More Wives Than One



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When Joseph Smith announced his revelation that plural marriage was essential to attaining the highest level of eternal salvation, he introduced what became the most notorious aspect of Mormon culture. "More Wives Than One" offers the first in-depth look at the long-term interaction between belief and the practice of polygamy, or plural marriage, among the Latter-day Saints. Focusing on the small community of Manti, Utah, Kathryn M. Daynes shows that plural marriage encompassed several forms of marriage endorsed by the church, each with its own rights and responsibilities. She gives a clear picture of the factors shaping the practice, who was likely to enter into a plural marriage, and how the practice dovetailed with Mormon convictions about the crucial role of families in solving social problems. She also explicates the web of beliefs about God-centred marriages and familial responsibility that underlay how plural marriage was experienced, including inheritance practices that protected plural children and wives; a simple, non-legalistic system of divorce; and zero tolerance for adultery. Daynes provides an intimate view of how Mormon doctrine and Utah laws on marriage and divorce were applied in people's lives. She discusses how Mormon practices, firmly based on a patriarchal model of marriage, diverged from the companionate ideal of marriage that was taking hold in mainstream America. During the frontier period, territorial laws in Utah allowed the Saints sufficient autonomy to

develop their distinctive marriage patterns. As settlement progressed, however, the federal government - prodded by late nineteenth-century family reformers - took an increasingly aggressive role in squelching anomalous practices of both marriage and divorce, eroding the ability of plural wives and children to inherit and ultimately disfranchising women and polygamists. Cogent and impeccably documented, "More Wives Than One" will enlighten both scholars and general readers on an intriguing and much-misunderstood chapter of Mormon history.

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