

Ester 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.