

The Mormon Masonic Connection

by
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Although not common knowledge, Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon religion, was definitely a Freemason. There is also very strong evidence that his successor, Brigham Young, was a member of the Order.

Volumes have been written on Mormonism, and today it is accepted by many people as a valid and honorable branch of Christianity. However, it has not found favor with the established Christian Church. Nevertheless, some notable people have been Mormons, and at this writing a high-ranking Mormon, Mitt Romney, narrowly missed his bid to become President of the United States.



Joseph Smith

I leave it to the reader to research the various aspects of Mormonism. In historic summary, Joseph Smith claimed that he had “spiritual visions” during the early 1800s whereby he was instructed to form a new church. He was subsequently visited by an angel who directed him to recover a number of “gold plates” that were buried in a stone box near his home in Manchester, New York. Smith recovered the plates on September 22, 1823. They were inscribed in a strange language which Smith was given the “grace” to translate into English. Smith had the plates for a period of one year and then returned them to where they had been obtained. They were then taken back by the angel. Smith’s resulting translation of the plates became the *Book of Mormon* and the foundation, as it were, of the Mormon Church.

One of the highly unacceptable practices of the early Mormon Church was polygamy (more than one wife), often with wives being very young (under 18 years of age). However, it must be kept in mind that originally polygamy was sort of a Biblically directed “social welfare system.” Widows and other women without a

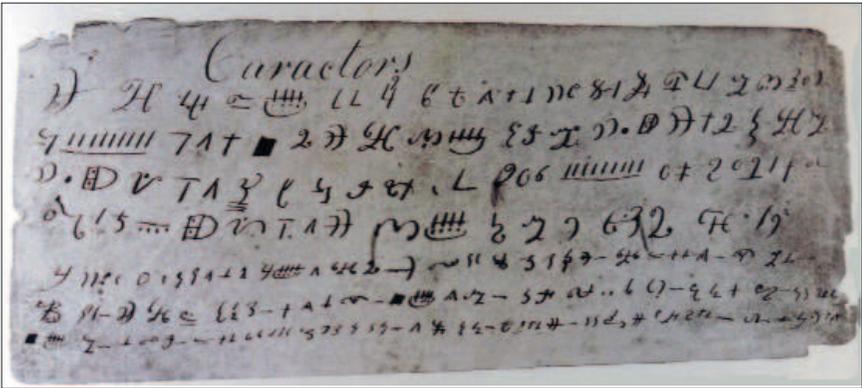
means to support themselves were “married” to a man who was able to provide for them. In this sense, polygamy was effectively an act of compassion. Women to this day have difficulties in male-dominated societies. For certain, in the 1800s women in America had nowhere near the status they presently have. Joseph Smith’s adoption of the age-old practice of polygamy can therefore be both effectively understood and rationalized from a religions standpoint. Just how it “went off track” to include very young women who could not be considered “in need” is a question I cannot answer.

Whatever the case, we can certainly reason that Smith was a very charismatic and impressive individual. He amassed a large following, centered in Nauvoo, Illinois. In 1844, he campaigned for the Presidency of the United States. According to *Wikipedia*, he considered the United States Constitution and especially the Bill of Rights to have been inspired by God. He believed a strong central government through democracy to be crucial to the nation’s well-being—although he also taught that a theocratic monarchy was the ideal form of government. In foreign affairs he was an expansionist, although he viewed “expansion” as brotherhood.

In the spring of 1844, a rift developed between Smith and six of his close associates. As a result, Smith excommunicated them. They formed their own church and procured a grand jury indictment against Smith for polygamy and other crimes. Serious unrest followed culminating in Joseph Smith and his brother, Hiram, being placed in a jail at Carthage, Illinois, on the charge of treason. On June 27, 1844, an armed mob stormed the jail and both Joseph and his brother were murdered. As a result, Joseph Smith became the first candidate for the Presidency of the United States to be assassinated.

As I have mentioned, the established Christian Church (various denominations) was (and still is) totally against Mormonism. Besides polygamy, there were (and still are) numerous other theological reasons in this connection. As a result, in the early years tension mounted and Mormon followers were virtually “rooted out” wherever they settled in eastern USA.

Brigham Young succeeded Smith as the church leader. Young and a fairly small group of followers made their way to Utah Territory, where they settled (July 1847). Over the years the church flourished. Young subsequently served as the first governor of Utah Territory.



Above shows characters from the gold plates that Smith was given. On the right is a Mormon "talisman" medal that appears to show the same type of characters.



Shown on the left is Joseph Smith's "death mask." There can be no doubt that it provides an exact likeness of the man. Below is a photograph of the jail building in which Joseph and his brother were murdered.





A rare 1837 bank note signed by Joseph Smith and reportedly Brigham Young (signatures on the right are difficult to read). The notes were issued for circulation in Mormon settlements, and were rarely accepted elsewhere. As soon as gold coins became available, the notes were redeemed.



This US stamp (Scott #950) obviously shows Brigham Young arriving in Utah (Valley of the Great Salt Lake). The words "This is the Place" shown on the stamp are attributed to him.



A set of “bogus” Utah postage stamps that show Brigham Young. The stamps were known to exist as early as 1864, so may be somewhat older, but likely not prior to 1847 when the US adopted postage stamps. Brigham Young died in 1877.

As to Freemasonry, Smith initially identified with the anti-Masonic movement that began in 1827 as a result of the Morgan abduction in Batavia, New York. Morgan’s widow, Lucinda Pendleton, subsequently became one of Smith’s plural wives.

Much later, apparently after the anti-Masonic sentiments subsided, a number of Smith’s followers had become Masons and requested (1841) a dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Illinois to form a lodge at Nauvoo, Illinois. This request was granted and a lodge was formed in March 1842. Smith received the Entered Apprentice Degree on March 15, 1842. The next day, Smith and his counselor, Sidney Rigdon, were made “Masons at sight” by Grand Master Abraham Jonas. Smith later served as the Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of Illinois.

In August 1842, the Grand Lodge of Illinois revoked the Nauvoo Lodge dispensation as a result of irregularities. By this time 286 candidates had been initiated of which 256 had received the Master Mason’s Degree. Whatever the issue, the dispensation was restored in November of that same year. A short time later, dispensations for two other lodges in Nauvoo were granted.

When the Grand Lodge met on October 3, 1843, severe criticism was raised on the activities of the Nauvoo lodges (now referred to as Mormon lodges). Consequently, the three Nauvoo

lodge dispensations were revoked along with charters granted to the two Mormon lodges in Iowa (Nye Lodge and Keokuck Lodge). The Nauvoo lodges continued to work and were declared clandestine.

According to Masonic scholars, Smith embraced Freemasonry because he thought its rituals and teaching were closer to those of ancient Biblical times than to current church practices. Smith incorporated a lot of Masonic rituals into his church rituals.

The Mormon practice of polygamy was discontinued in 1890. However, the church was divided on the issue and as a result an “orthodox” group formed which continues the practice to this day (despite laws to the contrary) in both the United States and Canada. The main church calls itself The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), the orthodox group calls itself The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS). Its leader, Warren Steed Jeffs, is currently in jail serving a life term plus 20 years for child sexual assault.

Smith remained a Freemason until his death; however, later Mormon leaders distanced themselves from Freemasonry.

In modern times, the predominant Mormon Church (LDS), holds no position for or against the compatibility of Freemasonry with their church doctrine. In other words, as far as I can gather, a Mormon may become a Freemason, and vice-versa. There are no restrictions. Nevertheless, the LDS Church does not encourage Masonic membership as Lodge activity takes time that could be used for church activities. Today there are 29 Masonic Lodges in Utah (6 in Salt Lake City) with over 2,000 members.

As to the orthodox faction (FLDS), it appears the group essentially “self-perpetuates.” I can find no information on how it gets new members, or rules related to such.

From my personal perspective, I can certainly see why Joseph Smith came to embrace Masonic ritual. Having worked intently on lodge rituals (actually preparing lodge ritual books) plus going through several of the “chairs” and serving as a Worshipful Master, I became very much attached to it myself. It is exceedingly well thought-out with superb symbolism. If anything, the adoption of such by the Mormon Church is a compliment to the numerous eminent brethren who created it.

As to the credibility of Joseph Smith and all that he came to stand for, like all religions, it’s a matter of faith, not fact. Indeed if any religion could present scientific facts as to its belief system, then that would become the only religion.

Reference: MP Vol. 68, No. 4, December 2012