

## Hard Questions in Church History

Lynne Hilton Wilson

### Questions to Consider

- What do we know about Emma’s childhood?
- Did Emma believe Joseph’s story?
- Why didn’t Emma’s family believe?

### Emma Hale Smith (1804-1879): Family Background and First 25 Years

#### Emma’s Parents: Isaac and Elizabeth Hale

The ancestors of Emma’s mother were on the Mayflower. Ancestors of Emma’s father, Isaac Hale, voyaged to America hoping to find prosperity.

- 1635 Heald (later spelled Hale) arrived in the Colonies as an indentured worker. He settled in Connecticut and enjoyed a modest lifestyle.
- Emma’s father Isaac Hale left his parental home in Connecticut to live with his grandfather Arah Ward in Wells, Vermont.
- In 1780, at age seventeen, he marched under the direction of Colonel Ebenezer Allen in the Revolutionary War.
- The same year, his Grandfather Ward died, and Isaac inherited his properties in Wells, Vermont. There was one important stipulation—that he take “into his care his Grandmother Phoebe Ward in her old age, to keep and provide for during her life” (Linda K. Newell, Valeen T. Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 4).

Because Isaac deeded a portion of his grandmother’s land to his brother in 1784, we assume that she lived only four more years. Free from the responsibility of being a landowner—and perhaps also that of his grandmother—Isaac was free to express his adventurous nature. In 1787, at age twenty-four, he explored the Susquehanna River to the Great Bend. After exploring the area and getting acquainted with the oldest settlers, Isaac went back to Vermont in 1790, at age twenty-seven and married his sweetheart Elizabeth Lewis. Isaac and his brother and their respective new brides were the first white settlers in the area later known as Harmony, Pennsylvania.

Isaac Hale (1763-1839) + Elizabeth Lewis Hale (1767-1842)

Jesse (1792-1874)  
David (1794-1878)  
Alva (1795-1862)

Phoebe (1798-1836)  
Elizabeth (1800-1874)  
Isaac (1802-1892)

Emma (1804-1879)  
Tryal (1806-1860)  
Reuben (1810-1891)

<p style="text-align: center;">Isaac Hale</p> <p>Birth: March 21, 1763 in Waterbury, Connecticut Son of Reuben Hale and Diantha Ward</p> <p>Marriage: September 20, 1790 to Elizabeth Lewis</p> <p>Residence: Connecticut, Vermont, NY, and PA</p> <p>Occupation: Farmer, Hunter, Innkeeper</p> <p>Religious Affiliation: Methodist Episcopal Church</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Elizabeth Lewis Hale</p> <p>Birth: November 19, 1767 in Litchfield County, Connecticut</p> <p>Daughter of Nathaniel Lewis and Esther Tuttle</p> <p>Marriage: September 20, 1790 to Isaac Hale</p> <p>Mother of nine children</p> <p>Occupation: Innkeeper</p>
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Military: Fought in the American Revolutionary War Death: January 11, 1839 in Harmony, Pennsylvania	Religious Affiliation: Methodist Episcopal Church Death: February 16, 1842 in Harmony, Pennsylvania
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Soon after their marriage, Isaac and Elizabeth, accompanied by extended family members, moved from Wells, Vermont approximately 220 miles southwest to an area of Pennsylvania along the Susquehanna River. Isaac purchased property on the north side of the Susquehanna. He lived within a few miles of the village of Harmony. On his approximately 620-acre property, he built his home—in which his nine children were born—and he was buried. During his almost fifty-year residence in the Susquehanna region, Isaac gained a reputation as a solid citizen. At one point he was a supervisor, assessor, and collector. He was also an expert marksman. He became a well-to-do hunter, innkeeper, and farmer, having a large orchard. Isaac was also a fur trader, shipping furs downriver to Philadelphia.

### The Hale Family Religious Practices

The Hales attended Daniel Buck's church, located six miles from their property. However, they stopped attending his worship services due to unorthodox religious practices. In 1807, a large Methodist revival took place near the Hale home. It was estimated that the number of people attending the revival was twice the population of the county. True to form for a revival, enthusiasm ran high. Emma was drawn to Methodism. Her mother Elizabeth Hale was baptized. Emma's uncle Nathaniel Lewis was ordained a deacon. Isaac Hale stood apart from religion until he overheard Emma praying for him. Isaac then turned to religion and was numbered with those of the first religious class conducted at Lanesboro, Pennsylvania, about two miles east of his property. Before long, Methodist meetings were held in the Hales' parlor with a traveling minister preaching in his home once a month.

### Birth, Education, Skills, and Personality

On June 10, 1804, Elizabeth Hale gave birth to her seventh child, Emma—also known as “Emmy.” She was very bright and could be considered a “tomboy.” She grew up canoeing on the river and loved to ride horses. It could rightfully be said that she:

Enjoyed physical activity	Made and sold cheese and probably butter from her cow
Enjoyed sleigh riding	Was independent
Musical (Sang Methodist Hymns and prepared hymnal)	Managed financial accounts
Cook in her father's inn	Housekeeper, had furnishings
Had knowledge of herbal medicine	Early Disciple of Restoration
Was sent away for more education at a girl's school after age twelve	Natural Leader (Relief Society)

### Emma Meets and Marries Joseph Smith

In the early 1820s, Josiah Stowell and Jason Tidwell came to the Susquehanna Valley looking for a silver mine in the Oquago Mountains, near Harmony, Pennsylvania. Initially, Isaac Hale had some connection with the Stowell/Tidwell search: men who came to the area in search of the silver mine boarded in Isaac's inn. Mr. Stowell hired Joseph Smith and his father to help find the silver mine (after a few weeks of digging, Joseph convinced his employers to stop and Mr. Stowell hired him as a farm hand instead). Joseph accepted room and board at the Hale boarding house. Joseph later wrote, it was here “I first saw my wife . . . Emma Hale” (*Times and Seasons*, 2 May 1842, 772). The happiness of meeting his future wife was tempered by the cold reception of sixty-two-year-old Isaac Hale. Isaac wrote, “I first became acquainted with Joseph Smith, Jr. in November 1825. He was at the time in the

employ of a set of men who were called “money-diggers” (Emily C. Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania*, 578).

According to Joseph Knight, when Joseph Smith stopped working for Josiah Stowell, Joseph Knight hired him to cut timber at his carding mill in Colesville, New York. It was Joseph Knight who loaned Joseph a sleigh to journey eighteen miles to court Emma (Emmy) Hale. Joseph may have also attended school in the area (Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 52).

In January 1827, Emma traveled about twenty miles north across the Pennsylvania boarder to New York. She planned to visit her sister and also probably intended to see her suitor, Joseph Smith, Jr. But what happened was unexpected. They had known each other over a year and Joseph encouraged her to elope. With a little persuasion, she agreed. Years later she confessed, “preferring him to all others,” she accepted his proposal. They were married on January 18, 1827 by Judge Tarbell in Banbridge, NY (Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *The Saints’ Herald* 26, no. 19 [October 1, 1879]: 101, 289; Gordon A. Madsen, *BYU Studies*, vol 30, no 2, 91ff).

Years later, Joseph recorded in his journal, “With what unspeakable delight, and what transports of joy swelled my bosom, when I took by the hand on that night, my beloved Emma, she that was my wife, even the wife of my youth; and the choice of my heart. . . . The fatigues, and the toils, the sorrows, and sufferings, and the joys and consolations from time to time. Oh! what a comingling of thought filled my mind for the moment, Again she is here, even in the seventh trouble, undaunted, firm and unwavering, unchangeable Emma” (*Journal*, Dec 1841-Dec 1842, 164. JosephSmithPapers.org).

### Joseph and Emma Reside in Harmony, Pennsylvania

After their marriage/elopement, Joseph and Emma moved into the Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith frame house in Manchester. There, Emma corresponded with her father, asking if she could receive her clothing, furniture, her cow, and other articles left behind. Isaac responded kindlier than might have been expected: “Her property was safe and at her disposal” (The Susquehanna Register, vol IX, Montrose, PA, 1May 1834, 1). Isaac extended an invitation to Joseph and Emma to make their home in Harmony. Joseph did not accept his offer until persecution mounted in Palmyra/Manchester. Joseph then sent word to Isaac of his acceptance. Isaac sold Joseph thirteen excellent acres—six acres pasture, six agriculture, and one prime land ([www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/agreement-with-isaac-hale-6-april-1829](http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/agreement-with-isaac-hale-6-april-1829)).

### Emma is “The Right Person”

According to Joseph Knight, “The ‘personage’ [a reference to angel Moroni] told [Joseph Smith] he could have the record the following September ‘if he brought with him the right person’ [to the hill] and indicated that Joseph would know who that was.” Joseph “looked into his glass and found it was Emma Hale Daughter of old Mr. Hale of Pensylvany (sic)” (William G. Hartley, “Close Friends as Witnesses: Joseph Smith and the Joseph Knight Families,” *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man*, 272). On September 21, shortly before midnight, Emma dressed in her bonnet and riding dress and left the Smith frame home with Joseph. They took Joseph Knight’s wagon and drove to the hill a short distance from the home. Emma waited in the wagon while Joseph climbed the hill and there conversed with the angel Moroni. When Joseph returned to the wagon with plates in hand, Emma was the first to know that he had received the golden plates from the angel Moroni.

## Emma and the Early Translation of the Book of Mormon

Emma was a witness of the covered plates. In addition to seeing Joseph carry them, her son later asked her about it, and he recorded her answer:

The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen tablecloth, which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book (Emma Smith, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints' Herald*, Oct. 1, 1879, 290).

It appears that she was also her husband's first scribe as he translated the Book of Mormon prior to April 1828. She later told her son:

When acting as his scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. . . . I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, and was present during the translation of the plates, and had cognizance of things as they transpired, it is marvelous to me, ‘a marvel and a wonder,’ as much so as to any one else (*ibid.*, 290).

We do not see Emma's handwriting in the surviving original manuscript pages, which may be due to the fact that only 28% of the pages survive—a portion that Oliver scribed. But she may have scribed earlier on the lost 116 manuscript pages—known as the Book of Lehi—or on other unavailable pages. She also acted as Joseph's scribe later, as directed by God in, July 1830, now recorded in D&C 25:6.

It was probably during this early translation of the Book of Lehi that Joseph asked: “Emma, did Jerusalem have walls around it?” When she answered “Yes,” Joseph replied, “Oh! I was afraid I had been deceived.” Emma later added the commentary to a questioner, Mr. Briggs: “He had such limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls” (John Welch and Erick B. Carlson, ed. *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*. Salt Lake City/Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2005; 129).

## Their Firstborn Dies in Childbirth

Before their first wedding anniversary, Emma was expecting their first child. Toward the end of her pregnancy, from mid-April to June 14, 1828, Martin Harris lived with Emma and Joseph in Harmony Pennsylvania, acting as scribe for the Book of Mormon. The day after Martin left with the first 116 manuscript pages of translation, Emma went into labor with their first child. The labor was difficult and their first son died the next day (Joseph Smith Family Bible, ca.1831-1866). They named him after Joseph's older brother Alvin, who had died almost five years earlier.

Emma herself was close to death and Joseph nursed her for two weeks. The trauma and hardship were intensified by the Emma's parents' lack of belief in Joseph's call as a prophet and the Book of Mormon as scripture. Martin's tardy return of the manuscript also worried Emma. It was at her insistence that Joseph left her in the hands of her mother so that Joseph could travel 140 miles to Palmyra to discover what had become of the 116 pages.

Within fourteen years (1828-1842), Emma would lose five more children to death—a total of four in childbirth and two who died at about twelve months. Tragic. It is hard to imagine the trauma and hardship that this caused to her physical, spiritual, and emotional health. Yet she trusted in the Lord and carried on.

### Excerpts from Letters between Emma and Joseph

1. Joseph wrote to Emma on April 4, 1839: “If you want to know how much I want to see you, examine your feelings, how much you want to see me, and judge for [yourself]. I would gladly [walk] from here to you barefoot and bareheaded, and half naked to see you and think it great pleasure.” (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 4 April 1839, p. [1]. Joseph Smith Papers).
2. Emma wrote to Joseph on April 25, 1837: “I cannot tell you my feelings when I found I would not see you before you left . . . yet I expect you can realize them.” (Letter of Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, 25 April 1837, p. 25. Joseph Smith Papers).
3. Emma wrote to Joseph on March 7, 1839: “You may be astonished at my bad writing and incoherent manner, but you will pardon all when you reflect on how hard it would be for you to write when your hands were stiffened with hard work, and your heart convulsed with intense anxiety. But I hope there is better days to come to us yet . . . ever your’s affectionately.” (Letter of Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, 7 March 1839, p. 37. Joseph Smith Papers).
4. Joseph wrote to Emma on October 13, 1832: “I hope you will excuse me for writing this letter so soon after writing for I feel I want to say something to you to comfort you in your [p]eculiar triel [sic] and present affliction.” (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 13 October 1832. [www.josephsmithpapers.org](http://www.josephsmithpapers.org)).
5. Joseph wrote to Emma on March 21, 1839: “I very well know your toils and sympathize with you if God will spare my life once more to have the privilege of taking care of you I will ease your care and endeavor to comfort your heart.” (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 21 March 1839, pg. [1 & 3]. Joseph Smith Papers).
6. Emma wrote to Joseph on March 7, 1839: “I shall not attempt to write my feelings altogether, for the situation in which you are, the walls, bars and bolts, rolling rivers, running streams, rising hills, sinking valleys, and spreading prairies, that separate us, and the cruel injustice that first cast you into prison and still holds you there.” (Letter of Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, 7 March 1839, p. 37. Joseph Smith Papers).
7. Joseph wrote to Emma on April 4, 1839: “My Dear Emma, I think of you and the children continually. If I could tell you of my tale, I think you would say it was altogether enough for one to gratify the malice of hell that I have suffered. I want to see little Fredrick, Joseph, Julia, and Alexander, Joanna and old Major.” The latter was his dog. (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 4 April 1839, p. [1]. Joseph Smith Papers).
8. Joseph wrote to Emma on November 12, 1838: “Oh my affectionate Emma, I want you to remember that I am [a] true and faithful friend, to you and the children, forever my heart is entwined around yours forever and ever. (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 12 November 1838, pg. 1-2. Joseph Smith Papers).
9. Joseph wrote to Emma on June 27, 1844: “I am very much resigned to my lot, knowing I am justified and have done the best that could be done. Give my love to the children and

all my Friends.” (Letter of Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 27 June 1844, pg. 1-2. Joseph Smith Papers).

### Oliver Cowdery 1835 Statement about Emma

. . . Mrs. Smith, (formerly Emma Hale.) She has most certainly evinced a decidedly correct mind and uncommon ability of talent and judgment, in a manifest willingness to fulfill, on her part, that passage in sacred writ,—“and they twain shall be one flesh”,—by accompanying her husband, against the wishes and advise of her relatives, to a land of strangers: and however I may deprecate their actions, can say in justice, her character stands as fair for morality, piety and virtue, as any in the world (Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” October 1835; <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1834-1836/98#full-transcript>).

### Lucy Mack Smith’s 1845 Statement about Emma

Shortly after Joseph death, Emma’s mother-in-law Lucy Mack Smith recorded a statement of Emma’s qualities:

Whatever her hands found to do, she did with her might, untill [sic] she went so far beyond her strength, that she brought upon herself a heavy fit of sickness, which lasted for weeks. And, although her strength was exhausted, still her spirits were the same; which in fact, was always the case with her under the most trying circu[m]stances: And 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 always done; for I know that which she has had to endure; that she has been tossed upon the ocean of uncertainty; that She has breasted the storm of persecution, and buffeted the rage of man men and devils, until [sic] she has been swallowed up in a sea of trouble which have borne down almost any other woman (Lucy Mack Smith History, 1845, p. 190, [www.josephsmithpapers.org](http://www.josephsmithpapers.org)).

### Emma and Joseph’s Children

#### Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844) + Emma Hale (1804-1879)

Alvin (1828-1828)	Joseph Murdock (1831-1832)	Don Carlos (1840-1841)
Louisa (1831-1831)	Joseph III (1832-1914)	Son (1842-1842)
Thadius (1831-1831)	Fredrick (1836-1862)	David Hyrum (1844-1904)
Julia Murdock (1831-1880)	Alexander (1838-1909)	

#### Timeline of Emma Hale Smith (July 10, 1804–April 30, 1879)

July 10, 1804	Emma Hale, daughter of Isaac Hale and Elizabeth Lewis, seventh child born in Willingborough Township (renamed Harmony in 1809), Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania.
November 1825	Age 21: Meets Joseph Smith.
January 18, 1827	Age 22: Joseph and Emma marry in South Bainbridge, Chenango County, New York, officiated by Justice of the Peace Zachariah Tarbell.
September 22, 1827	First to learn that Joseph has the golden plates.
1828-1829	Scribe for the Book of Mormon translation.
June 15, 1828	Age 23: Gives birth to son in Harmony; baby Alvin dies.
June 28, 1830	Age 25: Is baptized a member of the Church of Christ by Oliver Cowdery.
July 1830	Age 26: Is the subject of a revelation to Joseph (D&C 25).

Aug-Sept 1830	Conceives twins.
Jan-February 1831	Moves to Kirtland, Geauga County, Ohio.
April 30, 1831	Gives birth to a twins—son and daughter—in Kirtland; twins die the same day.
May 1831	Becomes the adoptive mother of twins—Joseph and Julia Murdock.
Sep 1831-Mar 1832	Resides in the John Johnson home in Hiram, Portage County, Ohio.
March 29, 1832	Age 28: Adopted son Joseph Murdock dies at age ten months. Pregnant with Joseph III.
November 6, 1832	Age 29: Gives birth to Joseph Smith III in an upper room of the Gilbert and Whitney Store. Julia is eighteen months old).
December 9, 1834	Age 30: Joseph Smith Sr. gives Emma and Joseph their patriarchal blessings.
September 14, 1835	Emma assigned “to make a selection of sacred hymns.”
1835	A Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Church of the Latter-Day Saints is published.
June 20, 1836	Age 32: Gives birth to Frederick Granger Williams Smith in Kirtland (Julia 5, Joseph III 3 ½).
Jan-March 1838	Age 33: Journey to Far West, Missouri.
June 2, 1838	Gives birth to Alexander Hale Smith in Far West. (Julia 7, Joseph III 5 ½, Frederick 2).
December 1838	Age 34: With Mary, Hyrum’s wife, and their two babies, visits Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail.
February 1839	Leaves Missouri; crosses the Mississippi River to reach Quincy, Illinois.
May 10, 1839	Moves to Commerce (later Nauvoo), Hancock County, Illinois.
October 27, 1839	Age 35: High Council of Nauvoo votes that “Sister Emma Smith select and publish a hymn-book for the use of the church.”
June 13, 1840	Age 35: Delivers Don Carlos Smith in Nauvoo (Julia 10, Joseph III 8 ½, Frederick 4, Alex 2).
August 15, 1841	Age 37: Don Carlos Smith dies, age two.
1841	Compiles a hymnal consisting of 304 hymns.
February 6, 1842	Age 38: Gives birth to 8th child, an unnamed son who dies, in Nauvoo.
March 17, 1842	Elected President of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo.
June 27, 1844	Age 39: Mob kills Joseph and his brother Hyrum Smith in Carthage, Illinois.
Nov 17, 1844	Age 40: Gives birth to David Hyrum Smith in Nauvoo (Julia 13 ½, Joseph III 12, Fredrick 8, Alexander 6 ½).
December 23, 1847	Age 43: Marries Lewis Crum Bidamon at Nauvoo on Joseph Smith’s Birthday.
April 6, 1860	Age 56: Begins affiliation with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.
April 30, 1879	Age 74: Dies in Nauvoo.

### Sources:

*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, [https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Smith,\\_Emma\\_Hale](https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Smith,_Emma_Hale); Joseph Smith Papers; *Biographical Register*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/emma-hale-smith>; Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr., *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man*. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1993; BYU Studies, Book of Mormon Central, <https://bookofmormoncentral.org/search/google/Emma#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=Emma&gsc.sort>; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (NY: Vintage Books, 2005); Lavina Anderson, *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Book, 2001). Gordon A. Madsen, “Joseph Smith’s 1826 Trial: A Legal Setting,” *BYU Studies*, vol. 30, no 2, 91ff. Linda K. Newell, Valeen T. Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (Champaign IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994).