

How did Joseph Smith's wives refer to their unions?

Denials of polygamy should be interpreted in light of how the women Joseph Smith married referred to their relationship with him.

For clarity on what the word “marriage” means, Merriam-Webster’s [first definition of the word “marry”](#) (last accessed 2017-02-05) is “to become the husband or wife of (someone)”.

Terminology used by Joseph's wives

Except where noted, the following first-hand accounts are taken from Brian Hales site Joseph Smith's Polygamy “[Stories of Faith: Joseph Smith's Plural Wives](#)” accessed 2017-02-05.

Special attention should be paid to these women's usage of the words “marry”, “married”, “wife”, “wives”, “husband”, “plural marriage”, and “polygamy”.

(emphasis added)

Emily Dow Partridge

It was about this time [Feb. 1843] that the principles of Celestial marriage were being taught to a few. I and my sister Eliza received it and were **married** to br. Joseph about the same time, but neither of us knew about the other at the time, everything was so secret. This was March of 1843. Joseph had tried to make these things known to me, several months before – I think, in the spring or summer of 1842, but I had shut him up so quick that he said no more to me until the 28th of Feb. 1843, (my nineteenth birthday) and **I was married** the 4th of March following.

He told me then what he wanted to say to me, and he taught me this principle of **plural marriage called polygamy now**, but we called it celestial marriage, and he told me that this principle had been revealed to him but it was not generally known; and he went on and said that the Lord had given me to him, and he wanted to know if I would consent to a **marriage**, and I consented. . . . I was **married** to him on the 4th day of March, 1843.

Eliza Partridge

Times were not then as they are now in 1877 but a woman living in **polygamy** dare not let it be known and nothing but a firm desire to keep the commandments of the Lord could have **induced a girl to marry in that way**.

This was truly a great trial for me, but I had the most implicit confidence in him as a Prophet of the Lord and not but believe his word and as a matter of course accept of the privilege **of being sealed to him as a wife** for time and all eternity.

Mary Elizabeth Rollins

But on going to the office [the] next day, I received the interpretation for what to my astonishment, when Joseph made known to me that God had commanded him in July, 1834, **to take me for a wife**.

Lucy Walker

In the year 1842, President Joseph Smith sought an interview with me, and said: "I have a message for you. **I have been commanded of God to take another wife**, and you are the woman." My astonishment knew no bounds.

The Prophet discerned my sorrow. He saw how unhappy I was, and sought an opportunity of again speaking to me on this subject, and said: "**Although I cannot, under existing circumstances, acknowledge you as my wife, the time is near when we will go beyond the Rocky Mountains and then you will be acknowledged and honored as my wife.**"

The first day of May, 1843, **I consented to become the Prophet's wife**, and was sealed to him for time and all eternity, at his own house by Elder William Clayton.

Shortly afterwards **I consented to become the Prophet's wife**, and was **married** to him May 1, 1843, Elder William Clayton officiating. I am also able to testify that Emma Smith, **the Prophet's first wife**, gave her consent to the **marriage** of at least four other girls to her husband, and that **she was well aware that he associated with them as wives within the meaning of all that word implies**.

Alemera Johnson

That in the years 1842 and 1843, I resided most of the time at Macedonia, in the County of Hancock, State of Illinois, sometimes with my sister **who was the wife of Almon W. Babbitt**, and sometimes with my brother Benjamin F. Johnson. During that time the Prophet Joseph Smith taught me the principle of Celestial Marriage including **plurality of wives** and **asked me to become his wife**. He first spoke to me on this subject at the house of my brother Benjamin F. I also lived a portion of the time at Brother Joseph Smith's in Nauvoo, when many conversations passed between him and myself on this subject. On a certain occasion in the

spring of the year 1843, the exact date of/ which I do not now recollect, I went from Macedonia to Nauvoo to visit another of my sisters, the one who was the widow of Lyman R. Sherman, deceased, at which time I was sealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith. At the time this took place Hyrum Smith, Joseph's brother, came to me and said, I need not be afraid. I had been fearing and doubting about the principle and so had he, but he now knew it was true. After this time **I lived with the Prophet Joseph Smith as his wife**, and he visited me at the home of my brother Benjamin F. at Macedonia.

Eliza Snow referring to Fanny Alger

Here's how Eliza R. Snow described the marriage of Fanny Alger to Joseph Smith (from [here](#)):

Alger, Fanny, Joseph Smith's wife. **One of the first wives Joseph married.** ~~Emma made such a fuss about.~~ Sister E. R. Snow was well acquainted with her as she lived with the Prophet at the time. She **afterwards married in Indiana** where she became the mother of a large family. A brother Alger lives in St. George. Write to Pres Mc Allister

Summary

- The women considered these “marriages” and they considered themselves a “wife” of Joseph Smith.
- Lucy Walker's testimony establishes that the plural wives of Joseph Smith were living as husband and wife “within the meaning of all that word [wives] implies.”
- Both Eliza R. Snow and Almera Johnson's words establish that when they were using the word “wife” they were using it synonymously with the word “wife” used in describing a monogamous marriage.
- None of the accounts distinguish in any way the usage of the word plural “wife” from a normal “wife” (except to say that it was in the Celestial order).
- “Celestial marriage” was used as a qualifier of a kind of “plural marriage” or “polygamy” (i.e., these women referred to their unions within the umbrella of “plural marriage” and “polygamy”).