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Post-Manifesto Polygamy

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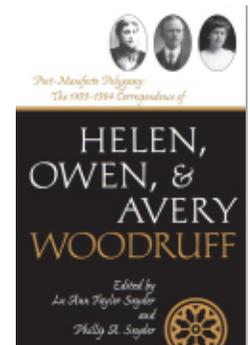
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Introduction

Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same.¹

Reinterment and Restoration

Over two hundred Woodruff family members gathered on July 17, 1993, in the Salt Lake City Cemetery, to witness the reinterment of Abraham Owen Woodruff and his wife Helen May Winters. This family celebration ended the eighty-nine-year separation of Helen and Owen after their unexpected deaths from smallpox in June 1904 in Mexico City and El Paso, respectively. Grandsons of the Woodruffs, with funding from Brigham Young University and approval from Mexican authorities, arranged to exhume the bodies and bring them to Salt Lake City, along with their original headstones. The reburial served as the culmination of family efforts to restore them to one another, as reported by grandson Wilford Bruce Woodruff:

As plans for this significant event have proceeded, a wonderful spirit of unity has grown in the family. We felt that a husband and wife separated 89 years and by more than 1,000 miles should be brought together and buried side by side. It is the result of a series of wonderful experiences.²

One of the “wonderful experiences” mentioned by Bruce included the fortuitous timing of the reinterment. Because no one paid Helen’s grave fees for nearly nine decades, the Mexican authorities had declared her grave abandoned and scheduled the reburial of her remains in a common grave and the reselling of her plot. Arriving just in time to pay the fees and exhume the body, the Woodruffs made a posthumous reunion for Helen and Owen possible. In addition to bringing together husband and wife, the burial also reunited their family. Helen and Owen were reinterred alongside their three deceased children — Wilford Owen,



*Abraham Owen
Woodruff*

Courtesy of the Lambert and Woodruff families

Helen Mar, and Rhoda — and Owen was buried near his father and mother, Wilford and Emma Woodruff. At the Woodruffs' original memorial service on June 26, 1904, Seymour B. Young, then president of the First Council of the Seventy of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), said he “hoped that at some future time the couple could be brought back home and reunited with loved ones.”³ The Woodruffs' reunion in the Salt Lake City Cemetery in 1993 paralleled a reunion of family artifacts — letters, journals, and autobiographies — now preserved at Brigham Young University's L. Tom Perry Special Collections as the Abraham Owen Woodruff Collection. These artifacts provide firsthand accounts of Owen and his wives, Helen Winters and Avery Clark, as post-Manifesto polygamists and demonstrate some of the personal effects of plural marriage.

This essay focuses mainly on the correspondence between Helen, Owen, and Avery. The eighty-five-letter Woodruff Correspondence includes Helen's thirty-two typed and *handwritten* letters to Owen and his five to her; Owen's thirty-one typed and *handwritten* letters to Avery and her nine to him; Avery's four letters to both Owen and Helen, her two letters to Helen, and Helen's two letters to Avery. This collection spans

the period 1899–1904, covering the five years of Helen and Owen’s marriage and the three years of Owen and Avery’s polygamous marriage. Transcribed and historically documented here, these letters place the Woodruffs’ marital experience in Utah’s turn-of-the-century context with particular emphasis on religion, culture, and politics. In addition, a few of Owen’s journal entries; excerpts from Avery’s 1952 autobiography; journal entries by Alonzo Taylor, an LDS missionary who cared for Helen at the time of her death; and recollections of Kate Spilsbury, who cared for Helen and Owen’s baby when Helen became ill, supply further perspectives on the day-to-day logistics of the Woodruffs’ relationships and the joys and sorrows they produced. The Woodruff Collection also adds a significant personal and familial perspective to Mormon culture and social history. For example, most previous books about late nineteenth-century polygamy, such as Annie Clark Tanner’s *A Mormon Mother* and Ida Hunt Udall’s *Mormon Odyssey*, are based on journals and other autobiographical writings edited by succeeding generations to display their ancestors as both heroes and victims. Written as public reminiscences, these accounts reflect a certain bias in their retrospective public transmissions.

Antithetically, because the Woodruffs’ letters are immediate and relatively unmediated in articulating their struggles with their polygamous marriage, with their absences from each other, and with their sometimes wavering self-confidence, they represent a private account of a public issue, one that developed during the LDS Church’s transition from isolation to integration into mainstream American culture, which celebrated monogamy. Perhaps most importantly, while generalizations can be made from this collection as a significant case study of post-Manifesto life in the polygamy “underground” set against the backdrop of such historical events as the Smoot Senate hearings, this analysis focuses most specifically on how the Woodruffs’ commitment to plural marriage as a fundamental religious principle complicated and disrupted their personal lives and relationships.

Abraham Owen Woodruff

Abraham Owen Woodruff, born November 23, 1872, in Salt Lake City, was raised in a polygamous family. His mother, Emma Smith, became the third wife of Wilford Woodruff in 1853 and had eight children, Owen being the youngest son. Each of Woodruff’s four wives produced a large family, but even with so many siblings, Owen captured much of his aging father’s attention and support. Raised in a primitive log house built by his father in 1847, Owen grew to manhood learning and performing the labors of farm life. Like his father, he loved outdoor activities, especially fishing and hunting. A young and enterprising Owen attempted to earn

pocket money by gathering watercress from Liberty Park Springs and then selling it at the local market.

The familial circle of Owen's childhood was surrounded by an intense anti-polygamy environment. From 1843 to 1852, a limited number of Latter-day Saints practiced plural marriage as an essential tenet of their faith with only isolated persecution, partly because these plural marriages initially were kept secret from even general church membership, but whenever Utah applied for statehood, polygamy became the central problematic issue. Plural marriage had been practiced by selected Latter-day Saints as early as 1843 when in Nauvoo, Illinois, the Prophet Joseph Smith had William Clayton record a revelation from God, which offered the conditions and sanctions for polygamy under the "new and everlasting covenant."⁴ According to Richard L. Bushman in *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, it is possible that Joseph entered into plural marriage with Fanny Alger sometime before 1836, with Louisa Bateman in April 1841, and then with an additional thirty women before his death in 1844.⁵ Bushman argues that the primary motivation for these plural marriages was not sexual lust but spiritual necessity and summarizes Joseph's plural marriage practice as follows:

He did not court his prospective wives by first trying to win their affections. Often he asked a relative — a father or an uncle — to propose the marriage. Sometimes one of the current wives proposed for him. When he made the proposal himself, a friend like Brigham Young was often present. The language was religious and doctrinal, stressing that a new law had been revealed. She was to seek spiritual confirmation. Once consent was given, a formal ceremony was performed before witnesses, with Joseph dictating the words to the person officiating.⁶

In addition, Bushman stresses Joseph's insistence that anyone entering into polygamy have priesthood sanction first and that men were not to proceed independently.⁷ Other Latter-day Saint men who were sanctioned to take additional wives were expected to follow Joseph's example in that process, stressing always the spiritual imperative of the practice.⁸ Further, Bushman reports that the accounts of plural wives published in the decades after the Mormon migration West also reflect this spiritual focus as well as the importance of divine confirmation.⁹ In *Solemn Covenant*, B. Carmon Hardy adds that the LDS Church considered polygamy to be "the family order of heaven" and proclaimed that "it would regenerate mankind, nurture a superior civilization, and eliminate sexual wickedness."¹⁰

Increasing LDS acknowledgment of polygamy fueled the anti-Mormon criticism and persecution that followed the pioneers as they made their way west after 1846. In the years following Mormon settlement in Utah and the Intermountain West, polygamy's profile was raised even higher both within and without the church. In response to the national anti-polygamy outcry, Congress enacted the 1882 Edmunds Act, which defined "unlawful cohabitation" as supporting and caring for more than one woman, legally disenfranchising polygamists and their supporters. The Edmunds Act forced polygamists, especially those among the church hierarchy, to go underground to avoid arrest, so ten-year-old Owen was left fatherless for extended periods of time as his father, Wilford, attempted to stay a step ahead of law enforcement. Congress passed the Edmunds-Tucker Act in March 1887, which required wives to testify against husbands, abolished woman suffrage in Utah, and dissolved the Nauvoo Legion and the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, which had aided foreign Latter-day Saints in their immigration to Utah. Congress enacted these laws as a way to force the LDS Church to discontinue what outsiders saw as a depraved practice rather than as a doctrinal mandate to which the church subscribed. These two acts created an almost unbearable situation for the polygamists who were separated from their families through incarceration, seclusion, or missionary service to foreign lands, causing them to rethink the practicality of a now-illegal practice. Four months after the passage of the Edmunds-Tucker Act, President John Taylor died, leaving Wilford Woodruff to preside over the church. Owen was then fifteen years old.

President Woodruff issued his anti-polygamy Manifesto in September 1890, announcing that the church would discontinue the practice of plural marriage and conform to the laws of the United States. He declared in the Manifesto that his advice to the Latter-day Saints was to "refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land."¹¹ He said that he received this proclamation as an answer to his prayers "by vision and revelation" and that the Lord "told me exactly what to do and what the result would be if we did not do it."¹²

A month later, this "Official Declaration" was sustained unanimously by the general church membership during General Conference on October 6, 1890, and later added to the 1908 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, thus making it part of canonized LDS scripture.¹³ In this context, George Q. Cannon, counselor to President Woodruff, expressed the political effects of continuing the practice of plural marriage: "I have ever been assured hundreds of times, by men, too, of wisdom and discernment, that our overthrow was inevitable unless we conformed to the demands of public opinion and renounced all peculiarities of faith."¹⁴

However, appeasing the national public also sowed seeds of confusion among the Latter-day Saints because the Manifesto raised



Courtesy of the Lambert and Woodruff families

Owen Woodruff with his father, LDS President Wilford Woodruff, 1897

fundamental questions regarding the implications of polygamy's abolition: How does this change affect the revealed doctrines of the church? What happens to the polygamous families already established? Kenneth Godfrey notes this confusion in *Women's Voices*: "It was not without struggle and sorrow that Latter-day Saint men and women let go of plural marriage and of their hopes for a unique political and economic kingdom."¹⁵ Although many Latter-day Saints reluctantly accepted the loss of polygamy as a requirement necessary for Utah and the church to enter into mainstream American society, many did not, especially some in general church leadership positions. The United States government continually monitored the church's adherence to recently passed anti-polygamy laws and continued to pass additional anti-polygamy legislation. The Enabling Act of July 16, 1894, for example, forever prohibited polygamous marriages, not just cohabitation. Clearly the government felt it could not yet trust the Latter-day Saints to adhere fully to their own Manifesto renouncing polygamy as church doctrine and practice.

This transitional time for the church coincided with Owen's entrance into adulthood. He was eighteen years old and studying at the LDS College in Salt Lake City with noted Professors James E. Talmage and Karl G. Maeser when his father issued the Manifesto. Upon his graduation, Owen worked at Zion's Savings & Trust Co. in Salt Lake City as a collector and as an assistant bookkeeper.¹⁶ In 1893, at age twenty-one, Owen received a call to serve in the Swiss-German mission. In a somewhat unusual beginning, he served without a companion for the first five months and learned the language from a German family where he recited lessons with the children each morning.¹⁷ Owen distributed religious tracts during the day and held meetings in the evening where he preached in broken, stammering German. Once the mission president finally assigned a companion to Owen, a branch of the church was soon organized.¹⁸ Owen labored diligently, even disguising himself as a peasant worker when the German civil officials banished LDS missionaries, so he could continue his work. Owen returned home in 1896 and resumed his work in the bank. He met Helen May Winters that same year.

Helen May Winters Woodruff

Woodruff family tradition holds that when Owen's father, then president of the LDS Church, first saw Helen, he introduced himself to her. He then told her that he would like her to meet his son Owen and that, if they married, they would be happy together and would not be separated, even in death, by more than two weeks.¹⁹ More important than President Woodruff's encouragement to Owen and Helen, however, was



Courtesy of the Lambert and Woodruff families

Helen May Winters

their meeting and falling in love; they were married on June 30, 1897, as described in the *Deseret News*: “President Woodruff, though feeling quite feeble today, went to the temple and performed the ordinance of marriage between his son Abraham Owen Woodruff and Miss Helen May Winters.”²⁰ President Woodruff also recorded this event in his journal:

June 30th I slept fairly well the latter part of the night & this morning. Felt better of myself. Arose shaved & dressed myself and went to the office. Attended a special meeting of the Board of Directors of Z. S. B. & T co at 10.30 am. Declared a dividend for 6% for the past six months. This afternoon at the Temple I performed the marriage ceremony uniting Miss Helen Winter to my son A. O. Woodruff, and then drove home. There was a family gathering at the residence of Br Heber J Grant this evening. I did not attend.²¹

On October 7, 1897, a month before Owen’s twenty-fifth birthday, President Woodruff called him to be an apostle. Owen’s appointment was sustained by the church membership at that October General Conference, and he was then set apart by his father. This assignment entailed traveling to various LDS congregations to dedicate buildings, call church leaders, and generally oversee the operations of the church. Owen also served on the General Board of the Sunday School as part of his apostleship and on business boards such as the Logan Knitting Factory. Thus, within only three months of their marriage, young Owen and Helen became prominent members of the church’s religious and social hierarchy.

Helen May Winters, born September 24, 1873, grew up in Pleasant Grove, Utah, the youngest of eight children. Today the graves of her parents, Oscar Winters and Mary Ann Stearns, retain a prominent place in the city’s cemetery, as befitting two of the founders of Pleasant Grove. One of Helen’s sisters described her as “always the one who first came out of the gloom if a shadow fell upon the household, and who by her very nature and presence brought the sunshine back again.”²² Helen attended district schools, later took a course at the Brigham Young Academy in Provo, Utah, and taught in the public schools of Sevier and Summit counties. She returned to school as a student at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, where she became acquainted with Owen.²³

Like Owen, Helen was no stranger to polygamy. Her grandmother, Mary Ann Frost Stearns Smith Pratt, became a bride in April 1832, a mother in April 1833, and a widow by August 1833. Alone in Kirtland, Ohio, she married Parley P. Pratt after the death of his wife Thankful. He later married ten other wives, only one with the prior knowledge

of Mary Ann. Estranged from Pratt, she was sealed for eternity in the Nauvoo Temple to a deceased Joseph Smith and for time to Pratt, as Brigham Young directed. She raised four children she had with Pratt, and her only child, Mary Ann Stearns, by her first husband. Daughter Mary Ann, Helen's mother, married Oscar Winters at the age of nineteen and, although surrounded by practitioners of plural marriage, chose to remain in a monogamous marriage, even though she believed in plural marriage as a tenet of LDS doctrine. She records her personal coming to terms with polygamy in the following excerpt from her autobiography:

It was while located on the boat at St. Louis that I saw the little book published by Martha Brotherton on polygamy. She with her family had visited at our house before they left England, and being acquainted with her made me very curious to know what she had to say about it, so I took the book, went into my berth, drew the curtains, and proceeded to investigate. I had always been taught to believe in the Bible, and when I came to the place where it quoted Abraham, Jacob and others as having more than one wife, I decided that the principle must be true, coming from that source and also, though right for others, not for me was my firm conclusion. An[d] though thus steeled against it for myself, I always honored and respected those living in it.²⁴

Accordingly, Mary Ann supported her daughter Hulda Augusta when she became the second wife of Heber J. Grant in 1884 at the age of twenty-eight.

Only two of Helen's letters to Owen prior to 1900 remain, but those letters and other remembrances demonstrate the mutual love and devotion we traditionally associate with monogamous marriage. Their correspondence manifests a physical and emotional intimacy unmatched by many nineteenth-century marriages, as evidenced in the following reminiscence in an October 27, 1903, letter from Helen to Owen:

I have thought and thought of the many sweet experiences of our lives together and have lived again those happy days when first you took me to your heart and then to "our" home. How free from care and sorrow those days. We were children then, boy and girl together. I remember how I used to watch and wa[^]i[^]t for your home coming and when you came would always welcome you with a smile and a "bebe kiiss" (I can't

spell German). How we used to sit for hours and never tire of telling each other of our love for each other. (Letter 59)

During the first few years of their married life, Helen and Owen frequently traveled together in Utah, Wyoming, and Canada on church assignments. Owen ministered as an apostle, and Helen assisted the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association (YLMIA), beginning in May of 1898. Because Helen represented the YLMIA General Board, she had her own leadership status, apart from being an apostle's wife.²⁵ Helen's responsibilities also required her to serve on various committees, such as the Library Committee, where the board members devised plans to help various branches of the church set up "Traveling Libraries" to provide books for study and reference.²⁶ As May Boothe Talmage wrote in a 1904 memorial to Helen, those who served with the Woodruffs in their church callings could easily observe their loving relationship:

None who have ever been fortunate enough to be intimately acquainted with Brother and Sister Woodruff could ever doubt that they were given each other of God. No outward demonstration was necessary. There was something so genuine, so frank and sincere, yet, withal, so tender and affectionate in their bearing toward each other that their unostentatious devotion was often commented kindly upon by their friends.²⁷

Although their travels provided leadership and social opportunities, which both Helen and Owen enjoyed, the early years of their marriage were also marked by their worry over their inability to conceive a child. As Owen recorded in his journal:

The past two years have been the most eventful, substantial and best of my life. My good, faithful Helen has been the chief factor in the hands of God in making the past two years the best of my life. She has always been full of faith and equally anxious with me that I may be successful in the service of my God and fellow men. We have as yet not been blessed with children, but the Lord has heard our united prayers and at last blessed us with "good Prospects." I am contented, happy and thoroughly satisfied with my Helen.²⁸

Their fears proved unwarranted, and the "good prospects" to which Owen referred — Wilford Owen Woodruff — was born to Owen and Helen on

October 31, 1899, after a very difficult labor. Owen noted later that day:

Fordie — 10 2 lbs — 5:25 pm
Prest. Richards made a promise about 10 months ago regarding my son and therefore we regard him as a child of promise.²⁹

Busy with a new baby, Helen remained at home while her husband continued with his church business travels in Wyoming, Mexico, and Utah. Owen recorded an example of the extensive travel requirements of his apostleship in a December 31, 1900, journal entry:

In the year just closed I have attended 317 Meetings
Travelled 3555 Miles by team
Travelled 10570 Miles by R. R.³⁰

The bulk of Helen's letters correspond to the frequent and lengthy periods of time during which Owen was away from home. Initially, Owen's absence and Helen's increasing familial responsibilities troubled her. Two early references in Helen's letters demonstrate her love for, dependence on, and need for Owen:

The way I feel sometimes I am afraid I will not hold out until you come but hope I will. . . .(Letter 7)

Only two more weeks. I can scarcely wait that long to see you.
(Letter 15)

However, as she gained confidence and experience, Helen became a more independent woman.

The Woodruffs moved in an elite social circle. Owen's position as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, albeit the youngest, aligned him with the prestigious and powerful of Salt Lake City. Owen's letters, for example, include his correspondence with Senator Thomas Kearns, Senator-elect Reed Smoot, and various leaders of the LDS Church. Within this influential group, Owen associated most closely with apostles Mathias F. Cowley and John W. Taylor, both strong advocates of polygamy, even after the 1890 Manifesto. Because of his relationship with these two men, which grew closer as the three traveled together to Wyoming's Bighorn Basin, he must have been aware that secret, officially sanctioned plural marriages were still taking place. Eventually, apparently after much

soul-searching, Owen determined to embrace post-Manifesto polygamy because he must have believed that the laws of God would eventually supersede those of the government despite the Manifesto's promise of the church's legal compliance.³¹ Indeed, Hardy quotes Owen from the clerk's record of a November 1900 quarterly conference in Colonia Juárez as stating "no year will ever pass, whether it be in this country, in India, or wherever, from now until the coming of the Saviour, when children will not be born in plural marriage. And I make this prophecy in the name of Jesus Christ."³² This prophecy underscores both his philosophical and practical commitment to plural marriage, as he was engaged to Avery at the time.

Owen's travel stemmed mostly from a new assignment he received from his father's successor, President Lorenzo Snow, in December 1899 to be a colonizing agent for the church. In January of 1900 President Snow gave Owen a mandate:

You are a committee of "one" and I want you to go right ahead to organize your Co. for your work in Wyoming and I want you to be Prest. of it. You know you have been sustained to do this work by me and the Twelve Apostles.³³

Owen enthusiastically accepted this assignment, stating that "I have had a desire all my life to be of use to my people in this line."³⁴

While this assignment came to Owen as an ecclesiastical responsibility, it was primarily an economic development task. The Bighorn Basin project developed partly out of the Carey Act. LDS Church leaders had been impressed by the Carey Act of 1894, whereby settlers had irrigated arid lands in the Greybull River area of the Bighorn. The original act stated that any person twenty-one years or older who intended to become a citizen of a western state such as Wyoming was entitled to land. Settlers in the Bighorn Basin purchased a perpetual water right from the Cincinnati Canal builders for the number of acres wanted, but not to exceed one hundred and sixty. After the canal was ready, the settlers had one year to cultivate at least one-sixteenth of their acreage and within three years to have cultivated no less than one-eighth. Having met these requirements, the settlers could then buy their land for twenty-five cents per acre. The opening for the church to become part of this settlement opportunity occurred when the Cincinnati Canal builders abandoned the project. Because William F. (Buffalo Bill) Cody owned most of the land and water rights near the Shoshone River and envisioned successful agricultural settlement in the area, he supported the church's interest in the canal project:

If the Mormons want to build a canal and irrigate the land down lower on the river I will relinquish both land and water to them, for if they will do this I know they are the kind of people who will do what they agree to do. . . . Now my dream will be realized, for I have thought that I should live to see this country developed into a great agricultural region and now the Mormons will fulfill my dream.³⁵

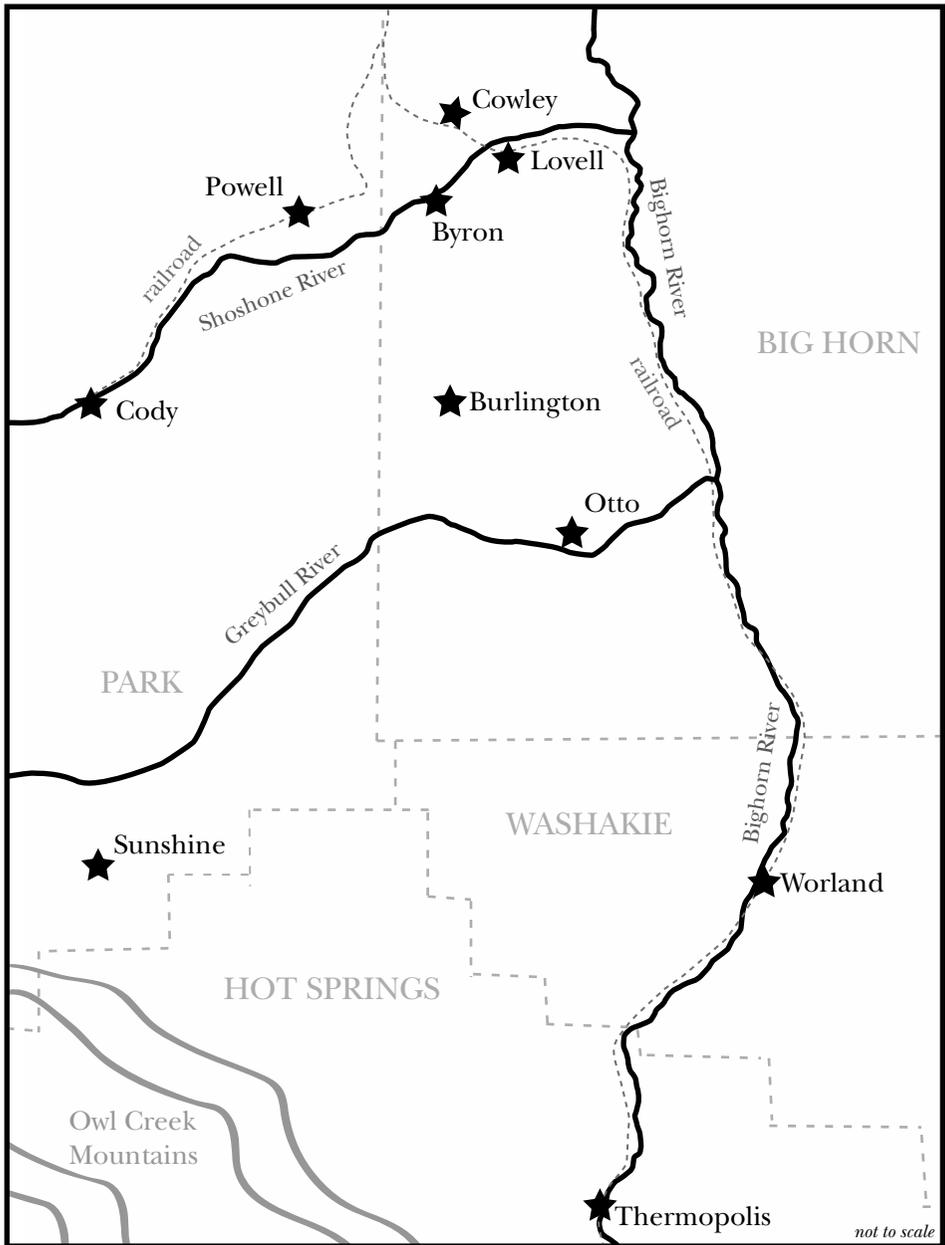
While Cody's approval of the project served his own dream, it also facilitated LDS expansion and settlement into the Bighorn Basin. With Cody's backing and the support of Wyoming's governor, DeForest Richards, the Big Horn Basin Colonization Company met April 6, 1900, with Elder Franklin S. Richards, attorney for the church, who drew up the articles of incorporation. The company was organized as follows: Abraham Owen Woodruff, president; Byron Sessions, vice president and head of canal project; Charles Kingston, secretary; Charles A. Welsh, treasurer; and Jesse W. Crosby, Brigham L. Tippetts, William B. Graham, Hyrum K. North, and Charles A. Welch as board members.³⁶ After the organization of the company, recruitment began in earnest through personal contacts and *Deseret News* advertisements. Settlers began to arrive in the Bighorn Basin in May of 1900. Owen dedicated the land and the canal on May 28, 1900, promising the settlers, "If you keep the commandments of the Lord this shall be a land of Zion unto you and your children."³⁷

He organized the first stake in May 1901 with Byron Sessions as the stake president. As Kurt Graham notes in his thesis, "The Mormon Migration to Wyoming's Big Horn Basin in 1900,"

The three [Sessions, Crosby, and Welch] shared general supervision of the spiritual activities of all the Mormons in the area and were influential in all of the matters until they were released from their church positions in 1910. All three were men of influence before coming to the Big Horn Basin, and they had more in common than the leadership of the stake. They were three of the wealthier individuals to migrate to the Basin, and like their esteemed leader Apostle Woodruff, all three were polygamists.³⁸ Crosby and Welch both had their second wives join them once they were established in Cowley, and Sessions entered into a plural marriage after he had settled in the Basin.³⁹

Although the local stake leadership was comprised of polygamists, the LDS communities in northern Wyoming were primarily monogamous.

Mormon Colonies in the Bighorn Basin, Wyoming



There is little evidence that the Bighorn Basin settlements, unlike those in Star Valley, Wyoming, were intended to harbor church members still practicing polygamy.⁴⁰

Owen's most significant contribution as an apostle came as a result of his supervision of the settlement of Wyoming's Bighorn Basin. Working closely with fellow apostles Cowley and Taylor, Owen negotiated water rights and land purchases to establish this important LDS colony, and he directed the settlers in their material as well as their religious needs. A May 27, 1900, journal entry illustrates this secular/spiritual mix in Owen's administrative responsibilities:

I spoke about an hour to the saints and told them some things I wanted them to do in this new colony. Said if there were any dissatisfied they had better go home at once. I told them as an Apostle of Jesus Christ I wanted to call them on a mission to remain and make homes in this land that I would tell Prest. Snow what I had done and if he disapproved would come back and rectify my mistake.

We had a good spirit present and I felt that the Lord was with me and the assembly.⁴¹

Owen's journal suggests that as early as 1899, Elder Cowley encouraged Owen to join him ideologically and practically in supporting post-Manifesto polygamy. The subject of polygamy weaves itself cryptically through Owen's early journal entries in 1900, and in August of that year he writes of presenting his dilemma to the future president of the church, Joseph F. Smith, who would succeed Lorenzo Snow in 1901:

A subject has been troubling me of late so I have made it a matter of prayer and asked the Lord to reveal his will to me through Prest. Joseph F. Smith to whom I will present the matter at the Temple tomorrow.⁴²

I talked with JFS and he counsiled me to follow the impression I have had. The matter is clear to me now and I mean to do it.⁴³

In this frame of mind, Owen traveled that month on church business to the Bighorn Basin, stopping in Star Valley on the way, and there met Eliza Avery Clark, an eighteen-year-old woman spending summer vacation at home with her family while on a break from her university studies in Logan, Utah.



Eliza Avery Clark Woodruff

Courtesy of the Lambert and Woodruff families

Eliza Avery Clark Woodruff Lambert

According to Avery's autobiography, written fifty years later, she remembered being impressed with Owen's "charming, magnetic personality . . . angelic as Mother often said afterward."⁴⁴ Avery, who was tentatively promised to a young man named Fred Dixon, began comparing Fred and Owen, finding the latter more "handsome and intelligent, and thinking what a lucky girl his wife was."⁴⁵ Avery's romantic young mind fantasized about what it would be like to be married to someone like Owen. It was thus a pleasant surprise when Owen later joined her family at home for an informal visit.

The Clark family assumed that Owen's visit concerned a possible church calling for Avery's father, Hyrum D. Clark. With these thoughts, the Clarks welcomed Owen into their Star Valley home. Hyrum drove Owen to his destination the following day, expecting to hear the specific purpose for Owen's visit. He was not expecting, however, Owen's awkward request for Avery's hand as a polygamous wife. According to Avery's autobiography, Hyrum later recounted the conversation to her, his shocked and tearful daughter:

I was just as shocked and surprised as you are Dot when I learned of this new Polygamy and I asked a lot of questions about it. . . . He [Owen] said that while he was speaking it was made known to him that the girl sitting before him would be his wife. . . . It was as if a voice had said the words. . . . "Not being able to throw it off my mind, I've prayed about it, feeling that my impression is from the Lord. . . . Would you be willing for her to marry me in case she wanted to"? I said, "Not unless it can be sanctioned by the Church." Bro. W. pointed out how several of the brethren in high positions had been advised to take plural wives which justified his [Hyrum's] confidence in the matter.⁴⁶

After contemplation and prayer, Avery consented to Owen's proposal and, after four brief and secret meetings over a four-month period, Owen and Avery married in January 1901, probably on January 18.⁴⁷ No official LDS Church document records the polygamous marriage or who performed it, although Hardy's Appendix II indicates that Elder Cowley officiated at the ceremony.⁴⁸ This makes sense because, not only was he close to Owen, but also, according to Hardy, he was probably the "most frequently employed of the church's high leaders in performing polygamous marriages for his brethren."⁴⁹

Avery had had little immediate experience with polygamous families, having been raised as the eldest of a very large monogamous family. She was born March 9, 1882, to Hyrum Don Carlos Clark and Ann Eliza Porter. She moved to Star Valley with her family when she was six. They took over a squatter's claim of a hundred and sixty acres, including a two-room log house with a dirt floor. Meeting with some economic success there, her father eventually bought out his neighbors. Avery explains this development in the following way: "As father expanded his meadow land — eventually buying out his neighbors on three sides, the work on the ranch multiplied, he had more live stock to care for, more machinery, more money and more children, more worries, more blessings."⁵⁰ The Clarks eventually moved from the log cabin into a twelve-room ranch house, the largest and most imposing in all of Star Valley. Two rooms were also added to the back of the cabin and the dirt roof was replaced with wooden shingles. The family used the cabin as a kitchen, and one of its bedrooms was often occupied by extended family members.

Although polygamy was quite common in Star Valley, Avery's youthful sexual and spiritual attraction to Owen seemed to push her resolve toward polygamy more than her personal experiences in observing "the principle." She writes of her interaction with Owen in her autobiography with an emphasis on the spiritual:

Always I felt sure he was as perfect as mortal man can be. He treated me as if I were a queen, tenderly touching my hand. There was no love making, just beautiful, lofty words of devotion to the principle we were contemplating living and for each other and Helen.⁵¹

Further, after their first discussion of marriage, Avery wrote to Owen on October 25, 1900, in spiritual terms:

I can say that I feel as you do in regards to the matter and think it is all right. I believe too that we have been guided by our Father in Heaven. Do not see how it could possibly be mistaken.

A happier hour of my life was never spent than was during the conversation. It filled me with joy and gladness that has not departed from me, and I thank God that I am so highly favored for I feel that I am. (Letter 3)

Both Avery and Owen considered their impending post-Manifesto polygamous marriage to be sanctioned spiritually according to the "new and

everlasting covenant,” which they must have still interpreted as referring exclusively to plural marriage, and they comported themselves during their courtship after the pattern established years earlier by Joseph Smith. Whatever sexual and emotional attraction they may have also felt toward each other, their focus was on the spiritual aspect of their relationship.

The Woodruffs’ Post-Manifesto Marriage

That Owen entered into a post-Manifesto polygamous relationship in 1901 is ironic, of course, because it was his own father who had issued the 1890 Manifesto proclaiming the end of plural marriage. This contradiction may be understood best in light of the belief held by some members that the LDS Church had adopted a public stance against plural marriage while maintaining a private stance supporting it. According to D. Michael Quinn in “LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890–1904,” local church leaders quietly performed undocumented post-Manifesto plural marriages in the 1890s, probably with the church’s tacit approval both outside and within its temples.⁵² Indeed, Hardy’s Appendix II lists 262 post-Manifesto polygamous marriages (October 1890 to December 1910) involving 220 different men, 59 percent of whom served as missionaries, branch presidents, bishops, stake presidents, or apostles, reinforcing the notion that polygamy continued to be practiced mostly within the male hierarchy of the LDS Church.⁵³

Family letters and journals do not indicate that any of Owen’s siblings entered into post-Manifesto polygamy, but his father’s belief and practice in plural marriage, combined with Owen’s own childhood experiences in a polygamous household, helped establish his affinity with this way of life. Hardy suggests that Wilford Woodruff’s close relationship with Owen demonstrates that his actions were “at least indirectly representative of the sentiments of his late father.”⁵⁴ Although polygamy proved difficult to practice personally, it was a marital and familial arrangement that grew out of Owen’s own experiences. After a confrontation about polygamy during a quorum meeting, Owen recorded the following defense in a journal entry dated January 11, 1900, a year before his own plural marriage:

I owe my exhistance to the principal of Polygamy and I have some intense feelings regarding the sustaining of that principle. I am indebted to that principle for my life and anytime my Father wants my life to defend that principle (and those who practice it in righteousness) God being my helper it is at

his command. . . . I pray God to give me light on this matter as I feel almost sick about it. I want to and intend to be loyal to my belief.⁵⁵

No documentation exists to substantiate whether Owen was given official permission to enter into polygamy. However, Quinn suggests that “[i]f Joseph F. Smith did not authorize Apostle Owen Woodruff’s plural marriage . . . he gave it after-the-fact sanction as Church president.”⁵⁶

After Owen and Avery’s marriage in January 1901, she moved with her sister, Mary, back to school in Logan. Owen wrote Avery often and sent money on a regular basis. Following Owen’s instructions for protecting their secrecy, Avery wrote to Owen in November of 1900 during their courtship:

I must not forget to tell you that I have burned all letters and will continue to do so, although it seems like destroying valuable literature. . . . I will keep all secrets in my heart and ask God to guard my words and actions. (Letter 10)⁵⁷

Secrecy presented a difficult situation for Avery; only her immediate family and a few close friends knew of her plural marriage to Owen. Publicly, people still referred to her as Miss Clark, and Avery’s correspondence from Owen was either communicated in code, using different names for people and places, or written mostly about trivial matters from a detached viewpoint. Avery remembered crying over her difficult marital situation, longing to see her husband for more than a few minutes, and being scolded by her sister for not being thankful.⁵⁸

In addition to living with the complex logistics of a secret polygamous marriage, Avery had to face the world as a single woman. She recorded an incident that sheds some light on the emotional complications the secret marriage arrangement had for both her and Owen in terms of jealousy, particularly related to Avery’s would-be suitors:

Russell [a companion in Owen’s group] and I took little lard buckets and strolled down to the meadow to pick wild strawberries. Owen sat on the front porch watching just how close our heads came together while we were fairly rooting for the tiny wild berries. He said to me later on: “Make sure he behaves himself I can tell he likes you, just give him the cold shoulder or do you want to?” It was an aggravation to me to not be able to announce to the world that I was happily married to a grand

person whom everyone admired. I had moments of resentment, when I may have used indescression in acting naughty.⁵⁹

Pregnancy further complicated the issue of marriage secrecy for Avery in 1902, but that pregnancy ended in a miscarriage after just a few months. Except for the support of her sister, Mary, Avery struggled alone through this sorrowful time, unable to explain her illness or receive immediate emotional support from others. Owen's support at this time came mainly through letters.

As Avery struggled with the difficulties of living within a post-Manifesto marriage from her situation and perspective, so Helen struggled with it from hers. Because post-Manifesto polygamy remained a secret, even within the church, there were only a handful of people in whom Helen could confide her feelings. Some of the pain Helen experienced stemmed from a natural sense of jealousy and also from her own deteriorating self-confidence given Owen's frequent absences and the necessity of sharing his marital affections. From a contemporary perspective, it is difficult to understand how she persevered so earnestly to help make this polygamous union successful. The motivation behind her determination may be found in an essay she wrote for the *Young Women's Journal* in 1903 entitled, "Be Ye Not Unequally Yoked." The following excerpt from this essay, combined with Helen's devotion to God and to her children, clarifies the foundation on which she built her life as a polygamist's wife:

Parents who are united in their belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and who by their works show that they are striving to serve God and keep His commandments furnish for their children a corner stone upon which may be built a structure of faith that cannot be shaken by the powers of adversity.⁶⁰

In a November 1900 letter to Owen, two months before Owen and Avery's marriage, Helen reported an incident that had just occurred which gave her some comfort in anticipating their entering into post-Manifesto polygamy:

You ask how I am feeling. Some days I feel fine and at other times I am "blue" as "Indago." Yesterday I had Aunt Zina and Aunt Bathesheba down and we spent a splendid afternoon. They gave me a lovely blessing and made me some beautiful promises which I firmly believe will be answered if I am humble and faithful.⁶¹ (Letter 7)

This blessing, administered by women who understood very personally the doctrine and practice of plural marriage, strengthened Helen's faith and restored her courage. Again, even though she drew sustenance from her few apprised friends, Helen still felt isolated, both physically and emotionally. Helen drew strength primarily from her children, from her role as a mother, and from her personal connection with God. In March 1904, two months before her death, Helen wrote a moving letter to Owen that demonstrates her depth of character and devotion:

I have my precious children and I am wrapped up in them heart and soul. They give me joy and comfort every hour. And I have so much to be thankful for the Lord knows my heart and He knows how grateful I am for all my many blessings although it would seem sometimes to others that I am ungrateful. The one fact, that God knows my every thought, hope and desire, is one of my greatest sources of happiness. I keep nothing from Him. . . . there is only One who can judge me, and He is merciful and I feel will be charitable with me. (Letter 76)

Helen's isolation also led her to more independence, and Owen's confidence in her abilities increased as did her competence in rearing a growing family. She attended parties alone and began handling financial and delicate religious matters for Owen, such as his August 5, 1902, request to "Please drop a note to Sophronia Tucker. . . . Tell her I have no authority to release them from any covenant they have made with the Lord. You know the case dear & I can't trust it to anyone but you" (Letter 41). These additional responsibilities occupied Helen's daily life and altered her tone in letters as shown in entries two years later:

I have been so extremely busy since you left that the time has passed so rapidly I scarcely know where it has gone to and you will soon be home again before I get half done that I anticipated. (Letter 54)

Now I do not want you to cut your visit short on my account for I will get along some way as many women have to do. (Letter 61)

Three baby girls — Helen Mar (1901), June (1902), and Rhoda (1903) — quickly followed the birth of Wilford Owen, so home and

family responsibilities threatened at times to overwhelm Helen. She hired a young immigrant girl, Anna Rosenkilde, to help care for the home and the children, and she also employed “young Heber” (probably Helen’s nephew Heber Bennion) to do chores. In addition to this help, Helen could rely on her mother-in-law, Emma Woodruff, and Owen’s sister, Winifred Blanche Woodruff Daynes, who lived nearby. Furthermore, Helen traveled to Pleasant Grove for visits with her parents in Owen’s absences, as she relates in an August 1899 letter:

Mother says it seems like old times to have me at home again and says she can’t let me go again, she has been trying to persuade me to stay here until you come but I have nearly finished all the work I brought with me and have so much to do at home I feel as though I must go and get some of it done before your return. (Letter 2)

Although Helen was not completely alone, she felt increased personal responsibility during Owen’s absences and expressed her discouragement in a letter to Owen, dated February 1904: “I feel more keenly all the time the great responsibility of the children’s rearing and am at a loss to know how to deal with them always. I get discouraged in this every few days” (Letter 68). To cope with discouragement and loneliness, Helen immersed herself in friends and church activities. Her letters to Owen often recount social events which she attended, such as parties at the splendid McCune Mansion near the state capitol building, church meetings, or Woodruff family gatherings.

At times Owen sensed Helen’s frustrations and insecurities. He did not share his letters from Avery with Helen and did not speak frequently about the other family unless questioned.⁶² Owen mentioned several times to both women that he was thankful for their sisterly love and feeling of friendliness. He also emphasized the importance of unity for the success of their family. However, one glimpse of a more vulnerable Owen surfaced in his July 12, 1902, letter to Helen, in which he may be alluding to a personal questioning of the wisdom of his decision to enter into post-Manifesto polygamy:

Write me often dear, I so love to hear from you and nowadays you seem more like my own, sweet Helen in letters than you do when I am with you; for when I am with you I try you and when I am away you think of me as your other self, struggling and trying to do my duty just as you are trying. How much

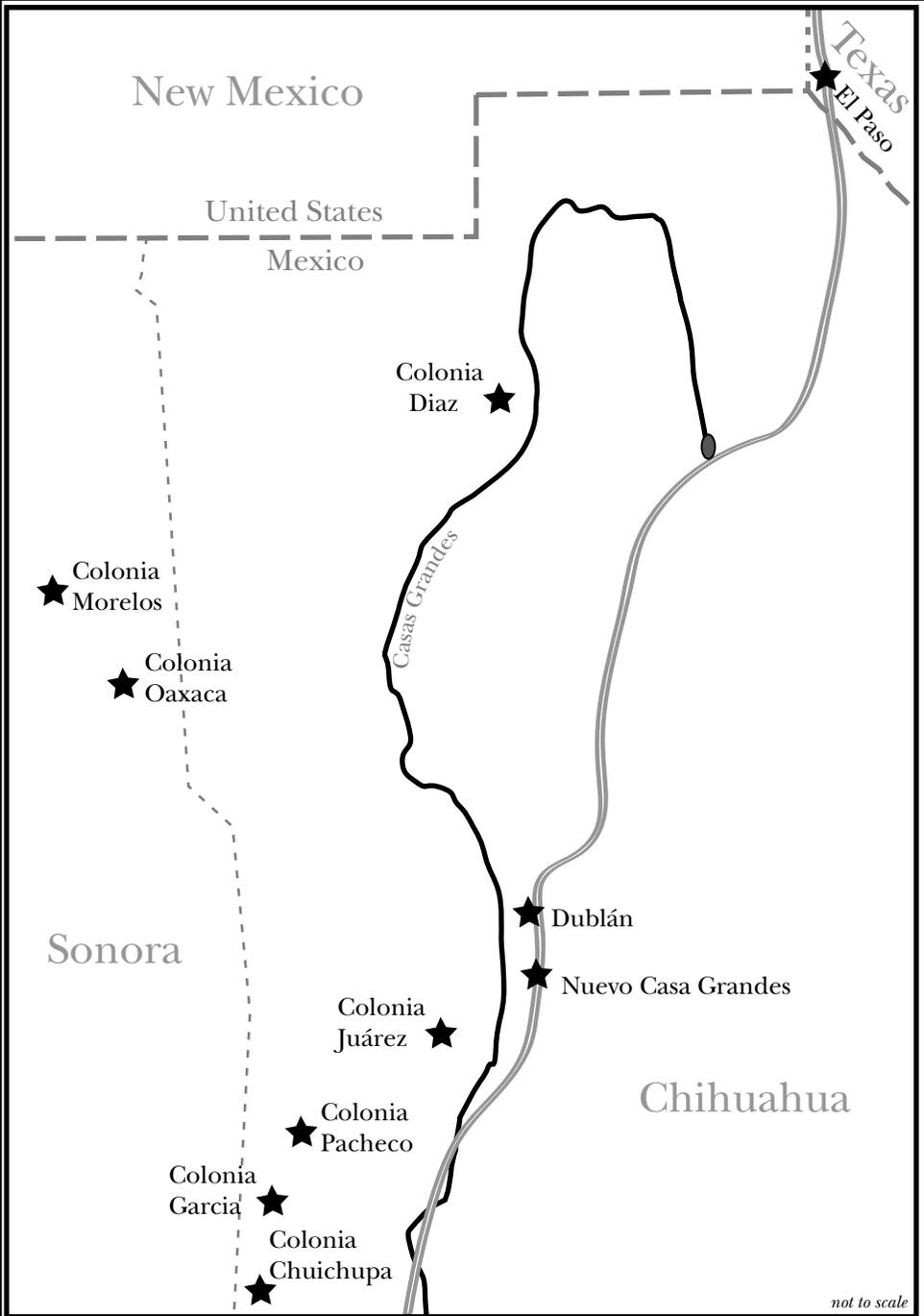
easier it is when we sustain each other and struggle together. I love you my darling Helen and for my life I could not have you alienate yourself from me. I feel that if you were to I could not live. I may have been unwise but God who knows me best knows I am as loyal to you in your position as I am to Him in his. (Letter 38)

Owen's possible second thoughts about entering into post-Manifesto polygamy and his concern over maintaining a good relationship with Helen demonstrate his own difficulties in managing to be a good husband to both wives. Obviously, plural marriage presented difficulties for all participants, not just the women.

However, as the second, secret wife, Avery was perhaps in the most difficult situation of all. As the first wife, Helen held more familial authority than Avery, following the established tradition of LDS plural marriage. In addition, Owen appeared to be deeply in love with Helen. While his letters to Avery express kindness and love, albeit sometimes with a slight touch of condescension, Owen's letters to Helen declare his deep devotion, even passion. Becoming the third partner in such a strong relationship undoubtedly presented particular challenges for Avery, who was ten years younger than Helen and Owen. However, she always spoke of Helen with gratitude, even admiration, as in her October 1900 letter to Owen: "I am also thankful to her who gave her consent and sacrificed that she all ready has for my sake and for principle's sake, for it must be contrary to the natural feelings, which we all have" (Letter 3). No documents exist that give direct evidence of Helen's consent to Owen's polygamous marriage, but her letters document an emotional change prior to the marriage date, which seems to indicate that Helen and Owen had discussed it. Helen's assumed consent thus placed Avery in her debt. Also, Helen's general church position with the YLMIA, advanced schooling, maturity, and guardianship of Owen's growing family could have left Avery feeling subordinate and even inferior. Perhaps these factors contributed to the idea that it might be easier for Avery to carve out her own space in the Mormon colonies of Mexico.

In 1903 Avery graduated from college in Logan, but Owen's travels on church business kept him away from the ceremonies. Because she had prepared herself to become a teacher and because she was pregnant again, Owen arranged for her to travel a second time to Colonia Juárez, Mexico, to teach at the academy there. Colonia Juárez and other LDS Chihuahua colonies had been founded in the mid-1880s as a place to expand polygamy outside the United States' borders. For a time after the Manifesto, no plural marriages were performed there. However, in June

Mormon Colonies in Northern Mexico





Courtesy of the Lambert and Woodruff families

Avery Woodruff's house in Colonia Juárez. On the porch are Mr. and Dr. Farr, to whom Avery rented one of the front rooms. Avery lived in the house for over a year, leaving it in May 1905.

of 1897, holding to a narrow interpretation of the Manifesto prohibiting plural marriage only in lands where the law forbids it, the First Presidency authorized President Anthony Ivins to perform polygamous ceremonies in Mexico, even though, as Hardy argues, “polygamy had been against the law in Mexico ever since they [Mormons] first entered Mexican territory in the late 1840s.”⁶³ Many polygamous wives and families from the United States sought refuge in the LDS Mexican colonies, protected against prosecution by Mexican laws that indirectly sanctioned male adultery to preserve Mexican marriages.⁶⁴

Avery lived initially with President Ivins and his family, close friends of Owen’s, and taught at the academy until close to her due date. A few months before the baby was born, Avery moved in with Rhoda and Roxie Taylor, sisters and wives of John W. Taylor, another pro-polygamy mentor-apostle to Owen. Owen and Avery made plans to build a home in Mexico, which they discussed in detail in their correspondence. Both Owen and Helen mention the importance of Avery obtaining a “home of her own.” In Owen’s January 1902 letter to Avery, for example, he places this desire in the context of turn-of-the-century gender roles and, accordingly, subtly affirms his authoritative status in her regard:

As woman's highest aim and noblest mission is wife-hood and mother-hood all men appreciate any of these qualities which goes to make home the dearest place on earth. My dear girl I want to give you every possible advantage of education and practice to become a model house-wife and that means that you must be an excellent cook (which qualification I think you already possess), a good seamstress, a lover of house plants, a good washer, and possessing originality in the draping and decoration of home that it may be tasty and cozy. I will feel glad for some reasons when you have a home of your own so that you can take pride in keeping it according to your own ideas. (Letter 30)

Avery's autobiography, however, suggests her more negative feeling toward their new Mexican home, especially because it would represent a permanent settling so far from her home and family in the United States:

From the moment the first load of beautiful white stone was delivered to the building site I was filled with apprehension fear of the financial struggle it would involve and the feeling of permanency that a house in Mexico would bring. This feeling increased as the solid foundation took shape. Then as the walls arose high and higher under the mason's skill I projected my thoughts ⁱⁿto the years ahead when I should be left in this far away land with my little family my husband on tours for the church most of the time and the folks in Wyo. I would seldom see. Loneliness enveloped me.⁶⁵

When Avery questioned Owen about whether her status in Mexico would be permanent, he replied, "This is our home as long as we are in the flesh or not another dollar goes on the place." Owen's words struck Avery like a heavy blow.⁶⁶ Having a home of her own, however, would facilitate Avery's full acceptance within the Colonia Juárez community, for other polygamous wives had settled in Mexico to escape a new national probe into Mormonism and polygamy, finally giving Avery an open support system. Owen made the long trip from Salt Lake City to Colonia Juárez to see her several times, allowing the couple to enjoy a more public marital relationship together. The birth of Owen and Avery's daughter, Ruth, in February 1904 seemed to signal this emergence of normalcy in their marriage and family relationship.

Most of the time the two distinct families led separate lives from each other; however, situations arose when Helen, Owen, and Avery met

together. The few letters that exist between Helen and Avery and from Avery to both Helen and Owen offer a first-hand view of post-Manifesto “sister wives” and the curious relationship derived from sharing the same husband. Although both strived to be generous and kind to one another, a slight tone of jealousy and insecurity sometimes colors their rhetoric of love and friendship, as evidenced in Avery’s account of a visit Owen and Helen made while she was still living in Star Valley:

Owen and Helen came for a week’s visit enroute for the Big Horn. My family made their stay pleasant as possible, especially were we careful to guard Helen’s feelings against any strain of sharing her husband’s time with another woman on this vacation trip. Mother kept me near her coaching me very frequently on how to play my part heroically. “Be happy about it and don’t expect Bro. W. to give you much time or attention” mother said, “not in Helen’s presence. Remember she is our guest.” So I was thrilled when one morning while I was running the “separator” in a back room and Owen rushed in, taking me in his arms for an instant told me how sweet and brave I was. This lifted my spirits — primed me for the day ahead — reassured me of my husband’s love.

As Helen said of herself — “It is as natural for me to be jolly as for the sun to shine” proved to be a fact to all observers. She had hours and days of feeling blue she told me and had to struggle with self discipline. It worried her that I took life so seriously, and she often asked me if she had made me unhappy — she didn’t mean to.⁶⁷

As might be expected, Helen’s occasional insecurity expressed itself in her letters to Owen more than in her letters to Avery. However, in the following excerpt from an October 1903 letter to Avery, Helen demonstrates her understanding of how Avery might take her suggestions in a negative way that possibly could damage Avery’s sense of self-worth:

I have gone off on a tangent that sounds very much like preaching and you do not need preaching to one bit; you are just doing fine, it is myself that I need to labor with. (Letter 59)

Sometimes when Helen wrote to Owen, perhaps for validation, her fears and jealousies seemed more obvious, such as in the following from November 1900 and then later from July 1902:

You won't need my letters so much now as of old as you will get encouragement and strength from other sources and it seems when I read over what I have written it will surely fail to interest you. (Letter 8)

Now you might think from the tenor of my letter that I am dissatisfied with my lot, but believe me dear Owen, when I say such is not the case. I am contented as can be and would not change one thing in all my circumstances. The only thing I would have changed is "my self," my stubborn selfish nature. But this can not be done in a day. I must struggle & wait. I am not a bit like I want to be. (Letter 39)

As evidenced here, Helen tended to be self-critical in terms of her role in her polygamous marriage and worked at not making others responsible for her personal happiness. Owen and Avery demonstrated similar self-critical, self-reliant attitudes as well. At almost every turn, the three sublimated any emotion or criticism that could undermine their relationship.

To complicate the personal struggles felt by Helen and Owen and Avery, outside forces combined to create a growing hostile environment both locally and nationally. LDS apostle Reed Smoot publicly announced his candidacy for United States Senator at a meeting of the Ladies' Republican Club of Provo on May 14, 1902.⁶⁸ This announcement infuriated an already angry anti-Mormon faction in Utah and also drew unwanted attention from national anti-Mormon political figures. The *Salt Lake Tribune*, for example, listed the four main anti-Mormon arguments against candidate Smoot, all revolving around his ecclesiastical position.⁶⁹ On January 21, 1903, the state legislature voted him in as a United States senator, and five days later a Salt Lake City citizens' group and a ministerial group filed protests directed to the president of the United States stating that senator-elect Smoot should not be seated.⁷⁰ After much wrangling in the Senate over his being seated, Senator Smoot was officially seated in March 1903 with questions and protests to be raised later. As he noted in a letter to Owen, dated January 21, 1904:

I am not worrying about the investigation of myself, the only thing that is troubling me is the inclination of many, and the determination of some, to go into a never-ending investigation of the Mormon Church and charge me with being responsible for the sayings of every man, and the actions of every member of the Church.⁷¹

Senator Smoot, himself a monogamist, was correct in his prediction that he, along with the LDS Church, would go on trial when the Senate committee had collected its data.

Through the summer of 1903, anti-Mormon articles and publications filled the nation's newspapers. Two incidents in November intensified the committee's search. First, Heber J. Grant, Helen's brother-in-law, just returning from his mission to Japan, spoke at a University of Utah fund-raiser. Milton Merrill notes:

Heber J. Grant . . . always a vigorous, outspoken, and enthusiastic man, he was extremely popular with gentiles as well as Mormons. . . . In 1903, however, his exuberance was not appreciated . . . he made statements which brought down a storm of abuse on his head, on Smoot, and on the Church. He was in the process of giving a gift of one hundred fifty dollars; fifty dollars for each of his two wives and fifty dollars for himself. This evoked loud laughter among the students and stimulated the speaker, who added, "yes, I have two wives and the only reason I haven't got another one is because the government won't let me."⁷²

The national public saw this incident as a flaunting of polygamy. Charles Owen, an enthusiastic anti-Mormon from Salt Lake City, charged Grant with cohabitation and issued a warrant for his arrest, but Grant was quickly sent on another mission to Europe before it could be served.⁷³ Senator Smoot commented on Grant's unfortunate speech and its dramatic consequences in a letter to John Henry Smith:

You state that Heber's case has created a stir in Salt Lake City, I can assure you that it is not to be compared to the sensation that it has created in the East. Heber is lost sight of as the person making the comment, and the whole criticism is laid at the door of the Church and myself.⁷⁴

In a letter to his close friend, James Clove, Smoot reveals an even more candid response to Grant's actions:

Heber J's little episode . . . has caused an immense amount of unpleasant criticism against myself in particular and against the church in general. . . . I guess Heber is on the water, and we

can all take a long breath again. Oh, what an immense amount of trouble would have been avoided if he had remained in Japan a couple of months longer.⁷⁵

The second problem rose out of Idaho's rabid anti-Mormon Fred T. Dubois's desire to travel to Salt Lake City on a fact-finding mission regarding his suspicions that post-Manifesto polygamy was on the rise.⁷⁶

While official church statements denied the charge of increasing post-Manifesto plural marriages, a study of Helen and Owen's close circle of friends and relatives clearly supports its occurrence. Again, Quinn suggests that the church hierarchy was divided and ambiguous about the post-Manifesto polygamy issue and argues that while President Lorenzo Snow mildly opposed it, instructing the full Quorum of the Twelve to stop performing plural marriages, he probably gave individual approval for some of the apostles, including Owen, to marry plural wives. He also argues that Joseph F. Smith, as counselor and then as president, privately promoted post-Manifesto polygamy.⁷⁷ Helen's sister, Susan, for example, became Heber Bennion's wife in a monogamous marriage in 1885. She had given birth to ten children by 1900 and, shortly thereafter, about the time of Owen's polygamous marriage to Avery, her husband married two additional wives, Mary Bringhurst in 1902 and Emma Jane Webster in 1900. In addition, Edwin "Teddy" Bennion, Heber's brother, married Mary Clark, Avery's sister, in a polygamous relationship in April 1904. Interestingly, Avery's father, Hyrum D. Clark, also became a polygamist on December 3, 1903, marrying Mary Alice Robinson. Heber J. Grant also recorded that President Snow told him in 1901 to "take the action needed to increase my family." The timing of these post-Manifesto marriages within the same circle of family and friends implies an attempted renewal of plural marriage as advocated by apostles Cowley and Taylor.

Post-Manifesto polygamy carried the same significance as earlier polygamy: compliance would qualify one for eternal salvation. As Carrie A. Miles argues in "Polygamy and the Economics of Salvation," "Many questions that polygamy raises for us today were simply not a problem in early Mormonism, since the basis of plural marriage was salvation, not love, sex or material production."⁷⁸ This basic belief, however, became more emotionally difficult to practice at the turn of the century because companionate marriage — the union of two approximate equals, based on mutual respect, affection, and the close companionship of husband and wife — was becoming the American social norm.⁷⁹ Thus, according to Miles, the substance of comments like the following from Brigham Young in 1856 made less sense to the husbands and wives of 1900:

Wives should put aside all desire for the exclusive and romantic company of their husbands. Rather, they should simply “receive, conceive, bear, and bring forth” in the name of Israel’s God. They should not be concerned with whether they were loved “a particle” by their companions. That was not what the principle was about.⁸⁰

When Helen wrote to Owen in November 1900, just two months before his marriage to Avery, that “we will not shrink from duty whatever it may cost for that in the end will bring true happiness in the Eternal World and that is what we are striving for” (Letter 13), she was referring to the founding principle of plural marriage: eternal salvation. Nevertheless, Helen’s conflicting feelings between polygamy and companionate marriage are demonstrated in another, earlier November 1900 letter to Owen:

How very selfish and mean it is for me to want you all for my own, and all your love and affection just for my own comfort and happiness, and still when I think of it, this is all I have been grieving and suffering in my feelings for. (Letter 9)

This excerpt shows Helen’s personal conflict with Owen’s impending marriage and her growing anxiety over losing her exclusive, companionate marriage. Post-Manifesto polygamy was conflicted at the personal level and at the general church level while being increasingly opposed at the national level.

In December 1903, the Committee on Privileges and Elections laid out its plan: 1) they would attempt to prove Smoot a polygamist; 2) they would prove that Smoot had taken an oath against the State of Utah and the government of the United States (in the Mormon temple); 3) if 1 and 2 failed, they would show that such an oath would be administered by the LDS Church and that Smoot would comply; 4) if 1 through 3 failed, they would try to expel Smoot because Utah flagrantly violated its contract with the United States by permitting polygamy.⁸² The hearings began the following March with subpoenas sent out to Joseph F. Smith, M. W. Merrill, John W. Taylor, George Teasdale, Matthias F. Cowley, John Henry Smith, and Dr. J. M. Tanner. Apostles Merrill and Teasdale could not appear due to illness while apostles Taylor, Cowley, and Tanner simply disappeared. President Joseph F. Smith took the stand on March 2, 1904, and testified for three days regarding polygamy, church involvement in business and politics, and LDS doctrine and practice. Smith’s testimony angered many

people, who interpreted it as a validation of the charges and petitions. The following excerpt of his testimony, which was distributed nationally, illustrates both the substance and tone of his testimony:

- MR. TAYLER: Is there not a Revelation published in the Book of Covenants here that you shall abide by the law of the State?
- MR. SMITH: Yes, sir.
- MR. TAYLER: If that is a revelation, are you not violating the laws of God?
- MR. SMITH: I have admitted that, Mr. Senator, a great many times here.
- MR. TAYLER: But do you mean to say, at your pleasure, obey or disobey the commands of God Almighty?
- MR. SMITH: Yes sir [. . .] I obey or disobey at my will.
- MR. TAYLER: Just as you please.
- MR. SMITH: Just I please.
- MR. TAYLER: And that is the kind of a God you believe in?
- MR. SMITH: That is exactly the kind of a God I believe in.⁸²

While this publication may have been construed to incite anti-Mormons, it nonetheless represents the view received by non-Mormons of President Joseph F. Smith and the LDS Church's view of the dilemma between obedience to temporal laws and ecclesiastical commandments.

Apostle Francis M. Lyman's testimony followed, which, combined with President Smith's, outraged the national public. As president of the Quorum of the Twelve, Apostle Lyman admitted to cohabitation and his intention to continue the practice, even though it contradicted the laws of the land and the law of God as articulated in the Manifesto.⁸³ The committee asked for President Smith's assistance in encouraging the other subpoenaed witnesses to appear before the committee, but Smith responded that "As this is a political matter and not a religious duty devolving on them or me, I am powerless to exert more than moral suasion in the premise."⁸⁴ The missing witnesses and the church's uncooperative attitude plagued the Smoot trial and the LDS Church's national reputation for several years.

During this period the *Deseret News* reported that the committee intended to subpoena Owen; however, a letter to Owen from Reed Smoot indicated that no formal subpoena had been made:

I see by the papers and also learn by telegraph that you have not been subpoenaed as a witness in my case. This coming

*Courtesy of the Lambert and Woodruff families**Avery Woodruff and her daughter Ruth, 1905*

week, if all is well, we will have a quorum of the Twelve here, and, I suppose, if we should happen to meet, the papers of the country would immediately howl that the Presidency of the Church and the Quorum of the Twelve had held a meeting for the purpose of plotting against the Government of the United States. I hope that most of the Senators will have a chance to meet our brethren; if they do, I am positive that their visit will have a good effect.⁸⁵

To ensure his safety from testifying, Owen traveled to Mexico in March 1904 to visit Avery. He had planned to remain with Avery during this turbulent time, especially because Avery was due to give birth to their first child in early April. However, shortly after Owen arrived in Mexico, he received a telegram from President Smith requesting his immediate return to Utah for an important meeting during the LDS Church's April General Conference. In this meeting, President Smith presented a proposal to the full Quorum of the Twelve stating that "any violators of the Manifesto regarding plural marriage would be severely dealt with by the

church.”⁸⁶ Midway through April Conference, President Smith told Owen to “stay in retirement. . . . You would not make a good witness.”⁸⁷ So, to avoid a subpoena, Owen immediately prepared to leave Utah for Mexico and then possibly to preside over an LDS mission in Germany.⁸⁸

Avery gave birth to her only child, Ruth, in Mexico on April 11, 1904. Although unable to be present for Ruth’s difficult delivery because of his assignment at General Conference, Owen visited Avery and Ruth four days later. Owen’s arrival surprised Avery, for she did not expect him; nor did she expect Owen to be accompanied by Helen and her four children. Helen dismissed Avery’s nurse and proceeded to care for her. Avery later recalled that “this may have been distasteful to her taking care of her husband’s other wife and child and I wondered why she chose to come at such a time.”⁸⁹ Avery subsequently learned that President Smith had sent Owen and Helen to Mexico to avoid the threat of arrest and the possibility of testifying in the Smoot polygamy trials.⁹⁰ Fear of prosecution may have sent the Woodruffs to Mexico, but they determined to have a good time anyway. In spite of Avery’s postpartum condition, Owen and Helen planned to leave three of their children and their maid, Anna, with her while they traveled to Mexico City. In addition, Avery learned that President Smith advised Helen and Owen to travel to Germany later that summer to escape the law. Hurt by these new decisions, which did not include her and Ruth, Avery somewhat resentfully bade farewell to Owen, Helen, and baby Rhoda on May 5, 1904. Little did she know then that this would be the last time she would ever see Owen and Helen.

Death and Burial

Before their trip, Helen and Owen had been advised to vaccinate themselves against smallpox, which infected many in Mexico at the time. According to Avery’s autobiography, Owen refused vaccinations, saying that he was on the Lord’s errand and God would protect them.⁹¹ This attitude, however unfounded it would turn out to be, proved consistent with Owen’s preference for faith and obedience in spiritual as well as material matters. Helen fell ill first, contracting a serious case of black smallpox on May 23. Alonzo Taylor, an LDS missionary in Mexico, helped care for Helen and kept a daily record of her treatment and Owen’s bedside devotion. Taylor described Helen’s horrific condition in a journal entry dated June 3, 1904:

I decided at his suggestion to return to the sick room and help wait on Sister Woodruff. The eruption had developed so much that I was about frightened when I saw her. Great white blisters



Courtesy of the Lambert and Woodruff families

Grave of Abraham Owen Woodruff (AOW) in El Paso, Texas

filled with pus were standing out all over her body and wherever they had broken were sores it was a terrible sight.

After suffering so severely that she even asked her husband to pray for her death, Helen died on June 7, 1904. Her final moments were detailed by Taylor:

[A]t 3:45 a.m. Bro. Henning came rushing up the steps to where Bro. Woodruff and I were sleeping on the roof, and told us to come at once for sister Woodruff was dying and scarcely had we reached her bedside when she passed peacefully away after having suffered since May 23 with a most loathing and virulent form of smallpox. Her suffering has been something fearful and for her, death was surely a relief.

Taylor continued his narrative with a detailed account of Helen's burial. He concluded:

There we all surrounded the grave and sang "O My Father." Bishop Johnson dedicated the grave . . . and the grave was

covered while a sorrowing band of brethren and sisters looked on in silence.

It was a terrible blow to Bro Woodruff but he stood it bravely and manfully and reconciled himself to the ordeal.

Because of feared contamination, Mexican law prevented moving Helen's body to Utah for twenty years, although Owen had planned to bring her home to Salt Lake City. Unfortunately, he was also afflicted with smallpox just after Helen's death. To get Owen better medical attention, his companions privately and unlawfully moved him to El Paso, Texas, where he seemed to regain his strength and move toward recovery. However, on June 20, 1904, Owen died suddenly, shocking friends and family. Family members today recall the promise reportedly made to Helen in 1896 by President Woodruff: Owen and Helen would not be separated in death by more than two weeks.

Countless memorial services, letters of condolences, resolutions of respect, and commemorative articles appeared immediately in honor of both Helen and Owen. Owen's mother, Emma, received an outpouring of love and support from friends, family, and church leaders. However, symbolic of the public/private conflict of post-Manifesto polygamy, Avery and her daughter, Ruth, received no public consolation. Initially left with three orphaned children, a newborn baby, and her private grief, Avery struggled as might be expected. She later wrote in her autobiography:

The sorrow that filled my heart can't be described. It seemed I wept buckets of tears in the days that followed. Two wonderful people who left me well and happy never returned and their four children made orphans. My own child fatherless. I was now a widow.⁹²

Strongly encouraged by church authorities to remain in Mexico for another year, Avery worked to make a new life for herself and her daughter. The other Woodruff children traveled to Salt Lake City to be with their grandmother and other relatives, while Avery and Ruth's existence remained secluded.

Helen's friend, Ruth May Fox, memorialized her in a sentimental, overly wrought memorial poem:

Helen
Pure as the fragrance of lilies,
Fair as the roses of June,

Sweet as the breath of the valley
 Where zephyrs with peach-blossoms dally,
 Where the birds and the honey-bees rally,
 Was Helen — our sister, our friend.
 Simplicity's mantle adorned her,
 Humility haloed her brow;
 Veneration for all that is holy
 For the good, the meek and the lowly
 (Ah, blessed thy friends were to know thee!)
 Was Helen's — our sister, our friend.
 A flow'r from the hand of the Father
 She descended to gladden the earth,
 To blossom and bud for a season,
 Then return to the gardens alysian.
 O God! do Thou grant us submission
 Like Helen's — our sister, our friend.⁹³

Rudger Clawson likewise praised Owen in a 1904 letter to his mother, Emma Woodruff:

He accomplished a work of great magnitude, and his memory will ever be green in the hearts of the Latter-day Saints. His life and labors, his devotion to the Cause of Truth, his purity of life, his winning manners and lovable ways will continue to exert a power and influence in the earth when other things are forgotten.⁹⁴

Admirable character traits were shared by Helen and Owen and Avery. However, at the reburial of Owen and Helen in 1993, church leaders once again voiced high praise for Helen and Owen, while Avery remained absent and unmentioned.⁹⁵

After Owen and Helen's death, Avery communicated from Mexico frequently with Emma regarding the Woodruff children. She even attempted to live with Emma as a co-caregiver, but Emma's strong personality eventually drove her away. The LDS Church, especially Elder Cowley, may have supported Avery initially, but Avery independently raised her own daughter for ten years before remarrying. She met and married George Lambert, a widower with one child, in 1914. Avery died in El Cerritos, California, in 1953 and is buried alongside her second husband in the Cyprus Lawn Cemetery. Ruth grew up in Avery's care and



Courtesy of the Lambert and Woodruff families

Wilford Owen, Rhoda, June, and Helen Mar Woodruff

eventually married her stepbrother after attempting to sublimate her own complex feelings of romance.

Owen and Helen's children stayed for several years with their grandmother Emma. Other members of the Woodruff family desired to care for the children, but Emma remained determined to care for them herself. It was during Emma's care that baby Rhoda, then three years old, died unexpectedly. Family members consoled themselves with the thought that Helen and Owen could be reunited with their baby. At Emma's death, Heber J. Grant and his wife Augusta (Helen's sister) "adopted" Wilford Owen, Helen Mar, and June. The children remained in the Grants' care until adulthood. Wilford, the eldest and perhaps the most affected by his parents' life and death, led a troubled existence. He served the LDS Church on a mission and married in the LDS temple, but later felt compelled to enter into plural marriage. The LDS Church, by then totally estranged from the practice of polygamy, excommunicated Wilford, and his first wife divorced him. Wilford was later rebaptized in the LDS Church, remaining with his second wife and their seven children but almost completely abandoning his first family of five. Both Helen and June also married, each having five children. Wilford died in 1986, Helen in 1990, and June in 1995.

Shortly after Owen and Helen's deaths, apostles Cowley and Taylor were removed from their leadership positions in the LDS Church, and their membership was tenuous. President Joseph F. Smith issued in 1904



Photo by C. R. Savage, courtesy of the Lambert and Woodruff families

Helen Woodruff

what became known as the “Second Manifesto,” calling for a complete end to public and private polygamy. Some Latter-day Saints speculated that Owen’s death had spared him from church punishment, while others felt his death represented a punishment itself. Although the first Manifesto had enabled Utah to achieve statehood, national fears of lingering polygamy left Utah politicians powerless, as evidenced in the 1904 Smoot hearings. President Smith’s Second Manifesto solidly set the course for the LDS Church’s increased social status and political power in the United States and for the Latter-day Saints to become supportive, patriotic Americans.

The Abraham Owen Woodruff family story reflects national public dramas over post-Manifesto polygamy while also revealing private internal dramas. Viewing the relationship between Helen, Owen, and Avery offers an unusual, if not unique, opportunity to see how polygamous first wives dealt with insecurity and jealousy, how additional wives struggled to measure up and find their own place, and how the logistics of managing two families presented challenges for the polygamous husband, both financially and emotionally. The letters and autobiographical reminiscences that follow present three distinct individuals who desired to demonstrate their faith in God by following the counsel of LDS Church authorities to participate in an illegal but privately sanctioned relationship. Their trials and sorrows and the faith and courage that sustained them command our respect.

So it was against this backdrop that, on July 17, 1997, in the Salt Lake City Cemetery, the Woodruff family gathered for an affirmative, unifying reburial ritual. Descendants from Owen and Helen and from Owen and Avery attended the ceremony. Both lines of descendants honored their ancestors and conveyed a love for them. It was Helen's grandson, Bruce, and Avery's grandson, Richard, who directed the reburial project, reuniting ancestors and descendants in a common purpose. Perhaps it was in this quiet, shaded Utah cemetery that Helen, Owen, and Avery's vision of what faithful LDS families could become, if they remained united, finally became a reality.