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Post-Manifesto Polygamy

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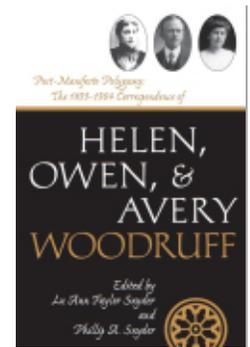
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Woodruff Letters and Supporting Documents

1899

[Letter 1: Helen to Owen]

[LDS Church letterhead, handwritten]

July 17, 1899

My Darling Owen: —

This morning I sent you a telegram informing you of the sad news about our darling little Florilla.¹ Owen dear, we are all heart sick this morning. Blanch² is just frantic they can do scarcely anything with her. It all happened so suddenly that we can not realize the real truth. Last night I was sleeping over at mother's and about twelve o'clock the electric bell rang furiously and we all jumped up and ran to see what was the matter, little Florilla was having a convulsion, she had two in a short time and then she came too and seemed perfectly natural, she talked about her dolly and seemed cheerful and bright. Will Mother,³ Sister Lambert and Blanch and Joe⁴ sat up nearly all night and she slept all night until six o'clock this morning, when they called us all again and the little darling just gasped twice and never breathed again. We all watched and prayed for nearly an hour thinking every minute she would come back and it was not until the Doctor came that we could believe the sad truth. Oh, my dear I wish you were at home now, I know you will fell so very sad as we all do, but I do not know whether to look for you to come home for a few days or not. The rest of the folks are all as well as they can be under the circumstances.

They have telegraphed for Asahel⁵ and Van⁶ and also Bro. Daynes⁷ who is at Rd. [Richfield, Utah] attending the dedication of the Sevier Stake Tabernacle.⁸ Nellie⁹ and I went out and spent the day with Susie¹⁰ yesterday and Susie and her children are going to Pl. Grove next week and I will go with them.

My Dear Husband I hope you are well and I know you will pray for Blanch if you can not be here to comfort her.

With constant prayers for your comfort and welfare I remain as ever

Your Own Helen.

[Letter 2: Helen to Owen]

[no letterhead, handwritten]

Pleasant Grove
Aug 14, 1899.

Dearest Owen: —

Your letter written at Ft. Bridger [Montana] Aug 10, is the last one I have had. Was real disappointed that I did not get one this evening as I thought after reading your “whole pack” of mail you would have made a beginning at answering some of my letters sent there.

Yesterday I received a letter from your Mother and will send it to you and then it will be needless for me to repeat all she says. Isn't it terrible that the Scarlet Fever has broken out again? I am very much afraid it will go through all the families; and also the whooping cough, oh, dear I am afraid of that Mother¹¹ is beginning to worry about it all ready, she had such an experience with Susie's baby and the poor little fellow isn't over it yet.¹²

Van's case was very light, he was only at the Hospital seven days and is getting along nicely; but poor Clara what an ordeal it was for her. I don't know who had the worst of it she or Van. It was terrible for both.

Doesn't Eugene write to his Mother? I think he ought to she hasn't heard from him only through my letters to your Mother.

Have almost decided to go home [Salt Lake City] next Friday, but do not know how I shall go. Ray¹³ is thinking of taking a load of fruit in and I could go with him and take my fruit with me. Mother is trying to persuade me to go on the train. Says she thinks it would be much better for me but oh, I do dislike going on the train and will have to take the car home; but I'll decide about that later.

Got a letter from Gusta¹⁴ to-day. She is still at Soda [Springs, Idaho] having a fine time. Will no doubt return in time to see the “boys” come home. I wish you were going to be here for the occasion and then I could ride out and see the parade anyway, but as it is, think I shall have to content myself with reading about the grand affair same as you will.¹⁵

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.

Shall probably write one more letter to Vernal [Utah] before leaving here and then one to the farm, but hardly see the need of that as you will be home the next day. Oh, how delighted I shall be to see you once again, it seems ages since you went away, and I am afraid the remaining time will seem ages too; but I keep busy all the time and that helps to make the time seem short.

Did you read the account of the Wasatch Stake Conference?¹⁶ Le Roi and Ma Belle accompanied papa and mamma and had a glorious time. I hope Ed and wife attended the meetings and got the instructions on tithing. "Most undoubtedly" they were there.

Delia¹⁷ came over Saturday and stayed until to-day. She also came while Susie was here so Ma had four of her girls home at once. Mami gets a little stronger every day but very slowly.

Well, my dear boy you will soon be home and I fear I shall talk you blind I have so much to tell you. Am well and happy and trust you are. With bushels of love and constant prayers for your safety and success I am as ever Your devoted wife

Helen Winters Woodruff.

[Avery's "Autobiography and Recollections": Excerpt A (pages 32–42)]

[*handwritten*]

1901 [*in left margin*] "After fifty years" As I remember it January 17, 1951. The question has often been asked me, "How did you come to know Owen Woodruff"? It's a unique story.¹⁸

Mary¹⁹ and I were home in *Valley for our summer vacation having attended B.Y.C.²⁰

Conference was scheduled for Auburn Ward announcement had been made in church the week before when a committee was formed to clean up the rock church for the occasion because one of the "authorities" from Salt Lake City would be present.

But when Mother,²¹ Mary and I went to choir practice Saturday night we noticed the church in much the same condition as of last Sunday. The committee evidently had not functioned, where upon mother decided to take things in her own hands. So early Sunday morning Old Grey and Minnie were hitched to the old carriage and off to a good start went Mother, Avery and Mary with an ample supply of brooms, scrubbing brush soap cleaning cloths galore and a ladder.

We arrived at Auburn a self made committee of three. Soon the activity and speed with which we moved our equipment drew the attention of Johny Walton and Nate Putnam who had come to Henry Harrison's store across the street. These boys soon joined our force and with good spirit helped to transfer grimy windows, benches and dirty wooden floors into sparkling steaming surfaces — which left a strong "wet wood smell." After wiping the last foot print dry — doors and windows were left wide open in hopes the summer sunshine would lend her hand in drying out the place before the morning services began at 10 a.m.

The three of us rushed home driving the two and a half miles in about twenty minutes. After a quick bath we changed dressed in our best togs — pure white summer sheers — “transforming the scrub women into lovely ladies” as we jokingly put it and were soon on our way back to town this time in the white top carriage.

Promptly at 10 a.m. our whole family arrived en mass with father²² driving his favorite high spirited team of horses.

Immediately on entering the church we sniffed the “wet wood odor” and took a quick glance at each other — Mother, Mary and I — as we spied damp spots on the floor. During the fifteen minutes delay — waiting for the visiting brethren the spots almost completely disappeared and we inwardly were glad they were late.

Mother, Mary and I took our accostomed places in the choir on the front bench, facing the pulpit. The little church was filled to capacity little over 150 souls when suddenly all eyes turned to the front door as the visitors were entering. Mary and I sat stoically watching our manners since we remembered our tutoring at B.Y.C. on the rudeness of turning one’s head and staring at late comers, and too we spared no criticism of the country folks’ carless habits. We were all the more circumspect in contrast perhaps to the degree that we put on city airs.

Bishop Hyde and Father his first councilor stood immediately and greeted the guests and all were seated on the stand.

The services began as usual — singing, prayer, singing. Then bishop Hyde introduced Apostle Owen Woodruff and Joseph McMurrin²³ to the audience. At bro. A. O’s request brother McMurrin was the first speaker. I recall not a word he said, but I do remember that according to instructions I received in my English class at B.Y. that he spoke with more gusto and in larger voice than the size of the audience and Church warranted. Mary and I voiced this observation in the privacy of our room afterward. Most everything in our immediate life was measured by B.Y. standards.

Elder Woodruff followed elder McMurrin in a soft conversational tone yet quite as affective as his companion. As we arose Mary nudged me and I pressed her hand — we were both impressed with this charming, magnetic personality — angelic as mother often said afterward.

I heard only part of what he said — my mind wandered — I thot of Fred Dixon, a young man I called my sweet heart tho I hadn’t seen him for almost a year. He had moved away from *Valley with his family to a farm in Burly Idaho. He and his brother Jim attended B.Y.C. the first year Mary and I were there and Cynthia Davis, a girl who lived with us, and I went to College dances with the brothers, Fred and Jim. This last year our letters were infrequent and very brief, he had not come to *Valley to see me in the summer as planned. I began to wonder if Fred and I really

cared for each other altho I wore a ring he had slipped on my finger before he went away.

I found myself comparing the younger man with brother Woodruff as he stood speaking — I had never seen bro. W. before, but he at once captured my admiration and respect — I felt that he was a great man — pure and holy. I questioned my love for Fred — if only I could see him I would know! My frustration mounted during the rest of the service.

After the meeting Father introduced Mother and all of us children to the guest speakers and we waited while the brethern and the “bishop rick” administered to Money Welch’s boy who had been spitting blood for several days — a slip of June grass lodged in his lung. Brother W. was mouth and he promised that according to the faith of the parents and the will of God the boy would be healed. In not many hours we were told the boy coughed up the cutting grass and very soon recovered. Note: Money Welch had never before been seen at church except to attend dances and other recreations. He and his family were known as “Jack Mormons.”

On our way home from church, I sat quietly absorbed in my thoughts, wiping a tear now and then refusing Porter’s peanuts and candy the others were gaily munching. Mother said: “Avery what’s the matter?” I said: “Nothing.” But once inside the house I dashed into my bedroom clamped down the leaver on the lock of my door and dropped to my knees and prayed: “Dear Heavenly Father if Fred and I are meant for each other please make me feel assured of our love. May I have for him the same admiration and respect I feel for brother Woodruff.” Amen.

I quickly unlocked my door, tied an apron around my waist and went to the kitchen to help with lunch. There was no time to waste if we were to be on time for the two o’clock, meeting.

Now my tention was relieved with the assurance that God understood what was in my heart and instead of tears I was able to smile. Prayers if sincere are always answered.

On our way back to conference Mary and I commented that the old meeting house certainly looked a lot better for our efforts especially when the benches were filled with people and the spotless white cloth was laid for the sacrament. The silver service added much. It had been purchased from E. D. Harrison of Pocatello [Idaho] when I was Pres. of M.I.A. It consisted of a beautiful pitcher, two goblets and two plates. All the people sipped water from the two goblets which was customary in the church at that time. There was a good spirit in our conference and we were glad we had in any way contributed to its success. Afterall this was our town, our people and we were proud of any obvious virtues and we lamented our deficiencies.

We greatly enjoyed the afternoon session of the conference — again listened to services by our guest speakers. It was announced that the

evening meeting would be held at Grover [Wyoming] a small town a few miles East of Auburn. O yes, we wanted to go to this meeting too and were willing to help with the chores such as ^the boys^ milking cows after supper so we might get an early start. Father enumerated the many things that would have to be done. The girls helped mother with an early supper.

Again Mary and I slipped on our white dresses and white straw hats with pink roses and feathers. Our shoes and stockings were black — these were worn with any and all dresses by all girls and women in 1901 so we were in good style tho it seems funny as I write about it in 1952. The little church in Grover was very dimly lighted and with a huge cylinder shape stove in the center of the room there was a somber atmosphere. We felt a bit strange as we glanced about for familiar faces. Finally we took seats midway between the awful stove and the wall, wondering how it was we had become so very religious as to go to the third meeting in one day. But on second thought realized our church contacts furnished about all the social enjoyment we had in *Valley in the summer time and we should make the most of the opportunity.

We listened to ward officers reports and again talks by the two visiting brethren — Woodruff and McMurrin. At the close of the meeting brother W. stopped to shake hands with Mary and me and asked if we intended going to B.Y.C. in the Fall — remembering that Father had mentioned proudly that his two daughters were home on vacation. We were pleased to tell him we expected to go on to College. This made us feel so important as we related to Father and Mother every single word that passed between us [and br *in left margin*]other Woodruff as we said good bye. We still raved on about his good looks intelligence and personality wondering why there weren't more of his kind to be passed around so more deserving girls could get a worthy husband. His wife — what a lucky woman!

Monday morning mother decided if we were to pick wild currants this season we better waste no more time — the birds were taking them fast. “Which of you girls want to go with me”? Mother asked in her cheerful tone. “I want to go” I said. Mary was glad she was to stay home with the younger children. She never liked getting all scratched up picking wild fruit.

In short order Mother and I were off to a good start with our small buckets wearing our broad brimmed straw hats for shade. We followed the banks of Stump Creek to our familiar spot where for several seasons we had gleaned the precious fruit. Mother was used to the horses she often hitched to the old carriage to go to Primary and Relief Society and it was no trick for her to detach the team from the carriage and stake them out to graise while we picked our berries.

Disregarding burs, bites and scratches we scrambled thru brush finding the gleaning tedious. But we were enjoying ourselves busy with out

chatter about the wonderful conference of the previous day — the friends we met. We agreed that our family had contributed a good share in making the conference a success with father in the bishoprick, two of us in the choir and the older boys Hyrum T. and Heber²⁴ passing the sacrament.

Then mother asked me: “what was the matter with you Avery on our way back home yesterday.” Then I told mother about my frustration over Fred. Mother was so comforting and understanding and she loved romance even in her own children. After I had finished my story she said “Avery I’m sure if you continue to pray about it you will be sure to find the right companion or he will find you. There’s no question in my mind but that your father and I were meant for each other and that the Lord brought us together.”

When we reached home in late afternoon Father was at the kitchen table eating alone. Mary had fixed his meal. Mother inquired why he was all dressed up in his Sunday best? Father said: “Charley’s boy (on horse back) came with a message from Apostle Woodruff to come to Fairview [Wyoming] to get him.” Mother said: “Do you mean you are to bring him to this house.” As she spoke she surveyed the humble appearance of the four log rooms with the meager furnishings. Father said: “I guess that is what it means” and he left in the white top carriage on the ten miles trip to Fairview.

While putting our house in order Mother Mary and I speculated on the purpose of bro. W’s visit to our house deciding he was putting Father in a higher position in our church probably to make him a high counselor to Pres. Osmond.

I chose to scrub the kitchen floor preferring this to most other tasks. However this time I made short work of it since the strong home-made soap suds caused my scratched hands and arms to burn and smart. Remembering the “wet wood smell” of the church the morning before I wiped the floor as dry as I possibly could with the hope that there would be no wet spots showing by the time Father and our guest arrived. We three women laughed about the similarity of the two occasions.

In due time Father returned with bro. W. The evening meal was eaten leisurely with no comment as to the purpose of his visit to our home. As Mary and I washed the dishes we fabricated reasons of our own.

Later in the evening after the chores were done all the family gathered in the front room where we sang several gospel songs with Avery at the organ struggling with the accompaniment. We had family prayer and retired for the night. Mother fixed a bed for brother Woodruff in the front room. After all we had only two bedrooms. Next morning as I was drawing water from the well bro. W. came and took hold of the rope to help me. As he poured the water into my bucket he asked me how I spelled my name. I said: “A-v-e-r-y” He said: “A very good girl.”

Shortly after breakfast Father took bro W. to Fairview where he joined bro. McMurrin and they left the valley for Salt Lake City. On Father's return we quizzed him getting little satisfaction. But the following morning he asked if I would like to ride to Afton [Wyoming] with him. He had to take some machinery to a shop for repair. "Why not take Mother" I said. "I'll stay home and do the work" or else take Mary if mother wont go. Mother took me to one side and explained Father wanted to talk with me, that I should go. My heart thumped against my chest as my thoughts flashed over my past conduct. What ever had I done to displease Father and I thot of the time he called me to account on the red parlor carpet.

At that time I had broken a rule laid down by the presidency of the Stake and high councilors which was — that they and all their families hence forth cease "round dancing" . . . ²⁵

I went to Afton with Father as he requested. From the moment we left home until we reached the Leavett Hill — half mile to the South he hardly spoke a word but seemed deep in thought. I sat rigidly beside him still waiting for to tell me the purpose of our trip.

Then he said: "Dot how would you like to swap Fred for brother Woodruff"? Puzzled I said: "What do you mean"? Isn't bro. W. married? I thot all the apostles were married." "Yes he is married and has a family." What then do you mean — polygamy"? "Yes, Dot" Then I burst into tears — cried hard and long. Father tried to comfort me realizing the terrible shock that brought the tears and he began to tell me of bro. W's conversation as he rode along with him from Fairview. Father said: 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 a bout it. Bro. W wanted to know the first thing if you had any impression regarding him at Auburn conference. I said: not that I know of." He said ~~that~~ while I was speaking it was made known to ~~him~~ that ~~I would be~~ the girl sitting before ~~him~~ would be ~~his~~ wife. Then after the service bro. Clark you introduced her to me as your daughter Avery." It was as if a voice had said the words. It was with effort that I continued with my talk, so strong was the impression. An angel from heaven could not appear more pure and perfect as she sat there all in white. Not having seen her before I wondered as I took my seat what to make of it. Not being able to throw it off my mind I've prayed about it. Feeling that my impression is from the Lord I sent word for you to come and take me to your home so I could get acquainted with your family and especially your oldest daughter." Would you, be willing for her to marry me in case she wanted to"? Father said "Not unless it can be sanctioned by the church". Bro W. pointed out how several of the brethern in high positions had been advised to take plural wives which justified his confidence in the matter.

After his visit to our home Father took Bro W. back to Fairview to join Bro. McMurrin. En route bro. W. explained that he would write to

Father but not to me until he learned the facts of how I felt about the matter. On our ride back from Afton I told father about my impression of bro. W. while he was speaking at Auburn Conference that it had caused me to question my love for Fred, about the relief and comfort I got thru prayer. Father then said: Dot do you feel happy about it now after I've given you bro. W's explanation"? I said: It is more than I can fully comprehend I still feel frightened and puzzled but I believe if I keep on praying I will know in time what is best for me — what is right.