

Book of Mormon Translation

STAKE EDUCATION CLASS, 18 OCT 2018

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Description: This class discusses the events surrounding the discovery, translation, and publication of the Book of Mormon, from 1823 to 1830.

Peep Stones and Seer Stones

This class begins with an area of Joseph Smith's life that has received much needed attention in recent years, starting with the Joseph Smith Papers project and extending to other studies: peep stones and seer stones.

Until recently, many were unaware of Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone in relation to the Book of Mormon. It's not that we didn't know that he had seer stones until a few years ago. Quite the contrary—they were well-known in the early Church and published in multiple sources in the last century, including books like Bruce McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* and B. H. Roberts' *Comprehensive History of the Church*. They were mentioned in *Ensign* and even *Friend* articles, and in numerous publications by Church history professors and scholars.

Yet many members of the Church have been caught by surprise by this topic. I think this is mainly due to three things:

- 1) We don't talk about them in our normal Sunday curriculum related to the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine and Covenants. For many Latter-day Saints, this is their main source of information about these scriptures, outside of their own personal study.
- 2) The standard-issue Church artwork found in building libraries around the world includes pictures of Joseph Smith translating the Book of Mormon that, while painted with love and faith, is simply incorrect on many levels. But teachers who use library resources will seek a picture showing the translation of the Book of Mormon, and this is their only choice today. Movies about Joseph Smith have also portrayed this event inaccurately or at least obscurely, even the brand new Seminary videos released this year.
- 3) Joseph Smith used a single name, "Urim and Thummim," later in life to refer to *both* his seer stones and the Nephite interpreters. Early on, he called the instruments found with the golden plates "spectacles" (History, circa Summer 1832, 5, in his own handwriting), but later as he translated the Old Testament and saw the term Urim and Thummin for a divination instrument used by the high priest, he associated that name with all of these things. This makes it very difficult to know just what stone he might be talking about at any given point.

Since you're at this class or reading these notes, you're probably not among those who were surprised or confused by this research and discussion about seer stones. But let's review a bit of what we've learned, so we're all on the same page.

First, Joseph Smith appears to have had two stones in his life that he called seer stones (he may have had as many as five, according to a later quote by Brigham Young (<http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/topic/seer-stone>)). The first one was brown, and photos have been published on the Joseph Smith Papers' website and in their books, along with descriptions and other details. This stone was given by Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery shortly after the Book of Mormon translation was finished, and through various possession changes, ended up in the possession of the First Presidency, where it is today.

The second stone was white and has a more vague history and transmission record. Joseph Smith seems to have kept it all of his life, showing it to people in Nauvoo and making its future use the subject of a teaching (D&C 130:10-11). There is no record of its possession after Joseph Smith's death until 1888, when Wilford Woodruff consecrated it on the altar of the Manti temple. Presumably, it came to him through Brigham Young and John Taylor, but we cannot be certain. Woodruff gave it to Lorenzo Snow, his successor, who showed it to at least one person. It has not been heard of again but it likely still in possession of the First Presidency. It has never been photographed and not displayed in public for over one hundred years.

The stories of how Joseph Smith came to possess these two stones are conflicting and difficult to validate, but the indications are that he possessed both the brown and the white stones by 1826. One probably came while digging a well for Willard Chase, a neighbor of the Smith's, and the other was perhaps found near Lake Erie, Joseph being directed to the spot by another person with a seer or peep stone. Critics of the Church take these stories as displaying a fondness for magic or deception on Joseph's part, while members of the Church in the earliest days were aware of his stones and saw them as gifts from God.

There was a culture of using peep or seer stones in Joseph Smith's immediate area in New York, coming originally from Europe in the Middle Ages. Such stones were used by people gifted with the ability to see into them to find lost objects, buried treasure, and similar things. Joseph was involved in this culture in the 1820s. In his 1838 history in the PoGP, he probably alluded to this even while distancing himself from it, writing:

I was left to all kinds of temptations, and mingling <with> all kinds of society I frequently <fell> into many foolish errors and displayed the weakness of youth and the corruption of human nature which I am sorry to say led me into divers temptations to the gratification of many appetites offensive in the sight of God (History, circa June 1839-circa 1841 [Draft 2]; JS-H 1:28).

But in his youth, there are several accounts of Joseph Smith using his seer stones to find things. Because of his ability, he was hired in 1825 by family friend, Josiah Stowell, and other investors, to look for a Spanish silver mine, with the potential reward being 1/11th of the findings for the young man (<http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-1-agreement-of-josiah-stowell-and-others-1-november-1825/1>, only available through an 1880 newspaper account). It was during this time that Joseph Smith boarded with Isaac Hale, one of the investors, and met his future wife, which we'll speak of shortly.

Soon after the Spanish mine incident, which lasted only a month or so before being disbanded, Joseph Smith was brought to court by a nephew of Josiah Stowell, Peter Bridgman, and charged with being "a disorderly person and an Imposter." These charges relate to his claim to discover lost goods. While no original record of the trial has been found, people have published what they claimed to be transcripts (though conflicting with each other). Some consistent findings from these transcripts are that Josiah Stowell spoke strongly in Joseph's defense (even though his nephew supposedly brought the suit in his behalf), and that Joseph had used his seer stone(s) to find things for a few years but by 1826 "had pretty much given it up," blaming poor health. (Vogel 4:248-256).

Joseph Smith would soon use his seer stones for things no one in that culture or society had ever seen or done before—reading the words of a book in an unknown language.

Sources: Joseph Smith-History 1:21-28; JSP, H1:10-16, 115-117, 187-221, 492-495; JSP, J1:87-95; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*; Brant A. Gardner, "Translating the Book of Mormon," in Laura Harris Hales, ed., *A Reason for Faith*; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*; Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*.

Moroni's visits, 1823-1827

But first Joseph had to get the Book of Mormon plates, which experience began on the night of 21-22 September 1823, when he was seventeen years old. It was a Sunday evening, and Lucy Mack Smith remembered that the family had a lively discussion about churches that day, before retiring to bed. The Smith family was still living in the log home while their frame home, being mainly built by Alvin, the oldest son, was under construction at this time. Again, the image we have of this event is a wonderful artistic representation but quite untrue to the experience, as recorded by the Prophet in his histories. He was not sleeping alone in a bedroom but rather sharing the room with his five brothers, Alvin, Hyrum, Samuel, William, and Don Carlos. In the modern re-creation of the home, there are two beds in the boys' room, which might be right. The three sisters shared a room at the other end of the upper floor of the log home, perhaps separated by a wall and door like in the picture, or perhaps only by a curtain, we don't know.

Like with the First Vision, there are multiple accounts of Moroni's appearance that first night. In one from 1835, Joseph stated that Moroni "stood between the floors of the room" (1835; *JSP*, J1:88) in a way that apparently opened up the house around him. In the 1838 account, Joseph Smith gave great details about his clothing, not surprising, given how many times he saw him that night and how much time they spent together. He said that his clothing, skin, hair, everything, was white "like lightning." Moroni appears to have been the source of the light, or at least it was most concentrated around him. It might be surprising no one else woke up in the house as he had his three conversations with Moroni, lasting most of the night, but they all slept through it, which says something about how appearances might happen.

In this appearance, Joseph first learned that he had a specific mission relating to restoring of lost truths:

I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of his purposes in this glorious dispensation ("Church History," 1 March 1842, 707).

Joseph Smith related that his conversations with Moroni "occupied the whole of that night" (JS-H 1:47). The brief accounts in the Pearl of Great Price would certainly not take that long. In his 1842 history, he wrote about the conversations of that night in more detail:

I was also informed concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country, and shown who they were, and from whence they came; a brief sketch of their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments, of their righteousness and iniquity, and the blessings of God being finally withdrawn from them as a people was made known unto me. (*JSP*, H1:495).

The next day he went to the hill as Moroni had commanded. Note that Joseph does not call it "Cumorah" in his own histories. That name was adopted later by those who knew the Book of Mormon and has caused some small confusion among members, thinking that the hill was the place of the final battle of the Nephites and Lamanites. True enough that in his history in 1834, Oliver Cowdery pronounced the hill in New York as being "Cumorah" where the Nephites were "doomed to suffer extermination." (Jesse, *Papers*, 1:78-79). But that appears to be his conclusion; he does not claim to have learned that from Joseph, instead drawing it out of his own reading of the final chapters of the Book of Mormon. Wherever the book's Cumorah was, this hill in New York was simply the final resting place of the plates after Moroni's nearly four decades of wandering (Moroni 10:1 concludes 420 years after the sign of Christ's birth, compared to Mormon 6:5, which shows it was 384 years after the sign when the final battle began).

When he got to the hill, Joseph's 1832 account provides more details about what happened:

I immediately went to the place and found where the plates were deposited as the angel of the Lord had commanded me and straightway made three attempts to get them and then being exceedingly frightened I supposed it had been a dream of Vision but when I considered I knew that it was not therefore I cried unto the Lord in the agony of my soul why can I not obtain them behold the angel appeared unto me again and said unto me you have not kept the commandments of the

Lord which I gave unto you therefore you cannot now obtain them for the time is not yet fulfilled therefore thou wast left unto temptation that thou mightiest be made acquainted ~~of~~ with the power of the adversary [adversary]. (*JSP*, H1:14).

Oliver Cowdery's 1834 account gave even more details about Joseph's attempt to get the plates on this first visit to the hill:

On attempting to take possession of the records a shock was produced upon his system, by an invisible power, which deprived him in a measure, of his natural strength. He desisted for an instant, and then made another attempt, but was more sensibly shocked than before....He therefore made the third attempt with an increased exertion, when his strength failed him more than at either of the former times, and without premeditation he exclaimed, "Why can I not obtain this book?" (*Jesse, Papers*, 1:86).

Moroni then appeared and told him it was because he had not kept the commandments of God. Calling upon the Lord in prayer, the "darkness began to disperse from his mind and his soul was lit up as it was the evening before, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and again did the Lord manifest his condescension and mercy." He saw "the glory of the Lord" and also "the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates." Moroni explained that this vision was given so that he would know of "the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one" (*Jesse, Papers* 1:87).

One thing that is hard for us to recognize now is that in 1823, Joseph Smith had no idea when he was going to get the plates. The Pearl of Great Price history states matter-of-factly that he got them four years later, but he wrote that years after the fact. After the first visit to the hill and his failed attempt to retrieve the plates, he didn't know when it was going to happen, if ever.

As instructed, he went back to the hill each 22 September. The records of what happened each year are sparse, but here's what we know.

In 1824, Lucy Mack Smith recorded that, hoping he would get the plates, Joseph had tried to keep God's commandments all year, and thus "fully expected to carry them home with him." But on 22 September 1824, as he lifted the lid and reached into the box, the thought that perhaps there might be something else in the box that would enrich his family entered his mind. He lifted out the plates and set them aside, then covered the box again to protect the other contents. When he turned around, the plates were gone.

He prayed to ask what had happened, and Moroni again appeared, explaining that he had not kept the Lord's commandments again, both in his thoughts about gain and in laying the plates down, for he had been commanded not to let them out of his hands. He opened the box again and saw the plates back in their place. When he reached toward them, he was thrown to the ground, and Moroni left, leaving Joseph to walk home weeping.

When he returned home, his father asked him about the plates, and Joseph told him he had not obtained them. His father replied, "I would have taken them if I had been in your place." But Joseph humbly answered, "You do not know what you say. I could not get them, for the angel of the Lord would not let me." Thereafter, the family renewed their prayers for Joseph to be successful.¹

The details of the 1825 visit, which happened just a few days before Joseph left for Josiah Stowell's employment, are not documented, but the result was the same as 1823 and 1824—no plates. Perhaps the timing of Joseph's employment was

¹ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 122-124. Joseph's brother, William Smith, related an account in 1884. Though he seems to be referring to the first 1823 visit in his retelling, the details align more with the 1824 visit. He stated that when Joseph went to get the plates, "He found them as he was told he should. He took them from the stone box in which they were found, and placed them on the ground behind him, when the thought came into his mind that there might be a treasure hidden with them. While stooping forward to see, he was overpowered, so that he could not look farther. Turning to get the plates, he found they had gone; and on looking around found that they were in the box again; but he could not get them, and he cried out, "Why can't I get the plates as Moroni told me I could?" The angel then appeared to him, and told him it was because he had not done as directed. That the plates could not be had for the purpose of making money," "William Smith Testimony, 1884," in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:504-505.

linked to the disappointment of another year without the plates: might as well go work for Stowell since the plates had to wait for at least another year.

Joseph returned home in September 1826 for another visit to the hill with Moroni. Joseph Knight recounted that during this visit, Joseph was told that he could not have the plates but “the 22nd Day of September nex[t] he mite have the book if he Brot with him the right person Joseph says who is the right Person the answer was you will know then he looked in his glass [seer stone] and found it was Emma Hale.”²

Sources: Joseph Smith-History 1:29-58; D&C 2; *JSP*, H1:10-16, 115-117, 221-239, 492-495; *JSP*, J1:87-95; Steve Harper, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones*; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*; <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/the-gold-plates-and-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon>.

Other events, 1823-1827

Backtracking just a bit, we need to cover a couple other important events before dealing with Joseph Smith getting the plates in 1827.

Alvin’s death

One of the greatest blows to the Smith family came in November 1823, just two months after Joseph’s first visits with Moroni. The oldest Smith boy, Alvin, died. Not only did they lose a dedicated son, but a valuable source of income and the main worker on their new frame home. They finished the home in 1825 but soon lost it because they couldn’t make the loan payment. A kind Quaker neighbor, Lemuel Durfee, purchased the farm and allowed them to live on it for a little longer by paying rent, but the poverty in the Smith family in the mid-1820s was very real and a huge burden on the family. You can see why Joseph Smith was so strongly tempted by the potential financial gain the plates could provide.

Alvin’s death had a profound impact on Joseph. He remembered “pangs of sorrow.” These feelings were worsened when the minister at Alvin’s funeral all but declared that Alvin had gone to hell because he had not been baptized. Later, in his revelations, Joseph learned that children were saved without the ordinances of salvation but he did not know Alvin’s status, or anyone else like him, until 1836, when he received the revelation today known as D&C 137.³

² Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:13.

³ *JSP*, D5:157-158; *JSP*, J1:166-171; Harper, *Making Sense*, 504-505; McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 1137-1138; Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 4:295-296; Cook, *The Revelations*, 302-304. The background for that revelation is very interesting. On 21 January 1836, those in Kirtland were anticipating the dedication of the temple, and were participating in ordinances to purify and prepare them for that event in March. After attending the School of the Prophets in the early afternoon, Joseph Smith and other men went to the room above the printing office, just behind the Kirtland temple. There they washed their bodies “in pure water” and applied perfume “in the name of the Lord,” preparatory to an oil anointing. They then moved to the upper floor of the nearly finished House of the Lord, to the “president’s room,” which was Joseph’s office at the southwest corner of the third floor. The group, which included Joseph and his father, the other members of the presidency, Warren Parrish, and the bishopricks of both Kirtland and Missouri. They anointed their heads with oil and gave blessings to each other. One of those blessings was to Father Smith, where the presidency of the high priesthood (First Presidency) laid their hands on Joseph Smith, Sr., and took turns pronouncing blessings on him. Joseph Jr. then took the seat and his father anointed and blessed him, along with the other members of the presidency. As that concluded, the Prophet experienced a vision that was recorded that day by Parrish, now Section 137. Others also experienced visions and saw “great and marvelous things,” including the face of the Savior and other angels, but the details were not recorded, except for Joseph’s vision. Oliver Cowdery wrote, “The glorious scene is too great to be described in this book, therefore, I only say, that the heavens were opened to many, and great and marvelous things were shown.” *JSP*, D5:158. In the vision, Joseph Smith saw the celestial kingdom and the glory of God therein. He saw many of the ancient prophets, including Adam and Abraham. Then he saw three people that surprised him: his father, mother, and Alvin (v. 5). Father Smith was sitting in the room with Joseph; his mother was safely in their home in Kirtland; and Alvin had died on 19 Nov 1823. Interestingly, the Prophet didn’t seem confused at the sight of his living parents in the future celestial kingdom, but seeing the dead Alvin caught him by surprise. This turned out to be one of the great teachings of this vision, causing him to pause in his description of the kingdom of glory to focus on the question of Alvin’s presence.

Emma Hale

Joseph told his mother that Emma was his “choice in preference to any other woman I have ever seen.”⁴ He met her while working for Stowell, as he and his father boarded at the Hale home. Joseph continued to court Emma during most of 1826, covering the twenty-five-mile distance from South Bainbridge to Harmony several times to see her. Isaac Hale, Emma’s father, did not approve of Joseph because his treasure hunting work and his claims to visions (v. 58).

Lucy said he stayed in Manchester until the end of the year, though he and his father were having business dealings with Stowell and Joseph Knight, Sr., so made the trip more than once that fall and early winter.⁵ Sometime that winter, Joseph returned to work briefly for the Knights.

When Emma came to visit the Stowells in January 1827, she saw Joseph again. Though it was not her intention, the visit became the opportunity for them to elope. She told her son later:

I was visiting <at> Mr Stowell’s who lived in Bainbridge and saw your father there. I had no intention of marrying ~~then~~ when I left home; but during my visit at Mr Stowell’s, your Father visited me there. My folks were bitterly opposed to him; and as being importuned by your father, aided by Mr Stowell, and preferring to marry him than any one I knew, I consented.⁶

Emma’s father, Isaac Hale, was very much against the marriage, and left this account:

young Smith made several visits at my house, and at length asked my consent to his marrying my daughter Emma. This I refused, and gave him my reasons for so doing; some of which were, that he was a stranger, and followed a business that I could not approve [treasure seeking and looking in a stone]; he then left the place. Not long after this, he returned, and while I was absent from home, carried off my daughter, into the state of New York, where they were married without my approbation or consent.⁷

Joseph recorded that they were “married at the house of Squire Tarbill” (JS-H 1:58). Zechariah Tarble lived across the river from the Hale home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, just north of Colesville and the Joseph Knight, Sr., home.⁸ Joseph Smith was twenty-one and Emma twenty-two. As we saw, Isaac Hale charged Joseph with ‘stealing’ Emma, but she was of age to make her own decision, and by her own account, did so willingly.

With the bad feelings in Harmony, Joseph and Emma went to live with his family in Manchester for a time. They would soon return to Harmony where the major work on the Book of Mormon translation took place. This was set up by a letter from Emma in the summer of 1827, a few months after their marriage, asking about her belongings she had left behind in the impromptu decision to marry. Her father agreed to give them all to her, so Joseph hired Peter Ingersoll to take them to

Alvin had died long before the Church was organized or even before any work was done on the Book of Mormon, even though he expressed belief in Joseph’s calling. This was before baptism for the dead was understood—in fact, this revelation appears to be a major trigger for Joseph Smith asking about baptism for the dead, hoping for an answer for Alvin and his family.

As Joseph paused in his tour of the celestial city to ponder Alvin’s state, the voice of the Lord—perhaps from the very throne of fire he had seen earlier—spoke to him and explained that those who would have received “this gospel” but were denied the opportunity, who nevertheless “be heirs of the celestial kingdom.” (v. 7). Not only did this concept apply to everyone born before 1830, but to everyone born afterwards—in other words, to anyone born any time (v. 8). If they would have fully embraced the gospel, had they had the blessing to do so, regardless of their time period, would receive a celestial reward.

Four years after this revelation, in 1840, Father Smith lay dying. He had been greatly upset by the teaching of the minister at Alvin’s funeral that his oldest son was going to hell because he had never been baptized. He rejoiced when his namesake son, Joseph the Prophet, dictated a revelation that Alvin was an heir to the celestial kingdom because the intent of his heart was right. This was good doctrine to Father Smith, as it is to us. On his deathbed, the final words that Joseph Smith, Sr., uttered were, “I see Alvin.”

⁴ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 53.

⁵ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 133-134.

⁶ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:538.

⁷ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:285.

⁸ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 53.

Harmony and retrieve Emma's possessions. When they arrived in Harmony, Isaac Hale expressed his discontent with their marriage, but Joseph assured Isaac that his treasure seeking days were behind him. Before they left, Isaac offered to give them a place to live and work for Joseph.⁹

Getting the Plates

Early in 1827, Lucy wrote that Joseph came home late one night from town. Worried, when he came in the door, his parents asked what had happened. Joseph replied, "I have taken the severest chastisement that I have ever had in my life." Thinking it was from a human source, Joseph, Sr., grew angry. But the son explained, "As I passed by the hill . . . where the plates are, the angel met me and said that I had not been engaged enough in the work of the Lord; that the time had come for the record to be brought forth; and that I must be up and doing and set myself about the things which God had commanded me to do."¹⁰ Other accounts say that Moroni had given Joseph an ultimatum: either be prepared to receive the plates that September, or he would never get them.¹¹

Soon the 22 September arrived. It had been four years since Moroni's first appearance. The annual trek had become a tradition. But this year would be different. Just after midnight, Joseph and Emma (he made sure she came along!) took Joseph Knight's wagon to the hill. Knight and Josiah Stowell were up visiting at the Smith home just to be there on this day. Joseph and Emma were gone all night, not returning until after breakfast. With excitement, he told his family and friends in the house that he had the plates and the Seers. Joseph Knight records the event with a sense of humor displayed on Joseph Smith's part, first making Knight think he did not get the plates again:

after Brackfirst [breakfast] Joseph Cald me into the other Room and he set his foot on the Bed and leaned his head on his hand and says well I am Dissopinted [disappointed]. Well say I I am sorrey Well says he I am grateley Dissopinted, it is ten times Better than I expected.¹²

Protecting the Plates

Many tried to get the plates from Joseph. The first night, he hid them in a log. When people went out hunting for them, he retrieved them, but was soon accosted and forced to fight and flee. Next they were buried under the hearth in the living room. When someone suspected that location, Joseph hid them in the attic of his father's cooper's shop in the yard. When people unsuccessfully tore up that building trying to find them, he determined it would be best to get out of town.¹³

As mentioned, Isaac Hale had offered to sell Joseph and Emma a place to live and a farm to work. This is the time when Martin Harris first appears in the history, though his involvement with Joseph was before this time. Martin Harris received an early witness of Joseph's calling, even before Joseph Smith had started translating. He hired members of the Smith family starting in 1824 to do work on his large farm just north of Palmyra. He asked them many questions about Joseph's experience in an attempt to uncover any potential lie. Skeptical at first, he asked for proof of Joseph's work, and was able to hold the box to feel the weight of the plates inside. He went home and prayed and received a witness of the Holy Ghost of Joseph's calling. After that, he was a steady supporter and played key roles in the early days of the work. When it was time to go to Harmony, he generously gave Joseph and Emma \$50 (JS-H 1:61). Giving them \$50 would be like giving them several thousand dollars today; it paid off their debts so they could leave the area, and helped sustain them for some time. Emma's brother, Alva, also helped by bringing a team and wagon to make the move.¹⁴

⁹ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 54; Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:285-286.

¹⁰ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 134-135.

¹¹ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

¹² Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

¹³ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 60-61; see MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 7-14 for even more examples.

¹⁴ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 62-63; MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 29-31.

Joseph and Emma's public reason for leaving was that Emma was several months pregnant and in poor health, so they wanted to be near her family, having reconciled somewhat the previous August. When they left, they packed the plates in the bottom of a barrel of beans. When leaving town, they were stopped by several men who searched the wagon, wanting to get the plates, but didn't find them in the beans.

Harmony

Joseph and Emma arrived in Harmony in December 1827. At first they lived with her parents, and even there attracted more attention than they wanted with neighbors coming to try and see the plates. But after Emma's father told them they could not stay in his house if he couldn't see the plates,¹⁵ they were able to arrange to purchase a small two-room log cabin and barn on 13.5 acres for \$200 (paid off in 1830) on the same property that belonged to Emma's brother, Jesse, and about 150 yards from Isaac Hale's house.¹⁶ In this house they lived for the next 2-1/2 years, and in this house the bulk of the Book of Mormon was translated.

Sources: Joseph Smith-History 1:29-58; D&C 2; *JSP*, H1:10-16, 115-117, 221-239, 492-495; *JSP*, J1:87-95; Steve Harper, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*; Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*.

Copying the characters

Finally, in a place of peace and relative seclusion, Joseph was able to spend time examining the plates themselves. Joseph speaks very little of this period, but nearby, in Colesville, was Joseph Knight, who visited frequently, bringing supplies and other support, and who, like Martin Harris, believed in Joseph and his mission before there were plates, a translation, or a Church. Knight met Joseph Smith no later than 1826 when Joseph Smith worked for Knight. Knight spoke much about this time and is one of the best sources for what went on.

Knight said that when Joseph first got the plates, he was more interested in the Interpreters than in the plates themselves: "But he seemed to think more of the glasses or the urim and thummim than [than] he did of the Plates for says he I can see anything they are Marvelous."¹⁷ By all accounts Joseph Smith did not know what to do with the Interpreters except what he already knew to do with seer stones—look for things. He didn't understand yet their ultimate role of performing the translation. Instead, on several occasions he used them to keep track of the plates when they were hidden, to be sure they were still safe, and to warn him of potential danger.¹⁸ Lucy Mack Smith agreed with this in her history, in which she said Joseph used the Interpreters "at any time [to] ascertain the approach of danger, either to himself or the record, and for this cause he kept these things constantly about his person."¹⁹ Joseph Smith does not appear to have considered using them to translate until much later.

In Manchester, many had wanted to see the plates. In Harmony, Joseph Smith seems to have kept a lower profile, but Emma's family, and especially her father, Isaac Hale, asked to see them. Joseph Smith let them hold the plates in a closed box but Isaac still insisted that he must see the plates or Joseph would have to leave his house. Joseph explained he could not do that, of course, and that was a big reason why they moved into their own home, which put a huge financial burden on Joseph and Emma. They likely used some of Martin's \$50 as down payment for the property. But the next thing Joseph Smith did with the plates was probably motivated by a desire to show something to Isaac Hale.

¹⁵ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 33-34.

¹⁶ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 63.

¹⁷ Joseph Knight, Sr., Reminiscence, circa 1835-1847, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

¹⁸ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 12-16.

¹⁹ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 145.

Joseph said in his 1838 history, “immediately after my arrival there [Harmony] I commenced copying the characters off the plates. I copied a considerable number of them” (JS-H 1:62). Joseph Knight, Sr., recounted that at this time, Joseph “with his wife Drew off[f] the Caricters exactly like the ancient.”²⁰ Since Emma never saw the plates, scholars have surmised that Joseph Smith did rubbings of the plates and then gave those to Emma, who could copy the characters she saw in the rubbings. Her brother, Reuben, is also said to have copied characters, according to a later testimony of another brother, David Hale, where he said that Reuben “assisted Joe Smith to fix up some characters such as Smith pretended were engraven on his book of plates.” Martin Harris may also have made one or more copies of characters. Joseph may have made several such rubbings and copies, but none of the rubbings nor copies of characters in Emma’s or Reuben’s hand, have survived.²¹ Whatever the details, the brief histories we have from that time indicate that copies of characters were made and shown to people as physical evidence of the plates that Joseph Smith possessed but was not allowed to show to others, such as Isaac Hale.

Martin Harris and the Scholars

In his first (1832) history, Joseph Smith said something unique about Martin Harris during this period of time:

because of his faith and this righteous deed [giving Joseph Smith \$50] the Lord appeared unto him in a vision and shewed unto him his marvelous work which he was about to do [Joseph Smith handwriting begins] and <h[e]> immediately came to Suquehannah and said the Lord had shown him that he must go to new York City <with> some of the characters so we proceeded to copy some of them (*JSP*, H1:15).

Martin came to Joseph Smith’s home in February 1828 and left on this trip to visit the scholars very soon after. The question arises, why did Martin Harris feel he needed to go to New York? Why did Joseph Smith agree? What was the purpose of this trip? Joseph Knight, Sr., said that Joseph Smith “now Began to be anxious to git them Translated . . . and sent Martin Harris to see if he Could git them Translated he went to Albeny and to Philadelph[i]a and to new york.”²²

In other words, Joseph Smith had the plates for over four months by the time Harris arrived, and still didn’t know how to fulfill the angel’s command to translate them. As Joseph Knight said, he wanted to “git them Translated.” So Martin came proposing a trip to visit scholars who might be able to do the translation, and Joseph sent sample characters with him so that he could let them see. Remember, at this time, Joseph Smith has no idea even what language the plates are in. He knew it was written by the ancient inhabitants of the New World, so he likely believed it was some kind of Indian language. He certainly didn’t go looking for an Egyptian expert, nor could he have found one in the United States at this time. That is why Martin Harris went to see those he did—he was looking for someone with expertise in native American languages!

The purpose of the trip is brought out in Lucy Mack Smith’s recollections. Lucy’s account says the purpose of Martin’s visit to New York was to “call on all who were professed linguists to give them an opportunity of showing their talents in giving a translation of the characters.”²³ She implied that once Joseph had a basic translation of the characters, he could proceed with the work—in other words, she believed that he was looking for an expert to teach Joseph the language, or perhaps give him a dictionary or something, and then he would still do the work.

Harris’ trip is recounted briefly in JS-History but more fully through other sources, especially some recently discovered documents from Charles Anthon himself. With a “considerable number” (JS-H 1:62) of characters in hand, Harris’ first known stop was in Utica, for unknown reasons, though later it was in this same city that the copyright for the Book of Mormon was requested, so perhaps he was looking into that process.²⁴ The next stop was in Albany to visit fellow Palmyra resident but newly elected state representative, Luther Bradish.²⁵ Bradish was not an expert on Indian languages but he was a well-

²⁰ Joseph Knight, Sr., Reminiscence, circa 1835-1847, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:15.

²¹ <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-2-copies-of-book-of-mormon-characters-introduction/1>.

²² Joseph Knight, Sr., Reminiscence, circa 1835-1847, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:17.

²³ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 154.

²⁴ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 40-41.

²⁵ John H. Gilbert, Memorandum, 8 September 1892, Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:546-547. Bradish later became New York lieutenant governor.

educated man and had an interest in antiquities and Harris likely hoped for referrals or letters of recommendation to scholars that Bradish thought could help him.²⁶

What Harris did next is not certain. Knight seems to remember that he went to Philadelphia: “he went to Albeny and to Philadelphia and to new york,”²⁷ though the language doesn’t require it to be in order (perhaps he went to Philadelphia after New York?). But Philadelphia would make sense as a first stop after Bradish, who knew about the American Philosophical Society which fostered research on Native Americans. Two members, Samuel Rafinesque and Caleb Atwater, were very engaged in such research, creating the start of a Mayan translation and with broad understanding of Native American languages. To be clear, no record exists of anyone Harris met with in Philadelphia, but solid documentation exists for what he did next—visit Samuel Mitchell, a prominent member of the American Philosophical Society, a former US senator who was chair of the Indian Affairs Committee, and a scholar of Native American languages and culture. He was vice president of Rutgers Medical College in New York when Harris sought him out. Mitchell examined the characters Harris presented to him and concluded that he could not read them nor identify their origin. He wrote an introductory letter for Harris to take to a professor at Columbia College that Mitchell thought might be able to help, Charles Anthon.²⁸ Mitchell knew Anthon mostly through Anthon’s father, a doctor who had worked side-by-side with Mitchell, as well as more directly through a mutual society of which they were both members. It’s likely that Mitchell, with little time or patience for Harris’ characters, which matched nothing he knew, was anxious to be rid of him and sent him to Anthon as a favor to his former colleague’s son.²⁹

Charles Anthon was a young classical scholar and adjunct professor at Columbia, teaching Greek and Latin and history, 30 years old, when Harris came calling. Though he had done no work on Native American languages, he was currently in the middle of gathering stories of Native Americans for a book he was co-authoring with a British acquaintance. There was much interest in such stories in 1828, and Anthon hoped to capitalize on that interest with stories about the native inhabitants of the land, but was struggling to find enough for a book. No doubt he had already reached out to Mitchell about it, and Mitchell probably thought that Harris might be able to help Anthon with his work.

The story of their visit that Harris told and the one that Anthon later told, when his name had been associated with the Latter-day Saint movement (and not in a very positive way) are quite different. Harris said that Anthon validated the characters and gave him a note indicating as much, but when he explained that they were given to Joseph by an angel and that Anthon could not see the plates themselves, Anthon tore up the document and chased Harris away. Harris’ recollection of Anthon’s demand to see the plates and his comment that he could not read a sealed book is well-known in the Church, as it has been noted to fulfill Isaiah 29:11-12. Anthon’s recital of the events removes the certificate completely from the story and has him (Anthon) telling Harris he was being deceived by an obvious forgery. He said that Harris asked him to provide a translation, which he refused to even attempt due to the nature of the document—being “a mere hoax.” On the one hand, Anthon said that Joseph Smith could translate the plates using the “spectacles” or Nephite Interpreters, provided with the plates, but then he stated that “no translation had been furnished.” In other words, Anthon claimed Harris came to him to verify Joseph Smith’s ability to translate but only provided characters from the plates without a corresponding translation. Anthon told Harris it was a scheme to cheat him from his money and warned him strongly. In one account Anthon said Harris requested this conclusion in writing, but Anthon refused and sent him on his way; in another, he said he gave his conclusion in writing “without any hesitation,” and that he extracted a promise from Harris that he would have nothing to do with this book.

Anthon described the paper that Harris showed him as containing characters written in columns from various alphabets, including Greek, Hebrew, and Roman, and “half moons, stars, and other natural objects,” including “a rude representation of the Mexican zodiac,” though he left out the Mexican zodiac comment in his final letter in 1844. He also said that later Harris came back for a second visit, bringing with him a copy of the Book of Mormon to present to Anthon, who refused to even

²⁶ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 41.

²⁷ Joseph Knight, Sr., *Reminiscence*, circa 1835-1847, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:17.

²⁸ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 47-49.

²⁹ Erin Jennings, “Charles Anthon,” *JWHAJ* v32 n2, 173.

accept the gift from Harris. Anthon said that Harris told him he never seen the plates, and Anthon urged him to go home, seize the trunk in which they were stored, and expose the fraud by which he had been duped.³⁰ This is an odd statement, given that Harris' personal witness of seeing the plates was published in the very book that he was supposedly trying to give to Anthon. Martin Harris never mentioned a second trip to New York to give a book to Anthon.

Regardless of the true nature of their conversation, Martin Harris came back to Palmyra and soon Harmony filled with a conviction that the work was of God and was ready to fully support Joseph Smith financially and personally, with his time and effort. So Anthon's version doesn't make sense, at least in terms of what Harris actually did. But Harris' version is also a product of later interpretation; the earliest published account (an 1829 Palmyra newspaper) only mentions Mitchell.³¹ It seems that after the Book of Mormon text itself interpreted Isaiah 29 (2 Nephi 27:9-20), that the retelling of the Anthon visit aligned with that interpretation.

First Translation Efforts

After Martin Harris returned from New York, Joseph Smith realized that there were no scholars who could help him: he was on his own to get the plates translated. In his 1832 history, he noted that after Harris returned from New York, he realized "the Lord had prepared ~~specticle~~ spectacles for to read the Book therefore I commenced translating the characters."³²

We don't know exactly how Joseph Smith figured out how to transition from tracking the plates with the Nephite interpreters to seeing words; the discovery process is undocumented but must have been fascinating. It was not a natural extension of using seer stones, as seers did not see words, just items and locations. But at some point, probably between February and April 1828, Joseph Smith began to actually translate the plates. His scribe was Emma, his pregnant wife. She described this period of time with great fondness and emotion later in life, in a question and answer interview with her oldest son, Joseph Smith III, saying:

I frequently wrote ~~for~~ day after day, often ~~he~~ sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it and dictating hour after hour, with nothing between us. He had neither mss [manuscript] nor book to read from. If he had anything of the Kind he could not have concealed it from me. The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen <table> cloth, which I have given him to fold them in. I ~~have~~ felt of the plates, as they lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like ~~st~~ 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.³³

She also told Edmund Briggs of the RLDS Church in 1856:

When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of it, as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out, and while I was writing them, if I made any mistake in spelling, he would stop me and correct my spelling, although it was impossible for him to see how I was writing them down at the time. Even the word *Sarah* [probably Sariah] he could not pronounce at first, but had to spell it, and I would pronounce it for him.

When he stopped for any purpose at any time he would, when he commenced again, begin where he left off without any hesitation, and one time while he was translating he stopped suddenly, pale as a sheet, and said, "Emma, did

³⁰ Erin Jennings, "Charles Anthon," *JWHAJ* v32 n2, 173-182.

³¹ *Palmyra Freeman*, 11 Aug 1829.

³² History, circa Summer 1832, 5.

³³ Emma Smith Bidamon Interview with Joseph Smith III, February 1879, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:539.

Jerusalem have walls around it?" When I answered, "Yes," he replied "Oh! I was afraid I had been deceived." He had such a limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls.³⁴

In a letter to Emma S. Pilgrim, a member of the RLDS Church, in 1870, Emma spoke about which instruments Joseph Smith used during different parts of the translation process:

Now the first that my <husband> translated, [it] was translated by the use of the Urim, and Thummin, and that was the part that Martin Harris lost, after that he used a small stone, not exactly, black, but was rather a dark color.³⁵

I think Emma's role in the translation is underappreciated, mainly because the part she worked on, the Book of Lehi, is now lost and not part of our current publication. But even so, we tend to describe the lost manuscript as the product of Joseph Smith and Martin Harris, and overlook Emma's role. Martin said this about her work as Joseph Smith's scribe, as related by Simon Smith, who interviewed him in 1875:

I was Joseph Smith's scribe, and wrote for him a great deal; for he was such a poor writer, and could not even draw up a note of hand as his education was so limited. I also wrote form him about one third of the first part of the translation of the plates as he interpreted them by the Urim and Thummim.³⁶

If this is recorded accurately, then Emma wrote about two-thirds of the first (lost) manuscript. We'll come back to that shortly.

After returning from New York, Martin Harris came to Harmony about 12 April 1828, and assisted Joseph in the translation from about 12 April to 14 June 1828, over the objection of Martin's wife, Lucy, who thought Joseph was only after Harris' money. This was good timing for Emma, who was getting toward the end of her pregnancy, allowing her to take a break from the long hours of writing. With Martin there, the two men went to work, finishing the remaining third of the book of Lehi by mid-June.³⁷

Sources: Joseph Smith-History 1:59-65; *JSP*, H1:14-16, 238-245; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*; Michael Hubbard MacKay, "Git Them Translated" in Blumell, Grey, and Hedges, *Approaching Antiquity*; Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*; <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/the-gold-plates-and-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon>.

First manuscript

With good progress being made by June 1828, Martin was anxious to return to New York and show the manuscript to his wife, Lucy, and others, to show that he was not engaged in a deceitful effort. He was sure that the manuscript would convince them. The story of what happened is well-known, but interesting to read in Joseph Smith's first written history (1832):

after we had translated 116 pages that he desired to carry them to read to his friends that peradventur he might convince them of the truth therefore I inquired of the Lord and the Lord said unto me that he must not take them and I spake unto him (Martin) the word of the Lord and he said inquire again and I inquired again and also the third time and the Lord said unto me let him go with them only he shall covenant with me that he will not shew them to only but four persons and he covenanted withe Lord that he would do according to the word of the Lord therefore he took them and took his journey unto his friends to Palmire Wayne County & State of N York.³⁸

³⁴ Emma Smith Bidamon Interview with Edmund C. Briggs, 1856, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:530-531.

³⁵ Emma Smith Bidamon to Emma Pilgrim, 27 March 1870, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:532.

³⁶ Martin Harris Interview with Simon Smith, 5 July 1875 (published in *Saints Herald*, 24 May 1884, 324), in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:384.

³⁷ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 89-92.

³⁸ *JSP*, H1:15-16.

The time period for the three inquires was the entire two months Martin was in Harmony, not just something in quick succession. Martin was persistent.

The covenant was that he was to show them only to his brother, Preserved, his wife, Lucy, his father and mother, Nathan and Rhoda, and his wife's sister, Polly Cobb [five people, slightly different than Joseph Smith remembered in 1832]. Martin agreed, and with manuscript in hand, went back to Palmyra on 14 June 1828.³⁹ Joseph said that after Martin took the manuscript, Moroni came and reclaimed the plates and the interpreters.

The day after Martin left, on 15 June 1828, Emma went into labor, and was delivered of a son, who lived less than an hour, however. Emma herself was brought very low by the pregnancy and likely the loss of the baby; she nearly died, and even after starting to recover, was ill for more than two weeks, during which Joseph cared for her day and night, supported by Emma's family, especially her mother. They named the child Alvin, according to the family Bible,⁴⁰ and buried him in a small grave in the cemetery near their home.

After two weeks Emma began to get better but there was no word from Martin, so with her urging, he left his wife in the care of her mother and took a stagecoach north to his parents' home, fasting and agonizing as he went. Being dropped twenty miles from his home, he walked all night. Exhausted but anxious to hear from Martin, Joseph called for him at breakfast time, and Harris reluctantly came after noon, delivering the news that the manuscript was gone. Martin had showed it others outside of his promise, including several friends, and it had disappeared from his house when he was away one day.⁴¹ The manuscript has never been found; some claimed that Lucy Harris, Martin's wife, burned it. Joseph related the story simply in his 1832 history:

and he brake the covenant which he made before the Lord and the Lord suffered the writings to fall into the hands of wicked men and Martin was Chastened for his transgression and I also was chastened ~~also~~ for my transgression for asking the Lord the third time wherefore the Plates was taken from me by the power of God and I was not able to obtain them for a season.⁴²

Lucy Smith, who was there, is recorded to have said in her history that when Martin told him the manuscript was lost (exclaiming twice, "I have lost my soul!"), Joseph cried out, "Oh, my God, my God! All is lost, is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned. It is I who tempted the wrath of God by asking him for that which I had no right to ask, as I was differently instructed by the angel."⁴³ Joseph Smith was 22 years old when this happened.

Immediately after returning to Harmony, Joseph walked out into a private area near his home and Moroni appeared to him again, handing him the interpreters. Using them, D&C 3 was received, the first written revelation of Joseph Smith's young prophetic experience. It was Joseph finding "his prophetic voice."⁴⁴ Then Moroni took the interpreters back and left Joseph alone to ponder his situation.

One final word on the lost manuscript: we frequently refer to it as the "116 pages" because of a reference in the introduction to the 1830 Book of Mormon to "one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon; which said account, some person or persons have stolen and kept from me." What is curious is that the content that was lost was replaced by Nephi's material on the small plates, which in the printer's manuscript, was 116 pages (the original manuscript was 133 pages for the same content). Thus It could well be that as Joseph Smith wrote the introductory text with the number of replacement pages in mind, rather than using a page count from the first manuscript that he no longer had in his possession.

³⁹ Joseph Smith, History, vol. A-1, 9; also historical introduction to D&C 5 in *JSP*, D1:13-19.

⁴⁰ The headstone at the cemetery just says "Infant Son" with no name.

⁴¹ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 93-96.

⁴² *JSP*, H1:16.

⁴³ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 165-166.

⁴⁴ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 69.

The return of the plates

Lucy Smith recorded that Joseph repented all summer and on 22 September 1828, Moroni returned the plates and the interpreters to him. She and Joseph Sr. went to visit him in September, shortly after the plates had been returned and were thrilled to find them not only well, but joyful at this blessing.⁴⁵ But there is no indication that translation resumed for several months, most likely because of the strong opposition of Emma's family and Joseph's complete lack of resources. He was just scraping by and had no money for paper, ink, and other supplies needed to do the work.⁴⁶

Two events changed his course. The first was a visit from his father and brother, Samuel, who were accompanied by Joseph Knight, in February 1829. Joseph Sr. asked his son what his duty might be in this work, and Joseph used his seer stone to receive what is now D&C 4. This was a call to serve, a mission beyond getting the plates translated, and is the first real hint of something bigger coming.⁴⁷ Joseph Knight was strapped for cash himself but gave Joseph and Emma "a little money to Buoy [buy] paper to translate."⁴⁸

Joseph Sr. returned home but young Samuel stayed behind, and the record indicates that he and Emma served as scribes while Joseph made some effort at translation. But resources were scarce and not much progress appears to have been made.⁴⁹

In March 1829, Martin Harris came to Harmony, seeking a "greater witness" of the work. This was the first time he and Joseph had seen each other since the loss of the manuscript. Martin came because his wife, Lucy, had threatened a lawsuit against Joseph to stop Martin from supporting him.⁵⁰ Martin hoped that he could persuade Joseph to at least let him see the plates in the hopes of quieting his wife. Joseph sought the guidance of the Lord and the result was D&C 5, counseling Martin to be patient and he would indeed see the plates one day as one of three witnesses. Harris acted as scribe for Joseph for a few pages and as part of his effort to gain evidence to convince his wife, traded Joseph's seer stone out for another during one of their breaks. When Joseph could tell something was wrong because no words were appearing, Martin confessed his attempt, saying he had done it "to stop the mouths of fools."⁵¹ He returned to Palmyra again convinced of the truthfulness of Joseph's work.

It is not known what happened to these few pages recorded between February and April 1829. No surviving manuscript is in Emma's, Samuel's, or Martin's hand.⁵² There are several theories about what happened but two seem most likely.

First, we do not have all of the original manuscript, much of it being destroyed by water when it was put in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House, so it's possible that their handwriting is on missing portions. But the missing sections don't correspond well to the timing or potential content of this early work, and Oliver Cowdery's hand appears in each section that is preserved. So there doesn't seem to be anything to support the idea of other hands on the original manuscript.

The other theory is one I've not found documented elsewhere but which fits the circumstances. Perhaps Joseph restarted the translation back with the book of Lehi and began to re-dictate the same material as before. The work did not progress far but soon (perhaps as early as 6-7 April 1829), Joseph received D&C 10 which told him not to retranslate the book of Lehi but that the Lord had prepared another solution for that part of the history—the small plates of Nephi that contained Nephi's personal account and those who followed after him. Thus when Oliver arrived, the translation picked up in Mosiah (chapter 3!) where it had left off a year earlier and continued on through Moroni's final words, then they finished by translating the small plates to

⁴⁵ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith*, 176; MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 97.

⁴⁶ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 70.

⁴⁷ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 70.

⁴⁸ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:19.

⁴⁹ JSP, H1:16.

⁵⁰ She threatened the suit in March and actually filed it in August 1829; see MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 107.

⁵¹ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 111.

⁵² MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 115 n7.

the Words of Mormon, and finally, the title page written by Moroni. This would mean that the few pages Emma, Samuel, and Martin had recorded in February to April 1829 were set aside and never used.⁵³

Sources: D&C 3, 5; *JSP*, H1:14-16, 244-275; *JSP*, D1:6-9, 13-22; *JSP*, MRB:8-11, 12-15; *JSP*, R1:9-11, 12-14 Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*; Michael Hubbard MacKay, “Git Them Translated” in Blumell, Grey, and Hedges, *Approaching Antiquity*; Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*; <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/the-gold-plates-and-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon>.

The original manuscript

Oliver Cowdery

As we said, Joseph made little progress on the translation, if any, before April 1829. D&C 10:4 counseled him not to “labor more than you have strength and means provided to enable you to translate.” Some of those “means provided” came to Joseph’s door on 5 April 1829, in the form of Oliver Cowdery.

Having learned about the work from Joseph Smith, Sr. (after the father received a commandment to open his mouth and share the message of the work in D&C 4), Oliver came to Harmony to meet Joseph and help. They immediately went to work and Oliver was the major scribe for the rest of the translation and soon the “second elder” of the Church (D&C 20:3). Oliver said that he had a vision where he learned of the truth of the plates and Joseph’s calling, and that he would be able to write for Joseph Smith. Accordingly, as soon as he could arrange things at the end of March, he left for Harmony, stopping along the way at his friend, David Whitmer’s house, whom he kept apprised through letters of their progress. It was that friendship that opened the door to them later being able to finish the translation in Fayette.

One of the interesting documents that came from the Joseph Smith Papers project is dated the day after Oliver’s arrival in Harmony, the day *before* they started the translation work, in which Oliver recorded a document. In other words, it was the first document where Oliver acted as scribe for Joseph. The document was an agreement with Isaac Hale, written up by Oliver and signed by Joseph Smith and Hale, with Oliver and Samuel Smith as witnesses. The agreement required a \$64 payment immediately toward an ultimate purchase price of \$200. Cowdery had received \$65.50 as his teacher’s salary just before leaving Palmyra, though he had to settle some debts before leaving and use some of the money to travel to Harmony. Still, he likely contributed the majority of the \$64 that day, showing great faith in and support for Joseph, whom he had just met the night before.⁵⁴

The order of the translation

As discussed above, it’s possible that the little bit of translating done before Oliver’s arrival, in the writing of Emma, Samuel Smith, and Martin Harris, was set aside as a result of D&C 10, which may have been received as soon as Oliver arrived. In other words, when Oliver starting writing, it seems to have been with the first chapter of the book of Mosiah in our current Book of Mormon, though Oliver first numbered it chapter 3, then changed it to chapter 1 for the publication. This may indicate where Joseph Smith and Martin Harris left off with the first translation effort, perhaps translating through Mosiah chapters 1 and 2 (as they were on the plates, not our current edition). These chapters may have discussed the reign of Mosiah(1) and the earliest days of his son, King Benjamin, as discussed in Omni 1:12-25 and Words of Mormon 1:12-18. Then they translated the large plates, completing 3 Nephi by about mid-May and finishing through Moroni’s record by the end of May (the rest of the large plates).⁵⁵

⁵³ Of course, problems exist. No such pages have ever been found, but following D&C 10’s instructions, Joseph could have destroyed them. The reconstruction is thus speculative but does have the merit of fitting all the known dates and circumstances.

⁵⁴ Agreement with Isaac Hale, 6 April 1829, in *JSP*, D1:28-34.

⁵⁵ MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 124.

At the end of May, Joseph and Oliver left Harmony and moved in with the Whitmers in Fayette, NY, arriving about 1 June 1829.⁵⁶ At the Whitmer home, they translated the remaining portions of the text, which was everything from the small plates (1 Nephi through Omni and Words of Mormon). Evidence for this is that the scribes for that section included John and Christian Whitmer (says “unknown” in the Book of Mormon manuscripts published by Royal Skousen, but he has now tentatively identified them), who were not in Harmony, only Fayette.⁵⁷

The title page was printed (perhaps by Grandin, perhaps another printer nearby) in early June and filed with the copyright information on 11 June 1829. Unlike most of his efforts where he could not tie the content of the plates to anything he was translating, Joseph said that the title page was “taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates, which contained the record which has been translated.”⁵⁸ Due to the timing, this likely means it was at the end of the large plates, and so translated at end of their stay in Harmony.

Oliver translating

Shortly after his arrival, Oliver may have sought a revelation, like Joseph’s father (D&C 4) and Martin Harris (D&C 5), which Oliver copied perhaps in the first few days in Harmony. The result was what is today D&C 6. Unfortunately, both the first recording of this and the copy by John Whitmer for Revelation Book 1 are missing, so the oldest copy we have is from the 1833 Book of Commandments. In this revelation, Oliver was promised many things by the Lord, one of which was that he had a sacred gift which would help him “find out mysteries” and help convert others to the truth. He was then promised another gift, if he desired it, “to translate even as my servant Joseph.” There has been much discussion about Oliver’s role in the translation of the Book of Mormon, if any. Some believe he didn’t translate anything but failed even in the attempt. Some believe he translated part of the Book of Mormon but there is so much missing from the original manuscript that it’s impossible to know. But this revelation contains a clue, saying, “there are records which contain much of my gospel, which have been kept back because of the wickedness of the people; and now I command you, that if you have good desires, a desire to lay up treasures for yourself in heaven, then shall you assist in bringing to light, with your gift, those parts of my scriptures which have been hidden because of iniquity.”⁵⁹ Notice that the records are hidden from the world because of wickedness and Oliver will help bring them to light.

A little later that same month, in April 1829, Oliver is given another revelation speaking more of this opportunity to translate, D&C 8. In his introduction in Revelation Book 1, the oldest surviving copy, John Whitmer wrote, “A Revelation to Oliver he being desirous to know whether the Lord would grant him the gift of Revelation & the Translation.” In that revelation, he was promised, “ye Shall receive, a knowledge concerning the engravings of old Records which are ancient which contain those parts of my Scriptures of which hath been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit.” He was told that he would know in his mind and his heart by the Holy Ghost, which is the spirit of revelation. He was also told he had another gift, “the gift of working with the sprout,” which refers to a divining rod to find water. Oliver had apparently used that in the past to find water, and the Lord told him, “there is no other power save God that can cause this thing of nature to work in your hands for it is the work of God.” Likewise, the gift of translation was from God but it required faith and serious application. If he did that, he was promised, “ye may Translate all those ancient Records which have been hid up which are Sacred & according to your faith it shall be done unto you.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Emma came later, after taking care of some business before heading north, perhaps driven there by her brother.

⁵⁷ See “The Original and Printer’s Manuscripts,” lecture by Royal Skousen, 26 Feb 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bW65LrdubZ0> accessed 9 Aug 2017.

⁵⁸ JS History, vol. A-1, 34, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/40>, accessed 9 Aug 2017.

⁵⁹ Revelation, April 1829-A [D&C 6], <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-april-1829-a-dc-6>, JSP, D1:34-37; see also D&C 6:10-11, 25-27.

⁶⁰ Revelation, April 1829-B [D&C 8], <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-april-1829-b-dc-8>, JSP, D1:44-47.

The language used could potentially apply to the Book of Mormon: “those ancient Records which have been hid up which are Sacred” and “those parts of my scriptures which have been hidden because of iniquity.” But what happens next sheds light on Oliver’s translation experience.

Though D&C 7-9 are in that order in our Doctrine and Covenants (and have been since the Book of Commandments in 1833), when John Whitmer originally recorded them in Revelation Book 1, he put them in the order 8, 7, 9. His order implies that 7 came between 8 and 9, which is exactly what I think happened.

Still in April 1829, Joseph Smith and Oliver had a discussion about the fate of John the Beloved. They had opposing positions (we don’t know which one had which position), with one believing John had died and the other that he lived on. This probably came up because they had reached Alma 45:19, which uses similar language to John 21 about Alma. To end the debate, they inquired of the Lord and received an answer through Joseph’s seer stone. The answer is D&C 7. When it was published in the Book of Commandments, the explanation was added that it was “Translated from parchment, written and hid up by himself [John].” There is no indication that Joseph Smith received an actual document in his hands, like the plates, but rather that the document existed at some point, and through the seer stone, a translation was provided.

The heading for D&C 7 calls this “A Revelation given to Joseph & Oliver.” No details are offered in the revelation or history about this dual-experience. But the language is remarkably similar to the language used in D&C 6 and 8 about what Oliver would help translate—an ancient record, hid up, sacred, and lost from the world. My proposal is that D&C 7 is what Oliver translated and was the fulfillment of the Lord’s promises to him. It may reflect what the Lord then told him after his effort to translate in D&C 9: “because you did not continue as you commenced, when you begun to translate, that I have taken away this privilege from you.”⁶¹

It’s speculative, but perhaps Joseph Smith started the revelation while Oliver wrote, realized this was Oliver’s opportunity to experience it, handed him the hat and stone, and Oliver did a few words which Joseph Smith wrote down, then could do no more, and Joseph Smith finished it. Or perhaps Oliver started it alone, did a little bit, then could do no more and Joseph Smith finished it? Something like that would explain why the revelation given in the first place—it was Oliver’s chance to try his hand at translating.

Priesthood restoration: John the Baptist

During the translation work, the two men had heard passage after passage talking about the importance of baptism and authority to baptize. This was an important point to Joseph Smith since the First Vision and Moroni’s visits, during which Moroni told him, “When they [the plates] are interpreted the Lord will give the holy priesthood to some, and they shall begin to proclaim this gospel and baptize by water, and after that they shall have power to give the Holy Ghost by the laying on of their hands.”⁶² When they finally arrived at the 3 Nephi account of the resurrected Savior teaching the people at the temple about baptism and authority (perhaps 3 Nephi 11, 19, or 27), it prompted them to pray and ask. The date was 15 May 1829.

For years, the common wisdom was that they went down toward the Susquehanna River and offered this prayer near its banks. But new research has shown that the southern part of the property was cleared of trees at that time and the northern part, which goes up a steep, rocky hill, was covered in maple and other trees. Both Oliver and Joseph Smith said that they went into an area of secluded woods to pray, so that means they had to go north. In addition, in 1829, the Susquehanna River was a busy thoroughfare, with boat traffic constantly moving in both directions. So the open southern part of Joseph Smith’s property would not have provided any privacy for prayer. The best conclusion is that they went even further north than Joseph Smith’s property, into the large grove of maple trees somewhere near where the Church has set up the new Aaronic priesthood restoration area.

⁶¹ Revelation, April 1829-D [D&C 9], *JSP*, D1:48-50.

⁶² History, 1834-1836, 97; *JSP*, H1:85 (written by Oliver Cowdery and copied from his history of the Church written originally in the *Messenger and Advocate*).

As the two men prayed for guidance, Joseph Smith's history recorded, "While we were thus employed praying and calling upon the Lord, a Messenger from heaven, descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us."⁶³ They learned the messenger was John called the Baptist from the New Testament, and later called the priesthood he gave them the Aaronic, which he explained gave them authority to baptize for the remission of sins. They were commanded to go baptize and then ordain each other, which they did. They may have waited until the traffic on the river slowed a bit, or perhaps found a quiet moment between boats. The ordinations likely then took place back in Joseph Smith's house, after they had dried off from their baptisms. Joseph Smith recorded that they were also promised additional authority, as Moroni had said, to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost, which would come from Peter, James, and John, under whose direction the Baptist had acted.

Priesthood restoration: Peter, James, and John

However, very few details are recorded about this appearance of the three leading apostles from Jesus' day. While this puzzles us today—why know the date of the appearance of John the Baptist giving the lesser priesthood but not Peter, James, and John giving the greater?—it seems that Joseph and Oliver perhaps saw both events as inter-related, so the first date was the far more significant one, when the priesthood was first restored. What followed after was not just one visit from three New Testament apostles, but several visitations that resulted in continued priesthood keys and authority, over several years, including all the way until 1836 in the Kirtland temple.

But in terms of this specific visit of Peter, James, and John, we can narrow things down quite a bit. Joseph and Oliver left Harmony on 1 June 1829, for Fayette, NY, to finish the translation (Emma came a bit later). Because D&C 128:20 states that the visitation happened on the banks of the Susquehanna River, between Harmony and Colesville, it had to have happened before they left the area. That means sometime between 16 May and 30 June. The only known trip of Joseph Smith and Oliver to Colesville during that time was described by Joseph Knight, which is the man they went to see.

Now Joseph and Oliver Came up to see me if I Could help him to some provisions having no way to Buy any But I was to Cattskill But when I Came home my folks told me what Joseph wanted But I had ingaged to go to Catskill again the next Day and I went again and I Bought a Barral of Mackrel and some Lined paper for writing and when I Came home I Bought some nine or ten Bushels of grain and five or six Bushels taters [potatoes] and a pound of tea and I went Down to see him and they ware in want Joseph and oliver ware gone to see if they Could find a place to work for provisions But found none they returned home and found me there with provisions and they ware glad for they ware out.⁶⁴

So supplied with fish, grain, potatoes, some tea, and a fresh supply of paper from Joseph Knight, the work continued. This was the setting of Joseph Smith receiving D&C 12 for Knight, who mentioned that Samuel Smith was there when he arrived as well, so that helps in the dating. Samuel was baptized on 25 May 1829 by Oliver Cowdery.⁶⁵ He likely had arrived back in April with Oliver and had stayed this whole time. He apparently returned back to Manchester immediately following his baptism. Correlating Knight's statements and Samuel's departure, it seems likely that Knight arrived in Harmony before 25 May when Samuel was still there but before Hyrum arrived at the end of the month.⁶⁶ If Knight arrived before Samuel's departure, as he indicated, but before Hyrum's arrival (who is not mentioned in Knight's story), and that was about two days after Joseph and Oliver had left his house, we can conclude that the appearance of Peter, James, and John may likely have been sometime between 22 and 24 May.

⁶³ History, 1838-1856, volume A1, 17 (<http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/23>).

⁶⁴ Joseph Knight, Sr., Reminiscence, circa 1835-1847, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:19-20.

⁶⁵ History, 1838-1856, volume A-1, 19 (<http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/25>).

⁶⁶ History, 1838-1856, volume A-1, 19 (<http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/25>).

It's important to understand that Joseph Smith did not see this visit from Peter, James, and John in quite the same way we do today, for they continued to seek after more priesthood authority that would let them give the gift of the Holy Ghost. In other words, one of the reasons they may not have viewed this event with the same significance we might today is that Peter, James, and John's visit was not perceived as giving them sufficient authority to do all the things they read about in the Book of Mormon, and were promised by John the Baptist. That understanding would come in June, in the chamber of Father Whitmer's house (D&C 128:21; more below).

Sources: Joseph Smith-History 1:66-75; D&C 6-9, 13; *JSP*, H1:276-313; *JSP*, MRB:14-19; *JSP*, R1:14-17; *JSP*, D1:44-48; *JSP*, R2:31, 471-472; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*; Michael Hubbard MacKay, "Git Them Translated" in Blumell, Grey, and Hedges, *Approaching Antiquity*; Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*; <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/the-gold-plates-and-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon>; <https://history.lds.org/article/where-was-the-priesthood-restored>; <https://history.lds.org/maps/priesthood-restoration-site>.

The witnesses to the Book of Mormon

Journey to Fayette

Opposition to Joseph and his work seemed to be growing from both Emma's family and local ministers (which included Emma's uncle) in May 1829. Accordingly, Oliver Cowdery wrote his friend, David Whitmer, that month, asking if Whitmer's family might have a place for them to stay and finish the translation. Whitmer and Cowdery had met while Oliver was teaching school in Palmyra, though the exact circumstances are unknown. The Whitmers were supportive but were also in the middle of essential spring planting. David Whitmer said later in life that he wanted to go get them but:

I did not know what to do. I was pressed with my work. I had some 20 acres to plow and so I concluded I would finish plowing, and then go. One morning I got up as usual to go to work. On going to the field I found between 5 and 7 acres of my ground had been plowed during the night. I don't know who did it, but it was done, just as I would have done it myself, and the plow was left standing in the furrow. This enabled me to start sooner.⁶⁷

Arriving in Harmony with his two-horse wagon, he discovered that Joseph Smith had been 'watching' his arrival using the seer stone and was able to identify where David stayed along the way. This increased his belief in what Joseph Smith and Oliver were doing. Whitmer loaded up Joseph and Oliver and began the trip back to Fayette, arriving about 4 June (Emma apparently came a little later, though by what means is unknown). He recounted, according to Orson Pratt:

When I was returning to Fayette with Joseph and Oliver, all of us riding in the wagon, Oliver and I on an old fashioned wood spring seat and Joseph behind us [in the wagon bed], we were suddenly approached by a very pleasant, nice looking old man in a clear open place, who saluted us with 'Good morning, it is very warm,' at the same instant wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation and by a sign from Joseph I invited him to ride if he was going our way, but he said very pleasantly, 'No, I am going to Cumorah.' This was something new to me, I did not know what Cumorah meant, and as I looked enquiringly at Joseph, the old man instantly disappeared so that I did not see him again. . . . It was the messenger who had the plates.⁶⁸

In some accounts, Whitmer said this was Moroni, but in others he called the man "a Nephite" and "one of the three Nephites."

⁶⁷ Interview with Orson Pratt, 1878, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:44.

⁶⁸ Interview with Orson Pratt, 1878, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:44-45.

Shortly after arriving, Joseph's history said:

We now became anxious to have that promise realized to us, which the Angel that conferred upon us the Aaronick Priesthood had given us, viz: that provided we continue faithful; we should also have the Melchizedec Priesthood, which holds the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. We had for some time made this matter a subject of humble prayer, and at length we got together in the Chamber of Mr Whitmer [Peter Whitmer Sr.]'s house in order more particularly to seek of the Lord what we now so earnestly desired: . . . for we had not long been engaged in solemn and fervent prayer, when the word of the Lord, came unto us in the Chamber, commanding us; that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ, and that he also should ordain me to the same office, ~~accordin~~ and then <to> ordain others as it should be made known unto us from time to time: we were however commanded to defer this our ordination untill, such times, as it should be practicable to have our brethren, who had been and who should be baptized, assembled together, when we must have their sanction to our thus proceeding to ordain each other, and have them decide by vote whether they were willing to accept us as spiritual teachers, or not.⁶⁹

This is apparently the revelation referred to in D&C 128:21 where “the voice of God in the chamber of old Father Whitmer” declared many things to them. This included the sacrament, ordaining others to the priesthood, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.⁷⁰ Though this revelation in Fayette was not recorded, many of its principles ended up as inspired direction in Section 20 later, and the ordination spoken of happened on the day of the organization of the Church about ten months later.

Shortly after this unrecorded revelation, D&C 18 was received, then sections 14-17, the last of which was the call for the three witnesses, which is discussed in the next section.

Mary Whitmer

The first witness, however, was a woman. Mary Whitmer, the mother of David and wife of Peter Whitmer, Sr., in whose house the translation was happening, was greatly burdened by the extra work. David Whitmer explained that as his mother was going to milk the cows one morning, shortly after Joseph Smith and Oliver had arrived, the same old man that had greeted them on the road met her by the barn and said, “You have been very faithful and diligent in your labours but you are tried because of the increase of your toil, it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness, that your faith may be strengthened,” and he showed her the plates, letting her touch them and turn the leaves. Thereafter she served without complaint, he reported.

The three witnesses

During the translation in Harmony, a portion of the Book of Mormon (Ether 5:2-4) had mentioned witnesses as well as some of the early revelations to various individuals (e.g., D&C 5:11-15; 6:25-28; 14:8). Once in Fayette, they translated a passage from the small plates that mentioned very specifically “three witnesses” who “by the power of God” would “testify to the truth of the book and the things therein” (2 Nephi 27:12; also 2 Nephi 11:3).

Toward the end of June, Martin Harris came to Fayette for a visit, to check on the progress of the translation (it was nearly done). Joseph recorded that

it <almost immediately> occurred to, Oliver Cowdery David Whitmer and the aforementioned martin Harris who had came to see us, and make enquiry how we got along with our work--<of translation;> that they would have me enquire of the Lord, to know if they might not obtain of him to be allowed to be the three witnesses and at length

⁶⁹ Draft 2, History Drafts, 1838-circa 1841, 25-26, in *JSP*, H1:326.

⁷⁰ *JSP*, H1:326.

<finally> they became so very solicitous, and teased me so much almost without intermission for some time, that I at length complied.⁷¹

Inquiring of the Lord through the seer stone, Joseph Smith obtained a revelation (D&C 17) which promised the three men they would view the plates, the breastplate, the sword of Laban, and the interpreters.

On a Sunday morning, David Whitmer was in his field plowing when he heard a voice and saw a personage who said to him, “Blessed is the name of the Lord, and they who keep his commandments.” Shortly after this Joseph Smith came and told David to come with him, Oliver, and Martin, and be one of the three witnesses. He fastened his team to a fence and crossed the field into the woods with them.⁷² There the men prayed in turn, then again, with no success. Martin Harris excused himself, saying it was his fault, and the other men prayed again. After praying, they were sitting on a log discussing the work of the Lord,

when a bright light shone around them which increased in lustre until an angel stood before them. Then David said the angel took the book of plates and turned over leaf after leaf, except a portion which was sealed by rings of gold *not* yet translated, but to yet be translated in the due time of the Lord. The angel, he said, proclaimed that the translation from those plates into the Book of Mormon was correct, and had been done by the power of God, and that they were chosen to be especial witnesses of the same.⁷³

In other accounts, Whitmer mentioned a table being brought down by the angel, on which were not only the plates of the Book of Mormon, but the brass plates, the Interpreters, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona. Though Martin Harris was not with them, he had his own individual experience with Joseph Smith shortly after this, which matched what the other two men had experienced, so they could all testify together.

Sometime later, a document was written and signed by all three men with their testimony, which was published with the Book of Mormon. The original is not extant, but the copy in the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon contains Oliver’s signature and he wrote out the names of the other two men.⁷⁴

Later in life, the three each testified this way. Oliver Cowdery said:

I wrote with my own pen the entire book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the prophet, As he translated <it> by the gift and power of god, By means of the urim and thummin, or as it is called by that book [“]holy interpreters.” I beheld with my eyes. And handled with my hands the gold plates from which it was translated. I also beheld the Interpreters. That book is true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it, Mr Spaulding did not write it. I wrote it myself as it fell from the Lips of the prophet.⁷⁵

In 1869, Martin Harris declared:

Just as surely as the sun is shining on us by day, just as surely as the breath of life sustains us, so surely do I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God; so surely do I know that the Book of Mormon was divinely translated. I saw the plates, I saw the angel. I heard the voice of God. I know that the Book of Mormon is true.⁷⁶

David Whitmer’s testimony was recorded in 1881 as follows:

All at once a light came down from above us and encircled us for quite a little distance around; and the angel stood before us. He was dressed in white, and spoke and called me by name and said ‘Blessed is he that keepeth His commandments.’

⁷¹ JSP, H1:314; History, 1838–1856, volume A-1, 23 (<http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/29>).

⁷² David Whitmer Interview with Edward Stevenson, 9 February 1886, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:164.

⁷³ David Whitmer Interview with Edward Stevenson, 9 February 1886, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:164.

⁷⁴ Printer’s Manuscript, 463-464.

⁷⁵ Oliver Cowdery, Council Bluffs Testimony, 21 Oct 1848, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:494.

⁷⁶ Martin Harris Interview with William Harrison Homer, 1869, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:316.

This is all that I heard the angel say...the voice of God spoke out of heaven saying that the Book was true and the translation correct.⁷⁷

This experience lifted a huge burden from Joseph's shoulders. As Lucy Smith recorded, they were visiting Joseph in Fayette when this happened, and Joseph came in the room and said:

Father! Mother! You do not know how happy I am. The Lord has now caused the plates to be shown to three more besides me. They have also seen an angel and will have to testify to the truth of what I have said, for they know for themselves that I do not go about to deceive the people. I do feel as though I was relieved of a dreadful burden which was almost too much for me to endure. But they will now have to bear a part, and it does rejoice my soul that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world.⁷⁸

The eight witnesses

Soon after the three witnesses' experience, eight other men were permitted to see the plates, but in a different way. No divine manifestation, just a physical presentation of the plates by Joseph Smith. They were able to hold and touch them but there was no angel or voice from heaven.

Few details are known about the experience of the eight witnesses. With no known revelation directing this effort, we don't know, for example, why these men were selected or even if eight was somehow significant. Five of them were Whitmers (Hiram Page being a Whitmer in-law) and three were Smiths. Unlike the three witnesses, the eight saw the plates in Palmyra, at or near the home of Joseph's parents, who at this time were back living in the log house. Joseph, Oliver, and the Whitmers had journeyed there to start negotiating for printing the book, though perhaps the Whitmers also came anticipating this witness experience, we don't know.

Lucy Mack Smith said that the eight saw the plates in "a little grove" near the Smith home where they often went to offer up prayer. She also said that all eight met together that evening, along with others, and bore their united testimony concerning the experience.⁷⁹

John Whitmer, one of the eight, however, told a different story. He said that Joseph showed them the plates in the house where they handled them and "turned the leaves sufficient to satisfy us." However, Whitmer clarified that only four saw them in this way, so Lucy's account is probably about the other four, who saw the plates a little later that same day.⁸⁰

The witness of the eight was recorded at the end of the Book of Mormon manuscript, just as with the three witnesses, with all eight names written by Oliver Cowdery. The original document is not extant.

Sources: D&C 14, 17-18; *JSP*, D1:66-74; *JSP*, H1:312-327; *JSP*, R2:44-51, 479-480, 481-484; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*; Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*; <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/the-gold-plates-and-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon>.

Getting the Book of Mormon published

Copyright

Printing a book was a major expense and effort. Martin Harris had already agreed to help publish it as early as mid-1828, and recommitted after his experience as one of the three witnesses at the end of June 1829. But first, in early June, Joseph needed

⁷⁷ David Whitmer Interview with William H. Kelley and George A. Blakeslee, 15 Dec 1881, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:91.

⁷⁸ Proctor and Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 199.

⁷⁹ Proctor & Proctor, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 201-202.

⁸⁰ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:248-249.

to find a printer and negotiate the work that would make the book a reality. One of the most important first steps was to obtain a copyright. To do that, you needed a printed title page, which Joseph had printed in early June 1829. Though the printer is unknown, it was perhaps Egbert B. Grandin of Palmyra. As mentioned yesterday, Martin may have been looking into the copyright process as early as his trip to New York City to meet with Mitchell and Anthon. Now the printed title page and the appropriate application were filed in Utica, New York, on 11 June 1829 (though by who is unknown). This protected Joseph Smith from someone stealing the book, but just as importantly, it protected any printer who accepted the job by making it illegal for another printer to print it without his knowledge.

Selecting a printer

With the copyright secured, the search for a printer began earnestly, starting with Egbert B. Grandin, who printed the *Wayne Sentinel* newspaper and other items. Grandin said the cost to print 5,000 copies of the book would be \$3,000, a sum that may have surprised Martin and Joseph. For Joseph Smith, that was more than he could typically earn in ten years doing the kind of labor he was accustomed to.

Even after agreeing to his terms, Grandin declined the project and even attempted to have friends and neighbors talk Martin out of it. Martin was determined, so the men were forced to look elsewhere.

The other printer in town was Jonathan A. Hadley, a twenty-year-old new business owner who printed the *Palmyra Freeman* paper, an anti-Masonic publication. Nothing is known of their conversations, but Hadley's later negative press against the book indicate that their talks were extensive (he knew great details about the project) and yet he not only declined but thought it was great foolishness. Still, Hadley appears to have referred Joseph and Martin to his former employer in Rochester, which is where the men next went.

In Rochester, the men first met with Thurlow Weed. He had served in state politics and, like Hadley, published an anti-Masonic paper. Weed also declined to publish the book, explaining later that he did not have the facility for such a project, nor the inclination to do it, considering Joseph Smith a fraud, even after Joseph apparently gave him a demonstration of how he had translated the record.

Going directly across the street, the men had better luck with Elihu Marshall, the printer of the *Rochester Album* paper. Marshall was an experienced book publisher and seller. Marshall was also very open-minded religiously, publicly supporting those who lived well but believed different than he. After discussing the terms, Marshall accepted the job. Now, however, Joseph hesitated, due to the distance and cost involved, because someone would have to board in Rochester to bring the daily pages in for printing and protect the manuscript. No contract was signed, but with Marshall's agreement in hand, the men returned to Grandin in Palmyra.

Telling Grandin that Marshall was prepared to print the book, the men were able to persuade him to take on the job after all. His terms were payment of \$3,000 up front instead of the more usual method of splitting the proceeds from the book sales. Calculations show that this was a \$1,000 profit for Grandin, a very inflated price. But Grandin knew he would have to buy 800 pounds of pica type to set the book, thousands of pages of paper, and pay workers for several months, all without any income during the printing—and he frankly expected none after. So securing all the money at the start was his only option. Joseph and Martin accepted the terms. The date of the final agreement is not known, but by 11 August 1829, the news reached Rochester that the deal was done.

Martin Harris's mortgage and D&C 19

Martin now needed to do his part and mortgage his farm to get Grandin the money. His wife, Lucy, was absolutely against it, and he had been told by multiple people that it was a fools' errand. He hesitated, and the project was delayed getting started as a result. Martin knew he faced certain ruin if the book would not sell. At the same time, his wife Lucy was gathering testimony from neighbors that Joseph was duping Martin out of his money, and took Joseph to court. Martin boldly testified in Joseph's behalf but still was not ready to close on the mortgage.

It was at this time that D&C 19 was given to Martin (not the date of March 1830 that was mistakenly attached to it for many years), instructing him in the strongest terms to pay the debt so the book could be printed. The exact date is not known, but on 25 August 1829, Martin complied, so it was before that date and after the agreement with Grandin was reached, which was sometime in early August. Grandin was thus paid in full (via the mortgage note that he held) on 25 August and Martin's role was done on that date, showing that D&C 19 could not have been in March 1830 but between 1 and 25 August 1829.

Printing the book

With Harris' note in hand, Grandin started printing the Book of Mormon in September 1829, after purchasing type and paper in New York. The work continued through the fall and winter into early 1830, monitored closely by Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, and Martin Harris, while Joseph returned to his farm in Harmony, Pennsylvania.

The task of supervising the printing of the Book of Mormon fell mainly to Oliver Cowdery and Hyrum Smith. Oliver had started making a copy of the manuscript to give to the printer in the summer of 1829; the men did not want to surrender the one and only original manuscript and risk losing it, as Martin had done with the first manuscript. This was, of course, the second time that Oliver Cowdery had written nearly the entire Book of Mormon out in longhand: in the printer's manuscript, Oliver wrote about 84%; another unknown scribe wrote about 15%; and Hyrum Smith wrote about 1%. The unknown scribe was probably a close friend or family member, but handwriting comparisons have ruled out Emma Smith, Samuel Smith, John Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jr., David Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, and Martin Harris. A comparison with Joseph Smith Sr.'s handwriting is inconclusive.⁸¹

John Gilbert was the lead typesetter at Grandin's shop. Oliver or Hyrum brought him a few pages of the copy at a time, and he would mark it up with punctuation and small corrections, then begin setting the type for the pages. Generally, Oliver seems to have been able to keep up with the pace of copying, but for some of the printing (5 of 21 gatherings), they fell behind and had to give the original manuscript to Gilbert, or because they needed the manuscript for the Canadian copyright effort.⁸²

During this period, Joseph and Oliver corresponded through letters, which are preserved in the Joseph Smith Papers.

The first was written on 22 October 1829 from Joseph to Oliver. He commented on his arrival in Harmony on 4 Oct, that he just bought a horse, and that Josiah Stowell was nearly ready to spend "five or six hundred dollars" buying books (there is no evidence he was able to arrange that). He was very anxious to hear from Oliver on the progress of the printing.⁸³

Oliver wrote back on 6 November 1829, spending much of the letter writing about his desires to serve God and his gratitude for salvation and desire to be prepared for the Second Coming. Oliver said the printing work had been somewhat delayed because of illness at Grandin's (perhaps with John Gilbert) but Grandin still hoped to be done by early February 1830. He mentioned a letter from Thomas B. Marsh, from Boston, who had heard about the book and expressed interest.⁸⁴ In a PS, Oliver stated that he had copied the printer's manuscript to Alma speaking to his son, so about Alma 36-42.⁸⁵

On 28 December 1829, Oliver wrote again. He told Joseph that he had "So Soon become a printer" by setting several pages of type for the project.⁸⁶ He has been pondering his mission and has experienced "many long Struglings in prayr of Sorrow for the Sins of my fellow beings."⁸⁷

⁸¹ *JSP*, R3, Part 1:8; Part 2:418 (Directory of Scribes and Printers).

⁸² *JSP*, R3, Part 1:9.

⁸³ Letter to Oliver Cowdery, 22 October 1829, in *JSP*, D1:96-97.

⁸⁴ Later Marsh came to Palmyra and met Martin Harris and Oliver, taking back a sheet from the printing, and shortly thereafter joining the Church. Others also received sheets from the printer at this time, including the Hyde family (Orson Hyde was later an apostle) and Solomon Chamberlain, who took his sheets preaching; see MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 200-202.

⁸⁵ Letter from Oliver Cowdery, 6 November 1829, in *JSP*, D1:98-101.

⁸⁶ This experience later played a role in Oliver taking the lead on printing several Church projects.

⁸⁷ Letter from Oliver Cowdery, 28 December 1829, in *JSP*, D1:103-104.

Abner Cole

Shortly after this letter, a man named Abner Cole, who was printing a newspaper in Palmyra and using Grandin's print shop on evenings and weekends to do it, began to take type set for the Book of Mormon and reset it for his paper, printing excerpts from the book. Hyrum and Oliver discovered him working on it one Sunday evening, and insisted he stop because it was a copyrighted work, but Cole went on printing it in his paper. In his paper, he also derided Joseph Smith and the whole project, working to turn his readers against the Prophet.

When Joseph heard about Cole's effort from his father, who came to Harmony to inform him, he immediately went to Palmyra and confronted Cole. As a former attorney, Cole knew the law, so when Joseph forbid him to print any more of the book that he possessed the copyright to, Cole's only reaction was rage and challenging Joseph to a fight. Finally, Cole agreed to arbitration. The details are unknown, but after printing two more editions of his paper with Book of Mormon quotations, he quit. However, he later published a fictional satire called the Book of Pukei that continued to mock the story of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith.

Finishing the book

In the meantime, Martin Harris continued to be concerned about how he was going to recover his \$3,000 mortgage. Initially his financing the book was seen as a gift, but Harris told the visiting Joseph that he hoped to recover some of his investment through book sales. On 16 January 1830, Joseph and Martin signed an agreement that gave Martin the right to sell copies of the Book of Mormon until he collected the amount of his mortgage.⁸⁸

Another interesting event happened early in 1830, perhaps as a result of the copyright confrontation with Cole, when Joseph received a revelation (unpublished) directing them to obtain copyrights for the Book of Mormon "upon all the face of the Earth." Accordingly, Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Knight, Sr. Hiram Page, and Josiah Stowell went to Canada to attempt to do that. The men were not successful, mainly due to the fact that Canada was still under British rule at that time and copyright had to be obtained in England, and was poorly enforced in Canada until more than a decade later. Thus no one was interested in purchasing the book's copyright and having the rights to print it in Canada.⁸⁹ Of course, later the Church pursued copyrights for all its scriptures in various nations and continues to protect the books using such methods today.

Finally, in late March 1830, the first books came from Luther Howard's bindery, located on the second floor of Grandin's building. Palettes of printed pages were lowered by a pulley system out the window from the third to second floor, for binding by Howard and his men. The finished books were lowered to the first floor in the same way, for sale in Grandin's store and for distribution to Joseph Smith and others. The books were immediately used for missionary purposes, and in just a few months, Oliver was writing from Ohio telling Joseph Smith to send 500 copies because the Book of Mormon was in great demand.

As for Martin Harris, as mentioned, he had mortgaged all his remaining available property (that his wife didn't control) to Egbert B. Grandin for \$3,000. It was an 18-month note, meaning Martin could stay until the note was due in February 1831, and retain ownership of the land if the note was paid in full before the due date. Grandin was also allowed to sell the mortgage for cash to speculators, who then took possession of it (today called assigning a loan and still commonly done). Grandin held the note until October 1830, then sold it to Thomas Rogers II for \$2,000. Because Martin Harris didn't have enough money when the note came due, Rogers ended up taking possession of the property and sold it to Thomas Lakey for \$3,000 in April 1831, who then sold it two years later for \$3,300. Everyone profited from the transaction—except Martin Harris, who simply lost his farm. The books did not sell well in Palmyra, and later Martin continued to try and sell them in Ohio, even after he'd lost his farm. However, one late account (1853) quoted him as saying, "I never lost one cent. Mr. Smith . . . paid me all that I advanced, and more too."⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Agreement with Martin Harris, 16 January 1830, in *JSP*, D1:105-108.

⁸⁹ Revelation, circa early 1830, in *JSP*, D1:108-112.

⁹⁰ Agreement with Martin Harris, 16 January 1830, in *JSP*, D1:107-108.