

Agnes Mouton Coolbrith

(Sealed January 6, 1842)



Born July 9, 1808, the third of eight children, Agnes Moulton Coolbrith joined the church in Boston on June 26, 1832. She traveled to Ohio and although she was eight years older than Don Carlos Smith, brother of the Prophet, they wed on July 30, 1835. Two years later on May 7, they left for Missouri where they stayed until February 1839. By November they were situated in Nauvoo. Two years later on August 7, 1841, Don Carlos passed away.¹

Five months later, Joseph Smith was sealed to Agnes. Brigham Young's journal for January 6, 1842, records: "I was taken in to the lodge, J Smith *was* Agness."² The word "was" probably stands for "wed and sealed."³

Whether it was for time, eternity, or time and eternity is not known.

Contradictory evidence exists concerning Don Carlos's feelings toward plural marriage. An 1892 account from Mary Ann West, who lived with Agnes in Nauvoo after Don Carlos's death, states: "She [Agnes] told me herself she was [married to Joseph Smith]. ... She said it was the wish of her husband, Don Carlos, that she should marry him [Joseph]."⁴

In 1890, Ebenezer Robinson quoted him saying: "Any man who will teach and practice the doctrine of spiritual wifery will go to hell, I don't care if it is my brother Joseph." Robinson added: "He was a bitter opposer of the 'spiritual wife' doctrine."⁵ The recollection is problematic because there is no contemporary evidence that anyone was using the term "spiritual wifery" in 1841.

Agnes Coolbrith married a LDS Church member, William Pickett, after Joseph Smith's death. Brother Pickett eventually left the church and transported his family to California. In 1876, just months before her death, Agnes was visited by David and Alexander Smith, who were on a missionary journey promoting their anti-polygamist RLDS religion. Undoubtedly they were surprised by what their Aunt Agnes had to say.

Lucy Walker visited Agnes's daughter, Ina, eight years later and was warmly received. Concerning the visit, Lucy wrote:

I had a very pleasant visit at Oakland, [California] with Ina [Coolbrith, the daughter of Agnes Coolbrith], who received me with much tenderness and affection. ... From her, I learned many things I was glad to know, one fact was, that her mother bore testimony to the "boys" [Joseph and Emma Smith's sons, members of the RLDS Church who visited in 1876] in regard to the faith and teachings of their father and told them that what they had seen, and heard in Salt Lake was truth, that those women were their father's wives, and it was useless to promulgate falsehood to the world, and advised them to desist. They pretended not to believe, but she could plainly see they were stung with the truth of her testimony.

David seemed struck dumb, astounded at the living testimony of so many – What could their object be! Alexander said he would *not take anybody's word* – not even Aunt Agnes. [Joseph Smith, III] would not talk on the subject. After they left [they] sent Ina/ what purported to be the 'History of their Father with their Mother's dying testimony—and desired her to place them

in the Library—She wrote them she could not with the knowledge she had—that they were false.⁶

While Agnes Coolbrith had separated herself physically from the Utah Church by moving to California and had apparently lost faith in the restored gospel, she remained in contact with various church members throughout her life.⁷

Even though she dropped all affiliation with the faith, when RLDS missionaries came teaching Joseph Smith was not a polygamist, Agnes directly challenged their testimony by recalling earlier events in her own life. Reportedly, her last words were, “O! What a dupe I have been; what a dupe I have been!”⁸

Agnes’s daughter interpreted this as referring to her association with Mormonism, while Agnes’s nephew Apostle Joseph F. Smith believed it a reference to marriage to William Pickett and her separation from the church.⁹

[Evidences of Plural Marriage](#)

For additional insights see [“Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives after the Martyrdom.”](#)

Endnotes:

1. Agnes and Don Carlos were married on July 30, 1835, and Don Carlos died August 7, 1841. (Ancestral File.)
2. Brigham Young Journal, January 6, 1842, CHL; emphasis added.
3. See discussion in Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 153.
4. Mary Ann West, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent’s testimony, part 3, pages 521–22, questions 679, 687.
5. Ebenezer Robinson, *The Return* 2, no. 7 (July 1890): 302; see also 2, no. 6 (June 1890): 287.
6. Lucy Walker Kimball to Joseph F. Smith (“My very dear Nephew”), Santa Rosa, February 24, 1884, in Franklin R. Smith collection, CHL, MS 13700, fd 2.
7. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 156–70.
8. Joseph F. Smith to Ina Coolbrith, April 20, 1918, CHL.
9. See discussion in Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 169.