

SARAH ANN WHITNEY

(Sealed July 27, 1842)



Sarah Ann Whitney was born on March 22, 1825, to Newel K. Whitney and Elizabeth Ann Smith in Kirtland, Ohio. Five years later the Whitneys heard of a new Prophet named Joseph Smith.

One day—it was in February 1831—a sleigh containing several persons drove in from the East and drew up in front of the mercantile store of Gilbert and Whitney. A stalwart young man sprang out, walked up the steps into the store and to where the junior partner was standing. Extending his hand as if to an old and familiar acquaintance, he exclaimed: “Newel K. Whitney, thou art the man!”

The merchant was astonished. He had never seen this person before. “Stranger,” he said, “you have the advantage of me; I could not call you by name, as you have me.”

“I am Joseph the Prophet,” said the stranger, smiling. “You’ve prayed me here, now what do you want of me?”¹



Soon after this meeting Newel was called to be a Church bishop in Kirtland where he stayed until 1837. After a two year stay in Missouri, the Whitney family moved to Nauvoo.

On June 19, 1869, Sarah Ann Whitney signed the following affidavit:

Be it remembered that on this nineteenth day of June A.D. 1869 personally appeared before me Elias Smith Probate Judge for said County, Sarah Ann Kimball, who was by me sworn in due form of law, and upon her oath Saith, that on the twenty-seventh day of July A.D. 1842 at the City of Nauvoo, County of Hancock, State of Illinois, She was married or Sealed to Joseph Smith, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints, by Newel K. Whitney, Presiding Bishop of Said Church, according to the laws of the Same regulating marriage; in the presence of Elizabeth Ann Whitney, her mother.²

Sarah Ann’s July 27, 1842, marriage to the Prophet was unique in several ways. First, her father and mother were the earliest parents to give their explicit permission for their daughter to enter plurality. They reported receiving their own confirming witness, prompting their approval. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, Sarah’s sister-in-law, recalled:

Bishop Whitney was not a man that readily accepted of every doctrine, and would question the Prophet very closely upon principles if not made clear to his understanding. When Joseph saw that he was doubtful concerning the righteousness of this celestial order he told him to go and enquire of the Lord concerning it, and he should receive a testimony for himself.

The Bishop, with his wife, who had for years been called Mother Whitney, retired together and unitedly besought the Lord for a testimony whether or not this principle was from Him; and they ever after bore testimony that they received a manifestation and that it was so powerful they could not mistake it. The Bishop never afterwards doubted, and they willingly gave to him their daughter, which was the strongest proof that they could possibly give their faith and confidence in him as a true Prophet of God.³

Elizabeth recounted her experience:

Joseph had the most implicit confidence in my husband's uprightness and integrity of character, and so he confided to him the principles set forth in that revelation [D&C 132], and also gave him the privilege of reading and making a copy of it [with Joseph C. Kingsbury as copyist], believing it would be perfectly safe with him. ... My husband revealed these things to me. We had always been united, and had the utmost faith and confidence in each other. We pondered upon the matter continually, and our prayers were unceasing that the Lord would grant us some special manifestation concerning this new and strange doctrine. The Lord was very merciful to us; He revealed unto us His power and glory. We were seemingly wrapt in a heavenly vision, a halo of light encircled us, and we were convinced in our own bosoms that God heard and approved our prayers and intercedings before him. Our hearts were comforted and our faith made so perfect that we were willing to give our eldest daughter, then seventeen years of age, to Joseph, in the order of plural marriage. Laying aside all our traditions and former notions in regard to marriage, we gave her with our mutual consent.⁴

Despite the spiritual confirmations, the process was nevertheless difficult for Sarah's mother Elizabeth. Sidney Rigdon's son J. Wycliffe was apparently aware of the proceedings writing in 1904: "In 1843 & 1844 it was the common talk of the members of the church Joseph Smith married at Nauvoo Sarah Ann Whitney. ... I talked with her Mother Old Mrs Whitney at Salt Lake City in 1863 — the old Lady told me how bad she felt when Joseph Smith first broched the subject to her, how she cried about it but the Prophet at last obtained her consent."⁵

Sarah Ann Whitney's sealing to Joseph Smith was also singular in that a revelation, dated July 27, 1842, specifically outlined the words Sarah's father, Bishop Newell K. Whitney, was to use in performing the ceremony:

Verily thus saith the Lord unto my servant N. K. Whitney the thing that my servant Joseph Smith has made known unto you and your family and which you have agreed upon is right in mine eyes and shall be crowned upon your heads with honor and immortality and eternal life to all your house both old & young because of the lineage of my priesthood saith the Lord. It shall be upon you and upon your children after you from generation to generation By virtue of the Holy promise which I now make unto you saith the Lord.

these are the words which you shall pronounce upon my servant Joseph and your Daughter S. A. Whitney. They shall take each other by the hand and you shall say:

you both mutu[al]ly agree calling them by name to be each others companion so long as you both shall live preserving yourselves for each other and from all others and also throughout all

eternity reserving only those rights which have been given to my servant Joseph by revelation and commandment and by legal Authority in times past.

If you both agree to covenant and do this, then I give you S. A. Whitney my Daughter to Joseph Smith to be his wife to observe all the rights between you both that belong to that condition. I do it in my own name and in the name of my wife your mother and in the name of my Holy Progenitors by the right of birth which is of Priesthood vested in me by revelation and commandment and promise of the living God obtained by the Holy Melchizedek Jethro and other of the Holy Fathers commanding in the name of the Lord all those powers to concentrate in you and through to your posterity forever

all these things I do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that through this order he may be glorified and that through the power of anointing David may reign King over Israel which shall hereafter be revealed let immortality and eternal life henceforth be sealed upon your heads forever and ever.⁶

This revelation is distinctive for several reasons. It begins referring to a thing Joseph had taught the Whitneys, undoubtedly, the principles of eternal and plural marriage. The revelation assures Newell this thing, which had been agreed upon, was *right*, presumably authorizing the plural marriage between the Prophet and Sarah Ann. The wording specifies that the marriage is “as long as you both shall live” and “also throughout all eternity” or for time and eternity. It contains references to “all the rights between you both that belong to that condition ... [and] all those powers to concentrate in your and through to your posterity forever” suggesting that children might spring from the union. No evidence of sexuality has been found, but the wording seems to authorize them to “multiply and replenish the earth.” ([See Appendix B for evidences of possible conjugality.](#))

Orson F. Whitney, Sarah Ann’s nephew and son of Helen Mar Kimball and Horace Whitney, wrote this account:

This bond of affection [between the Whitneys and Joseph Smith] was strengthened and intensified by the giving in marriage to the former of the Bishop’s eldest daughter, Sarah, in obedience to a revelation from God. This girl was but seventeen years of age, but she had implicit faith in the doctrine of plural marriage, as revealed to and practiced by the Prophet, was of celestial origin. She was the first woman, in this dispensation, who was given in plural marriage by and with the consent of both parents. Her father himself officiated in the ceremony. The revelation commanding and consecrating this union, is in existence, though it has never been published. It bears the date of July 27, 1842, and was given through the Prophet to the writer’s grandfather, Newel K. Whitney, whose daughter Sarah, on that day, became the wedded wife of Joseph Smith for time and all eternity.⁷

Apparently Joseph Smith was concerned that Sarah Ann’s brother, Horace Whitney, would try to prevent her plural marriage to the Prophet. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, who married Horace after the martyrdom, recalled:

Sarah Ann took this step of her own free will, but had to do it unbeknown to her brother [Horace Whitney], which grieved her most, and also her mother, that they could not open their hearts to him. But Joseph feared to disclose it, believing that the Higbee boys would embitter

Horace against him, as they had already caused serious trouble, and for this reason he favored his going East, which Horace was not slow to accept. He had had some slight suspicions that the stories about Joseph were not all without foundation, but had never told them, nor did he know the facts till after his return to Nauvoo, when Sarah hastened to tell him all. It was no small stumbling-block to him when learning of the course which had been taken towards him, which was hard for him to overlook. But Joseph had always treated him with the greatest kindness from the time he came to live in his father's house in Kirtland.⁸

One month after their sealing, the Prophet was in hiding and alone. He wrote to Newel, Elizabeth, and Sarah Ann Whitney, on August 18, 1842:

Dear, and Beloved, Brother
and Sister, Whitney, and &c.—

I take this opportunity to communicate, some of my feelings, privately at this time, which I want you three Eternally to keep in your own bosoms; for my feelings are so strong for you since what has passed lately between us, that the time of my absence from you seems so long, and dreary, that it seems, as if I could not live long in this way: and if you three would come and see me in this my lonely retreat, it would afford me great relief, of mind, if those with whom I am allied, do love me, now is the time to afford me succour, in the days of exile, for you know I foretold you of these things. I am now at Carlos Graingers, Just back of Brother Hyrams farm, it is only one mile from town, the nights are very pleasant indeed, all three of you can come and See me in the fore part of the night, let Brother Whitney come a little ahead, and knock at the south East corner of the house at the window; it is next to the cornfield, I have a room entirely by myself, the whole matter can be attended to with most perfect safety, I know it is the will of God that you should comfort me now in this time of affliction, or not at all; now is the time or never, but I have no need of saying any such thing, to you, for I know the goodness of your hearts, and that you will do the will of the Lord, when it is made known to you; the only thing to be careful of; is to find out when Emma [Smith] comes then you cannot be safe, but when she is not here, there is the most perfect safety: only be careful to escape observation, as much as possible, I know it is a heroic undertaking; but so much the greater friendship, and the more Joy, when I see you I will tell you all my plans, I cannot write them on paper, burn this letter as soon as you read it; keep all locked up in your breasts, my life depends upon it. one thing I want to see you for it is to get the fullness of my blessings sealed upon our heads, &c. you will pardon me for my earnestness on this subject when you consider how lonesome I must be, your good feelings know how to make every allowance for me, I close my letter, I think Emma [Smith, his first wife] wont come tonight, if she dont dont fail to come to night. I subscribe myself your most obedient, and affectionate, companion, and friend.⁹

Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery wrote: “This letter clearly indicates that Emma was unaware of Joseph’s marriage to Sarah Ann.”¹⁰ Hence there was a need to avoid a confrontation between Emma and Sarah Ann (with her parents) in the still Nauvoo darkness.

In the letter Joseph mentioned his desire to “get the fullness of my blessings sealed upon their heads,” an allusion to eternally sealing Newell and Elizabeth’s own marriage. Apparently, they did not join the Prophet that night. Todd Compton explained: “There are evidently further ordinances that Smith

wants to perform for the Whitneys. This is not just a meeting of husband and plural wife; it is a meeting with Sarah's family, with a religious aspect. ... Three days later, on August 21, Newel and Elizabeth Whitney were sealed to each other for time and eternity."¹¹

Sarah Ann's relationship with Joseph Smith was extraordinary in another way. Apparently sometime in the first half of 1843, suspicions arose concerning their plural marriage. In order to neutralize any concerns that might have existed among members, non-members, or perhaps law enforcement officers regarding their relationship, the Prophet requested that Joseph C. Kingsbury marry her civilly.¹²

For Kingsbury, the promises of an eternal family through Joseph Smith's sealing keys motivated him to assist the Prophet:

I was employed in Joseph Smith's Store under the direction of Bishop Newel K Whitney until the fall of 1842 and on the 16th day Oct Caroline my Wife Died. ... how thankfull I feel thinking I shall see & meet her again to enjoy each other society for ever to part no more & also my little sons ... and on the 29th of April 1843 I according to President Joseph Smith council & others agreed to stand by Sarah Ann/ Whitney as supposed to be her husband & had a pretended marriage for the purpose of bringing about the purposes of God in the last days as spoken by the mouth of the prophet Isiah Jeremiah Ezekiel and also Joseph Smith, & Sarah Ann should rec-d a great glory Honner & Eternal Lives and I Also Should Rec-d a Great Glory Honner & Eternal Lives to the full desire of my heart in having my companion Caroline in the first resurrection to hail her & no one to have power to take her from me & we Both shall be crowned & enthroned together in the Celestial Kingdom of God Enjoying Each others Society in all of the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ & our little ones with us as is Recorded in this blessing that President Joseph Smith Sealed upon my head on the Twenty third day of March 1843 as follows.¹³

Thereafter Joseph C. Kingsbury served as a "front husband," and he and Sarah lived in the same house and outwardly appeared as a married couple. The relationship between Sarah Ann Whitney, Joseph Smith, and Joseph C.

Kingsbury is unique because it represents the only sealing to a legally married woman where the civil marriage was performed *after* the eternal marriage ceremony. That is, Joseph Smith was sealed to Sarah and then months afterwards, she was legally married to Kingsbury.

Researcher Michael Marquardt summarized:

Sarah Ann Whitney was married to Joseph Smith on July 27, 1842. Nine months later on April 29, 1843, she was [legally] married to Joseph C. Kingsbury with the Prophet Joseph Smith officiating. She was then eighteen years old. It seems that Joseph Smith married Sarah Ann Whitney for time and for all eternity and then relinquished her for time, in a pretended marriage ceremony to Joseph C. Kingsbury.¹⁴

Years later in 1880, Kingsbury submitted a bill to the Church for his financial support of Sarah Ann. The bill read: "Nov 23, 1880, Joseph C. Kingsbury asked John Taylor that an \$8000 debt to the church be remitted in consideration of services he had rendered in Nauvoo, and after leaving there, to

the Prophet Joseph, in keeping one of his wives, Sarah Whitney, daughter of Bishop N. K. Whitney.”¹⁵ It is not known if Church President John Taylor honored the claim.

No details regarding Sarah Ann’s relationship with Joseph are known. Helen Mar Kimball recalled that when her father was teaching her about plural marriage in May of 1843, “he took the first opportunity to introduce Sarah Ann [Whitney] to me as Joseph’s wife.” And that “This astonished me beyond measure.”¹⁶

After Joseph Smith’s death, Sarah married Heber C. Kimball on March 17, 1845, for time, ending her pretend marriage to Kingsbury. Seven children resulted from her union with Kimball, two of which died in infancy. Sarah was described by Orson F. Whitney as “a woman of wonderful character, respected by the other wives and children. She was deeply devoted to her own children and to Heber C. Kimball.”¹⁷ She remained in the church until her death in 1873.

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

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

Endnotes:

1. Orson F. Whitney, *Through Memory’s Halls* (Independence: Zion’s Printing and Publishing Company, 1930), 13.
2. Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, CHL, 1:36; see also 1:72.
3. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, “Scenes in Nauvoo After the Martyrdom of the Prophet and Patriarch,” *Woman’s Exponent* 11 (March 1, 1883): 146.
4. Edward Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (New York City: n.p., 187), 7, 368–69; Elizabeth Ann Whitney, “A Leaf from an Autobiography,” *Woman’s Exponent* 7, no. 14 (December 15, 1878): 105; see also Carol Cornwall Madsen, ed., *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1994), 202.
5. John W. Rigdon, letter to “Arthur Willing, Elder,” Feb 20, 1904, (written from Brooklyn, New York) MS 14595, CHL, pages 6–7.
6. Revelation for Newell K. Whitney, July 27, 1842. Original manuscript in CHL; quoted in Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 315–16; see also Revelations in Addition to Those Found in the LDS Edition of the D&C on *New Mormon Studies: A Comprehensive Resource Library*, CD-ROM (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1998).
7. Orson F. Whitney, *The Contributor* 6, no. 4 (January 1885) : 131.
8. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, “Scenes in Nauvoo After the Martyrdom of the Prophet and Patriarch,” *Woman’s Exponent* 11, no. 19 (March 1, 1883): 146.

9. Joseph Smith, Jr., to Newel K. Whitney, Elizabeth Ann Whitney, etc., 18 August 1842, CHL; copy of holograph in possession of the author. The text and the signature of this document are in the handwriting of Joseph Smith, Jr. This document has been reproduced in Dean C. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1984): 539–40.
10. Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1984), 125.
11. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 350.
12. I have found no evidence of a plot to expose the Prophet and Sarah Ann, so possibly some other motivation might have existed prompting the performance of this pretended marriage.
13. Joseph C. Kingsbury, “History of Joseph C. Kingsbury,” (photocopy of manuscript), in Ronald and Ilene Kingsbury Collection, MS 522 Box 3 Folder 2, page 13, Marriott Library.
14. H. Michael Marquardt, *The Strange Marriages of Sarah Ann Whitney to Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet, Joseph C. Kingsbury, and Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1973; rev. ed., Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1982), 18.
15. L. John Nuttall Notes for J. Taylor Office Jrnl, HDC, d1346; quoted in D. Michael Quinn Papers—Addition—Uncat WA MS 244 (Accession:19990209-c) Box 1, Yale University Special Collections.
16. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, “Scenes in Nauvoo After the Martyrdom of the Prophet and Patriarch,” *Woman’s Exponent* 11, no. 19, (March 1, 1883): 146.
17. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City, 1888; 2nd ed., 1945), 419.

Appendix A — Evidences of Joseph Smith’s Sealing to Sarah Ann Whitney

- Sarah A. Kimball, Affidavit, July 27, 1869, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:36; 4:36. Printed in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage*, 73.
- Revelation to Joseph Smith, July 27, 1842, holograph in LDS Church History Library, published in H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 315–16; see also Revelations in Addition to Those Found in the LDS Edition of the D&C, *New Mormon Studies: A Comprehensive Resource Library*, CD-ROM (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1998).
- Eliza R. Snow, “First list of wives,” Document #1, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.
- Elizabeth Ann Whitney, Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, 1:72; 4:74, printed in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage*, 74.
- William Clayton, Affidavit, February 16, 1874, MS 3412, LDS Church History Library, in Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 225.
- Joseph Kingsbury, Affidavit, May 22, 1886, MS 3412, LDS Church History Library, printed in Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 226.

- Elizabeth Ann Whitney, in Edward Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (New York City: N.pub., 1877), 368–69. See also Elizabeth Ann Whitney, “A Leaf from an Autobiography,” *Woman=s Exponent* 7, no. 14 (December 15, 1878): 105; see also Carol Cornwall Madsen, ed., *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 202.
- Orson F. Whitney, “Life of Heber C. Kimball,” [headline?], *The Contributor* 6, no. 4 (January 1885,): 131.
- Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, “Scenes in Nauvoo after the Martyrdom of the Prophet and Patriarch,” *Woman’s Exponent* 11, no. 19 (March 1, 1883): 146.
- Nauvoo Temple proxy marriage to Joseph Smith, January 12, 1846. Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings*, 281.
- Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1945), 418.
- Jenson, “Sarah Ann Whitney biographical information sheet,” Document #17, Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, Box 49, fd. 16.
- Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 233.

Appendix B — Evidences of Sexuality

The marriage ceremony spoken to seal Joseph Smith and Sarah Ann Whitney implied that mortal offspring could occur:

I give you S. A. Whitney my Daughter to Joseph Smith to be his wife to observe all the rights between you both that belong to that condition I do it in my own name and in the name of my wife your mother and in the name of my Holy Progenitors by the right of birth which is of Priest Hood vested in me by revelation and commandment and promise of the living God obtained by the Holy Melchizedek, [Jethro], and other of the Holy Fathers commanding in the name of the Lord all those powers to concentrate in you and through to your posterity forever.¹

Additional evidence is lacking although Wilhelm Wyl, an anti-Mormon writer, asserted in 1886: “He [Joseph Smith] seduced her [Elizabeth Whitney’s] daughter [Sarah Ann Whitney].”²

Endnotes to Appendix B:

1. Sealing ceremony between Joseph Smith and Sarah Ann Whitney, quoted in H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary*, 315-16; see also *Revelations in Addition to Those Found in the LDS Edition of the D&C*, in *New Mormon Studies: A Comprehensive Resource Library*, CDROM, Signature Books.
2. Wilhelm Wyl, *Mormon Portraits*, 90.