

Polygamy and Mormon Church Leaders
Franklin Dewey Richards
April 2, 1821 – December 9, 1899

The life of a polygamist isn't easy by any stretch of the imagination. The series we've run on 'Polygamy and Mormon Church Leaders' isn't to just point out who the men were, but to give an identity to the women as well. While I'm not a woman's right activist, it's important to remember God knows the names of each person involved, and He doesn't forget you.

Over the years my view of these women has evolved a bit. Instead of seeing all of them as victims, I've come to accept there has to be some level of complicity in the choices they've made. Some were there because they chose to be, some felt they had no other choice, and still others simply didn't have enough life experience to know any better.

The quote below comes from the family genealogy site, OrsonPrattBrown.com. The comment this 19 year old polygamous woman made is indicative of the mindset many had after being taught by parents, and everyone else in their world, that polygamy was God's ideal setting. Her internal struggle is clearly evident –

“[In an interview with California historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, Jane Snyder Richards described how she learned of polygamy and how she came to accept it:

“A few months previous to her marriage the idea of more than one wife was generally spoken of, though the practice of polygamy was of later growth. It was repugnant to her idea of virtue ... About eight months after her marriage, her husband Elder Franklin D. Richards told her he felt he should like to have another wife. It was crushing at first, but she said that as he was an Elder, and if it was necessary to her salvation, she would let another woman share her pleasure.” From Inner Facts of Social Life in Utah, University of California Berkeley, 1888, Page 1.]”

The young woman mentioned above was Franklin Richards' first wife.

Several major events in early Mormon history played an integral role in shaping the way the Church publicly and privately portrays themselves, and for this article we're looking at three of them. The [Haun's Mill Massacre in October 1838](#), the deaths of brothers [Joseph and Hyrum Smith](#) at the Carthage Jail in 1844, and the Church's participation with the US in the war against Mexico in 1846.

All three events left indelible marks on the psyche of the Mormon people from there on out. It's safe to say the legacy of the Richards' family, and their role in Mormonism, was secured by their presence at all three.

Franklin Dewey Richards was the fourth of nine kids born to [Phinehas and Wealthy Dewey Richards](#). After reading a copy of the Book of Mormon their missionary cousins (Joseph & Brigham Young) left for them, most of the family believed the Mormon gospel, and were baptized into the Church in 1836. Not long after their conversion, the family began moving south to Kirtland, OH, and the unfolding of major events soon thereafter, would change their lives forever.

By the time 1838 rolled around, Mormons found themselves in a fair amount of trouble with the locals caused by doomsday type threats declared by Joe Smith, and reiterated by faithful adherents. The end result was the infamous [Haun's Mill Massacre](#) which left seventeen Mormons dead, including fifteen year old George S. Richards, Franklin's younger brother.

Less than six years later in 1844, Franklin Richards' uncle, [Willard](#), escaped certain death at the [Carthage Jail](#) when he was with Joe and Hyrum Smith who were awaiting trial on several charges. An angry mob stormed the facilities, shot and killed both brothers, shot John Taylor, and miraculously left Willard unscathed from the whole ordeal.

The third major event took place two years later with the death [Joseph William Richards](#), a [younger brother of Franklin](#). This time around, some members of the Church had volunteered to help the US Government in the war between the US and Mexico, and during the [Mormon Battalion's march](#), Joseph became ill and died in Pueblo, Colorado.

During all the busyness in this man's life mentioned above, Franklin was a dutiful member and served in every capacity the Church called him into. While out on missions work in Indiana during the summer of 1842, he met his [first wife](#) and then married her by the end of the year in Nauvoo. She would be the first of a dozen; four were the widows of his uncle [Willard](#).

Much like the life story of [Alpheus Cutler](#), you'll see an abundance of incest and inbreeding within this clan. Richards was a 1st cousin of at least one wife, and had a habit of marrying sisters.

During the times of Franklin's numerous missions and work for the Church, [Roots & Branches](#) also noted he was chairman of the committee that wrote by-laws for ZCMI, and was a probate judge of Weber County. He also founded the Utah Genealogical Society, and served as its first president. Additionally, he was the editor of the [Millennial Star](#) from 1851-1852, and again in 1854.

Franklin's claim to Mormon fame, and the legacy he left behind, can also be found in his calling to be a Mormon apostle, and the son, and grandsons who achieved the same status. D. Michael Quinn made the following observations in an article for [Ensign in 1980 –](#)

“Except for a six-and-one-half-year gap, men of the Richards [family](#) have served as General Authorities continuously from 1840 to the present.”

Here's a synopsis from Quinn's article of who those men were and positions they held –

“[George Franklin Richards \(1861–1950\)](#) – son of Franklin D. Richards sustained in general conference as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. In 1921, he became president of the Salt Lake Temple, and from 1937 to 1942, he served as Acting Patriarch to the Church.

Elder George F. Richards served as a member of the Council of the Twelve from 1906 to 1950. His son, [LeGrand Richards](#), was born in 1886.

Elder LeGrand Richards was called as Presiding Bishop of the Church in 1938. In 1952 he was called into the Council of the Twelve.

Another grandson of Apostle Franklin D. Richards and first cousin to Elder LeGrand Richards, is Elder [Franklin D. Richards](#) (1900-1987).

On 9 October 1960, he was called to serve as an Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. On 1 October 1976, with the reorganization of the First Quorum of Seventy, Franklin D. Richards was called as the senior president of the presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy.”

In addition to the aforementioned names above, another GA in Mormonism is [Tad Callister](#), who happens to be a grandson of LeGrand Richards.

As you can readily see, the family's loyalty to the Church was rewarded handsomely.

Richards also served multiple terms in the [Utah Legislature, as well as being elected a regent of the University of Deseret](#). Between the number of missions he served (4), to the countless positions he held, it's easy to see his love for the Church never waned.

The chart below contains vitals for all of Franklin's wives. Unless otherwise noted, references were obtained from [Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy: A Preliminary Demographic Report by George D. Smith](#). Overall, we found that Franklin had 12 wives, and fathered 29 children.

	Wife/Age @ Marriage (Richards' Age)		Marriage date	Kids	Other info	Wife's marital status
1	Jane Snyder Richards – 19 (21)		12/18/1842	6	Born 3/31/23 NY Died 11/17/1912 UT Findagrave.com shows marriage to Franklin & their 6 kids. The 2 oldest kids died early. She was the younger sister of Sarah Snyder, wife #3. Jane was a member of the original Relief Society at Nauvoo. First counselor to the general president of the Relief Society from 1888 to 1901 and was one of Utah's representatives to the National Council of Women in Washington, D.C., in 1891. Nauvoo Temple Endowment Name Index lists her name for 16 December 1845. Famlypedia.com gave the following info on Jane's experience w/ her kids and Franklin's 2nd wife, Elizabeth – 'While on the pioneer trail in Iowa, Jane delivered a son, Isaac, in July 1846, but he died shortly thereafter. She was still numb from that shock when her two-year-old daughter, Wealthy, died. By this time her husband's plural wife, Elizabeth McFate Richards, lay seriously ill with tuberculosis,	Single

					and Jane gave her continuous care until Elizabeth died in March 1847.' Familypedia.com also reported 'during the first fifteen years of their marriage, her husband was on Church missions for a total of ten years.' He also left for a mission overseas while she was preparing to head west w/ the other Saints. It was during his mission her 2 oldest kids died. In June 1849 Sarah gave birth to her 3rd child in four years. Four months later in October 1849, Franklin married 2 more wives. Earlylds.com shows marriage to Franklin, but only 1 kid.	
2	Elizabeth McFate – 16 (24)		1/31/1846	0	Born October 28, 1829 Mahoning, PA Died March 29, 1847 Omaha, NE Findagrave gives sparse info – date of death only. Familypedia.com states she died 3/1847 in NE. Elizabeth was buried in the Mormon Pioneer Cemetery in Omaha, NE. Omaha (aka Winter Quarters) was the stopping point for pioneers to wait out the winter months while on their trek to UT. About 4,000 Mormons used it as a resting & refueling depot. Sadly, about 600 or so, died while waiting for spring to arrive. Many deaths were caused from TB (consumption), which is how Elizabeth died. She was 16 years old. Geni.com gives same info as other sites. No forthcoming info on her	Single

					parents, etc. Nauvoo Temple Endowment Name Index shows her name listed for January 31, 1846. Earlylds.com shows marriage to Franklin.	
3	Sarah Snyder Richards – 36 (28)		10/13/1849	2	Born 4/11/1813 Canada Died 10/4/1894 UT Findagrave.com shows she was the older sister of Franklin's 1st wife, Jane Snyder. Findagrave.com also shows her 1st marriage to Benjamin Prince Jenne. Some reports show that she had 6 kids w/ Benjamin & 2 kids w/ Franklin. Geni.com gives reference to her traveling with the Overland Company in 1849, age 35. OrsonPrattBrown.com gives the following info about Sarah's marriage to Franklin – 'Jane's sister Sarah Snyder Jenne, wife of Benjamin Prince Jenne, married 20 Jan 1830 at Port of Ferry, St. Lawrence, New York, they had maybe <i>twelve children</i> but later divorced. It is recorded that <i>Jane gave her only sister to her husband, Franklin D. Richards, to marry</i> on 13 Oct 1849 at Salt Lake City, Salt Lake, Ut]' [emp. mine] Earlylds.com shows her marriages to both Franklin & Benjamin. It omits kids w/ Franklin & includes only 10 kids w/ Benjamin.	Divorced

4	Charlotte Fox Richards – 23 (28)		10/13/1849	6	Born 3/8/1826 England Died 12/2/1918 UT Findagrave.com shows her marriage to Franklin & 6 kids, 3 of which died in early childhood. Ancestry.com & Geni.com give same info as Findagrave. An article in the Deseret News noted her death as November 29, 1918. Another article on LDS.org reports her death as 11/29 – she traveled west w/ the Willard Richards Company in 1848 at the age of 21 yrs. FamilySearch lists her as 3rd of 8 kids born to Richard and Mary Fox. They also list the 6 kids she had w/ Franklin.	Single
5	Susan Sanford Pierson Richards – 21 (32) Her name is also known as Peirson.		6/26/1853	3	Born December 10, 1831 MA Died March 2, 1878 UT Ancestry.com shows marriage, 3 kids born to her and Franklin. Ancestry.com shows her older sister Amelia was wife #3 to Willard Richards, Franklin's uncle. Familiypedia.com shows Susan as wife #3 for Franklin. It also states Susan was his 1st cousin. Her grandfather was Joseph Richards. Her mother Nancy Richards, and Franklin's father (Phinehas), were siblings. FamilySearch provides a bio of her. She and her mother took Franklin's offer of going to Utah with the other Mormons. Her father decided not to go with them	Single

					as he didn't buy into Mormonism. On the way to UT, her mother died. Having no one to lean on, Franklin stepped in. They were married within a year. Each of Franklin's wives were expected to be self-sufficient, and so Susan opened a boarding house, and raised her 3 kids by herself. On occasion Franklin would stop in, but it was rare. Her oldest child, a girl, married early and moved away. Susan was left w/ less helping hands in raising 2 boys. She died when they were teens, so they were on their own. The bio says Franklin would stop by on occasion to give advice, but they had to learn real quick how to keep house, feed themselves, and earn money.	
6	Laura Altha Snyder Richards – 18 (32)		3/29/1854	0	Born 2/14/1836 Canada Died 3/11/1878 UT Laura died the same year as Susan Sanford – wife #5. Geni.com gives info on marriage to Franklin. OrsonPrattBrown.com shows Laura was the daughter of Samuel Comstock Snyder; the brother of Jane (wife #1) & Sarah Snyder Richards (wife #3) – making her Franklin's niece.	Single
7	Nanny Longstroth Richards – 28 (35)		3/6/1857	3	Born 4/15/1828 England Died 1/7/1911 UT The following info comes from The Dearies website –	Widow

"Nanny, with her family, left England when she was twelve years old. It took six weeks to make the voyage...

When seventeen years of age she was married to Doctor Willard Richards by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Nauvoo Temple. She was a plural wife. She remained with her parents for two years and with them went to St. Louis, Missouri, where her father...was an architect and builder, a master mechanic who helped to build two Temples. ...

After the death of Willard...she married his nephew Franklin Dewey Richards... ... She was twice widowed, first when twenty-six years of age. At this time she had two daughters and one son... ... Nanny crossed the plains in the fall of 1848 with her husband, her parents and their families.

On March 24, 1849, her eldest child was born in a wagon on south Main Street in very cold weather. Willard Richards died in 1854.

On March 6, 1857, Franklin Dewey Richards, my father, married four of his Uncle Willard's wives, thus fulfilling the wish of the first husband and President Young's counsel that they marry again to have a protector and provider, and that they might raise up a posterity to his name..."

Familiypedia.com gives same basic info as above.

Geni.com lists 3 kids w/ Willard and 3 kids w/ Franklin

[The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine, p. 59](#) mentions her marriage & 3 kids w/ Willard.

					She was 1 of 4 widows of Willard Richards.	
8	Rhoda Harriet Foss Richards – 26 (35)		3/6/1857	4	Born 4/19/1830 NY Died 11/19/1881 Geni.com gives info on all her kids & both marriages. She was 1 of 4 widows of Willard Richards. Earlylds.com shows marriage to Franklin, no kids. Ancestry.com & Findagrave.com both list 1 kid w/ Willard, 4 w/ Franklin. The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine, p. 59 mentions her marriage & 1 son w/ Willard	Widow
9	Mary Thompson Richards – 29 (35)		3/6/1857	4	Born 10/21/1827 England Died 9/10/1905 UT Roots & Branches gives bio on Mary. She was born in England, near the border of Scotland. Emigrated to the States in 1841 w/ her parents & married Willard Richards in 1846. He died 3/1857. They had 2 kids, 1 died early in childhood. Married Franklin 3/1857 for time only. Roots & Branches gave the following info – “This marriage was according to the counsel of Brigham Young, for the purpose of “raising a family for Willard.”” She was 1 of 4 widows married to Willard.	Widow

					Franklin and Mary had 4 kids. She supplemented her income as a tailor, which she learned from her father, and served as a temple officiator for many years. She died of heart failure. Earlylds.com shows marriage to Franklin, no kids. Famillypedia.com shows Franklin & Mary had 4 kids & lists her as wife #4. The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine, p. 59 mentions her marriage & 2 kids w/ Willard.	
10	Josephine de la Harpe - 44 (35)		3/6/1857	0	Born 2/2/1813 France Died 2/23/1878 UT Keepapitchinin.org gives a fascinating story about Josephine. Already the widow of a European aristocrat w/ 3 kids, she sailed to the US from Switzerland after converting to the Church. Her 2 oldest kids, both girls, stayed behind. Shortly after her arrival she met & married Franklin. Soon thereafter, she got divorced, their marriage lasting only 2 months or so. She met her 3rd husband Octave Ursenbach, a German born immigrant, and married him in Oct. 1859. She lived w/ her son and Octave. He met another wife while on a mission abroad, and had 2 or more kids w/ the 2nd wife. Octave & Josephine were instrumental in bringing the silk industry to Utah. They raised and	Widow

					took care of the cocoons, spun silk, and sold it for various uses. More info on Octave is available at FamilySearch.org. Her son became a well renowned theatre scenery painter in NY under the name Joseph Delaharpe.	
11	Ann Davis Dally Richards – 65 (35)		3/19/1857	0	Born 3/31/1791 England Died 3/21/1875 UT Findagrave.com gives detailed bio on Ann. Being widowed in England, she left w/ 6 of her children (the oldest was married w/ a family) and set sail for the US. After arriving stateside, she met and married a Robert Campbell who was also a widow w/ 2 small kids of his own. They settled in Pleasant Grove, UT in 1855. The bio continues on w/ the following info – “Ann Davies Dalley received her endowments in the old Endowment House in Salt Lake City on September 7, 1855, and later, according to the custom followed at that time by many widows, that of being sealed to prominent men of the church, she was sealed to Franklin D. Richards.” This ‘custom’ was a new doctrine implemented by Brigham Young after the Saints moved to UT. It’s known as ‘marrying up’. Even though Robert was a secretary in the Church, his position was much lower than Richards’. Her standing in the next life was promised to be better if married to a higher church	Widow

					authority here. Geni.com shows b/day, 7 kids, marriages to both Wm Dalley & Franklin. Geni.com shows marriage & 7 kids w/ Wm. Dalley in UK. He died in 1832.	
12	Susanna Bayliss Richards ("Susan") – 45 (36)		11/6/1857	1	Born May 31, 1812 England Died April 17, 1891 UT Overland Pioneer shows she went west w/ Willard Richards Company in 1848 at age 34. Married to Willard Richards, wife #10 Familiypedia.com lists Susanna as wife #6 for Franklin The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine, p. 59 mentions her marriage & 1 kid w/ Willard. OrsonPrattBrown.com lists her as a wife, but no mention of Willard, or the child they had together. Geni.com lists her name, marriage to Willard & Franklin, but no child w/ Franklin She was 1 of 4 widows of Willard Richards.	Widow
13	Serepta Lucy Wheelock			0	Born 1811??? Familiypedia.com lists 3 kids they supposedly had in this marriage, however, those 3 kids were from Franklin & Mary Thompson's marriage. There's no identifiable info on this woman, including parentage, birth date, marriage date, etc.	???

					Familypedia.com and a few other genealogy sites repeat the same info, but no one has any in-depth markers. Therefore, we've not counted her in the total # of wives.	
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