

## RHODA RICHARDS

(Sealed June 12, 1843)



Born on August 8, 1784, at Framingham, Massachusetts, to Joseph Richards and Rhoda Howe Richards, Rhoda was over twenty years older than Joseph Smith. In 1807 she fell in love and became engaged to Ebenezer Damon, but he died before the couple could wed. This left her heartbroken and constituted an emotional blow from which she never fully recovered.<sup>1</sup> She and her brother, future apostle Willard Richards, were baptized in 1838 and followed the Saints to Nauvoo.

On June 12, 1843, Rhoda Richards was sealed to Joseph Smith.<sup>2</sup> This marriage appears to have been an eternity-only sealing that did not include any physical intimacy or notable closeness.

She later recalled her life of loneliness: “In my young days I buried my first and only love, and true to that affiance, I have passed companionless through life; but am sure of having my proper place and standing in the resurrection, having been sealed to the prophet Joseph, according to the celestial law, by his own request, under the inspiration of divine revelation.”<sup>3</sup> Her comments that Ebenezer was her “only love” and that she passed “companionless through life” support a limited relationship with Joseph Smith.

Rhoda immigrated to Utah and lived in Salt Lake City for the remainder of her life as a faithful church member. On January 1, 1879, the sixty-fifth anniversary of Ebenezer Damon’s passing, Rhoda declared, “It was the first ‘Happy New Year’ she had known for sixty-six years. She said the snow looked exactly as it did the day ‘Mr. Damon’ was buried.”<sup>4</sup>

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

### Endnotes:

1. Joseph F. Smith affidavit books, CHL, 1:7.
2. Oliver Huntington Journals, no.15, entry for February 18, 1883, HBLL, BYU.

3. Presenda Huntington Kimball, "Biographical Sketch," 1881, MS 742, CHL, first copy page 2 and variant copy page 2.
4. "A Venerable Woman, Presendia Lathrop Kimball," *Woman's Exponent* 11, no. 21 (April 1, 1883): 163.
5. "Presendia Huntington Kimball to Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, March 9, 1880," Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner Collection, MSS 363, BYU HBLL Special Collections, Item 15.
6. Presenda Huntington Kimball, "Biographical Sketch," 1881, MS 742, CHL.

## **Appendix — Evidences of Joseph Smith's Sealing to Rhoda Richards:**

- Rhoda Richards, Affidavit, May 1, 1869, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:17, 4:17, published in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage*, 75.
- Joseph Smith, Journal, June 12, 1843, in Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, 387.
- George A. Smith, Letter to Joseph Smith III, October 9, 1869.
- Jenson, "First list of wives," Document #1, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.
- Jenson, "Rhoda Richards biographical information sheet," Document #15, in Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.
- Jenson, "Plural Marriage," 234.
- Nauvoo Temple proxy marriage to Joseph Smith, January 31, 1846, in Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings*, 284.
- Wilford Woodruff, "Historian's Private Journal," (one volume, 1858-1878), undated statement written between a July 1, 1866 entry and a November 18, 1874 entry.