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## Emma's Enduring Compassion: A Personal Reflection

*Joni Wilson*

Emma Hale Smith's life experience changed considerably following the murder of her husband, Joseph Smith Jr., in the summer of 1844. She found herself in Nauvoo, Illinois, in a tense political, religious climate with limited financial resources, few family members, responsibility for four children, and pregnant with her tenth. After a seventeen-year marriage, this forty-something woman had already buried seven children.<sup>1</sup>

I am not a historian; I am not a sociologist; I am not a theologian; and I have no advanced education in any of these areas. But I am extremely interested in the "other" side of Emma Hale Smith Bidamon—the incredible human story of one woman's life through joy and sorrow, triumph and disillusionment, and births and deaths.

Have you ever heard a story and have it so well memorized that you could relate almost all the details without any prompting and later found additional particulars that turned your whole perception of that story to a slightly different angle? This narrative is my journey in discovering compassion and caring in a world of the past not so different or bizarre from the present.

Emma Smith endured persecution and hardships while relocating to a variety of houses and separating from friends as she moved throughout her life from Pennsylvania; through New York, Ohio, and Missouri; and finally to Illinois.

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When Emma was twenty-two, she left home to marry Joseph Smith without the approval of her parents. She moved to Manchester where Joseph's parents were living and resided with her in-laws during 1827. The couple moved to Harmony, Pennsylvania, Emma's childhood home, in December 1827 and lived there until August 1830. The two then moved to Fayette, New York, to live briefly with Peter Whitmer Sr. in 1829 and returned there again in the fall of 1830 while the



*Sculpture of Emma and Joseph Smith  
located in the gardens of the LDS Visitor's Center, Nauvoo.  
Photo by Maurine Carr Ward*

Book of Mormon manuscript was being completed. They then moved to Kirtland, Ohio, to build up the Church in that area, living in an upstairs apartment above the Newel K. Whitney store in early 1831 and returning again in September 1832 for a few years. From there, they moved to Hiram, Ohio, and lived with the John Johnsons. Then, it was back to Kirtland to share the homes of friends willing to assist. Emma and the children moved to Far West, Missouri, in March 1838. They remained there until February 1839. When Emma left Missouri, she traveled to Quincy, Illinois, to live with John and Sarah Cleveland. These moves represent about a dozen different homes in as many years. In this time period, she was pregnant five times, buried four children, and cared for four toddlers during the majority of these years of resettling—an amazing feat under the best of circumstances and a chronicle of hardships rarely related or understood!

In May 1839, the family relocated to Nauvoo, Illinois, some sixty miles north of Quincy, and settled in a more permanent home than Emma had known since her marriage. Often, her moves were away from family and friends for the good of the religious movement or for the purpose of escaping the wrath of the local community members who were no longer able to tolerate the arrogance of the Mormons. The life she carved out was most often with other families, and she and her children lived at these families' mercy for care and shelter.



*Joseph Smith homestead, Nauvoo, Illinois.  
Courtesy of LDS Historical Dept., Archives*

In Nauvoo, after her husband's murder, Emma found herself alone with four children to raise (ages fourteen to six) and one more on the way, David.<sup>2</sup> Joseph III mentioned years later that his mother "met many difficulties and perplexities in those first years after she became a widow and had five children under her care."<sup>3</sup> Emma probably followed a somewhat predictable pattern of grieving following the murder of Joseph, but the additional burden of limited finances intensified her difficulties. Joseph Smith did not leave a will, and the estate was intertwined with the financial affairs of the Church. She did her best to obtain what was rightfully hers and to settle the debts of her late husband.

After Joseph Smith's death, Emma elected to remain in Nauvoo while many Mormons followed various leaders to other locations. Why did Emma stay in Nauvoo when she would have been welcome to go with any of the groups? Perhaps she needed a home to reside in with her children after experiencing all the previous moves and living with other families. Home was now Nauvoo.

Undoubtedly, she must have wondered what to do for the good of her family. Were there questions in her mind about whom to follow or where to go? She chose to separate from friends, extended family, and church and to remain in the hostile environment of Nauvoo. At least there she had to answer to no one but herself! Finally, in September 1846, Emma received an anonymous threat that could not be ignored—her house would be burned and her family killed if she did not move out.

On 12 September 1846, Emma moved to Fulton City, Illinois, about 150 miles north of Nauvoo, with her five children and a housekeeper, Servilla Durfee. Her grandson, Elbert A. Smith, remembers that at Fulton City Emma made up her mind she had no friend left but God and no place to go but home.<sup>4</sup> A family friend, William Marks, lived there, and her brothers and sisters were nearby in Lee County, Illinois. Emma's four brothers (Isaac, David, Jesse, and Alva) lived near Amboy. Two of her sisters, Elizabeth and Tryal, lived near Dixon.<sup>5</sup> Emma found an apartment in a house and shared living space with several other families, including "the Knights, the Walkers, William Clapp, and the two Carter girls, as well as Mrs. Durfee."<sup>6</sup>

While living in Fulton, Emma received a letter from Lewis Bidamon in January 1847. He wrote to Emma from Canton, Illinois, to inquire about renting the Mansion House in Nauvoo. Emma returned to Nauvoo in February 1847, partially to take care of the Mansion House. The hostilities and threat of harm evidently subsided after "outlaws had invaded the city, pillaging, ransacking and destroying property."<sup>7</sup> New settlers had taken over properties in the town, and perhaps their presence became a deterrent to crime. In the spring of 1847, Lewis Bidamon also returned to Nauvoo and furthered his relationship with Emma.

Lewis Crum Bidamon was from a German family of Methodist background. Born in Williamsport, West Virginia, on 16 January 1806, he was fourteen when the family moved to Highland County, Ohio. In 1827, when he was twenty-one, he married Nancy Sebree, and they had a son (name unknown) the following year. In 1829, Lewis fathered his second child, a daughter, but Nancy Sebree was not the mother. Nancy Smith was the mother. Years later, in 1853, this daughter, Almira Smith Swiggart, began a twenty-seven-year correspondence with Lewis.<sup>8</sup> Shortly after Almira's birth, Nancy Sebree and Lewis moved to Canton, Illinois, where two more daughters were born into the family, Emma Zerelda and Mary Elizabeth. Lewis Bidamon's first wife and son died of unknown causes while in Canton.

In 1842, Lewis married a widow, Mary Ann Douglas. The marriage lasted about six months and ended in divorce. Evidently, the widow Douglas thought Lewis was a wealthy man because of his business dealings. He owned an iron foundry in Canton and then converted a steam mill into a carriage factory that was sold to the McCormick Company. Bidamon created a match manufacturing

business that later became the Diamond Match Company after it was sold. He also worked for the Warsaw and Rockford Railroad, ran a packet boat on the Mississippi River, had a hack service, and started a sugar cane mill in Nauvoo. Lewis was also a member of the Wine Grower's Association. Emma Smith McCallum, Joseph Smith III's daughter and Emma's first grandchild, reported that her Grandpa Bidamon had two large vineyards and made a lot of wine. He made the stair steps into the cellar wide enough to put barrels of wine down.<sup>9</sup> In 1867, Emma and Lewis prepared over three hundred gallons of wine and a cask of cider.<sup>10</sup> Emma Smith McCallum recalled that Bidamon was a strength to Emma; he was intelligent with a pleasing personality.<sup>11</sup> Having not been very successful in any of his business endeavors, Bidamon set up a merchandising business in an abandoned shop in Nauvoo to try again.

Joseph III described Lewis as "a fine-looking man, six feet tall, with high forehead and splendid bearing. He usually dressed very well."<sup>12</sup> Another author described Bidamon as

handsome, six feet tall, with dark hair and eyes. He was a great friend-maker with a charming personality, but he could lose his friends as fast as he made them because of this uncontrollable temper. He was a "hail-fellow well-met," who frequented bars and liked to drink with his friends. He was fond of games of chance, being quite a gambler at heart.<sup>13</sup>

Junius Wells, a twenty-two-year-old Mormon missionary, penned this appraisal of Lewis Bidamon: "He is a full robust, idle, trickly, dirty, specimen of the *homo genus*, who on short acquaintance was familiarly impudent. No one would think of taking offense from his conduct, he is so manifestly a plebeian of the lower sort."<sup>14</sup>

Joseph C. Rich wrote that Lewis was "a man who, even among his friends is reproached as a drunkard and an adulterer."<sup>15</sup> He was also described as having a good sense of humor, an attractive charm, an affinity for strong liquor and gambling, and an uncontrollable temper. The name of Lewis Bidamon evoked positive and negative responses that were probably influenced by one's allegiance (or lack of allegiance) to Mormonism.

Lewis Bidamon served as a justice of the peace and police magistrate in Nauvoo for several consecutive terms until his death. These positions were elective offices and indicate that his neighbors trusted and respected him to be responsible. In Bidamon's obituary, the *Nauvoo Independent* of 13 February 1891 stated that Bidamon was "the best known man in the city. . . . He was good-natured, humorous and a jocular character."

An 1885 letter appraised Bidamon's hospitality: "We first called on [Lewis] Bidamon at the Nauvoo House, and after a trip through the once beautiful city, we returned to the [House], and were pleasantly entertained for an hour or so."<sup>16</sup>

The following was printed in a Keokuk, Iowa, paper:

Whenever a party of visitors strike the town they are sent to Bidamon. . . . He is always loaded with big yarns. . . . He tells them that he will be 90 years of age if he lives until the 30th of next February. . . . [He] describes the wonderful tunnel under the river from the Mansion House to Montrose [and] shows them the secret or hidden chamber wherein was placed the body of the murdered prophet, etc., etc. He has been telling these stories every week for twenty years, and many of his victims accept them for truth. He is fond of fun, and he is having considerable of it.<sup>17</sup>

How did the relationship between Lewis and Emma blossom? Was Lewis interested in Emma? Was Emma lonely and looking for someone to help care for her children? Did the boys need a father? Did she need someone to tend the farm and garden? Did she need an excuse not to go to the West? Or was she genuinely attracted to Lewis? It is interesting to mentally compare Joseph Smith Jr. to Lewis Crum Bidamon. Both were charismatic with an entrepreneurial spirit. They dabbled in many aspects of work and pleasure. Both were sociable but with different outlets. Their names were known for good and bad. They both exhibited a lusty sexual appetite and a desire for women. Did the same things that attracted Emma to Joseph also attract her to Lewis?

Lewis Bidamon came to call throughout the summer and fall of 1847. Joseph III says of the two suitors she had during these months: "Mother preferred [Lewis] and accepted his hand."<sup>18</sup> A Methodist minister married them on 23 December, Joseph Smith Jr.'s birth date, three and one-half years after his death. Emma was forty-four, and Lewis was forty-one. Frederick Smith remembered that somebody tried to quiz Emma about why she married Bidamon. She replied that it was a private affair. Alexander, her grandson, said he believed it was so the western Mormons would leave her alone. Frederick said that Bidamon always treated her respectfully.<sup>19</sup> A third-hand account nearly thirty years later stated that Emma

promised the mob if they would let her stay in Nauvoo and not molest her, she would hide the Mormon books from her children and do all she could do to turn them against the church and the works of their father. She thought that marrying Bidamon would help the matter.<sup>20</sup>

In an 1856 visit to Nauvoo, Edmund Briggs stated that Emma told him:

I have always avoided talking to my children about having anything to do in the church, for I have suffered so much I have dreaded to have them take any part in it. . . . I never had confidence in Brigham Young, and Joseph did not for some time before his death. . . .

I was threatened by Brigham Young because I opposed and denounced his measures and would not go west with them. At that time they did not know where they were going themselves, but he told me that he would yet bring me prostrate to his feet.<sup>21</sup>



*Emma's sons and her second husband, circa 1860.  
Sitting left to right: "Major" Lewis C. Bidamon,  
Frederick Granger Williams Smith, and Joseph Smith, III.  
Standing left to right: David Hyrum Smith and Alexander Hale Smith.  
Courtesy RLDS Archives, Independence, Missouri.*

Of course, there was the usual gossip that Bidamon had married Emma for her property, that Emma had rejoined with the Methodist Church, that the marriage ended any hope of Emma's joining with the Utah Mormons, and that Emma was providing protection for her children. Gossip also intimated another possible affair involving Lewis. In an 1847 letter to Nancy Marinda Hyde from Sarah M. Kimball, it was stated that "Mrs. Kinney, who credits him with one child, says he still loves her."<sup>22</sup> There is no evidence to substantiate who this Mrs. Kinney was or the identity of that child.

Emma's children seemed to relate to Bidamon with affection. Joseph III described Lewis as having many admirable characteristics: He was honest in his dealing with others, did not like to be in debt, always found room for others at their table, and was always very sociable. However, Lewis was more a promoter than a worker. Bidamon had a small store, and the Smith boys were employed there. Lewis took charge of the farm two and one-half miles east of the city and helped with the large garden and the cow, horses, pigs, and chickens. In an 1888 *Herald* note, Joseph III states: "The following will be interesting to the readers . . . not on account of the political faith of our respected step-father, but as an item of news respecting him, and his age."<sup>23</sup> The note, signed by Brooks R.

Hamilton, said that eighty-two-year-old Lewis Bidamon supported Old Tippecanoe in 1836 and 1840 and would vote for General Ben Harrison. “He says he had one knockdown in defense of Old Tippecanoe in 1840, and that he wouldn’t stand back from another now if necessary for Gen. Ben.”<sup>24</sup>

One author suggests that David Hyrum Smith was disgusted with Bidamon’s drunkenness and foul language as expressed in his poem “Two Fates,” written in 1865. The poem compares the fate of a man drinking at a bar using filthy words to a horse that is better off standing outside in the sunshine.<sup>25</sup> However, on 24 June 1871, David wrote to Lewis Bidamon, teasing him about his new city magistrate position by addressing him as “Illustrious Juror” and then informing him that things were well and that “times are pretty bright in spite of weeds in the grapes and trouble with Mrs. Hodges.” His tone was indulgent and kind.<sup>26</sup> Alexander wrote to Emma with affection for his stepfather: “Give my kind regards to Pa Bidamon.”<sup>27</sup>

After eighteen months of marriage to Emma and a bleak financial picture, Lewis and his brother, John, headed to California for the Gold Rush. Lewis and Emma corresponded over the year he was gone, and their few letters reveal an intimate glimpse of affection. In May 1849, Lewis wrote from Iowa that “I have nothing to regret in determining the undertaking this jant only being Seperated from hir—that I *love* and the Society of the Children.”<sup>28</sup> Then, in the summer of 1849, he wrote from the Indian Territory:

Dear Emma, ofttimes me mind hovers around the[e] and in amagination press the[e] tenderly to my bosom. O my Love! If I could only here from you and know that you was well and the family and you was enjoying your Selfs, it would ease this akeing hart.<sup>29</sup>

One letter remains from Emma to Lewis during this period. In it, Emma wrote:

My dear Lewis, I have scarsely enjoyed any good thing since you left home, in consequence of the terrifying apprehension that you might be suffering for the most common comforts of life. . . . Some may think that I might be content, but I am not, neither can I be untill you are within my grasp, then, and not till then shall I be free from fears for your safety, and anxieties for your wellfare.<sup>30</sup>

Lewis wrote to Emma on 7 January 1850, from a hundred miles southeast of Sacramento, “I do not like California. It affords no charms for me and especly in the absence of hir and only hir that can make me happy.”<sup>31</sup> While there, he “manufactured axes and shovels for the miners, served Hangtown, California, as deputy sheriff, and labored in the goldfields.”<sup>32</sup> Lewis returned to Nauvoo in the summer of 1850 without striking it rich. He did make some money while in California but spent it on the trip back to Illinois via Panama, Cuba, and New Orleans. Emma and the children were glad to see him. Joseph III again wrote,



“Our step father is as good as a step father can be. He loves us all as well as he does his own children.”<sup>33</sup> Evidently, things went well for a little over a decade. During the 1860s, Lewis Bidamon built the Nauwoo House into a substantial residence. It was then referred to as the Riverside Mansion. In the cornerstone, there were some pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript that were badly damaged. Lewis preserved a few pages, “some of which he sent to President Joseph Smith at Lamoni, Iowa, and some of them he sent to Joseph F. Smith, son of Hyrum Smith, at Salt Lake City, Utah.”<sup>34</sup>



*Nauwoo House, ca 1870s  
Nauwoo, Illinois.  
Courtesy of RLDS Archives, Independence, Missouri.*

After her marriage to Bidamon, Emma kept busy managing the Mansion House. But she also found time to nurture and sustain others. An 1850 census indicated an eight-year-old girl named Margaret in the household as well as two boys (six and nine), whose mother had been shot. Julia, Emma's oldest living daughter, married Elisha Dixon in 1849 and left for Texas in 1852. She returned as a widow with a daughter named Julia in 1853. Elisha had been killed in an explosion on a steamer. Julia then married John Middleton in 1855 and endured the cruelty of an alcoholic husband who eventually left her. She also suffered from cancer later in life and lived only one year beyond Emma, dying in 1880.

Zerelda and Mary Elizabeth, Lewis's daughters from his first marriage, joined Emma's household in 1847 when they were thirteen and eleven. Mary was wed

to a Mr. Gibson in 1849 and took Zerelda with her when she moved away. Mary returned in 1860 with her eight-year-old son, named Charles, to live with the family again. No mention is found of Zerelda's fate. When Lewis Bidamon died, the obituary mentioned only Mary and Charles as living children.

In addition to Emma's caring for the children, Emma's first husband's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, moved into the household in 1851. What an incredible act of "human compassion"<sup>35</sup> for Emma to invite Lucy to live with the family and care of her. Lucy had been living with her son William and had become more frail, so she moved in with Emma and lived there until she died on 14 May. Lucy paid this tribute to Emma:

I have never seen a woman in my life, who would endure every species of fatigue and hardship, from month to month, and from year to year, with that unflinching courage, zeal, and patience, which she has ever done; for I know that which she has had to endure—she has been tossed upon the ocean of uncertainty—she has breast-ed the storms of persecution, and buffeted the rage of men and devils, which would have borne down almost any other woman.<sup>36</sup>

Emma's children began to grow into adulthood, marry, and establish their own homes.<sup>37</sup> Her daughters-in-law gave birth to several children. Alexander (23) and Elizabeth (16) were married on 23 June 1861; and a full-term infant, Frederick, was born in January 1862, six months after the marriage. Fourteen-year-old Elizabeth had been living in the home under Emma's care after the death of her mother and apparently became intimate with Alexander.

Emma's earliest encounter with death came from the ghost of Alvin, Joseph's oldest brother, which haunted their marriage. The next death was that of her first-born child, a son who was named Alvin after Joseph's brother. The baby died 16 June 1828 after living for only three hours. Those in attendance at the birth reported that the child had severe birth deformities. In April 1831, Emma lost twin babies about three hours after their birth. Her adopted son Joseph Murdock died in March 1832. Isaac Hale, her father, died 11 January 1839. Joseph Sr., her father-in-law, died on 14 September 1840 at Nauvoo. In August 1841, her brother-in-law Don Carlos died; and in September, baby Don Carlos died at fourteen months of age. An unnamed stillborn son died in February 1842. Emma's mother, Elizabeth Lewis Hale, died 16 February 1842. The Christmas season of 1842 was not a festive occasion, as Emma was quite sick. She gave birth to another stillborn son. Joseph, Hyrum, and Samuel all died in 1844 as a result of the Carthage Jail debacle. Emma's sister Phebe died 25 December 1856 or 1857. Her other sister, Tryal Hale Morse, and a niece, named Emma, were killed as a result of a tornado on 3 June 1860. Emma's brother, Alva, died about 1862. Her son Frederick died on 13 April 1862. Frederick's wife had left him in 1861, taking their daughter, Alice. During Frederick's ensuing illness, Emma cared for him but eventually lost him in death as well as the company of

her grandchild.<sup>38</sup> Jesse, brother to Emma, died 2 December 1874. David, another brother, died 16 April 1878.

Even though not technically a death, the deterioration of her son David's mental health must have been of great concern and grief to his mother. David worried about his mother caring for him. In a letter from David to Emma dated 4 January 1874, he wrote: "I know your reward in Heaven is sure, whatever mine may be. . . . Well, dear Mother, remember me as if I had been all to you I might have been."<sup>39</sup> Emma told Junius F. Wells that "David's imbecility [sic] was her greatest trouble."<sup>40</sup> David was committed to the Illinois State Hospital for the Insane, Elgin, in January 1877. He died there on 29 August 1904.

How did Emma survive these years of tragedy? Even after all she had been through, there was yet more.

Nancy O. Perryman Brooks Abercrombie was born in Cumberland County, Kentucky, on 16 November 1828 and was apprenticed to Mathew Baker in the "art of seamster"<sup>41</sup> when she was seven years old. Some time prior to 1840, the Mathew Baker family moved to Illinois; Nancy came along. In 1845, Nancy left the Baker family and married William Brooks. She was seventeen. They had one son, William Brooks Jr., and then Brooks either died or the marriage failed. She was then married to William Abercrombie. They had one daughter before Abercrombie died in 1852. Nancy was described by a grandchild as "petite with dark hair and eyes, a soft voice and a self-effacing manner. She was a 'sweet woman,' although a little shy."<sup>42</sup>

Nancy with her two children went to live in Sonora Township near Nauvoo with Thomas and Mary Luce. While there, a daughter, Mary, was born on 9 September 1859. Her father was not identified. In the fall of 1863, Nancy was pregnant with her fourth child. The father of this child was Lewis Bidamon, the husband of Emma Smith. A son, Charles Edwin, was born on 16 March 1864. Emma Smith turned sixty-one in July of the same year. Lewis was fifty-eight. There could have been an estrangement in the Lewis-Emma relationship that led to the Lewis-Nancy liaison, but that is speculation: "While [Emma] left no record of her personal feelings, her subsequent actions indicate that with personal courage she accepted the facts of life as they existed and did not dwell on them with rancor."<sup>43</sup>

In 1868, Nancy was unable to care for the son that Lewis Bidamon had fathered and asked Emma to take care of him. Emma agreed and four years later asked Nancy to be housekeeper, probably so she could be closer to her eight-year-old son. No mention is made of Nancy's other children. The two oldest would have been twenty-three and eighteen years of age in 1868. However, Mary would have been nine and still in need of care.

In 1879, Emma was dying of old age. "In an extraordinary act of compassion,"<sup>44</sup> she asked Lewis and Nancy to marry after her death to provide proper parentage for Charles. It was probably also out of concern for the aging Lewis.

Emma died on 30 April 1879. Lewis and Nancy married a little over a year later. He was married to Nancy from the age of seventy-four until he was eighty-five. Lewis Bidamon died on 11 February 1891 and was buried near the old homestead next to Emma. In Lewis's will, he rather humorously named Nancy to have

the East half of the . . . Riverside Mansion [also known as the Nauvoo House] . . . One half of the garret . . . equal priveleges of the halls and stairs below and above . . . one half of the cellar . . . and full ingress and egress to and from the privy on the premises.<sup>45</sup>

A "Notice of Sale" appeared in the 16 June 1893 *Nauvoo Independent* stating that the Nauvoo House would be sold at public auction by the executor of the Bidamon estate. The legal description stated that it was free and discharged of the estate and dower and homestead of Nancy Bidamon. Charles E. Bidamon became the purchaser of this property.<sup>46</sup> He sold it to the RLDS Church on 13 October 1909 for \$3,000.<sup>47</sup> Nancy moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where she died 30 July 1903.<sup>48</sup>

As an adult, Charles Bidamon recalled that Emma "was a person of very even temper. I never heard her say an unkind word, or raise her voice in anger or contention. . . . A noble woman, living and showing charity for all, loving and beloved."<sup>49</sup>

Several reports on Emma's character mention Charles. All of these people were residents of Nauvoo and intimately acquainted with the family. Some of the thoughts are: "Her stepson, Charles (Eddie), thought well of her."<sup>50</sup> "She also raised Eddie (Charles Edwin) her step-son and made a good mother to him."<sup>51</sup> "She was good to Eddie Bidamon, her stepson."<sup>52</sup> A printed statement attested to Emma's character:

There was a bell in the cupola on the Nauvoo House and it had a rope running down by the side of the stairs. During the storm the lightning struck the building and the



*Lewis C. Bidamon.  
Courtesy of RLDS Archives,  
Independence, Missouri.*

charge ran down the rope and split the floor. Eddie Bidamon was in the closet under the stairs and was struck by it. Emma was as calm when she picked him up and examined him to see how badly he was hurt, she was so kind about it and so thankful when she found that he wasn't badly hurt. She never seemed to get upset about anything.<sup>53</sup>

Charles reports that he was a full member of the household and family from the time he was four until Emma died when he was fifteen. These reports verify that he was part of the family and that people knew of his background and accepted it.

Charles Edwin Bidamon, Emma's stepson, married Rose (Rosetta Pode) Walther. They had eight children, two boys and six girls.<sup>54</sup> One daughter, Laura V. Bidamon Palm, was born in Nauvoo in 1889. She attended the RLDS Sunday school there on an irregular basis from 1906–11. Charlie and Rose lived in Nauvoo until 1915 and then moved to Wilmette, Illinois.

What message have I received from these added insights into the compassion of Emma Smith Bidamon and her interactions with people beyond the Mormon movement? My early lessons of Emma were that of the "Elect Lady," a true supporter of Joseph Smith, and a strong woman who endured. But later in life, as I, too, became a wife and mother and tasted a small amount of tragedy, I have come to respect Emma more as a genuine human being. I may not know her real feelings and thoughts, but I have the facts of where she lived, whom she interacted with, her family relationships, and the memories of those who knew her better than I ever can. I see a courageous person who continually demonstrated love and compassion in her life with a little stubbornness and expressed them in the legacy left for us to examine.

Emma Hale Smith Bidamon is an important part of the legacy of the Mormon religion. Many know well her privileged status among the various churches. I learned the Reorganized Church version and, therefore, thought I knew the whole story about Emma and Joseph Smith. I originally learned the child's version of the Smith family. Then, I learned the academic, scholarly version. I was really interested to discover more about the behind-the-scenes story not often presented to the public. The various Mormon religions have tended to view Emma Smith from the "Elect Lady" and the "wife of Joseph Smith" viewpoints. Some put her on a pedestal and then dethroned her without fully appreciating the human side of this remarkable woman.

My experience in reviewing her life was not that she was simply unique but that she was a multidimensional woman—sometimes like other women and yet often remarkable. I sense Emma's compassion during the many births and deaths, the moves of her household and family, the horror of a religious movement that betrayed her and cost her a husband, and the experience of being a friend and mother to so many children. How did Emma feel when she learned her second husband had fathered a child through a younger woman? What for-



Emma Smith Bidamon, circa 1875.  
 Courtesy RLDS Archives, Independence, Missouri.

giveness and compassion prompted her to agree to care for four-year-old Charles Edwin Bidamon and then to invite his mother to join the household? This Emma—the old, well-worn, tired, not-so-pretty Emma—speaks to me as a friend and sister. My heart goes out to her with love, and I feel sustained as I continue my journey.

Others have said it well:

“I was overwhelmed as I learned what a remarkable woman she was and of the depth and breadth of her compassion and contributions to the restoration.”<sup>55</sup>

“Emma’s suffering from poverty and persecution, her pain at the premature deaths of her husband and many of her children, her devotion to her posterity, and her loneliness at the close of her life are all significant parts of this woman’s history.”<sup>56</sup>

Val Avery and Linda Newell, who enticed me on this journey, sum it up by writing that her “compassion was the moderating force.”<sup>57</sup>

Emma’s words to her son, Joseph, on 2 December 1867 offer a lasting insight: “I often find I have to yield my will to surrounding circumstances, so I am daily trying . . . to be contented with our *condition* . . . and in *all things* to give thanks. . . . I have a promise that my last days shall be my best days.”<sup>58</sup>

TABLE ONE

**Emma Hale Smith Bidamon's Relocations  
Born 1804 (Pennsylvania)~~~~Died 1879 (Illinois)**

1804-27	1827	1829	1831	1838-39	1839-46	1847-79
Harmony, PA with parents	Manchester, NY with Joseph's parents <u>moved to</u> Harmony, PA (periodically until 1830)	Fayette, NY with Peter Whitmer Sr. <u>moved to</u> Harmony, PA <u>moved 1830</u> Fayette, NY	Kirtland, OH in the Whitney store <u>moved to</u> Hiram, OH with John Johnson family <u>move to</u> Kirtland, OH until 1838	Far West, MO <u>moved to</u> Quincy, IL with John and Sarah Cleveland	Nauvoo, IL Mansion House <u>moved to</u> Fulton City, IL 1846-47	Nauvoo, IL Nauvoo House a.k.a. Riverside Mansion

TABLE TWO

**Lewis Crum Bidamon  
Born 1806 (West Virginia)~~~~Died 1891 (Illinois)**

1827 married Nancy Seebree died ?	1829 liaison with Nancy Smith	1842 married Mary Ann Douglas (widow) divorced 1842	? liaison with Mrs. Kinney?	1847 married Emma Smith (widow) died 1879	1863 liaison with Nancy Abercrombie married 1880
SON 1828-30 DAUGHTER 1834?-1860? Emma Zerelda DAUGHTER 1836?-? Mary Elizabeth (Gibson) (one son Charles) 1852-?	DAUGHTER 1829-? Almira Smith (Swiggart)		CHILD?	5 STEP-CHILDREN	SON 1864- Charles Edwin (he married Rose Walther) 8 children

TABLE THREE

**Emma Smith Bidamon  
Family Births and Deaths**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Birth</b>	<b>Death</b>
1828	Alvin—son	Alvin—son
1830	Julia/Joseph Murdock adopted	
1831	Louisa/Thaddeus—twins	Louisa/Thaddeus—twins
1832	Joseph III—son	Joseph Murdock—adopted son
1836	Frederick G.—son	
1838	Alexander H.—son	
1839		Isaac Hale—father
1840	Don Carlos—son	Joseph Sr.—father-in-law
1841		Don Carlos—brother-in-law
		Don Carlos—son
1842	two sons (Feb. and Dec.)	two sons (Feb. and Dec.)
		Elizabeth Hale—mother
1844	David Hyrum—son	Joseph Jr.—spouse
		Hyrum, Samuel—brothers-in-law
1853		Elisha Dixon—son-in-law
1856		Lucy Mack Smith—mother-in-law
		Phebe—sister
1859		granddaughter (dau. of Joseph III)
1860		Tryal—sister and Emma—niece
1862		Alva—brother and Frederick—son
1865		grandson (son of Joseph III)
1869		Emmaline—daughter-in-law
1874		Jesse—brother
1877		grandson (son of Joseph III)
		Bertha—daughter-in-law
		David—brother

TABLE FOUR

**Nancy O. Perryman Brooks Abercrombie  
1828 (Kentucky)~~~~1903 (Missouri)**

<b>1845</b>	<b>?</b>	<b>1859</b>	<b>1863</b>	<b>1880</b>	<b>1893</b>
Married	Married	Liaison	Liaison	Married	Moved
William	William	with ?	with	Lewis	to
Brooks	Abercrombie		Lewis	Bidamon	Missouri
died ?	died 1852		Bidamon	died 1891	
SON	DAUGHTER	DAUGHTER	SON		
William	?	Mary 1859-?	Charles Edwin		
Brooks Jr.			1864-		
			Nancy and Charles moved in		
			with Emma Smith, 1868		



## Notes

1. Her firstborn, Alvin (1828); twins, Louisa and Thaddeus (1830); adopted Joseph (1831); Don Carlos (1841); an unnamed infant son born in February 1842; and another unnamed boy born the day after Christmas 1842.
2. Julia M. was the oldest (born and adopted in 1830), Joseph III (1832), Frederick G. (1836), and Alexander H. (1838).
3. Keith and Ann Terry, *Emma: The Dramatic Biography of Emma Smith* (Santa Barbara, California, 1979), 115.
4. Buddy Youngreen, *Reflections of Emma: Joseph Smith's Wife* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1982), 131.
5. Valeen Tippetts Avery, "Last Years of the Prophet's Wife: Emma Hale Smith Bidamon and the Establishment of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," master's thesis, April 1981, Northern Arizona University, 21–22.
6. Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe, 1804–1879* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 240.
7. Terry, 124.
8. Seven letters are in the Huntington Library in California.
9. Youngreen, 59.
10. Avery, 40.
11. Youngreen, 73.
12. Mary Audentia Smith Anderson, ed., *Joseph Smith III and the Restoration* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1952), 94.
13. E. Cecil McGavin, *The Family of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), 173.
14. Youngreen, 79.
15. *Ibid.*, 85.
16. *Saints Herald* 32 (13 June 1885), 384.
17. *Saints Herald* 33 (6 November 1886), 691–92.
18. Anderson, 94.
19. Youngreen, 101.
20. Newell and Avery, 248.
21. Edmund C. Briggs, "A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856," *Journal of History* 9 (October 1916): 453, 460.
22. Newell and Avery, 247.
23. *Saints Herald* 35 (22 September 1888), 602.
24. *Ibid.*, 602–3.
25. F. Mark McKiernan, "David H. Smith: A Son of the Prophet," *BYU Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 236.
26. Avery, 68–69.
27. *Ibid.*, 33.
28. Lewis Bidamon to Emma Bidamon (May 1849), P4 f6, RLDS Library/Archives, Independence, Missouri.
29. Newell and Avery, 252.
30. *Ibid.*, 255.
31. Lewis Bidamon to Emma Bidamon (7 January 1850), P4 f6, RLDS Library/Archives, Independence, Missouri.
32. Valeen Tippetts Avery and Linda King Newell, "Lewis C. Bidamon, Stepchild of Mormondom," *BYU Studies* 19 (1979): 381.

33. Newell and Avery, 258.
34. "Nauvoo House," *Saints Herald* 96 (26 September 1949), 920.
35. Terry, 128.
36. Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 190–91.
37. Joseph III married Emmeline Griswold in 1856; Frederick married Annie Maria Jones in 1857; Alexander married Elizabeth Agnes Kendall in 1861; David married Clara Charlotte Hartshorn in 1870.
38. Avery, 26.
39. *Ibid.*, 79.
40. *Ibid.*, 81.
41. *Ibid.*, 29.
42. Newell and Avery, 276.
43. Avery, 31.
44. Newell and Avery, 303.
45. Avery and Newell, 387.
46. "Nauvoo House," *Saints Herald* 100 (24 August 1953), 796.
47. "Nauvoo House," *Saints Herald* 96 (26 September 1949), 920.
48. Youngreen, 84.
49. Newell and Avery, 276.
50. F. A. Harsch Sr., P13 f1739, RLDS Library/Archives, Independence, Missouri.
51. Charlotte Stevenson, P13 f1737, RLDS Library/Archives, Independence, Missouri.
52. Albert Jemison, P13 f1742, RLDS Library/Archives, Independence, Missouri.
53. Charlotte Stevenson, P21 f73, (21 July 1940), RLDS Library/Archives, Independence, Missouri.
54. The children were Charles (of San Francisco), Laura Palm (of Wilmette), Ruth Brown (of Los Angeles), Leah McLean (of San Francisco), Thomas (of Wilmette), Adray Guetzow (of Chicago), Nancy Kalk (of Chicago), and Marcia Backman (of Oak Lawn).
55. Wendy Top, *Emma Hale Smith: A Woman's Perspective* (Orem, Utah: Keepsake Publishing, 1991), i.
56. Youngreen, xi.
57. Newell and Avery, 277.
58. *Ibid.*, 280.