

Apostle John Willard Young

I. Amazing Background

A. Ordained an Apostle at Age 11. “On Nov. 22, 1855, eleven-year-old John Willard Young, son of Brigham Young, received his endowment. At the end of that ceremony, “President Young placed his hands on the head of his son and ordained him an apostle.” Later, Brigham named three other sons as apostles. “All this was done without the knowledge of the other general authorities.” (Todd Compton, citing “John Willard Young Papers, LDS Church Archives; *Dialogue*, Winter 2002, 111-112.)

B. Little Interest in Church. “From 1863 on, although John Willard was an apostle and assistant counselor in the First Presidency, he spent much of his life in New York, engaged in business ventures. In these he alternated between dazzling success and inability to fulfill his dreams and promises. One day he would be a millionaire (and he liked to live like a millionaire), the next he would be penniless. He quickly became chronically indebted and beset by creditors. He raised money with a golden tongue, but when his projects failed, many contributors felt betrayed. . . . Brigham Sr. would often plead with John Willard to come back to Utah to take up his responsibilities in church leadership, but John Willard never seemed singlemindedly interested in church affairs.” (*Ibid.*, 111-12.)

a. Emulated Brigham’s Tastes. As an example of John W.’s tastes, he once wrote to his father, “As it was generally known that I was your son, I felt I could do no less than stop at the finest hotel.” (*Ibid.*, 132.)

C. Called as Assistant Counselor: Debts Paid. In April 1873, John Willard, along with four others, was publicly sustained as an assistant counselor to Brigham. Still John did not seem to fulfill his church obligations in any substantial way. Brigham went to the length of paying many of John Willard’s debts to convince him to come back to Utah, but after a stay in Zion, John Willard once again returned to the east.” (*Ibid.*, 121-22.)

D. Called to First Presidency at 32. 1876. “Toward the end of Brigham’s life, he managed to bring John Willard back to church service once again. In February and March 1876, John Willard visited Utah. On the day before his departure, Brigham told his son that he desired to make him ‘his first counselor in the First Presidency if he would walk up to his duties.’ Evidently, Brigham Young once again coaxed him back by offering financial assistance. John Willard agreed to accept this high church position. . . . [He] returned to Utah in October 1876, and became First Counselor. This youthful apostle—now only 32 years old—had a church position of high visibility.” Todd Compton, citing “John Willard Young Papers, LDS Church Archives; *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 2002, 122.)

E. Received Second Anointing. 1877. “He had avoided church service throughout his life, but now held the second most important position in the church.” He received his second anointing on March 28, 1877. (*Ibid.*)

F. Tensions with Joseph F. Smith Over Appointment to Presidency. “A behind-the scenes vignette shows the tension between John Willard and Joseph F. Smith . . . Evidently, after John Willard was chosen as First Counselor, on Aug. 29, 1877, Brigham brought the matter before the Twelve to enlist their support. However, Joseph F. ‘Stated that he thought the people would very much prefer to see Brigham Jr. selected, rather than to take John W. to fill that position. President Young turned to Joseph F. and shaking his finger at him said, ‘I have got Brigham [Jr.] and I have got you and I want John W.’” (*Reminiscences of Charles W. Nibley, 1849-1931*, 1934, 73-74; cited in Compton, 123.)

1. Exiled on Mission. “Apostle Joseph F. Smith became a missionary-exile for opposing Young’s appointment of his son John W. Young as first counselor in 1876. Brigham condemned Smith’s opposition and called him on a foreign mission for ‘not less than five years.’ The Twelve rescinded this mission-exile after Young died in 1877. Of this incident a counselor in the Presidency [Charles W. Nibley] later wrote, ‘Truly man proposes and God disposes.’” (D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 1997, 39.)

2. Joseph F. Exiled to Europe. “Brigham immediately instructed Joseph F. to prepare to go on a five-year European mission. Joseph F. went to Europe, but was recalled soon after, when Brigham died.” (*Ibid.*)

G. John W.’s Salary. At a time (1877) when the other apostles were receiving \$2,000 a year from the tithing office for their living allowance, John W. Young was receiving \$16,000. Following Brigham Young’s death in that year, the others were shocked to learn about the arrangement for John W. Young. He was quickly reduced to \$2,000 as well. (D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 1997, 774.)

H. Alienation from Other Apostles: Named “Counselor to the Twelve.” 1877. At the death of Brigham Young, a new position was created for his counselors (Daniel H. Wells and John Willard Young), who were apostles, but not members of the Quorum of the Twelve. They became “counselors to the Twelve,” a new position. John W. “returned to the East, to take up his favored business dealings once again. . . . John Willard’s relations with the other general authorities quickly deteriorated.” (*Reminiscences of Charles W. Nibley, 1849-1931*, 1934, 73-4; cited in Compton, 124.)

I. Debts Paid Off By Church. Upon the death of Brigham Young, the Church paid for the accumulated debts of his son, apostle John W. Young, to the amount of \$53,682.22. (Leonard Arrington, *The Pacific His-torical Review*, February 1952, 18.)

a. Worth \$1,220,192 in 2015. A sum of \$53,682 in 1877 would be the equivalent of \$1,220,192 in 2015. (davemanuel.com/inflation-calculator.php; accessed Feb. 3, 2015.)

II. **Growing Concern About His Actions**

A. No Confidence in John W. April 3, 1881. These notations from Wilford Woodruff’s journal show the feelings expressed in 1881 at meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve: “We discussed the subject of John W Youngs affairs on the Rail Road which was not satisfactory. The Twelve were requested to take the matter in hand.” (*Wilford Woodruff Journal*, April 3, 1881.)

1. “The Twelve Met at Noon and discussed John W Youngs Case again and Expect to withhold his name at Conference.” (*Ibid.*, April 4, 1881.)

B. Apostles Oppose Having Him as Counselor. “The Twelve met in Council . . . and he must make ample satisfaction to the Presidency of the Church before we Can Consent to have him stand as a Councillor to the Twelve Apostles. Carried Unanimously.” (*Ibid.*, May 21, 1881.)

C. Name Withheld at April 1881 Conference and After. “On April 6, 1881, John’s name was withheld from the list of general authorities [though he was not formally dropped as an apostle]. On May 20, he was tried by the Quorum of the Twelve, but a reconciliation followed. He was again tried by the Quorum on April 3, 1883, immediately before General Conference, ‘for conduct unacceptable to the rest of the Quorum’; again he obtained reconciliation. On April 29, 1884, John Willard was ‘threatened with church discipline regarding his handling of church finances.’ and a year later, he was tried by the Quorum of the Twelve once again, on Nov. 7, 1885, when his release from general authority status was discussed. The authorities objected to John Willard’s long stay in the East, his disobedience to counsel, and the fact that his business dealings had not been in line with the church leaders’ desire. John Willard, however, obtained another reconciliation.” (*Reminiscences of Charles W. Nibley, 1849-1931*, 1934, 73-4; cited in Compton, 124.)

D. Not Worthy to Be Counselor. May 27, 1885. “Pres. Cannon handed our quorum a letter from John W. Young to answer John W’s failure to do his duty was [sic] freely and fully discussed and it was generally thought

that he was not worthy of being our counselor.” (*The Diaries of Heber J. Grant 1880-1895, Abridged*, Privately published, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2010, 18.)

E. Called to Repentance By His Brother, Brigham, Jr. Nov. 7, 1885. “Our meeting this evening was for the purpose of investigating the conduct and actions of Counselor John W. Young, some of his financial moves failing, that he had neglected the duties of his calling in his efforts to make money. . . . Especially powerful were the remarks of Bro Brigham Young [Jr.]. If ever man spake by the power of God brother Brigham did tonight. Brigham called upon his brother to step into line or it was inevitable that he must lose his standing with his brethren and finally in the Church. . . . At first John W. Justified himself in all his transactions and felt that he had done as much if not more for the cause while in New York, Washington & other eastern cities than most of the brethren. A motion was finally made by Bro Lyman that John W Young be dismissed from our quorum as counselor. Bro Young finally felt humbled in his spirit and made a promise which I think was sincere that he would in the future do his duty and Bro Lyman’s motion was not put.” (*Ibid.*, 21.)

F. Heber J. Grant’s Opinion of John W. Young. July 7, 1887. “Prest Cannon read us some telegrams that had been received from John W. Young also the answers that had been sent. These telegrams were regarding money matters and they were not calculated to inspire me with any additional confidence in brother John W. Young’s management of financial matters and my confidence in him heretofore has been wonderfully poor. I trust he may make a full and satisfactory report of how all the money forwarded him is spent but I have strong doubts of his doing so.” (*The Diaries of Heber J. Grant 1880-1895, Abridged*, Privately published, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2010, 32.)

G. Apostle John W. Young Was Go Between. Oct. 19, 1888. “A telegram was recd from Hon John T. Caine at Washington [D.C.] announcing the adjournment of the Congress for tomorrow, Saturday. A telegram was sent to him to remain there till after Monday next and in the meantime confer with the Leaders of the Democratic Party as to how much money they expect from Utah, if any, for the campaign. Bro John W Young having reported that they want \$25,000.00. (*In the President’s Office: The Diaries of L. John Nuttall, 1879-1892*, edited by Jedediah S. Rogers, 2007, 274.)

1. Woodruff Reluctant to Send Through John W. “According to the First Presidency Office Journal, October 19, 1888, typescript in Quinn Papers, original in LDS Archives: ‘The following telegram was sent to him [John T. Caine] in cipher, viz:

John W. Young states leaders [of the] Democratic party think we should contribute twenty five thousand to the campaign. Prest Woodruff thinks he should have it direct from them or through one in whom he has more confidence regarding money matters. Prest Woodruff absent, will be home Monday, when conclusion might be reached. We think \$25,000 is more than we can raise in [our] present state of finances, owing to the suits, but are willing to do our best. Will you see what do they expect of us and let us know. Wait until Prest Woodruff returns.

Joseph F. Smith

James Jack”

(*In the President’s Office: The Diaries of L. John Nuttall, 1879-1892*, edited by Jedediah S. Rogers, 2007, 274, f23.)

H. Why Was He Kept On? Because of his political and financial connections in the East, church leaders were reluctant to release John W., particularly during the delicate negotiations regarding statehood and anti-polygamy legislation. “In this mission, he was entrusted with extensive funds from the church to grease judicial, editorial, or political wheels. However, in 1888 he was accused by Joseph F. Smith of using this money unethically to maintain his wealthy lifestyle. Joseph F. Smith replaced him as head of Utah’s statehood efforts at that time, to John Willard’s chagrin.” (Todd Compton, citing “John Willard Young Papers, LDS Church Archives; *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 2002, 125-26.)

I. Given \$40,000 Bank Loan in 1889. Nov. 27, 1889. “I attended a meeting of the Directors of Z[ion’s]

S[avings] B[ank] and T[rust] Co. At 10 a.m. A request of John W. Young to get some money from the Bank was considered. A resolution was adopted whereby he can get \$40,00000 on loan if he complys with the require-ments as set forth in the resolution. He appears to be a very unsafe man to do business with.” (*In the President’s Office: The Diaries of L. John Nuttall, 1879-1892*, edited by Jedediah S. Rogers, 2007, 394-95.)

J. Made Large Bonus in Mexico. June 18, 1891. “I read a letter aloud which the Presidency have received from John W. Young. . . . John W. tells of his good deal in the Mexican railway scheme. He has sold his franchises, etc., for a good large bonus (some say \$1,500,000) and retained the right of construction, which will also bring him good profits.” (*Candid Insights of a Mormon Apostle: The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon, 1889-1895*, edited by Edward Leo Lyman, 2010, 220.)

K. Efforts To Remove Him from Office. Oct. 3, 1891. On this date the First Presidency and Twelve met to consider what to do with John W. Young. “Bro. Merrill opened our meeting with prayer, and we then considered the case of John W. Young. There was a fear expressed that if his name is presented to the Conference there will be some vote against him, and many will refuse to vote in his favor. The brethren were then called in turn to express themselves concerning him. F[ranklin] D. Richards felt the best thing to do was to quietly drop him, and not offer a word of explanation as to the cause. F[rancis] M. Lyman had felt condemned in his heart for years whenever he voted to sustain John W. Young as counselor to the quorum, because of his utter indifference to his Church duties, and his financial difficulties which have brought reproach upon the Saints. He favored his removal. H[eber] J. Grant felt that it might be best to hold on to him a little longer and not to add to his troubles by withdrawing our support when he might be in a position need it most to consummate his financial plans. Bros. Merrill and Lund offered no decided opinion either way, though the former had refused for some time to vote in favor of John W. when he was counselor to Pres. Young because of his improper acts; now, however, he had nothing in his heart against J. W. Young.” (*Ibid.*, 253-54.)

L. Liable to Indictment for Embezzlement? Oct. 3, 1891. “I [Abraham H. Cannon] felt that the most we could do in the matter and what I thought would be proper, [would be] to suspend John W., and so state to the Conference, till he gave some satisfactory explanations concerning his conduct of late in the matter of his financial obligations, it being even said that he is liable to indictment in Provo for embezzlement for his dis-honesty in connection with the disposal of the street railway bonds of that city.” (*Ibid.*, 254.)

M. Young Requests Release Himself. Oct. 3, 1891. “Pres. George Q. Cannon arrived at this point, with a letter from Young. In it, Young requested that his name not be presented at that time, but that he be relieved of his position. “It was therefore unanimously decided that this course be taken and a statement be made that at his request his name is not presented.” (*Candid Insights of a Mormon Apostle: The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon, 1889-1895*, edited by Edward Leo Lyman, 2010, 253-54.)

1. Young Sent a Letter of Resignation to the Brethren in 1891, and was Quickly Dropped. On April 5, 1889, the Twelve discussed releasing John W. Young from his calling; they debated the same issue two years later. “During the discussion they received a letter of resignation from John Willard. Three days later, he was released from his calling as Counselor to the Twelve. Evidently, he had suffered terrible financial setbacks at the time. (Todd Compton, citing “John Willard Young Papers, LDS Church Archives; *Dialogue*, Winter 2002, 125-26.)

2. Still an Apostle and in Line to Be President. While John Willard was still an apostle, and in line to become president of the church through the policy of apostolic seniority by ordination, he was no longer recog-nized at conference as a general authority, and relations between him and the church leaders had become extremely cool.” His life continued to spiral downward.” (*Ibid.*, 125-26.)

III. John W. Young’s Later Years

A. Line of Succession Changed. Relations between John W. and the Twelve deteriorated dramatically. They detested his lifestyle in the East, but hesitated to replace him because of his financial and political ties at a time statehood for Utah and anti-polygamy issues were heating up. The Twelve debated dropping him several different times, but always held back. He spent money lavishly, and seemed to lose it almost as fast as he obtained it. Because John W. had been ordained an apostle at such a young age, he seemed likely to become president of the Church in due course. Only a change in the rules for succession (counting only the years spent in the Quorum rather than the years since ordination) kept him from the top position. President Lorenzo Snow made the necessary change shortly before his death. (*Ibid.*)

B. Did He Expect to Become President? “On October 10, 1901, President Lorenzo Snow died. Five days later, John Willard was in Utah. ‘It was entirely possible that it was for succession reasons that John W. arrived in Salt Lake City,’ writes Watson [his biographer]. If so, he must have been bitterly disappointed when he discovered the policy change. [Succession would no longer be determined by seniority based on date of ordination as an apostle, but on continuous service in the Quorum of the Twelve.] His rival and critic Joseph F. Smith became president of the church on Oct. 17, 1901 . . . Joseph F. called a special conference in November, and explained that Lorenzo Snow had directed him to reorganize the First Presidency immediately after his death, with himself (Joseph F.) as president. Again, this might have been an act to forestall the possibility of John Willard putting forth any claim to the presidency, for John Willard had been ordained an apostle eleven years before Joseph F. Smith had. Furthermore, Lorenzo Snow’s change in policy had been very recent, and perhaps was not widely known or understood. John Willard returned to New York, where he probably felt more at home than in Utah. This little-known and little-understood succession crisis had passed.” (Todd Compton, citing “John Willard Young Papers, LDS Church Archives; *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 2002, 129.)

C. Young Left Utah for New York and Europe. “Upon hearing of Snow’s death, John W. Young returned to Utah, very possibly assuming he would be the new President. When he heard of the change in procedure, he returned to New York. “Financial disaster forced him to leave New York for Europe. Four of his five wives divorced him, and he fell on hard times.” (Todd Compton, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 2002, 129-130.)

D. Tried to Borrow Money From Church in 1893. Nov. 9, 1893. “After this meeting I went to the meeting of the State Bank Directors where we passed a resolution authorizing the borrowing by the bank of \$85,000. A message was also read from John W. Young in London asking the State and Zion’s Savings banks [both owned by the Church] to loan him \$10,000, which amount he says will enable him to get out of his difficulties. Other-wise he feels himself in danger of ruin, and it is feared he will be imprisoned. We are in no position to help him, and therefore took no action on his request.” (*Candid Insights*, 437-8.)

E. John W. Young and Embezzlement Charges. May 25, 1893. “We met in the apostles’ room of the Temple. A letter was read from [four men]. . . requesting the services of the authorities in assisting them to effect a settlement with John W. Young, who took the Provo street railway bonds to New York with him some time ago and negotiated them for about \$50,000, though they were of the par value of \$100,000 and of the amount re-ceived only remitted to the company the sum of \$5,000. He expended on the road from his own funds about seven or nine thousand dollars. These brethren are at personal loss in this matter as well as at a great loss as stock-holders in the Company, which has gone to the wall through the embezzlement of Bro. Young. The stock-holders threaten to try and have him extradited and punished, unless he makes a settlement. It is doubtful if the latter can be done. It was decided that the Presidency should write him a letter, and use their influence to have John W. make the matter right.” (*Candid Insights of a Mormon Apostle: The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon, 1889-1895*, edited by Edward Leo Lyman, 2010, 386.)

F. Scammed a Widow in London Out of \$6,000. Jan. 25, 1894. “Pres. Woodruff told of John W. Young having obtained \$6,000 from a widow of the Church in London with Kaibab bonds as security. John told her that he was in good standing in the Church, and the Lord had revealed to him that she was to loan him the money. She

is likely to lose it all.” (*Ibid.*, 465.)

G. Last Poverty-Filled Days: Elevator Operator. “In John Willard Young’s last years, he made his living by serving as an elevator operator in an exclusive New York hotel where he had once been a high-paying resident. . . . He would attend the LDS branch in New York as a regular member. A pathetic account records that the branch president would have to corner new members and warn them not to lend any money to John Willard when he approached them.” (Todd Compton, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 2002, 129-130.)

H. Son Hooper’s Murder Trial. “Another shattering blow to Young was a wayward son’s involvement in a bizarre, highly publicized murder case in New York. John Willard’s son, Hooper, was living in New York and had arranged a tryst in an apartment with a disreputable woman. She took drugs (possibly given to her by him) and died of an overdose. He probably did not kill her intentionally, even if he did give her the drugs. However, after she died, he panicked, and instead of calling the police, tried to dispose of the body himself, throwing it in the river. The river washed it up, detectives traced it back to Hooper, and after a sensational trial, he was sent to Sing Sing for some twenty years. Thus it is possible he did not commit an actual murder, although he was certainly involved with disreputable women, drugs, and trying to cover up the woman’s death.” (*Ibid.*, 130.)

1. “Blood Atonement.” A New York newspaper reported that someone had written in blood on the wall of the woman’s apartment, “Blood Atonement.” It may have been another example of “yellow journalism” at the time. (*Ibid.*)

I. At Death, Body Returned to Utah. Feb. 11, 1924. Following John W. Young’s death, in 1924, Church President Heber J. Grant arranged for the body to be shipped from New York to Salt Lake City (presumably at Church expense). President Grant then wrote in his journal: “To me, the life of John W. Young has been a failure. When I think that he was at one time first counselor to his father in the presidency of the Church and then his neglect of duty in later years when he was a counselor to the quorum of the Twelve Apostles when they were presiding as a quorum over the church, of his pursuit of money all his life and that he died practically a pauper in New York, to me it makes his life a complete failure. He was a wonderful man in many respects, one of the most magnetic men, and had one of the most pleasing personalities of most any man that I ever met.” (*The Diaries of Heber J. Grant 1880-1895, Abridged*; privately published, Salt Lake City, 2010, 326.)

J. Messages at Funeral. Feb. 17, 1924. President Grant recorded his thoughts: “The speakers were Levi Edgar Young, Antony W. Ivins, Charles W. Penrose and myself. The music was furnished by a male quartet. I was the last speaker. The other three speakers paid high tributes to the accomplishments of Brother Young, and I regretted exceedingly that I felt impressed to announce that Brother Young’s life in many respects had been a failure, as he had at one time been his father’s first counselor, and through neglect of his ecclesiastical duties and his devoting himself to business affairs had failed to magnify the very high position that he held as a counselor to the president of the Church, that wonderful and remarkable man, his father, Brigham Young. . . . I regretted very much that I had to talk along this line, but I felt impressed that it was only fair to faithful Latter-day Saints to not let them go away from the funeral of John W. Young feeling that he was a most splendid man, and he was in many respects, and all that was said by the previous speakers, told of his good deeds only and not of any neglect of duty on his part. After a meeting his brother, Willard Young, said that he was very grateful that I spoke along the lines that I did and felt that my remarks were just the proper thing to have been said.” (*Ibid.*, 326.)