

FAMILY AND  
FRIENDS



## “A Modern Patriarchal Family”:

### The Wives of Joseph F. Smith in the *Relief Society Magazine*, 1915–19

Joseph F. Smith’s devotion to his families is legendary. “I love them with an imperishable love,” he wrote of his wives in one letter. “I honor them as the Mothers of my children! I cherish them as the dearest partners of my greatest joys, the sweetest, best ministers to my earthly pleasures and happiness.”<sup>1</sup> Recollections of various grandchildren repeatedly emphasized their awareness of his great love and enjoyment of them, his personal attention to each individual, and his secret pocket of candies for his “babies.” “He had the marvelous ability of making every member of his entire family feel as though he loved him or her the most,” said one granddaughter.<sup>2</sup> President Smith’s close friend Charles W. Nibley eulogized his family as his “greatest work of all”: “Here is the work of a man indeed! Nay, is it not more like the work of a God?” he exclaimed.<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Nibley’s tribute appeared in the January 1919 issue of the *Relief Society Magazine* as part of a lengthy feature article memorializing Joseph F. Smith upon his death. This article took a significant turn when, after briefly recounting President Smith’s leadership in church and community, author Susa Young Gates abruptly shifted gears, removing the focus from the prophet himself.

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She declared, “President Smith himself would be loath to see this article appear in the leading women’s *Magazine*, in the Church, without due affectionate notice given to the women who have helped to mold his own character and that of his children.”<sup>4</sup> Following were six pages of text and photographs profiling his five wives and their families.

Since its founding in 1915, the *Relief Society Magazine* had frequently given face and voice to the wives of Joseph F. Smith. They were featured not only for their relationship to him but also for being accomplished women in their own right. Today these remarkable women are largely unknown, and even in biographies of Joseph F. Smith they are mentioned only in passing.<sup>5</sup> Yet we cannot hope to fully understand President Smith’s life without a complete picture of his families—“his greatest work” and the context in which he lived on the most personal level. Even more, these women—Julina, Sarah, Edna, Alice, and Mary—deserve recognition as individuals whose life experiences were at once unique and representative of many other LDS women of their generation.

This article presents a preliminary step toward a complete study of the Joseph F. Smith families by examining the portrayals of Joseph F. Smith and his wives in the *Relief Society Magazine* from its inception in 1915 to his death in 1918. This approach enables us to give an introduction to each woman while also highlighting how President Smith’s family was portrayed publicly. Moreover, it raises some interesting questions concerning the dynamics of this large plural family—and also concerning the place of plural marriage in the LDS Church almost three decades after the Manifesto. In order to probe at those questions, I will first consider what *is* said in these accounts and then consider what *is not* said.

It must be acknowledged that the portrayals of the Smith wives and families in the *Relief Society Magazine* were written primarily for public consumption in an official Church publication and therefore present only a partial and idealized view. There are two important responses to those concerns. First, by all accounts, the Smith families seem to have achieved a high level of love and unity, and the effusive, affectionate accounts of the participants and contemporary observers should not be discounted, regardless of the venue in which they appeared. Certainly, as I will discuss below, there must have been more complex dynamics under the surface; in hindsight we will never be able to fully separate idealization from genuine feeling. However, these facts do not render the genuine feeling invalid. Second, the fact that this was the image of plural marriage that the participants themselves

and the editor of the *Relief Society Magazine* wanted to portray, at this particular point in time, is significant and deserves examination for what it tells us about how Latter-day Saints were thinking about plural marriage as the end of that era came to a decisive close. In any case, I hope that this necessarily brief treatment will suggest fruitful avenues of inquiry for future research.

### **The Smith Families in 1915**

By way of overview, we should take note of the status of the Smith families in January 1915 as the magazine began publication. There were five wives at that time (in order of marriage): Julina Lambson, Sarah Ellen Richards, Edna Lambson, Alice Kimball, and Mary Schwartz. Of President Smith's forty-eight children, thirty-six were living; nineteen were married and had produced over seventy grandchildren (see appendix).<sup>6</sup> The wives ranged in age from forty-nine to sixty-five years of age; the oldest living child was Mary Sophronia (forty-five years old) and the youngest was Royal Grant (eight years old). Joseph F. Smith was seventy-six years old; he and Julina had been married for forty-eight years. (His first marriage and subsequent divorce is discussed below.) President Smith maintained close relations with all of his families and took his wives on various trips and excursions in turn. Each wife had her own home in downtown Salt Lake City—Julina in the Beehive House; Sarah, Edna, and Alice in adjoining lots on 300 West; and Mary just a few blocks away on North Temple.<sup>7</sup> Mary also had a farm in Taylorsville.

"Each is a queen in her own right," Susa Young Gates declared of the Smith wives in her "Memoriam" article four years later. "They have been and are as faithful and fond wives, as true and wise mothers as ever lived upon the earth." While President Smith deserved great credit for the "remarkable family" he had fathered, she continued, "it must be said that the five noble and high-principled 'mothers of his children'—as he loved to call them—deserve and should receive equal share in the credit for the beneficent training and careful nurture given to their families."<sup>8</sup> She then proceeded to profile each woman in turn.

### **Julina Lambson Smith: "At the Head of Her Husband's Kingdom"**

Julina Smith, wrote Susa Young Gates, was "amply qualified by her own native housewifely and social abilities, her broad sympathy and just understanding of the sacred principle of celestial marriage, to stand at the head of her great husband's

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kingdom.”<sup>9</sup> Honored as the first wife of President Smith, she had given her life to creating one of the most remarkable and successful families in Mormondom, entering into a unique partnership with him and four other women in building what she once called “a modern patriarchal family.”<sup>10</sup> As the second counselor to general Relief Society president Emmeline B. Wells, moreover, Julina was recognized as a leader and public worker. In her own mind, Sister Smith saw the domestic and public aspects of her life as mutually reinforcing, and in her published comments she encouraged other LDS women to take the same perspective.

Julina Lambson was born in 1849 to Alfred Lambson and Melissa Jane Bigler, pioneers of 1847.<sup>11</sup> In 1866, at age seventeen, Julina married Joseph F. Smith, who was then twenty-seven years old. At the time, as I will discuss below, he was already married to his cousin Levira, but Julina entered willingly into the role of plural wife. “He is the only man I have ever seen that I could love as a husband,” she told her mother.<sup>12</sup> Julina gave birth to eleven children and adopted two others, immersing herself in her chosen life. After taking a course in obstetrics in the mid-1870s, she added frequent service as a midwife to her family responsibilities. Managing the ever-growing household with her sister-wives during the frequent absences of their husband, Julina also accompanied him to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) in 1885 when he was exiled to avoid prosecution by antipolygamy forces. When Joseph took up residence in the Beehive House after becoming President of the Church in 1901, Julina moved there and served as a sort of “First Lady” to the Church while increasing her public work with her acceptance of the call to the Relief Society presidency in 1910.

In the *Relief Society Magazine*, Julina Smith expressed her devotion to motherhood repeatedly. “A woman who would make a success of her life must endeavor to make her home an altar of peace, love and companionship,” she wrote in the first issue. “Her husband should rest confident in her gentle solicitude, and her children trust in her unfailing wisdom. Such an ideal does not imply wealth, education nor brilliant gifts. Faith, affection, fidelity, industry, and above all, integrity, constitute the requirements for such a happy woman’s life and success.”<sup>13</sup>

Her public addresses also stress these themes. While other Relief Society leaders of the day discussed their participation in national women’s organizations and in charitable and educational efforts, Julina’s comments at Relief Society conferences showed her to be primarily concerned with home and family and with teaching the younger generation. At the April 1915 conference, for example, Sister

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*Julina and Joseph Smith on their golden wedding anniversary, May 5, 1916, an event highlighted in the Relief Society Magazine. "Sister Smith wore a golden wedding gown of white satin, beautifully made by one of our own sisters and modestly decorated with laces and flowers. She was not handsomer on her wedding day than she was on this happy occasion." Courtesy of Church History Library.*

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Smith “urged with great force the careful training of children religiously and morally. To this problem every mother should bend her best efforts because of the sacredness of the duty laid upon her as a parent.”<sup>14</sup>

Two aspects of Julina’s public work received particular notice in the *Relief Society Magazine*. She served as supervisor of the Wedding and Burial Clothes Department, overseeing the production and sale of temple and burial clothing to members of the Church, a work that had grown “steadily and surely” under Sister Smith’s leadership.<sup>15</sup> Julina was also recognized in the magazine for her work as a midwife. “It has always been a joy to me to place a tiny one for the first time in its mother’s arms, for then I felt again the thrills that I have felt in looking into the baby faces of my own,” she recalled.<sup>16</sup> A profile of “Ye Ancient and Honorable Order of Midwifery” celebrating early Mormon women mentioned both Julina and her sister Edna—“the two splendid sisters, and wives of Joseph F. Smith”—in this capacity.<sup>17</sup>

It was, of course, those “baby faces of [her] own” that consumed most of Julina Smith’s life, and her voice came through most forcefully in the *Relief Society Magazine* in her nostalgic recollections of her unusual family experience. The first—appearing in the fifth issue of the *Magazine*—was her “Loving Tribute” to her sister-wife Sarah after Sarah’s death in March 1915. This piece is remarkable for its deeply affectionate tone. “‘Not dead but sleeping,’ and sweet is thy memory to me, Aunt Sarah,” Julina began, “as are the recollections of our associations through the 48 years that we have journeyed together always sharing each other’s joys, loves and sorrows.”<sup>18</sup> In speaking of her family, Julina always used the first-person plural—“we” and “our family”—in a way that clearly included more than herself and her husband.

Julina wrote tenderly of her husband’s subsequent two marriages—events that, in another situation or for another woman, could have caused great heart-ache. Continuing to address Sarah directly, Julina recalled:

Mere girls, we were, when we started life together.

I the mother of one little one, when two years after my marriage ‘Papa’ brought you home his wife. . . .

A few years together, Joseph, you and I, and then again our family was increased, the home made larger and Aunt Edna came, to make a triangle of happiness with our husband as the center controlling bond of love.

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The picture painted by this recollection is one of three young women raising their families cooperatively as they all lived together in the same house, known as the Homestead. She then describes some of their “happiest hours” in vivid detail:

My large dining-room was always the personal property and common gathering place of all. Even now I can hear the laughter of our children as they played about us before being kissed, and tucked in their beds. There, too, I can see the evening picture of three tired but happy mothers, often busy with kneeless stockings, seatless trousers or other articles of clothing needing buttons or stitches; or with, perhaps, something good to read or ideas to exchange.

It is notable that this “triangle” of love and happiness includes the husband only by implication—his presence seems to have been felt mostly in his absence, and the bonds between the three women were perhaps primary. “As often as possible our papa was with us,” Julina wrote, “but oftener we three were alone, for we were the wives of a soldier of the truth whose armor was always on.”<sup>19</sup> Julina’s portrayal suggests that this modern “patriarchal” family may have been in fact, on a daily basis, more of a matriarchy—something that was undoubtedly true in other polygamous households. This is not to say that the women and children did not love their husband and father and defer to him when he was there, but it suggests the complexity of the emotional ties and daily dynamics in the family.

By any standard, Julina Smith’s descriptions of her life as a plural wife are remarkable. She is confident and unapologetic, affectionate and effusive; she comes across as totally and unhesitatingly dedicated to the life she has chosen, and her love for the people in that life is unequivocal. At the same time, as I will discuss below, she leaves much unsaid. We should also note that, of the Smith wives, hers is the only voice that appears directly in the magazine. While this fact is certainly due in large part to her position in the Relief Society, it nonetheless highlights her undisputed position as “first” wife of Joseph F. Smith and “first lady” of Mormondom.

### **Sarah Ellen Richards Smith: “A Quiet Power”**

“I am grateful beyond my power to express that ‘papa’ has ‘Aunt Sarah’ ‘over there’ to comfort and take care of him now,” Julina Smith is reported to have said when she looked into her husband’s coffin.<sup>20</sup> Sarah Ellen Richards Smith had been gone for over three years when Joseph F. Smith died in November 1918. She was nonetheless included in Gates’s memorial tribute to the women in his life, her death



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*Sarah Ellen Richards Smith (1850–1915) was the only one of Joseph F. Smith’s wives to precede him in death. “So easy, so guileless so cheerful is her deportment that her company is eagerly sought by those who know her best,” her husband wrote. “Her cheery laugh and her determined optimism make her world a very beautiful place to live in.” 1910 portrait, courtesy of Church History Library.*

having created a parallel scene of grief that left “a whole family in tears and deep mourning at her departure.”<sup>21</sup> Sarah was remembered as “beautiful, courteous and extremely intelligent.” “All her life was guided by high principle, and no mean or ignoble word or act marred the gentle standard of her fine character,” Gates wrote.<sup>22</sup>

Sarah Ellen Richards, a daughter of President Willard Richards and Sarah Longstroth, was born in Salt Lake City in 1850. She married Joseph F. Smith in March 1868; as recounted in the Smith family history, President Brigham Young had counseled Joseph to take another wife, and Joseph and Julina together selected Sarah as their choice.<sup>23</sup> Immediately after their marriage, the newlyweds went to Provo, where

Joseph had been assigned by Brigham Young to resolve some local problems. This also gave them a few months together for a honeymoon. Sarah eventually bore eleven children, five of whom preceded her in death. Sarah’s life, like Julina’s, was immersed in her family and household. She served in her ward Relief Society and was one of the founding officers of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers. She also did much genealogy and temple work on behalf of her ancestors. She seems to have had delicate health, which likely served to curtail her public activities. Sarah loved to sew and took up much of that sort of work in the household; she was also known for being very particular about cleanliness and order.<sup>24</sup>

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On the occasion of her death in 1915, the magazine carried as its lead article a memorial article in which the voices of both Joseph and Julina were featured, paying tribute to Sarah in poignant and loving terms. “The character of Sister Sarah E. Smith is at once strong and well controlled,” her husband wrote. “There is a quiet power about her spirit that manifests itself to all who come into her presence. But with that power she unites the gentle tact of a true woman.” Joseph characterized her as “guileless” and “cheerful,” with a “cheery laugh” and “determined optimism” that make her world “a very beautiful place to live in.”

No greater tribute could be paid, Joseph continued, than “to name the simple fact that out of all her honored husband’s family there could be found no single wife or child who had aught but loving words of praise and esteem for their beloved ‘Aunt Sarah.’ What greater proof of true loveliness could be adduced? . . . This tribute would be incomplete if there was no mention made of the tender consideration which this good wife accords to her busy and burdened companion,” Joseph concluded. “‘The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.’”<sup>25</sup> Such a tribute from any husband would be high praise indeed, but it is followed by the equally loving pen-sketch from Julina discussed above. “Your place is vacant now, Aunt Sarah” Julina wrote, “but memory is sweet. Our love has grown stronger with the passing years and today I feel your absence as keenly as if you were my own sister—my own flesh and blood.”<sup>26</sup>

Sarah’s voice is not included in this profile, or anywhere else in the magazine, making her seem more quiet than perhaps she actually was, but clearly the impression conveyed in these tributes, as well as the “Memoriam” profile, is of a strong but gentle woman who was known for her loving nature and her sterling character. Whereas Julina was noted for her domesticity and leadership, Sarah stood as an example of the individual virtues LDS women aspired to develop.

### **Edna Lambson Smith: A “Most Unique and Faithful Living Woman”**

Edna Lambson was born in 1851, the younger sister of Julina. Still in her mid-teens when her older sister married, Edna spent much time at her sister’s home. At age fifteen, she was healed of a “severe and almost fatal illness” after a dramatic night during which her brother-in-law and future husband, Joseph F. Smith, administered to her continuously for several hours. Having been counseled by Brigham Young to take another wife, Joseph was sealed to nineteen-year-old

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*Edna Lambson and Joseph F. Smith, early 1900s. Edna's simple but pretty dress and her direct, confident expression seem to reflect her energetic, no-nonsense personality. "Comely, nervously active in all her movements, and gifted with piercing eyes, she is sometimes abrupt and vigorous in her expressions," wrote Susa Young Gates. Courtesy of Church History Library.*

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Edna on New Year's Day, 1871. According to family history, this decision was made in a family council in which Edna was deemed a natural choice for a plural wife "since she was there most of the time anyway."<sup>27</sup> Edna bore ten children, five boys and five girls, six of whom preceded their father in death—most painfully, perhaps, Hyrum Mack, the eldest son in the family and an apostle, whose death in January 1918 seemed to precipitate his father's decline. With the death of her son, Edna also became the Smith wife to lose more of her children than any other.

In speaking of Edna, Gates emphasized her position as matron of the Salt Lake Temple, reporting that the sister workers in the temple "love her for the sterling virtues which buttress her character with unyielding fortitude and strength"; in return for their dedication, Sister Smith "mothers them all." Edna was described as being "like a lightning flash, instant in speech, strenuous in activity" but also "an ardent lover of deep spiritual truths" who reads the scriptures as her "diversion" (in other words, her hobby). "The sister workers in the temple who know her best give quick and willing service under her swift, directing hand," Gates reported.<sup>28</sup>

Temple work was a subject close to Susa Young Gates's heart, and it received much emphasis in the *Relief Society Magazine* during her editorship. One feature article on this subject gave extended attention to Edna's work in the temple. While the war was turning the world's attention to the "generous and tenderly sympathetic labors" of women such as Clara Barton, Gates asserted, Latter-day Saints should remember "that we have women amongst us, consecrated women, who have not only reared large families and ministered in the Relief Society, but also have labored as priestesses in the temples of the living God, and thus brought hope and cheer to the helpless, imprisoned spirits behind the veil." Among those, Edna Smith was "the most unique and faithful living woman associated with temple work."<sup>29</sup>

As recounted in this piece, Edna began her service at the age of twenty-two in the Endowment House, first working in the kitchen and then becoming an ordinance worker. When the Salt Lake Temple was dedicated in 1893, she was set apart as an ordinance worker, and in 1910 she was called to be the matron of the temple—"in charge of the sister workers," as Gates put it. In addition to her ordinance work, Edna was assigned to be in charge of "maintaining cleanliness"; in that capacity, she had "accomplished marvels in the regulation and inner arrangements of the temple." She was also asked in 1916 to assist the president of the Logan temple in recommending major renovations and improvements to that building.<sup>30</sup>

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In addition to Edna’s labors in the temple, she served on the General Board of the Primary and was a leader in the Daughters of Utah Pioneers. She was also credited with inspiring a Churchwide fundraising movement in 1915 that raised over \$30,000 for “destitute families and orphan children of the war” in Europe—money that was distributed by her son Hyrum and his wife, Ida, while he served as president of the European Mission.<sup>31</sup>

Along with Edna’s public labors, Gates described her personality in vivid terms:

Sister Smith is a woman of deep, spiritual insight, with an abounding love of the higher things of the kingdom. She is a natural student and possesses a keen mind. Comely, nervously active in all her movements, and gifted with piercing eyes, she is sometimes abrupt and vigorous in her expressions and with her quick word of counsel; but those who know her best forget the thrust of the two-edged sword in contemplating the mercy of the wound, which was made only that righteousness might increase and obedience be enforced.

“Those who come closest to her,” Gates concluded, “love her for her integrity, her genuineness, her nobility, and her pure, upright spirit.”<sup>32</sup>

Edna Smith’s success in motherhood was also mentioned. When her son Hyrum Mack died, the magazine’s eulogy honored Edna’s influence in his life: “From his youth up his mother followed his every footstep, taught him the principles of the gospel, inculcated the fear of the Lord in his soul, and helped him to overcome all youthful temptations, turning errors into experience and making of conquered temptation a bent circle of protection for the future guidance of his own children.”<sup>33</sup>

Of all the wives of Joseph F. Smith, Edna Lambson’s presence in the *Relief Society Magazine* was most visibly connected to her public work. While portrayals of Julina placed her public work alongside, or even subordinate to, her domestic role, it was just the opposite for Edna. She was honored as a mother, to be sure, but whenever she was mentioned in the magazine it was primarily as a woman whose energies were turned outward, beyond her home. Nonetheless, Edna’s public work was consecrated work, and her depictions in the magazine served to remind LDS women of their own potential to make important contributions to the community.

### **Alice Kimball Smith and Mary Taylor Schwartz Smith: “Well-Known Women”**

Taken together, Julina, Sarah, and Edna represented three distinct but interrelated points on the family “triangle”; based on their portrayals in the *Relief Society Magazine*, we might perceive that those women formed the central axis of the family. However, there were two other wives: Alice Kimball and Mary Schwartz. In her memorial article, Susa Young Gates asserted that all of President Smith’s wives were “well-known women in this community.”<sup>34</sup> In the magazine, however, this was not necessarily the case: Alice and Mary were barely mentioned. Because they received so much less mention than the other three, I will consider them together here.

Alice Kimball was described in the memorial article as “a lovely, sensitive, highly spiritualized character.” She had inherited “keen, incisive humor,” “dignity,” and “seeric gifts” from her father, Heber C. Kimball, and she was “devoted to her home and its constant needs.” Nonetheless, Alice had served publicly as general treasurer of the YLMIA and had “traveled much” in that capacity, always “lifting up her eloquent and appealing voice” to bear testimony of the gospel. She and her family were “prostrated with the influenza plague” when Joseph died, preventing Alice from being at his deathbed; only through her “indomitable courage and will” was she able to come, “stricken and pallid,” to the funeral.<sup>35</sup>

Other than a brief allusion to her name in a previous sketch by Julina, this is the only mention of Alice in the *Relief Society Magazine*. She was born in 1858 to Heber C. Kimball and Ann Alice Gheen. Alice was a twin; her brother Andrew Kimball was a stake president in Arizona and father of future Church president Spencer W. Kimball. Alice had been married previously, to a man with an alcohol problem. She bore him three children before finally seeking a divorce. According to Smith family tradition, President John Taylor advised Joseph F. Smith to marry Alice in order to provide for her and her children.<sup>36</sup> Alice was sealed to President Smith in December 1883. He adopted the three children from her first marriage, and they had four more children together, making her the mother of seven. Her youngest child was eighteen years old the year of his father’s death.

A biographical sketch in Gates’s *History of the YLMIA* mentions some of Alice’s talents. She had “the skill of the housewife and the rarer artistic handling of the needle, which can make old garments look like new, and can fashion the

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*Alice Kimball Smith, fourth wife of President Joseph F. Smith, ca. 1880. Alice's elaborate hat reflects the love of beauty and refined sense of style for which she was known. "Her heart is ever a-quiver with the suppressed emotions of a keenly sensitive spirit; and when she is forced to appear before an audience, she forgets self and remembers only God and the eager girls who are listening to her moving appeals," wrote Susa Young Gates, describing Alice's work in the YLMIA. Courtesy of Church History Library.*

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new into robes of grace and beauty,” Gates reported. “She is her own seamstress, and does not shrink even from the difficult art of tailoring her own outer garments.” Alice was also gifted “with the love of art in all its manifold expressions,” though she had never found opportunity for “proper cultivation” of that love. Upon becoming treasurer of the YLMIA in 1905, she felt that she did not know enough to fulfill that position to the highest standards, so she took a course in bookkeeping.<sup>37</sup> “She is a most devoted wife and fond mother, giving her wealth of passionate service without personal regard, or at times without self-protection,” Gates wrote in the *Relief Society Magazine*, suggesting that Alice had at times sacrificed her health in performing that service.<sup>38</sup>

Mary Taylor Schwartz Smith was profiled in the “Memoriam” article as a “loyal and devoted wife” who bequeathed to her children “the quick intelligence” and the “love of literary and educational pursuits” that she herself inherited “from



*Mary Taylor Schwartz Smith with her husband and sons, December 1896. Mary spent several years in Idaho in the 1890s; on her return to Utah, she purchased a farm where she could teach her five sons to work. “She has bequeathed to her children the quick intelligence, the love of literary and educational pursuits, which she, too, inherited from a superior ancestry. She has not disdained, however, to take up a farm and to lead her sons by precept and example to love Mother Earth in all her changing bestowals,” Susa Young Gates observed. Courtesy of Church History Library.*



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superior ancestry.” Gates declared that Mary had raised five “stalwart and exemplary boys” and commended Mary for raising those boys on a farm, leading her sons “by precept and example” in engaging in “homely toil” that had “dignified their ideals” and “solidified their natural gifts.”<sup>39</sup> (For some reason, she did not mention Mary’s daughter, Agnes, who was twenty-one years old at the time of Joseph’s death.) Beyond this article, Mary is pictured in the photograph taken of the group that attended the International Genealogical Congress in San Francisco in 1915,<sup>40</sup> and her name is mentioned in Julina’s Golden Wedding sketch.<sup>41</sup> Otherwise, she does not appear in the *Relief Society Magazine*.

Mary Taylor Schwartz was born in 1865 to Agnes Taylor, sister of President John Taylor, and William Schwartz, a German convert and miller. Mary’s mother was asked to become the official housekeeper at President Taylor’s residence, the Gardo House, in 1881, and Mary accompanied her as an assistant. Mary was the “official ironer” for President Taylor, since she was the only one who could do his shirts to his liking. She was also included in the social circle of the Taylor children and enjoyed her youthful activities.<sup>42</sup>

Mary was married to Joseph F. Smith—again, according to Smith family tradition, at the urging of President John Taylor—in January 1884, but her marriage could not become public knowledge for several years afterwards due to the antipolygamy prosecutions initiated by the Edmunds Act. More than once, she had to evade the federal marshals (and other would-be suitors who did not know she was married). President Smith went to Hawaii in 1885; Mary visited briefly in 1887 before he was recalled to Utah. She studied obstetrics and nursing under Salt Lake physicians Margaret Roberts and Mattie Hughes Cannon. Her first child was born in 1888, and over the next eighteen years she bore six sons and one daughter to Joseph F. Smith. She also lived for some years in Idaho, where she went to “make a home or a place of refuge for the family in case of need”—in other words, because of continued threats of antipolygamy prosecution. After returning to Utah, she eventually purchased a farm in Taylorsville, southwest of Salt Lake City, as a place for her boys to learn to work.<sup>43</sup>

Mary was a noted beauty. “She was tall and stately,” one biographer wrote, “and as the maidens of the Bible history was often described, of a comely appearance and fair to look upon.” She was known for her love of learning—she was one of the first Utah subscribers to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*—and she served as a leader in the Primary and the Relief Society. “The principal trait or characteristic

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in this daughter of the pioneers, is loyal courage. . . . She will do what is right, no matter what the consequences may be.”<sup>44</sup>

Clearly, both Alice and Mary were in fact “well-known women” in the LDS community by the time of their husband’s death. Because their public work was conducted under the auspices of other auxiliaries (the YLMIA for Alice, the Primary for Mary), it may not be surprising that they were not mentioned in the *Relief Society Magazine*. Even so, this would not explain why they received so little attention in the personal and familial profiles. This brings us to the subject of what is *not* said about the Smith wives in the magazine.

### “From a Triangle to a Star”: What Is *Not* Said

As we have seen, the *Relief Society Magazine* contained several interesting depictions of Joseph F. Smith’s wives. The net result is a remarkable portrait of a large, loving family—unusual, perhaps, in its composition, but founded upon the same principles of love and womanly service that all LDS women were encouraged to adopt in their own lives. While certainly composed for public consumption and intended to present an ideal image, there is no reason to doubt that these portrayals were true and sincere. At the same time, it seems important to consider some of the things that are *not* said—because those things can also give us greater insight into the families of Joseph F. Smith and even into the development of the Church under his administration.

The first and perhaps most complete silence concerns Joseph’s first wife, Levira, to whom he had already been married for seven years when Julina entered the household in 1866. By that time, the relationship was already strained due to his lengthy absences and Levira’s poor health; after another turbulent period, Joseph and Levira were divorced sometime in 1868–69.<sup>45</sup> Perceptive readers of the *Relief Society Magazine* would have known of Levira’s existence; she is mentioned in a genealogical chart published in conjunction with a profile of Mary Fielding Smith (Joseph’s mother) in the March 1916 issue. This brief notice, however, is presented somewhat deceptively. It reads, “Joseph Fielding Smith m[arried]. (firstly) 5<sup>th</sup> Apr., 1859, Levira A. Smith. . . . She d[ied]. and he m[arried]. (secondly) 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1866, Julina Lambson.”<sup>46</sup> Technically, it was correct that Levira had died, but that event occurred in 1888, not before Joseph’s marriage to Julina, as the wording here implies, and no mention is made of the divorce.

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Julina makes absolutely no mention of this painful chapter in their lives, which is understandable on many levels, especially given that she was essentially a Victorian woman, raised with the reticent norms of that era. But she is almost equally silent about Alice and Mary. In her tribute to Sarah, Julina obliquely mentions the other two wives, but in a way that one would have to already know the story in order to catch the reference. “The family triangle was changed into a star,” she wrote. Having referred to herself, Sarah, and Edna, as a “triangle” in a previous paragraph, this image introduces two more “points” to the family scheme.<sup>47</sup> Later, in her golden wedding sketch, Julina mentions Alice and Mary by name, but only in passing.<sup>48</sup> Given her openness about Sarah and Edna, this reticence cannot be attributed to a general reluctance to mention plural marriage and therefore seems all the more notable.

It is tempting to speculate about the reasons for this silence on Julina’s part. Why are the last two wives not mentioned when she speaks so lovingly of the other two? One obvious possibility is that she did not like or get along with Alice and Mary, and indeed there are hints in the family recollections that the first three wives were not too happy when their husband married these younger women, over a decade after his marriage to Edna.<sup>49</sup> However, those same accounts, as well as the comments in the magazine and other sources, insist that all of the families loved each other and got along well. It seems more likely that any difficulty with the new marriages on the part of the three wives could more likely be attributed to two causes. First is the fact that, as Julina’s tributes make clear, the three original women had formed a very close bond with each other and had worked out a harmonious, efficient system for running their joint household. Bringing new women into the picture—especially a divorced mother of three and a young, relatively inexperienced girl—would have presented a severe emotional and logistical disruption to the tightly knit family.

Another, more important reason may have been the timing of the last two marriages—December 1883 and January 1884, in the wake of the Edmunds Act and the intensification of the national crusade against plural marriage. While Joseph F. Smith would have been a wanted man regardless because of his position and his previous plural marriages, at least the case could be made that the first three wives were married at a time when the legal standing of plural marriage was still unsettled and its practice was relatively uncontested. No such thing could be said in 1884, and these new marriages may have seemed a terrible risk and further

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complication in the face of escalating uncertainty. If that was the case, the existing wives' hesitation probably had nothing to do with Alice or Mary personally but with the situation more generally.

These ideas are, admittedly, speculative and do not fully explain why Julina would have been so quiet about Alice and Mary when she was so vocal about Sarah and Edna, especially since she was writing two decades after her husband had been pardoned, when plural marriage was all but a thing of the past. Taking a broader view and reading between the lines a bit, what we do learn from the portrayals of Joseph F. Smith and his wives in the *Relief Society Magazine* is that he essentially had two sets of families—the original three, with Julina, Sarah, and Edna, which were very tightly knit and well established, and the last two, with Alice and Mary, which were perhaps more complicated than those in the original group. By all accounts, the women learned to love and respect each other. Nonetheless, it is certain that Alice and Mary had a very different experience, at least in the first decade of their marriages, than the other women had had.

For one thing, they had to hide their marriages. Sometimes they had to hide themselves. The results of this situation are clear enough in the record of their children: neither gave birth to a child by Joseph F. Smith until years after their marriage (see appendix). Moreover, both women had to be more independent from the beginning. Alice already had a house of her own and had been a single mother for some time; she may not have been any more comfortable “intruding” on the original families than they were in rearranging their lives. Mary bore her first child in 1888 in the old homestead where the three original families lived, with Julina as midwife, but she did not live there permanently; she went through a series of living arrangements after her marriage and then spent years in Idaho, far removed from the rest of the family. In fact, upon her return to Utah, she purchased a farm in Taylorsville and again spent much of her time at a distance from the rest.

For Alice and Mary, then, marriage to Joseph F. Smith was never marked by the idyllic communal household and cooperative childrearing that had bonded the first wives so closely together, and they entered into plural marriage at a highly stressful and dangerous time. Even if there was no animosity or conflict between any of the wives, it was inevitable that these two women would have a much different experience than their sister-wives, and it is probably this dynamic that the seeming lack of notice in the *Relief Society Magazine*, especially Julina's reminiscences, captures.

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Looking beyond the specific matter of Joseph F. Smith’s wives and families, modern readers may find the open, celebratory discussion of plural marriage in the *Relief Society Magazine*—the official publication of a Church auxiliary organization—almost thirty years after the Manifesto, a bit surprising. We speak today of President Woodruff’s 1890 announcement as the decisive end to plural marriage. What these depictions remind us is that the demise of plural marriage was a process, not an event. This fact would have been all too familiar to the many readers of the *Relief Society Magazine* who were themselves still living with the vestiges of plural families past. As they undoubtedly realized, plural marriage died in theory long before it died in practice. The Manifesto is best thought of as the starting point in a long course of transformation—a painful, uncertain, and gradual progression away from one of the founding ideals of the community.

By the time of the *Relief Society Magazine*, the Church had firmly and decisively broken with its polygamous past. That break, and the subsequent passage of time, had created a space in which plural marriage could be openly discussed and even idealized as part of celebrating the heroic pioneer past. Nonetheless, those discussions—as illustrated by the treatment of the Joseph F. Smith families—served as a reminder that the demise of plural marriage had to be worked out not only on an institutional, political, and theoretical level, but also in the individual lives of thousands of families. Hence, there is much said, but also much left unsaid. While the *Relief Society Magazine* shows no inclination to return to the practices of the past, it nonetheless notes that past and honors those, like Joseph F. Smith and his families, who sacrificed so much for the sake of their faith.

## Notes

1. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith, Sixth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1938), 452.
2. Imogene Kesler Linford, “When I Was Baptized,” Joseph F. Smith Family Association website; <http://www.josephsmith.org/node/85> (accessed December 5, 2012).
3. “In Memoriam: President Joseph F. Smith,” *Relief Society Magazine*, January 1919, 12.
4. “In Memoriam,” 5.
5. The one readily accessible recent treatment of Julina Lambson Smith mentions plural marriage only briefly and does not give the names of her sister-wives. See Leonard J. Arrington, Susan Arrington Madsen, and Emily Madsen Jones, *Mothers of the Prophets*, revised edition, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 159–76.
6. This number includes five adopted children: two adopted by Joseph and Julina and the three children from Alice Kimball’s first marriage, whom Joseph adopted when he married her.

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- Life of Joseph F. Smith*, 487–90; Susa Young Gates, “Mothers in Israel: Mary Fielding Smith, Wife of the Patriarch Hyrum Smith,” *Relief Society Magazine*, March 1916, 142–46. To reconcile the few discrepancies between these listings, I consulted Joseph F. Smith Family Genealogical Committee, *The Descendants of Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918)* (Provo, UT: J. Grant Stevenson, 1976), Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
7. Photographs of the Smith homes are published in Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and R. Q. Shupe, *Joseph F. Smith: Portrait of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 134–35. This book also contains lovely portraits of all the Smith families, some of which are still held in private collections.
  8. “In Memoriam,” 5.
  9. “In Memoriam,” 6.
  10. “A Priceless Golden Wedding,” *Relief Society Magazine*, July 1916, 373.
  11. Unless otherwise cited, biographical information about Julina Smith and the other wives is taken from *The Descendants of Joseph F. Smith*, cited in note 6 above. Another version of this information is available in Karol G. Chase, “The Wives and Children of Joseph F. Smith,” <http://josephsmith.org/node/44> (accessed January 10, 2013). Chase’s compilation incorporates and expands upon a similar account located in the Church History Library, an untitled, unattributed typescript written as if in first person by each wife.
  12. *Mothers of the Prophets*, 166.
  13. “From the General Board of the Relief Society,” *Relief Society Magazine*, January 1915, 5.
  14. Amy Brown Lyman, “The April Conference,” *Relief Society Magazine*, June 1915, 263.
  15. “The Historical Office of the First Presidency. And the New Relief Society Department Headquarters,” *Relief Society Magazine*, November 1917, 608–10. The Wedding and Burial Clothes Department should be seen as a forerunner to Beehive Clothing; this is an area where further research is needed.
  16. “A Priceless Golden Wedding,” 370.
  17. “Ye Ancient and Honorable Order of Midwifery,” *Relief Society Magazine*, August 1915, 348.
  18. Julina Lambson Smith, “A Loving Tribute to Sarah Ellen Richards Smith,” *Relief Society Magazine*, May 1915, 215.
  19. Smith, “A Loving Tribute,” 215.
  20. “In Memoriam,” 6.
  21. “In Memoriam,” 8.
  22. “In Memoriam,” 8.
  23. “How Joseph F. Smith Chose His Wives,” in *The Descendants of Joseph F. Smith*, 1.
  24. “Sarah Ellen Richards Smith,” *Relief Society Magazine*, May 1915, 211–14.
  25. “Sarah Ellen Richards Smith,” 213–14.
  26. Smith, “A Loving Tribute,” 216.
  27. “How Joseph F. Smith Chose His Wives,” 1.
  28. “In Memoriam,” 8.
  29. “A Friend of the Helpless Dead,” *Relief Society Magazine*, September 1917, 483.
  30. “Friend of the Helpless Dead,” 484–85.
  31. “Daughters of Zion: Mrs. Ida Bowman Smith,” *Relief Society Magazine*, October 1916, 543–44.
  32. “Friend of the Helpless Dead,” 485.

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33. Susa Young Gates, “The Passing of Apostle Hyrum M. Smith,” *Relief Society Magazine*, March 1918, 125.
34. “In Memoriam,” 5.
35. “In Memoriam,” 8, 10.
36. I have found no mention of the name of Alice’s first husband in any of the available sources, though the family biography refers to him as “the son of a great pioneer” (*The Descendants of Joseph F. Smith*, 112). Clearly, further research is warranted on this subject.
37. Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 297.
38. “In Memoriam,” 10.
39. “In Memoriam,” 10.
40. Susa Young Gates, “International Genealogical Congress at the Panama-Pacific Exposition,” *Relief Society Magazine*, September 1915, 396 (frontispiece). Mary is seated next to her husband on the front row and is identified as “Mary T. Smith” in the caption.
41. “A Priceless Golden Wedding,” 370.
42. Unless otherwise cited, biographical information about Mary Schwartz Smith is taken from *The Descendants of Joseph F. Smith*, 137–39.
43. “Mary Taylor Schwartz Smith,” *The Descendants of Joseph F. Smith*, 138.
44. Elizabeth Roundy, “Mary Taylor Schwartz Smith,” in Ja[me]s T. Jakeman, *Daughters of the Utah Pioneers and Their Mothers* (Western Album, n.d.), n.p. This volume, probably published in 1916, was a gift book or album containing biographical information and photographs of over four hundred women. It is available online; <http://archive.org/stream/albumdaughtersof00byujake#page/n7/mode/2up>.
45. Though he does not give an exact date for the divorce, the essential source on this sad episode is Scott G. Kenney, “Before the Beard: Trials of the Young Joseph F. Smith,” *Sunstone*, November 2001, 20–42. Available online; <https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/120-20-43.pdf>.
46. Gates, “Mothers in Israel,” 142.
47. “Sarah Ellen Richards Smith,” 215.
48. “A Priceless Golden Wedding,” 370.
49. “How Joseph F. Smith Chose His Wives” says that when Joseph married Alice “the three wives were unhappy that they had no choice in the matter this time, but concluded to support their husband in this as in all else” (p. 1). Joseph F. Smith entered into these last two marriages at the urging of President John Taylor.