

## **Like Two Crazy Aunts in the Attic: Latter-day Saints and Popular Polygamy Stereotypes**

By  
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One day when I was in fifth or sixth grade, a classmate came to my central California elementary school and said, “You’re a Mormon, right?” I answered in the affirmative and he then announced, “My father says Mormons can have more than one wife. Is that true?” I thought he was joking. I thought everyone knew we no longer practice plural marriage, so I played along with him. “Sure,” I said, “my dad has three.” Unfortunately, he believed me and it took a little bit of explaining for him to finally believe I had actually been joking and members of the LDS Church no longer practice plural marriage. That was my introduction to the fact that there are a lot of misperceptions about Mormons and especially about their polygamous past.

Unfortunately, this is certainly not a new phenomenon. Since the introduction of plural marriage, Latter-day Saints have been the victim of misunderstanding, stereotyping, and prurient curiosity.

Stereotyping is a natural process of human nature as people attempt to simplify, categorize and understand each other and aspects of this complex world. Various levels and forms of stereotyping occur everyday and, for the most part, is a healthy, positive way of synthesizing life. Unfortunately, stereotyping can also be negative and is often used to create and re-enforce bigotry.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its adherents have been stereotyped since their very beginning. Most of these stereotypes have been negative and a number of them regard the nineteenth-century practice of plural marriage, more commonly known as polygamy.

Because plural marriage was so strikingly contrary to Victorian American norms, the LDS practice engendered a significant amount of animosity from outside society.

From the 1860s through 1887, the year D. W. Meinig described as the height of American intolerance of ethnic identity, the LDS Church and its members were the target of federal legislation aimed to force their submission.<sup>1</sup> The Edmunds Act of 1882 was followed by the Edmunds-Tucker Act in 1887, which western historian Howard Lamar described as “one of the most far-reaching pieces of federal legislation ever passed in peacetime history.”<sup>2</sup> Legal historians Edwin B. Firmage and R. Collin Mangrum were even more critical of the legislation, “Even under the most generous standards of legislative latitude, the Edmunds-Tucker Act skirted the boundaries of constitutionality. It was legislation that nakedly attacked a religious institution and imposed civil punishments on an entire group of people solely for their religious beliefs.”<sup>3</sup>

After several tumultuous decades in which the LDS Church and its members faced a gauntlet of social and legal persecution, the church announced the end of practicing plural marriage. Admittedly, Latter-day Saint cessation of plural marriage was a slow, painful process which, unfortunately, left many members confused and ambiguous about The Principle, as it was called, and encouraged continued practice by some members and stereotyping from the outside.

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<sup>1</sup>Meinig, “The Mormon Nation and the America Empire,” 47. Interestingly, 1887 was also the year of the Dawes Act, which, according to Meinig, “forced Native Americans to accept individual parcels of land, allow the remainder of their lands to be taken by whites, and submit to a comprehensive program of cultural change . . . and systematic suppression of Native American languages, religious ceremonies, and marriage practices” (36).

<sup>2</sup>Howard R. Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History* (New York: Norton, 1970), 398.

<sup>3</sup>Edwin Brown Firmage and R. Collin Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 202.

Outside media fascination regarding plural marriage has continued to the present.<sup>4</sup> The stereotypes and imagery created in the nineteenth-century regarding Mormons and polygamy had several themes, three of which were the depiction of Mormon men being lustful and lascivious; of downtrodden Mormon polygamous wives victimized by lustful men; and, ironically, of Mormon polygamous wives being immoral and insatiable harlots. These themes have continued to the present and will be highlighted in this paper.

### **Lustful and Lascivious Mormon Men**

Early critics of the LDS Church helped shape the Mormon image with their descriptions of the “evils and horrors and abominations of the Mormon system.”<sup>5</sup> They portrayed Mormon men as “lecherous old scamps”<sup>6</sup> and “panderers to ... lusts”<sup>7</sup> who used sexual magnetism and hypnotism

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<sup>4</sup> The numerous news articles and other types of media that continue to discuss aspects of past and present plural marriage is incredible. A few examples would be the news coverage during the Vancouver British Columbia Temple open house and dedication. According to Nick Newman, “A mixed bag of temple reviews in the Canadian press,” *Mormon Times* (8 April 2010), [http://www.mormontimes.com/mormon\\_living/temples/?id=14294](http://www.mormontimes.com/mormon_living/temples/?id=14294), accessed: 15 May 2010, “But with every mention of LDS temples and belief comes references to polygamy.” *The Vancouver Sun* mentioned the FLDS and polygamy which is not surprising given the continued controversy regarding Winston Blackmore of Bountiful, British Columbia and his plural wives. Douglas Todd, “Mormon Church gives rare glimpse inside luxurious Langley temple,” *The Vancouver Sun* (7 April 2010), <http://www.vancouversun.com/life/Mormon+Church+gives+rare+glimpse+inside+luxurious+Langley+temple/2775268/story.html>, accessed 13 April 2010, wrote that with “Mormon fundamentalist polygamists in the Kootenays...the Mormon Church realizes it has to work hard to show its wholesome face to the world.” This reporter was not alone in confusing fundamentalists with the mainstream church and even thinking the LDS Church still practices plural marriage. Massimo Introvigne wrote in “The Mormon Factor in the Romney Campaign: European Perspectives,” *International Journal of Mormon Studies* 2 (Spring 2009): 102-103, “The astonishing news is that to a larger extent the fact that the LDS Church no longer practices polygamy is not generally known in Central and Southern Europe.” A number of articles assumed Romney’s one wife was an exception rather than the rule.

<sup>5</sup> [Maria Ward], *Female Life among the Mormons: A Narrative of Many Years’ Personal Experience* (New York: Burdick Brothers, 1857), iii-iv. For more descriptions and explanations regarding nineteenth-century anti-Mormon literature and imagery, see Craig L. Foster, “Victorian Pornographic Imagery in Anti-Mormon Literature,” *Journal of Mormon History* 19:1 (Spring 1993): 115-132.

<sup>6</sup> William Jarman, *British Female Slaves* (n.p.: Anti-Mormon Tracts No. 13, n.d.), 1.

<sup>7</sup> John Benjamin Franklin, *The Mysteries and the Crimes of Mormonism; or, a Voice from the Utah Pandemonium* (London: C. Elliott, ca. 1858-59), 3.

to seduce unsuspecting women. “The image of Mormon sensuality was common throughout the polemical literature on Mormon polygamy...”<sup>8</sup> To Victorians, the Mormon polygamist was “both a villain and a threat to human decency.”<sup>9</sup>

These same themes of gross sensuality, sexual magnetism, hypnotic powers, insatiable lust and deep-rooted evil carried over into the twentieth-century and into different mediums of communication. The anti-Mormon stereotypes of the printed page came to life with inaccuracy and malice in the early movies. These movies “generally depicted [Mormons] as bearded, depraved and violent cultists who abducted wholesome American women into polygamous marriages.”<sup>10</sup>

Stereotyping in movies is, of course, nothing new. As one film critic wrote:

Hollywood deals in stereotypes. Ask a lawyer, doctor, psychiatrist, policeman or stockbroker how they feel about the way their professions are portrayed in movies and on television, and they’ll all likely say the same thing – Hollywood never gets it right.

Or in the case of ethnic stereotypes, ask American Indians or Asians or Jews – or women – the same question.

Similarly, culture and religion are frequently misrepresented, whether for the sake of a plot device or a one-line gag.<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, the first movie made about Latter-day Saints and plural marriage was a 1905 Edison produced short nickelodeon-type film titled, *A Trip to Salt Lake City*. The film, “inspired

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<sup>8</sup> Cannon, “The Awesome Power of Sex,” 65.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas McKay, “The Puissant Procreator: Comic Ridicule of Brigham Young,” *Sunstone* 7:6 (November-December 1982): 16.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew O’Hehir, “The Mormons are coming,” Salon.com, 20 September 2007, <http://www.salon.com/books/review/2007/09/20/mormons/> (accessed 21 September 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Chris Hicks, “Cinema Saints: How Mormons are Portrayed by Hollywood,” *Deseret News* (26 February 1993): W1.

largely out of humorous curiosity,” was made for laughs.<sup>12</sup> It depicted a henpecked polygamous father with “an abundance of children and multiple nagging wives.”<sup>13</sup>

In spite of this initial humorous approach toward Mormons and plural marriage, the majority of the films gave a much darker portrayal. Among the better known films produced in the first few decades were *A Mormon Maid* (1917) and *Trapped by the Mormons* (1922). *A Mormon Maid* was of “extreme high quality”<sup>14</sup> for that era and used certain motifs that reinforced the public’s negative perception of Mormonism. It took some of the Victorian themes of Danites, strange temple ceremonies and lustful Mormon men and added visually to them by including Ku Klux Klan-like Mormons, secret rituals, and insidious plots to abduct and deflower the heroine.<sup>15</sup>

*A Mormon Maid* was “designed to incite fear in the viewer of the Mormon characters” by drawing “upon elements of the horror genre in order to fulfill that effect.”<sup>16</sup> A foundation of the horror film is “separation between difference and normality” in which “normality is threatened by the monster.” “Representing Mormons as monsters, isolated, and mysterious was popular in the literature of the Victorian Era” and films like *A Mormon Maid* enhanced the monstrous stereotype.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> James V. D’Arc, “The Image of Mormons in the Movies: The Way We Were,” *This People* 6:5 (August/September 1985): 44.

<sup>13</sup> Travis Sutton, “‘According to Their Wills and Pleasures’: The Sexual Stereotyping of Mormon Men in American Film and Television,” (Denton, Texas: Master of Arts thesis, University of North Texas, 2009), 30.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Alan Nelson, “Commercial Propaganda in the Silent Film: A Case Study of ‘A Mormon Maid’ (1917),” *Film History* 1:2 (1987): 149.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-152. Richard Alan Nelson’s “From Antagonism to Acceptance: Mormons and the Silver Screen,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10:3 (Spring 1977): 58-69 places *A Mormon Maid* into the context of that time-period and compares it to other films critical of Mormons.

<sup>16</sup> Sutton, 90.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 90 and 99.

*Trapped by the Mormons* which was adapted from the book, *A Love Story of a Mormon*, by British anti-Mormon Winifred Graham, also portrayed Mormon men as monsters. The movie opened to “a white, gaunt face with enormous eyes and the pulsating eyebrows of a hypnotist” and the Mormon villain in the movie used his unearthly powers to confuse and try to make the heroine his plural wife.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of their over the top portrayals of Mormon men as polygamous monsters, both *Trapped by the Mormons* and *A Mormon Maid* were extremely influential in their time.<sup>19</sup> This was especially since they played on “popular fears of Mormonism and polygamy” and “Eastern exhibitors openly stressed the alleged historicity of the photoplay with extravagant copy.”<sup>20</sup> By the 1930s, however, the vitriolic nature of media portrayals all but disappeared; this was mostly because of enforcement of the Hollywood Production Code which lasted until the 1960s.

Visual stereotypes in films and on television have continued to reinforce outsiders’ perceptions of Mormons, including mistaken views of plural marriage. 1969’s *Paint Your Wagon*, for example humorously portrayed the Mormon man “operating a monstrous form of polygamy through treating women as property in his act of buying and selling.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, polygamy was portrayed or referenced for laughs in films like *They Call Me Trinity* (1971), *The Dutchess and the Dirtwater Fox* (1976), and *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986).

*September Dawn* (2007) was a throwback to the sensationalized depictions of plural marriage in silent films like *A Mormon Maid*. Plural marriage in this lamentable film is portrayed as dehumanizing in over the top almost laughable ways. For example, one of the Mormon

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<sup>18</sup> D’Arc, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Sutton, 100.

<sup>20</sup> Nelson, “Commercial Propaganda in the Silent Film, 156.

<sup>21</sup> Sutton, 107.

characters boasted “about the pleasures of having two bodies in his bed” but did not feel love for either of his wives. Thus plural marriage, as portrayed in *September Dawn*, “is incapable of producing human feelings beyond sexual gratification.”<sup>22</sup>

The image of more than one woman in a bed with a man appeared in nineteenth-century cartoons of women fighting to see who would be next to Brigham Young in bed. This image was used again in the twenty-first century with *Big Love*.

The HBO series, which the producers claimed to have spent three years researching plural marriage in preparation, premiered in March 2006.<sup>23</sup> The series, which, quite frankly, is nothing more than a soap opera, has taken a number of real life events and incorporated them into the show. Thus we have the Juniper Creek compound which is supposed to represent Colorado City; the Lost Boys; conflict between rival polygamous groups; LDS temple ceremonies and other such subject matter. Unfortunately, the show is also filled with clichéd stereotypes.

### **Mormon Polygamous Wives Downtrodden and Victimized**

Negative imagery and stereotyping of Mormon women involved in plural marriages has been around since the mid-nineteenth century. Victorian literature portrayed the women as innocent victims, usually with big eyes, soft skin and beautiful hair, seduced by the immoral men and then held captive. Usually their prison was a Mormon harem. In fact, comparisons between Mormons and Muslims was a sub-theme that ran throughout the different types of media portrayals, usually involving polygamy, concubines and harems. William Jarman published a

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<sup>22</sup> Sutton, 111. For a detailed review of both the book and movie, *September Dawn*, see Craig L. Foster, “Massacring the Truth: A Review of *September Dawn* by Christopher Cain and Carole Whang Schutter,” *Farms Review* 19:2 (2007): 137-176.

<sup>23</sup> Felicia R. Lee, “‘Big Love’: Real Polygamists Look at HBO Polygamists and Find Sex,” *The New York Times*, 28 March 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/28/arts/television/28poly.html?ei=5090&en=f5a8a1639b304daf&ex=1301202000&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&pagewanted=all>, (accessed 5 August 2010).

pamphlet describing “fresh young girls” led into “Mormon Harems” where many died young, either by suicide or “of a broken heart.”<sup>24</sup>

The overarching theme in this type of stereotyping is the subjugation of girls and women through plural marriage and, in the process, despair and the loss of innocence. From the sensationalized exposés of the Victorian Era to the recent romantic novels of Marian Wells which described the misery and despair of polygamous life in 1800’s<sup>25</sup> and even the movie *September Dawn*, this theme has been shaped and reinforced. Non-fictional studies of early Mormon and also Fundamentalist plural marriage have also used the stereotype of the subjugated, pathetic plural wife. Carolyn Jessop’s *Escape* as well as Elissa Wall’s *Stolen Innocence*, as well as Daphne Braham’s 2008 book, *The Secret Lives of Saints*, among others, described the same themes of trials, feelings of despair, and loss of innocence of Fundamentalist women.<sup>26</sup>

### **Mormon Polygamous Wives Immoral and Insatiable**

In stark contrast to the portrayal of downtrodden, long-suffering plural wives is the last of the three types of stereotyping, which is that Mormon plural wives were immoral and sexually insatiable. In spite of the obvious irony of the two extremes, this was, nevertheless, a stereotype used in the nineteenth-century and beyond.

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<sup>24</sup> William Jarman, *British Female Slaves* (n.p.: Anti-Mormon Tracts No. 13, n.d.), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Marian Wells, *The Wedding Dress* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 1982), 243-245, 253-262; and, Marian Wells, *With This Ring* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 1984), 12, 183-185.

<sup>26</sup> See Elissa Wall, *Loss of innocence: My Story of growing Up in a Polygamous Sect, Becoming a Teenage Bride, and Breaking Free of Warren Jeffs* (New York: William Morrow Press, 2008) and Daphne Braham, *The Secret Lives of Saints: Child Brides and Lost Boys in Canada’s Polygamous Mormon Sect* (USA: Random House Canada, 2008).



Some examples were John Benjamin Franklin's claim that plural marriage was "but another name for indiscriminate prostitution."<sup>27</sup> An evangelical minister described Salt Lake City as a "bedlam, brothel, sink of iniquity, Hades, and a vortex of moral ruin," where "each family is a house of prostitution and all liars, thieves, drunkards, libertines, and subjects of any and all delusions."<sup>28</sup>

The HBO series *Big Love* is filled with clichéd stereotypes, including over-sexed wives vying for the husband's attentions. In episode two of the first season, the episode is titled "Viagra Blue" and one of Bill Henricksen's three wives' "lack of inhibition" and how it bothers the sister-wives who insist on their share of alone time. This appears to be a recurring theme in the series.<sup>29</sup>

### **Impact on Modern Latter-day Saints**

A common thread among these three stereotypes was gross Mormon sensuality. "The image of Mormon sensuality was common throughout the polemical literature on Mormon polygamy [in the 19<sup>th</sup> century]."<sup>30</sup> While these stereotypes were definitely over-the-top, aspects of all three have, nevertheless, continued up to the present.

Polygamy and the associated themes of sexuality are too tempting for people outside the LDS Church to ignore. This almost prurient interest in past Mormon plural marriage and, presently, Fundamentalist plural marriage, is present in many news stories regarding the LDS

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<sup>27</sup> John Benjamin Franklin, *The Mysteries and crimes of Mormonism; or, a Voice from the Utah Pandemonium* (London: C. Elliott, ca. 1858-1859), 3.

<sup>28</sup> C.R. Van Emman, Letters to James H. McNeill, 2 January and 28 February 1857, as quoted in Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1960), 207.

<sup>29</sup> *Big Love*, Season 1, Episode 2, "Viagra Blue," HBO, <http://www.hbo.com/big-love/#/big-love/episodes/1/02-viagra-blue/synopsis.html>, accessed 13 May 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Allred Cannon, "The Awesome Power of Sex: The Polemical Campaign Against Mormon Polygamy," *Pacific Historical Review* v. 43, no. 1 (1974): 65.

Church. In fact, even stories regarding the FLDS Church and other Fundamentalist groups often mention the LDS Church, thus associating modern Mormons with Fundamentalists. This helps perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes about Latter-day Saints.<sup>31</sup>

All of these things – our history of plural marriage with its ups and downs; the continued practice of plural marriage by Fundamentalists; media and other outsiders’ interest in Mormon polygamy; and the continued existence of stereotypes that paint Latter-day Saints in broad, if not always accurate strokes – have caused discomfort among many Latter-day Saints; at all levels.

The reasons for discomfort naturally vary by person, with some reasons having more significance than others. The depth of discomfort also varies per person. Many Latter-day Saints are simply unaware of the church’s past practice of plural marriage or do not understand it. In fact, most do not understand Mormon history and the significant role plural marriage played. The sad thing is most members of the LDS Church are not interested enough in history to find out about plural marriage or much else in their church’s past.

Unfortunately, at times the church doesn’t seem to want their members to know about potentially controversial aspects of church history like plural marriage. I realize this seems like a strong statement but a few examples will support it. Several years ago the priesthood/Relief Society manual on the teachings of Brigham Young included a timeline of significant dates in his life, including his first and second marriage, after the first wife died. There was not, however, any mention of Brigham Young’s plural marriages. And, later, the priesthood/Relief Society lesson was about Doctrine and Covenants section 132 and celestial marriage but did not mention plural marriage. A whole lesson on Doctrine and Covenants 132 and not one mention of plural marriage?

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<sup>31</sup> Joel Campbell, “Italian media misunderstand Mormons,” *Mormon Times* (May 13, 2009), [http://www.mormontimes.com/mormon\\_voices/joel\\_campbell/?id=7740](http://www.mormontimes.com/mormon_voices/joel_campbell/?id=7740), (accessed September 17, 2009). Articles discussing polygamy were 473 or 47.3% of those discussing Mormonism or members like Romney and Stephanie Meyer. Many Italians and other Europeans still believe members of the LDS Church practice polygamy.

Furthermore, missionaries giving tours at the Beehive House in Salt Lake City are specifically told not to discuss plural marriage. I would gather that's the same message given at other church historical sites. I remember being about fifteen or sixteen and visiting Brigham Young's Winter Home in St. George. The sister missionary was giving the tour to what appeared to be a non-member family and myself (my parents were attending a session and marriage in the temple and I was entertaining myself). This missionary was telling how Brigham Young's wife would keep house and so, I naturally wondered which wife. So I asked. She got a deer in the headlights expression on her face and said, "well, his wife." "Okay," I answered, "which wife?" "Well, his wife." I finally realized she did not want to discuss Brigham's plural wives, especially if this really was a non-member family, and dropped the subject.

Another example; I work at the Family History Library where part of my job is to host VIPs and other special guests. A number of years ago we had four special visitors from the British Library. They were in Salt Lake for a series of meetings and I was asked to host them not only at the library but also other places on and around Temple Square that I thought would be of interest to them. I made a couple of phone calls setting things up. One call I made was to Church Hosting where I spoke with a missionary. When I suggested taking the guests to the Beehive House she immediately said, "Oh you don't want to do that." I asked why not and she gave a nervous laugh and said, "well, you know." "I know?" I said, somewhat puzzled. She gave another nervous laugh and again repeated that I know and continued, "they might ask questions." "About plural marriage?" I asked. "Yes," she responded. "Well," I replied, perhaps a little too sarcastically, "we wouldn't want them to do that." "No," she answered. I thanked her and hung up.

Ironically, two days later when I guided these four British guests through the library and then the Museum of Church History and Art, they tentatively, almost apologetically asked me about how plural marriage started and what it was like. I told them I would be glad to answer any

question they had. We spoke for at least forty-five minutes during which time I was very open and honest about aspects of plural marriage, including my own family's history.

They thanked me for being willing to so openly and comfortably talk about plural marriage. They said they had asked other Mormons about plural marriage and had been met with embarrassment, silence, and awkwardness. They were not alone.

Plural marriage is an extremely complex topic that causes strong emotions in most members - even among defenders of the faith. It is remarkable that something that has officially been over for 120 years (and yes, I am well aware that it did not end in 1890 - thank goodness, or I wouldn't be here), anyway, it is remarkable that something from so long ago can still cause such strong emotions and, for some, pain. But it does.

So, what should Latter-day Saints do about their polygamous past? Because I'll tell you right now, it's not going away. No matter how much we officially or unofficially ignore it. Our polygamous heritage is here to stay.

How then should we (as a church and as individuals) treat the theoretical two crazy aunts in the attic? Should we continue to hide them in the church's attic, cringing in fear whenever the subject comes up? Should we hem and haw, swallow hard and start looking for a quick exit if we are asked about polygamy? That really doesn't seem to be the best route that either the church or its members should take, because plural marriage will continue to come up until the bitter end.

Let's face it, it's human nature to be curious about lifestyles that differ from our own. I will readily admit that I would love to go spend a week with an Amish family. Heck I'd like to do the same with some of the Fundamentalist families, just to see what life, structure and intra-family dynamics are like. I'm fascinated by family relationships and dynamics and for me, both the Amish and Fundamentalists would be fun to observe from the perspective of a fly on the wall. And then, as I contemplate something like that, embarrassment catches up to me and I ask myself what the

heck am I thinking. These are human beings, for heaven's sake, not lab specimens. Nevertheless, the curiosity is still there.

I also think its human nature to one degree or another to deep-down enjoy watching people be uncomfortable and twist in the wind (although, happily enough, most people keep this baser trait under control). And there will always be those who will continue attacking the LDS Church and being critical of our past and our beliefs. But they are in the vast minority.

So what do we do? As an active member of the LDS Church I do not have an inclination nor do I feel I'm in a position to lecture church leaders or even the regular membership, for that matter. So, instead, I will just offer a few gentle suggestions.

1. Learn our history. Ignorance is not bliss. It is potentially destructive and we cannot understand nor defend our church if we don't know our history. We must know our history, warts and all. And yes, that includes plural marriage.
2. Teach our history. Worse than ignorance is stumbling upon difficult or questionable information about something we have put our faith and our very lives into and having our faith tested or even destroyed. We are having too many people, young and old, who are stumbling upon controversial subjects like plural marriage or the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and are having their trust and faith destroyed. We are doing a serious disservice to our members by not teaching them. We must teach our history. Just this past weekend I was talking with one of my daughter's 16 year old friends and mentioned Joseph Smith's plural wives. Her eyes bugged out, mouth dropped open, and she asked in a weak voice, "Joseph Smith had more than one wife?" Afterward, she repeated several times that she was blown away. We must teach our members about plural marriage rather than wait for them to find out through critical and unfriendly sources. It is better and easier to teach in a faithful setting than to try to explain afterwards. There is nothing too bad, too scary, or too embarrassing in our history that doesn't

warrant a truthful examination. Juanita Brookes once commented, "nothing but the truth is good enough for the church to which I belong." We, here at FAIR, are defenders of the faith, but wouldn't it be better if sometimes we were teaching rather than defending?

3. **Appreciate our history.** We may not understand or even like plural marriage, but we can still appreciate it and the sacrifices made by our forbearers. Let me explain. Do we or do we not believe this was a commandment from God? We may not like some aspects of 19<sup>th</sup> century plural marriage, but we can move beyond the stereotypes that even some Mormons begin to accept and be proud of our heritage.
4. **Relax and embrace.** If this was really a commandment from God, then why the embarrassment? We have to stop being embarrassed and uncomfortable about historical Mormon plural marriage. When I'm asked about plural marriage, I always proudly announce that my great-grandfather had five wives and thirty children and that I come from the 5<sup>th</sup> wife, 27<sup>th</sup> child. After a few exclamations of surprise or amusement and a few questions or comments, the conversation quickly and smoothly moves on to other subjects. If we, as a church approached it with straight forward pride, I think there would be less curiosity and interest in this part of our rich heritage. Stereotypes will probably always be around but if we face our past head on and with pride, these stale stereotypes about plural marriage will fade to the background.