

Increasing LDS acknowledgment of polygamy fueled the anti-Mormon criticism and persecution that followed the pioneers as they made their way west after 1846. In the years following Mormon settlement in Utah and the Intermountain West, polygamy's profile was raised even higher both within and without the church. In response to the national anti-polygamy outcry, Congress enacted the 1882 Edmunds Act, which defined "unlawful cohabitation" as supporting and caring for more than one woman, legally disenfranchising polygamists and their supporters. The Edmunds Act forced polygamists, especially those among the church hierarchy, to go underground to avoid arrest, so ten-year-old Owen was left fatherless for extended periods of time as his father, Wilford, attempted to stay a step ahead of law enforcement. Congress passed the Edmunds-Tucker Act in March 1887, which required wives to testify against husbands, abolished woman suffrage in Utah, and dissolved the Nauvoo Legion and the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, which had aided foreign Latter-day Saints in their immigration to Utah. Congress enacted these laws as a way to force the LDS Church to discontinue what outsiders saw as a depraved practice rather than as a doctrinal mandate to which the church subscribed. These two acts created an almost unbearable situation for the polygamists who were separated from their families through incarceration, seclusion, or missionary service to foreign lands, causing them to rethink the practicality of a now-illegal practice. Four months after the passage of the Edmunds-Tucker Act, President John Taylor died, leaving Wilford Woodruff to preside over the church. Owen was then fifteen years old.

President Woodruff issued his anti-polygamy Manifesto in September 1890, announcing that the church would discontinue the practice of plural marriage and conform to the laws of the United States. He declared in the Manifesto that his advice to the Latter-day Saints was to "refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land."¹¹ He said that he received this proclamation as an answer to his prayers "by vision and revelation" and that the Lord "told me exactly what to do and what the result would be if we did not do it."¹²

A month later, this "Official Declaration" was sustained unanimously by the general church membership during General Conference on October 6, 1890, and later added to the 1908 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, thus making it part of canonized LDS scripture.¹³ In this context, George Q. Cannon, counselor to President Woodruff, expressed the political effects of continuing the practice of plural marriage: "I have ever been assured hundreds of times, by men, too, of wisdom and discernment, that our overthrow was inevitable unless we conformed to the demands of public opinion and renounced all peculiarities of faith."¹⁴

However, appealing the national public also sowed seeds of confusion among the Latter-day Saints because the Manifesto raised