Desdemona Fullmer

(Sealed July 1843)

On October 6, 1809, Desdemona was born to Peter Fullmer and Susannah Zerfass Fullmer in Huntingon, Pennsylvania. The Fullmer family settled south of Cleveland, Ohio, in 1835, and Desdemona was converted and baptized two years later. Desdemona moved to Nauvoo, and according to the Nauvoo 4th Ward records, she was living in Joseph Smith's home in the spring of 1842.

At that time Joseph Smith taught Desdemona Fullmer about plural marriage.[1] Desdemona Fullmer married Joseph Smith in July 1843.[2]

She gave this brief account: "Having been convinced of the truth of polygamy, I therefore entered into the order, but I dared not make it known not even to my parents for I was forbidden by the Prophet for it would endanger the life of Joseph and also many of the Saints."[3] She also reported a night vision in which an angel told her that the polygamy doctrine was true.[4]

Desdemona remembered Hyrum expressed his suspicions:

> After I [moved out of] brother Joseph's House, Sister Hyrum Smith wanted me to come for the winter with her to work tailoring as that was a trade, and while I was living at their house Hyrum had by some way learned something about polygamy. So one evening while the family of us were sitting arround the fire, he said to me, "I will ask you a fair question. Will you answer me?" "Yes, sir," I replied. Brother Hyrum said, "Supposing Brother Joseph would say to you that he had a revelation from God that it was right for him to have another wife besids Emma would you believe it was of God?"[5]

Perhaps caught off guard by Hyrum's direct methods, Desdemona quickly recovered by asking Hyrum if he believed Joseph Smith was a prophet. He answered, "Yes." Then she gave her opinion that since Joseph is a prophet, she cannot pick and choose which revelations she will believe. There the conversation ended. The next morning:

> [Hyrum] made mention of the subject in the following words. Said he, "If I knew that any or thought that any women in his house believed in such doctrine as polygamy, I would kick them 40 rods from this house and follow them and kick them still further. Soon after that I made tracks, not feeling it safe to stay there any longer and went to another place to live and while living there a few weeks.[6]

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On May 26, 1843, William Clayton recorded: "Hyrum received the doctrine of priesthood."[7] Shortly after his change of heart, Hyrum returned to Desdemona, whom he had earlier threatened:

> Afterwards Brothers Joseph and Hyrum came a long and called there, and Brother Hyrum wanted to talk with me and said, "Do you remember how I talked when [you were] at my Home? Yes, sir, I do." He said, "Now I have come to make it right with you. I hurt your feelings. I ask your forgiveness, and where I have said anything against the doctrine of polygamy in public or in private, I must take it all back for the Lord has shown unto me that I was wrong and that Joseph was right. Then [Hyrum] preached to me and exorted me much and said that I had done God service and for me to hold on to the faith that was taught me by Joseph and much more he said to me on the subject that I cannot write.[8]

Possibly reflecting the biases of Utah church leaders against Emma Smith, Desdemona penned on Jun 7, 1868: "In the rise of polygamy, I was warned in a dream [Emma] was going to poison me. I told my dream to brother Joseph. He told me it was true. She would do it if she could."[9]

Desdemona migrated to Utah with the Saints and died in 1886, a lifelong member.

Evidences of Plural Marriage

For additional insights see "Joseph Smith's Plural Wives after the Martyrdom."

Endnotes:

1. Current evidence supports that Desdemona Fullmer was sealed to Joseph Smith in July 1843 after Hyrum's May 26, 1843, acceptance of the principle. If the dating scheme is correct, this incident would have happened sometime in early May, after Joseph had taught Desdemona, but weeks before she was married to him.
2. Desdemona Fullmer, Affidavit, June 17, 1869, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:32, 4:32, CHL; William Clayton Affidavit, February 16, 1874, CHL; published in Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," Historical Record, Salt Lake City, 6:225. A proxy marriage to Joseph Smith was performed in the Nauvoo temple on January 26, 1846 (Lisle Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: a Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841–1846* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006), 283).
3. Desdemona Fullmer, Autobiography, [not MS 734 in CHL], quoted in D. Michael Quinn papers – Addition – Uncat WA MS 244, bx 1, Yale University, Special Collections. The exact source of this quotation is unknown. Church historians have been unable to locate it in the archives. When contacted by Don Bradley on July 14, 2008, Quinn was unable to recall additional details, but was confident of the accuracy of the document.
4. Desdemona Fullmer, Autobiography, [not MS 734 in CHL], quoted in D. Michael Quinn papers – Addition – Uncat WA MS 244, bx 1, Yale University, Special Collections.

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5. Desdemona Fullmer, Autobiography, [not MS 734 in CHL], cited in D. Michael Quinn papers – Addition – Uncat WA MS 244, bx 1, Yale University, Special Collections; spelling, punctuation, and grammar standardized. I have been unable to identify the original document at CHL.
6. Desdemona Fullmer, Autobiography, [not MS 734 in CHL], cited in D. Michael Quinn papers – Addition – Uncat WA MS 244, bx 1, Yale University, Special Collections; spelling, punctuation, and grammar standardized.
7. George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 106; see also Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the Mormon Succession Question" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), 56–60.
8. Desdemona Fullmer, Autobiography, [not MS 734 in CHL], cited in D. Michael Quinn papers – Addition – Uncat WA MS 244, bx 1, Yale University, Special Collections; spelling, punctuation, and grammar standardized.
9. Desdemona Wadsworth Fullmer, Autobiography, page 3, CHL, MS 734.

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