

FLORA ANN WOODWORTH

(Sealed Spring 1843)



Flora Ann Woodworth was born on November 14, 1826, in New York, the first child of Lucien Woodworth and Phebe Watrous Woodworth. The Woodworths contacted the missionaries in 1832 and were soon baptized. They subsequently joined the Saints in Missouri and then moved to Illinois by 1839. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney described Flora Ann as a “very intelligent and smart and bright girl.”¹

Joseph Smith’s relationship with Flora Ann Woodworth is poorly documented. She left no records and no sealing date is available. A March 4, 1843, entry in the Prophet’s diary appears to have been written “Woodworth,” which is crossed out and is difficult to discern. The name “Woodworth” appears interlineally above in shorthand, so it is possible they were sealed that day.²

Sometime after her sealing, Joseph presented her with a gold watch.³

In an August 23, 1843, journal entry, William Clayton referred to a conflict erupting between Emma Smith and Flora Ann that apparently involved that watch: “President Joseph told me that he had difficulty with Emma yesterday. She rode up to Woodworths with him and called while he came to the Temple. When he returned, she was demanding the gold watch of Flora [Woodworth]. He reproved her for her evil treatment. On their return home she abused him much. ... He had to use harsh measures to put a stop to her abuse but finally succeeded.”⁴

Seymour B. Young recalled in 1912 that Emma destroyed the watch: “The name of the Prophet’s plural wives [included] ... Flora Woodward to whom he is said to have given a gold locket or watch which was stamped under foot by Emma.”⁵

Flora apparently reacted dramatically to the confrontation. The marriage index of Hancock County records Flora Ann marrying Carlos Gove, a non-member, the very next day after her confrontation with Emma.⁶ The level of friendship between Gove and Flora prior to their legal marriage is unknown, but it is probable that Emma encouraged the nuptial.⁷

Flora had been previously chided by Orange Wight, another suitor, for allowing him to consort with her even though she was secretly sealed to the Prophet. Wight related in 1903:

I now come to that part of my story that you will be most likely interested in. Which regards the doctrine taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith in regard to the plural marriage system. At first the doctrine was taught in private. The first I knew about it was in John Higbie’s family. He lived close to us and being well acquainted with him and family I discovered he had two wives.

...

Now although only in my 20th year, ... I concluded to look about and try to pick up one or more of the young ladies before they were all gone, so I commenced keeping company with Flora Woodworth — daughter of Lucian Woodworth — (called the Pagan Prophet). I was walking along the street with Flora near the Prophet's residence when Joseph drove up in his carriage, stopped and spoke to I and Flora, and asked us to get in the carriage and ride with him. He opened the door for us and when we were seated oposite to him he told the driver to drive on. We went to the temple lot and many other places during the afternoon and then he drove to the Woodworth house, and we got out and went in —

After we got in the house Sister Woodworth took me in an other room and told me that Flora was one of Joseph's wives, I was aware or believed that Eliza R. Snow and the two Partridge girls were his wives but was not informed about Flora. But now sister Woodworth gave me all the information nessary, so I knew Joseph believed and practiced polygamy. ...

Now as a matter of course, I at once — after giving her Flora a mild lecture — left her and looked for a companion in other places, and where I could be more sure. I was now called on a mission to go up the river 5 or 6 hundred miles to make lumber for the Nauvoo House and temple.⁸

In the aftermath of her daughter's marriage to Carlos Gove, Flora's mother once again entered the picture attempting to assist her strong-willed daughter. On August 26 Clayton wrote: "Joseph met Mrs. Woodworth and Flora and conversed some time." Clayton's journal also reports two additional visits between Joseph and Flora at Clayton's home, occurring August 28 and 29.⁹

These meetings were undoubtedly to deal with the future of Flora's sealing to the Prophet, as well as to consider the theological consequences of her rash decision to marry Gove. On the other hand, if the plural marriage between Flora and Joseph had not been consummated, then the unrecorded consequences might have been different. Flora's willingness to marry Gove on the spur of the moment and her previous behavior with Orange Wight raise the question regarding the level of physicality in the Flora–Joseph plural union.

Malissa Lott wrote to Andrew Jenson on June 27, 1887: "Flora Ann Woodworth ... married Carlos Gove at Navoo with the consent of the Prophet."¹⁰ It appears less likely that the Prophet prospectively approved of the civil marriage or had freed Flora from her eternal covenant to him prior to her legal nuptial.¹¹

Our understanding of the interactions between Emma, Flora, and Joseph Smith is admittedly very limited. But it seems probable that Joseph Smith retrospectively granted Flora the needed divorce for this life. Whether other disciplinary action was taken is not recorded. Neither is it known if they agreed to also cancel (or "loosen") the "eternity" portion of the sealing. Flora received her endowment in the Nauvoo Temple on January 17, 1846, and a temple sealing ordinances to Joseph Smith by proxy on February 4, 1846.¹²

Despite Carlos Gove's dislike for the church, Flora convinced him to accompany the western migration of the Saints. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney provided this narrative that states her marriage to Gove occurred after the Prophet's death, which includes some apparent errors:

On the evening of September 1st [1846], Brother Woodworth and family arrived [at Winter Quarters]; all sick. They encamped outside of the square a little distance from our tent. We had a temporary bedstead prepared and took their daughter, Flora Gove, into our tent, where I nursed her until she recovered her strength. Her husband was also sick with fever; she had lain helpless for many days, and her heavy raven locks were so matted together that it took me hours to comb them out. We have lived neighbors in Nauvoo and were old schoolmates. She was older than myself and was sealed to the Prophet Joseph as his wife. This happened before I was aware of the principle. A young man boarding at her father's after the death of Joseph,¹³ not a member of the church, had sought her hand, in time won her heart, and in a reckless moment she was induced to accept his offer and they eloped to Carthage, accompanied by a young lady friend, and were there married by a Justice of the Peace. Flora was never happy with him as he hated the Mormons, and she felt condemned for the rash step she had taken. She made this confession to me while I was nursing her, and said she desired to cling to Joseph hereafter.

They settled at the "Point," and she paid me a visit the following winter. She still expressed herself as strong in the faith of the gospel, also her great desire to cleave to the Prophet. I never saw her again as she died at that place, leaving two or three children.¹⁴

Andrew Jenson recorded over forty years later: "She [Flora Ann Woodward] regretted her last marriage, her husband being an unbeliever, and intended to cling to the Prophet."¹⁵ The word "cling" could represent a desire to be sealed to him in eternity.¹⁶

Endnotes:

1. Andrew Jenson Papers [ca. 1871–1942], MS 17956; CHL, Box 49, Folder 16, document #13.
2. Richard E. Turley, Jr., *Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002): 1: DVD 20. See also Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 327, xviii; Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 389–90.
3. No record exists of the exact date of the marriage or the gift-giving of the watch. The Prophet may have given a gold watch to several of his plural wives. Mary Ann Barzee Boice remembered that she was "acquainted with Eliza R. Snow Smith, his [Joseph Smith's] wife and saw his gold watch which she carries." Mary Ann Boice in John Boice and Mary Ann (Barzee) Boice "Record," MS 8883, Microfilm of manuscript, 174.
4. George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 119.

5. Seymour B. Young, Journal, April 2, 1912, CHL, restricted; excerpt copied in D. Michael Quinn Papers—Addition—Uncat WA MS 244 (Accession:19990209–c), Box 1—Card file—Topic: Polygamy, Joseph Smith’s.
6. Marriage of Flora Woodworth to Carlos Gove, August 23, 1843, in *Marriage index of Hancock County, Ill., 1829–1849*, Tri-County Genealogical Society, comp. (Augusta, Illinois: Tri-County Genealogical Society, 1983), 19. Helen Mar Kimball recounted a different chronology: “A young man boarding at her father’s *after the death of Joseph* not a member of the Church had sought her hand, in time won her heart, and in a reckless moment she was induced to accept his offer and they eloped to Carthage, accompanied by a young lady friend, and were there married by a Justice of the Peace.” Helen Mar Whitney, “Travels Beyond the Mississippi,” *Woman’s Exponent* (November 1, 1884), 87; italics mine. This marriage is not listed in Lyndon Cook, *Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 1839–1845* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Co., 1994), undoubtedly because his marriage records are extracted from Church publications and records.
7. Emily Partridge recalled that Emma: “once proposed to a young man to ask Eliza [Partridge, Emily’s sister] to take a ride with him.” Emily Dow Partridge Young, “Incidents in the early life of Emily Dow partridge,” MS d 2845, fd 1, typescript in possession of the author.
8. “Recollections of Orange L Wight son of Lyman Wight,” written May 4 1903, holograph, CHL, (Ms 405) 19–21. 23.
9. A few authors have ignored the theological ramifications of Flora’s behavior and instead interpreted these entries in Clayton’s journal as referring to sexual liaisons. For example see D. Michael Quinn, “Evidence for the Sexual Side of Joseph Smith’s Polygamy” July 2012. Expanded version; Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 390.
10. Andrew Jenson Papers [ca. 1871–1942], MS 17956; CHL, Box 49, Folder 16, document #14. Helen Mar Kimball wrote a conflicting account, that Carlos did not approach Flora until after the death of Joseph Smith. See “Travels Beyond the Mississippi,” *Woman’s Exponent* 13, no. 11 (November 1, 1884): 87.
11. However, it is possible that after the blow-up between Emma and Flora, Joseph might have returned to the Woodworth’s to assuage hurt feelings.
12. Lisle Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: a Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841–1846* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006), 286.
13. The *Marriage Index of Hancock County, Ill., 1829–1849* lists the marriage of Flora Woodworth to Carlos Gove, August 23, 1843. Tri-County Genealogical Society, comp. (Augusta, Illinois: Tri-County Genealogical Society, 1983), 19.
14. Helen Mar Whitney, “Travels Beyond the Mississippi,” *Woman’s Exponent* (November 1, 1884), 87.
15. Andrew Jenson Papers [ca. 1871–1942], MS 17956; CHL, Box 49, Folder 16, document #13.
16. Under the direction of Church President Lorenzo Snow, a proxy ceremony was performed between Flora and Joseph Smith in the Salt Lake Temple in 1899. Salt Lake Temple Sealing Records, Book D, 243, April 4, 1899; Thomas Milton Tinney, *The Royal Family of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.* (Salt Lake City: Tinney-Greene Family Organization, 1973), 41.

Appendix—Evidences of Joseph Smith’s plural marriage to Flora Ann Woodworth:

- Malissa Lott via Jenson in Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16, “First list of wives,” Document #1.
- Jenson, “Flora Ann Woodworth biographical information sheet,” Document #13, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.
- Malissa Lott, “Letter of Malissa Willis to Jenson, June 27, 1887, regarding Flora Ann Woodworth,” Document #14, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.
- William Clayton, Affidavit, February 16, 1874, MS 3412. Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 225.
- Helen Mar Whitney, “Travels beyond the Mississippi,” *Woman’s Exponent* 13 (November 1, 1884): 87.
- Proxy sealing to Joseph Smith, April 4, 1899, under the direction of President Lorenzo Snow, Salt Lake Temple Sealing Records, Book D, 243, GS film, 184,590, LDS Family History Library. Tinney, “The Royal Family of the Prophet Joseph Smith” 41, 63.
- Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 234.
- Joseph Smith III, Letter to Bro. E. C. Brand, n.d. [likely early 1880s] Letter Press Book #4, 63–67, P6, Community of Christ Archives.