

Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised

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The biographer of Joseph Smith's early life will know his subject when he relies on sources that know their subject. This truism is more obvious in statement than application, for non-Mormon biography has not faced the severe limitations of the uniformly hostile affidavits taken by a sworn enemy of the Mormon Prophet. The image thus obtained is sharply discordant from the Joseph Smith documented in the 1830's: a leader of physical prowess and vigorous manhood, a profound idealist with spontaneous humor and warmth, who displayed personal courage under tremendous odds. A similar youth in the 1820's is discovered, not by editing out non-Mormon sources, but finding those non-Mormon sources that reflect definite contact with Joseph Smith. Such a study shows that collecting *informed* statements about the Prophet will produce a substantial favorable judgment.¹

Most books on Joseph Smith claim reliance on evidence, but the glaring contradictions show that many apparent historical sources are highly unreliable. Obviously Joseph Smith was a topic of warm controversy in his own community. Consequently one must not take at full value the statement of a contemporary without raising the following issues:

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- 1) *Verification of person.* Besides meeting the possibility of fictitious invention, vital statistics show whether a person was old enough to be a capable observer and may furnish clues on whether the observations are based on close or distant contact.
- 2) *Accuracy of reporting.* Here the question is whether the person purportedly making the statement really did so. Second and third hand statements are obviously suspect, but the interviewer recording an apparent first-hand statement may superimpose his preconceptions on the statement of another.
- 3) *Opportunity for observation.* The basic qualification for any historical source is firsthand contact with the person or event described. Yet the anti-Joseph Smith statements of contemporaries show a distinct tendency to report community rumor, not personal experience.
- 4) *Bias of the source.* Historians today recognize that no observer is free from bias, but intense prejudice tends to exaggeration. One must therefore be rigorous in examining the factual basis of the conclusions of Joseph Smith's contemporaries.

Although initial collection of statements against Joseph Smith is an oft-told story, its outline is a necessary background for the affidavits to be analyzed. D. P. Hurlbut, excommunicated twice by LDS tribunals for immorality, became so personally vindictive that he was put under a court order restraining him from doing harm to the person or property of Joseph Smith.² He was next "employed" by an anti-Mormon public committee to gather evidence to "completely divest Joseph Smith of all claims to the character of an honest man . . ."³ To achieve this goal he travelled to New York and procured statements at Palmyra Village, the largest business center adjacent to the Smith farm and also at Manchester, the rural district that included "Stafford Street." Cornelius Stafford, then twen-

²For a fuller discussion of Hurlbut's personal vindictiveness, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Reliability of the Early History of Lucy and Joseph Smith", *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 4 (Summer 1969), p. 15.

³"To the Public," official committee statement published in the *Painesville Telegraph*, January 31, 1834. Early nineteenth century spelling of names is not always consistent, and "Hurlburt" appears in LDS records. The quoted statement and autographs favor the "Hurlbut" of this article.

ty, later remembered that Hurlbut arrived at "our school house and took statements about the bad character of the Mormon Smith family, and saw them swear to them."⁴

The Painesville, Ohio, editor, E. D. Howe, replaced Hurlbut as a respectable author, and published the affidavits in *Mormonism Unveiled* (1834), laying the cornerstone of anti-Mormon historiography. Howe lived to see the solidity of the edifice, observing forty-four years afterward in his memoirs that the book "has been the basis of all the histories which have appeared from time to time since that period touching that people."⁵ More accurately, Howe's writing was insignificant, but the Palmyra-Manchester affidavits published by him have introduced Joseph Smith in every major non-Mormon study from 1834 to the present. Yet even supposedly definitive studies display no investigation of the individuals behind the Hurlbut statements, nor much insight into their community.

Some simple arithmetic ought to shake the canonical status of the Hurlbut-Howe affidavits. The Smith family lived on the line between Wayne and Ontario counties, well settled with substantial populations. All who claimed to know Joseph Smith in this area had contact in the townships of either Palmyra or Manchester, and the 1830 census contains about 2,000 males old enough to know the Smiths in these two localities. From that possible number, Hurlbut procured the signatures of seventy-two individuals who claimed firsthand experience with Joseph Smith. At best, Hurlbut selected one-half of one percent of the males who potentially knew anything about the Smiths. Although Howe presented these as representative, they are matched by approximately the same number in those communities known to have a favorable opinion of the Smiths in the late 1820's. Dr. Gain Robinson, uncle of the Smith family physician, gathered sixty signatures on a certificate attesting the Smiths' reliability in an attempt to prevent loss of their farm in 1825.⁶ Yet the crucial issue is not signatures,

⁴Statement of C. R. Stafford, March 1885, Auburn, Ohio, cit. *Naked Truths About Mormonism*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 1888), p. 3. Hurlbut's published affidavits will be analyzed in the article. They include two general statements with multiple signatures and also the following individual statements: Joseph Capron, Parley Chase, Willard Chase, Abigail Harris, Henry Harris, Lucy Harris, Peter Ingersoll, Roswell Nichols, Barton Stafford, David Stafford, Joshua Stafford, William Stafford, and G. W. Stoddard.

⁵Eber D. Howe, *Autobiography and Recollections of a Pioneer Printer* (Painesville, Ohio, 1878), p. 45.

⁶For full discussion, see Anderson, *Dialogue*, pp. 16, 19.

but individual testimony with supporting details. In this category there are only ten individual statements on Joseph Smith to be considered.⁷ But three times this number of individual recollections have been preserved from non-Mormons of Palmyra-Manchester that do not appear in Hurlbut-Howe.

Until Hugh Nibley's *Myth Makers* opened the subject, detailed study of deficiencies in the Hurlbut-Howe evidence was not easily found. Nibley drew the net broadly and exposed the contradictory nature of anti-Mormon testimonials on Joseph Smith. The purpose here is more specific: to analyze Hurlbut's statements for firsthand information—then to suggest major insights from other non-Mormon statements from Palmyra-Manchester. Although this will exclude a number of Susquehanna Valley and Fayette recollections, the more abundant Palmyra-Manchester evidence is based on longer contact with Joseph Smith, much of which extended to pre-Mormon days.

HURLBUT'S GENERAL AFFIDAVITS

Hurlbut heavily influenced the individual statements from Palmyra-Manchester, as can be shown by his phrases regularly appearing in affidavits of the Staffords, Chases, etc. His language evidently appears in two community affidavits: names of fifty-one residents of Palmyra appear on one document and names of eleven residents of Manchester appear on another. One must make a necessary assumption here. The signers of a petition or declaration are normally not authors, merely ratifiers. When Hurlbut appeared in the Manchester schoolhouse, he undoubtedly had penned the statement that eleven rather nonliterary farmers signed. One would envision the same procedure as inevitable for the fifty-one signers from Palmyra. Someone authored the general statements, and Hurlbut is the best candidate.

Not only does identifiable phrasing appear, but similar structuring of the affidavits. In the following comparison, significant word correlations are indicated, but the more signifi-

⁷This statistic excludes three Palmyra declarations. Lucy Harris talks only of her husband. G. S. Stoddard's single sentence on the Smiths is merely a gratuitous comment: "The Smith family never made any pretensions to respectability." And Abigail Harris reports a single conversation with Lucy Smith that is strictly not relevant to the character of Joseph Smith. For Abigail's evident tendency to maliciousness, see Hugh Nibley, *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City, 1961), pp. 20-22.

cant point is the similarity of basic structure from two purportedly different authors:

GENERAL PALMYRA AFFIDAVIT

We, the undersigned, have been *acquainted with the Smith family*, for a number of years, while they resided near this place, and we have no hesitation in saying, that we consider them destitute of that moral character, which ought to *entitle* them to the confidence of any community. They were particularly famous for visionary projects, spent much of their time in *digging for money* which they pretended was hid in the earth; and to this day, large excavations may be seen in the earth, not far from their residence, where they used to spend their time in digging for hidden treasures. Joseph Smith, Senior, and his son, Joseph, were in particular, considered entirely destitute of moral character and *addicted to* vicious habits. . . .

It was not supposed that any of them were possessed of sufficient character or influence to make any one believe their book or their sentiments,

PARLEY CHASE AFFIDAVIT⁸

I was *acquainted with the family* of Joseph Smith, Sen. both before and since they became Mormons, and feel free to state that not one of the male members of the Smith family were *entitled* to any credit whatsoever.

Digging for money was their principal employment.

They were lazy, intemperate and worthless men, very much *addicted to* lying. In this they frequently boasted of their skill.

In regard to their Gold Bible speculation they scarcely ever told two stories alike. The Mormon Bible is said to be a revelation from God, through Joseph Smith Jr., his Prophet, and this same Joseph Smith, Jr. to my knowledge, bore the reputa-

⁸These two documents (and all Hurlbut affidavits cited) are in E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, Ohio, 1834), pp. 261-262 and p. 248. For purposes of comparison, the sentence about money digging has been placed before its preceding sentence, and Hurlbut's italics removed and mine added. Deletions in the general Palmyra affidavit are restricted to the non-Smith paragraph. Since the affidavits appear in this work of Howe (pp. 232-262) arranged by the name of the deponents, further reference will be made by name and not footnoted pages.

and we know not of a single individual in this vicinity that puts the least confidence in their pretended revelations.

tion among his neighbors of being a liar.

The foregoing statement can be corroborated by all his former neighbors.

The words italicized in the above comparisons are a key to equivalent portions of the two affidavits. Both progress formally through a recital of knowledge of the Smiths, their desreputability in the community, money digging, and being "addicted to" evil practices, closing with application of general character to religious claims and the assertion that no one in that area takes them seriously. It is highly unlikely that Parley Chase would write following the identical outline of Hurlbut's Palmyra affidavit—rather Hurlbut composed both.

Moving to the general Manchester affidavit, one can see from the similar language that Hurlbut obviously prepared it for signing. The sole claim there against the Smiths is found in the first sentence on the following chart, which contains three negative patterns mirrored in other affidavits of supposed independent authorship:⁹

lazy, indolent set of men, but also intemperate; and their word was not to be depended upon.

lazy,	intemperate	. . .very much addicted to lying.
lazy set of fellows. . .	a drunkard	and a liar

lying and indolent set of men, and no confidence could be placed in them

became indolent	and told marvellous stories
notorious for indolence, foolery	and falsehood

Once more, the combination of similar vocabulary and similar thought pattern is apparent. The "indolent-intemperate-lying" pattern of four affidavits, with slight modification in another two, was not independently created by six spontaneous declarations. Hurlbut either suggested this language, penned it for signing, or interpolated it afterwards. A greater point is being made than common phrases, however. Hurlbut's redundancies reveal what he most wanted to prove—and what the

⁹Statements respectively from the general Manchester affidavit, Parley Chase, David Stafford (the first phrase appears in the sentence following "a drunkard and a liar"), Henry Harris, Joshua Stafford, and Joseph Capron.

reader must be cautious of accepting. This would not necessarily be so, if independent language gave support to independent statements, but the opposite is true on his themes of laziness, drunkenness, and untruthfulness. The first of this triad is Hurlbut's variation on his favorite theme, the Smith's constant money digging:¹⁰

. . .the general employment of the Smith family was money digging. . .

The general employment of the	family was digging for money.
their principal employment.	Digging for money was
A great part of their time was devoted to	digging for money. . .
. . .spent much of their time in	digging for money. . .

This similar phrasing suggests a common author, and the last example is demonstrably Hurlbut's, since it comes from the general Palmyra affidavit. Similar language is found in every Palmyra-Manchester declaration under study here, with the exception of Barton Stafford's.

Other favorite words from the general affidavits are "pretended," "visionary," and a stressed concept is the lack of "influence in this community," which finds its counterpart in individual statements such as "The Smith family never made any pretensions to respectability"—or, "In short, not one of the family had at least claims to respectability."¹¹ Virtually every affidavit bearing on the Smiths opens with several sentences similar to the general Palmyra affidavit, clear evidence of regular outside structuring.

Placing Hurlbut's vocabulary under a magnifying glass in this manner reveals his specific goals. Common language is most frequent on the points of intemperance, lying, and laziness, with the last redundantly emphasized as vocational money digging. Since Hurlbut's hand is plain on these general charges, the careful historian must be skeptical of stories supporting these charges throughout many affidavits. Hurlbut's language in ostensibly non-Hurlbut affidavits shows that all his specific evidence is highly suspect, *especially on the point of money digging*. Careful study of the pre-1830 Smith economics proves they were anything but lazy. And if that contention in fact

¹⁰Statements respectively from David Stafford, Peter Ingersoll, Parley Chase (sentence inverted), William Stafford, and the general Palmyra affidavit.

¹¹Statements respectively of G. W. Stoddard and Barton Stafford.

falls, Hurlbut's related accusation of money digging is seriously suspect. In fact, the extreme language of almost every affidavit on this subject raises doubt. Had the Smiths been regularly observed in money digging, reasonable statements to that effect would be expected. As it is, the collected depositions describe a large family living under marginal frontier economy "without work" or by laboring "very little."¹² Their "general employment" of money digging never gave them income, but they somehow survived doing little else. Such exaggerations indicate more than overstatement—they suggest invention.

Yet the historian must study the content of all documents, and the one striking characteristic of Hurlbut is reliance on vague generalities. The two community statements combined accuse the Smiths of being "a lazy, indolent set of men" who were "entirely destitute of moral character, and addicted to vicious habits." Such phrases really do not say anything, as both critic and friend of Hurlbut agree. The rules of evidence in the United States insist that a witness tell specific experiences, and leave to the court or jury the function of forming opinions from them. For lack of specific evidence, the general Palmyra and Manchester statements of Hurlbut merely prove that sixty-two signers found the Smiths objectionable; they fail to state what direct observation led to this conclusion. Similarly, the individual statement of Parley Chase, quoted above with the general Palmyra affidavit, is historically insignificant. It merely parades conclusions without substantiation, and to make matters worse, in Hurlbut's concepts and language.

HURLBUT'S SHORTER AFFIDAVITS

The arithmetic of the Hurlbut witnesses from Palmyra-Manchester can now be summarized. From a total of fifteen statements, the three affidavits just discussed must be subtracted as insignificant: the general Manchester statement, the general Palmyra statement, and its echo, the Parley Chase affidavit. Three more are irrelevant: statements of Lucy Harris, Abigail Harris, and G. W. Stoddard mainly concern Martin Harris and contain nothing observed about Joseph Smith. With these half-dozen excluded, there remain three long statements and

¹²Statements respectively of Joseph Capron and Henry Harris. Responsible investigation dismisses these contentions. See Anderson, *Dialogue*, p. 15.

six of the one-page variety. The latter are typically deficient in evidence about Joseph Smith, Jr.

Analysis of Hurlbut-Howe will lose its way in pointless detail without constant reiteration of a single question: *What firsthand experiences do the Hurlbut affidavits allege concerning Joseph Smith?* For instance, Henry Harris reports certain conversations with Joseph Smith, close enough to the Prophet's own claims to be garbled in the telling, but the sole observation of the "lying" nature of "the pretended Prophet" is the failure of a jury in a "justice's court" to decide a case according to Smith's testimony when Harris was a juror. Since many a truthful man has failed to gain the vote of a jury, the point is trivial regarding Joseph Smith's character. Only three of the shorter affidavits seriously detail Smith money digging, and none in convincing terms. Roswell Nichols ties the supposed treasure searches entirely to conversations with Joseph Smith, Sr., that resemble his known belief in the Book of Mormon. Joshua Stafford claims that Joseph Smith, Jr. showed him a piece of wood from a money box and also claimed to have discovered buried watches. As will be shown later, Joshua Stafford himself is named by relatives as leading in money digging in the neighborhood, which renders such indirect evidence against Joseph Smith suspect. After all, Stafford's claim is limited to reported (and possibly garbled) conversations with Joseph Smith, not observation of any act of the Mormon founder. Likewise, Joseph Capron tells details of a fantastic dig "north west of my house," but alleges no personal observation. The "money digging" subject must be further discussed—the point for now is that direct experience with Joseph Smith is strictly lacking in the smaller affidavits raising the issue.

The remaining two shorter affidavits allege Joseph Smith's human failings. Barton Stafford, a few years younger than Joseph, accuses the young Prophet of undignified conduct. Sometime in 1827 or afterward Joseph was allegedly intoxicated on cider, scuffled with a fellow-worker, tore his shirt, and was escorted home by Emma. Since even here Barton Stafford does not clearly say that he observed the event (only that it happened in "my father's field"), some doubt remains whether this is a story or an observation. David Stafford does describe a personal experience, claiming that Joseph had "drunked a little too freely," and while working together a dispute led

to "hard words," which led to a fight, and "he got the advantage of me in the scuffle." One Ford, who attempted to intervene, supposedly came off little better, for "we both entered a complaint against him, and he was fined for the breach of the peace."

Joseph Smith's only known response to a particular Hurlbut affidavit presents another version of the David Stafford incident. It appears in Willard Richards' memo entries of 1843 conversations of the Prophet:

While supper was preparing Joseph related an anecdote. While young, his father had a fine large watch dog, which bit off an ear from David Stafford's hog, which Stafford had turned into the Smith corn field. Stafford shot the dog, and with six other fellows pitched upon him unawares. And Joseph whipped the whole of them and escaped unhurt, which they swore to as recorded in Hurlbut or Howe's book.¹³

Since the above incident takes on such a different context in being told by Stafford or Smith, it is a striking reminder that controversial events cannot be settled by hearing only one side.

If David Stafford took his complaint to the local justice of the peace, the extant record does not show it, though it only covers the years 1827-1830. The record does give certain factual insights into the characters of both the Smiths and David Stafford. It lists three suits in the above period against "Hiram" (or "Hyrarn") Smith and two against Joseph Smith. Since there were other Joseph Smiths in the Manchester area, and since one "Hiram" Smith signed Hurlbut's general Manchester affidavit,¹⁴ it cannot be proved that these five actions pertain to the family of the Prophet. The one that evidently does, however, shows the attempt of the Smiths to be honest in their financial obligations. The abbreviated trial notation of June 28, 1830, records the following in a suit against "Hyrarn" Smith:

Joseph Smith, father of the defendant, appeared, and the case was called, and the plaintiff declared on a note and

¹³Joseph Smith's Journal, kept by Willard Richards, Jan. 1, 1843. I am indebted to Professor Marvin S. Hill of Brigham Young University for pointing it out. The Richards' statement is an official record, kept daily from current minutes.

¹⁴This Hiram Smith is evidently the same person who was elected highway supervisor in the Smith neighborhood both before and after the Joseph Smith family had moved west. Microfilms of the Manchester Town Record, as well as the Justice's Record being discussed, are at Brigham Young University Library.

account. Note dated 7th April, 1830, for \$20.07 on interest and on account for shoeing horses, of balance due on account \$.69. Joseph Smith sworn and saith that his son the defendant engaged him to come down at the return of the summons and direct the Justice to enter judgment against the defendant for the amount of the note and account. Judgment for the plaintiff for twenty one dollars, seven cents.¹⁵

If all of the Smith actions in the Manchester record pertain to the Joseph Smith family, they indicate only that the family was poor—a condition which the Smith autobiographies also portray with considerable emotion. Thus Roswell Nichols' comment (based on "two years" as a neighbor) is gratuitous: "For breach of contracts, for the non-payment of debts and borrowed money, and for duplicity with their neighbors, the family was notorious." By this standard, the neighborhood justice of the peace record indicts David Stafford, not the Smiths. From 1827 to 1830, he was plaintiff in three suits and defendant in six suits of collection, a record in the locality. With this streak of legal cantankerousness, one is not inclined to think that Joseph Smith was necessarily the guilty party in quarreling with David Stafford. Nor is Stafford's *ex parte* affidavit likely to represent the character of the Smiths without guile.

HURLBUT'S LONGER AFFIDAVITS

Since the shorter affidavits contain essentially non-evidence, a study of Hurlbut-Howe must focus on the only three substantial statements in the collection. The shortest of these comes from William Stafford, the father of Barton Stafford, and there is fortunately additional family information by which to test it. The Hurlbut touch in vocabulary is unmistakable here, as a closing comment imitates the close of the general Palmyra affidavit: "No one apprehended any danger from a book, originating with individuals who had neither influence, honesty or honor." Pomeroy Tucker portrays Stafford as a former sailor without education, which if true would considerably heighten the possibility that Hurlbut composed Stafford's affidavit and merely had him sign it.¹⁶

¹⁵Justice's Record of Nathan Pierce, 1827-1830.

¹⁶Pomeroy Tucker, *The Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York, 1867), p. 24, note. Compare the nearly identical reports supposedly remembered spontaneously for some years by two different affiants: ". . . for he had often said, that the hills in our neighborhood were nearly all erected by human hands" (Roswell Nichols); "They would say, also, that nearly all the

There is one clear firsthand testimony of participating with Joseph Smith, Sr. in a treasure dig (with Joseph Smith, Jr. supervising from the house), but the accompanying sheep story throws a great deal of doubt on the digging story as authentically coming from Stafford. As told by the Hurlbut affidavit, the Smiths "devised a scheme" to cheat their neighbor out of "a large, fat, black wether." Hearing the Smiths represent that the sacrifice of such a sheep must appease the spirit guarding a treasure, Stafford contributed the sheep "to gratify my curiosity." But the treasure was lost, and with it the sheep, which "I believe, is the only time they ever made money-digging a profitable business." Oddly, after the "only time," the Stafford statement adds a comment about "a worthless gang" (a typical Hurlbut phrase) which surrounded the Smiths and "had more to do with mutton than money," an intended implication of the Smiths in repeated sheep stealing.

Hurlbut evidently did not represent Stafford accurately. In 1932 M. Wilford Poulson took notes as Wallace Miner recalled a conversation with William Stafford on the subject:

I once asked Stafford if Smith did steal a sheep from him. He said no, not exactly. He said, he did miss a black sheep, but soon Joseph came and admitted he took it for sacrifice but he was willing to work for it. He made wooden sap buckets to fully pay for it.¹⁷

A more elaborate version of the Miner-Stafford conversation was reported in the village history of Thomas Cook, which agrees that Joseph took the initiative to admit the taking and that he did the work to repay Stafford for the sheep.¹⁸ Of course William Stafford died in 1863 (at which time Miner was twenty), and there are obvious limitations in recalling the details of what one had said almost seventy years earlier. Nevertheless, it is significant that Miner's recollection of Stafford exonerates the Smiths of dishonesty, a reversal of Hurlbut reporting Stafford.

hills in this part of New York, were thrown up by human hands. . . ." (William Stafford).

¹⁷M. Wilford Poulson, Notebook of 1932 interviews, Brigham Young University Archives. The obvious error of writing "Smith" for "sheep" in the first sentence has been corrected.

¹⁸Thomas L. Cook, *Palmyra and Vicinity* (Palmyra, New York, 1930), pp. 221-222. Cook gives Miner's recollection because "various stories have been told about the sacrificing of the sheep. . . ."

An earlier insight into William Stafford's opinion is available, however. His second son was born the same year as Joseph Smith (1805), had the personal ambition to gain a good education for the day, and qualify by examination as a physician, practicing until about 1870 in the general area of Manchester and thereafter at Rochester. There Dr. John Stafford was interviewed by the Reorganized Latter Day Saint apostle William H. Kelley in 1881. The Kelley question-answer notes on this point read as follows:

What about that black sheep your father let them have?

"I have heard that story, but don't think my father was there at the time they say Smith got the sheep. I don't know anything about it."

You were living at home at the time, and it seems you ought to know if they got a sheep, or stole one, from your father?

"They never stole one, I am sure; they may have got one sometime."

Well, Doctor, you know pretty well whether that story is true or not, that Tucker tells. What do you think of it?

"I don't think it is true. I would have heard more about it, that is true. . . ." ¹⁹

Since the well-informed John Stafford knew nothing of the sheep story, it is plain that William Stafford did not carry the attitude against the Smiths that his Hurlbut affidavit represents. If there was such an event of a borrowed sheep, it had nothing to do with dishonesty. But in the interview, Dr. Stafford also insisted, "My father, William Stafford, was never connected with them in any way," a direct denial of the relationship presupposed by the Smith-Stafford money digging episode luridly described in the Hurlbut affidavit.²⁰ The fact that William Stafford's family doubted the authenticity of the Hurlbut inspired testimony, together with Hurlbut's evident editorializing talents, casts serious doubt upon the William Stafford affidavit as an historical document.

The longest Hurlbut affidavit is that of Willard Chase,

¹⁹William H. Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah . . . The Stories of Hurlbut, Howe, Tucker, etc. from Late Interviews," *Saints' Herald*, Vol. 28 (June 1, 1881), p. 167 [hereinafter referred to as Kelley Interviews].

²⁰The sentence preceding John Stafford's denial is, "What Tucker said about them [the Smiths] was false, absolutely." Since Tucker's reference to William Stafford was a reiteration of Hurlbut's sheep story, John Stafford clearly was skeptical that his father was correctly represented in either Hurlbut-Howe or Tucker.

in which instances of dishonesty and treasure digging are minimal. In fact, the Chase statement contains more parallels to Mormon sources than any other affidavit. This would lead to the inference that Chase imposed his individuality to a large extent, though many of the Hurlbut stock phrases and formulae are still apparent. The Chase family tradition was later reported by the younger brother of Willard, and he maintained Willard's statement to Hurlbut genuine; on the other hand, he differed in certain details of recollection from the printed affidavit.²¹ Willard Chase ought to have taken more care in his statement than others contacted by Hurlbut, since Lucy Smith recalled him as "a Methodist class leader" in 1827, and his obituary described him as "formerly a Minister of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and was an earnest and zealous worker for many years. . . ."²²

Although Chase had superior practical education, his performance as a witness is characterized by a nearly total lack of personal observation. He tells the familiar story of finding an unusual stone while digging a well with Alvin and Joseph Smith, and accuses Joseph and Hyrum of duplicity in keeping the object. Beyond that he discloses no direct knowledge that the stone was utilized in treasure digging, but only alleges that Joseph claimed to discover "wonders" by its use. The intriguing thing is what Willard Chase does not say here. The Palmyra-Manchester sources attach a firm money-digging tradition to the Chase family. For instance, Dr. John Stafford recalled:

The neighbors used to claim Sally Chase could look at a stone she had, and see money. Willard Chase used to dig when she found where the money was. Don't know as anybody ever found any money.²³

The interview the same year with Abel Chase confirmed his family's involvement. After describing the stone in possession of his sister, Abel Chase responded to the following questions:

Do you really think your sister could see things by looking through that stone, Mr. Chase?

"Well, she claimed to; and I must say there was something strange about it."

²¹Cf. Kelley Interviews, p. 165.

²²*Palmyra Courier*, March 17, 1871.

²³Kelley Interviews, p. 167.

Where is your sister now?

"She is not living now: my brother Willard is dead also. He would know more than I do about those things."²⁴

The Chase family were in actuality money diggers, but in the longest Hurlbut affidavit Willard Chase fails to report any Smith money digging activities firsthand. If Willard Chase is honestly describing what he knows, the conclusion follows that the Smiths did not have a connection with the money digging circles in the area. And this is just what Lucy Smith reports in her history, describing the "ridiculous" magical activities of Chase and company to steal the plates of the Book of Mormon, practices that appear foreign to her experience.²⁵

Willard Chase does report stories about the money digging of Joseph Smith in the Susquehanna area. Apparently without real knowledge of Palmyra-Manchester activities, he imported secondhand stories from more than a hundred miles away. What he tells is a highly distorted version of Joseph Smith's employment on a treasure excavation project there. This is his pattern in other matters. He tells of several episodes about the Smiths published by Mormons long after the 1834 printing of Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*, so either Hurlbut or Willard Chase knew of these independently. The Chase affidavit approximates these incidents (e.g., the first failure at the hill to obtain the plates, Emma's warning ride to Macedon, etc.) but with exaggerated, ridiculing details. One would assume the same of his secondhand treasure stories about Joseph Smith.²⁶

This leaves only Peter Ingersoll as a Hurlbut witness with a serious claim to firsthand knowledge of Smith malpractices. Little is known about him other than his appearance in the land records around the 1820's as a property holder near Palmyra Village, a foreclosure on land to satisfy a judgment, and the apparent move from Palmyra after sale of properties in 1836. In 1879 Abel Chase claimed, "He moved west years ago and died

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 165.

²⁵Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Liverpool, 1853), p. 102 (applying the "ridiculous" terminology both to Willard Chase and his group, and their procurement of a "conjurer" to locate the plates). Cf. her characterization in ironic terms of Sally Chase's utilization of "a green glass," on which she claimed to see "many very wonderful things" and "great discoveries." *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²⁶Hurlbut in general, and the Chase affidavit in particular, rely heavily upon conversations with the Smiths, notoriously open to mistaken interpretation, recollection, and amplification.

about two years ago,"²⁷ but his life after leaving Palmyra is at present a mystery. So is his affidavit. Opening with the standard Hurlbut language that "the general employment of the family, was digging for money," Ingersoll follows with two claimed experiences of Joseph Smith, Sr.'s use of the divining rod.²⁸ Beyond this, everything of a negative nature about Joseph Smith, Jr. consists not in observation, but supposed admissions in conversation. No Hurlbut affiant represents knowing Joseph Smith so intimately; yet no personal observation about Joseph Smith is given.

The real issue in the Ingersoll statement is whether the damaging admissions reported from Joseph Smith debunk the Mormon Prophet or Hurlbut-Ingersoll. The prize story concerns Joseph's supposedly confiding in Ingersoll that he brought a quantity of wrapped sand into the Smith home; his family's curiosity resulted in questions, which brought his impulsive identification with "the golden Bible":

'To my surprise, they were credulous enough to believe what I said. Accordingly, I told them that I had received a commandment to let no one see it, for, says I, no man can see it with the naked eye and live. However, I offered to take out the book and show it to them, but they refuse to see it, and left the room.' 'Now,' said Jo, 'I have got the damned fools fixed, and will carry out the fun.'

There are serious difficulties in accepting this story. The Ingersoll affidavit dates the episode at August 1827. But the Chase affidavit maintains that by June 1827 Joseph Smith, Sr. had given Willard Chase full details of the "record on plates of gold," and the family's knowledge of it from "some years ago." Since Ingersoll so violently contradicts the Chase chronology (which agrees with Mormon sources), the accuracy of "Peter Ingersoll" is seriously suspect. Beyond this is the improbability that any family consists of such a collection of gullibles as to be awed by the mechanical brashness of the Ingersoll episode. After all, the Smiths are known in history as competent people.

²⁷Statement of Abel D. Chase, May 2, 1879, Palmyra, New York, cit. Charles A. Shook, *True Origin of the Book of Mormon* (Cincinnati, [1914]), p. 131.

²⁸In one of these is the accusation (like the sheep story) that the Smiths milked Ingersoll's cows while manipulating their discovery. Although Ingersoll received a favorable verdict, he was himself sued on this claim that he had taken a cow. Justice's Record of Nathan Pierce, 1827-1830, entry of May 26, 1830.

There is but one remarkable consistency about the Hurlbut-Howe affidavits—their unmodified condemnation of Joseph Smith and his entire family. This “evidence” proves too much. It portrays a dozen people living in a restricted area from 1816 to 1830 (Lucy was born 1821), and not a single good act or redeeming quality was displayed in that time by any one of them. Fifty-one Palmyrans “acquainted with the Smith family for a number of years” found them “destitute of . . . moral character.” This solemn anti-Smith credo casts a shadow across every affidavit: “In short, not one of the family had the least claims to respectability.” More than sweeping phrases are at stake—the Hurlbut testimony runs through about thirty pages on the Smiths in Palmyra-Manchester and fails to include even one favorable recollection of the Mormon founders. These are diatribes, not evaluations. Obviously, the attempt was made only to discredit—not to gather authentic information. Because history is the art of seeing both sides of the balance sheet, Hurlbut produced mere propaganda. His total lack of any affirmative family tradition contaminates every negative story repeated. This general quality of Hurlbut-Howe as non-evidence highlights sharply the only two systematic attempts that were later made to gather recollections of non-Mormon associates of the Smiths in New York.

DEMING'S COLLECTED STATEMENTS

A. B. Deming published his gathered testimony in a newspaper entitled, *Naked Truths About Mormonism*, with the banner line over the only two issues to appear, “Read and Laugh as You Never Laughed Before,” and “Startling Revelations.” He was the son of the courageous non-Mormon general, M. R. Deming, who stood for law and order in the civil chaos of western Illinois after the Prophet’s martyrdom. Affected by his father’s early death, and neurotically resentful at the persecution his father’s Mormon sympathies caused him, Deming considered “all my *misfortunes* through life” to be “the *direct* or *indirect* result of his *friendship* to the Mormons . . .” Although impelled to gather evidence against their faith, Deming was plagued by fears that the Mormons “might kill me, as I have several times been creditably informed they intend to do.” Yet he describes in detail his cordial reception in Salt Lake City

by Mormon officials in 1882 and 1886.²⁹ Deming therefore appears as a pathetic reincarnation of the disgruntled Hurlbut.

The historian must treat Deming's results as carefully as Hurlbut's. Checking out the names and residences designated in his statements shows that Deming apparently did make contact with several who had known the Smiths in Palmyra-Manchester. This is not to say that these parties were carefully interviewed, or that Deming was above Hurlbut-like prompting or editing. The point is that in his one-sided reports from biased people, Deming does not totally damn the Smiths as Hurlbut-Howe. For instance, Christopher Stafford was three years younger than Joseph Smith and despised him, though he admitted he really knew Joseph's brother Samuel Harrison Smith better and considered him "a good, industrious boy."³⁰ Caroline Rockwell Smith remembered her family's conversion to Mormonism without bitterness, and the good deeds of Lucy Smith: "Jo Smith's mother doctored many persons in Palmyra." She did not consider Joseph Smith an obvious fraud: "I hope sometime it will be known whether Mormonism is true or not."³¹

Reading Deming requires gleaning through piles of the usual chaff of hearsay, admissions reported indirectly, generalities on bad reputation, etc. Firsthand claims of Joseph Smith's drinking and fighting occasionally appear, though in language standard enough to come from a common compiler. The money digging theme, however, contains the real surprise, for the Deming statements involve not only the Chases, but the Staffords and others in the community in the quest for buried treasure. Caroline Rockwell Smith does not even mention the Joseph Smith family in connection with this subject, but generalizes:

There was considerable digging for money in our neighborhood by men, women and children. . . I saw Joshua Stafford's peepstone, which looked like white marble and had a hole through the center. Sally Chase, a Methodist, had one, and people would go for her to find lost and hidden or stolen things.³²

²⁹All this personal data Deming volunteers on the first page of *Naked Truths About Mormonism*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 1888).

³⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April 1888), p. 1. Statement of C. M. Stafford, March 23, 1885, Auburn, Ohio.

³¹*Ibid.*, Statement of Mrs. M. C. R. Smith, March 25, 1885.

³²*Ibid.*

Cornelius Stafford, repeated the sheep story in exaggerated form, but personal observation of money digging points elsewhere than the Mormon Prophet:

There was much digging for money on our farm and about the neighborhood. I saw Uncle John and Cousin Joshua Stafford dig a hole twenty feet long, eight broad and seven deep. They claimed that they were digging for money. . . .³³

One of the more amusing features of Smith folklore in Palmyra-Manchester is the frequent reference to existing holes of the money diggers as proof that the *Smiths* were digging. The Deming affidavits shatter the Hurlbut-imposed monopoly by revealing that excavations were made by numerous others. In fact, these statements reveal no direct knowledge that the Smiths were involved—the nearest miss is the claim of Isaac Butts that Joshua Stafford “told me that young Jo Smith and himself dug for money in his orchard and elsewhere nights.”³⁴ That might be far from clear, since the last thing to be suspected from the Hurlbut-Joshua Stafford affidavit is that upright Joshua would long tolerate the presence of Joseph Smith.

Faced with more comprehensive evidence on money digging than Hurlbut admitted, the historian may envision one of four situations: (1) Francis W. Kirkham located a newspaper article on early money-digging that parallels every story told against Joseph Smith. The editor of the Rochester *Gem* reacted to the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830 by remembering that a “family of Smiths” moved into the primitive Rochester of 1815. The eighteen year old son of this poor family claimed to find a stone with clairvoyant properties, located treasure in nearby hills by its use, and engendered a night-dig on the part of followers, marked by a disappearing chest upon the breaking of a spell.³⁵ Kirkham asks concerning this pre-Hurlbut reference: “Was this ridiculous story the origin of the accusations that were heaped upon Joseph

³³*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 1888), p. 3. Statement of C. R. Stafford, March 1885

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 2. Statement of Isaac Butts, n.d., South Newbury, Ohio. Butts also says that Joseph Smith used a divining rod and later a peep-stone for locating buried or lost objects. Although claiming to “have seen both,” he specifically does not claim observation of Joseph Smith in these practices, a point seriously in doubt because of Butts’ indiscriminate use of hearsay and confessed residence in Ohio from 1818 into the 1820’s.

³⁵“Imposition and Blasphemy!—Moneydiggers, etc.,” *Gem*, May 15, 1830.

Smith?"³⁶ Hugh Nibley develops evidence for such a transference by showing other pre-Joseph Smith money-digging parallels. Since "every weird detail of the stories later attached to Joseph Smith is found in full bloom *before* Smith can possibly have been involved," and since a solid group of Mormon witnesses who knew Joseph in this early period "protest that the digging stories about him are *not* true," public rumor simply created an erroneous parallel by "trying to dress Joseph Smith in other men's clothes."³⁷

(2) Early Mormon and non-Mormon sources agree that the Smith men hired out frequently and that one main activity was digging wells, pits, and other building excavations. Since many saw this regular construction work of the Smiths, it is likely that their later notoriety in the Book of Mormon revelation brought the accusation of money digging for many ordinary activities. (3) When Josiah Stool was excited about the possibility of discovering Spanish gold, he hired a crew of laborers, among which were Joseph Smith and his father. Since the existence of Palmyra-Manchester treasure digs is certain, the Smith men may have participated in other ventures merely as employees, a variation of the previous case. In either of these events, one might observe one of the Smiths digging and completely misinterpret his reasons for doing so.

There is no substantial evidence for the final possibility, (4) the aggressive treasure seeking of the Smiths. If it took place, they participated in a passing cultural phenomenon, shared widely by people of known honesty. However, the supernaturalism presented in early Mormon sources is restrained, qualitatively distinct from the magical superstitions of the money digging stories. Yet to know these propensities of certain segments of the Palmyra-Manchester community makes Joseph and Lucy Smith's histories more credible in regard to non-Mormon attempts to search for the plates and the danger of staying in that area during the translation. Frustrated money diggers had nothing to show for their consider-

³⁶Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, 1959), Vol. 2, p. 46. The *Gem* article is also quoted in full at pp. 46-49. Its editor, Edwin Scrantom, was twelve years of age at the time of this episode, but when he wrote the article was an authority on Rochester history. For common pre-1827 money digging publicity, see *Ontario Repository*, February 9, 1825, and *Wayne Sentinel*, February 16, 1825.

³⁷Hugh Nibley, *Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City, 1961), pp. 182-183, 190.

able efforts, whereas Joseph Smith possessed tangible plates that he displayed to witnesses.³⁸

Hurlbut structured his evidence to create the false impression that the Smiths, not others, dug for money. This leads one to question the time alleged for this activity as equally erroneous. The majority of the individual affidavits allege treasure hunting as the major Smith occupation from 1820 "until the latter part of the season of 1827." But at least one Palmyra source acknowledges the latter date as the *beginning* of such rumors. The Rev. Jesse Townsend penned an abusive account of Joseph Smith in 1833: "For the ten years I have known anything of him, he has been a person of questionable character, of intemperate habits, and latterly a noted *money digger*."³⁹ "Latterly" suggests approximately 1828 for the spread of such a reputation, which corresponds to the Prophet's recollection that at the news of the Book of Mormon discovery in 1827, "false reports, misrepresentation, and slander flew as on the wings of the wind in every direction. . ."⁴⁰ His own history specifically identified his hired employment on the Stool excavation late 1825 and early 1826 as the source of *later* rumors: "Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money digger."⁴¹ There is no solid

³⁸Compare Caroline Rockwell Smith's recollection that the Mormon-source version of these events was told at the time: "Catherine Smith, sister of the Prophet, showed me in their house a chest with lock where the plates were kept, but they feared they would be stolen, and then she took up four bricks in the hearth and said they had been buried there." Ref. at n. 31.

³⁹Letter of Jesse Townsend to Phineas Stiles, December 24, 1833, Palmyra, New York, cit. Tucker, *Origin . . . of Mormonism*, p. 288.

⁴⁰*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3 (March 1, 1842), p. 708, also cit. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1946-1950), Vol. 4, p. 538. Cf. the earlier-written recollection of the Prophet about the identical year: "[R]umor with her thousand tongues was all the time employed in circulating tales about my father's family, and about myself. If I were to relate a thousandth part of them, it would fill up volumes." *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3 (May 2, 1842), p. 772, also cit. *History of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 19.

⁴¹*Ibid.* Lucy Smith represents Stool (the Nauvoo spelling) as locating Joseph because he had heard of his supernatural gifts, but both Lucy and Joseph Smith's histories describe notoriety from the telling of the First Vision in 1820. In fact, Joseph Smith, Sr. bought space in the *Wayne Sentinel* for six weeks beginning Sept. 29, 1824 to refute rumors tending "to injure the reputation" of the Smiths. The 1825-1826 work for Stool and 1827 acquiring the plates undoubtedly gave new directions to gossip. Other Mormon sources do not furnish reliable evidence for money digging in New York. Accusations upon apostasy in Kirtland may be smears, and Joseph Smith's Salem trip in this period is not a historical source for his life a decade earlier. The interview with Martin Harris by Joel Tiffany mentions Joseph seeking treasure in this early period, but if Harris is quoted correctly, the source of information (not disclosed) is possibly

evidence of Joseph Smith as the prime mover in any treasure seeking project. Perhaps the supernaturalism of receiving revelations through the Urim and Thummim and "seerstone" after 1827 resembles generally the "peeking" practices of that time. The policeman and thief, the chemist and alchemist, use similar equipment, but with quite distinctly different motivations and abilities.

THE KELLEY INTERVIEWS

The legend of the dishonest money diggers who founded Mormonism received new impetus from Pomeroy Tucker in 1867. A Palmyra editor, Tucker depicted superstitious and unscrupulous Smiths by merely re quoting the 1833 statements apparently without so much as reinterviewing the Hurlbut contacts still alive. Tucker was aware of at least three of these, named in his preface as references: Joseph Capron, Barton Stafford, and Willard Chase. Such sloppy methods were evidently not completely applauded. A dozen years later Abigail Jackway told William H. Kelley, "I have heard Willard Chase say Tucker never even asked him for what he knew, and Chase lived next door to him, too."⁴² As pointed out elsewhere, Tucker knew Joseph Smith and admitted that dishonesty was "not within the remembrance of the writer," though repeating community gossip as "recollections of many living witnesses."⁴³ The difference between what Tucker himself remembered and the stories he still heard is the difference between personal observation of the Smiths and the Palmyra-Manchester folklore. Yet Palmyra-Manchester was never totally scornful of Mormon origins. Although Wallace W. Miner was not born until 1843, he grew up in the former Smith vicinity, and Thomas L. Cook in 1930 named him "the only one living in the neighborhood whose relations with the earlier families have continued for the last eighty-five years."⁴⁴

public rumor of the time. Tiffany, however, mentions Howe's book as one of the three sources he relies on for authentic knowledge of Mormonism. Because of his spiritualist theory that inferior beings inspired Joseph Smith, Tiffany's reliance on Howe means that Hurlbut possibly contaminated Tiffany's reporting of Martin Harris. Particularly see "Mormonism," *Tiffany's Monthly*, Vol. 4 (1859), p. 568: "We also procured a copy of an expose, published about twenty years ago, by E.D. Howe, of Painesville, so that we are now in possession of the facts and early literature of the Mormon faith."

⁴²Kelley Interviews, p. 166. Willard Chase and Pomeroy Tucker appear as neighbors in the 1860 census.

⁴³Tucker, *Origin . . . of Mormonism*, p. 15.

⁴⁴Cook, *Palmyra*, p. 241.

In 1932 Miner told M. Wilford Poulson, "In the early days we didn't hear so much that was disreputable about the Smiths."⁴⁵

The clearest proof that certain neighbors approved of the Smiths comes in the second systematic attempt to preserve Palmyra-Manchester recollections. In 1881 William H. and E. L. Kelley visited there with the express purpose of interviewing all who had firsthand knowledge of the Mormon founders, particularly Joseph Smith. The Kelleys were willing to "hear the worst, let it hurt whom it would," and their going together made possible "one writing during each interview." William H. Kelley, then an RLDS apostle and competent leader, took responsibility for writing up the detailed transcript of conversations, which concluded with a description of his method:

These facts and interviews are presented. . . just as they occurred—the good and bad, side by side; and allowing for a possible mistake, or error, arising from a misapprehension, or mistake in taking notes, it can be relied upon as the opinion and gossip had about the Smith family and others, among their old neighbors.⁴⁶

For a test of William H. Kelley's note-taking ability, one should compare his report on David Whitmer the same year. The Kelley-Whitmer interview is detailed and minutely agrees with known writings and comments of the Book of Mormon witness. Consequently, the William H. Kelley transcripts from Palmyra-Manchester can be trusted as the most comprehensive investigations ever made there.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Poulson, Notebook of 1932 interviews. Professor Poulson's strict standards of accuracy are well known.

⁴⁶The Kelley Interviews contain William L. Kelley's description of method at pp. 161-162 and 168. Since the interviews were printed in transcript form by individuals contacted, page citations are unnecessary.

⁴⁷The printing of the Kelley Interviews sparked a skirmish of affidavits, recorded in Charles A. Shook, *True Origin of Mormon Polygamy* (Cincinnati, 1914), pp. 36-38. The only statement that raises a significant issue on Kelley misquotation is that of John H. Gilbert, who alleges a half-dozen mistakes in the long interview, obviously to discredit all of the Kelley interviews. Without claiming perfection for the Kelleys (or any other nineteenth century interview), one can see that Gilbert admits the main direction of conversation, and quarrels with certain details. Some of Gilbert's "misrepresentations" are trivial. Other main points in the Kelley interviews can be substantiated as being said to others by Gilbert, and even written by Gilbert himself. He also claims but one change necessary after talking with the Jackways. On analysis, Gilbert is a source of confirmation of the basic accuracy of the Kelley reports. For the Kelley-Whitmer interview, see *Saints' Herald*, Vol. 29 (1882), pp. 66-69.

The Kelleys' dogged insistence on personal knowledge disqualified several who merely repeated hearsay about the Smiths, a tendency also true of Hurlbut's day. One young man who signed the 1833 condemnation at Manchester was Abel Chase. Some fifty years later he confessed only a knowledge of "general character," and careful questioning turned up nothing that he really knew about the Smiths. Since he was only thirteen years old when Joseph Smith left Palmyra for a permanent residence in the Harmony and Fayette areas, it is little wonder that Abel Chase could tell the Kelleys nothing definite.

Ezra Pierce and Hiram Jackway vaguely remembered Joseph Smith in public situations (Jackway was twelve when Joseph moved to Harmony), but only two individuals out of nine interviewed displayed any intimate knowledge. One was the same age as Joseph, John Stafford, the doctor already mentioned in connection with the affidavit attributed to his father William. The Kelleys' questions are not always specific enough to determine which recollections of John Stafford are personal and which recall stories that circulated early. For instance, the only mention of drinking is the cider and torn shirt story told Hurlbut by John's brother Barton—but it is not really clear that either of them saw what went on. Personal observation does come to bear, however, in John Stafford's comments on Joseph's physical aggression: "Never saw him fight; have known him to scuffle," evidently the distinction between brawling and playful wrestling. Regarding accusations of laziness, it appears that he had worked by Joseph's side: "[He] would do a fair day's work if hired out to a man. . ." Questioned regarding Joseph's education, Dr. Stafford replied (omitting intervening queries):

Joe was quite illiterate. After they began to have school at their house, he improved greatly. They had school in their house, and studied the Bible. They did not have any teacher; they taught themselves.

His impression of Joseph as a person agrees with the Prophet's known traits and autobiographical comments, and at the same time disagrees with much Palmyra folklore: "He was a real clever, jovial boy."

Because there are problems with the quality of John Stafford's observations on money digging, his remarks really tell more about his father William than the Smiths:

The Smiths, with others, were digging for money before Joe got the plates. My father had a stone, which some thought they could look through, and old Mrs. Smith came there after it one day, but never got it. Saw them digging one time for money (this was three or four years before the Book of Mormon was found), the Smiths and others. The old man and Hyrum were there, I think, but Joseph was not there.

In the lengthy Kelley transcript of interviews, this is the only stated observation of anyone regarding Smith money digging. Aside from the question of whether Stafford was sure the group of men were digging *for money*, he appears to doubt whether he really saw Joseph Smith, Sr. and Hyrum there ("I think"). That the Smiths "were digging for money" as a general practice evidently rests on hearsay, since the doctor has but one inexact recollection of seeing them, and he was certain that Joseph was not there. Whether Lucy Smith's attempting to borrow the seerstone is an authentic recollection is far from clear. A mere social visit and mild interest might be behind John Stafford's impression. But he must be speaking from observation on the possession of a stone by his own family. So the Hurlbut affidavit from his father only tells part of the truth: William Stafford was evidently independently involved in the superstitions that he (or Hurlbut) accuses the Smiths of.

What can be safely asserted historically after reading Hurlbut, Deming, and Kelley is that money digging did go on in Palmyra-Manchester before Joseph Smith acquired his plates in 1827. What remains unclear, however, is a definite association of the Smiths with it. Close family members implicate Willard Chase, Joshua Stafford, William Stafford, and others in some aspects of these practices.

In the Kelley Interviews, the person with the most firsthand knowledge was also the most favorable to the Smith reputation. This was Orlando Saunders, an "old settler" whom Thomas Cook particularly regretted not interviewing.⁴⁸ Anti-Mormon writers of the late nineteenth century preferred to quote his younger brother Lorenzo, who moved to Michigan about 1854 and died there in 1888. But Lorenzo was six years younger than Joseph Smith, whereas Orlando Saunders was two years older than the Mormon Prophet.⁴⁹ Orlando is also the

⁴⁸Cook, *Palmyra*, p. 10.

⁴⁹In two preserved statements, Lorenzo Saunders says virtually nothing firsthand about Joseph Smith. After considerable correspondence virtually re-

more interesting in that he remained all his life on the family farm (within a mile of the Smith farm) and was aware of the various anti-Mormon spokesmen for Palmyra-Manchester until his death in 1889. It is clear that he dissented, and on specific grounds of experience.

Fortunately, Orlando Saunders was also interviewed by a non-Mormon author of ability, Frederic G. Mather, a short time before the Kelleys' report.⁵⁰ Mather was conditioned to journalistic interpretation instead of historical documentation, with the consequent brief and paraphrased comments, but the two interviews remarkably agree. Mather reports Saunders as saying "that the Smith family worked for his father and for himself,"⁵¹ which fits the fact of Enoch Saunder's death in 1825. This contact with the Smith men was not cursory, according to the Kelley interview: "They have all worked for me many a day." Mather also reports specific business dealing, the purchase of a horse and bridle, the latter being paid for by "a Bible."⁵²

There is one apparent contradiction in the two interviews, which must be resolved in favor of the Kelleys. After quoting Saunders on Joseph Smith, Mather follows, "By nature he was peacably disposed, but when he had taken too much liquor he was inclined to fight, with or without provocation." The weakness of this statement is that Mather's article is a synthesis of opinions about Joseph Smith in Mather's own words, and the above statement must be a lapse back to his normal narrative. The Kelleys asked particularly about this subject, and they quote Saunders directly: "Everybody drank a little in those days, and the Smiths with the rest; they never got drunk to my knowledge."

questing him to remember seeing Sidney Rigdon at the Smiths before 1830, Lorenzo gave some vague recollections claiming to do so. From age sixteen, he also remembers Joseph coming to his house and explaining his difficulties in getting the plates, though he considers him an imposter and maintains his mother did also. Letter of Lorenzo Saunders to Thomas Gregg, January 28, 1885, cit. Shook, *True Origin of the Book of Mormon*, pp. 134-135.

⁵⁰For a brief biography see *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Vol. 20 (New York, 1929), pp. 492-493.

⁵¹Frederic G. Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine*, Vol. 26 (1880), p. 198. With the exception of the following footnote citation, all further quotations of Mather are on this page. Although Mather writes "Sanders," rather consistent family practice, and Orlando's autograph, follow "Saunders."

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 205.

Money digging is notable by its absence in both the Mather and Kelley reports. In the latter, Saunders insisted, "I don't know anything against these men, myself." Furthermore, he contradicts the Hurlbut contention that the Book of Mormon was Joseph Smith's inconsistent adaptation of his treasure seeking: "He always claimed that he saw the angel and received the book; but I don't know anything about it." If the Smiths merited the money-digging criticism, Saunders was not above giving it. But the only criticisms reported by either Mather or the Kelleys were on another point. The "well-preserved gentleman of over eighty" told Mather that the Smiths "could save no money," which is mirrored precisely in the Kelley record: "I did not consider them good managers about business, but they were poor people; the old man had a large family."

In Hurlbut the Smiths did nothing but exploit their neighbors, but Orlando Saunders' experience was opposite: "They were the best family in the neighborhood in case of sickness; one was at my house nearly all the time when my father died." Neither did he consider them poor credit risks: "I always thought them honest. They were owing me some money when they left here; that is, the old man and Hyrum did, and Martin Harris. One of them came back in about a year and paid me."

Hurlbut-Howe and Tucker had a single thesis: the Smith family (particularly Joseph) were so thoroughly unreliable in ordinary affairs that they necessarily defrauded the public on the Book of Mormon. The Kelleys found Saunders "a fair type of the intelligent New York farmer," and he was characteristically agnostic here. He had seen the book, "but never read it" nor did he "care anything about it." On the practical issue of the Smith reliability, he was solidly favorable. Mather summarily reported, "He gives them the credit of being good workers. . . ." The Kelleys quoted his words: "They were very good people. Young Joe (as we called him then), has worked for me, and he was a good worker; they all were." Evidently referring to the youthful strength of the Prophet, Saunders told Mather "that Joseph Jr., was 'a greeny,' both large and strong." Pressed by the Kelleys on how well he knew Joseph Smith, Orlando Saunders reiterated:

Oh! Just as well as one could very well; he has worked for me many a time, and been about my place a great deal. He

stopped with me many a time, when through here, after they went west to Kirtland; he was always a gentleman when about my place.

WILLIAM SMITH'S REFUTATION

In sum, major non-Mormon biographies treating Joseph Smith's New York life and reputation are historically substandard. This judgment unfortunately applies as well to twentieth century productions as nineteenth, since both fall into an unsophisticated acceptance of Hurlbut's contrived and slanted statements, without apparent awareness of non-Mormon sources favorable to the Smiths from Palmyra-Manchester. Nor do other independent statements from that area confirm the Hurlbut evidence. Some merely repeat rumors of the time, but compound hearsay does not suddenly become evidence when spoken by a genuine Palmyra-Manchester resident.⁵³ For all of his prejudice, crusty Orsamus Turner was honest enough to distinguish between his own rather complementary recollections and the stories that later circulated about Joseph Smith. He knew that community reports had various qualities, for he ruled out the Spaulding theory of the Book of Mormon because it was not accepted "by those who were best acquainted with the Smith family. . . ."⁵⁴ History begins when that issue is raised.

But anti-Mormon literature is overcrowded with non-witnesses. For instance, Rev. Jesse Townsend can prate about the "impostures and low cunning" of the "Mormonite" leader and yet say not that he *knows* Joseph Smith, but that he *knows of* him. The reason why more accurate data on Joseph Smith was not of easy access is suggested in Townsend's own words:

⁵³Indiscriminate quotation reaches its lowest ebb when supposed Palmyra residents are relied upon without investigation. Daniel Hendrix is typically quoted on early Joseph Smith biography as remembering that "Parson Reed told Joe that he was going to hell for his lying habits." Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York, 1946), p. 26, cited recently for this quote in Edmund Wilson's acrid excursus into Mormon history, *The Dead Sea Scrolls 1947-1969* (New York, 1969), p. 280. The lateness of the "recollection" demands verification, since it comes from a purported interview printed in the *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, February 21, 1897, p. 34. To date rather diligent investigation has failed to verify the existence of Daniel Hendrix (whose other rambling descriptions are not notably accurate), or "Parson Reed."

⁵⁴O. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, 1852), p. 214. The recollections of Turner and Tucker regarding Joseph Smith have been studied in Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision Through Reminiscences," *Brigham Young University Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Spring 1969), pp. 376-386.

"He lived in a sequestered neighborhood. . . ." ⁵⁵ In simple terms, the Smiths lived away from any village by two miles or more. To add to the problem of a villager really knowing the young prophet, within a few months of obtaining the ancient plates, he moved to other neighborhoods, only occasionally visiting Palmyra-Manchester during the publication of the Book of Mormon. Consequently, John Gilbert, chief compositor for the Book of Mormon stated in interviews that he saw Joseph Smith only once or twice, even though Gilbert was in public life in Palmyra from 1824 through the Mormon exodus of 1831. ⁵⁶ Albert Chandler, later a prominent editor in Michigan, worked as a bookbinder's apprentice on the Book of Mormon in 1829-30. Yet he knew Joseph Smith, Jr. "but slightly." "What I know of him was from hearsay, principally from Martin Harris, who believed fully in him." ⁵⁷ Some of the fifty-one signers of the general Palmyra condemnation probably had no more than this degree of knowledge of the Smiths. ⁵⁸

There are even greater problems in taking Palmyra-Manchester statements as definitive on the origin of the Book of Mormon. As Chandler recalled the Palmyra of 1829-30, everyone scoffed at Martin Harris, but none really knew the events and personalities behind the new religion:

The absolute secrecy of the whole inception and publication of the Mormon Bible stopped positive knowledge. We only knew what Joseph Smith would permit Martin Harris to publish, in reference to the whole thing. ⁵⁹

Much non-Mormon opinion is obviously irrelevant to the writing of early Mormon history. Howe claimed to print only "a few, among the many depositions which have been obtained

⁵⁵Townsend to Stiles in *Origin of Mormonism*, p. 288.

⁵⁶Numerous interviews with Gilbert establish that he dealt with Hyrum Smith and Martin Harris in the Book of Mormon production. His letter to James T. Cobb, March 16, 1879, Palmyra, New York is clear: "Hyrum Smith was the only one of the family I had any acquaintance with, and that very slight." A microfilm of this letter was kindly loaned me by Larry Porter, Brigham University field research representative in New York State.

⁵⁷Letter of Albert Chandler to William Alexander Linn, December 22, 1898, Coldwater, Mich., cit. William Alexander Linn, *Story of the Mormons* (New York, 1902), pp. 48-49.

⁵⁸Lemuel Durfee knew the Smiths indirectly as a landlord from 1825 to 1829, but prior to that evidently did not know them at all, according to Lucy Smith's account, pp. 96-98.

⁵⁹Chandler to Linn in *Story of the Mormons*, pp. 48-49.

from the neighborhood of the Smith family. . . ."⁶⁰ Doubtless, his motivation was to prove the worst without much awareness of which signers were in the best position to speak. In the study of Joseph Smith's character, it is the distant non-observer of Palmyra-Manchester who tends to be hostile. The better informed the witness, the more affirmative his views.

This tendency requires a careful look at the close-knit Smith family, since they had the most intimate knowledge of young Joseph Smith. The Prophet answered Hurlbut-Howe by admitting human weaknesses but denying gross personal transgression and insisting, "I have not . . . been guilty of wronging or injuring any man or society of men."⁶¹ In further statements, he elaborated only to the extent of admitting digging (in Nibley's phrase) not for gold but for hire.⁶² The unaffected but detailed history of Lucy Smith throws far more light on the family's early history than all of Hurlbut-Howe, but in her artless simplicity she does not respond specifically to the charge of the early affidavits, actually an evidential strength. But the last surviving brother of the Prophet met these issues head on.

William Smith was too young to remember the earliest days at Palmyra-Manchester, but his recollections are very specific from about 1823. An individualist who was notably not an organization man, he spent his later years in the obscurity of an Iowa farm. He is known for an occasional speech or interview, but his considered answer to Hurlbut-Howe lay among the papers of a friend until forwarded to the LDS Church about 1925. In sending Smith's manuscript, Charles Knecht described his own interest in the family, which prompted him to loan William a *Chambers' Miscellany*, containing a summary of the Hurlbut evidence. William "wanted to reply to it, and wanted me to see it published. . . ."⁶³ The manu-

⁶⁰Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, p. 231.

⁶¹*Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1 (December, 1834), p. 40.

⁶²In addition to the citations of Joseph Smith's published histories already made, see the *Elders' Journal*, Vol. 1 (July 1838), p. 43: "Question 10. Was not Jo Smith a money digger. Answer. Yes, but it was never a very profitable job to him, as he only got fourteen dollars a month for it." Also cit. Joseph Smith, *History of Church*, Vol. 3, p. 29.

⁶³Letter of Charles Knecht, 1925, Yakima, Washington. Both Smith and Knecht appear (as required by Knecht's recollections) on the 1880 census in Elkader, Iowa, Knecht then as 36 and a "clerk, dry goods store." Knecht is listed in Yakima city directories from 1924 through 1926.

script is definitely in William Smith's handwriting and evidently dates from about 1875.⁶⁴

William's discursive response reached methodological bedrock in its third sentence, frustration at historians who "have no greater foundation for facts to build upon than *public rumor*. . . ."⁶⁵ Embedded in doctrinal discussions and lengthy historical parallels are specific reactions to the conclusions of Hurlbut-Howe. To the charge that his brother Joseph was "suspected of sheep stealing," William replied vigorously that "at no period of his life" was he guilty, "nor was he ever suspected of committing such an offense."⁶⁶ The value of the younger brother's comments go beyond specific denials to details of their home life. The father (absurdly characterized by a noted biographer as possessing "irreligion and cynicism") insisted quietly on hymns and "prayers both night and morning." The tone of "strict piety" in the home is described: "My parents, father and mother, poured out their souls to God, the donor of all blessings, to keep and guard their children, and keep them from sin and from all evil works."⁶⁷

The Chambers' summary of Hurlbut goes to the essential issues of this paper:

The reputation of the family (according to the testimony of neighbors) was of the worst kind. We are told that they avoided honest labour, were intemperate and untruthful, addicted to sheep stealing, digging for hidden treasures, etc. . . .⁶⁸

Responding specifically to this quoted statement, William Smith's answer was brief but direct in denial and explanation of the origin of these charges:

⁶⁴Knecht's handwritten letter gives 1875 as the approximate year of his contact with William Smith, and the close of the manuscript (p. 19 of the transcription) reads, "My father and mother are both dead some 20 years. . . ."; a statement (as it relates to the last-surviving Lucy Smith) harmonious with 1875.

⁶⁵Smith's underlining is preserved in this quotation, though so irregular that remaining quotations will ignore his underlinings. All quotations from William Smith (and those throughout the article) are modified only to the extent of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

⁶⁶Typescript, p. 3. All quotations have been checked with the manuscript, though the typescript is a nearly perfect transcription and is cited for convenience in paging.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁸This quotation corresponds exactly in the Smith manuscript (typescript, p. 6) and the only edition of *Chambers' Miscellany* available at this writing, one undated but by reference to Mormon events published after 1877. The many editions of this work, reaching back to the 1840's, make possible Smith's use of an earlier edition.

My statement on this subject is that the charges are false. My father's family were a peacable, quiet, and a church going people—and nothing of these calumnies was ever heard of, not until after my brother Joseph Smith came out with his profession as a prophet. . .⁶⁹

William Smith, supported by informed non-Mormon testimony, gives specific recollections of daily life designed to reveal Hurlbut's charges as malicious defamation:

The improvements made on this farm was first commenced by building a log house at no small expense, and at a later date a frame house at a cost of several hundred dollars. After noticing these facts we crave the reader of this article to judge whether there was much time for indolence or for indulgence in immoral or intemperate habits. Here I wish to remark that I never knew my father Joseph Smith to be intoxicated or the worse for liquor, nor was my brother Joseph Smith in the habit of drinking spiritous liquors. Neither did my father's family spend their time, or any portion of their time, in idle habits. Such was the prevailing circumstances of the family, connected with the want of money and the scarcity of provisions, that necessity made an imperative demand upon every energy, nerve, or member of the family for both economy and labor, which this demand had to be met with the strictest kind of industry, and no persons speaking the truth can say to the contrary.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Typescript, p. 6. The unorganized pattern of the biographical material in William Smith's answer is a valuable insight into his historical aims and talents. He is spontaneous to a fault, and organized only in intent, bringing his experiences to bear in random fashion. Since he is not characterized by careful historical explanations, and is careless of sequence, the absence of descriptions of the First Vision (an event of his late childhood) is objectively insignificant. Cf. Anderson, "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision. . ." *BYU Studies*, pp. 398-401.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.