

Hannah Ells

(Sealed Prior to the Summer of 1843)



Hannah Ells was born in 1813 in New Castle, Northumberland, England, the daughter of Thomas and Hanna Ells. After immigrating to Philadelphia, they encountered Church missionaries in 1838 and were baptized. Sometime in 1840 they moved to Nauvoo. During the summer of 1843, Hannah Ells was sealed to Joseph Smith.¹

Eliza R. Snow wrote to Church President John Taylor on December 27, 1886: “I think President Taylor will recollect a young English sister in Nauvoo by the name of Hannah Ells. She was sealed to Joseph the Prophet before his death. She died in Nauvoo in Sister Sarah Kimball’s house. I loved her very much — was present at her death.”²

In 1869, LDS Church member John Benbow signed an affidavit affirming: “President Smith frequently visited his wife Hannah at his (John Benbow’s) house.”³ Whether those visits included conjugal relations is not clear, but possible. ([See Appendix B below for evidence.](#)) Otherwise, little is known regarding her marriage and relationship with the Prophet.

Andrew Jenson recorded: “Ells, Hannah ... described as a good and noble woman — strong lady of culture and refinement, tall and lady-like in appearance — died in 1844 at Nauvoo. Sister E. R. Snow was with her when she died [in 1845]. Died in the house of Hiram Kimball at Nauvoo.”⁴ At her death, she appears to have been firm in her faith in the Restoration.

[Evidences of Plural Marriage: See Appendix A](#)

[Evidences of Sexuality: See Appendix B](#)

Endnotes:

1. See John Benbow, Affidavit, August 28, 1869, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:74, 4:76; CHL; printed in Andrew Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 6: 222-23. In 1899, a proxy marriage ceremony was performed for her and Joseph Smith. See Thomas Milton Tinney, *The Royal Family of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.* (Salt Lake City: Tinney-Greene Family Organization, 1973), 41.
2. Eliza R. Snow to President John Taylor, December 27, 1886, in CR 1 180, First Presidency, incoming correspondence, LDS CHD.
3. Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:74; Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 223; Hannah Ells, Letter to Sister [Phoebe] Woodruff, Nauvoo, May 4, 1845.
4. Andrew Jenson, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, Folder 16, document #11, CHL.

Appendix A—Evidences of Joseph Smith’s Sealing to Hannah Ells

- Malissa Lott, “First list of wives,” Document #1, dictated to Jenson, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.

- Jenson, “Hannah Ells biographical information sheet,” Document #11, in Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.
- John Benbow, Affidavit, August 28, 1869, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:74, 4:76; Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 222–23, 234.
- 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, in Tinney, “The Royal Family of the Prophet Joseph Smith” 41, 63.
- Eliza R. Snow, Letter to President John Taylor, December 27, 1886; also in the First Presidency Office Journal, December 28, 1886, *Minutes of the Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1835–1893*, 368.
- Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 234.

Appendix B — Evidences of Sexuality

In 1869, LDS Church member John Benbow signed an affidavit affirming: “President Smith frequently visited his wife Hannah at his (John Benbow’s) house.”¹ Whether those visits included conjugal relations is not clear, but it is possible.

Endnotes to Appendix B:

1. Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:74; Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 223; Hannah Ells, Letter to Sister [Phoebe] Woodruff, Nauvoo, May 4, 1845.