

A Brief Chronology of Mormon Polygamy and Anti-Polygamy Legislation

Compiled by Loren Webb

1831, Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith learns of the principle of plural marriage as early as July 1831 near Independence, Missouri.

1836, He begins to take additional wives in Kirtland, Ohio. (The concept of plural marriage appears to have had its birth in Kirtland, the principle of eternal marriage developed at Nauvoo, Illinois).

1841, A combination of both principles was taught privately by the Prophet Joseph Smith, beginning at this time.

1843, Section 132 received on the morning of July 12, at the request of Hyrum Smith, (Joseph Smith's brother) who hoped a written revelation on the subject would assuage Joseph Smith's wife, Emma Smith's feelings. The revelation was first published in the 1876 edition of the Doctrine & Covenants, replacing the "*Article on Marriage*," written by Oliver Cowdery in 1835.

Aug. 28, 1852, Plural marriage was publicly taught and became a law of the church.

1856, the Republican Party platform sets its goal to eradicate the twin relics of barbarism: slavery and polygamy.

1862, Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act passed by Congress. The act, introduced by Vermont congressman Justin Morrill, intended to "punish and prevent the practice of polygamy in the Territories of the United States...." It also revoked an 1855 act of the Utah Territorial Legislature incorporating the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It also provided that no religious or charitable organization in any territory could "acquire or hold real estate" valued at more than \$50,000. Real estate acquired in excess of the limit would escheat to the United States, but property acquired prior to the act's passage was not subject to those limits.

1874, Poland Act passed by Congress. Gave U.S. district courts in Utah exclusive civil and criminal jurisdiction, thus limiting courts to estate and divorce settlement. The act provided that cases of polygamy or bigamy could be appealed to the United States Supreme Court from the Utah Supreme Court by writ of error. The Poland Act nullified earlier Supreme Court decisions favorable to the Mormons. It created a new jury selection process aimed at limiting Mormon control.

1879, Reynolds Polygamy test case. George Reynolds, Brigham Young's private secretary, was indicted in October 1874 for violation of the Morrill Act. tried and convicted and sentenced to one year imprisonment and fined \$500. The case was dismissed by the Utah Territorial Supreme Court in June 1875. Reynolds was indicted a second time in October 1875 and convicted and sentenced to two years imprisonment at hard labor and fined \$500. Appealed to the Territorial Supreme Court which affirmed the decision of the lower court in July 1876. The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court which rendered its decision on Jan. 6, 1879. The court upheld the Utah Supreme Court decision and upheld the Morrill Act and found that "Laws are made for the government of actions and while they cannot interfere with mere religious belief and opinions, they may with practices."

1882, Edmunds Act. The Act imposed penalties on polygamists without benefit of trial by depriving them of the right to hold office, vote or serve as jurors. Power to impose this penalty would lie solely in the hands of a five-man Utah Commission.

All voter registration would be canceled by the act, and all active offices would become vacant. Not only would amnesty be offered to polygamists who complied with specific conditions but children born to plural marriages prior to Jan. 1, 1883 would be declared legitimate.

1887, Edmunds-Tucker Act. Declared that marriages not publicly recorded were felonies, that wives could be forced to testify against husbands and that children of plural marriages would be disinherited. Female suffrage was abolished as was the Nauvoo Legion. All sectarian instruction in the common schools was forbidden. The LDS Church was disenfranchised and the Attorney General was empowered to confiscate all church property in excess of

\$50,000. A test oath was also administered which disenfranchised all polygamists and prohibited them from jury service or political office.

1886, *Unpublished Revelation on Celestial Marriage*, attributed to Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints President John Taylor in Centerville, Utah. "This is the revelation disputed by orthodox and fundamentalists regarding its origin". The revelation quietly appeared in the Church History's Library Catalog on June 14, 2025. See "Commentary: LDS Church finally publishes a polygamy revelation it insisted for years didn't exist," by Benjamin E. Park, *Religion News Service* (and published by *The Salt Lake Tribune*), June 17, 2025.

July 25, 1887, LDS President John Taylor died.

Sept. 24, 1890, The **Official Manifesto** is issued by President Wilford Woodruff. Woodruff "publicly declares that my advice to the Latter-day Saints is to refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land.

1890 to 1904, Various plural marriages continued to be performed by LDS Church authorities.

1903-1907, **Reed Smoot hearings** began on whether to seat Smoot, a Mormon monogamist apostle, to the U.S. Senate.

1904, Joseph F. Smith issued the **Second Manifesto**. "I, Joseph F. Smith,... do hereby affirm and declare that no such marriages have been solemnized with the sanction, consent, or knowledge of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

"If any officer or member of the church shall assume to solemnize or enter into any such marriage he will be dealt with according to the rules and regulations thereof and excommunicated therefrom."

1906, **LDS Apostles John W. Taylor and Mathias Cowley** resignations from the Council of the Twelve were accepted during the October conference on grounds the apostles were "out of harmony" with their brethren.

1911, **John W. Taylor** was excommunicated for "insubordination to the government and discipline of the church" and **Mathias Cowley** was disfellowed "for insubordination of the government and discipline of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" and was deprived of right to "exercise any of the functions of the Priesthood."

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