

1 | Born in the Kingdom

Joseph Francis Merrill was born in 1868, the first son of a fourth wife. The nation he was born into, in reality a religious kingdom built in the arid valleys of the Great Basin of Western North America,¹ was on the cusp of a great transformation. Less than a year after Merrill's birth, the arrival of the transcontinental railroad, along with its infusion of people of other religious persuasions, effectively brought to an end the isolation enjoyed by the Latter-day Saints in the mountain kingdom they carved out of the Intermountain West. From this period on, the Saints of the West could claim only a metaphysical separation from Babylon, as their daily economic, educational, and professional lives drew closer to that of the outside world. Merrill began his life a scion of the Latter-day Saint kingdom and ended it a citizen of the United States. He would begin his life in a family enraptured by the visions of angels and demons, would then move in a world earthbound by the principles of science, and by the end of his life he would live in a unique fusion of the two. But these life changes came gradually to Joseph F. Merrill, as they did to the land of his nativity, Cache Valley, in the northern realms of the Latter-day Saint kingdom.

Cache Valley is a tiny patch of green amid the long brown and yellow mountain valleys of western North America. Fifty miles long and surrounded by dramatic mountain ranges on all sides, the valley is a natural fortress. An observer standing in the valley gains either a sense of isolation from the outside world or comfort and protection from behind the granite walls. The mountains can be comforting and suffocating at the same time. Merrill was born in Richmond, a tiny hamlet on the valley's gentle eastern slope leading up to the dramatic mountain rise. It was a small pioneer settlement, like hundreds spread throughout the kingdom, and there was little to distinguish Richmond to an outside observer, except the structure of several of its families. At the time of Merrill's birth, polygamy was a peculiarity that invited the interest and general dismay of the world outside the kingdom.

Joseph's father, Marriner Wood Merrill, was one of the leading men of the string of settlements stretching up and down Cache Valley. Involved in nearly every aspect of life in the valley, Marriner was a striking example of the merging of temporal and spiritual affairs that was championed in Latter-day Saint thought and doctrine. Legends about Marriner began during his lifetime and will most likely continue as long as the Saints remain in the valley. As the first president of the Logan Utah Temple, he is said to have withstood the devil himself in a face-to-face encounter, calmly holding a conversation with Lucifer before sending him and his followers on their way.

According to legend later circulated throughout the valley, Marriner was sitting in his office in the temple in the early 1890s when he heard a commotion from outside the building. Peering outside, he saw a large congregation coming to the temple, some on foot, others on horseback and in carriages. The visitors hitched up their horses and began to mill about the grounds complacently. Upon seeing they had no plans to enter the temple, Marriner walked outside to greet the shabbily dressed group. Confronting them, Marriner asked, "Who are you, and who are these people who have taken possession of the temple grounds unannounced?" Their leader answered, "I am Satan, and these are my people. . . . I don't like what is being done in the Logan Temple and have come to stop it." Marriner, shocked, replied, "No, we will not stop



Joseph's father, Marriner Wood Merrill, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, first president of the Logan Temple, and a legend in Cache Valley. Courtesy of Church History Library.

it. This is the work of the Lord and must go on. You know that you or anyone else cannot stop the work of the Lord.” “If you refuse to stop it,” the adversary replied, “I will tell you what I propose to do. I will scatter this congregation of people throughout these valleys, and we will keep people from coming to the temple. We will whisper in their ears and discourage them from attending the temple.” Marriner subsequently used the power of the priesthood to command Satan and his followers to leave the temple grounds. Within minutes, according to the story, the visitors disappeared into thin air and were gone. The story continues, “For the next ten or twelve years we could have closed the Logan Temple, for very little work was accomplished. In one full year, the number of endowments done totaled only 5,121, while in our day we have done 3,064 in one day. Where all ordinances for the year equaled but 20,110, today we have done 15,456 in one day, and a total of 1,808,265 for the full year.”² The story blends together the world of angels and devils the nineteenth-century Saints were immersed in, with the practical matter of carrying out the Lord’s work, complete with ordinance statistics. The statistics are likely accurate as well—Marriner kept assiduous notes of the number of baptisms, endowments, and sealings performed in the Logan Temple.³

Though less miraculous than staring down the devil himself, the tales of Marriner’s acumen for labor and industry are no less impressive. According to one of his children, as a member of the Cache Stake presidency Marriner chose William Lewis to settle a particularly desolate spot in the valley. After trying to survive in the harsh conditions for a short time, Lewis spied Marriner one day on a trip to the flourmill. He harangued his leader, proclaiming, “Brother Merrill, what sort of a grudge did you have against me to locate in such a forsaken place? Water is scarce and the wind blows constantly. I simply can’t stand it any longer, I am quitting the place.” Marriner simply replied, “Well, Brother Lewis, what you need is more sand in your craw. Go home and try it some more.” So angered was Lewis that he drove his team back home, determined to prove Marriner wrong. According to legend, thus was the town of Lewiston born.⁴

Marriner's own hardiness was proven during the early difficulties of his life. Born in New Brunswick, Canada, in 1832, Marriner was a child of the sea, true to his name. His mother was an early convert to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1830s. His father, an unbeliever, forbade his mother from relocating closer to the Saints. His mother taught Marriner the precepts of the faith, though he himself never joined until he reached adulthood. Instead, he spent his life as a young man working on fishing vessels, ferrying lobsters from the coast of Maine to the markets of the bustling city of Boston. Marriner's full entry into the Church came in his twentieth year, when he returned home to mourn the death of his father. He was soon visited by a pair of Latter-day Saint missionaries and heard the gospel of his youth ring in his ears once again. His longing to travel west and to join the kingdom of the Saints was nourished by the increasing persecution he felt because of his newfound faith. He was taught by John Skerry of Halifax and baptized on 3 April 1852. His baptism, he later wrote, "was an excuse for my associates and young companions, both male and female, to turn against me because they said I was a fool for joining the Mormons. But this only strengthened my faith and fired my heart with a zeal that only Latter-day Saints know."⁵

He subsequently left New Brunswick the following year and traveled to Utah, a journey that made him one of the thousands of participants in the great nineteenth-century saga of the Latter-day Saint exodus to the West. His trek was filled with its fair share of adventures. He nearly drowned in the Platte River, encountered hostile Indians, and marveled at herds of buffalo he numbered at ten or fifteen thousand. Connecting the landscape with the newly revealed scriptures of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he wrote, "There is no doubt but what the wild buffalo was at one time the domestic cattle of the ancient inhabitants of this land, Jaredites or Nephites."⁶

He arrived in Salt Lake City in September 1853, noting the "peace and good will and brotherly kindness [that] seemed to prevail in all the land." Coming from a sailor's background, he also noticed that "there were no grog shops, no drunkenness, and no profanity anywhere to be found in all the city of Salt Lake."⁷ Within a year he married Sarah Ann

Atkinson, the first of his wives. He soon found himself moving from odd job to odd job, making shingles, hauling lumber from the mountain canyons, and constantly engaging in shrewd trades designed to better his situation. With the help of his father-in-law and the generosity of the mountain Saints, he soon found himself in comfortable circumstances despite the primitive setting. In October 1854, a little over a year after his arrival, his first child, a girl named Phebe Ann, was born.

Marriner reflected on the hand of providence in his deliverance and his prosperity. He wrote in his later years, “Thus in a little over one year after I came to the Salt Lake Valley a young boy penniless, with no one in the Territory I had ever seen (save those who came in the same company) before, through the blessings of our Heavenly Father I had a kind, good wife, one nice girl baby, a house and home of my own.” He listed his earthly possessions as follows: “An unbroken farm of 33 and one-third acres, one yoke of splendid, well-broken oxen, and good new wagon with only \$70 due on it, 90 bushels of good wheat, 20 bushels of nice potatoes, a fat hog to kill, a cow, and other small things for the house and farm.” His benedictory comment to this listing of his assets taught the principle he wished to impart to his descendants: “Thus it was demonstrated in my case that the Lord helps those who make an effort to help themselves.”⁸

As the years passed, Marriner added two more wives to his family. In 1868 came a fourth, Maria Kingsbury, who had been born in the Salt Lake Valley in 1852. In their wedding photo, Maria looks young and apprehensive, and rightly so, for she was only fifteen at the time of her nuptials, a young but not uncommon age for marriage at the time. Her descendants later reasoned that she was large for her age and therefore fit to be wed, though the thought of marrying a man more than twice her age (Marriner was thirty-five at the time of the wedding) would naturally lead to some trepidation on the part of the bride. Her mother died when Maria was still a baby, so Maria spent the better part of her youth with a compassionate neighbor while her father traveled the territory on business. Little is mentioned of Maria and Marriner’s courtship in the family history, but this should not lead to assumptions of a marriage of convenience or of a loveless union.⁹ One of Maria’s sons



Maria Kingsbury Merrill and Marriner Wood Merrill near the time of their marriage. Maria was the fourth wife of Marriner. Photo from *Descendants of Marriner Wood Merrill*, 455.

noted his mother's eager anticipation as Marriner returned home from his weekly duties in the Logan Temple, and all their children spoke of their parents having a loving union.

Polygamist marriages, while peculiar outside of the Church, often radiated love and affection. When the descendants of Marriner Merrill decided to publish his history, one of their stated purposes was to disabuse the public mind of the oddness of polygamous families, writing, "It is ever a source of the greatest astonishment to many to learn that such a [polygamous] structure could be erected and maintained in love, harmony, good will, unselfish cooperation, personal integrity, and in accordance with the strictest standards of chastity in personal conduct, prayerful devotion, religious zeal, Christian idealism, and a burning ambition for culture education, professional advancement, and a high regard for the opportunities for service to fellowmen."¹⁰ Such a long note of explanation was a complicated way of saying only that family structure was relative to those who experienced it, and a polygamous home could be a happy and content one. Six of Marriner's sons followed their father into the polygamous lifestyle, and the rest of his children never spoke of anything other than a wholesome upbringing. When, near the end of his life, Joseph F. Merrill was asked about polygamy in a letter, he responded only that the "practice of plural marriage had served a beneficent purpose."¹¹

Less than a year after Maria's marriage, she gave birth to her first son, Joseph Francis Merrill. The child was named after his maternal grandfather, Joseph C. Kingsbury. Joseph was Marriner's fifteenth child and his eighth son.¹² Little detail is known about Joseph's adolescence on a personal level, but he and his siblings wrote enough about their childhoods to provide a composite picture of life in the family of Maria Merrill. Marriner was a man of sufficient means to allow each of his wives to possess their own home. They were spread out in a northern track with the homes of two wives in Logan and the rest on a northward line through the valley.

Maria and Marriner had ten children together, the majority of them being raised at Fountain Farm, a picturesque rock-and-frame house located on the gentle slope of the mountains. Maria's house consisted of twelve large rooms, encased in two-foot-thick stone walls that provided warmth in the winter and cool air in the summer. Cold water was piped into the house from a nearby spring. One of Maria's children later lauded the idyllic setting in which he was raised: "With its hundred acres of dry-farm land on the plateau and hills above the farm buildings, it was a glorious place on which to grow up as a youngster."¹³

Joseph always spoke fondly of his childhood, noting the virtues gained in scarcity and hardship. "We had little or no money; we needed none," he wrote decades later. "We raised our own food, made our clothes from home-grown wool, built our own houses, and burned wood from nearby canyons. Our groceries and store goods were bought with butter, eggs, grain, cattle, etc. Doctors and other professional people were almost unknown to us. Faith and mild herbs served us in illness. We were contented and happy."¹⁴

The reminiscences of Maria's children are no doubt colored by warm nostalgia. There are indications that Fountain Farm was not always the Arcadian paradise they seemed to recall in all of their descriptions. Maria ran the farm on her own, with increasing help from her sons as they grew older. Her days could begin as early as three o'clock in the morning. With her husband away during the week



Fountain Farm near Richmond, Utah, was where Maria raised her family. Like many plural wives, Maria lived a fairly independent life, raising her children, taking care of the home, cooking for her children and the hired hands who did the farm work, and supervising the operations of the farm. Photo from *Descendants of Marriner Wood Merrill*, 458.

working at the temple, Maria lived an independent, industrious life on her own. Though some of the work was carried out by hired hands, she took upon herself a large measure of the labors inherent in maintaining a large home, managing the farm, and meeting the needs of a bustling brood of children. According to one of her children, Maria “milked cows, made butter and cheese, fed pigs, kept chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys, managed a small flock of sheep, did the family washing, carded, spun, and wove into cloth the wool from her sheep, wove

carpets and made her children's clothing." This overwhelming array of activities kept her busy from before the sun rose until long after dark, when her children read and studied by the light of the candles she made herself.¹⁵

Marriner expected work from his children, sermonizing that "children should do some definite work and not devote all their time to play." The only recorded instance of corporal punishment in the family came when he caught Melvin, a puckish son, playing with some calves instead of picking up shingle debris as he was instructed. When Marriner directed his son back to

his work, the child responded, "I won't do it." What came next was described by the lad in later years: "He himself then did the picking up of a shingle he found close at hand, and with my supple little body bent in the good old-fashioned way over his protruding knee he applied that shingle to that portion of the anatomy where it did the most good in instilling a lasting lesson of obedience."¹⁶

A welcome respite in Maria's routine came on Friday nights, when Marriner returned from his weekly work in the temple. After spending most of his week in the Logan Temple, Marriner spent his weekends at his homes in Richmond, Franklin, and Lewiston. Maria's house on Fountain Farm was the closest of the three and the first he visited, usually on Friday nights. Maria's son, Merrill, recalled with fondness the approach of Marriner's wagon. "How eagerly mother always anticipated his coming! And how we children enjoyed his interesting narratives during or after the evening meal! I can see him now how he used to laugh heartily, as he frequently did, over the amusing features of the



Maria Kingsbury Merrill in the 1870s, near the time of Joseph's birth. Photo from *Descendants of Marriner Wood Merrill*, 456.

incidents he was relating or of the accounts the mother and children told him of their activities or experiences. And how his fat sides would shake in their jolly merriment of all we enjoyed!”¹⁷

The earliest recollections of Joseph’s life dealt with work. Pressed into service on one of Marriner’s business ventures, the construction of the Utah Northern Railroad, young Joseph was introduced to the back-breaking work first as a water boy. He also served as a team driver and later as a scraper, though Joseph, only eleven, was so small that an elder brother had to help him dump the scraper. From Joseph’s recollection, he worked on the railroad from ages eleven to thirteen, young for the job but qualified because he was “large for his age.”¹⁸ Joseph’s mother accompanied Marriner to the camps that followed the railroad construction in the summer of 1879. She spent her days as the camp cook, looking after Joseph, who was old enough to work, and her daughter Lucy, who was too young to be separated from her mother.¹⁹ Joseph fondly recalled the figure of his father riding Fanny, his white bay mare, up and down the line to oversee the work, and to this memory he added yet another gentle gibe at his father’s weight: “I used to wonder how so small a horse could gallop under so heavy a load.”²⁰

Educating a Family

Although the children of Marriner and Maria recalled their rustic life as idyllic, there were indications of insecurities over Marriner’s status as a man of the soil, as well as his desire for bigger and better things for his children. The hardscrabble nature of Marriner’s early life, combined with his lack of formal schooling, colored all his interactions with his offspring, who spoke frequently of his sermons to his children to gain more education. More often than not, Marriner tied his lectures on education to the need for money to make a better life. Marriner also may have realized that the nature of the polygamous life, with his numerous progeny, meant a small share for each child when his personal fortune was divided among forty-six descendants. To his son Albert he said, “I may not be able to leave my children any property, but if I can give them an education I shall be satisfied.”²¹ According to the same son, on

one occasion Marriner gathered all of his sons in one house and asked them, “Boys, do you know what an education means?” After a moment’s pause, Marriner continued, “An education means five dollars a day,” thus ending the conversation without further comment.²² One daughter confirmed that in the families Marriner presided over, the order of priorities was as follows: “School seemed to stand first, then farm work, the store, the mill, the dairy, teaching them to be industrious instead of wasting their time on the streets and other places.”²³

The stories told by Marriner’s descendants concerning his thrift are legendary, and yet he seems to have held no apprehensions about spending money when it came to education. When one daughter asked for five cents to purchase a notebook for school, he gave her ten cents. When she pointed out the excess, he laughed and gave her twenty-five cents, commenting, “Here is the money for your book; here is ten cents for not asking for more than you needed, and here is another ten cents because you are a good girl.”²⁴ One of Marriner’s investments was using his own private funds to pay for a teacher for his children and the neighboring youth. Because there was no public high school yet in the territory, Marriner hired Miss Ida Ione Cook, whom his children proudly declared as “one of the noted school women of her day.” School typically began after the autumn harvest and ended when plowing began in the spring, a period of four to five months, but at Marriner’s urging, the school period was lengthened to six months. School was held in the Relief Society hall, and it was there, under the tutelage of Miss Cook, that Joseph F. Merrill became acquainted with the wonders of science.²⁵

Young Joseph appears to have taken quickly to school. The first entry he made in anything that could reasonably be called a journal mentions a teacher named Miss Cook, another school taught by a Miss Stoddard, and yet another school. These schools were most likely all of the educational institutions a town the size of Richmond could support at the time. Joseph’s entire first journal, covering a period of four years, contains only a handful of entries, all of them mentioning school.²⁶ In their memoirs, most Latter-day Saints describe their first encounter with scripture, but Joseph’s reverential recollections speak instead of

his first encounter with a book on domestic science, authored by Utah scholar and future Apostle James E. Talmage. Joseph's first encounters with physical science contain almost the air of a man falling in love. "I began to read out of curiosity; I was soon spellbound. The chemistry of baking powder, what yeast does, etc. were described and goaded me on. Then and there I determined I was going to study science, if ever I could go away to school, and emphasize chemistry."²⁷

Religion and the Home

The other grand theme of the home kept by Maria and Marriner was commitment to the faith. The remembrances of Marriner's children do not entirely harmonize when it comes to their recollection of their father's faith. According to a younger son, Maria typically led the children in prayer before the evening and morning meals. When Marriner was present, he did the praying. His son Melvin wrote, "I remember how as a boy I used to watch the clock and note that the usual length of his prayers was five minutes. And such beautiful, wonderful prayers they were! It seemed to me as if he always talked to Deity in a matter-of-fact way as though he were conversing with a friendly comrade sitting before him as he kneeled."²⁸ Joseph recorded a different impression, writing, "He seemed a matter-of-fact, unemotional man, yet his personality was very strong. He did not impress one as very devout religiously."²⁹ The discrepancy between the memories of the two sons is mostly likely a result of Marriner's move from a secular to a spiritual figure later on in his life. Marriner was called as an Apostle in 1889, when Joseph was twenty-one and out of the home; Melvin was only five and likely knew no father other than the Apostle.³⁰ Joseph himself noticed the change in his father when the apostolic calling came upon him, noting, "His faith in Divinity was very strong and his spirituality, especially in later years, at times attained high levels."³¹ A fellow Apostle and a colleague of Marriner's came to similar conclusions, saying, "Apostle [Marriner] Merrill is not what people generally term an enthusiast in religious matters, but is as firm as a rock in his convictions of the truth."³²

If Joseph downplayed his father's spirituality, it might have been because he grew up in a world where the supernatural informed all aspects of life. Marriner became an Apostle after Joseph's adolescence, but he served as the bishop of Richmond during nearly the entirety of Joseph's childhood.³³ In early Latter-day Saint communities, the bishop was nearly always an outstanding temporal and spiritual leader, and Marriner was no exception. Yet in these communities, the Church's theology fused the sacred and secular in a peculiar way. The revelations of Joseph Smith commonly used the words *temporal* and *spiritual* in the same sentence,³⁴ and the sermons heard over the pulpit in general conference held as good a chance of centering on irrigation or proper care for crops as they did on angels and visions. One of the grandest compliments a member of the kingdom could receive was given to Marriner from fellow Apostle Matthias F. Cowley, when Cowley referred to him as "perhaps as choice a blending of the spiritual and the temporal as any man in the Church."³⁵

Marriner eschewed impracticality even in his theology. One of Joseph's fondest memories of his father came from a Church meeting in the early 1880s. A speaker gave a long and convoluted talk on "The Immaculate Conception." Joseph recalled, "His long talk tired everybody. . . . Finally the preacher said, 'This is one of the mysteries of the kingdom.'" At this point Marriner interrupted the speaker, saying, "Sit down. We don't care anything about the mysteries of the kingdom," forcing the speaker to slump to his seat, mumbling, "I thought the mysteries were for the Saints." Young Joseph recorded as a point of pride, "Father was not one of those orators who expand a two-minute thought into a two-hour address."³⁶

In the kingdom everyone lived a gospel of work, but Joseph grew up during a time when every member of Latter-day Saint society was also expected to have a grand theophany—a personal experience with God. A year before Joseph's birth, Heber C. Kimball proclaimed, "Remember these sayings, for many of you will live to see them fulfilled. The time will come when no man nor woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to be guided by the light within himself. If you do not have it, how can you stand?"³⁷ Many Latter-day Saint

autobiographies from the early Church record personal theophanies, and most at a young age. Joseph Smith's first visions came at the age of fourteen. Brigham Young spoke in the Adamic tongue when he first met the Prophet.³⁸ Likewise, John Taylor was a small boy when he saw a vision of "an angel in the heavens, holding a trumpet to his mouth, sounding a message to the nations."³⁹ Some of these theophanies came easily; others did not. Lorenzo Snow reported, "the heavens seemed like brass over my head" before he heard the "rustling of silken robes" and was enveloped in the Spirit.⁴⁰

Marriner also laid claim to a heavenly vision received when he was a boy, long before he joined the Church. He related his own personal encounter with Deity as follows: "When I was a boy of nine years my mother sent me to the hay-field where my father and brother were at work, to call them to dinner. On the way I became unconscious and was clothed with a vision which I distinctly remembered when I gained my usual feelings and thoughts." In the vision Marriner was transported to a log cabin where he saw in vision "the Church and the Prophets Joseph and Brigham." He continued, "I saw the travels . . . of the Saints from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters to Utah." In addition to the pioneers he saw in his vision, Marriner saw two friends from his youth and "each of them had more than one wife. In my vision at the time the divinity of plural marriage was revealed to me."⁴¹

In time, Joseph came to record his own communication from God, but in contrast to his father's, it was remarkably simple and almost stark in its description. He did not write it down until late in his life, and it was included as an item of instruction to children. "When I was about ten years of age, after my candle was blown out at night in my little bedroom, I knelt down and prayed for that special thing that I wanted." He added common provisions about praying worthily and with faith, then continued, "I thought I needed a special blessing. I had no doubt of it, and so every night in my private prayer I prayed for this particular blessing." At this point in the narrative, Joseph added in a point of fact that appears unusual in a Latter-day Saint theophany narrative. While he never mentioned the object of his prayers, he wrote, "I did not get it the first week, nor the first year, but this did not discourage me."⁴²

It is characteristic of Merrill's honesty that he frankly admitted he had received no answer to his prayers.

This was not a faith-crushing experience, but he did begin to search for a reason why the "heavens were brass" and remained that way indefinitely. The boy's first thoughts sprang to his own disobedience. "I thought the reason was that I wasn't worthy of the blessing." His mind sprang to an incident in which his mother admonished him to stay away from a nearby swimming hole and he disobeyed her. "I knew it was wrong to disobey mother, therefore I felt that the Lord likely would not answer my prayer until I had overcome my disobedience." Nevertheless, he pressed on. "I continued to pray month after month every night. I was sure as soon as I made myself worthy enough and it was wise for Him to do so, I felt He would answer."⁴³ The years dragged on, and no answer came.

Merrill's theophany remained out of reach—a fact that must have caused some distress, for it was during this period of Joseph's adolescence that the very storms the Latter-day Saint leadership had spoken of broke upon the people. During the 1880s, stern antipolygamy legislation came into effect, and the Church resisted because it saw plural marriage as a divinely given command. One of Joseph's earliest memories was hearing the President of the Church inform the members to brace themselves for a storm. Near the end of his life, he recalled, "I, myself, heard President John Taylor in the Logan Tabernacle in the early [18]80's declare in an afternoon sermon at a quarterly conference that, 'A STORM IS COMING, A STORM IS COMING.'" But the President said, suiting his actions to the words, "We'll round up our shoulders, turn up our collars and the storm will pass. God will not permit Satan to destroy this Church." Nearly sixty years later, Joseph wrote, "I remember that just as distinctly as if it were yesterday."⁴⁴

Marriner, one of the territory's most prominent polygamists, became a target. Descriptions of Maria's Fountain Farm given by the children told of built-in hiding places in case federal officials came to the farm. Below the trapdoor there was "a well-built ladder down which Pa could descend easily, and when he reached the bottom of the dark pit a chair was awaiting him on which he could sit in comfort as long as the search continued for him in the house." The pit was surrounded by



Maria Loenza Kingsbury Merrill, Joseph's mother. Denied the advantages of having an education herself, she was intensely focused on making sure her children had every educational opportunity possible. Photo from *Descendants of Marriner Wood Merrill*, 454.

thick rock walls, but in the cellar, there was “a very slight indication, if one knew about it and looked closely, of the place where the old and the new wall joined.” Melvin Merrill spoke of “times when my mother was in the cellar [when] she would look rather anxiously at that wall and wonder and worry whether the deputies would notice the joining place.” The youngest Merrill children received warnings to not even whisper Marriner’s name if strangers came to the farm. Fortunately, the deputies never came to Fountain Farm.⁴⁵

Marriner Merrill, with his several residences, managed to evade the deputies, but his oldest son and namesake, Marriner Jr., was not so fortunate. The younger Marriner, also a polygamist, was arrested for unlawful cohabitation on 13 October 1887.⁴⁶ The following January, Joseph’s half brother was sentenced to five months in the state peniten-

tiary. It was a dark time for the kingdom, and it takes no stretch of the imagination to picture the anxiety and insecurity in Joseph's home as each day his mother eyed the stone hideaway with apprehension, while his younger brothers and sisters spoke their father's name only in whispers to each other. Only a few months prior, John Taylor, the President of the Church, had passed away in a forced exile, hiding in a house less than seventy-five miles from Fountain Farm.⁴⁷

During this time of anxiety, Joseph kept praying. He was nearing his nineteenth birthday and preparing to leave the valley to attend school at the University of Deseret in Salt Lake City. He adds no tone of exasperation in his recollections of this experience. Ten years of nightly prayers since his first attempt had so far failed to bring an answer. "I prayed perhaps more earnestly than I had ever prayed before. Among other things, I said very pleadingly, 'Oh Father, wilt Thou not hear me?'" He continued, "As distinctly as any word I ever heard in my life, I heard the word 'Yes,' softly spoken, and I was thrilled from head to foot with the most happy, satisfying, joyous feeling that it was possible to have. I sprung from my knees and shouted, 'Oh Father, I thank Thee.'"⁴⁸

Such was the contrast between father and son in conversion. Without requesting it, Marriner had received a grandiose vision. The elder Merrill saw the founders of the Church and the epic cross-country trek of the Saints, and he had even gained a witness of the faith's most controversial doctrine, all at the age of eleven. Joseph, in contrast, prayed earnestly for ten years straight and then received a whispered syllable in answer. The divergence between the two experiences illustrated as much as anything the changing nature of the Latter-day Saint people. As the nineteenth century drew to its close, the old guard of the Church, with its grand, romantic visions, began to recede into the past, to be replaced by quiet moments of reflection. In the theology of the Saints, both experiences would be labeled revelation, though the moment experienced by Joseph became a more common template for conversation with God than did the visions of his father. Both men held their own brand of theology, and Joseph's experience, though far less grandiose than his father's, was just as powerful. This disparity may spring from the backgrounds of the two men. After all, one was a convert, and the other was born in the kingdom.

1. By the time of Merrill's birth, Utah was officially a territory of the United States. However, culturally and religiously, the Utah territory was dominated by the influence of the Latter-day Saints. Throughout the nineteenth century, tensions rose and fell between the Latter-day Saints and the government of the United States. Thomas G. Alexander records that the Saints "had to learn to endure rule by a hostile U.S. Government that organized the Utah Territory in 1850 with narrowly limited rights rather than admitting Utahns as state with shared sovereignty." Thomas G. Alexander, *Utah, The Right Place* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2003), 100.
2. This story was shared by Apostle Rudger Clawson and has become well established in Cache Valley lore about the Logan Temple. Rudger Clawson, *Deseret News*, Church Section, 12 December 1936. See also N. B. Lundwall, comp., *Temples of the Most High* (Salt Lake City: printed by the compiler, 1945), 108, and Nolan P. Olsen, *Logan Temple: The First 100 Years* (Providence, UT: Keith W. Watkins and Sons, 1978), 165–67.
3. See Melvin Clarence Merrill, ed., *Utah Pioneer Marriner Wood Merrill and His Family* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1937), 337.
4. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 337.
5. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 29.
6. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 31.
7. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 31–32.
8. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 40.
9. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 454–56.
10. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 12.
11. Joseph F. Merrill to J. W. Musser, 5 December 1951, box 20, folder 2, Joseph F. Merrill Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University (BYU).
12. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 510.
13. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 360–61.
14. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 346.
15. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 458.
16. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 357.
17. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 363.
18. Bryant S. Hinckley, "Greatness in Men: Joseph F. Merrill," *Improvement Era*, December 1932, 77.
19. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 457.
20. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 347.
21. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 341.
22. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 341.
23. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 343.
24. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 365.
25. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 330.

26. Joseph F. Merrill Journal, box 1, folder 1, Merrill Papers, BYU.
27. Joseph F. Merrill, "James E. Talmage," draft of an article written for the *Relief Society Magazine*, MSS 1540, box 11, folder 3, Merrill Papers, BYU.
28. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 358.
29. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 347.
30. Joseph F. Merrill, comp., *Descendants of Marriner Wood Merrill* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938), 173.
31. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 347.
32. Matthias F. Cowley, *Prophets and Patriarchs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Chattanooga, TN: Ben E. Rich, n.d.), 280.
33. Marriner was appointed bishop in 1861 and served until 1879. J. M. Tanner, "Apostle Marriner W. Merrill," in *Lives of Our Leaders* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1901), 193.
34. See Doctrine and Covenants 29:31–33, or *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86). A sermon given by Brigham Young during this period began with, "I wish to say a few words before this meeting is dismissed, upon the subject of the Big Cottonwood Canal." *Journal of Discourses*, 3:328.
35. Cowley, *Prophets and Patriarchs*, 279.
36. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 349.
37. Orson F. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 451.
38. John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Frontier Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 32.
39. B. H. Roberts, *The Life of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), 28.
40. Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1884), 8.
41. Tanner, "Apostle Marriner W. Merrill," 185.
42. Joseph F. Merrill, "Boyhood Experiences: Does the Lord Answer Children's Prayers?," *Improvement Era*, May 1944, 146.
43. Merrill, "Boyhood Experiences," 146.
44. Joseph F. Merrill to J. W. Musser, 5 December 1951, box 20, folder 2, Merrill Papers, BYU (emphasis in original).
45. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 356–7.
46. Merrill, *Marriner Wood Merrill*, 99.
47. See Eric Perkins and Mary Jane Woodger, "Administration from the Underground," in *Champion of Liberty: John Taylor*, ed. Mary Jane Woodger (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 347–63.
48. Merrill, "Boyhood Experiences," 146.