

Esther Dutcher

(Unknown Sealing Date)



Esther Dutcher was born January 25, 1811, in Cherry Valley, Oswego, New York, to Thomas Dutcher and Betsy Hurlbert. Her relationship with Joseph Smith is among the poorest documented of all of his plural wives. Only one evidence, a single late attestation, refers to this sealing.

The lack of additional documentation has caused some authors to discount the overall credibility and to view Esther Dutcher as strictly a possible plural wife, but one that is too poorly documented to include in a list of official plural wives of the Prophet.¹ However, since the single reference is from a reliable source, albeit late, she is included here.

Esther Dutcher married Albert Smith (who was not related to Joseph Smith or Apostle George Albert Smith) on May 19 (or May 11) of 1826, at Boylston Centre, Oswego, New York. In 1835, Albert moved his family to Ohio, where in 1837 he united with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From there, they migrated with the Saints to Far West, Caldwell, Missouri, and later to Nauvoo, Hancock, Illinois, where they attended the Nauvoo First Ward.

In a letter from Daniel H. Wells to Joseph F. Smith dated June 25, 1888, Apostle Wells speaks of Albert Smith whose wife Esther Dutcher had died in 1856: “[Albert Smith was] also much afflicted with the loss of his first wife. It seems that she was sealed to Joseph the Prophet in the days of Nauvoo, though she still remained his wife, and afterwards nearly broke his heart by telling him of it, and expressing her intention of adhering to that relationship. He however got to feeling better over it and acting for Joseph, had her sealed to him, and to himself for time.”² This letter constitutes the only evidence of a plural sealing between Joseph and Esther.

None of the details surrounding this sealing have been discovered, nor does Wells explain how he learned about it. Did Esther, like Ruth Vose Sayers, actively petition Joseph to be sealed to him? What role did the Prophet play in the proceedings? Wells’s description of Esther as “sealed to Joseph the Prophet in the days of Nauvoo, though she still remained his [Albert’s] wife” is consistent with an eternity-only sealing. However, there is no known date for the ceremony.

Albert and Esther Smith had five children: Azariah (b. 1828), Emily (b. 1832), Candace (b. 1833), Joseph Albert (b. 1844), and Esther (b. 1849).³ Esther did not conceive any children while Albert was on his mission between September 12, 1842, and August 22, 1843. Joseph Albert Smith was conceived about four months after his return (on approximately December 29, 1843).⁴

The only author to list Esther Dutcher Smith as a plural wife of Joseph Smith was polygamy researcher Stanley Ivins, who identifies the sealing as having occurred *by proxy* after Joseph’s death. He lists her as wife number 56: “Esther Dutcher Smith, wife of Albert Smith. Born in

Cherry Valley, New York, February 15, 1811. She married Albert Smith in 1826. ... On October 10, 1851, she was sealed to Joseph Smith, her husband standing as proxy for the Prophet.”⁵ Ivins was apparently unaware of any sealing ordinance performed during the Prophet’s lifetime.

According to David L. Bigler, biographer of Esther’s son Azariah, she was a literate and gentle woman, beloved of her family.⁶ After several years of ill health, she died on September 17, 1856, at Manti, Utah, having been a faithful member of the church.

[Evidences of Plural Marriage](#)

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

Endnotes:

1. See, for example, “Appendix: Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives: Total Number, Reasons for, and Methods of Selection,” in *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy*, eds. Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster (Independence, Missouri: John Whitmer Books, 2010), 290–98. The authors were well aware of the supporting evidence and chose to not include Esther Dutcher, which is a valid interpretation due to the paucity of documentation.
2. Daniel H. Wells, Letter to Joseph F. Smith, June 25, 1888. I am indebted to Joseph Johnstun and Michael Marquardt for bringing this source to my attention.
3. Albert Smith, “Journal of Albert Smith, 1804–1889,” 2.
4. David L. Bigler, transcriber, “Journal of Albert Smith, 1804–1889,” 2, 9, 17.
5. Stanley S. Ivins, “Wives of Joseph Smith,” Ivins Papers, Box 12, fd. 1, no. 56. Ivins’s entry is faithfully transcribed in Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith and Polygamy*, 45.
6. David L. Bigler, ed., *The Gold Discovery Journal of Azariah Smith*, viii.

Born the third child of Edward Partridge and Lydia Clisbee on February 28, 1824, in Painesville, Ohio, Emily Partridge’s is one of the best documented of all of Joseph Smith’s plural marriages.

In late 1830, missionary Parley P. Pratt visited the Partridges, then living in Kirtland, Ohio, and baptized them as some of the newest members of the Church. On February 4, 1831, Edward was called to be the first bishop in the Church. The Partridges migrated to Missouri and endured the hardships of the first LDS settlers there. Moving to Nauvoo in January 1839, they stayed in a tent until a log cabin could be built. Unfortunately, Edward unexpectedly died on May 27, 1840, leaving the family fatherless.

Emily and her older sister, Eliza, went to live in the Prophet’s home. She recalled: “Joseph and Emma offered us [Emily and her sister Eliza] a home in their family They treated us with great

kindness. We had been there about one year when the principle of plural marriage was made known to us, and I was married to Joseph Smith on the fourth of March 1843 Brother Heber Kimball performing the ceremony.”¹ Her sister was sealed to the Prophet about the same time, but neither was aware of the other’s marriage:

It was about this time [Feb. 1843] that the principles of Celestial marriage were being taught to a few. I and my sister Eliza received it and were married to br. Joseph about the same time, but neither of us knew about the other at the time, everything was so secret. This was March of 1843. Joseph had tried to make these things known to me, several months before – I think, in the spring or summer of 1842, but I had shut him up so quick that he said no more to me until the 28th of Feb. 1843, (my nineteenth birthday) and I was married the 4th of March following.²

In 1892 Emily reported a longer version of her experience:

He [Joseph Smith] taught it to me with his own lips. ... I was living at his house at the time, and had been living there for quite a while after my father’s death, for he died there in Nauvoo. ... He came into the room where I was one day, when I was in the room alone, and asked me if I could keep a secret. I was about eighteen years of age then I think,—at any rate, I was quite young. He asked me if I could keep a secret, and I told him I thought I could, and then he told me that he would sometime, if he had an opportunity,—he would tell me something that would be for my benefit, if I would not betray him, and I told him I wouldn’t.

Well it run along for a good while,—I don’t know just how long, and there was no opportunity of saying anything to me more than he had, and one day he sat in the room alone, and I passed through it and he called to me or spoke to me, and called me to him, and then he said that he had intended to tell me something, but he had no opportunity to do so, and so he would write me a letter, if I would agree to burn it as soon as I read it, and with that I looked frightened, for I thought there was something about it that was not just right, and so I told him that I would rather that he would not write to me,—that he would not write me any letter, and then he asked me if I wanted him to [not] say any more, and I said yes, that I did not want to hear anything more about it at all, for I had got a little frightened about it.³

Emily admitted that she was not completely ignorant of what the Prophet might want to discuss with her. Regarding that period, she testified: “I had heard the reports that were out, and I thought that what he had to say to me might be something relating to that [plural marriage]. ... I don’t know whether my information was gained from talking with women, or from reading the papers or books or something of that kind. ... Some people must have known about it because I heard it whispered around there in Nauvoo, before he told me what it was, and that is what made me suspect what it was at the time he spoke about writing the letter to me.”⁴

Emily continued:

Well it went in that condition and there was not anything more said about it for several months, not until 1843 I think,—some time in ‘43, for he had no other opportunity until then

and I did not think he would ever say anything more about it until then, but I had thought a great deal about it in that time, and I had prayed for it to know what it was, and if it was my duty. I thought I ought to have listened to it, that is, to what he was going to tell me or write to me, for I was greatly troubled over it, as I feared I had done wrong in not listening to it,—and so I prayed to be enlightened in regard to what I should have done. Well, in time I became convinced that there was nothing wrong about it, and that it would be right for me to hear what he had to say, but there was nothing more said for a good while after I came to that conclusion. I think it was months before there was anything more said about it, but I don't know just how long it was. But he spoke to me again and wanted an opportunity to speak to me and I granted it. ...

He told me then what he wanted to say to me, and he taught me this principle of plural marriage called polygamy now, but we called it celestial marriage, and he told me that this principle had been revealed to him but it was not generally known; and he went on and said that the Lord had given me to him, and he wanted to know if I would consent to a marriage, and I consented. ... I was married to him on the 4th day of March, 1843.⁵

Understandably, in all of her writings, Emily was reticent to address the issue of conjugality in her plural marriage with Joseph Smith.⁶ However, when giving her deposition in the Temple Lot litigation in 1892, she was asked point-blank by the RLDS attorney, “Did you ever have carnal intercourse with Joseph Smith?” she answered frankly: “Yes sir.”⁷ When asked if during their year-long courtship period, did Joseph Smith ever “lay his hand on your shoulder?” or “put his arm around you?” or “offer to take your hand?” Emily Partridge testified: “He never did for he was not that kind of a man. He was a gentleman in every way and did not indulge in liberties like that ... not before we was [sic] married.”⁸ When the questioner asked: “Were you in bed with him at any time before ... you were married?” she also acknowledged: “No sir, not before I was married to him. I never was.”⁹ ([Click here to view evidences the sealing was consummated.](#))

Emma Smith eventually forced Emily and her sister to leave the Mansion.

Emily recalled:

Emma had consented to give Joseph two wives if he would let her choose them for him, and ... she choose Eliza and myself ... I do not know why she gave us to him unless she thought we were where she could watch us better than some others, [who lived] outside of the house.

[After the ceremony] she wanted us immediately divorced, and she seemed to think that she only had to say the word, and it was done. But we thought different. We looked upon the covenants we had made as sacred. She afterwards gave Sarah and Maria Lawrence to him, and they lived in the house as his wives. I knew this; but my sister and I were cast off.¹⁰

Emily also remembered:

I think Emma always regretted having any hand in getting us into such trying circumstances. But she need not have blamed herself for that ... for it would have been the same with or

without her consent. ... I have never repented the act that made me a plural wife ... of Joseph Smith and bound me to him for time and all eternity.”[11](#)

In an 1899 letter, Emily summarized her feelings regarding plural marriage:

Did Joseph Smith, the Prophet claim to have a revelation on polygamy, or plural marriage?”... It is a positive fact that he did so claim, and teach, and also practice. I am a living witness of the same. With me it is neither guess work on or hearsay. I had it from his own mouth. To us, it was the word of the Lord. I accepted the pure and sacred principle, and was married, or sealed, to him, as his wife, for time and all eternity.[12](#)

Emily Dow Partridge died in 1899, a faithful member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

[Evidences](#)

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

1. Emily Dow Partridge Young, Autobiographical Sketch, holograph, n.d., 1–2, in Andrew Jenson Papers, Box 26, fd. 3, pp. 1–2. Terminal punctuation added. [\(back\)](#)
2. Emily Dow Partridge Young, “Incidents in the Life of a Mormon Girl,” undated manuscript, CHL, Ms 5220, pages 186, 186b. [\(back\)](#)
3. Emily D. P. Young, Deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent’s Testimony, part 3, pp. 349–50, questions 18–22. See also Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:11, 1:13. [\(back\)](#)
4. Emily D. P. Young, Deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent’s Testimony, part 3., 373, 385, questions 532–34, 770. In fact, there was nothing printed at that time that could have enlightened her regarding the restoration of plural marriage. [\(back\)](#)
5. Emily D. P. Young, Deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent’s Testimony, part 3, pp. 350–52, questions 22–24. See also Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:11, 1:13. The multiple ellipses are the result of splicing together consecutive responses to questions given during her deposition. [\(back\)](#)
6. See Emily D. Partridge Young, “Incidents of the Early Life of Emily Dow Partridge,” written between December 1876 and January 7, 1877; “Written Especially for My Children, January 7, 1877”; Autobiographical Sketch: “Written for family January 7, 1877”; Diary, 1880–93; “Pioneer Day,” 37; “Testimony That Cannot Be Refuted,” 164–65; Autobiography, typescript, April 7, 1884; “A Living Testimony,” 570–71; “Incidents in the Life of a Mormon Girl,” n.d. [\(back\)](#)
7. Emily Dow Partridge Young, Deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Part 3, pp. 371, 384, questions 480–84, 747, 751–62.xx [\(back\)](#)
8. Emily Partridge, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent’s testimony (part 3), pages 357–58, questions 148–54, 179–85. Emily also testified that she never slept with Joseph Smith prior to her sealing. (Ibid., part 3, page 371, questions 481–84.) [\(back\)](#)
9. Emily Dow Partridge Young, Deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, part 3, pp. 371, 384, questions 480–84, 747, 751–62.xx. [\(back\)](#)

10. Emily Dow Partridge Young, “Incidents in the life of a Mormon girl,” undated, Ms 5220, 186–186b; see also page 54. [\(back\)](#)
11. Emily D. Partridge Young, “Testimony that cannot be refuted,” *Woman’s Exponent* 12, no. 21 (April 1, 1884): 165. [\(back\)](#)
12. Emily D. P. Young to W. Collins, January 27, 1899, copy of holograph in possession of the author. [\(back\)](#)