

# MITT ROMNEY'S POLYGAMY TREE

346 wives for 15 direct ancestors of Mitt Romney at the last count

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## The double standard for Mormon marriage

The present-day Mormon mindset, including 2012 Republican presidential candidate, **Willard Mitt Romney**—a lifelong Mormon who boasts of only having one wife—define Mormon marriage as between “one-man and one-woman.” Along with the monogamous unions that occur in Mormon temples, a far more unconventional view of marriage is also promoted. Polygamy is given an official thumbs up. Polygamous ceremonies by proxy for deceased men and women—but mainly for men—are performed regularly in Mormon temples, including ongoing polygamous rites for *direct* male ancestors of Mitt Romney.

## Mormon polygamy

Polygamy, also known as plural marriage or plurality of wives, was a significant defining characteristic of early Mormonism. The founder of the Mormon religion, Joseph Smith Jr., taught that plural marriage was a divine commandment. According to Mormon history, polygamy was so important God enforced the practice. Smith claimed an angel with a drawn sword compelled him to act on the revelation. Leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) openly encouraged polygamy from 1852 to 1890.

Mormon leadership formally suspended polygamy, when the *1890 Manifesto*, an official statement which disavowed the continuing practice of plural marriage in the LDS Church, was issued by Church president, Wilford Woodruff, in September 1890. The *1890 Manifesto* was a response to mounting anti-polygamy pressure from the United States Congress, which by 1890 had disincorporated the LDS Church, escheated its assets to the US federal government, and imprisoned many prominent Mormon polygamists.

The *1890 Manifesto*, also known as the *Manifesto*, prohibited Church members from entering into any marriage banned by the law of the land, and made it possible for Utah to become a U.S. state in 1896. But even after the *Manifesto*, some Mormon officials quietly continued to perform plural marriages in the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

The *Second Manifesto* was a 1904 declaration made by Joseph F. Smith, the then Church president, in which Smith stated the LDS Church was no longer sanctioning marriages that violated the laws of the land, and set down the principle that those entering into (or solemnizing) polygamous marriages would be excommunicated from the Church.

Mormon polygamy for the living continues to be outlawed by the LDS Church. Mormons today are permitted only one (living) spouse at a time. Without exception, Church members who enter into the practice of plural marriage are excommunicated. Although

Church leaders no longer tolerate polygamy on Earth, they do permit a living man to be sealed for eternity to another (living) woman after the death of his wife, or after divorce.

Plural marriage remains an inherent part of the present-day teachings of Mormonism. Section 132 of *Doctrine and Covenants*, the revelation outlining “celestial marriage” and the plurality of wives, as given through Joseph Smith at Nauvoo, Illinois, on July 12, 1843, is still canonized scripture: <http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/132?lang=eng> .

The late Mormon Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie, summed it up by stating: “Obviously the holy practice [of polygamy] will commence again after the Second Coming of the Son of Man and the ushering in of the millennium.” (*Mormon Doctrine, 1966 edition*)

Mainstream Mormons have not abandoned the doctrines of polygamy in an eternal sense. The practice of men having more than one wife is commonly understood by Mormons to be a divine principle and the marriage pattern in heaven. The prevalent LDS view is that plural marriage temple “sealings” may continue in force in the afterlife, resulting in perpetual polygamous relationships. Behind the walls of Mormon temples, away from public scrutiny, the private face of the LDS Church wholeheartedly endorses polygamy.

Living Mormons act as proxies for deceased men and women, who may be “sealed” to multiple dead partners. It should be noted, according to Mormon beliefs, proxy marriage sealings, like proxy baptisms, are merely *offered* to involved parties in the afterlife.

## Mormon polygamy records

Mormons are a record-keeping people. Church members are instructed to submit information from reliable sources for proxy temple work for their ancestors. However, submissions data has been largely unmonitored. Over the years, elements of carelessness have crept in. Against Church rules, many Mormons have submitted the names of non-relatives. In the past, member-submitted data in Mormon files has been accepted “*as is*.”

Databases for the dead have been over-loaded with duplicate, inaccurate, and incomplete data. The current online genealogical database of the LDS Church that contains updated details of proxy temple rites is *New FamilySearch*, which requires a member log-in to access. Plural marriage listings (especially for females) may contain duplicates and lack vital data, such as full birth and death information. Details of Mitt Romney’s polygamous lines are only as accurate as the hodgepodge of Mormon records for his family tree.

Many prominent early Mormon polygamists have been sealed to extra spouses since their deaths. A prime example is Joseph Smith Jr., who was “married” to at least 34 women when he was alive. Since his death in Carthage, Illinois, in June 1844, Smith has been posthumously sealed to hundreds of additional wives, according to *New FamilySearch*.

Another early Mormon polygamist who received a harem of dead women after his death was Parley Parker Pratt, an original LDS apostle, who married 12 women while he was alive. From *New FamilySearch* records, and other research, it appears that Parley Parker Pratt may have been “married” by Mormon rites to at least 175 women. Pratt, who was

murdered near Van Buren, Arkansas, in May 1857, by the estranged husband of Pratt's 12<sup>th</sup> wife—Eleanor McLean Pratt—is a great-great-grandfather of Mitt Romney.

*New FamilySearch* entries show polygamous sealings continue to be performed in LDS temples for other prominent early Mormon polygamists. Brigham Young, 2<sup>nd</sup> president of the LDS Church and colonizer of Utah, was sealed to 22 wives in Mormon temples in 2011. Young was possibly married to 57 women when he was living. Fifty percent of Young's 22 plural marriage sealings in 2011 were repeat sealings to women he married when he was alive. Irrespective of whether Young ever married all 22 women, his 2011 "marriages" show polygamy for polygamists is perpetuated in Mormon temples today.

## Polygamy - and polygamy by proxy - for Mitt Romney's ancestors

A reliable description of Mitt Romney's polygamous ancestry can be found on this Mormon history blog: "Guest Post: A Brief Guide to Mitt Romney's Polygamous Heritage," by Amy Tanner Thiriot: <http://www.keepapitchinin.org/2012/05/15/guest-post-a-brief-guide-to-mitt-romneys-polygamous-heritage/>.

Six *direct* male ancestors of Mitt Romney practiced polygamy when they were living. These polygamists are two of Mitt's great-grandfathers: Miles Park Romney (5 living wives) and Helaman Pratt (3 living wives); and four of his great-great-grandfathers, Archibald Newell Hill, (5 living wives), Parley Parker Pratt (12 living wives), Carl Heinrich "Charles Henry" Wilcken (4 living wives), and Lewis Seth Robison (4 living wives). Except for Miles Park Romney, these men have also been sealed to dead women.

Going back six generations, there are at least 15 male ancestors on Mitt Romney's *direct* lines—including the six known polygamists—who are listed in Mormon records with marriage sealings to more than one wife. These 15 men share a total of 346 wives.

Gaskell Romney, Mitt Romney's grandfather, was sealed in person to a second (living) wife after his first wife died. Excluding (living) wives the other 14 men may have married, most of these men have been sealed by proxy to additional dead women.

Mitt Romney's great-great-grandfather, Carl Heinrich "Charles Henry" Wilcken, who had four living wives, is listed with 58 spouses in *New FamilySearch*. Sealing Mormon men to deceased women seems to have been a cultural trend among pioneer Mormons.

Jared Pratt, father of Parley Parker Pratt, and a great-great-great-grandfather of Mitt Romney, was born before the advent of Mormonism. Jared Pratt was not a Mormon or a polygamist. He remarried after the death of his first wife. Pratt has been sealed to 44 dead women, including his two lawful spouses. He has become a "polygamist by proxy."

Rev. Charles Robison, father of Mormon polygamist, Lewis Robison, was a Baptist preacher in Nauvoo, Illinois. Charles Robison never became a Mormon. He has been sealed to three women, including his two lawful wives. Charles Robison, like Jared Pratt, is a great-great-great-grandfather of Mitt Romney, and is now a "polygamist by proxy."

Other “polygamists by proxy” on Mitt Romney’s direct family lines include Mitt’s great-great-great-grandfathers—Alexander Hill and Carl Heinrich Wilcken. Both men have been sealed in LDS temples to women they were not married to when they were alive. A plural marriage sealing for Alexander Hill to an unknown spouse, Emily Melburg, was performed in the Columbia South Carolina (LDS) Temple as recently as March 29, 2011.

## The Salt Lake Tribune and Mitt Romney’s polygamous ancestors

On August 21, 2006, *The Salt Lake Tribune* published a feature article: “Could ancestors haunt Romney? Polygamous family tree: Political pros say the past won't dim the ascendant candidate's future,” by Thomas Burr: [http://www.sltrib.com/ci\\_4212788](http://www.sltrib.com/ci_4212788) . A graphic titled: "Polygamous ties in Mitt Romney's family tree," was published with Burr’s report. There were three major family history errors in the report and the graphic.

**Miles Romney (1806-1877)**, a great-great-grandfather of Mitt Romney, is described in the *Tribune* “tree” graphic and Burr’s report as a Mormon polygamist with 13 wives. There are no definitive records to prove Miles Romney had 13 (living) wives. Romney married Elizabeth Gaitskell (Gaskell) in Lancashire, England, in 1830, and both converted to Mormonism in 1837. Miles and Elizabeth Romney emigrated to Nauvoo, Illinois, from England, in 1841. In early 1846, they were sealed as husband and wife, in Nauvoo, Illinois. *New FamilySearch* lists Miles Romney with a dozen plural wives from Lancashire, England, whom he was sealed to, in May 1872, in Endowment House, Salt Lake City. It is probable these women were deceased at the time of the sealings. A sealing for Miles Romney to a 14<sup>th</sup> unknown wife, Miriam Meenan, was listed “*In progress*” in *New FamilySearch*, as of February 2012.

**Isabella Hood Hill (1821-1847)**, a great-great-grandmother of Mitt Romney, and the first wife of Mitt Romney’s great-great-grandfather, Archibald Newell Hill (1816-1900), was omitted from the *Tribune* “tree” graphic. Isabella Hood Hill died at Winter Quarters, Nebraska, in March 1847, and is buried in the Mormon Pioneer Cemetery—also known as Winter Quarters Pioneer Cemetery—along with hundreds of other Mormons. Archibald Hill, who was left with three small children after the death of Isabella, would become a Mormon polygamist, marrying four more wives.

**Lewis Seth Robison (1816-1883)**, a great-great-grandfather of Mitt Romney on a maternal line, was omitted from the *Tribune* report. Burr’s article incorrectly stated, “There is no indication of polygamy on the maternal side of the family.” Lewis Robison, a convert to Mormonism in Nauvoo, Illinois, was the son of the Baptist preacher, (Rev.) Charles Robison (1785-1840). Lewis Robison became a well-known Mormon polygamist with four living wives. A sealing for Lewis Robison to an 11<sup>th</sup> wife, Sarah Kelsey, was listed “*In progress*” in *New FamilySearch*, as of Feb 2012.

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