

William Smith, Isaach Sheen, and the *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*

by Connell O'Donovan

William Smith (1811-1893), the youngest brother of Mormon prophet, Joseph Smith, was formally excommunicated *in absentia* from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on October 19, 1845.¹ The charges brought against him as one of the twelve apostles and Patriarch to the church, which led to his excommunication and loss of position in the church founded by his brother, included his claiming the “right to have one-twelfth part of the tithing set off to him, to be appropriated to his own individual use,” for “publishing false and slanderous statements concerning the Church” (and in particular, Brigham Young, along with the rest of the Twelve), “and for a general looseness and recklessness of character which is ill comported with the dignity of his high calling.”² Over the next 15 years, William founded some seven schismatic LDS churches, as well as joined the Strangite LDS Church and even was surreptitiously rebaptized into the Utah LDS church in 1860.³

What led William to believe he had the right, as an apostle and Patriarch to the Church, to succeed his brother Joseph, claiming authority to preside over the Quorum of the Twelve, and indeed the whole church? The answer proves to be incredibly, voluminously complex. In the research for my forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Strange Fire: William Smith, Spiritual Wifery, and the Mormon “Clerical Delinquency” Crises of the 1840s*, I theorize that William may have begun setting up his own church in the eastern states (far from his brother’s oversight) as early as 1842. As president of the Eastern States Mission while he was in New England from 1842-1845, set up his own abolitionist and feminist oriented newspaper that also politically stumped for unapproved political candidates, he and George J. Adams (see below) were performing some sort of an endowment ceremony in which they revealed “the secrets of a lodge” to Mormon women in Massachusetts, he practiced unauthorized spiritual wifery in New England, he summarily excommunicated anyone who opposed him in any way, established several “Penny & Sewing Societies” that were almost identical to the Nauvoo Female Relief Society in structure and purpose, reversed major decisions that had been made in Nauvoo (for example giving a preaching license to Benjamin Winchester in the spring of 1844 after his brother Joseph Smith had taken it away from Winchester in Nauvoo), embezzled church donations and tithes for his own use, brought slander and libel lawsuits against honest, faithful Mormons who opposed him, and a myriad of other actions that were clearly outside the authority given him as a mission president and traveling apostle.

William was recalled to Nauvoo in May 1845 to answer for his actions while in the eastern states, after his arrival. In the midst of all William’s interviews and hearings, with the Quorum of the Twelve to clarify and justify what he had been doing, on the night of June 26-27, 1845 (significantly the one year anniversary of the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith) Lucy Mack Smith, who “felt as if I had the sins of the whole world to bear, and the burthen of the Church,” had a series of three visions after “I called upon the

Lord to show me what was wrong, and if it was me.” After she fell asleep, she “then heard a voice calling on me saying awake, awake, awake, for thy only son that thou has living [i.e. William], they for his life have laid a snare.” She was then shown William “in a room full of armed men and he having no weapons. They would have crushed him down, if it had not been for the power of God...Two amongst them had blacker hearts than the rest,” and she implied these two were Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball. The voice then informed her, “Thy son William he shall have power over the Churches, he is the father in Israel over the patriarchs and the whole of the Church, he is the last of the lineage raised up in these last days. He is patriarch to regulate the affairs of the Church.” (Remember that Joseph Smith Jr. had said upon at least one public occasion that the role of Patriarch to the Church was the highest office in the Church, even higher than church president.)⁴ The voice continued by assuring Lucy, “He is President over all the Church, they cannot take his apostleship away from him. The Presidency of the Church belongs to William, he being the last of the heads of the Church, according to lineage, he having inherited it from the family before the foundation of the world.” Lucy’s second and third visions were of her husband, Joseph Smith Sr., who appeared to her once to reassure her and the church they would have power of their enemies, gain eternal life, and be rewarded for all their persecution, and then appeared a second time to tell her to live “to take care of William and my daughters, and see that they have their rights and standing where they ought to have it.”⁵

Lucy reported the visions to her son immediately and then to Bishop George Miller, who arranged for her to have an interview with Brigham Young and other leaders, to share her visions with them, as *the Mother of Israel*. She felt that her visions should be read from the stand on the following Sunday, during church services. The day after the visions, William’s uncle John Smith and cousin George A. Smith visited him, and found him antagonistically reveling in the visions that supported him as the proper successor to his murdered brother, Joseph.

While William was becoming more and more hostile to the Twelve in Nauvoo,⁶ George J. Adams (who had been ordained an evangelical - but not administrative - apostle by Joseph and Hyrum Smith)⁷ founded a church in Augusta, Iowa in May 1845, with support from William, who was that church's Patriarch, but it was of short duration.⁸ Although their “next church” could be seen as identical to the one Adams founded in Augusta, Iowa, it is my view that what the two men were next doing in St. Louis as founding yet another church. First of all, Adams founded the first church in Augusta and invited William Smith to be his right hand man, while six months later in St. Louis, William was definitely in the lead role with Adams as Smith’s second-in-command – and it too was of brief duration.⁹ Brighamite Mormons in St. Louis reported by February 1846, that Adams and Smith had had a falling apart.¹⁰ Ironically, the two men almost immediately became actively involved as high-ranking leaders in James J. Strang's church. Adams remained a Strangite for a number of years, but William Smith was excommunicated (again *in absentia*) from the Strangite LDS Church in October 1847 for committing adultery at least twice with a young woman named Abenade E. Archer in July 1846. (She was the domestic servant in the home of Strangite apostle Benjamin C.

Ellsworth, where William boarded during his stay at Strangite headquarters in Voree, Wisconsin.)¹¹

Up until this time, William had claimed that his nephew, young Joseph Smith III, was the proper successor of Joseph Smith, and that William was merely acting as regent *pro tem* when the young Joseph reached the age of majority and could assume the church's mantle.¹² But during the Strangite investigation into his sexual improprieties that led up to his excommunication in the fall of 1847, William published a broadside in Ottawa, Illinois, claiming that in fact, he had the “right of authority...by right of revelation from God, and by ordination *which I received from under the hands of Joseph Smith*, which was to be a Prophet, Seer and Revelator,” (emphasis added) which had ostensibly happened before Joseph's murder in 1844.¹³ The “revelation from God” authorizing him to preside surely refers to his mother's 1845 visions. And now, after the Strangite trial and excommunication, William Smith, has a new claim to preside over the latter-day church – an ordination from his prophet-brother. With these, William moved to Amboy, Lee, Illinois, where he founded yet a third Williamite church.

William Smith's bellicose temperament, however, got the best of him yet again, and on August 24, 1848, he violently assaulted Stephen L. Little or Sittle in Winnebago, Illinois, for reasons unknown.¹⁴ Smith was found guilty of assault and battery and fined.¹⁵ In the wake of this embarrassing incident, William and the First Counselor in his First Presidency, Aaron Hook, were conveniently called by revelation to go on a mission to the eastern states, and the two left the Amboy area in late October 1848. On their way east, the two missionaries stopped to preach in Cincinnati, where a sizable Brighamite LDS congregation had been for some years now.¹⁶ There, William Smith met Isaac Sheen (see his biography below), who was an intelligent English covert with a newspaper press, which Sheen had used for years to publish small abolitionist papers. While Smith was in Cincinnati, the Mormons there who were loyal to Brigham Young received instructions to appoint a committee to watch over the movements of both Smith and Sheen, which angered Sheen deeply and disaffected him farther from Utah Mormonism.¹⁷

William then left Cincinnati for Philadelphia, while Sheen stayed in the Cincinnati area to make a thorough examination of LDS scriptures (mainly the Book of Mormon) for proof-texting passages to validate William's claim as a surviving *brother* to preside over a patrilineal church structure. Sheen wrote up his extensive positive findings and sent them to William in Philadelphia, who welcomed the essay supporting his claims.¹⁸

From Philadelphia, Smith went to Hartford, Connecticut with Aaron Hook, and there they met up with another dissident Mormon, Selah Lane. On March 18, 1849, William, acting as “Elijah the Prophet,” delivered a revelation to Lane, Hook, and others gathered there. The revelation instructed them to fully organize yet another Williamite church, with William “to stand at the head of this last dispensation on earth, to regulate my church and kingdom, to ordain apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.” Aaron Hook and Selah Lane were also chosen to be the new First Presidency.¹⁹

In the meantime, Isaac Sheen came out on his own with the first issue of the *Aaronic Herald* on February 1, 1849, which included his support for William Smith as successor to Joseph Smith Jr.²⁰ Delighted by Sheen's infectious and public commitment to his cause, William Smith returned to the Cincinnati area, afire with his new calling and now supported by a number of influential Mormons, especially fellow apostle Lyman Wight, who had taken a colony of Mormons to Zodiac, Texas, under orders from Joseph Smith just prior to his murder. Brigham Young and his devotees had slighted Wight and his colony, which offended the man, and he threw his weight behind William.²¹

During the winter of 1847-1848 the Wight colony in Zodiac had already completed a small temple there and were performing the unembellished, pre-martyrdom endowment ceremony.²² William accepted that temple as his own and also called for another to be built in Independence, Missouri.²³ Smith had been told in his March 1849 revelation to reform the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, so this became one of his main goals, especially drawing upon faithful men in Wight's Texas colony.²⁴ William also called Aaron Hook and Lyman Wight to be his First and Second Counselors *in and of* the First Presidency, with Isaac Sheen as a special Counselor *to* the First Presidency (apparently similar to the role John C. Bennett had played in Nauvoo). Zodiac was officially made a stake, and another stake was organized in Cincinnati-Covington, with a third stake planned for Palestine, Lee, Illinois. As documented in two letters from Lyman Wight published in Sheen's *Herald*, this version of the Williamite church acknowledged Joseph Smith as the "Archangel of the seventh and last dispensation," yet it officially opposed polygamy (Sheen was a major opponent to the practice).²⁵ However, the incorrigible William secretly practiced it with women related to members of his First Presidency (both married and single), and Lyman Wight also married several young single women in his colony (as did at least five other men there).²⁶ The United Order was also to be instituted in their church, in which the faithful would share all things spiritual and temporal.²⁷

Of the seven Williamite churches founded, this one proved to have the broadest support and potentially could have rivaled the Utah church if William had had the charisma, stability, integrity, sobriety, and wisdom to preside over a church. Instead, wherever William walked he was followed closely by the quietly whispered label of *hypocrite*, so any spiritually-oriented project of his was doomed to failure sooner or later.

One of William's twelve apostles whom he called from the Cincinnati area was Henry Nisonger.²⁸ In 1850, Nisonger and his family resided with the most famous African American Mormons, Elijah Abel and Mary Ann Adams Abel, in their home (probably an apartment) in Cincinnati on the northwest corner of Western Row and Clinton Street.²⁹ William Smith, when visiting Cincinnati, stayed at the Abel's home.³⁰ Although this evidence is merely circumstantial, it certainly seems like the Abel family must have converted to William Smith's church, which explains why they remained in Cincinnati for so long, before finally migrating to Utah to join the gathered Saints there in the mid-1850s.³¹

Even with some really strong people in his church, William could not hold the reins for long, and soon this fourth Williamite church began to crumble. Although a large April General Conference was planned at the Cincinnati-Covington Stake, Lyman Wight and the several Williamite apostles provided by his colony were not able to make it.³² In fact, Wight's single delegate, Otis Hobart (president of the Zodiac Stake High Council), very ominously died almost immediately upon his arrival in Covington January 17, 1850.³³ To downplay this negative omen, Smith and Sheen used the *Herald* to spin a tale of *martyrdom* for the visiting delegate. In multiple articles about Hobart, readers were assured that Hobart died “a firm believer in the gospel and in the lineal priesthood of the church,” and just prior to his death, uttered that “it is through much tribulation that we must enter the Kingdom.” William Smith even received a revelation just prior to the beginning of the conference which assured the Saints that Otis Hobart was one “whom I have taken unto myself, whose works I have accepted, and is justified before me,” and that “he is with me, and his spirit mingleth in the councils of the martyred prophets... He is mine, I have called him hither. It was for Zion’s sake.”³⁴ During the conference itself, Hobart was eulogized, a resolution of regret, lamentation, and sympathy for his family and the Zodiac Stake was passed, and then a second resolution was passed that he be buried in his temple robes and garments.³⁵

At the same time, murmurings about spiritual wifery began to assault Isaac Sheen's ears and on April 18, 1850, William Smith confided to Sheen that he “had a right to raise up posterity from other men's wives.” Sheen then procured a letter in which Smith admitted to practicing spiritual wifery among the women related to the First Presidency. Smith even offered his own wife to Sheen in exchange for the privilege of bedding Sheen's wife. Horrified, Sheen immediately defected and began a campaign to destroy the Williamite church - quite successfully.³⁶ Lyman Wight and his colony immediately broke from Smith, who then left Cincinnati under the dark clouds of public controversy and returned to Amboy, Illinois, where he began yet a fifth church in 1851. He would continue on this path of church-hopping until about 1861, when he finally settled down. Initially unwelcomed in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints because of his checkered past (and openness about Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo spiritual wifery, as well as his own). He quietly farmed for the rest of his life and occasionally preached as a non-denominational pastor using the name William B. Smith. Joseph Smith III and his church leaders finally allowed William to join the RLDS Church on April 9, 1878 (on his original LDS baptism by Oliver Cowdery – but only as a high priest, not apostle or patriarch),³⁷ but was rather inactive for the rest of his life, until his death in Osterdock, Clayton, Iowa, on November 18, 1893.³⁸

Isaac Sheen was born December 22, 1810 in Littlethorpe, Leicestershire, England to William Sheen and Jane Kirk, the eldest of nine children.³⁹ He immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1830, where he became a radical abolitionist and was affiliated with the Society of Friends (Quakers). Initially working as a stocking-maker (the family trade) he

began publishing an abolitionist paper with only six months' of schooling. He was rumored to have been quite actively involved with the Underground Railroad, was a member of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and is known to have gone to Maryland once and convinced a slave he met there to escape north, by hiking out together.⁴⁰ In June 1834, Sheen wrote the most radical personal ad of the 19th century, for William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*:

A Friend of equal rights is convinced that our colored brethren and sisters are entitled to all the rights and privileges which are claimed by the whites; that prejudice against color is extremely absurd; and that as long as this prejudice exists, its victims will feel the yoke of oppression crushing them to the earth. He takes the liberty also to state, (being himself what is termed a white man,) should he meet with a suitable opportunity, he is convinced that it would be his duty, and it is his determination, to bear testimony against this prejudice by marrying a Colored Woman.

Information would be thankfully received of any young, respectable, and intelligent Colored Woman, (entirely or chiefly of African descent,) who would be willing to endure the insults and reproaches that would be heaped upon her for being the partner of a white man, and who is either in low circumstances, or would be willing to cede all she has or may have of this world's goods to the American Anti-Slavery Society, that the mouths of gainsayers may be stopped. Information sent by letter (post paid) to E. K., West Chester, Pa. will meet due attention.⁴¹

"E. K." was likely Emmor Kimber, a fellow abolitionist, Quaker, Underground Railroad conductor, and a neighbor of Sheen's.⁴² Several other newspapers reprinted this personal ad and exposed Isaac Sheen's identity as the author of this most unique request.⁴³ (I have never encountered anything else like it, despite many years researching early African American history.) Sheen's letter caused quite an uproar, even among the more liberal Yankees who supported civil rights for African Americans; intentionally seeking intermarriage was simply too much for most to bear at the time. By 1838, Sheen was also an active member of the Northern Liberties Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia.⁴⁴

Although barely educated, Sheen invented a shorthand system and sold it to *Harper's* of New York for \$100, and also became a professional daguerreotypist in Philadelphia.⁴⁵ In May 1840, he was also a Corresponding Member representing Philadelphia County at the annual meeting of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society.⁴⁶ Not long after, one day in Philadelphia, he noted a crowd of people entering a hallway, and out of curiosity followed them, changing his life's path forever. They were Latter-Day Saints, gathering for Sunday worship. He stayed, listened, and became a believer, getting baptized by Erastus Snow on August 31, 1840.⁴⁷ In 1841, Sheen traveled to Kirtland with Seventy Almon W. Babbit, who once there was elected "presiding elder of the stake in Kirtland."⁴⁸ Sheen himself was ordained an Elder there by Zebedee Coltrin in May 1841. Sheen also met there Almon's sister, Drusilla Ann Babbitt, and having been unsuccessful

in finding a "Colored Woman" to wed, Sheen married Drusilla Babbitt on May 30, 1841, in a Kirtland house that once had belonged to Joseph Smith. Sheen was 30 and Babbitt was 18.⁴⁹ Also while in Kirtland, Sheen advertised in nearby Cleveland for students to learn the "new and improved system of Stenography...invented by myself." Interested students were to call upon him at the Cleveland Temperance House on Superior Street, beginning in July 1841.⁵⁰

The Sheens remained in the Kirtland area until August 1842, when they moved to Nauvoo. There only briefly, they soon removed to Macedonia (now Webster), in Hancock County, some 20 miles southeast of Nauvoo, where they remained until January 1846.⁵¹ Upon the death of Joseph and Hyrum Smith in 1844, Sheen refused to curry favor with Brigham Young, and all along believed that the sacerdotal presidency of the LDS church was patrilineal and therefore rightly belonged only to members of the Smith family, especially favoring young Joseph Smith III. As Brigham Young increasingly gained control of the LDS Church after the deaths of the four Smith brothers, mob violence in the area increased, forcing Young to make preparations to depart westward, ultimately for Utah. As the main body of Saints prepared to abandon Nauvoo in January 1846, the Sheens too packed up and crossed the Mississippi with the main body of the Saints in February 1846. But then came the moment of decision, and Sheen could not, in good conscience, follow Brigham Young. While Young and the Saints continued westward, Sheen headed south into Missouri, and set up his family in Booneville (about 70 miles due east of Jackson County, Missouri), where Babbitt relatives lived. Sheen then went on to Cincinnati, where he became a newspaper carrier, and eventually made enough money to buy his own printing press and send for his family, locating them in Covington, Kentucky, across the Ohio from Cincinnati, in 1847.⁵² Sheen then began to publish his religious views with the first issue of his own newspaper.

Although meant to be monthly, in over a year and a half Sheen only published nine issues of the *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*. (Note that the first issue only bore the name *Aaronic Herald* until influenced by William Smith to add "Melchisedek".) This paper was a labor of love for Sheen and he had no intention of making any profit out of the venture, as he stated in its pages.

It seems that the greatest impact that William Smith and Isaac Sheen had was from their December 1849 "Memorial" to the U. S. Congress, which charged Utah Mormons "with having taken an oath to avenge on the people and Government of this country the murder of Joseph Smith, and with a determination now to carry that oat into effect; and further accusing them of grossly immoral conduct, by adopting the doctrine of polygamy, &c." and "they call on the authorities of the nation to establish a system of government by which the perpetration of those crimes and offences may be prevented." One way that they hoped to do this was proposing that Almon W. Babbitt, Sheen's brother-in-law, be made territorial governor of Utah, rather than Brigham Young. Their congressional memorial was published across the country and influenced many lawmakers to believe that Brigham Young was a traitor to the United States and had become a law unto himself.⁵³

However, just a few months later, as noted above, Sheen discovered that William Smith himself was involved in spiritual wifery and adultery, and Sheen abandoned William Smith's church and cause. On May 5, 1850, Sheen drafted a letter that he sent to both U. S. Representative Robert H. Stanton (Dem-KY) and Senator Joseph R. Underwood (Whig-KY), repudiating the congressional memorial of the previous year. "I have become satisfied that there are many false statements in that memorial," Sheen wrote, adding about William, "I have ascertained that I have been greatly deceived in regard to his veracity. His complaints against the Deseret Mormons are unworthy of any attention. I cannot think of troubling you with a detail of all the disclosures which have been made concerning the hypocrisy, licentiousness, treachery, deceit, slanders, and lies, of William Smith."⁵⁴ Dr. John M. Bernhisel, who was Brigham Young's territorial representative at Washington D. C. at the time, received a copy of Sheen's repudiation, and quickly spread the news, getting Sheen's letter published far and wide, in order to lessen the tension that the federal government was feeling about the Utah Mormons and Brigham Young's theocratic government there. William bitterly responded just days later by announcing in Cincinnati newspapers that Sheen was excommunicated from the Williamite church.⁵⁵ Sheen then rebutted in the paper, claiming,

Wm. Smith has not cut me off from his church. I have cut myself off, and intend to remain cut off eternally from such a hypocritical libertine. He has professed the greatest hostility to the plurality wife doctrine, but on the 18th ult., he told me that he had a right to raise up posterity from other men's wives. He said it would be an honor conferred upon them and their husbands, to allow him that privilege, and that they would thereby be exalted to a high degree of glory in eternity. *He offered me his wife on the same terms that he claimed a partnership in other men's wives.* I told him instantly that I would have no more connection with him, and that such damnable iniquity, I never had, and never would participate in. I did not wait for him to cut me off...[emphasis added]⁵⁶

In their contentious split, William left his "old leather trunk" in Covington, at the home of Isaac Sheen. The contents of this trunk were a marvelous collection of early LDS documents, including the manuscript of Lucy Mack Smith's autobiography, several patriarchal blessing books, Williams journals (now lost), some of his correspondence - including romantic letters between him and many of his wives and paramours around the country (now lost), early LDS hymnals, a dictionary, the holographic manuscript of William's 1844 pamphlet defending Mormon spiritual wifery and polygamy (*The Elder's Pocket Companion*), what William referred to as "the records, journals and proceedings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," and likely a manuscript copy of the 1842 "revelation" on polygamy, as well as some fragments of Egyptian papyri.⁵⁷ The contents of the trunk were partially sold to Isaac's brother-in-law, Almon W. Babbit, some were returned to William's now ex-wife, Roxey Ann Grant Smith, some were passed down to Isaac's anti-Mormon son, John Kirk Sheen, and the rest of the contents are lost to history.

In June 1859, at a special conference held at Amboy, Illinois (where Smith had attempted to found his own church on other occasions), representatives from various dissenting groups of Mormons met to further the cause of the “Reorganization” of the LDS Church, with Joseph Smith III soon thereafter accepting the position of President. Isaac Sheen sent a letter of inquiry to the conference, and William W. Blair was told to reply to Sheen.⁵⁸ After receiving Blair's reply, Sheen threw himself into the Reorganization and in January 1860, published the first issue of the RLDS *True Latter Day Saints' Herald*, using the same press that had printed the *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*.⁵⁹ However, even this effort was not without controversy, for Sheen admitted in this very first issue, that although “Joseph Smith taught the spiritual-wife doctrine,” he “repented of his connection with this doctrine, and said it was of the devil. He caused the revelation on this subject to be burned.” RLDS leaders were appalled at this very public admission by one of their own that Joseph Smith had authorized polygamy with a revelation. However, Sheen otherwise proved to be a faithful and talented follower, so he was welcomed into the new church's fold.

By 1863 he (and his press) had moved to Plano, Illinois, where Joseph Smith III acted as Sheen's associate editor of the *Saints' Herald*.⁶⁰ It took a while longer for wife Drusilla to come around, but she too finally joined the RLDS Church in 1867, being baptized by David Hyrum Smith (Joseph Smith Jr.'s youngest son) and confirmed by Joseph Smith III and William Marks.⁶¹ Sheen's work with the *Herald* continued until 1872 when age stopped him, and he died two years later from typhoid fever.⁶²

ENDNOTES

¹ Hosea Stout Journal, October 19, 1845; Alexander Neibaur Journal, October 19, 1845; and Norton Jacob Journal, October 19, 1845. All are available online at <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/> (accessed March 20, 2010).

² “Cause for which William Smith was excluded from the Church!” *Frontier Guardian*, February 6, 1850, p. 2.

³ For William's rebaptism without permission from Brigham Young, see Brigham Young's office journal, p. 86, in which Albert Carrington read Young a letter from a J. J. Butler (probably John L. Butler) “stating he had baptized Wm. Smith.”

⁴ Minutes of meeting of Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, James Adams, Newell K. Whitney et al., Nauvoo, March 27, 1843, LDS Archives, as quoted in Quinn, *Origins of Power*, pp. 213 and 425, note 144.

⁵ A version of Lucy's visions are recorded in their entirety in John Taylor's journal, June 27, 1845, as published in Dean C. Jessee, “The John Taylor Nauvoo Journal, January 1845-September 1845,” *BYU Studies*, 1983, pp. 56-57.

⁶ See “Trouble in the Holy City,” *Warsaw Signal*, June 21, 1845 (and reprinted in the *Boston Cultivator* of June 28, 1845); it is reported here that while William “has been comparatively quiet since his arrival in the city...there have been many points in which

he has disagreed with the heads of the church, which has led to coldness, if not hostility.” This interesting article also quotes rumors from that William would also “in a decent time” marry Emma Hale Smith in a levirate marriage. (In fact, when William first arrived in Nauvoo, he expected to marry *all* of Joseph’s wives, per Helen Mar Kimball.) The article in the *Signal* ends with this summary of William’s character: “He is generous, liberal and candid; but at the same time, one of the most licentious men in the nation.”

⁷ D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), p. 534.

⁸ William Clayton Journal, May 23, 1845, online at <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/> (accessed March 20, 2010).

⁹ See in particular William’s fascinating letter to Emma Smith recounting his efforts to “reform the Church...to Save my fathers family and all my friends” in St. Louis. Emma had earlier told him that it was duty “to Come out and proclame against the Spiritual wife doctrine the userpation of the 12 &c &c,” in William Smith to Emma Hale Smith, [November] 21, 1845, p.

¹⁰ James Kay to “Brother Ward,” dated St. Louis, Missouri on November 22, 1845, *Latter-Day Saints Millenial Star*, vol. 7, pp. 134-135.

¹¹ See Sarah Ellsworth’s eye- and ear-witness testimony, April 23, 1847, Strangite Document 181; John C. Gaylord accusations, June 1, 1847, Strangite Document 180; “William Smith – Trial for Adultery,” ca. April 32, 1847, Strangite Document 182; William Smith to James J. Strang, December 2, 1846, Strangite Document 492; all in the Thomas Schroeder Mormon Collection, Wisconsin State Historical Library, microfilm in my possession. See also, “A Mormon Patriarch Fallen,” September 30, 1847, *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*; reprinted October 1, 1847, *The Liberator* (Boston), October 2, 1847, *Daily Sentinel and Gazette* (Milwaukee), and the *Cleveland Herald*, October 7, 1847; and “Bill Smith and the Prophet,” *Warsaw Signal*, October 2, 1847. For the Voree High Council minutes of the excommunication trial, see “High Council,” *Chronicles of Voree*, October 8, 1847, p. 152. Sarah Ellsworth here apparently again gave testimony of William Smith’s adultery, while William Marks and Ebenezer Page testified of his “apostasy,” after which “[h]e was found guilty and excommunicated from the Church and delivered over to the buffetings of Satan until he repent and make satisfaction.” Moses Chase was then chosen to be the Patriarch to the Church. Notably, apostle Benjamin C. Ellsworth himself had been excommunicated the previous day, by the Voree High Council for “teaching and practicing the spiritual wife system, so called.” John C. Bennett was also excommunicated during the same High Council meeting for apostasy, conspiracy to establish a Stake by deception, and “various immoralities,” per “Meeting of the Council,” *Chronicles of Voree*, October 7, 1847, p. 151. Ellsworth’s excommunication for spiritual wifery seems to indicate that he likely knew of and *supported* William Smith’s actions with Abenade E. Archer, while his wife Sarah certainly found them objectionable.

¹² “Mormonism – The Young Joseph!” *St. Louis Weekly Reveille*, November 3, 1845, vol. II, no. 17, also reprinted in *The True American* (Lexington, KY) of November 25, 1845 as “Mormon Oratory”; and “Proclamation of Bill Smith,” *Quincy Whig*, November 5, 1845. A later reminiscence, (no author) *The History of Lee County, together with Biographical Matter, Statistics, etc.*, (Chicago: H. H. Hill and Company, 1881), p. 310, reports that about the fall of 1847, William Smith “claimed to be a representative of the

young Joseph, son of the prophet and a mere lab, and that it was his duty to rule and direct the people until the latter should assume the first place, or prophethood, in the church”.

¹³ William Smith, *William Smith, Patriarch & Prophet of the Most High God – Latter Day Saints, Beware of Imposition!*, (broadside) Ottawa, Illinois: *Free Press*, September 1847,

¹⁴ The identity of Stephen L. Little or Sittle remains uncertain. There was a 16-year-old Stephen L. Liddle born in Wabash County, Illinois in 1834, to Ralph and Mary Ridgley Liddle (see 1850 Census of Wabash County, Illinois, p. 67). My gratitude goes to Erin Jennings for scanned images of the original court documents.

¹⁵ Criminal File Records of Dekalb, Illinois, Criminal Book B, August 24, 1848; subpoena issued for witnesses, August 24, 1848; and *People v. William Smith*, August 26, 1848.

¹⁶ “A Singular Committee,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, May 1, 1850, p. 3; Peter Hess to James J. Strang, November 30, 1848, *Gospel Herald*, p. 226/538; and RLDS *Journal of History*, pp. 521-523.

¹⁷ “A Singular Committee,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, May 1, 1850, p. 3.

¹⁸ Isaac Sheen to William Smith, November 26, 1848, *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, March 1849, pp. 1-2 and concluded in *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, May 1, 1849, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ “A Revelation,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, May 1, 1849, pp. 1-2.

²⁰ *Aaronic Herald*, vol. 1, no. 1, February 1, 1849.

²¹ First article in column one (untitled), *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, March 1849, p. 1.

²² John Hawley, *Autobiography*, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers, P13, f317, p. 7, Community of Christ Archives. Lyman Wight sealed John Hawley to Harriet Hobart, daughter of Otis Hobart, on July 4, 1848, in the Zodiac Temple, which Hawley helped to build. For more on Otis Hobart, see later in this essay. I am indebted to Erin Jennings for this fascinating source. See also William Leyland’s journal, as quoted in Heman Hale Smith, “The Lyman Wight Colony in Texas,” p. 24, unpublished manuscript at the University of Texas, Austin; photocopy at the Salt Lake Family History Library, 976.4F2.

²³ For a Williamite temple to be built in Jackson County, Missouri, see first article in column one (untitled), *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, March 1849, p. 1; Lyman Wight to Orange Wight, August 28, 1848, *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, May 1, 1849, p. 4; “Special Conference,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, June 1849, p. 4; and Lyman Wight to William Smith, July 26, 1849, *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, September 1849, p. 3.

²⁴ “The Greatest Annual Conference, Ever held since the martyrdom,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, April 1850, p. 3, lists the Williamite apostles. Of the twelve men, eight were members of Lyman Wight’s colony; two were from Lee County, Illinois, and two were from Wisconsin (as former Strangites).

²⁵ For Joseph as the seventh archangel, see Lyman Wight to Lucy Mack Smith, August 21, 1848, *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, May 1, 1849, p. 4; and Lyman Wight to William Smith, August 22, 1848, *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, March 1849, p. 1. For opposition to polygamy or “spiritual wifery,” see “The Man of Sin,” *Aaronic Herald*,

February 1, 1848, p. 2; and “An Extract of Conference Minutes,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, September 1849, p. 4.

²⁶ For William’s spiritual wifery, see “Mormonism in this County,” *Dixon Telegraph*, April 9, 1853; “Mormonism in Illinois,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 25, 1853, p. 3; William Smith to Isaac Sheen, April 18, 1850, as quoted in Isaac Sheen to the Editor, “William Smith – Fornication – Adultery,” May 20, 1850, *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, May 22, 1850; William Smith to Isaac Sheen, April 29, 1850, as quoted in same source; and Isaac Sheen to U. S. Representative Honorable R. H. Stanton, May 4, 1850, as quoted in “The Mormons,” *National Era*, May 30, 1850, p. 88. For Lyman Wight’s polygamy, see “Lyman Wight (1796-1856),” http://saintswithouthalos.com/b/wight_1.phtml (accessed March 1, 2010); and “Wight’s Mormons in Texas included Langford, Hay families,” *West Kerr Current* (Ingram, Texas), July 30, 2009, <http://wkcurrent.com> (accessed March 25, 2010). The 1850 Census of Zodiac, Gillespie, Texas, p. 1, also lists Lyman Wight, his civil wife, and his three young plural wives in one household (although the plural wives used their maiden names).

²⁷ “The United Order – Conclusion of Pres. Smith’s Letter,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, October 1849, p. 1.

²⁸ Nisonger was ordained an apostle by Smith on September 10, 1849 per “Letter from Pres. William Smith,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, September 1849, p. 1.

²⁹ 1850 Census of Cincinnati (Ward 10), Hamilton, Ohio, Household 703, pp. 177-178 (89-90). For the Abel family’s home address, see “Elisha Abels, carp.” *Williams’ Cincinnati Directory and Business Advertiser for 1849-50*, (Cincinnati: C. S. Williams – College Hall, 1849), p. 17. At that corner location lay two Clinton Buildings, and the Abels and Nisongers lived in building #2, per the directory.

³⁰ Isaac Sheen, “A Prophetic Family Arrangement,” *Covington Daily Union*, June 5, 1850, p. 2.

³¹ See the 1860 Census of Salt Lake City (Ward 13), Salt Lake, Utah, p. 1, which enumerates Elijah’s daughter, Ann R. Able, as born in Ohio in 1853, and then the next child, Delilah Able, born in Utah in 1856. Therefore the Abels did not migrate to Utah until sometime between the spring of 1854 and the fall of 1855.

³² “The Annual Conference,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, February 1850, p. 4

³³ “Death,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, February 1850, p. 4.

³⁴ “A Revelation, given March 20, 1850,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, April 1850, p. 1.

³⁵ “The Greatest Annual Conference, Ever held since the martyrdom,” *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, April 1850, p. 4.

³⁶ William Smith to Isaac Sheen, April 18, 1850, as quoted in Isaac Sheen to the Editor, “William Smith – Fornication – Adultery,” May 20, 1850, *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, May 22, 1850; William Smith to Isaac Sheen, April 29, 1850, as quoted in same source; and Isaac Sheen to U. S. Representative Honorable R. H. Stanton, May 4, 1850, as quoted in “The Mormons,” *National Era*, May 30, 1850, p. 88.

³⁷ Joseph Smith III, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration*, (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1959), p. 281; and *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1951), vol. IV, p. 212.

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- ³⁸ See William B. Smith's gravestone at Bethel Cemetery, Mallory, Clayton, Iowa, <http://iowawpagraves.org/view.php?id=771179> (accessed November 7, 2009).
- ³⁹ See Isaac Sheen, familysearch.org, accessed February 19, 2009; and "A Patriarchal Blessing," *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, October 1849, p. 1.
- ⁴⁰ "Isaac Sheen – First Editor of the 'Herald'," *The Saints' Herald*, January 26, 1910, pp. 94-95.
- ⁴¹ "A Wife Wanted," *The Liberator*, June 28, 1834, p. 2.
- ⁴² Robert Clemens Smedley, *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania*, (Lancaster, PA: John A. Hiestand, 1883), p. 326; Gilbert Cope and John Smith Futhey, *History of Chester County, Pennsylvania: with Genealogical and Biographical Sketches*, (n. p.) 1995, vol. 1, p. 427; and anonymous pamphlet, *A Sketch of Henry Franklin and Family*, (Philadelphia: Collins Printing House, 1887), pp. 2-3.
- ⁴³ *Independent Inquirer* (Brattleboro VT), July 26, 1834, p. 3; *Norfolk Advertiser* (Mass.) of same date; *New Bedford Gazette*, July 28, 1834; and *Farmers Gazette* (Mass.), August 1, 1834.
- ⁴⁴ "Northern Liberties A. S. Society," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, June 14, 1838, p. 2.
- ⁴⁵ "Isaac Sheen – First Editor of the 'Herald'," *The Saints' Herald*, January 26, 1910, pp. 94-95.
- ⁴⁶ "Annual Meeting of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 14, 1840, p. 2.
- ⁴⁷ Maurine Carr Ward, "Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Branch Membership, 1840-1854," *Mormon Historical Studies*, (Spring 2005), vol. 6, no. 1, p. 87.
- ⁴⁸ "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons*, July 1, 1841, vol. 2, no. 17, p. 458.
- ⁴⁹ "Isaac Sheen – First Editor of the 'Herald'," *The Saints' Herald*, January 26, 1910, p. 95; and Lake County, Ohio Marriage Index, 1840-1915, book A, p. 26, online at http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohlake/vitalrec/marriage/m_ap.html (accessed March 25, 2010).
- ⁵⁰ Isaac Sheen, "Short Hand Writing," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, July 20, 1841.
- ⁵¹ Joseph Smith III, *True Latter Day Saints' Herald*, April 15, 1874, vol. 21, p. 240.
- ⁵² "Isaac Sheen – First Editor of the 'Herald'," *The Saints' Herald*, January 26, 1910, p. 95. For Sheen's early belief in the patrilineal priesthood, see the Strangite article "A Trio," *Gospel Herald*, December 16, 1847, p. 184/236.
- ⁵³ "Memorial to Congress," *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald*, February 1850, p. 4.
- ⁵⁴ Isaac Sheen to Hon. R. H. Stanton, May 4, 1850, *Daily Globe* (Washington D. C.), May 16, 1850; reprinted in "The Mormons," *National Era*, May 30, 1850, p. 88. For Sheen's letter to Senator Underwood, see J. R. Underwood to Dr. J. M. Bernhisel, May 14, 1850, *Daily Globe*, May 14, 1850. See Lee County, Illinois Criminal Court Records, General number 111, Term 1849, Record B, p. 82 and Final Decree, Bill of Divorce, Roxey Ann Smith vs. William Smith, April 26, 1853, April Term, Knox County Circuit Court Record, per Stanley B. Kimball, "New Light on Old Egyptiana – Mormon Mummies, 1848-1871," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 16, no. 4, (Winter 1983), pp. 87-88.
- ⁵⁵ *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, May 20, 1850.

⁵⁶ “William Smith – Fornication – Adultery,” May 20, 1850, *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, May 22, 1850; and May 30, 1850, *Gospel Herald*, p. 81/989. William’s wife that he offered to Isaac Sheen, was Roxey Ann Grant Smith (sister of both Jedediah M. Grant and William’s first civil wife, Caroline Amanda Grant, who had died in Nauvoo in 1845). Oddly, by the time of William’s split with Isaac Sheen, Roxey Ann had already begun suing William for divorce, he having abandoned her and their daughter Thalia Smith in March of 1850, when Roxey was three months pregnant with their second child.

⁵⁷ Most of the contents are given in Lee County Criminal Court Records, Court House, Dixon, Illinois, General number 111, Term 1849, Record B, p. 82; William Smith and Roxey Ann Smith; Defendant’s answer, filed 11 May 1852, April Term, Knox County, Illinois Circuit Court, 1852. In addition, see Lavina Fielding Anderson (ed.), *Lucy’s Book A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001) for an extensive (but still somewhat inaccurate) discussion of how Babbitt got the Lucy Mack Smith manuscript from Sheen; and John K. Sheen, *Polygamy: Or the Veil Lifted*, (York, Nebraska: 1889), pp. 15-22. Using John K. Sheen’s excerpts, I have reconstructed most of *The Elders’ Pocket Companion* at connellodonovan.com/pocket_companion.pdf.

⁵⁸ *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, vol. 3, p. 237.

⁵⁹ *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, vol. 3, pp. 238-239.

⁶⁰ *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, vol. 3, p. 239.

⁶¹ *Early Reorganization Minutes, 1852-1871*, Book A, p. 454, Early Members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (database), worldvitalrecords.com (pay website), accessed March 26, 2010.

⁶² “Obituary,” *True Saints’ Herald*, April 15, 1874:

It is with sorrow that we notice the departure from this life of Bro. Isaac Sheen.

A man so long known as a steadfast defender of the faith, and so intimately connected and acquainted with every step of the progress of the work, can but be seriously missed from his place by the Church. An able and discriminating collector of statistics, a careful compiler of facts, he was a strong man in the points upon which he had collated his proofs. A man of radical temperament, he was quite positive in debate, and what was to him right, he defended with all his powers; what was wrong, he opposed with vehemence, without fear of persons or consequences; he made some enemies and many friends....

The sickness that terminated his life set in on Thursday, March 26th. From the first, many of his friends were premonished that his appointed hour of death was at hand. Medical skill, the most tender nursing, the prayers and tears of friends and loved ones, all were unavailing, – he continued to fail from the first, and at four A. M. Friday, April 3d, his tried spirit fled the

pulseless tenement of clay, to mingle with the spirits of the just, and with the holy angels in the glorious presence of our God and his Christ.

Bro Sheen was buried from the Saints' Meeting House [at Plano, Illinois] on Sunday, April 5th, his pall bearers bearing the corpse from his home to the church, thence by hearse to the grave....

Bro. Sheen stated a day or two before his death that he did not "desire to live longer in sickness and pain," and that he was prepared to go.