

Polygamy and Mormon Church Leaders
William Adams Hickman
aka Brigham Young's Destroying Angel
April 16, 1815 – August 21, 1883

“1846. Fought in the “Battle of Nauvoo: ... How many were killed I never learned. I had been anxious from a boy to be in a battle, but I assure you this fight took a great deal of starch out of me. My appetite for such fun has never been so craving since.” – *A Book of Mormons*, p 119,
Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker

“Wild Bill Hickman” was a colorful fellow with a wide range of vocations in his repertoire. Born the oldest child of thirteen in Kentucky his parents moved to Missouri when William was three years old. (*Brigham's Destroying Angel*) Manyresources also note that he was a skilled woodsman being raised in his father's business of a grist mill.

He married his first wife Bernetta Burckhardt in 1832 when he was all of seventeen and she was twenty. (*Brigham's Destroying Angel*, pg 33. Most other resources state he was 16 yrs old.) He met her while boarding at her father's home while attending school and against the wishes of both sets of parents they were married. He got a job straightaway teaching school.

It's said he looked for religion everywhere while growing up and joined the Methodist faith which is what his wife grew up in and originally rejected Mormonism, but converted in 1839 and was baptized by no less than John D. Lee. (“A Book of Mormons”) By 1840 he was one of the twelve who was ordained as a body guard for Joseph Smith. The same book notes the many people he killed from 1850 to 1859.

His monogamous lifestyle came to a close in 1846 when he began taking in other wives, the first of those being Sarah Luce although that marriage was short lived as they were divorced in 1850.

Over all he had ten wives and fathered 39 kids. He served the Church for numerous decades in various capacities such as being a body guard for Joseph Smith and Brigham Young during the early heyday years of Mormonism, bishop's counselor, attorney, mail carrier, member of the Seventies, sheriff, avenger and murderer. *Signature Books Excerpts Wild Bill Hickman and the Mormon Frontier*

“Wild Bill's” reputation will go down in history as one of the most controversial in Mormondom. The Church claims they never sanctioned any of his nefarious deeds, but according to independent eyewitness testimonies in addition to Hickman's, this is a misnomer. Even the feds cut a deal with Hickman; in exchange for his testimony against Brigham Young's complicity in many of the murders, he would tell all to avoid a prison sentence.

He played a prominent role in the Utah War by torching Fort Bridger and numerous supply trains of the Federal Army which helped keep the US government at bay from interfering with the activities in the Utah Territory.

The same reference given above from [Signature Books](#) provided a blessing given by Joseph Young to Hickman before he set out on a four month journey to carry mail for the Church. In part alluding to his activities in blood atonement for the Church it reads;

“...a blessing by church patriarch, John Young:

...I bless you with health, strength, and life and say thy body shall be blest with health . . . to perform the duties, the arduous duties you shall have to perform.

You shall have wisdom, discretion, and understanding and knowledge to foresee evil, when danger approaches you the Angel of Life shall be with you to forewarn you of those things. If you are faithful you shall assist in avenging the blood of the prophets of God, and assist in accomplishing the great work of the last days . . . You shall be blest in all things and not a hair of your head shall fall to the ground by the enemy . . . [God] shall give you favor in the eyes of the people where you are going and you shall fill your mission with honor and return safe to the valleys of the mountains, to your family and friends. The Angel of mercy and life shall be upon your right hand in all times of trouble, danger and difficulty, and trial, and everything shall fall before you that might be used to prevent you from accomplishing the duties of life.”

Only the Lord and Hickman know how many people he murdered, but to say it was a lot would be the understatement of the year. In his [book](#) he confessed to being an active participant to the Aikman murders which took place in May 1857, just four months before the Mountain Meadows Massacre. The party was traveling through Utah when the Danites stopped them, put them through a mock trial and took them out to the hills and murdered them. They stole the cattle and \$25,000 in cash the party was transporting for their bosses (probably Johnston's Army) from Sacramento back to Arkansas.

He also confessed to knowing about the murder of Yates who was a fur trader. In his confession he implicated Hosea Stout and two others of murdering him upon the orders of Brigham Young. [Brigham's Destroying Angel, pg 122.](#)

If you search for info on his background you're sure to come across many websites provided by his descendants who emphatically denounce the book Brigham's Destroying Angel written by JH Beadle stating Hickman never profited from the book and that much of its content was rewritten not giving a true portrayal of the real William Hickman.

While Beadle did indeed interview Hickman during his house arrest awaiting trial for the murder of Yates, it's probably as close to the truth of William's history that we'll ever know.

In 1868 he was [excommunicated](#) for “reasons that were unclear”. From that point on he was treated and looked upon as a leper in the community. The wives that were still married to him all left except for Bernetta, the first wife he married in Missouri.

He died in 1883 due to lingering complications (dysentery) from a gunfight in 1869.

As always, because there's a certain standard the Church must live up to, after his death they restored his blessings in 1934 through prophet Grant.

Unless otherwise noted in imbedded links below, information on basic vitals for each wife were obtained from Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841-1846: A Preliminary Demographic Report by George D. Smith.

| | Wife/Age @ marriage (Hickman's age) |  | Marriage date | Kids | Other info | Wife's marital status |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|---------------|------|--|-----------------------|
| 1 | Bernetta Burkhardt – 19 (16) |  | 4/12/1832 | 8 | Born 8/8/1812 KY Died 12/27/1886 UT Only wife who didn't leave him after his ex-communication from church. Findagrave reports she was known as a "Mother in Israel". Records.ancestry. | Single |

com lists her w/
9 kids.

Geni.com says
she was married
to James Barton
Hickman as well
as Wm.

Earlylds.com lists
birth date 1810
but only lists 4 kids

Vitals on her birth
above are from

Nauvoo Report by
George D. Smith.

The 1810 b/day
is probably correct.

Familytreemaker.
genealogy.com lists
marriage to Wm

w/ 11 kids. At
least 2 of

their kids

died as infants.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|-----------|---|--|--------|
| 2 | Sarah Elizabeth Luce Hickman Beebe Berry- 17 (30) |  | 1/30/1846 | 1 | <p>Born 9/11/1829 ME</p> <p>Died 3/29/1909 UT</p> <p>Hickmansfamily homstead.com says she arrived in UT 1847. Gave birth to a child in SLC 1849, but Hickman wouldn't claim the boy as his citing he was in IA thru 1848. She named the child William Adams Hickman, Jr. This site also said the child was born in 1850 as recorded in Patty Bartlett Sessions' diary.</p> <p>1853 Sarah married</p> | Single |
|---|---|---|-----------|---|--|--------|

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|------------------|---|--|--------|
| | | | | | William Albert Beebe. | |
| 3 | Minerva Emma Wade Hickman - 19 (34) |  | 5/1/ 1849 | 8 | Born 9/2/1829 NY Died 12/23/1918 UT Her father was part of the Mormon Battalion Earlylds reports marriage to Wm 1849 & marriage to George Albert Smith 6/1899 - site also shows sealing to parents 1/1990 in SLC & death date of 1877 which is wrong. No other info on | Single |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|------------------|---|---------------|
| | | | | <p>her marriage to Smith outside the earlylds.com reference.</p> <p>Records.ancestry.com lists marriage to Hickman w/ 10 kids.</p> <p>Hickmanmuseum.homestead.com lists letter of daughter (Mrs. Shaw) for anti-Mormon book written in early 1900's giving insight to marital problems amongst all the wives.</p> | |
| 4 | <p>Sarah Basford Meacham Hickman Franks - 15 (35)</p> |  | <p>8/18/1850</p> | <p>4</p> <p>Born 10/10/1834 USA</p> <p>Died 11/29/1909 CO</p> <p>Records.ancestry.</p> | <p>Single</p> |

com lists marriage
to Wm w/ 9
kids.

Geni.com lists
marriages to Wm –
no kids except
for stepchildren.

Earlylds.com lists
her as wife
#6 w/ no kids.

Hickmansfamily.
homstead.com says
they were married
while crossing the
plains in 1850 –
they had 4 kids.

Familytreemaker.com
notes her marriage
to John Franks
7/1868.

Freepagesgenealogy.
rootsweb.ancestry.
com cites marriage
to Hickman and

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---------------|---|--|--------|
| | | | | | Franks. Notes she had 5 kids w/ Franks. | |
| 5 | Hannah Dyantha Harr (Horr) Byington – 17 (38) |  | 9/11/ 1853 | 5 | Born 8/3/1836 MO Died 7/27/1917 ID Findagrave lists her marriage & that of her sister Mary's marriage to Wm when they both worked part time for Brigham Young. It states neither sister liked living in polygamy & ran away in the middle of the night | Single |

w/ Hannah's 2
kids.

A temple divorce
was granted to
both 11/1860.

Hannah married
Hyrum Byington
2/1861 in
SLC - sealed in
1873.

Findagrave also
notes her sister's
death in 1863.

Hickmansfamily.
homstead.com notes
her 2 kids w/
Hickman.

Records.ancestry.
com lists 2
kids w/ Wm &
8 kids w/
Byington.

Earlylds.com cites
marriage to Wm

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|------------------|---|---|--------|
| | | | | | <p>w/ no kids.</p> <p>She was sealed to her parents 6/1987 in Provo.</p> | |
| 6 | <p>Sarah Eliza “Virginia” Johnson – 26 or 16 (39)</p> |  | <p>3/28/1855</p> | 5 | <p>Born 3/7/1829 or 1839 OH</p> <p>Died 9/24/1889 MT</p> <p>Hickmansfamily.homestead.com & Findagrave.com gives same report – “On 14 September 1870 Bill sued Frank Moreno, “Spanish Frank” to regain custody of his three daughters Laura, Susan, and Caroline, then</p> | Single |

living on an
isolated ranch
in Rush Valley.
Frank and Eliza
refused to give
up the children
and a few days
later he was
killed by a
shotgun blast. This
was the beginning
of the worst of
Bill's troubles.
Eliza is said
to have moved to
Butte, Montana
and married Edwin
Sherman, who
owned a funeral
home.”

Author who wrote
Brigham's Destroying
Angel said he

was sure Hickman

was guilty of

murdering her 2nd

husband

(Spanish Frank).

See Brigham's

Destroying Angel,

pp 187-189.

Records.ancestry.

com reports her

birth in 1838

not 1829.

Findagrave.com &

genealogy.rootsweb.

ancestry.com lists

her birth in 1839.

Most reports give

1839 so Nauvoo

Report &

hickmansfamily.

homestead.com

is likely a typo.

Earlylds.com lists

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---------------|---|--|-----|
| | | | | | their marriage, no kids. | |
| 7 | Margaret Hickman (Shoshone Indian) – 35 (39) | | 3/28/ 1855 | 0 | Born 1820 ??? Died ??? ??? Thisistheplace.org provides picture of her log home. Lists her marriage to Hickman & that she was a foster daughter of Brigham Young. Hickmansfamily. homestead.com lists her marriage to Wm – no picture, no kids, about 35 yrs | ??? |

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|---|--|---|------------------|---|---|------------------------|
| | | | | | <p>old @ time of marriage.</p> <p>Earlylds.com lists marriage, no kids & her name as "Margaret Indian".</p> | |
| 8 | <p>Martha Diana Case Howland – 33 (41)</p> |  | <p>11/2/1856</p> | 4 | <p>Born 1823 PA</p> <p>Died 1872</p> <p>ID</p> <p>Earlylds.com gives excerpt from Pioneer Women of Faith & Fortitude, V 2:345-346 on marriage to Howard Howland.</p> <p>He died in 1852.</p> <p>She moved to SLC w/ 3 daughters & married</p> | <p>Widow/ Divorced</p> |

Telamchus Rogers –
had 1 girl –
divorced him.

Married Hickman in
1855; had 4 kids.

It also gave
excerpt which we've
listed here:

“The temple records
indicate that she
was sealed to
all three husbands.

Joseph Fielding
Smith wrote a
daughter answering
this problem that
such problems as
this one will be
worked during the
Millennium.

The children of
all three marriages
wanted to and

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|--|-----------------------|---|--|--------|
| | | | | | <p>were sealed to Henry Howland.”</p> <p>Henry died from cholera on MO river while on their way to UT.</p> <p>Records.ancestry.com reports she had 7 kids w/ Henry & 4 w/ Hickman.</p> | |
| 9 | <p>Mary Jane Lucretia Harr (Horr) – 16 (41)</p> | | <p>8/30/ 1856</p> | 2 | <p>Born 12/1839 IL Died 1863 USA Conflicting reports on whether or not she had kids. Her sister Hannah’s finagrave link says Mary had no kids.</p> | Single |

Earlylds.com cites
marriage to Hickman
w/ no kids.

Familytreemaker.
genealogy.com lists
marriage, no kids.

Nauvoo Report says
she had 2 kids.

Freepages.genealogy.
rootsweb.ancestry.com

lists a daughter Vie
(Violala) – born in
1859

has census record#.

To complicate matters
more hickmansfamily.
homestead.com lists

2 kids and a son
named Vie.

She & her sister
(wife #5) snuck away
in the night w/ kids
to escape polygamy,
granted divorces in

| | | | | | |
|----|--|---|--------------|---|---|
| | | | | | 1860 but her sister remarried polygamist. |
| 10 | (Mary) Jane Heatherton Heatherington Hickman – 19 (44) |  | 6/2/ 1859 | 2 | Born 3/20/1840 NY Died 5/29/1923 UT Freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com lists marriage, 2 kids & last name of Heatherington. Her death certificate says Heatherington. A bio of her is provided on Hickmansfamily.homestead.com. She was known as “Aunt Jane” & was summoned by townsfolk many times to help in medical |

emergencies.

She was orphaned

by the time her

family made it

to SLC. She

made money by

doing laundry for

miners & boarding

those w/out

a hotel. She

married Hickman

& had 2 sons,

one of which died in

mining explosion.

She moved to CA for

awhile but moved

back to UT to live

w/ her son.