

NANCY MARIA WINCHESTER

(Sealing Date Unknown)



Born August 10, 1828, in Black Rock, Pennsylvania, to Stephen Winchester and Nancy Case Winchester, Nancy Maria Winchester was apparently baptized at age eight in Kirtland, Ohio, her family having converted to the church three years earlier.¹

Two late sources support that at some point she might have been sealed to Joseph Smith. The first is her inclusion by Eliza R. Snow on a handwritten list penned in 1886.²

Eliza may have been the only witness to affirm that Nancy Maria was sealed to Joseph Smith while he was living. Winchester's name is mentioned only one additional time in Jenson's notes, having been copied onto a second comprehensive list. No additional information was apparently collected concerning her involvement with the Prophet. Perhaps relying on his own understanding, in his article Jenson mistakenly wrote: "Maria Winchester, daughter of Benjamin Winchester."³ In fact, Nancy Maria Winchester was the sister of Benjamin, who himself had a stormy relationship with Church leaders in Nauvoo.

The other piece of evidence supporting Nancy's position as a plural wife of the Prophet comes from Orson F. Whitney, who was the son of Joseph Smith's plural wife Helen Mar Kimball and her legal husband, Horace Whitney. It seems likely that Orson would have received information from his mother who was still living at the time his list was published. A year after Jenson's list was published, Orson wrote that Nancy Maria Winchester was one of nine "wives of the Prophet who wedded Heber C. Kimball."⁴

It is curious that Nancy's brother Benjamin failed to give evidence of her marriage to Joseph. Benjamin had many negative things to say about the Prophet, even accusing him of adultery in Philadelphia in 1840 and criticizing him several times in later accusations. But throughout it all, Benjamin never mentioned a plural marriage or any improper relations between Joseph and his fourteen-year-old sister.

This might be because there was no marriage or because Benjamin was simply unaware of the sealing. Had Benjamin been aware, he would likely have condemned the plural union.

Historians Scott Faulring and Richard L. Anderson argue that the "*cumulative evidence* argument for such marginal references [supporting Winchester as one of Joseph's plural wives] does not meet historical guidelines," and Winchester should not be included. However, they were undoubtedly unaware of the opinion of Eliza R. Snow.⁵ While it appears that Nancy Maria Winchester was fourteen or fifteen when she was sealed to Joseph Smith, no documentation exists suggesting that she was sexually involved with the Prophet.

After Joseph Smith's death, Nancy was sealed to Heber C. Kimball and in 1849 immigrated to Utah. In 1865 she separated from Kimball, marrying Amos George Arnold in a marriage arranged by Kimball. She bore Arnold one child and died in 1876 at the age of forty-seven in Salt Lake City — apparently strong in the faith.

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

Endnotes:

1. While it is possible that Nancy Maria was sealed to the Prophet after August 10, 1843, thus making her fifteen not fourteen, such a sealing would have been contrary to Joseph's apparent agreement with Emma on July 13 to stop marrying plural wives. If, as Utah evidence supports, conjugal relations were not included until plural wives were more mature, it is possible that the Prophet allowed the sealing, anticipating that when Nancy Maria was older, Emma would have become more accepting of full polygamy. ([back](#))
2. Don Bradley is responsible for this discovery. The handwriting has been compared to other samples from Eliza R. Snow's penmanship during this same period showing unmistakable similarities and idiosyncrasies. Jill Derr, author of several articles on Eliza, concurs that "Eliza R. Snow had a very distinctive hand," and the handwriting on the Jenson document is hers. Conversation July 25, 2008, while examining the Jenson document. ([back](#))
3. Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 234. ([back](#))
4. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 9th ed. (Salt Lake City: Book Craft, 1945), 418–19. ([back](#))
5. Richard Lloyd Anderson and Scott H. Faulring, "Review of *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, by Todd M. Compton," *FARMS Review of Books* 10, no. 2 (1998): 77. ([back](#))

Appendix — Evidences of Joseph Smith's Sealing to Nancy Maria Winchester

- Eliza R. Snow, "First list of wives," Document #1, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.
- Jenson, "Plural Marriage," 234.
- Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 419.
- Nauvoo Temple proxy marriage to Joseph Smith, February 3, 1846, in Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings*, 284.