

[Page 191] **Abstract:** *Critics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have accused Joseph Smith and other early Latter-day Saint men of pedophilia because they married teenaged women. Indeed, they have emphatically declared that such marriages were against 19th-century societal norms. However, historians and other experts have repeatedly stated that young people married throughout the 19th-century, and such marriages have been relatively common throughout all of US history. This article examines some of the accusations of early Latter-day Saint pedophilia and places such marriages within the greater historical and social context, illustrating that such marriages were normal and acceptable for their time and place.*

Modern critics of the Latter-day Saint Church and even some of its members have expressed discomfort over the Prophet Joseph Smith's marrying teenage women, including at least one and probably two as young as 14 years. Criticism can be found in both regular and social media. Many people have unfortunately and ignorantly compared Joseph Smith to FLDS leader Warren Jeffs.¹ Others have specifically called Joseph Smith a pedophile because of his marriages to teenage women. For example, a meme found on Pinterest and other sites has a picture of Joseph Smith with the following: "My wife called me a pedophile. I said, 'That's a pretty big word for a 14 year old.'"² A radio listener responded, online, to a broadcast about Smith's polygamy: "So the official position of the LDS Church is to blame God Almighty for Joseph Smith's polygamy, polyandry and pedophilia. The Mormon leadership cannot be SERIOUS! [sic]"³ And yet another person commented regarding a *Salt Lake Tribune* article about post-Manifesto plural marriage: "Imagine that you are 37. Now imagine marrying an [Page 192]eighth or ninth grader. If that's anything but repulsive to you then you're probably a sicko."⁴

As a professional genealogist, I have been disappointed by people such as those above regarding historical marriages to teenage women as a form of pedophilia. While the idea of marrying women so young is foreign and even repulsive to modern Americans, it was not always so. In the course of my genealogical research, I have seen numerous examples of marriage at an early age. While certainly not dominant, early marriage age was also not uncommon and was socially acceptable in the past. In other words, people in the past had a different understanding and definition of childhood, adolescence, and appropriate age to marry than what is accepted, even expected, in the present.

In 2010 Newell G. Bringhurst and I co-edited *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy*. In that volume I co-authored with David Keller and Gregory L. Smith an essay titled "The Age of Joseph Smith's Plural Wives in Social and Demographic Context,"⁵ in which we argued that early marriage age was not uncommon and was socially acceptable in Joseph Smith's time.

Reaction to the essay was mixed. Some people agreed with the findings, while others were critical, accusing the authors of overstating their argument. There was even a counter-essay in the same volume by historian Todd M. Compton, titled "Early Marriage in the New England and Northeastern States, and in Mormon Polygamy: What was the Norm?" Compton shows that marriage age was much higher in New England and argues that Latter-day Saints were outside of the norm with their early marriages.⁶ Compton's findings were certainly not surprising to anyone with a genealogical background and who is aware of historical marriage patterns in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic United States. While Compton focuses on East-Coast-marriage patterns, he did not adequately explain early marriage patterns that existed on the frontier.

Pedogamy: The Series

More recently, a writer reignited the controversy about young marriage ages by publishing a series of blog posts on the topic. Without trying to hide apparent bias, he wrote that by "marrying very young girls to much older men," the "FLDS church is doing what the mainstream LDS church did from the 1840s through at least the 1870s." Not stopping there, the writer then announced that "the data that [he has] collected on American marital practices of the

mid-1800s” does not support claims [Page 193]of young girls marrying older men. “Child brides marrying significantly older men were very rare everywhere I investigated, except in Utah.”⁷

In an unfortunate attempt at neologism, this same writer coined the term pedogamy to refer to “older men marrying young girls.”⁸ In an interesting twist, the writer suggests (without any published documentation) that such marriages were “especially noxious to non-?Mormons, not necessarily polygamy per se. They clearly transgressed the mores of those days as well, bringing down the ire of the world on Mormonism.”⁹ Despite the lack of documentation, one of the people commenting at the end of the essay wrote, “I work for a historical society in Massachusetts, but I was born and raised in Utah and have polygamous Utan [sic] ancestry. You are so right about the data. This was unusual in the 19th century, and even in the 18th century and earlier. Most of what I see is people who marry pretty late, into their mid 20s. I always heard that excuse and thought it was true because you hear about it with figures in various royal families. It just wasn’t the case for everyday people.”¹⁰

The editor of the blog claimed that editorial practice prevented documentation or endnotes when several readers requested corroborating data. In response, the editor assured the audience that “the research is solid” and “I would say wait and read the whole series”¹¹ or were told to contact the author for his sources or to write a letter to the editor.¹²

The fourth essay dealing with pedogamy, “Observations and Accusations of Pedogamy,” included a rather dramatic photo of a young girl standing next to an older man. The girl’s height was about midway between the man’s waist and shoulders, demonstrating her young age and petite frame, to which one reader responded, “Great terrible story and picture!”¹³ Although almost every other picture in the series was identified, particularly pictures of people, this photo was unidentified, suggesting an authorial or editorial oversight. Further research, however, identifies the young girl as 11-year-old Francesca Carboni, who immigrated to New York from Italy and was forced to marry a 27-year-old man who beat and kicked her until she was able to run away. Her plight was tragic, and the husband was arrested and tried for abuse. Neither she nor her husband was a Latter-day Saint. The event occurred in 1891, which is even outside the time frame focused on by the series of blog posts. The man in the photo was an agent of the Brooklyn Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and the photo is held in the collection of the Brooklyn Public Library.¹⁴ There is a point at which misinformation becomes propaganda and does nothing but feed [Page 194]sensationalism. Without documentation, the entire series becomes less credible.

Comparing Apples to Oranges

In the concluding article of the pedogamy series, the author compared couples getting married in Utah to couples in Springfield, Hamden County, Massachusetts; and Branch County, Michigan. As with Compton’s findings, anyone with a genealogical background and awareness of historical marriage patterns in the Northeast and the Eastern Seaboard would not be surprised. Nor should they be surprised by the findings in Branch County, Michigan, which is located on the Michigan-Indiana border.

Michigan, in the East North Central States, was a part of the historic Northwest Territory, or Old Northwest, and became a state in 1837. By 1857, Michigan had been a state for 20 years, and most of it, particularly in the southeast and south-central part of the state, was no longer considered the frontier. Nevertheless, the statistics from the final pedogamy essay were quite interesting. According to the author, the average age of the Massachusetts brides was 24.1, while the average age of the Michigan brides was 22.6.

As will be discussed later, the general marriage-age pattern was for marriage age to decrease the farther west and the more frontier the settings. Once frontier conditions no longer existed, marriage age would slowly increase to be similar to that in the older, more settled areas, particularly the eastern part of the country. Jack Larkin wrote in *The Reshaping of Everyday Life: 1790?1840*:

A trip westward was almost a demographic journey back in time; family sizes in communities further west mirrored those in much-longer settled places a generation or two previously. The women of

In Michigan's early settlement phase in the 1800-teens and twenties, young women "often said yes [to marriage] at the age of fourteen or fifteen if the right young man popped the question."¹⁶ Comparable demographics appear in other parts of the old historic Northwest Territory. According to one historian, in Ohio of the 1820s "girls were generally married before they were seventeen."¹⁷

[Page 195] Generalizing a Narrow Time Window

In the concluding article, the author also explained that to "learn how extensive the system of child brides was in Utah, ... [he] began collecting data on all marriages performed in Utah in 1857."¹⁸ In his first article, he explained that he noticed "a large percentage of [Martin Handcart Company] young girls married in 1857, at the height of the so-called Reformation that was sweeping Mormon territory with its religious zeal and excesses, and that many of the men they married were much, much older than they were."¹⁹

The author was correct to mention the zeal of the time-period. Latter-day Saint historian Eugene E. Campbell wrote about marriages during the Mormon Reformation, "Many Saints were urged to live polygamy, and this push resulted in considerable competition for wives. The competition became so intense in some places that men volunteered to go on missions to find new wives."²⁰ Whether or not men going on missions to find wives was appropriate is a discussion best left for another article.

Historian Kathryn M. Daynes also mentioned the effect of the Mormon Reformation on Utah marriage rates:

The large number of women entering plural marriage in the frontier period, particularly in 1856 and 1857, adversely affected the availability of mates for men by creating a scarcity of marriageable women. It also had an impact on the age at which women married. Finding few women at the usual ages for marriage, men sought wives among increasingly younger women, thus intensifying the decline in women's mean age at marriage. ... the mean marriage age for both monogamous and plural wives declined rapidly and bottomed out during the Mormon reformation period in 1856-57 and its aftermath.²¹

In light of such explanations about the effect of the Mormon Reformation on marriages and marriage age in Utah, one is left to wonder why the author of the polygamy essays picked 1857, the peak of religious zeal and excess. Particularly since, according to Daynes, the mean age for women marrying decreased from a mean of between 18 and 19 in 1850 to lows during the reformation. Monogamous marriages bottomed out in 1857 at the mean age 16.49 and for plural wives in 1860 at 16.42. From that time, the mean marriage age of monogamous women steadily increased throughout the rest of the 19th century. The increase of mean marriage age for polygamous wives was not as steady, [Page 196]experiencing a sharp decrease in marriage age in the 1870s, but even at that time, the mean age was 17+ years.²²

Therefore, focusing on 1857 marriage ages would not fairly represent Utah marriage patterns during the whole of the territorial period. While there certainly were marriages to teens of all ages before and after the Mormon Reformation, the high number of marriages to girls in their early teens during this period was an anomaly. So why, then, would the author focus on that year? Perhaps the author's conclusion gives readers a hint. He explains that "some might want to whitewash, or even deny, these stories and statistical findings."²³ He then declares it was time for "those of us with a Utah Mormon heritage and ancestry to confront this unsavory part of our history and recognize clearly the dangers of theocratic rule, whether blatant or subtle."²⁴

Understandably, readers might be concerned about "whitewashing" past events; and the biases of apologists or detractors may prevent accurate portrayals of what actually occurred. The goal, instead, should be to seek

transparency on this topic, arguably something the pedogamy series does not actively seek to deliver to its

audience. Why is this obvious? Because of the volumes of relevant data not discussed. Judging historical incidents without sufficient context invariably results in distortions rather than accurate reconstructions. Transparency helps us in our time to understand previous occurrences through the eyes of the participants.

Pedogamy and Joseph Smith's Young Brides

The pedogamy author began and ended his series by referring to Joseph Smith's "marriages to children."²⁵ By so doing, he touched on a point of discomfort for some Latter-day Saints who have expressed shock and angst over Joseph Smith's marriages to younger wives. Because some of Joseph Smith's wives were teens, at least one 14, critics have viewed Joseph Smith's marriages to young teens as pedophilic, which is inaccurate. *Pedophilia* is defined as the primary or exclusive sexual interest in prepubescent children. That automatically rules out Joseph Smith and the men discussed in the "pedogamy" essays, for there is no evidence of their being sexually interested in prepubescent children.

But what about marriages to teens? *Hebephelia* is defined as the strong, persistent sexual interest by adults in pubescent children between the ages of 11 and 14. *Ephhebophilia* is defined as the primary sexual interest in later adolescents, which is typically ages 15 to 19.²⁶ As for Joseph Smith, the majority of women he married were in their [Page 197]twenties, thirties, and older, so it is obvious he was not fixated on teens. Therefore, while it makes for sensationalistic criticism of Joseph Smith to accuse him of pedophilia, the reality is that both science and history demonstrate that his marriages to teenage women were not "pedophilic behavior." In addition, the evidence is strong that his marriage to 14-year-old Helen Mar Kimball was never consummated.²⁷

Changing Attitudes and Definitions of Childhood and Marriage

It has been said that the past is a foreign country — things are done differently there. One example is how our modern understanding of what constitutes childhood has drastically changed from that of previous centuries. In the past hundred-plus years, western culture has redefined and extended childhood to the point that even people in their early to mid-twenties are viewed as still in a stage of childhood.²⁸ New definitions and an extension of childhood started to become prevalent near the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. Previous to that time, children, especially those living in rural settings and frontier conditions were considered adults by the time they reached puberty and were expected to perform adult labor.²⁹ These children were "initiated into adulthood at a tender age" and were entrusted "early with responsibilities that would horrify a modern parent."³⁰

As one writer mentions, "The ages at which men and women mature and become adults in their own eyes and in the eyes of their elders have varied considerably in the past, reflecting not only legal practices but also — and more importantly — the effects of custom, parental influence, and the varied social and economic circumstances of a given period."³¹ Nicholas L. Syrett explains further in his book *American Child Bride: A History of Minors and Marriage in the United States* that "the precise line of when childhood ended and adulthood began" was not well defined. In fact, "For most of American history there was no distinction between the marriage of two minors or that between one party who was older (sometimes considerably so) and one who was younger."³² Furthermore, according to Syrett, "marrying at the age of fourteen was not at all uncommon ... throughout the nation in the middle of the nineteenth century."³³ Syrett explains, "It is clear that young people married throughout the nineteenth-century United States."³⁴ Indeed, "the marriage of legal children, in fact, has been relatively common throughout US history."³⁵

[Page 198]There are numerous examples throughout North American history of people marrying at a young age, and in some cases a very young age. Discussing marriage patterns of young people, one early settler reminisced about growing up in the Willamette Valley on the Oregon frontier and the prevalence of such early marriages:

It is remarkable at what an age young girls developed into women and the early marriages are

surprising to us of the present day. I know of several brides of 13 years. One neighbor girl between 12 and 13 eloped with her lover and was married before her parents could intervene. That couple is living yet. Their oldest child is 30 years older than their last one. There was no state law regulating the marriage age nor license required.³⁶

Before the middle of the 19th-century, age was not as important in determining marriage readiness because it was believed that marriage could transform a child into an adult, and “her marital status trumped her chronological age.”³⁷ In fact, the term *child bride* didn’t appear in American newspapers until the 1870s and 1880s.³⁸ But the age of consent and marriage in our nation was still very young. In most states and territories, the minimum marriage age for girls was twelve and for boys fourteen, both ages being based on English common law.³⁹ However, “either could actually marry at age seven, but between the ages of seven and twelve/fourteen, the marriage would be considered imperfect or inchoate, almost like a trial run for real marriage. A girl or boy could opt to leave an inchoate marriage, but only on reaching the age of 12 or 14, and only if the couple had not consummated the marriage.”⁴⁰ As incredible as these ages sound, “there is plentiful evidence, both from England and the early colonies, that children as young as eight, nine, and ten did marry. ... [And] parental consent was not required at these young ages.”⁴¹ In New France and New Spain, the minimum ages for marriage were eleven for girls and thirteen for boys.⁴²

What is surprising is that the age of legal consent to sexual intercourse was even younger than the traditional age of marriage, 12 and 14. As late as 1880, the majority of states had age 10 as the minimum age of consent. Incredibly, Delaware’s age of consent for a girl was seven.⁴³

However, the focus of this discussion is on marriage age. In 1880, the first year the US census linked marital status, almost 12% of girls aged 15 to 19 were wives.⁴⁴ Based on research of historical marriage patterns, it appears that even as early as the 1850s, “the marriage of young people was least common in the industrializing Northeast, and most common [Page 199]in the South, Midwest, and West.”⁴⁵ In the mid-1850s, 22% of marriages in Massachusetts were by young women under the age of 20. Obviously, most of those young women were in their later teens. At the same time, 42% of young women in Kentucky married before the age of 20. While most would also have been in their later teens, a number would also have been in their younger teens.

“In all societies men marry later in life than women and the gender differential in age at first marriage tends to be largest in more traditional societies. The nineteenth century United States is no exception. ... The male-female differential in median age at first marriage was quite large in the nineteenth century.”⁴⁶ While discussing community studies, historian Christopher Waldrep writes about how an examination of marriages “may find very young brides marrying older grooms, or the inverse.”⁴⁷ *Significantly older* has been considered an 11-year differential and up.⁴⁸

While marriages of a significant age differential were not as common as most marriages, still there are examples of such with mixed results of acceptability by the community. Consider these anecdotal examples:⁴⁹

- Fifteen-year-old Ann Ball married a rich South Carolina plantation owner, Captain Philip Dawes, age sixty.⁵⁰
- In California in 1841, forty-one-year-old Abel Stearns married fourteen-year-old Arcadia Bandini. Both the Catholic Church and the California colonial government gave permission to this marriage. The couple was popular, well respected, and for years was the center of Los Angeles society.⁵¹
- In 1769, fifty-eight-year-old widower Reverend John Camm approached fifteen-year-old Betsy Hansford about the importance of marriage. Tradition has it that both used Biblical scripture to demonstrate interest in one another and to justify their marriage. Because Reverend Camm had known the Hansford family long enough that he presided over her baptism as a baby, there was some comment on their age difference. Nevertheless, they married later that year, and he eventually served as the seventh president of William and Mary College in Williamsburg, Virginia.⁵²
- Forty-four-year-old F. C. Scott of Mound Valley, Nevada, his sixteen-year-old wife, Mary, who had in 1880

- [Page 200]Jose Abeta, age forty, and Maria, age fourteen of Conejos Valley, Colorado.⁵⁴
- Jose Baca, age thirty-five, and thirteen-year-old M'a Delicia of Huerfano, Colorado.⁵⁵
- William Skelton was in his early thirties when he married fourteen-year-old Vaitleain Vann in 1879 in Geysler, Montana. Vaitleain's own mother, Marie, was fifteen when she married thirty-five-year-old Pierre Venne in 1862.⁵⁶
- William Turnage was twenty-one years older than Elizabeth Silverthorn, a part-Native American, who had barely turned thirteen at the time of their marriage in Lolo Fork, Montana, in 1871. After Elizabeth's death in 1878, he married her younger sister, Annette Anna Silverthorne, in 1880. He was forty-three and she was sixteen. The girls' mother, Elizabeth, was fifteen when she married forty-year-old John Samuel Silverthorn.⁵⁷

Such marriages as well as others to young girls no doubt shock modern sensibilities.⁵⁸ But such was not the case at that time, as Nicholas L. Syrett explains:

From the perspective of a man, the precise age of a girl — especially if she were in the fuzzy region between thirteen and seventeen that we would now call adolescence — might be less important than attractiveness, capability, and willingness. Americans of the nineteenth century [and earlier] did not identify particular men as child predators or pedophiles, so sexual desire for a younger girl was not stigmatized as it is now. Modern statutory rape laws were not passed before the 1880s. The age of consent to sex outside of marriage was ten in most states. And precisely because a man who married a young girl legitimized his relationship with her through matrimony, socially and legally, both his intentions and their relationship would not achieve the notoriety that it might today.⁵⁹

If the culture had frowned on such relationships between older men and young girls, “these men would not have come calling if they thought their attentions unreasonable.”⁶⁰ Thus society, depending on place and time, generally accepted these marriage relationships.

[Page 201]Yet another example of the male-female age differential was the 1762 marriage of 73-year-old Arthur Dobbs, sixth governor of the royal colony of North Carolina, to 15-year-old Justina Davis. Criticism of this match was not surprising. However, at no point does concern for Justina Davis's age appear. “The problem here was not Davis's youth but rather Dobbs's age. ... He was a fool for allowing himself to fall for someone so youthful, but that she might be suitable for marriage at age fifteen was certainly not in doubt.”⁶¹

But why were there teen marriages and why were they prevalent in some parts of the country while barely existent in other parts? That is because of what genealogists and historians refer to as the product of time and place that might encourage earlier marriages. This article will discuss what defined the correct time and place for early marriage age in North America.

Reasons for and Examples of Early Marriage

Several factors created the right climate for early-age marriages, and numerous social and family historians have discussed these factors. They were economic, demographic, and cultural and involved at least two and usually all three factors. Furthermore, locality and timing were very important and usually influenced or were influenced by the above three factors.

For example, while conditions encouraged early marriage along the eastern seaboard in the 17th and early part of the 18th centuries, they didn't later. The locality was obviously the same, but the times had changed. Further, while there may still have been some economic benefits, demographics, and culture which made early marriage less conducive, that was not always the case, even in New England.

Economic Influence

A major economic factor involved the availability of work and land. “North American colonists tended to get married early due to several factors. The first, and perhaps most important, was simply that they could.”⁶² Good, stable employment with relatively high wages and year-round work “helped to encourage younger marriage,” even in parts of the British Isles with such industries as the weaving industry and mining.⁶³

Economic factors and job opportunities were even better in North America. In colonial New England, for example, there was significant immigration and large population growth because “freedom from [Page 202]indenture, a balanced sex ratio, a healthy climate, and plentiful food encouraged early marriage, a high birth rate, and low mortality.”⁶⁴ It has been noted that “at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, fertility in the United States was much higher than that found in Western Europe.” Economic structure of the region impacted “the dynamics of the family.”⁶⁵

A large part of economic advantage was the availability of inexpensive land. More than one historian has argued that “high frontier fertility was directly related to land abundance, resultant economic opportunity and early marriage.”⁶⁶ “Descendants of English immigrants, who had far more land at their disposal, jumped quickly into marriage.”⁶⁷ One English traveler noted during a journey in 1704 between Boston and New York, “They generally marry very young; the males oftener, as I am told, under twenty than above.”⁶⁸ Even Benjamin Franklin acknowledged, “Marriages in America are more general, and more generally early, than in Europe.”⁶⁹ Franklin also noted that more and earlier marriages came, in part, from cheap and plentiful land that allowed large families, in which children were taught “Examples of industry ... and industrious education.”⁷⁰

Cheap and plentiful land was generally located on the unsettled or little-settled frontier. And the frontier was constantly in flux as it moved westward with the expanding population. So in early colonial Massachusetts, Puritan settlers had “earlier marriages and hence larger families than had been typical in England.”⁷¹ For these early Puritans, “early marriages were the rule,” because the moral and economic conditions, as well as the political and ecclesiastical system all worked **not only to allow but put a premium on early marriage.⁷² Still, when Massachusetts became an older colony and later a state, cheap unsettled land with the accompanying economic benefits that encouraged marriage at a younger age was no longer available because of the large population. These economic conditions and resultant opportunities of early marriage had moved on with the ever-expanding frontier, leaving behind a population that began to marry at a later age for both men and women.

Early marriage and large families were considered an economic advantage on the frontier.⁷³ “Sometimes the pressure to move west or to acquire new land necessitated early marriages. Reasons to marry were accelerated. Reasons not to marry were eliminated.”⁷⁴ The frontier “tended to blur the meanings of age and allow for marriage of girls who might be seen as too young for marriage in other situations.”⁷⁵ Because [Page 203]of frontier conditions, “young girls in the West matured rapidly into women’s roles. They were courted at a very young age by much older men and were sometimes married when only a few years into their teens.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, “women in newer regions started childbearing earlier and continued longer.”⁷⁷

Anecdotal evidence confirms this trend for early marriage. One example among many was early Oregon settler Charlotte Matheny, who described how she married John Kirkwood after having met him only a few times. Her brother was to be married the next day, and John Kirkwood, visiting for the wedding, asked her to marry him at the same time. She later recalled, “I was nearly fifteen years old and I thought it was high time that I got married so I consented.”⁷⁸ Memoirs suggest that fifteen was a typical age for women to marry during the earliest years on the Willamette Valley frontier. One woman recalled that “in those days the young men began wondering why a girl wasn’t married if she was still single when she was 16.”⁷⁹

Historian John Mack Faragher has argued that marriage for romance was neither accessible to nor a priority for people raised on the frontier. Marriage “was a necessity, and frontier men and women lacked the luxury of searching for romantic love.” Certainly, mutual attraction and companionship were desired, but for most, “the financial necessity of a partner in labor superseded their desire for a romantic companion.”⁸⁰ Cynthia Culver

Prescott has contended that the “chief purpose of early frontier marriages was to combine men’s outdoor work with women’s domestic labor to overcome chronic labor shortages.” On the frontier, a wife was “an equal partner in everything,” particularly labor.⁸¹

The need for partners in labor as well as the potential to claim twice the amount of land as could a single man “encouraged teenage girls to marry at even younger ages” than in other places, even some other frontier regions.⁸² Jennie Stevenson Miller, an early Oregon settler, recalled, “I had my first offer of marriage when I was 13, and from then till I was 24 I had numerous proposals.”⁸³ So much pressure to marry as soon as physically possible was placed on single girls and women in the Willamette Valley that marriages took place quickly and “with little or no attention to social compatibility.” Teenage girls who migrated to Oregon with their families “were sometimes pressured to marry significantly older men, and at least a few young women married men whom they hardly knew. For example, one fourteen-year-old married a man twice her age whom she had known only a week.”⁸⁴

[Page 204]Such was the emphasis on marrying quickly and usually young that 13-year-old Elizabeth Keegan wrote back to her home in the East and warned, “I want you to let Kate O’Shea see this letter. Tell her that I would not encourage her to come here. For there is no encouragement for females here unless she were married.”⁸⁵ Women’s rights activist Abigail Scott Duniway, who arrived in Oregon in 1852 and married a year later at age 19, complained about men “forty, thirty, or even twenty-five” marrying “a child of fourteen.”⁸⁶

Despite the remonstrations of a few naysayers like Duniway, “mid-?nineteenth-century men and women across rural America married at relatively young ages.” In Oregon, it is estimated that “the median age of marriage of female settlers at first marriage in [the Willamette Valley] was only 17.4 years, far younger than the 1860 national norm of 23 years. This was, however, comparable to the first marriage age of women who settled in Sugar creek, Illinois, several decades earlier.”⁸⁷

Sugar Creek, located a few miles east of present-day Springfield, Illinois, was first settled in 1817. Its main growth was in the early 1820s. John Mack Faragher’s *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* explains that as a result of “both commercial and urban development, the age of marriage for American women increased, and by 1800 much of coastal North American society had fallen in line with the European pattern” of later marriage and smaller families. On the other hand, Sugar Creek and other backcountry or frontier settlements continued to experience earlier marriage and larger families.⁸⁸

As noted earlier, this was certainly the case for the Oregon Territory as well as other parts of the western frontier. In mid-19th-century Colorado, for example, most women married from their mid-teens to their early twenties. While there are a number of anecdotal examples, I will give a personal one. My second great-grandmother, Minerva Ellis, married the prominent Elizabeth, Colorado, cattleman Charles Garland when she had recently turned 16, and he had barely turned 39.⁸⁹ In spite of Minerva’s youth and the age disparity between her and Charles Garland, they continued to be among the most respected members of the small community.

This marriage reflected the frontier conditions found across the West that allowed for economic opportunities and encouraged marriage at a young age, sometimes with much older and more established men. Frontier conditions waxed and waned depending on the locality and the first-to-second generation of settlement. More often than not, marriage [Page 205]age began to rise after the first generation, and certainly after the second or third.

Demographic Influence

Another factor that encouraged early marriage was a marriage squeeze in which marriageable women were scarce. A scarcity of marriageable-aged women (or men, for that matter) could be caused by different factors. For example, in post-Civil War America, some parts of the country experienced a population imbalance in which there were more women than men and a resulting marriage squeeze. This was particularly true in the South, where so many men had been killed in that great war. Chances of remarriage, or marriage at all, were “significantly reduced because the pool of marriageable men was so much smaller than normal.”⁹⁰ Indeed, “far more women remained permanently unmarried in the East than on the frontier, where they continued to marry at young ages and high

proportions characteristic of the early colonial period.”⁹¹

Nevertheless, and remarkably, not as many women were forced to remain unmarried as originally feared at the close of the Civil War. In times of extraordinary or catastrophic events, extraordinary actions are taken. Perhaps “fears of spinsterhood spurred women to accept unconventional suitors — men who were younger, much older, of a lower social class, from a distant community, or of a different ethnic group — and thus reduced what would otherwise have been a larger cohort of unmarried women.”⁹²

In certain periods in history and places, a dearth of marriageable women encouraged a much younger marriage age. An example of such was in mid-1600s Québec, Canada, where large numbers of men had been sent to trap for fur, harvest timber, and perform other economically important work. To make sure the men remained in Québec, the French government attempted to remedy the lack of women by importing *filles du Roi* (“King’s daughters”). These were mainly poor and orphaned young women who were willing to risk their lives crossing the Atlantic and living in North America in order to better their lives. Almost 800 women traveled to Québec, and, today, most French Canadians and many other Canadians and Americans descend from these women. Of the 774 women identified as “King’s daughters,” 76 — almost 10% — were between the ages of 12 and 15. Almost 42% were age 20 and younger.⁹³

Not as well-known as the *filles du Roi* were the *filles à marier* (“marriageable girls”) who were recruited to settle in Québec between 1634 and 1663. Some 262 women traveled to Canada. Of those 262, the [Page 206]age of the woman is available for 181: about 16.5% were age 15 and under. Most of these were 13 or 14 years old.⁹⁴

Interestingly, the second generation of French settlers in Québec married as young as and sometimes even younger than those in the first generation. This was because there still existed a population imbalance of more men than women. Françoise Boucher married in 1650 at age 14, while her younger sister, Marie Boucher, married at age 12 in 1656 at Chateau Richer.⁹⁵ In 1637 two Couillard sisters married within a week of each other. Twelve-year-old Louise married a close family friend, Olivier Le Tardiff, age approximately 36, a week after her 11-year-old sister, Marguerite, wed Jean Nicolet, age approximately 39.⁹⁶ Another 11-year-old girl who married was Anne Cloutier, who married in 1637 to Robert Drouin, age approximately 37.⁹⁷

Marrying that same day was 13-year-old Marie-Magdeliene Robin Guyon to François Belanger, age about 25. Marie-Magdeliene was the daughter of Jean Guyon and Mathurine Robin. This marriage is of special interest to me because they are my ancestors. Another 13-year-old ancestor of mine who married in 1648 was Marie Martin, the bride of Jean Cloutier, age 28.⁹⁸

French brides were not only sent to Québec, they were also sent to America’s Gulf Coast. In 1704, 23 women, between the ages of 14 and 19, sailed on the ship *Le Pelican*. These young women were known as “casket girls” because the wooden boxes holding their dowry they carried were called “casquettes.” They arrived in Mobile, Alabama, married, and settled in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Illinois.⁹⁹ There were other efforts to provide women of marriageable age to French settlers and trappers. In 1721, a group of French young women arrived in Biloxi, Mississippi, aboard the ship *La Baleine*. These women, 24 of whom married within a month or so of arrival and eventually had large families, ranged in age between 12 and 30.¹⁰⁰

As would be expected, within a few generations, the age of marriage began to increase and eventually came more to reflect western European marriage patterns. Eastern Canada experienced a significant upward trend in marriage age in the early- to mid-19th century.¹⁰¹ In mid- to late-Victorian Ontario, for example, because the ratio of marriageable age men and women was closer — as well as the lack of land and the high cost of any available land — about 90% of women married between the ages of 18 and 28, while the age range for men was about three to four years older. This mid- to late-Victorian marriage pattern resulted [Page 207]in “comparatively late marriage, small age differences between spouses, and significant numbers of unmarried.”¹⁰²

Previous to the mid-19th-century, however, the early settlement patterns of Anglo-Canadians were similar to those of their French-Canadian neighbors who had first settled in the 17th century. For example, Cornwall, Ontario, located across the St. Lawrence River from upstate New York, was founded in 1784. In the early years of pioneer

Cornwall, 6% of brides married younger grooms for their first marriage, compared to 12% in the second half of the 19th century. In early Cornwall, grooms were generally almost six years older than brides. Brides in their teens “almost invariably married men considerably older than themselves.” Furthermore, the “older the men grew, the more likely they were to take a younger wife, and the greater the spread in their ages.”¹⁰³

Similar to the French-Canadian “prêtes au mariage” girls, French girls were also sent to New Orleans and up the Mississippi River to French outposts. Amos Stoddard wrote shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, “The French are prompted to marry early in life; the climate dictates this practice.”¹⁰⁴ Like the French settlers in 1600s Québec, the first-generation females married at a much younger age. Sister Marie-Madeleine Hachard wrote from New Orleans in 1728, “The custom here is to marry girls of twelve to fourteen years.”¹⁰⁵ While she might have been exaggerating a little, there was certainly evidence of early marriages. In Natchitoches, located some two hundred and fifty miles northwest of New Orleans, “A fourth of the females to marry ... prior to 1733 (all of whom were French-Indian) were known to be fourteen or under; and in half of the marriages of the next decade (1734-1743), the bride was not yet fifteen.”¹⁰⁶

In French Louisiana, in “90 percent of all marriages, the male outranked the female by a mean of 11 years. Some far more extreme age gaps appeared.” Three marriages had a 28-year age gap, while one marriage had a thirty-two-year age gap.¹⁰⁷ The author of a book about settlement in St. Louis, Missouri, noted that among the French, “marriages between very young brides and older grooms were not uncommon.”¹⁰⁸

The French were not alone in marrying young when women of marriageable age were hard to find. In other places across the United States with a high male population and low female population, “young girls were often courted when they were barely into their teens.”¹⁰⁹ “Marriages of twelve-and-thirteen-year-old girls were not unheard of [Page 208]in the Chesapeake colonies and were noted during the California Gold Rush.”¹¹⁰

Early Oregon territory settlers, experiencing not only abundant land and labor possibilities, but also a significant marriage squeeze, produced numerous young brides. “For many women it was assumed that they would marry early — nearly six out of every ten emigrant women were married before their twentieth birthday, and by age twenty-five, only one in ten women remained unmarried.”¹¹¹ Fifteen-year-old Sallie Hester, residing in Oregon in 1850, wrote, “I am invited out so much that I am beginning to feel quite like a young lady. Girls are scarce; I presume that is the reason. Young men are plenty.”¹¹² And when 12-year-old Molly Sheehan attended her first dance in Virginia City, Montana, she was one of very “few females in attendance and was therefore sought out by many young men.”¹¹³

Even before the gold rush and the invasion of thousands of gold-seeking Forty-Niners, California apparently lacked marriageable women. Western historian Albert L. Hurtado wrote about California’s population, “There were too many men competing for too few women. This basic fact was plain in the operation of the marriage market, where women had many opportunities to marry and men had few.”¹¹⁴ Thirteen-year-old Virginia Reed of Donner Party fame wrote back to Illinois advising that a girl who wanted to get married should come to California, where “she can get a spanyard [sic] any time.”¹¹⁵ Reed received a marriage proposal shortly after being rescued but turned her suitor down. She married another man three years later when she was 16. Another Donner Party member, Mary Murphy, married three months after her rescue; she was 13 at the time.¹¹⁶

At the height of the California gold rush, the “populace was overwhelmingly young and male.”¹¹⁷ In 1850, there were 12.2 males per female. While this imbalance had decreased in 1852 to 7.2 and in 1860 to 2.4, there was, nevertheless, an imbalance, and women were scarce to the point that, as a former pioneer emigrant remembered, “It was customary in early days [in California] for girls to marry at fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen years of age.”¹¹⁸ Even more significant, according to Hurtado, the sex ratios for white age cohorts in 1860 had 3.1 males per female for those aged 20-29, and 4.3 males per female in the 30-39 age cohort. This obviously meant significant competition for marriageable females and naturally would have driven the marriage market toward younger girls.¹¹⁹ Historian Kenneth L. Holmes observed about California in that [Page 209]period, “Men courted young girls barely into their teens, and a girl could get married ‘halfway through her adolescent years.’”¹²⁰

In the different agricultural communities and even most mining towns of settled regions that had previously exhibited frontier conditions, typically within a generation the average age at first marriage began to increase, following the course of earlier places such as Massachusetts and localities west of there. “Eventually, as population density increased and the numbers of males and females evened out, the average marriage age of women increased and their fertility declined.”¹²¹

Cultural Influences

Culture was another factor in marrying at a young age, as certain ethnic and other groups tended to marry earlier than others. “Southern women, as a rule, married very young — younger than their northern counterparts and much younger than men.”¹²² Southerners in general married at a younger age than they did in other regions, such as New England. In a pattern from colonial times, some “planter families had married their children (as young as eight or nine) to each other to solidify family dynasties; this practice had largely been eliminated by the antebellum period.”¹²³

Teenage marriages, however, did continue. This was particularly the case in the southern backcountry, which included the piedmont and Appalachian Mountains, extending from Virginia down through Georgia. In fact, historians have noted that in particular regions of the southern backcountry — upcountry Georgia, for example — “marriage beginning at fourteen or fifteen was common.”¹²⁴ For example, one writer noted that southern backcountry “frontier marriages were early and prolific.” He added, probably with some exaggeration, “In one Carolina back-country district with 17,000 white inhabitants, there was not a woman at age twenty-five who was neither wife nor widow.”¹²⁵ In 1737, John Brickell, in describing his travels through North Carolina, wrote that women there “marry generally very young, some at thirteen or fourteen; and she that continues unmarried until twenty is reckoned a stale Maid, which is a very indifferent character in this country.”¹²⁶

Thus both brides and grooms on the southern frontier or “backcountry” were particularly young. These young “backsettlers” appear to have been following cultural norms:

This was partly the result of a frontier environment, but not entirely so. Other frontiers were very different. And it is interesting to observe that of all the regions of England, age [Page 210]at marriage was lowest in the north — as much as three years below southern England. Here again the backsettlers followed their ancestral ways.¹²⁷

The north of England was actually specifically the Scottish-English border or what the lowland Scots referred to as *the borders*. A number of these borderers chose or were forced to immigrate to Ulster. Their descendants later immigrated to North America, bringing with them their customs and traditions. These Ulster Scots were known in the Americas as the Scotch-Irish.

The customs of the Scotch-Irish “encouraged very early marriage; common was age fourteen for boys, and twelve for girls.”¹²⁸ These Scotch-Irish drew on the tradition of early marriage and large families replicated elsewhere in the American colonies. One contemporary wrote about the Scotch-Irish of the backcountry, “There’s not a Cabin but has 10 or 12 Young children in it — When the Boys are 18 and the Girls 14 they marry — so that in many Cabbins [sic] you will see 10 or 15 children.”¹²⁹

This Scotch-Irish culture spread out from 18th-century Appalachia and influenced the greater American culture, particularly on the ever-expanding frontier. Part of that cultural influence involved early marriage when economic and other conditions were right. This was witnessed repeatedly in American history from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific coast as descendants of the Scotch-Irish as well as others moved westward.

Timing and Incidence of First Marriage

As Nicholas L. Syrett has explained, throughout most of the 19th-century, “Marriage in the middle teen years, and sometimes earlier, while by no means the norm, was relatively common.”¹³⁰ Plenty of anecdotal evidence demonstrating that early marriage age was accepted by most of society in the 19th century and earlier has been given in this article, but works such as Syrett’s *American Child Bride* and “The Effect of the Civil War on Southern Marriage Patterns” have also provided statistical evidence of such. Following are the nuptiality measurements for the white population of the United States, 1850-1880, provided in “The Effect of the Civil War on Southern Marriage Patterns.” While the charts in that article cover males and females ages 15 to 54, only the mean age at marriage and the married males and females ages 15 to 19 will be discussed here.¹³¹

| [Page 211]Census Year | Mean Age at Marriage | | Percent Married 15–19 | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| United States | | | | |
| 1850 | 26.8 | 23.1 | 1.7 | 12.2 |
| 1860 | 26.9 | 22.8 | 1.6 | 12.4 |
| 1870 | 26.8 | 23.2 | 1.6 | 10.9 |
| 1880 | 27.1 | 23.4 | 1.1 | 11.0 |
| Northern Census Regions | | | | |
| 1850 | 26.9 | 23.4 | 1.3 | 10.3 |
| 1860 | 26.6 | 23.0 | 1.1 | 10.7 |
| 1870 | 27.0 | 23.3 | 1.1 | 9.7 |
| 1880 | 27.4 | 23.8 | 0.7 | 9.0 |
| Southern Census Regions | | | | |
| 1850 | 26.5 | 22.4 | 2.7 | 16.5 |
| 1860 | 26.6 | 22.3 | 2.8 | 15.8 |
| 1870 | 25.9 | 23.0 | 2.6 | 13.2 |
| 1880 | 25.9 | 22.4 | 2.1 | 16.7 |
| New England Census Region | | | | |
| 1850 | 27.5 | 24.9 | 1.9 | 7.7 |

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|---|------|------|-----|------------------------|
| 1860 | 26.9 | 24.1 | 1.6 | 7.1 |
| 1870 | 27.7 | 25.0 | 1.3 | 6.9 |
| 1880 | 27.5 | 24.9 | 1.1 | 6.7 |
| Mid-Atlantic Census Region | | | | |
| 1850 | 27.0 | 23.8 | 1.3 | 8.5 |
| 1860 | 26.6 | 23.7 | 1.1 | 8.7 |
| 1870 | 26.7 | 23.9 | 1.5 | 8.3 |
| 1880 | 27.4 | 24.5 | 0.7 | 6.5 |
| East-North Central Census Region | | | | |
| 1850 | 26.1 | 22.2 | 1.1 | 12.4 |
| 1860 | 26.1 | 22.1 | 1.0 | 12.9 |
| 1870 | 26.5 | 22.8 | 0.7 | 10.5 |
| 1880 | 27.3 | 23.5 | 0.6 | 9.8 |
| West-North Central Census Region | | | | |
| 1850 | 26.6 | 21.4 | 1.0 | 20.5 |
| 1860 | 26.6 | 21.5 | 1.1 | 16.0 |
| [Page 212]1870 | 27.0 | 22.2 | 1.5 | 13.3 |
| 1880 | 27.6 | 22.3 | 0.7 | 13.0 |
| South Atlantic Census Region | | | | |
| 1850 | 26.2 | 22.9 | 2.8 | 15.2 |
| 1860 | 26.4 | 22.9 | 2.7 | 12.5 |
| 1870 | 25.6 | 23.4 | 2.7 | 10.9 |
| 1880 | 25.8 | 23.2 | 2.2 | 12.4 |
| East-South Central Census Region | | | | |
| 1850 | 25.9 | 22.1 | 2.8 | 16.0 |

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|--|------|------|-----|-----------------|
| 1860 | 26.3 | 22.3 | 2.9 | 16.8 |
| 1870 | 25.7 | 23.3 | 2.6 | 12.5 |
| 1880 | 25.8 | 22.4 | 2.0 | 17.9 |
| West-South Central Census Region | | | | |
| 1850 | 27.2 | 20.9 | 1.8 | 24.6 |
| 1860 | 26.7 | 20.5 | 3.0 | 23.8 |
| 1870 | 26.1 | 21.4 | 2.8 | 20.9 |
| 1880 | 26.0 | 21.0 | 2.1 | 24.1 |
| Mountain and Pacific Census Regions | | | | |
| 1850 | — | — | — | — |
| 1860 | 32.8 | — | 1.8 | 32.4 |
| 1870 | 30.2 | 20.1 | 0.8 | 27.5 |
| 1880 | 29.2 | 21.9 | 1.0 | 15.1 |

Of particular interest, when the statistics are analyzed by census region, they tell a very interesting story about marriage-age trends. The regions were analyzed by northern regions and southern regions where the percentage of married 15- to 19-year-olds was greater in the southern regions. Even more significant, both the New England and Mid-Atlantic women were above the U.S. average for mean age and below the average percent of females married. The statistical difference between the East-North Central census region and the West-North Central region is fascinating. In the 1850s East-North Central (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin) the percentage of married women age 15 to 19 was 12.4. The percentage rose to 12.9 in 1860 but by 1880 had fallen to 9.8. The West-North Central region (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, [Page 213]Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota) had a mean marriage age below the national average at 21.4.¹³² These statistics demonstrate why using localities in Massachusetts and Michigan as a comparison with Utah — as was done in the pedogamy series — truly is like comparing apples to oranges.

The East-South Central region (Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee) and the West-South Central region (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas) had even lower mean marriage ages and higher percentages of married women in the 15 to 19 cohort.¹³³ Unfortunately, no statistics were available for the 1850 census in the Mountain and Pacific census regions, and there was no mean marriage age for females from the 1860 census. However, the percentage of married women between 15 and 19 was 32.4, and in 1870 it was 27.5%. These percentages represented a third in 1860 and well over a quarter in 1870 of married women in the combined Mountain and Pacific regions — a significant number, indeed. Moreover, the mean marriage age for women in 1870 was 20.1 — almost five years younger than women’s mean marriage age in New England, almost four years younger than women in the Mid-Atlantic, and two years younger than women in East-North central.¹³⁴

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|--|-------|-------------------------------|--|
| Census Year | Cases | Average Years Older than Wife | Percentage of Women Married to Men 15+ Years Older |
| Northern Census Region | | | |
| 1850 | 2,658 | 5.4 | 5.0 |
| 1860 | 3,642 | 5.5 | 5.6 |
| 1870 | 4,426 | 5.5 | 5.4 |
| 1880 | 5,846 | 5.6 | 5.2 |
| Southern Census Region | | | |
| 1850 | 1,383 | 5.9 | 7.6 |
| 1860 | 1,768 | 5.8 | 6.4 |
| 1870 | 2,067 | 5.6 | 8.0 |
| 1880 | 2,859 | 5.6 | 6.0 |

Also of interest to this discussion was the percentage of women married to a man fifteen or more years older. The statistics, according to “The Effect of the Civil War on Southern Marriage Patterns,” divided by northern and southern census regions, as shown above.

Obviously, the numbers and percentages were not high for women married to a man fifteen years or older. The percentages were higher in the southern census region.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, despite accusations of [Page 214]so-called “pedogamy” being a Latter-day Saint thing that shocked and offended the rest of the nation, while far from being in the majority, still, thousands of couples across the country obviously were in similar relationships that involved a wife much younger than the husband.

Early Marriage Age Continues into the Twentieth Century

By the end of the 19th century, most states and territories had changed the laws governing marriage age and age of consent, the majority raising the ages. The social trend toward a higher marriage age started in the industrialized Northeast in the mid-1800s, where “marriage at fifteen was indeed increasingly seen as bizarre.”¹³⁶ The trend continued into the first decades of the 20th century. After World War II, marriage age dropped significantly. In fact, a higher percentage of girls age fourteen married in 1970 than in 1940, albeit both groups were quite low compared to the rest of the population.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, in some parts of the country, marrying early was still not only acceptable but also fairly common.¹³⁸ This was especially so in places like the rural South, particularly Appalachia, where one person explained, “Marriage comes early in the mountains.” “Rural southerners particularly were much more likely to marry at younger ages than those in other regions of the country.” In fact, in the 1920s and 1930s, it was claimed that “a girl [was] a spinster at eighteen, and on the ‘cull list’ by twenty.”¹³⁹ In 1937, the marriage of Eunice Winstead to her neighbor, Charlie Johns, brought unwanted national and even international media attention to youthful marriages in eastern Tennessee. The bride was of the extremely young age of nine while the groom was 22. While the couple

had married without parental permission, both sets of parents accepted the marriage and allowed the newlyweds to set up house.¹⁴⁰

Obviously, this marriage was extraordinary and even shocked the couple's family and neighbors. Still, Eunice's mother had married at age 16, and her older sister was 13 when she married.¹⁴¹ Moreover, in 1930, only seven years before this marriage, there were still 4,506 wives (including widows and divorcées) under the age of 15.¹⁴² Thus, while young-age marriage trends had changed significantly from the middle of the 19th century, marrying at a young age had not completely disappeared and was a way of life in some parts of the United States.

Conclusion

This essay does not attempt to justify past marriages, including plural marriages, among the Latter-day Saints, which involved young brides. [Page 215]A primary concern about the recent discussion of such unions is the apparent lack of context regarding 19th-century marriage patterns. As portrayed in the pedogamy series, the men were seemingly libido-?driven pedophiliacs and the women gullible pawns. Further, pedogamy was implied as predominantly practiced by members of the Church in Nauvoo and Utah during the 19th century. Such one-dimensional depictions are not really that useful or knowledgeable, even if applauded by a host of online commentators and Facebook posters.

A more accurate view of history demonstrates that our modern understanding of what constitutes childhood and proper age of first marriage has drastically changed from earlier times. This, then, results in a more nuanced view of the topic. What shocks and offends 21st century sensibilities was accepted, sometimes even expected, in the centuries leading up to at least the later decades of the 19th-century.

As a number of non-Latter-day Saint historians and researchers have demonstrated, early-age marriages were a part of the wider American social fabric in the mid-1850s — the same period ostensibly examined in the pedogamy series. They have demonstrated that time, place, economics, demographics, and culture all played a role in determining the marriage ages of both females and males. Places where land and work were readily available encouraged early marriage, as did a high male-to-female ratio. The frontier almost always provided the right circumstances for early marriage, and the frontier was constantly in flux.

Moreover, Nauvoo of the 1840s, on the edge of the western frontier, exhibited many of the characteristics of frontier society; and Utah was certainly a frontier setting through much of the latter 19th century. It is understandable that marriages in both Nauvoo and Utah would reflect frontier marriage patterns, resemble patterns of other western and frontier states and territories, and would not reflect marriage trends of most states in the non-frontier eastern portion of the United States.

So rather than Joseph Smith's and other Latter-day Saints' marriages to teens being out of the norm or an evidence of pedophilia, these marriages seem to fit comfortably into the culture and setting of that period.¹⁴³ Despite the concerns and possible good intentions of those writing about 19th-century Latter-day Saint marriages, writers and commentators may find themselves spinning the historical data rather than accurately reporting it when they fail to take the greater historical context into account.

[Page 216]*The author would like to thank The Family History Library and FamilySearch, Suzanne L. Foster, Brian C. Hales, Allen Wyatt, Steven L. Mayfield, Martin Tanner, and Marianne T. Watson.*

1. See "Joseph Smith vs Warren Jeffs; Visualized," *Mormon Infographics* (blog), August 2, 2012, <http://www.mormoninfographics.com/2012/08/joseph-smith-vs-warren-jeffs-visualized.html>; Brett Williams, "Was

the Mormon ‘prophet’ Joseph Smith a pedophile?” Quora, October 11, 2016,

<https://www.quora.com/Was-the-Mormon-%E2%80%9Cprophet%E2%80%9D-Joseph-Smith-a-pedophile>; Steve Benson, “History, not Mystery: Joseph Smith was a Pedophile (as confirmed by even Mormon sources);” Recovery From Mormonism, March 2012,

<https://www.exmormon.org/d6/drupal/Joseph-Smith-was-a-Pedophile-Mormon-sources.>; “Joseph Smith Was a Sexual Predator,” *Issues Facing the Mormon Church: Historical and Doctrinal Issues of the LDS Faith* (blog), August 31, 2016, <http://www.116pages.com/2016/08/evidence-that-joseph-smith-was-sexual.html>; and Jeremy T. Runnells, *CES Letter: My Search for Answers to My Mormon Doubts* (CES Letter Foundation, 2017), 59 & 128, <https://cesletter.org/CES-Letter.pdf>, are just a few examples.

2. Tapirofzelp, “My wife called me a ‘pedophile,’” June 21, 2015, image, <https://imgur.com/gallery/ooVtrqr>. There are variations to that same meme. A few memes include vulgar and obscene words, while one meme was posted on Sam Young’s Facebook page by Stan Zielinski on September 16, 2018, shortly after Young was excommunicated, whose text was “If you sing the praises of a rapist you are the problem” over the cover of the Tabernacle [Page 217]Choir CD, “Praise to the Man,”

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10156320552240041>.

3. Zeke, 2015, comment on Doug Fabrizio, “The LDS Church and Joseph Smith’s Polygamy,” Radiowest audio recording, 52:26, December 4, 2014, <http://radiowest.kuer.org/post/lds-church-and-joseph-smiths-polygamy>.

4. Ds1st, comment on Peggy Fletcher Stack, “LDS essay: Mormons practiced polygamy after Manifesto,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, December 27, 2013, <http://archive.slttrib.com/article.php?id=57272299&itype=CMSID>.

5. Craig L. Foster, David Keller, and Gregory L. Smith, “The Age of Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives in Social and Demographic Context,” in Newell G. Bringham and Craig L. Foster, eds., *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2010), 152-83.

6. Todd M. Compton, “Early marriage in the New England and Northeastern States, and in Mormon Polygamy: What was the Norm?” in Bringham and Foster, *The Persistence of Polygamy*, 184-232.

7. Connell O’Donovan, “Pedogamy: ‘Sealing Girls to Old Men,’” *The Utah Bee*, November 13, 2018, <http://www.theutahbee.com/2018/11/13/sealing-girls-to-old-men-institutionalized-pedophilia-in-early-lds-church/>.

8. Even though *pedogamy* is an invented word, I shall reluctantly adopt it throughout this essay for ease of reference and for clarity in referring to the article series to which this essay refers.

9. O’Donovan, “Pedogamy: ‘Sealing Girls to Old Men.’” This article was the first of a series of articles on the topic of marriages of young girls in Utah. It was explained at the end of a later article that *The Utah Bee* does not allow people to have citations and sources in their articles. This begs the question of why O’Donovan chose this publication and format to publish these essays.

10. Sara Lundberg, 2018, comment on O’Donovan, “Pedogamy: ‘Sealing Girls to Old Men.’” If this is the correct Sara Lundberg, she appears to work for the Arlington Historical Society in Arlington, Massachusetts.

11. Cristina Rosetti, 2018, comment on O’Donovan, “Pedogamy: ‘Sealing Girls to Old Men.’” Rosetti also wrote, “There some [sic] [Page 218]historical information that I was surprised by, including hard evidence that sexual relations were happening with the young women and people knowing about it. I think it is fair to argue that this is a case of people abusing a religious principle.”

12. Facebook, “Mormon Historians” closed group discussing O’Donovan’s *pedogamy* series in *The Utah Bee*, copy of discussion between Cristina Rosetti and Brian Hales, in possession of the author. Unfortunately, the discussion over sources became personal. After the second essay was published in which the author asserted that a 42-two-year-old man fathering a child with his 14-year-old wife indicated “not just *pedogamy*, but *pedophilia* as well,” concern was again expressed about the continued lack of documentation. Another reader angrily responded, “Seriously, the girl was 14! A Child! Do you have a daughter who is 14? Do you want a nan [sic] in his 40s having a child with your daughter? It’s *pedophilia*!” Dana Robinson, 2018, comment to Connell O’Donovan, “Sarah Ann Briggs: A Child Bride from the Martin Handcart Company,” *The Utah Bee*, <http://www.theutahbee.com/2018/11/19/sarah-ann-briggs-a-child-bride-from-the-martin-handcart-company/>. Later, another wrote in response to discussion over the lack of sources, “This whole series has taught me that people care more about citations that [sic] rape. And that is shameful.” At this point, the conversation was between Cristina Rosetti and Craig L. Foster.

13. Robert D. Anderson, 2018, comment to Connell O’Donovan, “Observations and Accusations of *Pedogamy*,” *The Utah Bee*, December 4, 2018, <http://www.theutahbee.com/2018/12/04/observations-and-accusations-of-pedogamy-2/>.

14. Joy, "The Brooklyn Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children," Brooklyn Public Library, March 25, 2010, <https://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/blog/2010/03/25/brooklyn-society>. The photo is also found in an article discussing Nicholas Syrett's book *American Child Bride*. See Andrea Dukakis, "Child Marriage, Common In The Past, Persists Today," Colorado Public Radio, April 4, 2017, <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/teen-marriage-isnt-just-a-thing-of-the-past>. Unlike *The Utah Bee* article, Colorado Public Radio identifies the girl and properly credits the photograph.
- [Page 219]15. Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life: 1790?1840*, rep. ed. (New York City: Harper Perennial, 1989), 69.
16. Willis F. Dunbar, George S. May, *Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State*, rev. ed., (1965; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 175.
17. James E. Davis, *Frontier America, 1800?1840: A Comparative Demographic Analysis of the Settlement Process* (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark, 1977), 51?52.
18. Connell O'Donovan, "Statistical Data on Pedogamy," *The Utah Bee*, December 11, 2018, <http://www.theutahbee.com/2018/12/11/statistical-data-on-pedogamy/>.
19. O'Donovan, "Pedogamy: 'Sealing Girls to Old Men.'"
20. Eugene E. Campbell, *Establishing Zion: The Mormon Church in the American West, 1847?1869* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 197.
21. Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840?1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 106?07.
22. *Ibid.*, 107.
23. It should go without saying that minus source documentation, it is virtually impossible for anyone else to independently verify whether the stories are truly representative or the findings statistically sound.
24. O'Donovan, "Statistical Data on Pedogamy."
25. *Ibid.*
26. Wikipedia, s.v. "Pedophilia," last edited January 18, 2019, 21:36, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedophilia>; *Psychology Today*, s.v. "Hebephilia," January 23, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/hebephilia>; and, Wikipedia, s.v. "Ephebophilia," last edited January 11, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephebophilia>.
27. Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History and Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), 2:295?98.
28. See Bret Stetka, "Extended Adolescence: When 25 Is the New 18," *Scientific American*, September 19, 2017, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/extended-adolescence-when-25-is-the-new-181/>; and Suzanne McFarlin, "We Make It Easy for Our Children to Not Grow Up," *Huffington Post*, September 13, 2014, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/suzanne-mcfarlin/we-make-it-easy-for-our-children-not-to-grow-up_b_5581856.html.
- [Page 220]29. Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 16.
30. Rebecca Price Janney, *Then Comes Marriage? A Cultural History of the American Family* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 45, 46.
31. Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 31.
32. Nicholas L. Syrett, *American Child Bride: A History of Minors and Marriage in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2016), 3.
33. *Ibid.*, 1.
34. Syrett, "Statutory Marriage Ages and the Gendered Construction of Adulthood in the Nineteenth Century," in *Age in America: The Colonial Era to the Present*, ed. Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 106. On the same page, Syrett reiterates that "there is plentiful evidence of individual cases from across the growing nation to indicate that marriage in the middle teen years, and sometimes earlier, while by no means the norm, was relatively common."
35. Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 2.
36. Joseph D. Lee, "Annual Address," *Transactions of the Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association* 41?45 (Portland, OR: Chausse-Prudhomme, 1916): 64.
37. Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 4.
38. Lee, "Annual Address," 64. Syrett noted in *American Child Bride*, 13, that "from the moment that it entered

Americans' vocabulary, the phrase 'child bride' has regularly been applied to those in their teens and even twenties. ... The phrase encompasses the discomfort that Americans feel about young people marrying, even when those young people may or may not be, by one definition or another, 'children.'"

39. S.N.D. North, comp., *Marriage Laws in the United States, 1887?1906*, ed. Desmond Walls Allen (Conway, AR: Arkansas Research, 1993). As late as 1906, six states still had 12 as the minimum age for girls. Also, according to Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 28, throughout the colonial period, New York had no minimum marriageable age.

40. Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 19.

[Page 221]41. Ibid. It should be noted, according to p. 21, that these young ages have their roots in religious canon law and were sometimes called "canon ages."

42. Ibid., 27. New France at one time included the Mississippi River basin, the Ohio River basin, the Great Lakes and into Canada with most of Ontario, all of Québec, and most of the Maritime Provinces. New Spain included Florida, most of Texas, and areas westward.

43. Mike A. Males, *Teenage Sex and Pregnancy: Modern Myths, Unsexy Realities* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 40. See also Richard A. Posner and Katharine B. Silbaugh, *A Guide to America's Sex Laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 44; and Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 46.

44. Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 2. Also, on p. 5, "Before the eighteenth century, children as young as eight or nine married in America, and children in their teen age years have been marrying in the United States since then."

45. Ibid., 43.

46. Claudia Olivetti and M. Daniele Paserman, "In the Name of the Son (and Daughter): Intergenerational Mobility in the United States, 1850?1940," *The American Economic Review* 105, no. 8 (August 2015): 2706.

47. Christopher Waldrep, "Creating a Metaphor for the Past: Uniting History and Computing in the Classroom," *Perspectives: American Historical Association Newsletter* 33, no. 3 (March 1995): 13.

48. Sheri Stritof, "May-December Marriage — Marriage Age Difference," Very Well Mind, November 17, 2017, <https://www.verywellmind.com/may-december-marriage-age-difference-2303203>. Admittedly, this article concerns modern marriages like Tony Randall and Heather Harland with 50 years difference, Dick Van Dyke and Arlene Silver with 46 years difference, right down to Jay-Z and Beyoncé Knowles with 12 years difference.

49. These are examples of couples with a 15-or-more-year age difference found in the process of genealogical and historical research. Although they are not representative of the majority of U.S. married couples, they still reflect unions with a significant age difference from the mid- to later-19th-century. While some marriages might have been surprising and perhaps even frowned upon, they nonetheless existed and were legal, and [Page 222]those involved were accepted into society.

50. Anne Simons Deas, *Recollections of the Ball Family of South Carolina and the Comingtee Plantation* (1909; repr., Charleston: South Carolina Historical Society, 1978), 52.

51. Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 39?42.

52. Ibid., 56.

53. 1880 United State Census, Mound Valley, Elko County, Nevada; p. 96B; June 1, 1880; National Archives Microfilm Roll 758.

54. 1880 United State Census, Conejos Valley, Conejos County, Colorado; p. 176C; June 1, 1880; National Archives Microfilm Roll 89.

55. 1880 United State Census, Huerfano, Colorado; p. 226A; June 1, 1880; National Archives Microfilm Roll 91.

56. 1880 United State Census, Callatta Mining, Meagher County, Montana; p. 421A; June 1, 1880; National Archives Microfilm Roll 742; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *FamilySearch*, Pierre J. Venne (1827) and Marie Belgarde (abt 1847) family group record, accessed July 28, 2018,

<https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/KPDT-97L>.

57. *FamilySearch*, William Turnage Sr. (1837) and Elizabeth Silverthorn (1857) family group record,

<https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/L2WG-DV4>.

58. The following are some additional examples of such marital unions: John B. Aiken, 55, and Sarah Aiken, 12, living in Danville, Indiana, in 1880 (this was obviously a second marriage for him, as he had an eleven-year-old-daughter living in the household, no doubt making interesting family dynamics); Reuben F. Beals, 47, and Amanda M. Beals, 13, living in Clover, Illinois, in 1880; Lucas Andausky, 45, and Agnes Andausky, 13, living in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1880; John Bewes, 42, and Mary Bewes, 16, living in Cherry Creek, Nevada, in 1880; Ventura Lopez, 31, and Maria Lopez, 13, living in Pueblo, Colorado, in 1880; and John Brown, 34, and Ann Brown, 15, of Pioneer,

Montana, in 1880. These examples simply personalize and put a face, so to speak, on such unions. With that in mind, the final example is that of Jonas Dalton, 23, and Isabelle Dalton, 13, living in Callands, Virginia, in 1880. Both were obviously below the fifteen-year age difference. But at the time of the census, they had an eleven-month-old son, Charles, meaning that Isabelle was at least twelve and perhaps a bit younger at the time of marriage. [Page 223]59. Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 46.

60. Ibid., 56

61. Ibid., 15.

62. April Sanders, "Age of Marriage in the U.S. in the 1800s," The Classroom, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://classroom.synonym.com/age-marriage-us-1800s-23174.html>.

63. Emma Griffin, "A Conundrum Resolved? Rethinking Courtship, Marriage and Population Growth in Eighteenth-Century England," *Past & Present*, no. 215 (May 2012):141?42.

64. Joseph E. Illick, "Childhood in Three Cultures in Early America," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 64, Empire, Society, and Labor: Essays in Honor of Richard S. Dunn (Summer 1997): 311.

65. Kristin Senecal, "Marriage and Fertility Patterns in Cumberland County, 1800?1859," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 71, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 193.

66. Jim Potter, "Population," in *Reader's Guide to American History*, ed. Peter J. Parish (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 551.

67. Allan Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 228.

68. Alice Morse Earle, "Old-Time Marriage Customs in New England," *The Journal of American Folklore* 6, no. 21 (Apr-Jun 1893): 99.

69. Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers*, 228. Ben Marsh, *Georgia's Frontier Women: Female Fortunes in a Southern Colony* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 32, demonstrates that marrying quickly and early extended from New England down to the southern colonies, as far as Georgia: "The colonial records of Georgia highlight the young age of many first-time brides and the celerity with which they became wives after their arrival in the province" (p. 31).

70. Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers*, 228.

71. David T. Courtwright, *Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 139.

72. J. A. Doyle, *The English Colonies in America: The Puritan Colonies* (New York: Henry Holt, 1887), 3:5. Obviously, it depends on how "early marriage" is defined as well as on locality. Philip J. Greven, [Page 224]Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 32?33, wrote that while historians have assumed that men and women in the 17th and 18th-century Massachusetts married at a very young age — in their teens or early twenties — that was not always the case. He found that marriages in early Andover were at a higher age, similar to those of 17th-century England. Further, women's age at first marriage ranged between 21.1 and 22.5 for 1680?1705 (pp. 120?21). After 1705, the age at marriage sharply increased. While the second generation had 35.8 % of women who married do so under age 21, the third generation only had 27.6% do so. Of the third generation who married under age 21, the youngest was age 16, but 17 was more common. There were no marriages of females age 12 to 15. Greven notes that as with other places and people of that time, marriages "were as much an economic as an emotional affair, involving the transference of property from one generation to another and from one family to another" (p. 74).

73. *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, s.v. "Women," last updated May 30, 2018, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=400>. In *The Book of History, A History of all Nations from the Earliest Times to the Present* (New York: The Grolier Society, 1915), 12: 6314, when discussing the American frontier, explains that "Early marriage was the rule and families were large." Furthermore, according to Richard H. Steckel, "Antebellum Southern White Fertility: A Demographic and Economic Analysis," *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 2 (June 1980): 350, "A demographic analysis reveals that relatively higher child-woman ratios in the West are explained primarily by earlier marriage and a higher proportion of women who married."

74. Henry Garrison, quoted in Jim Tompkins, comp., "In Their Own Words: Teenagers On The Trail," Oregon Pioneers (website), accessed February 16, 2018, <http://www.oregonpioneers.com/TeenagerQuotes.htm>.

75. Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 44. The explanation that while no longer on the frontier, early marriage in the South was particularly common for two populations: "the landed gentry and their slaves. Plantation owners smiled

on the marriages of their youthful daughters to suitable mates (sometimes their own [Page 225]relatives)” (p. 44).

76. Jeremy Agnew, *Brides of the Multitude: Prostitution in the Old West* (Lake City, CO: Western Reflections Publishing, 2008), 43.
77. Richard A. Easterlin, et al., “Farms and Farm Families in Old and New Areas: The Northern States in 1860,” in *Family and Population in Nineteenth-Century America*, eds. Tamara K. Hareven and Maris A. Vinovskis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 40.
78. Lillian Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982, 1992), 45; and Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 70.
79. Cynthia Culver Prescott, ““Why She Didn’t Marry Him’: Love, Power, and Marital Choice on the Far Western Frontier,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 38 (Spring 2007): 29.
80. Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier*, 60.
81. *Ibid.*, 61.
82. *Ibid.*, 62?63.
83. *Ibid.*, 64.
84. *Ibid.*, 65 and 63.
85. Elizabeth Keegan, quoted in Tompkins, “In Their Own Words: Teenagers On The Trail.”
86. Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier*, 63.
87. *Ibid.*, 62.
88. John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 87?88. Faragher explains that Sugar Creek’s first generation of women married at the average age of 19 while their daughters married at the average age of 21. Only one in 10 women had five or fewer children. Their size of family was about average for both north and south backcountry families but significantly higher than in rural and urban centers of the Northeast.
89. *FamilySearch*, Charles Garland (1831) and Minerva Ellis (1847) family group record, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/KH3S-289>.
90. Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, 2nd ed. (200; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 78.
91. J. David Hacker, Libra Hilde, and James Holland Jones, “The Effect of the Civil War on Southern Marriage Patterns,” *Journal of Southern History* 76, no. 1 (2010): 43. [Page 226]92. *Ibid.*, 50.
93. Silvio Dumas, *Les Filles du Roi en Nouvelle-France: Études Historique avec Répertoire Biographic* (Québec: Société Historique de Québec, 1972), 67; and “Most French Canadians are descended from these 800 women,” CBC, March 30, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/2017/canadathestoryofus/most-french-canadians-are-descended-from-these-800-women-1.4029>
699. The ages of 11.5% of the women could not be identified. Within a few generations, the age of marriage began to increase and reflect more the western European marriage patterns. According to Cynthia R. Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850?1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 72?73, a significant upward trend in marriage age in eastern Canada began in the mid-nineteenth-century. By 1901, it had decreased a little. Although the marriage rate had risen, the birth rate continued to fall, “a pattern found when marital fertility declines. Fertility was markedly lower in towns and cities than in rural areas.”
94. “The Filles à Marier, 1634?1662,” We All Came From Somewhere (website), accessed January 16, 2018, http://www.oocities.org/weallcamefromsomewhere/Kebec/filles_marier.html.
95. “The Boucher Matriarch,” We All Came From Somewhere (website), accessed January 18, 2018, http://www.oocities.org/weallcamefromsomewhere/Kebec/perrine_mallet.html.
96. “A Plowman’s Daughter,” We All Came From Somewhere (website), accessed January 18, 2018, http://www.oocities.org/weallcamefromsomewhere/Kebec/louise_couillard.html. Marguerite did not have a baby until three years after their marriage, so they may have waited until she was older to consummate the marriage.
97. “The Cloutier Sisters,” We All Came From Somewhere (website), accessed January 18, 2018, http://www.oocities.org/weallcamefromsomewhere/Kebec/cloutier_sisters.html.
98. “Life on the Beupre Coast,” We All Came From Somewhere (website), accessed January 18, 2018, http://www.oocities.org/weallcamefromsomewhere/Kebec/mariemag_guyon.html; “Généalogie Marie Guyon,” Généalogie du Québec et d’Amérique française, accessed January 18, 2018, http://www.nosorigines.org/GenealogieQuebec.aspx?genealogie=Guyon_Marie&pid=3956; and “Généalogie

Marie Martin,” *Généalogie* [Page 227]du Québec et d’Amérique française, accessed January 18, 2018,

http://www.nosorigines.org/GenealogieQuebec.aspx?genealogie=Martin_Marie&pid=1174.

99. Geovanni M., “The Women The King Of France Used To Populate His Colonies,” January 12, 2017, <https://culturacolectiva.com/history/casket-girls-louisiana-french-colonies/>; and Kelly Kazek, “When French orphans called Casket Girls came to Alabama as wives for colonists,” *Alabama Living*, September 14, 2015, http://www.al.com/living/index.ssf/2015/09/when_french_orphans_called_cas.html.

100. Mary Perez, “Are you descended from one of the ‘brides’ of Biloxi?” *Sun Herald*, May 7, 2017, <http://www.sunherald.com/news/local/counties/harrison-county/article1049077319.html>. The French were not alone in bringing marriageable women to a place lacking such. In the mid-1800s, Seattle, Washington had its own version of “filles du Roi” and “filles à marier.” According to Marshall Trimble, “Courtship and Marriage in the Territories,” *True West Magazine*, November 1, 2017, <https://truewestmagazine.com/courtship-marriage-territories/>, in the early 1860s, Asa Mercer, a native New Englander, noting the lack of marriageable women, traveled back to Lowell, Massachusetts to recruit some women. Eleven, known as “Mercer Girls,” went with him in 1864. Their ages ranged from Annie Mae Adams, age 16, to Lizzie Ordway, age 35. In 1866, mercer recruited about 100 women known as “Mercer’s Belles.” The 1968?1970 television series “Here Come the Brides” was loosely based on Mercer Girls.

101. Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850?1940*, 72?73. According to Comacchio, by 1901, marriage age had decreased a little. Although the marriage rate had risen, the birth rate continued to fall, “a pattern found when marital fertility declines. Fertility was markedly lower in towns and cities than in rural areas.”

102. Peter Ward, *Courtship, Love, and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Canada: McGill-Queens University Press, 1990), 51.

103. *Ibid.*, 58. The average age gap of men in their late twenties and early thirties was eight years.

104. Elizabeth Shown Mills, “Family and Social Patterns of the Colonial Louisiana Frontier: A Quantitative Analysis, [Page 228]1714?1803,” (BA thesis, University of Alabama, 1981), 131.

105. *Ibid.*, 135.

106. *Ibid.* By the 1790s, fewer than 10 percent of girls were marrying before age 15 and 45 percent were marrying after the age of 20 (136). Despite the previous quotes and statistics, Mills stated that the generalization about early marriages had been made about French Louisiana and “numerous societies.” She then added on the same page that “occasional examples of very early marriages can be found at Natchitoches, as well as elsewhere, and females did exhibit a tendency (a decreasing tendency) to marry somewhat earlier than their contemporaries in France and early Anglo-America” (131).

107. *Ibid.*, 140.

108. Patricia Cleary, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil: A history of Colonial St. Louis* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 20.

109. Linda Peavy & Ursula Smith, *Frontier Children* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 141.

100. Courtwright, *Violent Land*, 137.

111. “Domestic Challenges,” Bureau of Land Management, National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, accessed February 18, 2018, https://www.blm.gov/or/oregontrail/files/LoveCherish_Domestic_Challenge.pdf.

112. Sallie Hester, quoted in Jim Tompkins, comp., “In Their Own Words: Teenagers On The Trail.”

113. Peavy & Smith, *Frontier Children*, 141.

114. Albert L. Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 104?05.

115. Kenneth L. Holmes, ed., *Best of Covered Wagon Women Vol. 2: Emigrant Girls on the Overland Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 20.

116. Daniel M. Rosen, “Survivors and Casualties,” Donner Party Diary, accessed February 1, 2018, <http://www.donnerpartydiary.com/survivor.html>.

117. Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers*, 76.

118. *Ibid.* and Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 69.

119. Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers*, 77. Hurtado further explained on p. 129, “For a century and more, California had too many men. This basic demographic fact meant intense competition for women, [Page 229]some of whom benefited from a favorable marriage market. This condition encouraged families to betroth prepubescent californianas in the Spanish and Mexican eras, a custom that harked back to Iberian practice.”

[120.](#) Holmes, *Best of Covered Wagon Women*, 20.

[121.](#) Courtwright, *Violent Land*, 138.

[122.](#) Jessica Hager, "Love and marriage in Appalachia," *Smoky Mountain Living: Celebrating the Southern Appalachians*, February 1, 2011, <http://www.smliv.com/features/love-and-marriage-in-appalachia/>.

[123.](#) Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 55.

[124.](#) *Ibid.*, 57.

[125.](#) Allan C. Carlson, *Conjugal America: On the Public Purposes of Marriage* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2008), 81.

[126.](#) James M. Gallman, "Determinants of Age at Marriage in Colonial Perquimans County, North Carolina," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Jan. 1982), 180. Gallman calculated his own marriage age totals for men and women residing in Perquimans County from before 1680 to 1740. These totals do not agree with the statement regarding early marriage, including ages 13 and 14, and show higher averages ranging between 18 to 22 for brides for the period being discussed. "This statement is clearly inaccurate for Perquimans women; the records show none marrying at age thirteen, and only two each marrying at fourteen and fifteen" (180). This statement and accompanying statistics show that not all places had very early marriages. It should be noted that Perquimans County is located in the northeast part of North Carolina, one county to the south of the North Carolina-Virginia border and fewer than 25 miles from the Atlantic coast. The writer was probably describing the Carolina backcountry rather than this part of North Carolina.

[127.](#) David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 675. There are numerous anecdotal examples of early marriage. Two are provided. According to "American Revolutionary War Record of William Warren," *Central Kentucky Researcher* 4, no. 12 (December 1974): 2?3, William Warren married Rhoda (no maiden name given) in about 1775 when she was fourteen years old. They eventually had thirteen children, the first born eighteen months after their marriage. Another example found [Page 230]in John J. Roark, *Hardtack and Hardship: The Life and Times of Confederate Veteran James A. Roark and His Family* (Dallas, Texas: Personal Profiles Publishing, 1996), 42, James Roark's sister, Sarah Elizabeth, known as Liz, married at age 12 in 1846 in Hamilton County, Tennessee to 23-year-old Joel A. Talley. Their first child was born in 1847.

[128.](#) Allan C. Carlson, *Family Cycles: Strength, Decline, and Renewal in American Domestic Life, 1630?2000* (London: Routledge, 2017), 58.

[129.](#) *Ibid.*, 58, 60.

[130.](#) Syrett, *Age in America*, 106.

[131.](#) Hacker, Hilde, and Jones, "The Effect of the Civil War on Southern Marriage Patterns," 52?54. The article notes all statistics between 1850 and 1870 are based on imputed relationships.

[132.](#) *Ibid.*, 53.

[133.](#) *Ibid.*, 54.

[134.](#) *Ibid.*

[135.](#) *Ibid.*, 66.

[136.](#) Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 55.

[137.](#) *Ibid.*, 232. The table shows that the percentage of girls age fourteen who were married in 1940 was 0.28%, compared to 1.07% in 1970. The percentage of girls age 15?17 in 1940 was 4.55% compared to 4.30% in 1970. On page 233, the table showing the "Percentage of Married Teens Age Fifteen to Nineteen by Year, Sex, and Region, 1940?1960" shows 1.9% of boys and 8.6% of girls in the Northeast in 1950, compared to 4.5% of boys and 23.7% of girls in the South and 3.7% of boys and 20% of girls in the West. By 1960, the percentage was 2.5% for boys and 10.2% for girls in the Northeast, 4.9% for the boys and 20.3% for the girls in the South, and 4.5% for the boys and 18.4% for the girls in the West.

[138.](#) An example of such would be, according to Steven Mintz and Susan Kellog, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 103, coal mining villages of northeastern and western Pennsylvania, southern West Virginia, and the Midwest. In these places, "coal miners tended to marry at an unusually early age and to have large numbers of children. A low marriage age was encouraged by the fact coal miners reached their peak earnings at an early age, usually in their late teens and early twenties. ... Independent [Page 231]wages permitted sons to set up their own households at a relatively early age."

[139.](#) Syrett, *American Child Bride*, 203?04, 221.

[140.](#) *Ibid.*, 202-0 3, 206. It should also be noted that Eunice had obviously not experienced menarche and, when

the subject of sexual relations was broached by members of the press, it was made clear that they were not having sexual relations and would not do so until she was old enough. Her first child was not born until she was 15 years old.

[141](#). Ibid., 203.

[142](#). Ibid., 218.

[143](#). Critics may respond by reminding anyone who will listen that Joseph Smith's plural marriages were an aberration and outside of accepted marriage practices in 19th century America. This is a case of stating the obvious — they were polygynous marriages in a monogamous society. Most will admit that fact, but Joseph Smith's polygynous marriages were just as obviously not the focus of this article.