

Polygamy and Mormon Church Leaders
Benjamin Franklin Johnson
July 28, 1818 – November 18, 1905

The dominating keyword in each of the families involved is inbreeding. I've researched more than thirty families in our series, and have come across my fair share of shallow gene pools in my day. While it can be cumbersome to follow, the trails that are intertwined eventually become more clearly defined so one can make sense of it all.

However, I've never witnessed anything like this family. No one, and I do mean no one, has the same story twice. Typically the person hosting the site w/ the info will be identified. I found maybe 3-4 who had a real name attached. Everything else said 'by private user'. This leads me to believe the Church is behind the odious information presented on this family. If I can be proven wrong, I'll be more than happy to report it. Making matters worse, the majority of Benjamin Johnson's wives were related to each other in one way or another. With that being said, here we go folks!

[The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Johnson, 1818-1903; My Life's Review](#); "...April 3rd or 4th, 1843...I looked him straight in the face and said: "Brother Joseph...if I ever should know that you do this to dishonor and debauch my sister, I will kill you as sure as the Lord lives." ... we soon met the Prophet with his brother Hyrum and Wm. Clayton...this was the manner of his talk to me...I [Hyrum Smith] know that Joseph was commanded to take more wives, and he waited until an angel with a drawn sword stood before him and declared that if he longer delayed fulfilling that command he would slay him.'..."

[Infant and childhood mortality rates](#) in European nations, including early America, remained extremely high by today's standards and had been so from the beginning of time. However, people's life expectancy experienced a dramatic change for the better with the advent of medicine, and good hygiene amongst the lower class.

These two events brought about the most dramatic change we've seen in history for how long people could survive after birth. Tragically before that time, infant and childhood mortality still averaged around twenty-five percent during the days of the Revolutionary War. At the end of the eighteenth century, only seventy-eight of one thousand people would die from old age.

Because of high mortality rates, it wasn't unusual for one couple to have a dozen or more kids. The need to have helping hands on farms necessitated high birth rates and with an average of twenty-five percent of your work force dying, having large families was a necessity, not a choice. Such was the case with the Johnson family.

[Benjamin Franklin Johnson](#) was the tenth of sixteen children born to Ezekiel and Julia Hills Johnson in 1818 when they were living in Pomfret, NY. By all accounts, they were the average family on the early Americana landscape and found numerous ways to sustain their large brood.

Basic farming, making candles, honey, and beer, as well as processing wool for clothing, and sugar from maple trees, were the common income generators for most families. It was considered a privilege if one or two of the male children were able to attend school. Children typically learned how to read and write from the family bible, which is where most of Benjamin's education was extracted from.

According to his [autobiography](#), he grew up in the Presbyterian faith, and at an early age began questioning the 'fire and brimstone' sermons he said was pummeled upon the family. By the time he was eleven years old, he said that he also began wondering what happened to all the

prophets and apostles he read about in the Bible. This was the same time (1829) he and the family read an article in his 'village newspaper' declaring God had returned to save His people.

The same article also included the announcement of an amazing discovery just 140 miles east of their small town of Pomfret. In another small town (Palmyra, NY), an angel appeared to a young man just four years older than Benjamin, and told the teenager about a set of 'golden plates' buried in a cave on his family's farm. Johnson's family had been waiting to hear of just such a miraculous event, so the news was eagerly snatched up as gold from heaven.

The Second Great Awakening sweeping across the American colonies produced the fertile ground needed for people to buy into Smith's mysterious 'angel of light' story. Along with the renewed interest in God, came the rejection of organized religion. With no line of accountability, the dangerous combination opened the doors of unbiblical theories, and manmade suppositions of who God might be for the everyday Christian.

In reality, these were nothing but demonic forces masquerading as God. For anyone with the ungodly ambition to trick people, it proved to be a window of opportunity with unlimited potential, helping to fulfill America's reputation of having her streets paved in gold.

The Johnson family bought into Smith's tall tales, hook, line, and sinker, and they weren't alone. In one fell swoop they became instantly qualified to fill the shoes of both victim, and false teacher.

After reading the article in their town paper, the family packed up everything they owned, and by 1833 were living in Kirtland, Ohio. Giving every monetary dime they had to further the cause of the Mormon gospel, they helped even more by building a 'temple for the Lord'. After his baptism, Johnson worked relentlessly performing whatever task assigned to him be it missionary, or temple builder.

Johnson married his first wife, [Melissa Bloomfield LeBaron](#), on Christmas Day, December 25, 1841 after being introduced to her by his family. She was orphaned at the age of twelve and was also the great-great granddaughter of the first physician of Plymouth, MA, a Frenchman by the name of Francis LeBaron. Being taken in by the LDS, she joined their ranks.

Within two years of meeting Melissa, Benjamin was also introduced to 'the principle', aka polygamy. In May 1843 Joe Smith approached him and asked for his sister in marriage, making [Almera](#) the 29th wife of Joseph Smith, Jr. Benjamin and Almera's older sister, [Delcena](#), was widowed and had married Smith a year previous to this meeting. Delcena was wife #19.

At the same meeting in 1843, Johnson offered his foster-sister as a wife for Smith, but Smith told Johnson he should 'take her as his own'. The orphaned foster child of the family, [Mary Ann Hale](#), would become Johnson's second wife. Mary Ann had lived with the Johnson family from the time she was a young girl.

After Smith bedded down with Almera, he approached Benjamin again, this time asking for his youngest sister, fifteen year old [Esther](#), but Johnson told him she was already promised to someone else. Not long after this event, Benjamin became the youngest [member of Smith's bodyguard](#), collectively known as 'The Council of the Fifty'.

Sometime after 1845 with the new church structure in place, the family eventually moved to Utah with the rest of the Saints where Johnson served fourteen terms in the Utah State Legislature. Throughout his life, Benjamin went on numerous missions, settled several colonies in Mexico, and towns both in southern Utah and Arizona.

He married his brother's widow, [Eliza Saunders Johnson](#), in 1885 after his brother [Joseph](#) died in 1882. He was also ordained as a Patriarch 1883.

[FamilySearch.org](#) gave a brief summation of how Johnson spent the last twenty years of his life running from the law and always watching his back for fear of arrest. FYI: Mormons typically refer to this as being in 'exile'. Benjamin Johnson left a large clan in his wake, numbering over 800 people.



As always, available info on this polygamist is varied, and will be contradictory. We found, and know for sure, he married a minimum of eight wives (three were sisters), and fathered 47-50 children. All but 3 of his wives were young teen girls, decades younger than himself. You can find links with more info on each wife in the chart below, as well as the excerpt from FamilySearch.


“Elder Johnson went into exile in 1885 on account of his family relations. After sojourning temporarily in St. George and other parts of Utah, he returned to Arizona in 1887 and later the same year moved to Mexico together with many others. For several years he was in hiding from officers in different places in order to escape arrest on the ground of unlawful co-habitation. Elder Johnson was ordained a patriarch by Apostle Brigham Young January 7, 1883 while residing in Salt River Valley. In Arizona he spent the last years of his life and died in Mesa November 18, 1905, in his 88th year. At the time of his death his posterity numbered in the neighborhood of 800 souls.”

Also see:


[Blood Atonement & the Origin of Plural Marriage, pp. 70-71](#): “Most of Smith's plural wives boarded with other families, whom he visited periodically. His secretary, William Clayton, recorded one such visit to young Almera Johnson on May 16, 1843: “Prest. Joseph and I went to B[enjamin]. F. Johnsons to sleep.” Johnson himself later noted that on this visit Smith stayed with Almera “as man and wife” and “occupied the same room and bed with my sister, that the previous month he had occupied with the daughter of the late Bishop Partridge as his wife.”

Almera Johnson also confirmed her secret marriage to Joseph Smith: “I lived with the prophet Joseph as his wife and he visited me at the home of my brother Benjamin F.””

		Wife/Age @ marriage (Johnson's age)	Marriage date	Kids	Other info	Wife's marital status
1		Melissa Bloomfield LeBaron – 24 (23)	12/25/ 1841	9	Born 1/28/1817 NY Died 9/4/1860 UT The info for Melissa is the first of	Single

					<p>the many tangled webs we encountered in our research.</p> <p>Engraving on Melissa's headstone found at Findagrave.com indicates she and youngest child, Leah, died during childbirth. FamilySearch said Melissa died shortly after giving birth and Leah died a few months later.</p> <p>For info on her genealogy, one story says...</p> <p>Melissa's half-brother was David Tully LeBaron. He was married to Benjamin's sister, Esther Melita Johnson.</p> <p>Geni.com also says David Tulley LeBaron was married to Esther Melita Johnson, Benjamin's sister.</p> <p>This makes David Tulley LeBaron both the father-in-law, and the brother-in-law of Benjamin Johnson.</p> <p>It also means Benjamin married his niece.</p> <p>Nauvoo Demographic Report lists 9 kids.</p>	
2		<p>Mary Ann Hale – 17 (25)</p>	<p>11/14/ 1844</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>Born 8/11/1826 NY Died 12/17/1910 AZ</p> <p>Findagrave lists 4 kids, not 5.</p> <p>Geni.com lists 5 kids; 2 boys, 3 girls and findagrave lists 3 kids.</p> <p>From FamilySearch:</p> <p>Mary became orphaned around the age of ten when both parents (Samuel & Mary Ann Cook Hale) died while traveling from OH to MO.</p>	<p>Single</p>

					<p>FamilySearch went on to say that Mary Ann was 'given' to Benjamin to marry by the prophet Joseph.</p> <p>FamilySearch & Ancestry.com both reported only 2 kids; 1 boy, 1 girl.</p> <p>Nauvoo Demographic Report lists 5 kids w/ this marriage.</p>	
3		<p>Flora Clarinda Washburn Johnson Gleason - 26 (27)</p>	2/3/1846	2	<p>Born 8/2/1819 MA Died 8/13/1900 UT</p> <p>Ancestry.com lists Flora's husband as Abraham Washburn. They had 7 kids; 4 girls, 3 boys</p> <p>Married Benjamin Jan. 3, 1846 in Nauvoo. Their daughter, Clarinda Huetta Wingate was born in 1847 in Winter Quarters, NE.</p> <p>Findagrave lists her name as Flora Clarinda Gleason Washburn, omitting her name of Johnson, marriage to Benjamin, and their daughter.</p> <p>Findagrave lists husband, Abraham, with a death date of 1886.</p> <p>Earlylds.com shows her maiden name as Gleason, and marriages to both Benjamin Johnson (Feb. 3, 1846) & Abraham Washburn (Feb. 11, 1849). Only 1 child is listed thru marriage to Washburn & no kids thru Benjamin.</p> <p>FamilySearch provides a bio written by Flora's daughter which sounds reliable. Flora accused Benjamin of dereliction of duties as a husband/provider & filed for divorce. She married Abraham Washburn</p>	Single

					3/1849. Ancestry.com lists only 1 child. Nauvoo Demographic Report listed 2 kids, but this is probably incorrect.	
4		Harriet Naomi Holman - 16 (31)	3/17/1850	9	<p>Born 1/28/1834 NY Died 8/1/1914 Canada</p> <p>Findagrave lists 8 kids – 7 w/ Benjamin</p> <p>Geni.com lists 9 kids, 7 w/ Benjamin. She had 6 boys, 3 girls.</p> <p>Harriet was the niece of Melissa (wife #1) because Harriet's mother, Naomi Roxania, was Melissa's half-sister.</p> <p>Ancestry.com also said she had 8 kids with Benjamin.</p> <p>Harriet was the older sister of both Sarah Melissa & Susan Adelaide.</p> <p>From FamilySearch:</p> <p>“They were in Arizona for 20 years when in 1902 Harriet's family decided to move to Canada. There were many reasons for their move including; there was not enough land available for each family, son James Francis lost his prosperous holdings through prosecutions of the U. S. government, and the church was encouraging members to settle the Southern Alberta area.”</p> <p>Nauvoo Demographic Report lists 8 kids.</p>	Single
5		Sarah Melissa Holman –	2/3/1856	12	<p>Born 8/18/1838 OH</p>	Single

	 <p>Sarah Melissa Johnson</p>	17 (37)			<p>Died 11/4/1901 AZ</p> <p>Findagrave.com lists one kid, a son.</p> <p>geni.com lists 11 kids; 7 boys, 4 girls, 2 of which were twins.</p> <p>Ancestry.com reports Sarah had 10 kids; 7 boys, 3 girls.</p> <p>Sarah was the niece of Melissa (wife #1) because Sarah's mother, Naomi Roxania, was Melissa's half-sister.</p> <p>She was also the younger sister of Harriet Naomi & older sister of Susan Adelaide.</p> <p>Nauvoo Demographic Report lists 12 kids.</p>	
6	 <p>Susan Adelaide Holman</p>	<p>Susan Adelaide/ Adaline Holman – 15 (38)</p>	2/8/ 1857	8	<p>Born 10/7/1841 IL</p> <p>Died 2/5/1919 AZ</p> <p>Findagrave.com lists 6 kids; 4 girls, 2 boys</p> <p>Ancestry.com lists her name as Adaline & says she had 8 kids; 4 boys, 4 girls.</p> <p>Susan was the niece of Melissa (wife #1) because Susan's mother, Naomi Roxania, was Melissa's half-sister.</p> <p>Susan was also the younger sister of Harriet Naomi & Sarah Melissa.</p> <p>Nauvoo Demographic Report lists 8 kids.</p>	Single
7		<p>Sarah Jane Spooner – 17 (38)</p>	4/5/ 1857	3	<p>Born 10/1/1839 Wales</p> <p>Died 11/5/1911</p>	Single



Sarah Jane Johnson

					<p>AZ</p> <p>Earlylds.com shows marriage to Benjamin, her birth in Wales, no kids.</p> <p>Findagrave lists 2 daughters of Benjamin Johnson – both married into the LeBaron clan. These 2 daughters married the same man, Don Moroni LeBaron.</p> <p>Don Moroni LeBaron’s mother, Esther Melita Johnson, was the sister of Benjamin Franklin Johnson, making Benjamin Franklin Johnson, Don Moroni’s uncle. Geni.com gives same info.</p> <p>Making matters worse, Benjamin’s first wife, Melissa Bloomfield LeBaron Johnson, obviously belonged to the LeBaron clan as well.</p> <p>Don Moroni LeBaron’s father was David Tulley LeBaron. David Tulley LeBaron was the half-brother of Melissa Bloomfield LeBaron, Benjamin’s 1st wife.</p> <p>Don Moroni then married 2 daughters of his Uncle Benjamin – which means he married two of his 1st cousins.</p> <p>This means their mother-in-law was also their aunt because their father’s sister was Esther, & Esther was their husband’s mom.</p> <p>Ancestry.com also reports Melissa Bloomfield was the half-sister of David Tulley LeBaron.</p> <p>Nauvoo Demographic Report lists 3 kids.</p>	
8		<p>Eliza Saunders Johnson – 45 (67)</p>	<p>3/3/1885</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>Born 2/19/1840 England Died 3/22/1903 UT</p>	<p>Widowed</p>



Eliza married Benjamin 3 Mar 1885 in St. George, Washington, Utah.1885 after his brother [Joseph](#) died in 1882.

[Findagrave](#) shows her marriage to Joseph Johnson along with their 11 kids. No mention of her marriage to Benjamin.

[Geni.com](#) also lists her 11 kids with Joseph Johnson

[Ancestry.com](#) gives the same info as other resources listed above. It did give info on her marriage to Benjamin.