

Joseph and Emma Hale Smith Family

The Joseph and Emma Smith family weathered tremendous opposition and tragedy, including political and religious persecution, forced homelessness, the untimely deaths of seven children, and Joseph's own martyrdom.¹ In times of difficulty, family members turned to each other for strength. During his incarceration at Liberty Jail, for example, Joseph wrote to Emma and offered her encouragement even while mourning their separation. He also instructed her regarding their children: "Tell them Father loves them with a perfect love, and he is doing all he can to get away from the mob to come to them."² In their later years, the surviving Smith children remained close and supported each other in their church service. They defended their mother's reputation and cared for her until her death in 1879.

After Joseph and Emma's marriage in 1827, the family resided briefly in Manchester with Joseph's family, then moved to Harmony, Pennsylvania. Their first three children did not survive more than a day, and not until Joseph and Emma had relocated to Ohio did they adopt twins and begin to raise their own children. In Ohio, Joseph balanced his family life with major administrative work as he led a quickly expanding church with small branches throughout the United States and a thriving community of Latter-day Saints in Missouri. A nationwide economic crisis, the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society Banking Company, and rising threats to Joseph's safety drove the family from Ohio to Missouri in early 1838, but widespread antagonism toward the Saints in Missouri only intensified throughout the following year until mob violence split the family. Emma found shelter with other Saints in Illinois while Joseph was incarcerated in Missouri. In early 1839, Joseph reunited with the family after being allowed to escape further imprisonment.

In Illinois, the family joined in developing the city of Nauvoo, and both Joseph and Emma led civic and religious groups for the next few years. While in Nauvoo, Joseph practiced plural marriage as he was directed by revelation. He married many additional women, though there is no reliable evidence Joseph had children with his plural wives.³ Plural marriage in Nauvoo was practiced confidentially, and Joseph did not acknowledge or live publicly with any of his plural wives. The Smith children, therefore, did not directly observe any practice of plural marriage. In particular, Joseph III, Alexander, and David believed the doctrine had not originated with their father.⁴

Upon Joseph's death in 1844, Emma directed Joseph's personal estate, which included several treasured artifacts. Both the original documents

produced by Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible (including the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price) and the Egyptian papyri related to the book of Abraham remained in Emma's custody. Emma remained in Nauvoo with the children when most Church members migrated to the Great Basin. Her second husband, Lewis Bidamon, rescued the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon from its deposit in a cornerstone of the Nauvoo House. As members of the Smith family assumed leadership in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Reorganized Church (later Community of Christ) has preserved many of these artifacts to the present. The Smith family championed Joseph's work and vision and left not only an indelible legacy for their posterity but also an invaluable witness of the early Latter-day Saint experience.

Joseph Smith Jr. (1805–1844)

(See "Joseph Smith and His Papers: An Introduction," josephsmithpapers.org.)

Emma Hale Smith Bidamon (1804–1879)

(See "Emma Hale Smith," Church History Topics.)

Unnamed Son (1828)

Emma gave birth to a son on June 15, 1828, but the child died the same day. A gravestone on the Hale family property in Harmony, Pennsylvania, reads "In Memory of An Infant Son of Joseph And Emma Smith June 15th 1828." In a family Bible, a relative wrote the name "Alvin" to identify this child, but Emma later confirmed the infant was never named.⁵

Unnamed Twins (1831)

In 1831, Emma delivered twins, a girl and a boy, but both infants died at birth. The next day, family friend Julia Clapp Murdock also gave birth to twins, but she died six hours after the delivery. Julia's husband, John Murdock, upon being left a widower with five children to care for, gave the twins to Emma and Joseph for adoption. Emma appears to have never named her deceased twins. When her mother-in-law, Lucy Mack Smith, requested information for a family history, Emma left out her firstborn and the twins. In an interview with her adult son Joseph

Smith III, Emma explained that these three siblings did not live long enough to be named. Although a family Bible identified the twins as “Louisa” and “Thadeus,” these names were recorded by a later relative without any reference as to their source.⁶

Joseph Murdock Smith (1831–1832)

Joseph and Emma adopted Joseph Murdock Smith and his twin sister, Julia, from their friend John Murdock soon after the babies’ mother died. Baby Joseph caught the measles in early 1832, and while he was being tended in a trundle bed, a mob attacked, dragging his adoptive father Joseph from the bedroom into the cold night and beating him unconscious. Less than a year old, little Joseph Murdock Smith died a few days later. Joseph Smith attributed his adopted son’s death to the exposure of that cold night, which was consistent with medical understanding of the time.⁷

Julia Murdock Smith Dixon Middleton (1831–1880)

When Julia’s natural father, John Murdock, gave her and her twin brother for adoption, Emma Smith requested Murdock not tell the children of their adoption so they could have a full sense of belonging to the Smith family. Julia learned the truth as a five-year-old, however, from a “spite[ful]” neighbor. She married Elisha Dixon sometime before 1850, and upon his death in 1853 she moved to Nauvoo. Three years later Julia converted to Catholicism after marrying a Catholic, John Middleton. She never had children and resided near Nauvoo when she died in 1880.⁸

Joseph Smith III (1832–1914)

Joseph Smith III was born on November 6, 1832, soon after his father, Joseph Smith Jr., returned to Kirtland from a visit to New York City and Boston. Six years later, “Young Joseph” witnessed his father’s arrest in Missouri, at which time a guard forced him away from his father, threatening to “run [him] through” with a sword.⁹ As a child, he visited Liberty Jail with his mother and spent a night there with his father and the other prisoners. He passed his late childhood in Nauvoo and was baptized by his father in November 1843.

In the decade following his father’s 1844 death, Joseph III remained detached from the several churches claiming a line of succession from

the Prophet Joseph Smith. During Joseph Smith Jr.'s lifetime, he gave Joseph III several blessings, one of which was later claimed to include the promise of presiding over the Church.¹⁰ In 1856, two men representing the Reorganization movement approached him with a written revelation. The document named Joseph Smith III his father's successor by lineal descent, but Joseph demurred the invitation to lead a reorganized church. His father's blessings and a spiritual experience eventually persuaded him to join the Reorganization movement and preside over the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now known as Community of Christ).¹¹

For the next 54 years, Joseph III directed the Reorganized Church as prophet-president and built up congregations of early Saints who had not migrated to the West. Known for his integrity and political acumen, he sought to fulfill his father's religious vision and developed a lasting church organization, the second largest of those claiming Joseph Smith as founder. While he maintained an amicable relationship with his cousin and President of the Church in Utah, Joseph F. Smith, Joseph III denied his father had practiced plural marriage and disagreed with the Church's missionary activities and claim on historic sites.¹² He brought his brothers Alexander and David into senior leadership and secured his son's path to succession as church president.¹³ He was married three times and widowed twice, first to Emmeline Griswold in 1856, then to Bertha Madison in 1869, and finally to Ada Rachel Clark in 1898. Joseph III was the father of 17 children. He died of a heart seizure in 1914.¹⁴

Frederick Granger Williams Smith (1836–1862)

Little documentation remains of Joseph and Emma's fifth biological child, Frederick Granger Williams Smith, born on June 20, 1836, in Kirtland and named after Frederick G. Williams, one of Joseph Smith's counselors. Frederick spent most of his life in Nauvoo as a farmer and merchant, married Anna Marie Jones in 1857, and died (possibly of tuberculosis) in 1862.¹⁵

Alexander Hale Smith (1838–1909)

Named after the Saints' advocate and trusted lawyer Alexander Doniphan, Alexander Hale Smith was born during the escalating persecutions in Missouri. Emma carried eight-month-old Alexander across the frozen Mississippi River in 1839 to escape Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs's infamous "extermination order." The boy grew up devoted to belief in the Book of Mormon and in his father's prophetic

ministry. As an adult, Alexander followed his older brother Joseph III into the Reorganization movement and served in prominent positions in the Reorganized Church.¹⁶

Alexander married Elizabeth Agnes Kendall in 1861, with whom he would have nine children. Soon after the birth of their first child, Frederick Alexander, Alexander's older brother Frederick Granger Williams Smith died, sending Alexander into some anxiety over his brother's eternal fate. Reportedly, his first spiritual experience followed, a whispering of the Holy Spirit that calmed his soul. He felt reassured that "Frederick's condition is pleasant."¹⁷

Alexander served multiple missions for the Reorganized Church, visiting Utah on some occasions and meeting with relatives in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Despite some spirited debate over religious differences at times, he maintained an open posture toward his cousins outside the Reorganization movement. He served as a counselor to his brother, Joseph III, in the RLDS First Presidency and was ordained president of the RLDS Quorum of the Twelve in 1890. He died in 1909 in Nauvoo while serving as patriarch.¹⁸

Don Carlos Smith (1840–1841)

Don Carlos Smith was born on June 13, 1840, in Nauvoo and lived only 14 months, dying of malaria within days of his uncle and namesake, Don Carlos Smith, Joseph Smith's younger brother. Alexander Smith, another of Joseph and Emma Smith's sons, reported that shortly before their mother Emma's death in 1879, Emma saw a vision in which Joseph Smith escorted her through a mansion in heaven to a nursery where she cradled young Don Carlos. When she asked Joseph about the rest of their deceased children, Joseph promised she would, after her mortal life, raise all of her children who had not lived to adulthood.¹⁹

Unnamed Son (1842)

Emma reportedly delivered a son on February 6, 1842, in Nauvoo, and buried the child the same day.²⁰

David Hyrum Smith (1844–1904)

Emma was pregnant with David Hyrum Smith when Joseph Smith died in 1844. Known for his poetry, singing, and art, David later served multiple missions for the Reorganized Church, some of which took him to Utah, where he visited with relatives and other Latter-day Saints.

Concerned about talk of his father's plural marriages, David debated his cousin Joseph F. Smith and interviewed women who claimed to have been sealed to Joseph Smith. These missions initiated the collection of significant source material on polygamy in Nauvoo.²¹

Not long after he returned from a mission to Utah, David's mental health deteriorated, and his brother Joseph III had him committed to an asylum at Elgin, Illinois, in 1877. Joseph III wrote to David's close friend, "After long meditation, prayers and in grief, I took David to the Hospital at Elgin for treatment. . . . I am sadly burdened about it, but have acted for the best as I now think."²² Staff at the Elgin asylum noted David's depression, reclusiveness, sensitivity to noise, periodic loss of memory, and belief that others possessed mysterious power over him. He may have suffered from conditions today associated with mania and dementia. Friends and family expected David's health to improve, but asylum staff reported no significant change in his symptoms in the 27 years he lived there. David suffered from diabetes in the final months of his life, and three months before his 60th birthday, he died of kidney failure.

Church Resources

"Joseph and Emma's Family," *Ensign*, Feb. 2008, 39–41.

Related Topics: Joseph Smith Jr., Emma Hale Smith

Notes

1. Though David spent the last 27 years of his life in an asylum under full-time observation, the staff did not notify his next of kin about his declining health in the months before he died, making news of his death unanticipated and sudden.
2. Joseph Smith, "Letter to Emma Smith, 4 April 1839," 2, josephsmithpapers.org, spelling standardized; Joseph Smith, "Letter to Emma Smith, 21 March 1839," josephsmithpapers.org.
3. Genetic testing has ruled out heredity claims made by some connected to Joseph's polygamy. See Ugo A. Perego, Natalie M. Myres, and Scott R. Woodward, "Reconstructing the Y-Chromosome of Joseph Smith: Genealogical Applications," *Journal of Mormon History*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2005), 42–60; Ugo A. Perego, "Was Joseph Smith the Biological Father of Josephine Lyon? The Genetic Evidence," presentation, Mormon History Association, Snowbird, Utah, 2016; Brian C. Hales and Laura Harris Hales, "Allegations of

Joseph and Emma Hale Smith Family
 2010, Brian C. Haits and Laura Haits Haits, "Allegations of
 Joseph's Paternity," josephsmithspolygamy.org.

4. "Plural Marriages in Kirtland and Nauvoo," Gospel Topics, topics.lds.org; Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 250.
5. George Anderson, "Gravestone of Joseph and Emma Smith's Son," photograph, 1907, history.lds.org; Joseph Smith, "History, 1834–1836," 9, josephsmithpapers.org; Lucy Mack Smith, "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845," book 7, page 1, josephsmithpapers.org; Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, vol. 26, no. 19 (Oct. 1, 1879), 289.
6. "Joseph Murdock Smith," josephsmithpapers.org; "Julia M. Smith Middleton," josephsmithpapers.org; Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," 289.
7. An aggressive strain of measles likely contributed to the child's death. "Joseph Murdock Smith," josephsmithpapers.org; see also Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting for Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 354.
8. In 1859, near the end of his life, John Murdock explained to Julia in a letter why he hadn't told her he was her father when she was a child: "Sister Smith requested me not to make my self known to the children as being their Father: It was a hard request and I said but little on the subject. She wanted to bring the children up as her own and never have them know anything to the contrary" (S. Reed Murdock, *Joseph and Emma's Julia: The "Other" Twin* [Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2004], 120). See also Sunny Jane McClellan, "'Gone But Not Forgotten': The Life of Julia Murdock Smith" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1995).
9. Dec. 30, 1842, in Joseph Smith, *Journal, December 1842–June 1844*; Book 1, 21 December 1842–10 March 1843, 15, josephsmithpapers.org.
10. Alexander L. Baugh, "Was Joseph F. Smith Blessed by His Father Hyrum Smith in Liberty Jail?" *Mormon Historical Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 104, 105 (footnote 7); *In the Circuit Court of the United States, Western District of Missouri, Western Division, at Kansas City: Complainant's Abstract of Pleading and Evidence* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1893), 40–41, 79. These blessings should not be confused with the forged January 17, 1844, blessing by

Joseph Smith to Joseph Smith III, a document created by Mark Hofmann in 1981 and proven to be inauthentic. Before the forgery was known, President Gordon B. Hinckley addressed its quality as a father's blessing, not an ordination record.

When describing his father's blessings, Joseph III distinguished between his father setting him apart and ordaining him. Joseph III did not believe that his father had ever ordained him President of the Church. He did, however, believe that the blessings had called him to leadership and that a later conference assembly brought about his formal ordination to priesthood office (see *Circuit Court of the United States*, 40–41, 79; Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Joseph Smith III Document and the Keys of the Kingdom,” *Ensign*, May 1981, 20–22; Richard E. Turley Jr., *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 40–57; Dallin H. Oaks, “Recent Events Involving Church History and Forged Documents,” *Ensign*, October 1987, 63–69.

11. Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, 101–12.
12. Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, 218–72.
13. Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, 346–50.
14. “Joseph Smith III,” josephsmithpapers.org.
15. “Frederick Granger Williams Smith,” josephsmithpapers.org.
16. Ronald E. Romig, “Alexander H. Smith: Remembering a Son of Joseph and Emma Smith,” *Journal of Mormon History*, vol. 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011), 3–14.
17. Romig, “Alexander H. Smith,” 11.
18. Romig, “Alexander H. Smith,” 16–57; “Alexander Hale Smith,” josephsmithpapers.org.
19. Alexander H. Smith, “Second Coming of Christ: The Home of the Redeemed” (sermon, Bottineau, North Dakota, July 1, 1903), *Zion's Ensign*, vol. 14 (Dec. 31, 1903), quoted in Romig, “Alexander H. Smith,” 31.
20. Two relatives writing within weeks of the birth mentioned Emma's infant son and his burial: the sexton of Nauvoo who kept cemetery records noted the child's burial, and a family Bible lists the child and his death date. A family friend also remembered years later how Emma nursed a neighbor's infant throughout 1849 in part to ease her grief of losing this

inant throughout 1842 in part to ease her grief of losing this child (see Almira Mack Covey letter to Harriet Mack Whittemore, Feb. 24, 1842, Harriet Mack Whittemore Correspondence, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Jacob Scott letter to Mary Scott Warnock, Mar. 24, 1832, Jacob Scott Letters to Mary Warnock, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Fred E. Woods, “The Cemetery Record of William D. Huntington, Nauvoo Sexton,” *Mormon Historical Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 131–63; Margarete McIntire Burgess, quoted in “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Jan. 15, 1892), 67.

21. “David Hyrum Smith,” josephsmithpapers.org.
22. Joseph Smith III letter to Charles J. Jensen, Jan. 22, 1877, quoted in Valeen Tippetts Avery, *From Mission to Madness: Last Son of the Mormon Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 245.

