style.
(*Warsaw Signal* [April 17, 1844], 2)

A week later Editor Sharp published that Emma Smith, wife of Joseph, had passed down the river on the previous Sunday on the steamboat *Hibernia*. It was also reported that prior to leaving Nauvoo, Emma had become reconciled to Joseph, who had “turned her out of his house” (see *Warsaw Signal*, April 24, 1844).

Joseph did not cast Emma out of the Mansion House on April 12 as Sharp claimed. If that had happened, dozens would have witnessed such an event. There was a huge influx of nonmember and member visitors in Nauvoo on that date as a result of the Church conference that had commenced on April 6 and continued through April 9. The throngs of people at the Church conference services were estimated to have numbered from fifteen to twenty thousand people (see *Nauvoo Neighbor* [April 10, 1844], 2). For days Nauvoo was teeming with conference visitors from Quincy, Alton, Warsaw, Fort Madison, and other places, who had not yet departed the city. The Mansion House was crowded with visitors day and night.

It is true that Emma Smith did board a steamboat at Nauvoo and took passage to St. Louis. But, she was not fleeing from Joseph. Emma was a competent businesswoman who had previously gone to St. Louis to shop, and she was doing so again. The newly built Mansion House was greatly in need of furnishings and Emma was naturally anxious to shop in St. Louis. She left Nauvoo accompanied by her nephew, Lorenzo Wasson, by steamboat on April 20, 1844, and returned to Nauvoo five days later, on April 25 (see *LDS History of the Church* 6:342, 343). Joseph III recalled his mother making the trip to St. Louis, with these words:

Mother was to be installed as landlady, and soon made a trip to Saint Louis for the purpose of securing such furniture, curtains, bed linen, table napery, dishes, and utensils as

were needed to properly equip and operate a hostelry of its kind. . . . It has been charged by certain ones advocating plural marriage that she was a thorn in his side, opposing his policies, and leading him an ill life. This is absolutely not true. I was old enough at the time to know what was going on around me, and was closely associated with both my parents. The sleeping room I shared with my brothers was never more than a door away from where Father and Mother slept. Because of the great love and concern Mother had for her children she never wanted us far from her, in order that she might be on hand to take care of us herself in case of necessity. So, I am sure that if there ever were angry words between my parents I should have known it, and I can truthfully state that nothing of the kind ever occurred. Father was a kindly man, and emphatically a home-loving one, whose wife and children were very dear to him and who was, in turn, loved and respected by them. (Mary Audentia Smith Anderson, *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III (1832–1914)*, 34, 35)

And so the rumors continued to multiply and spread. In this case, so eager were the enemies of the Church to see fault where there was none that they misconstrued an otherwise happy shopping trip by Emma to decorate her home and business as evidence that she had been forced from her home.

Jeremiah Smith Wrote in Defense of Joseph

News of Emma's purported ejection from her home and subsequent exodus upon the Mississippi River came as a surprise to Jeremiah Smith. While rooming at the Mansion House, he had witnessed no such domestic dispute between Joseph and Emma. He wrote the following statement in order to exonerate Joseph of the charge of having cast Emma out:

Friends and Fellow-Citizens: . . .

As to the report of Gen. [Joseph] Smith's spiritual wives—if I understand the name of spiritual wife—it is all

false. I have been lodging at Smith's house some time and if there was any thing of the kind I must have seen something of it going on. I have seen a note in the Warsaw Signal stating difficulties between Joseph Smith and his wife, not long since. I was at his house when this thing was said to have taken place. I saw Mrs. Smith start to St. Louis, and when she returned home, and they had every appearance of love and friendship. I will say to you the statement is all false and without grounds. This I will certify on oath.

JEREMIAH SMITH, Sen, (*Nauvoo Neighbor*, May 1, 1844)

Joseph's Cousin Almira Covey Exonerated Joseph

On July 18, 1844, three weeks after Joseph's death, his first cousin Almira Mack Covey, who was a member of the Church and lived at Nauvoo, wrote to her sister who resided in Michigan. Almira contradicted the charge that had by now been republished throughout the nation that Joseph had abused Emma by casting her out of the home and she had left Nauvoo. Almira, who was Lucy Mack Smith's niece, wrote:

Joseph's wife is not very well, the report you heard about her being turned out of doors is false; there never could a man use a wife better than he has her! I presume you hear a great deal that is not true; but what I have written you is correct. (*The Saints' Herald* 81 [September 25, 1934]: 1229)

Summary

Brigham Young and those in his conspiracy, and William Law and those in his conspiracy battled Joseph and each other for control of the Church. As they did so, they both sought to bring Joseph down by declaring he had plural wives. They and Dr. John C. Bennett used the same tactics and sometimes named the same women whom they claimed were Joseph's wives. Their twin conspiracies fanned the flames of mobocracy that generated yet a third threat to Joseph Smith and the Church.