

Polygamy and Mormon Church Leaders
Aaron Johnson
June 22, 1806 – May 10, 1877

Long ago, but not far away, lived a man with the unusual first name of Didymus. Not only was his first name unusual, but his first wife's first name was unusual as well, that being Rheuama.

Regrettably, his bride of thirty-six years died in 1826 when their youngest child had just reached his teen years. Now that's where our memorable story could and should have stopped, however, in the world of Mormonism this would be rather blasé.

The unusual names bequeathed to the young couple was paired alongside the unusual lifestyles of their descendants. Our main focus today is on one of their sons (Aaron Johnson), and his highly unusual, not to mention highly unethical, behavior.

In fact, there are multiple layers of abhorrent and ungodly behavior patterns found in this man's life and the life of his brother, Lorenzo. You'll also see that the strange and tangled relationships in many of our other cast of characters are equally disturbing as well. Their behavior seemed to overshadow any other aspect of their lives.

Mr. Aaron Johnson had twelve wives and was the father of (are you ready for this?) fifty-seven kids. And yes, those are his biological heirs. To compound the situation further, his twelve wives didn't come from twelve families, rather, we find Mr. Johnson thought it best to draw from a small handful of gene pools. As you may have guessed this only means one thing. His wives were literally 'sister-wives'. See [earlylds.com here](http://earlylds.com/here).



Now if this wasn't bad enough, seven of the wives were young girls (underage brides) and this doesn't include his first wife who was barely legal, but still a teen. Of the four wives who weren't teenagers, three were young enough to be his daughters.

Making matters worse, he didn't stray too far from the family nest in search of those with whom he wanted to set up domestic bliss. Aaron Johnson rationalized the daughters of his brothers [Lorenzo](#) and William could help fulfill his godhood goals in life.

Five of Aaron's wives were actually his nieces and apparently good ol' Lorenzo had no problem opening the door when his brother came calling for four of his daughters' hands in marriage.

The fifth niece was Mary Ann Johnson, the daughter of William Johnson and Mary Lyman. William was Aaron's oldest brother who died in October 1832. Two months later (December 1832,) Mary Lyman married William's younger brother Lorenzo. Obviously, Mary Lyman was the mother of all five girls.

Just to confuse things a bit more, some genealogical records claim Sarah Mariah Johnson (wife #2) was also the daughter of Mary Lyman and William Johnson. Whoever her father was, it doesn't deter from the fact Aaron was her uncle.

Of those five sisters, four ranged in ages of 14-17. The oldest of the group was barely twenty years old when she married thirty eight year old Aaron. Additionally, he married Jemima Davis (wife #12), who had also been married to his youngest brother, Huntington.

With our view of his confusing polygamous lifestyle out of the way, the story of [Aaron Johnson](#) reads much like that of other people born in the early years of American history.

Familysearch.org states he was the tenth of thirteen children born to Didymus and Rheuama Johnson who eked out a living trying to farm their way out of poverty.* At the age of six he was summarily put to work and six years later was driving their team of oxen to plow fields and do the heavy work required for every farm.

Financially strapped, Aaron's parents eventually bound him to a local businessman for seven years where he could learn a trade and possibly learn basic skills of reading and writing. He indeed learned how to read and write, and he also became a skilled gunsmith and blacksmith which served him well during life. See [Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine, pp. 410-411](#). In 1820 at the age of fourteen, he joined the local Methodist church and was an astute member for his duration there.

In 1827 at the age of twenty-one, he married Polly Kelsey, the day before her nineteenth birthday. While working for the Winchester Firearms Company they had four kids within nine years and according to written journals about him, they had a 'pleasant life until 1836'. It was at this time they heard several sermons delivered by members of the Mormon sect and subsequently joined their ranks.

By the spring of 1837 Aaron left his job and moved his family to Kirtland, OH to surround themselves with other members of the Church. Unbeknownst to any of them at the time, it wouldn't be long before they were moving again to Missouri, then Nauvoo and finally to Utah.

While in Nauvoo, Aaron would buy into Smith's story of a 'new and everlasting covenant' the Mormon god had revealed to him and begin his unusual polygamist lifestyle. He served as a bodyguard for Smith and even walked with him and others on the way to Carthage where Smith was killed in a gunfight at the jail.

[Aaron Johnson's life](#) accomplishments include the illustrious titles of settling and being the first mayor of Springville, Utah, the first bishop in the area, and Springville's first postmaster. He also happened to be the first judge for Utah County, a member of the 1st Legislative Assembly and also served as a delegate for the Constitutional Convention to draft the constitution for the state of Deseret.

You can read about Aaron's wives and kids in the chart below. As always, the info can be confusing, or even contradictory at times. We've done our best to clear up the confusion, and have provided additional info for each wife in the embedded links.

One thing is certain with this unusual family. They crossed the lines of impropriety repeatedly, and all against their very own family. It's odd no one seemed to be in possession of a clear understanding that God frowns on marrying your relatives. Equally disturbing is how no one had a desire to look for marriage partners outside of their own gene pool.

[Ancestry.com](#) served as a good resource for info on Aaron and all his wives. An interesting item of note is the birthdates for some of his kids. Some wives were barely pubescent when he married them so they were still giving birth just a couple or so years before his death at seventy-one.

Our look at Aaron Johnson's life marks the thirty-third family we've researched in our series, Polygamy & Mormon Church Leaders. To date, if this isn't the worst case of pedophile behavior and incestual relationships I've seen thus far, it's right near the top. His predatory behavior rivaled even that of his beloved prophet, [Joseph Smith](#).

*Earlylds.com only lists 5-6 kids for Didymus & Rheuama. Other sources like [Geni.com](#) and others provides info on all thirteen kids.

		Wife/Age @ marriage (Johnson's age)	Marriage Date	Kids	Other info	Wife's marital status
1		Polly Zerviah Kelsey - 18 (21)	9/13/ 1827	4	Born 9/14/1808 CT Died 6/27/1850 NE Earlylds shows marriage to Aaron & 3 kids. Her name is on Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register, p. 7. Ancestry.com also lists 3 kids. Familysearch.org gives short bio of Aaron's life - mentions Polly & their 4 kids - also mentions Polly & their son Willis Kelsey (21 yrs) died of cholera in 1850.	Single
2		Sarah Mariah Johnson (name variants Include: Sariah Maria , Sarah Maria) - 20 (38)	12/22/ 1844	4	Born 5/17/ 1824 CT Died 7/3/1850 IA Info on Sarah is confusing & contradictory. Her mother Mary Lyman's findagrave site lists Sarah as 1st child born to her & Lorenzo. Mary Lyman didn't marry Lorenzo until 1832 - Sarah was born in 1824 or 1830. Most resources give b/day of 1824 - it's unclear who her father was. Some earlylds sites show her as a child of Wm. Johnson & Mary Lyman & others list	Single

					her as child of Lorenzo Johnson & Mary Lyman. Ancestry.com says she had 4 kids w/ Aaron, last kid born in 1863, but death records show she died of cholera in 1850. William Wallace's findagrave page lists father as Aaron Johnson & mother as Julia (wife #11). Another Ancestry.com link gives info on all Lorenzo's kids including Sarah Mariah w/ b/day of 1824.	
3		Jane Scott – 23 (39)	7/12/1845	6	Born 7/10/1822 NY Died 2/24/1880 Her name is on Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register, p. 122 Funwithfamily.com gives story on conversion, marriage to Aaron, & move to UT. Their daughter Polly died 1854 & son Heber died from burns in 1860. She taught kindergarten most of her adult life, & lived in Springville. Her grandparents came from Scotland. Earlylds gives info on marriage to Aaron, w/ 0 kids listed. Findagrave lists 2 kids.	Single
4		Mary Ann Johnson – 14 (39)	1/30/1846	9	Born 8/3/ 1831 NY Died 8/14/ 1915 ID Mary Ann's father was probably Wm. Johnson who died 10/1832. Her mother Mary Lyman married Lorenzo Johnson 12/1832. Earlylds link has	Single

				<p>note at end of profile stating her father was Wm. Johnson even though group sheet states Lorenzo as father. Findagrave link for Mary Lyman listed her as daughter of William Johnson.</p> <p>Geni.com gives same info as above.</p> <p>Hancocklegacy.org gives detailed info on Lorenzo's wives, kids, & history. They list Mary Ann as Wm.'s daughter & Lorenzo as Mary Lyman's 2nd husband.</p>		
5		<p>Rachel Robinson or Roberson Ford - 16 (45)</p>	4/25/ 1852	5	<p>Born 11/10/1835 or 1834 IN Died 2/17/ 1878 UT</p> <p>Rachel is younger sister of Margaret (wife #8). Earlylds shows her parents as Jonathan Ford & Rachael Roberson. Upon her arrival & that of her sister Margaret to Utah they discovered their father Jonathan, 1 brother & 1 other sister had died from diphtheria while waiting for them. Familysearch gives bio on her family & parents. Her mother Rachel Roberson had been disowned by her family when she & Jonathan joined Mormonism. Findagrave.com gives short bio & lists 5 kids w/ their names. Nauvoo Polygamy Demographic Report lists 4 kids, most other sources list 5. Familysearch.org provides short talk by David O. McKay (9th LDS</p>	Single

					prophet) who spoke on his grandfather Aaron Johnson. His grandmother was Rachel Ford.	
6		Harriet Fidelia Johnson (Johnston) Tuckett – 15 (46)	12/16 1852	5	<p>Born 8/27/1837 MI Died 9/20/1919 UT</p> <p>Familysearch shows marriage to Joseph Tuckett -Harriet's 2nd marriage. Findagrave lists both marriages, but only 2 kids, not 4. Familysearch.org link here gives short bio & lists 5 kids she had w/ Aaron. Geni.com also lists 5 kids. After his death in 1877 she married Joseph Tuckett & moved to Monroe, UT. In 1917 she suffered a 'severe illness', incapacitating her for last 2 yrs of life – youngest daughter Cristobel cared for her until she died. Familysearch link here provides pics of Tuckett brothers, Joseph, John, & Henry. Familysearch.org link here shows multiple pics – of note is Brigham Young Johnson, son of Aaron & Susan James (wife #10) & stepson of Harriet. Brigham Young Johnson is husband of Caroline Tuckett, niece of Joseph Tuckett, Harriet's 2nd husband. Hancocklegacy.org shows Harriet was child #3 for Lorenzo & Mary Lyman. Nauvoo Polygamy Demographic Report lists 4 kids, most other sources list 5.</p>	Single

7		Margaret Jane Ford – 23 (47)	5/8/1854	8 Born 4/17/1830 IN Died 3/23/1893 Margaret is older sister of Rachel (wife #5). Familysearch says she married Aaron in UT. Upon arriving to UT discovered her father, 1 brother & 1 sister had died from diphtheria. Another sister begged her to leave for CA, but she refused. Nauvoo Polygamy Dem. Report lists 6 kids, & Geni.com provides names for 8 children she gave birth to.	Single
8		Eunice Lucinda Johnson – 17 (46)	6/14/1854	0 Born 11/2/1835 or 11/8/1835 MI Died April 11, 1873 UT Earlylds.com provides vitals, marriage to Aaron & names of parents, Lorenzo & Mary Lyman. She died at 37 years. No other info found unless her name was in the lists of Lorenzo's kids. She married in the Endowment House in SLC just as many others had done before & after her.	Single
9		Cecelia Elimina (Elmira) Sanford – 15 (50)	3/1/1857	8 Born 8/22/1841 IL Died 5/20/1934 UT Because of the huge age difference, Aaron's wives were still of childbearing age well into his senior years. Ancestry.com link here	Single

				<p>provides info on Silas Johnson, son of Ceclia & Aaron.</p> <p>He was born in 1873 – just 4 yrs before Aaron’s death in 1877 @ age 71. We found several other siblings who were also born shortly before his death in 1877.</p> <p>Ancestry.com link here provides info on marriage & 4 kids.</p> <p>Geni.com provides info on Cecelia, marriage to Aaron & names of their 8 kids.</p> <p>Nauvoo Polygamy Dem. Report lists 7 kids.</p> <p>Earlylds.com provides info on their marriage, no kids listed.</p> <p>Findagrave.com provides basic vitals, marriage to Aaron & names of 2 kids.</p>	
10		<p>Sarah James Carter – 19 (50)</p>	<p>3/1/1857</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Born 8/13/1837 England Died 6/22/1922 UT</p> <p>Familysearch.org link provides short bio on Sarah & family. She was part of the Willie & Martin Handcart disaster (1/3 of the group died of starvation or freezing to death on trek to UT). Sarah married Aaron on same day her sister Emma married Lorenzo, Aaron’s brother. Sarah’s father & 1 brother didn’t survive trek to UT. Aaron volunteered to take in Sarah’s family when they reached UT – he married her 4 mos. later. She remarried after</p>	<p>Single</p>

					<p>Aaron's death & had 1 child w/ 2nd husband, Samuel Carter. Familysearch.org provides journal writings of Sarah's experience during trek to UT. Familysearch.org link here shows multiple pics – of note is Brigham Young Johnson, son of Aaron & Susan James. He was husband of Caroline Tuckett, niece of Joseph Tuckett, Harriet's 2nd husband, wife #6 for Aaron.</p>	
11		<p>Julia Maria Johnson Curtis – 14 (50)</p>	<p>3/1/1857</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>Born 9/14/1842 MI Died 4/6/1915 UT Ancestry.com provides info on marriages to Aaron & Levi Curtis. Findagrave gives her original name as Julia M. Cutis. It shows 1 child –Wm. Wallace Johnson. His findagrave page lists parents as Aaron Johnson & Julia M. Curtis – he was married with 5 kids. William Wallace Johnson is a name listed for a child of Sarah Mariah Johnson – wife #2. See her profile above. Geni.com link here shows marriage to Aaron – no kids – omits marriage to Levi Curtis. Earlylds.com gives vitals, endowment date – parents were Lorenzo Johnson & Mary Lyman. Hancocklegacy.org gives info on all of Lorenzo's kids w/ pics.</p>	<p>Single</p>

					<p>Earlylds.com provides data on marriage to Aaron & endowment date.</p> <p>Nauvoo Polygamy Demographic Report lists no kids born in this marriage.</p> <p>Familysearch.org provides bio on her marriage to Aaron & 3 kids. He died when she was 34. She then married Levi Curtis & had 5 more kids.</p> <p>She loved to play the organ. This site reports her son Wm. Wallace Johnson carried her portable organ around for her so she could play at the dances & other festivities.</p> <p>Her 2nd husband, Levi Curtis, was a widower w/ 6 kids – Aaron Johnson had taken him & his kids in when Levi’s wife died. Levi was known as the ‘pioneer fiddler’ & was at all parties & festivities to play for the dances. Levi also married Julia’s daughter Isabelle shortly after he married Julia.</p>	
12		<p>Jemima Davis Johnson – 62 (50)</p>	4/6/1857	0	<p>Born 11/4/1794 or 1796 CT Died 1863???</p> <p>UT</p> <p>In-depth info on Jemima is sparse.</p> <p>Her 1st husband was Aaron’s youngest brother Huntington, who had passed away.</p> <p>Ancestry.com gives his death date as 1853 – this conflicts w/ info for his 2nd marriage to Betty Ingles whom he married that same year.</p>	Widow

[Winter Quarters Portals](#)

provides info on Huntington & Jemima Johnson's basic vitals. They were married in 1821 & shows both died on the same day. There's no record of any divorce from Huntington.

She married Aaron (Huntington's older brother) in 1857.

[Familysearch.org](#) has identical stats.

Earlylds.com shows marriage to Aaron, no vitals, no death date for her.

[Women of the Nauvoo Relief Society](#),

p. 144 Jemima's name is on the list for 1842 Relief Society Membership – gives basic vitals & marriage to Huntington in 1821, endowed in 1842. Gives death date of 1863 – same as Huntington's. Also see [Fromtheroots](#) & [Mytrees.com](#) for more research info.