

Unlikely Allies: Madison M. Scott and the LDS/RLDS Battle over Polygamy

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Among nineteenth-century affidavits collected by leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints testifying of founder Joseph Smith's involvement with polygamy is a copy of a letter written by William Clayton to an individual named Madison M. Scott.¹ In this letter dated November 11, 1871, William Clayton testifies of being scribe to Joseph Smith's July 12, 1843 revelation on plural marriage. The account given in this letter subsequently formed the basis for an affidavit sworn by William Clayton in 1874.²

Although Clayton's 1871 letter is occasionally cited, little has been published about Madison M. Scott or the context of his request to Clayton. This paper provides biographical information for Madison M. Scott, revealing the motive behind his requests to Utah-based church leaders for testimony of the 1843 Nauvoo polygamy revelation. I also place these written exchanges within the larger nineteenth century battle engaged by leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and their Midwestern cousins, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, over public memory of Joseph Smith and polygamy.³

*Links in this paper are live at journalofmormonpolygamy.org.

¹This handwritten copy of Clayton's letter to Madison M. Scott (see Appendix C) is likely the enclosure referenced in William Clayton's 1872 letter to George A. Smith (see Appendix D). William Clayton to Madison M. Scott, Nov. 11, 1871, Affidavits about celestial marriage, 1869-1915, MS 3423, LDS Church History Library (CHL), [LINK](#) (see Appendix C); William Clayton to George A. Smith, Aug. 21, 1872, George A. Smith papers, 1834-1877, MS 1322, CHL, [LINK](#) (see Appendix D).

²Cheryl L. Bruno and Michelle B. Stone, "Crafting a Sacred Story: Joseph F. Smith and the William Clayton Affidavits," *Journal of Mormon Polygamy* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1-34, [LINK](#).

³Mark A. Scherer, *The Journey of a People: The Era of Reorganization, 1844-1946* (Community of Christ Seminary Press, 2013), 152. Although not ratified until 1872, the name "Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" was informally used by the group of Latter Day Saints following Joseph Smith III as early as 1866. The denomination is now called Community of Christ.

Use of Clayton's 1871 Letter by Historians and Others

A portion of the letter from William Clayton to Madison M. Scott was published by *The Salt Lake Herald* on February 13, 1885. In a letter to the editor, Milando Pratt takes issue with the newspaper for stating that Thomas Bullock was the scribe for the 1843 polygamy revelation. Pratt talked to Clayton about his role in writing the polygamy revelation “a year or so before his death.”⁴ Pratt saw Clayton's 1871 letter at that time and copied a portion of it for his own records. He subsequently quotes Clayton's testimony to Madison M. Scott in his letter to the *Herald* editor.⁵

Historian George D. Smith uses Clayton's letter to Madison M. Scott to provide additional details of the transmission of the 1843 polygamy revelation in *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton*. He quotes a large portion of the letter in a footnote tied to Clayton's journal entry for July 12, 1843. George D. simply refers to this as a later statement from Clayton.⁶ In a subsequent journal article, he describes the same quotation from Clayton's letter as an “amplified” version of his journal entry thirty years after the fact.⁷

In their article “LDS Joseph vs. RLDS Joseph: The Battle to Control the Public Memory of Joseph Smith,” historians Don Bradley and Brian C. Hales list Clayton's 1871 letter in a table describing unbound affidavits on polygamy at the Church History Library.⁸ They use a quote from the letter in a footnote to expand the discussion of Joseph F. Smith collecting polygamy affidavits in response to the Utah mission of Joseph Smith's sons, Alexander Hale Smith and David Hyrum Smith. In the quote, Clayton expresses frustration with the “sons of the Prophet” who “den[y] bitterly that [their] father ever had a revelation on the subject.”⁹

In none of these cases, however, do the authors reveal any additional details about Madison M. Scott, the recipient of Clayton's letter, or why Clayton provides Madison with such a detailed reminiscence of the 1843 polygamy revelation.

⁴The *Herald* editors contend that their source for Thomas Bullock writing the polygamy revelation was Bullock's son. In their published copy of Clayton's letter, the year for the polygamy revelation is initially misstated as 1842. Both the copy of Clayton's letter at the Church Historian's Office and his contemporary letter book are consistent in giving the year 1843 for the revelation. This published error, then, is either on the part of Pratt or the newspaper. Milando Pratt, “That Revelation: A Claim that William Clayton First Wrote It,” *Salt Lake Herald*, Feb. 13, 1885, [LINK](#).

⁵Pratt, “That Revelation,” 7.

⁶George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Signature Books, 1995), 110 n42.

⁷George D. Smith, “Encounter Essay: William Clayton: In the Shadow of Power,” *Journal of Mormon History* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 134, [LINK](#).

⁸Don Bradley and Brian C. Hales, “LDS Joseph vs. RLDS Joseph: The Battle to Control the Public Memory of Joseph Smith,” in Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, eds., *The Persistence of Polygamy: From Joseph Smith's Martyrdom to the First Manifesto, 1844-1890*, (John Whitmer Books, 2013), 225.

⁹Bradley and Hales, “LDS Joseph vs. RLDS Joseph,” 209 n17.

Madison M. Scott, Scottsville, and the Old Mt. Eden Church

Madison Monroe Scott was born on January 8, 1841, in Scottsville, Floyd County, Indiana.¹⁰ Madison was by occupation a teacher and country merchant.¹¹ At the time of writing his letter to William Clayton, the thirty-year-old also served as a local Justice of the Peace.¹²

Scottsville itself was a small village consisting of a “blacksmith shop and repair-shop, a store, and a few dwellings.”¹³ The settlement was named after brothers John Scott (Madison’s paternal grandfather) and Moses Scott.¹⁴ John Scott and his wife, Anna Reazor, were Kentucky natives and had twelve children.¹⁵ The family was known for their religiosity, and they were closely associated with the “ancient hewed log” Mt. Eden Church. By the late 1830s, Mt. Eden was a Campbellite stronghold.¹⁶

Madison’s wife, Harriet E. Goss, recalled as a young girl attending the old Mt. Eden Church where two of John Scott’s sons “occupied the pulpit, while the father, then an old man, had a front seat.”¹⁷ Tensions heightened when several of Madison’s uncles became swayed by Latter Day Saint teachings. A breaking point occurred in 1866 when those who remained committed to the teachings of Alexander Campbell opted to separate from Mt.

¹⁰Although later published accounts state Madison was born in 1842, his ages in the 1850 and 1860 censuses indicate the 1841 year given by Charles B. Scott in his family history was more accurate. 1850 U.S. census, Floyd County, Indiana, population schedule, Lafayette Township, p. 733, FamilySearch website, *LINK*; 1860 U.S. census, Floyd County, Indiana, population schedule, LaFayette Township, p. 84, FamilySearch website, *LINK*; Charles Benton Scott, “Family History,” in Nina Ann (Scott) Konig, “Three Scott Family Stories,” *The Rogue Digger* 29 (Summer 1994): 7; *Memoirs of the Lower Ohio Valley: Personal and Genealogical with Portraits* Vol. 1 (Federal Publishing Company, 1905), 230.

¹¹C. B. Scott, “Family History,” 7.

¹²Madison was elected Justice of the Peace for Lafayette Township in April 1868 and his term lasted until May 2, 1872. “Township Officers Elected in Floyd County,” *New Albany Daily Commercial* (New Albany, IN), Apr. 10, 1868, p. 4, col. 2, NewspaperArchive website, *LINK*; “Justices of the Peace,” *The New Albany Daily Ledger* (New Albany, IN), Oct. 22, 1870, p. 2, col. 3, NewspaperArchive website, *LINK*.

¹³*History of the Ohio Falls Cities and their Counties, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches* Vol. II (L. A. Williams & Co., 1882), 313, *LINK*.

¹⁴*History of the Ohio Falls Cities and their Counties*, 313.

¹⁵Shelby County, Kentucky, Marriage Records, 1792-1966, marriage bond of John Scott and Anne Reazor, Jan. 2, 1815, FamilySearch website, *LINK*; U.S. census, Floyd County, Indiana, Greenville Township, page 145, FamilySearch website, *LINK*; Wesley G. Scott, “A Pioneer Family of Kentucky and Indiana,” in Nina Ann (Scott) Konig, “Three Scott Family Stories,” *The Rogue Digger* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 8.

¹⁶Mt. Eden was a member of the Silver Creek Baptist Association prior to its disbanding in 1837. Henry K. Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples: A Comprehensive History of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) in Indiana* (The Bethany Press for the Association of the Christian Churches in Indiana, 1966), 51-52 and 55n13; *History of the Ohio Falls Cities*, 288-289; *History of the Ohio Falls Cities*, 288-289.

¹⁷Harriet Esther Goss Scott, “Reminiscence of the Old Mount Eden and Chapel Hill Churches,” in Nina Ann (Scott) Konig, “Three Scott Family Stories,” *The Rogue Digger* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 4.

Eden and build their own chapel. Madison's wife, Harriet, and her father, Frederick Goss, were among those who helped organize the new congregation. They built a wood frame church on what became known as Chapel Hill.¹⁸ It is likely Madison M. Scott attended the Chapel Hill Church with his wife and in-laws.

RLDS Missionary Activity and Founding the Mt. Eden Branch

Elijah Banta was the first to expound the message of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to the residents of Scottsville, preaching twice in that area in 1865.¹⁹ The following year, in December 1866, Banta enlisted the help of apostle William W. Blair to defend RLDS teachings in Floyd County.²⁰ W. W. Blair recalled that the opposing camp of Campbellites, Methodists, and Adventists had enlisted the help of a Reverend Henry, a "theological champion" from nearby New Albany.²¹ W. W. Blair and Banta preached at Mt. Eden on the evening of December 14, while Henry observed from the audience. The following day, the "church was packed with an eager and excited congregation, among whom were probably no less than a score of ministers."²² For two hours, Reverend Henry used biblical teachings to argue Latter Day Saint beliefs heretical. After a short recess, W. W. Blair stood and "replied for two hours, not a soul of the large congregation leaving their seats."²³ W. W. Blair was satisfied in his defense against Henry's "flimsy, shattered theories," and the RLDS missionaries preached several more times before returning home.²⁴

Although some in Scottsville were persuaded by RLDS teachings as early as 1866, it took another four years before any baptisms occurred and a branch was organized. W. W. Blair returned to Scottsville in May 1870 after "urgent requests" from brothers John A., James G., and David Scott, all paternal uncles to Madison M. Scott.²⁵ James G. Scott, the former preacher in the old Mt. Eden Church, was the first to be baptized on May 14, 1870.²⁶ More baptisms followed, and W. W. Blair officially organized the Eden branch near

¹⁸C. B. Scott, "Family History," 6. H. E. G. Scott, "Reminiscence of the Old Mount Eden and Chapel Hill Churches," 5. *History of the Ohio Falls Cities*, 289 and 292; Church Activities Committee, *Church Histories, 1813-1963: New Albany-Floyd County, Indiana* (Women's Sesquicentennial Committee, 1963), 24, Indiana State Library Digital Collections, *LINK*.

¹⁹W. W. Blair, "Correspondence," *The True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 17, no. 14 (Jul. 15, 1870): 436, CHL, *LINK*.

²⁰Frederick B. Blair, comp., *The Memoirs of President W. W. Blair* (Herald Publishing House, 1908), 127.

²¹F. B. Blair, *Memoirs*, 127-128.

²²F. B. Blair, *Memoirs*, 128.

²³F. B. Blair, *Memoirs*, 129.

²⁴F. B. Blair, *Memoirs*, 129.

²⁵F. B. Blair, *Memoirs*, 163.

²⁶Eden Branch, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints collection of records, MS

Scottsville on June 5, 1870. The founding fourteen members included four of Madison's paternal uncles (James G., John A., David, and Moses R. Scott) and a paternal aunt (Emily Scott McCutcheon).²⁷ By the time W. W. Blair left towards the end of June, there were twenty-one members in the Eden branch. James G. Scott was selected Presiding Elder, and David Scott was a deacon.²⁸

W. W. Blair reported that during his visit to Southern Indiana, he "was bitterly opposed, especially by sectarian ministers who agreed among themselves long enough to array all their talent and skill to overthrow what they called 'Mormonism.'" ²⁹ At Mt. Eden, W. W. Blair held a three-day discussion with Elder Vardeman Scott "of the Campbellite Church," another of Madison's uncles.³⁰ Vardeman and other ministers in the area had spent two years and over a hundred dollars preparing for another standoff with RLDS missionaries. Ultimately, however, W. W. Blair reported that Vardeman "made an utter failure."³¹

Six months later, the Eden branch was visited by another church leader, RLDS Seventy Thomas W. Smith. Thomas reported that he baptized six new members at Scottsville, making special note of his baptism of Harbert Scott on January 4, 1871.³² "Among [those baptized was] a brother of Mr. Vardimon Scott, the opponent of Brother Blair, and also brother of Brothers James, Moses, John and David Scott, who are earnest and faithful saints. He is recognized as the most intelligent, influential, and capable of the family."³³

Four months after Thomas Smith's visit, another RLDS Seventy passed through Scottsville. Although no report from William H. Kelley was published in the *Saints' Herald*, branch records indicate he ordained John A. Scott to the office of elder on May 28, 1871.³⁴ Kelley also likely brought with him two recently published tracts: *Polygamy: Was it an Original Tenet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* by Alexander H. Smith and *The Successor in the Prophetic Office and Presidency of the Church* (no author given).³⁵ It was during Kelley's visit that Madison M. Scott finally penned a letter to LDS church leaders in

30683, CHL, *LINK*.

²⁷Eden Branch records

²⁸In his letter of June 23, 1870, to President Joseph Smith, W. W. Blair mistakenly calls the Mt. Eden branch the Pleasant Ridge Branch. W. W. Blair, "Correspondence," 436.

²⁹F. B. Blair, *Memoirs*, 163.

³⁰W. W. Blair, "Correspondence," 436.

³¹W. W. Blair, "Correspondence," 436.

³²Eden Branch records

³³T.W. Smith, "Correspondence," *The True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 18, no. 4 (Feb. 15, 1871): 115, CHL, *LINK*.

³⁴Eden Branch records.

³⁵*The True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 18, no. 9 (May 1, 1871): 276, CHL, *LINK*.

Utah.³⁶ Madison likely determined that if he obtained testimony that Joseph Smith was the author of polygamy, he could rebut RLDS teachings and claims of succession.

LDS/RLDS Battles over Joseph Smith's Practice of Plural Marriage

Alexander H. Smith's 1871 polygamy tract was the latest volley between LDS and RLDS church leaders over Joseph Smith's involvement in polygamy. Although the Reorganized Church held from its beginning that polygamy was an evil practice, there was "disagreement on its origins."³⁷ As late as 1867, RLDS apostles acknowledged privately an "almost universal opinion among the Saints that Joseph was in some way connected with it."³⁸ In contrast, the sons of Joseph Smith, especially RLDS President Joseph Smith III, fervently denied their father was ever involved in the practice. Upon his ascension to the presidency in 1860, the younger Joseph declared, "I have been told that my father taught such doctrines. I have never believed it and never can believe it."³⁹

At first, some members of the LDS Church were incredulous that Joseph Smith's sons claimed he never practiced polygamy. After visiting Joseph Smith III at Nauvoo in 1860, Samuel H. B. Smith wrote in disbelief, "he didn't believe his Father ever taught and practised that principle, . . . anyone that knows any thing about mormonism at all knows better then (sic) that."⁴⁰ When Alexander H. Smith served his first mission to Utah in 1866, newly ordained LDS apostle Joseph F. Smith afterwards expressed frustration. "Do you suppose an angel would convince him? He said no human testimony could convince him."⁴¹ After Alexander left Utah, church leaders began assembling details about Joseph Smith's involve-

³⁶In his letter to Brigham Young, Madison M. Scott notes that Kelley is "here now on a mission" (see Appendix A). Madison M. Scott to Brigham Young, 1871, Brigham Young office files, 1832-1878, CR 1234 1, CHL, [LINK](#).

³⁷Scherer, *The Journey of a People*, 265.

³⁸Alma R. Blair, "RLDS Views of Polygamy: Some Historiographical Notes," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 5 (1985): 19, [LINK](#).

³⁹"The Mormon Conference," *The True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 1, no. 5 (May 1860): 103, CHL, [LINK](#); Scherer, *The Journey of a People*, 96. In 1887, Joseph Smith III responded to accusations of suppressing information regarding his father's involvement in polygamy. He affirmed, "That no matter who, or by whom [polygamy] was introduced, it was not of God, and was just what Elder Marks states Joseph Smith told him in 1844 that it was, a 'cursed doctrine;' evil from first to last. We have affirmed this position from 1860, the date of our connection with the work until now; always and in every place; and further, that neither admitting, nor denying that Joseph Smith, the martyr, had any thing to do, either in teaching, or practicing it, but holding if he did he transgressed the law of God, and broke the law of the land." Joseph Smith, "What was Suppressed?" *The True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 34, no. 50 (Dec. 10, 1887): 794, CHL, [LINK](#).

⁴⁰Samuel H. B. Smith to George A. Smith, Jul. 11, 1860, George A. Smith papers, 1834-1877, MS 1322, CHL, [LINK](#).

⁴¹Stephen C. Taysom, *Like a Fiery Meteor: The Life of Joseph F. Smith* (The University of Utah Press, 2023), 145.

ment with plural marriage in Nauvoo.⁴² When Alexander and his younger brother, David Hyrum Smith, were assigned another RLDS mission to Utah in 1869, Joseph F. Smith prepared by looking for written evidence of Joseph Smith's practice of polygamy. He was shocked to learn that there was almost nothing besides the 1843 revelation itself.⁴³ He began collecting affidavits of those "who received personal instruction or commandment from the Prophet respecting the subject of celestial marriage."⁴⁴

Both Alexander and David remained unconvinced by testimonies of LDS church members in Utah, and each subsequently wrote a pamphlet denouncing polygamy.⁴⁵ David's 1870 tract, *The Bible versus Polygamy*, argues that biblical passages often used by LDS church members to justify polygamy were taken out of context.⁴⁶ Alexander's 1871 tract instead uses the Book of Mormon and Doctrine & Covenants to argue that polygamy was condemned in modern scripture.⁴⁷ It also includes selections from the Nauvoo newspaper *Times & Seasons* up to and after Joseph Smith's death denying that plural marriage was condoned by church leaders. After reproducing public denunciations of John C. Bennett's 1842 spiritual wifery with associated lists of signatories, Alexander writes, "From the above testimonies I draw the conclusion, that some affidavits lately taken in Salt Lake City are false."⁴⁸ Alexander further ridicules claims about the 1843 polygamy revelation. "[A]ccording to their own testimony," he writes, "they only have a copy, written from *memory*, which, it is said, was locked up

⁴²Gary Bergera notes that the 14 September 1866 testimony of Heber C. Kimball's involvement with Nauvoo polygamy occurred the day after Alexander H. Smith left for California. Gary James Bergera, "Memory as Evidence: Dating Joseph Smith's Plural Marriages to Louisa Beaman, Zina Jacobs, and Presendia Buell," *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 4 (Oct. 2015): 96 and 102, [LINK](#).

⁴³Joseph F. Smith to Orson Pratt, Jul. 19, 1875, in Joseph F. Smith letterpress copybook, July 19, 1875 - September 7, 1879, p. 3, MS 1325, CHL, [LINK](#).

⁴⁴Taysom, *Like a Fiery Meteor*, 152. See also Bradley and Hales, "LDS Joseph vs. RLDS Joseph," 209-210.

⁴⁵Alexander H. Smith, *Polygamy: Was it an Original Tenet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints?* (The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, n.d.), LatterDayTruth website, [LINK](#); David H. Smith, *The Bible versus Polygamy* (The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, n.d.), LatterDayTruth website, [LINK](#). Both Alexander and David's pamphlets built on scriptural arguments against polygamy that were published earlier in *A Word of Consolation to the Scattered Saints* (1853) and *Address to the Saints in Utah* (1864, revised in 1869). Jason W. Briggs, Zenos H. Gurley, and John Harrington, *A Word of Consolation to the Scattered Saints* (D. W. Scott & Co., 1853), 21-23, LatterDayTruth website, [LINK](#); E. C. Briggs and R. H. Attwood, *Address to the Saints in Utah* (Turnbull & Smith, 1864), 1-20, LatterDayTruth website, [LINK](#); E. C. Briggs and R. M. Attwood, rev. by Joseph Smith and W. W. Blair, *An Address to the Saints in Utah and California* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1869), 1-20, LatterDayTruth website, [LINK](#).

⁴⁶Valeen Tippetts Avery, *From Mission to Madness: Last Son of the Mormon Prophet* (University of Illinois Press, 1998), 125-126.

⁴⁷Alexander Smith, *Polygamy: Was it an Original Tenet*, 1.

⁴⁸Alexander Smith, *Polygamy: Was it an Original Tenet*, 6.

in someone[’s] desk for nine long years.”⁴⁹ He says it is “evident that a supposed copy of a revelation has been palmed off upon the people, by a designing set of men, who... have made money and women their only pleasure.”⁵⁰

Madison M. Scott’s Correspondence with LDS Church Leaders

Madison addressed his initial letter to Brigham Young, President of the LDS Church in Utah.⁵¹ Without giving his personal beliefs, he mentions that there are many of the Latter Day Saint faith in his community, with some contending “that the Church at Salt Lake is the true Church,” but others who say “it is not so.”⁵² He notes the recent visits of W. W. Blair, Thomas W. Smith, and others who argued that the Utah Church was in apostasy for introducing polygamy. “[T]ell them That you did not introduce Polygomy,” he requests, “but that Joe Smith introduced [it] or that the Rev[elation] was given to him concerning many wives.”⁵³ Madison further asks for information “of young Joe Smith’s be[i]ng the successor of his fath[e]r instead of yourself,” arguing that it would be “a great favor” for those contending “for the truth.”⁵⁴ He discloses that “[y]oung Joe has a church of nearly 30 members” in Scottsville with RLDS church leader William H. Kelley there “to make out their claims [and] also to disprove [Brigham Young’s].”⁵⁵ Madison signs his letter with the honorary title of esquire reflecting his current position as Justice of the Peace.⁵⁶

Madison’s letter was answered by David McKenzie, Brigham Young’s private secretary.⁵⁷ Writing under the date of June 8, 1871, McKenzie explains that “the doctrine of ‘Celestial Marriage,’ or Plurality of Wives was taught and practised by the Prophet Joseph Smith, having been revealed to him at Nauvoo, July 12, 1843.”⁵⁸ He identifies William Clayton, “a resident of this city,” as the scribe for that revelation, and says that Clayton “testified to

⁴⁹Alexander Smith, *Polygamy: Was it an Original Tenet*, 7.

⁵⁰Alexander Smith, *Polygamy: Was it an Original Tenet*, 7.

⁵¹Madison M. Scott to Young, 1871 (see Appendix A).

⁵²Madison M. Scott to Young, 1871, 1-2.

⁵³Madison M. Scott to Young, 1871, 2.

⁵⁴Madison M. Scott to Young, 1871, 2.

⁵⁵Madison M. Scott to Young, 1871, 3.

⁵⁶Madison served as Justice of the Peace for Lafayette Township from April 1868 to May 1872. Madison M. Scott to Young, 1871, 3. “Township Officers Elected in Floyd County,” *New Albany Daily Commercial*, Apr. 10, 1868; “Justices of the Peace,” *The New Albany Daily Ledger*, Oct. 22, 1870.

⁵⁷David McKenzie became Brigham Young’s private secretary in 1868. Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout 1844-1861* (University of Utah Press and Utah State Historical Society, 1982), 2:698 n58.

⁵⁸David McKenzie to Madison M. Scott, Jun. 8, 1871, in Letterbook, vol. 12, Feb. 9, 1870 – Mar. 15, 1872, pp. 713–714, Brigham Young office files, 1832-1878, CR 1234 1, CHL, *LINK* (see Appendix B).

this in public, times almost without number.”⁵⁹ McKenzie continues, “Some of our elders testified to Alexander and David Smith in the office of Pres^t. Brigham Young, in my hearing, that they had a plurality of wives given to them by the Prophet Joseph Smith, their father, in Nauvoo. Several of the women certify the same.”⁶⁰ He further lays blame for the dispute on Joseph Smith’s wife, Emma Smith, saying that she raised “her children to believe that the doctrine was neither taught nor practised by their father; and they were too young at the time of his death to know for themselves.”⁶¹

It appears that Madison received the response from President Young’s office within a couple of weeks.⁶² He then pens another letter, this time to William Clayton himself, on June 23, 1871.⁶³ Although the second letter is not extant, Clayton’s lengthy reply indicates that Madison’s requests mirrored the first. Clayton was indignant about RLDS claims that the Utah Church was in apostasy, “that we have introduced polygamy,” asserting his personal belief that Joseph Smith III knew better.⁶⁴ Clayton then provides a detailed account of Joseph Smith dictating the “Revelation on Celestial marriage” on July 12, 1843, explaining it took three hours to write. On that same day, “a copy was taken by Bishop Whitney, which copy is now here.”⁶⁵ He states that Joseph Smith sealed Clayton to his second wife, his “first wife being then living,” and that Clayton himself sealed a woman to Joseph Smith. “I could name ten or a dozen of his wives who are living now in this Territory,” he asserts, “so that for any man to tell me that Joseph did not teach polygamy, he is losing his time, for I know better.”⁶⁶ Clayton closes his letter by bearing testimony of plural marriage to Madison, “You may rest assured that no man that fights against polygamy will have the privilege of sitting down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven.”⁶⁷

The Aftermath

If Madison M. Scott received Clayton’s reply, it did not appear to hinder the progress of RLDS missionary work in Southern Indiana. Church leaders William H. Kelley, Thomas W. Smith, and W. W. Blair continued to visit the area, supporting the work of James G. Scott and his brothers in sharing the message of the Reorganized Church.⁶⁸

⁵⁹McKenzie to Madison M. Scott, 1871, 1.

⁶⁰McKenzie to Madison M. Scott, 1871, 1.

⁶¹McKenzie to Madison M. Scott, 1871, 1.

⁶²Clayton notes the date of Madison’s June 23, 1871 letter in his reply.

⁶³Clayton to Madison M. Scott, 1871, 1 (see Appendix C).

⁶⁴Clayton to Madison M. Scott, 1871, 1.

⁶⁵Clayton to Madison M. Scott, 1871, 2.

⁶⁶Clayton to Madison M. Scott, 1871, 3.

⁶⁷Clayton to Madison M. Scott, 1871, 4.

⁶⁸Eden Branch records; F. B. Blair, *Memoirs*, 173 and 186.

In 1876, Madison moved his family to New Albany, Floyd County, Indiana. He sold his store in Scottsville and set himself up as a dry goods merchant in the city.⁶⁹ It is possible the religious tension in Scottsville was a factor in the removal. One Scott descendant writes, “Since some of the Scott family belonged to the RLDS branch at Mt. Eden, all other Scotts who did not belong could not escape the public scrutiny and out-cry against the Mormon (Latter Day Saints) faith.”⁷⁰ At the time of his death in 1892, Madison M. Scott was a member of the Central Christian Church in New Albany.⁷¹

Word apparently got out about Clayton’s 1871 letter to Madison M. Scott, and at least one individual expressed interest in obtaining a copy. Clayton likely consulted his letterpress book to create a verbatim transcript for George A. Smith.⁷² In his cover letter, dated August 21, 1872, Clayton apologetically writes, “I did not anticipate that any portion of the letter would find its way to publick print, or I should have taken pains to more fully explain one or two points, which may appear obs[c]ure.”⁷³ In February 1874, Clayton expanded on his testimony in a separate affidavit drafted by Joseph F. Smith.⁷⁴

Conclusion

This article provides context for William Clayton’s 1871 letter to Madison M. Scott, a non-Mormon living in Scottsville, Indiana. Madison requested personal testimony from Utah leaders concerning Joseph Smith’s practice of polygamy to combat the influence of RLDS missionaries among his family and community. Correspondence between Madison M. Scott and LDS Church leaders reveals an unlikely alliance combining against a perceived common enemy. Madison’s initial request was likely prompted by RLDS missionaries introducing the most-recently published tracts on polygamy and succession. In the anti-polygamy tract, Alexander H. Smith was responding to claims of his father’s involvement in plural marriage encountered during his 1869 mission to Utah. Clayton’s 1871 letter to Madison M. Scott

⁶⁹Floyd County, Indiana, Deed records, Vol. 22, Feb. 18, 1876 - Aug. 14, 1877, p. 271, no. 3380, FamilySearch website, [LINK](#); “State News,” *Richmond Evening Item* (Richmond, IN), May 2, 1892, p. 1, col. 5; Newspapers.com website, [LINK](#).

⁷⁰Nelson S. Scott, “Moses Scott, Son of Robert and Winifred (Green) Scott,” in *The Family Lineage of Robert Scott & Winifred Green*, 2006, Scott Family website, [LINK](#).

⁷¹“State News,” *Richmond Evening Item*, May 2, 1892.

⁷²Clayton’s handwritten copy is nearly identical to the version in his letterpress book, with differences primarily in punctuation and capitalization. William Clayton to Madison M. Scott, Nov. 11, 1871, in William Clayton Letterbooks, 1860-1879, Volume 4, pages 764-765, Utah and the Mormons Collection (Bancroft Library), undated, MS 8305, CHL, [LINK](#).

⁷³Clayton to George A. Smith, 1872. (see Appendix D)

⁷⁴William Clayton affidavit, Feb. 16, 1874, Affidavits about celestial marriage, 1869-1915, MS 3423, CHL, [LINK](#); Bruno and Stone, “Crafting a Sacred Story,” 10-24.

should be viewed as part of the wider contentious dialogue in the nineteenth century between the LDS and RLDS Churches over the memory of Joseph Smith and polygamy.

Appendix A

Madison M. Scott Letter to Brigham Young⁷⁵

Note: A member of the historian's office wrote "May(?) 1871" on the back of this letter. Contextual clues support that date.⁷⁶

Scottsville Floyd Co Ind^a
To Your Honor
 Brigham Young
it may seam strange
but never the less I hope
you will pleas[e] Receive this
letter with kindness – you
perhaps will know that
there are ma[n]y of the
Saints in this vicinity
or at least ma[n]y in the
Latter day-Saint faith,
and Recently. W W Blair[,]
Smith[,] and others have
come here and have establish[ed]
a church - while ma[n]y contend
For the truth that the church
at Salt Lake is the true
church they say that it is

it is not so that you
have gone off in apostasy
from the fact they Says–
you have introduced
Polygomy. well tell them
That you did not introdu[c]e

⁷⁵Madison M. Scott to Brigham Young, 1871, Brigham Young office files, 1832-1878, CR 1234 1, CHL, *LINK*.

⁷⁶In his letter, Madison M. Scott mentioned the presence of RLDS leader W. H. Kelley. Records from the Mt. Eden branch indicate Kelley was in Scottsville on May 28, 1871, when he ordained John A. Scott to the office of Elder. The response from Brigham Young's office, dated June 8, 1871, suggests that the letter was received in Salt Lake in the early part of June. Eden branch records. David McKenzie letter to Madison M. Scott, 8 June 1871.

Polygomy, but that Joe Smith
introduced [it] or that the Rev[elation]
was given to him concerning
many wives now if you
or Bro Jo[h]n Taylor could
furnish us with any-
information concern[in]g
this mat[t]er together with that
of young Joe Smith's be[i]ng
the successor of his fath[e]r
instead of yourself you
would do us \a great favor/ that are contend[in]g
for the truth a great [d]eal
of good and yourself also
because they are trying to
do you great injustice[.]

Now I hope you will not
treat this with silence for-
the good of the Cause-
Please to grant our request
Yo[u]ng Joe has a church of
nearly 30 members[.] they have
one Kelly- here now on
a mission they say-
or try to make out their
clai^mes also to disprove yours
Please to answer by retur[n]
mail myself & others have
no motive but simply
after the truth - Yours-
Very Truly & Respectful[l]y
Madison M. Scott Esqr

Address. Madison M Scott.
Scottville
Floyd County
Indiana

Appendix B

David McKenzie Letter to Madison M. Scott Jun. 8, 1871⁷⁷

Note: David McKenzie was Brigham Young's personal secretary.

Salt Lake City, U. T.
June 8, 1871.

Madison M. Scott, Esq^r.
Scotville, Floyd Co. Ind.

Dear Sir,

Yours to Prest. Brigham Young, without date, has been received, to which I have been instructed to reply. With regard to the doctrine of "Celestial Marriage," or Plurality of Wives, it was taught and practised by the Prophet Joseph Smith, having been revealed to him at Nauvoo, July 12, 1843. The scribe who wrote it, M^r. William Clayton, is a resident of this city, and has testified to this in public, times almost without number. Several of the Prophet's wives are now living in this city. Some of our elders testified to Alexander and David Smith in the office of Pres^t. Brigham Young, in my hearing, that they had a plurality of wives given to them by the Prophet Joseph Smith, their father, in Nauvoo. Several of the women certify the same. This very day, a lady, a stranger here, not a member of our church, told me in conversation, "she Knew the Mormons practiced Polygamy in Nauvoo, for Emma Smith told her so." Yet this very Emma Smith, (the Prophet's first wife) has trained her children to believe that the doctrine was neither taught nor practised by their father; and they were too young at the time of his death to Know for themselves. The fact is, she has fought the principle from the first, and because

the authorities of the church would not succumb to her, she has hated the doctrine, and taught her children to hate it, and all who teach it; and she has spared no pains to bring them in antagonism with the authorities, whom she represents as the bitter enemies of the truth as taught by the prophet.

⁷⁷David McKenzie to Madison M. Scott, Jun. 8, 1871, in Letterbook, vol. 12, Feb. 9, 1870 – Mar. 15, 1872, pp. 713–714, Brigham Young office files, 1832-1878, CR 1234 1, CHL, [LINK](#).

Hoping this will in some measure answer your interrogatory.

I am, very respectfully

D. McKenzie Secr

Prest B. Young.

Appendix C

William Clayton Letter to Madison M. Scott, Nov. 11, 1871⁷⁸

*Note: This is a handwritten copy William Clayton likely made from his letterbook to send to George A. Smith. Although the wording is identical to that in his letterbook, capitalization and punctuation differ slightly.*⁷⁹

(Copy)

Salt Lake City. Nov^r 11. 1871

Madison M. Scott. Esqr

Dear Sir:—

Your letter of 23rd June last was received by due course of mail; but owing to my being so very closely confined with public duties, which has almost destroyed my health, I have not answered your letter so promptly as is my practice. My health is yet very poor, but I have resigned the office which was bearing so heavy upon me, and am in hopes to regain my usual sound health.

Now in regard to the subject matter of your letter, it appears to me the principal topic is what is commonly called polygamy, but which I prefer to call Celestial marriage. As to young Joseph Smith saying that the church here have apostatized; that we have introduced polygamy, denying bitterly that his father ever had a revelation on the subject, that is all mere bosh. I believe he knows better, and I have often felt sorry to learn that the sons of the prophet, should spend their time in contending against a pure and holy principle which their father had his blood shed to establish. They will

⁷⁸William Clayton to Madison M. Scott, 11 November 1871, Affidavits about celestial marriage, 1869-1915, MS 3423, CHL, [LINK](#). Emphasis in original.

⁷⁹William Clayton to Madison M. Scott, 11 November 1871, in William Clayton Letterbooks, 1860-1879, Volume 4, pages 764-765, Utah and the Mormons Collection (Bancroft Library), undated, MS 8305, CHL, [LINK](#).

have a heavy atonement to make when they meet their father in the next world. They are in the hands of God, and my respect for their father will not permit me to say much about the wicked course of his sons. Now I say to you, as I am ready to testify to all the world, and on which testimony I am most willing to meet all the Latter Day Saints and all apostates, in time and through all eternity, I did write the Revelation on Celestial marriage given through the Prophet Joseph Smith on the 12th of July 1843. When the Revelation was written there was no one present except the Prophet Joseph, his brother Hyrum and myself. It was written in the small office upstairs in the rear of the brick store which stood on the banks of the Mississippi river. It took some three hours to write it. Joseph dictated sentence by sentence and I wrote it as he dictated. After the whole was written Joseph requested me to read it slowly and carefully which I did, and he then pronounced it correct. The same night a copy was taken by Bishop Whitney, which copy is now here, and which I know and testify is correct. The original was destroyed by Emma Smith.

I again testify that the revelation on polygamy was given through the prophet Joseph on the 12th July 1843, and that the prophet Joseph both taught and practised polygamy I do positively know, and bear testimony to the fact. In April 1843 he sealed to me my second wife, my first wife being then living. By my said second wife I had two sons born in Nauvoo. The first one died; the second one is here now and is married. I had the honor to seal one woman to Joseph under his direction. I could name ten or a dozen of his wives who are living now in this Territory, so that for any man to tell me that Joseph did not teach polygamy, he is losing his time, for I know

better. It is not hearsay, nor opinion with me, for I positively know of what I speak and I testify to the truth, and shall be willing to meet all opponents on the subject through all eternity. As to the Church here having apostatized that is all a mere matter of assertion, destitute of truth. Pres^t Young and his associates are, and have been, doing every thing they can to carry out the plans and instructions of the prophet Joseph, and so

eternity will prove to the condemnation and confusion of all their enemies. Any one that says to the contrary does not know Joseph nor the mission the Lord gave him to fulfil. Polygamy is a Celestial order, the most sacred and holy that was ever revealed from Heaven to man. The Revelation of July 12th 1843 says plainly, “to whomsoever this law is revealed they must and shall obey the same, or they shall be damned saith the Lord God.” How any man who pretends to believe the bible can fight against polygamy, is a mystery to me. Abraham and Jacob were polygamists. One is called the “father of the faithful.” Of the other it is said, “In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;” so that there can be no blessings for the human family only through a polygamist. I do not know where I could get a copy of the revelation or I would send you one. You may rest assured that no man that fights against polygamy will have the privilege of sitting down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. I must now close. I could say much on this subject did time allow.

Truly Yours. W^m Clayton

Appendix D

William Clayton Letter to George A. Smith, Aug. 21, 1872⁸⁰

Aug. 21, '72
Wm. Clayton
To Geo. A. Smith

Salt Lake City, Aug^t 21.1872
Pres^t George A. Smith

Dear brother

Accompanying is the copy of the letter I addressed to Mr. Scott last November. The underscoring is precisely as it is in the original. The copy is verbatim.

It is needless to say that I did not anticipate that any portion of the letter would find its way to publick print, or I should have taken pains to more fully explain one or two points, which may appear obs[c]ure.

Your brother in the gospel.

W^m Clayton

⁸⁰William Clayton to George A. Smith, August 21, 1872, George A. Smith papers, 1834-1877, MS 1322, CHL, *LINK*.