The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources, and Problems

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Of the many important and little understood events of early Church history, certainly the consultation of Martin Harris with Professor Charles Anthon in New York City in February 1828 regarding the Book of Mormon is one of the most important and intriguing. It is also one of the earliest events of the Restoration which can be assessed rationally and tested. The events leading up to this visit are briefly as follows: By late 1827 the story of Joseph Smith and the "gold plates" was sufficiently well known in and around Palmyra, New York to have caused great curiosity and cupidity among some of his contemporaries. In order to protect the plates and to have sufficient time and peace of mind to commence the translation of the plates, Joseph and Emma moved to Harmony, Pennsylvania, about 150 miles away, where Emma's parents lived.

Shortly thereafter, a friend of the Smith family, Martin Harris of Palmyra, visited him, secured a handwritten copy of some of the characters on the plates, took them to New York City for the evaluation of men of learning, and returned to relate the following to Joseph Smith:

> I went to the city of New York, and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof, to Professor Anthony [*sic*], a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments;—Professor Anthony stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were

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> Egyptian, Chaldeac [*sic*], Assyriac, and Arabac [*sic*]; and he said they were true characters. He gave me a certificate, certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such of them as had been translated was also correct. I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthony called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him.
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> He then said to me, 'let me see that certificate.' I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him, he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, 'I cannot read a sealed book.' I left him and went to Dr. Mitchell, who sanctioned what Professor Anthony had said respecting both the characters and the translation.[1]

This story, familiar in Mormon lore, raises a great many important questions which need careful examination. Among these questions are the following: Who was Martin Harris? How did he become involved with Joseph Smith? Who advised him whom to consult regarding the transcription? Who were the persons with whom he did consult? What were their qualifications? What was the import and significance of their opinions? What was the necessity, if any, of the consultations? How reliable is Martin Harris' account of what transpired? When and how was the connection made between the prophecy of Isaiah 29:11 regarding "a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned"? How and when was the transcript made? How rapidly did the story of this remarkable event spread? Was it used as a "missionary tool"? What is the pedigree of the so-called "Anthon transcript" in existence today?

WHO WAS MARTIN HARRIS AND WHAT WERE HIS CONNECTIONS WITH JOSEPH SMITH?

Martin Harris (1783-1875) was a highly respected and well-to-do farmer and individual in Palmyra, New York at that time. Prior to his trips to Harmony, Pennsylvania, and New

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[1] *Times and Seasons,* Vol. 3 (May 2, 1842), p. 773. (Usually cited as Joseph Smith 2:64-65).

York City, he had resided in Palmyra for over thirty-five years. (He had been born in Easttown, Saratoga County, New York and had moved with his family to Palmyra in 1792 when he was nine years old.) We are told that as a boy, Joseph Smith had worked on the Harris farm for fifty cents a day and that he and Harris had even wrestled together. We also know that Harris was a friend of the Smith family and was one of the first individuals with whom the family shared the information about Joseph's spiritual experiences.[2]

Just prior to Joseph's move to Harmony, an important meeting took place between him and Martin Harris. Whether this meeting was by design or accident we are not sure. Joseph's mother records that "With a view of commencing the work of translation and carrying it forward as speedily as circumstances would permit,"[3] Joseph requested her to set up an appointment for him with Martin Harris. Such a request suggests that in spite of having worked for Harris, Joseph did not know him very well. Whether this appointment was ever made and kept is not known. We do know, however, that late in 1827 when Emma's brother Alva Hale, arrived in Palmyra to help the young couple move to Harmony, Joseph and Alva met Harris in a public-house in Palmyra. Mr. Harris stepped up to Joseph and said, "How do you do, Mr. Smith.' After which he took a bag of silver from his pocket and said again, 'Here, Mr. Smith, $50.00, I give this to you to do the Lord's work with . . . .' "[4]

During this, or a subsequent conversation, arrangements were apparently made for Martin Harris to give Joseph enough time to settle in Harmony and transcribe some of the characters, whereupon Harris should come to Harmony and "take the characters to the East, and, on his way, he was to call on all the professed linguists, in order to give them an opportunity to display their talents in giving a translation of the characters."[5] This Harris did in February 1828.

It is highly unlikely that Harris knew with whom to consult in "the East" regarding the transcription and translation from

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[2]For Joseph's connections with Harris see the *Millennial Star,* Vol. 55, (December 4, 1879), p. 794; *The Historical Record,* Vol. 6 (May 1887), p. 218; and Lucy Mack Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, 1954), pp. 104-105, 114.

[3]Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* p. 114.

[4]*Ibid.,* p. 118.

[5]*Ibid.,* p. 119.

the plates. There is, of course, the possibility that he simply went to New York City and inquired on the spot. It is much more probable that he sought advice in advance.

There is some evidence that he returned to Palmyra after receiving the manuscript before leaving for the East. The Reverend John A. Clark (1801-1843), then a resident minister in Palmyra, later recorded that "It was early in the Autumn of 1827 [*sic*] that Martin Harris called at my home . . . remarking that he had a matter to communicate that he wished to be strictly confidential," and showed him a few characters copied from the plates. Clark also wrote that "He was so much in earnest on this subject, that he immediately started off with some of the manuscript Smith had furnished him on a journey to New York and Washington."[6] Clark does not say whether Harris requested advice from him regarding men of learning.

WHO ADVISED HARRIS ABOUT WHOM TO VISIT?

Two other possible sources of information are worth considering. One was the nearby academy in Canandaigua, only nine miles from Palmyra. The Canandaigua Academy, one of the oldest and best in western New York state, opened in the fall of 1796. Unfortunately the early records of the academy are very incomplete prior to 1842, so we know little about the faculty with whom Martin Harris may have advised.[7]

Another possible source of Harris' information was a Luther Bradish. Bradish (1783-1863), a diplomat, statesman, and student of languages, was born in Cummington, Massachusetts, but later settled in Franklyn County, New York. Bradish was also well traveled for his day. Just before the War of 1812, in which he served as a volunteer, he had visited the West Indies, South America, and Great Britain, and during the years 1820-26 he was sent by John Quincy Adams, U.S. Secretary of State, to Asia as a semi-official agent on a special mission to the Sublime Porte in Constantinople concerning an American trade treaty with the Ottoman Empire. After fin-

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[6]John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia, 1842), pp. 222, 229. Apparently Clark was much too busy in Philadelphia to be accurate about the date of such things.

[7]Lewis C. Aldrich, comp., *History of Ontario County, N.Y.,* (Syracuse, 1893), pp. 226-228, and correspondence with Clyde M. Maffin, Ontario County Historian. Stephen A. Douglas was a student of the academy for three years in the 1830's.

ishing this mission, during which time he learned Arabic, he traveled to Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Europe "where he spent considerable time in the great capitols and studied assiduously their languages, manners and antiquities."[8] Of his sojourn in Egypt Bradish himself informs us that he spent five months there in 1821.[9] During that time he happened to pass through Dendera when the French engineer Jean Baptiste Lelorraine was engaged in the operation of preparing antiquities for removal to France. Bradish carried this news to Cairo where Henry Salt and Bernadino Drovetti (the English and French Consuls-General in Egypt at that time) did all they could (unsuccessfully) to prevent Lelorraine from shipping his antiquities to France.[10] Upon his return home, Bradish won a Franklyn County seat in the New York state assembly in Albany; he held that position from 1827-1830.

There are two independent sources stating that Harris did indeed seek the opinion and advice of Bradish concerning the transcription. The first source is Pomeroy Tucker (1802-1870), founder (in 1822), editor, and part owner with Egbert B. Grandin (printer of the Book of Mormon) of the *Wayne Sentinel* published in Palmyra. Tucker reports that Harris "sought the interpretation and bibliological scrutiny of such scholars as Hon. Luther Bradish, Dr. Mitchell, Professor Anthon and others."[11] Since Tucker was a native and resident of the area and a newspaper editor, it is safe to assume that, in spite of his anti-Mormon bias, this simple declaration of fact is reliable, especially since we have a corroborating second source.

This second source is a statement made by John H. Gilbert in September 1892. An associate of both Tucker and Grandin,

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[8]*Dictionary of American Biography,* Vol. 2, p. 568 [hereafter cited as *DAB*]. Other important references to Bradish will be found in the *Electic,* Vol. 60 (September 1863), pp. 111-114 and the *New England Historic Genealogical Society Memorial Biographies,* Vol. 5, pp. 268-276.

[9]Luther Bradish to unknown person, November 1838 (?); "Luther Bradish Papers," New York Historical Society.

[10]M. Saulnier, *Notice sur le Voyage de M. Lelorraine en Egypte. . .*(Paris, 1822), pp. 45, 48. Since Salt and Drovetti figure so prominently in the career of Antonio Lebolo—the discoverer of the mummies which contained the Book of Abraham—this reference to them in connection with Bradish is intriguing, if not very important. The most complete and recent study of the connection between Salt, Drovetti, and Lebolo and Joseph Smith is Jay M. Todd's *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City, 1969).

[11]Pomeroy Tucker, *The Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York, 1867), p. 42.

Gilbert was the chief compositor of the Book of Mormon, which was printed on the *Wayne Sentinel* press. According to Gilbert, Harris "stopped at Albany and called on Lt. Governor Bradish. . . . "[12] (Furthermore, the statement by W. W. Phelps, that Harris "went to New York City by way of Utica and Albany,"[13] strengthens the possibility that Harris consulted Bradish about the transcription.)

It is entirely possible that Martin Harris knew Bradish beforehand. Though a resident of Franklyn County (over 200 miles northeast of Palmyra), Bradish did have relatives in the Palmyra area.[14] It is also entirely possible that his travel experiences (especially those in Egypt and the Near East) were known to Harris, since few Americans of that day had made so long and so varied a foreign tour.

Regardless of who advised Harris, a more important question is why he was directed to Professor Anthon (and "Mitchell"). In 1828 the main centers of learning were, of course, all in "the East." There were five such centers—Harvard, Yale, Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania (or what was later called by that name), and Columbia College (now Columbia University.) Since the science of Egyptology did not exist in 1828 there were no Egyptologists. The only scholars in the world acquainted to any degree with the Egyptian language would have been those in the field of classical studies. In those days, classicists did not limit themselves strictly to Greek and Roman studies, but studied most of the other ancient civilizations as well.

The chief classical scholars in the United States in 1828 were Edward Robinson, George Ticknor, Edward Everett, and George Bancroft at Harvard; James L. Kingsley and T.D. Woolsey at Yale; and Anthon at Columbia. Robinson and Woolsey, however, were in Europe in 1828; Ticknor was at that time primarily interested in the Romance languages; and Everett was in politics after 1826.[15] Of the remaining practicing classicists in the East during 1828, Anthon was the best known.

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[12]Memorandum of John H. Gilbert, Esq., September 8, 1892, Palmyra, New York (typescript copy p. 4, located in LDS Church Historian's Office).

[13]Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed* [*sic*] (Painesville, Ohio, 1834), p. 273.

[14]In the Bradish papers there are several letters connecting him with Palmyra prior to 1828.

[15]John Edwin Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship* (Cambridge, 1908).

It seems certain then that anyone qualified to advise Harris properly would have recommended him to Anthon.

WHO WAS PROFESSOR ANTHON?

Charles Anthon (1787-1867) was a professor of classical studies at Columbia for forty-seven years—from 1820 until his death. One of eight children born to Dr. George Christian Anthon, a German surgeon, and his second wife, Genevieve Jadot, who made their home in New York City, young Charles was probably the most brilliant student who had ever attended Columbia College. He won so many prizes and honors that, to give other students a chance, his name was witheld from scholastic competition.

At first his main interest was law, but in 1820, one year after being admitted to the bar, he became adjunct professor of Greek and Latin at Columbia College and in 1830 was advanced to Professor of Greek language and literature. Anthon was a prolific scholar and for more than thirty years produced at least one volume annually. "Each of his text books passed through several editions, and for thirty years, about the middle of the nineteenth century, his influence upon the study of the classics in the United States was probably greater than that of any other man."[16]

Of the many extant contemporary opinions concerning Anthon, the following are representative. In an 1850 sketch of his life, Edgar Allan Poe wrote, "If not absolutely the best, he is at least generally considered the best classicist in America. . . . As commentator he may rank with any of his day, and has evinced powers very unusual in men who devote their lives to classical lore."[17] Upon his death he was eulogized in an important magazine of the day, *Harper's Weekly,* as "more widely known in Europe than any other American commentator on classical authors."[18] His obituary in the *New York Times* of July 30, 1867, noted that his textbooks "are regarded as standard authority in many schools and colleges, and their republication and extensive uses in England bear ample testimony to the esteem in which they are held abroad."

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[16]*DAB,* Vol. 1, p. 314.

[17]Edgar Allan Poe, *The Literati. . .* (New York, 1859), pp. 45-47.

[18]August 17, 1867. The article is illustrated with a large portrait by Matthew Brady, the famous Civil War photographer.

Anthon was a bachelor and lived in the residence wing of the college (at 7 College Green), and it was likely in his study that the visit of Harris took place. (The college was then located one block north of the present post office and federal building near City Hall Park in lower Manhattan.) At the time of Harris' visit, Anthon was probably working on his *magnum opus,* an edition of *Horace,* a study which won him his full-professorship in 1830. It is also important to note that Martin Harris later related that Anthon was alone at the time of the consultation.[19] This fact is important because there were no witnesses to the event from whom we might glean more information.

WHO WAS DR. MITCHELL?

The identification of Professor Anthon has provided no difficulties. The determination of who "Dr. Mitchell" was is somewhat more complicated. The *Dictionary of American Biography,* a comprehensive and reliable source of American biography, lists three *Mitchels* and thirty-two *Mitchells.* Among them are several who could possibly have been this "Dr. Mitchell." The most likely candidates are:

(1) Nehum Mitchell, 1767-1853, American jurist, born in Massachusetts; (2) Samuel Augustus Mitchell, 1702-1868, American geographer, born in Bristol, Connecticut, who settled in Philadelphia where he prepared textbooks, maps, and geographic manuals; and (3) Stephen Mix Mitchell, 1743-1835, American jurist and legislator, born in Wethersfield, Connecticut, member Continental Congress 1783-1788, U.S. Senator 1793-1795, Chief Justice, Connecticut Supreme Court 1801-1818.

Unfortunately Martin Harris never referred to this learned man except as "Dr. Mitchell." References to him in Church history are scanty and sometimes vague. One suggests that he was a certain Dr. Samuel Mitchell. Another states he may have been a Dr. Mitchell of Philadelphia. (Both writers were apparently thinking of Samuel Augustus Mitchell, mentioned above.) Others refer to him as Samuel I. Mitchell and Samuel E. Mitchell.

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[19]From a statement by David B. Dille, a one time missionary in England who had interviewed Harris, in the *Millenial Star,* Vol. 21 (September 1853), p. 545.

However, a non-Mormon writer who is well qualified to shed some light on the subject rules out all the above candidates. This writer is Professor Anthon himself. In two of his letters, one dated February 17, 1834, to Mr. E. D. Howe of Painesville, Ohio, and the other dated April 3, 1841, to Rev. T. W. Coit, Rector of Trinity Church, New Rochelle, West Chester County, New York, we find the following statements. In the Howe letter, Anthon wrote:

> Some years ago, a plain and apparently simple-hearted farmer called on me with a note from Dr. Mitchell, *of our city, now deceased* [italics mine], requesting me to decypher [*sic*], if possible, the paper which the farmer would hand me.[20]

This would fix the date of "Dr. Mitchell's" death sometime between 1828 and 1834. All of the previously mentioned Mitchells died after 1834. In the Coit letter, Anthon wrote:

> Many years ago—the precise date I do not now recollect—a plain looking countryman called upon me with a letter from *Dr. Samuel L. Mitchell. . .* [italics mine][21]

Neither the *Dictionary of American Biography* nor *Longworth's Directory of the City of New York, 1828-29,* however, list a Samuel L. Mitchell. The latter lists a Samuel Mitchell who was a lampmaker—obviously not Dr. Mitchell. This same directory, however does indicate a Samuel L. Mitchill, M.D. living at 47 White Street. Research revealed that in 1828 a Samuel Latham Mitchill, M.D., was a vice-president of Rutgers Medical College in lower Manhattan. We also know that this Dr. Mitchill was in New York City during February 1828, for on February 16 of that year, "Dr. Mitchill [delivered] in the city hall, an address on the late Thos. Addis Emmet."[22] This Dr. Mitchill, born 1776, died in 1831, and thereby complies with the death before 1834 of "Dr. Mitchell," as mentioned above in Anthon's letter to Howe. He also resided in New York City, as did the "Dr. Mitchell" mentioned in the same letter.

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[20]Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed,* pp. 270-272.

[21]Even though this letter was first published by Coit in *The Church Record,* Vol. 1 (Flushing, New York, April 24, 1841), pp. 231-232, the usual source is given as the 1842 reprint of the letter in Clark's *Gleanings,* pp. 233-238. The two printings are identical.

[22]J. N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909* (New York), p. 1675. Emmett was a famous Irish lawyer.

Samuel Latham Mitchill was of Quaker parentage, the son of Robert and Mary (Latham) Mitchill of North Hemstead, Long Island, New York. His early studies were in the classics. After receiving his medical and scientific training in New York and Edinburgh, he was appointed to the chair of natural history, chemistry, and agriculture at Columbia College in 1792. He was a man of many talents and much energy. In addition to teaching, he was twice in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1801-1804 and 1810-1813; a senator from 1804-1809; professor, College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, 1807-1826; and an organizer and a vice-president of Rutgers Medical College during its brief existence, 1826-1830.[23]

First, last, and always, Mitchill was a promoter of science. He has been called the "Nestor of American Science"; he was a member of dozens of scientific and scholarly societies and wrote scores of learned books, pamphlets, articles, etc., on a multitude of subjects. His contemporaries described him both as "a living encyclopedia" and "a chaos of knowledge."

Although all Mormon (and many non-Mormon) references to the good doctor spell the name Mitchell rather than Mitchill, this writer is satisfied that the shadowy "Dr. Mitchell" is in reality Samuel L. Mitchill. This problem of the spelling of the name need not be confusing. The two names sound very much alike—Mitchell being the much more common spelling.[24]

HOW VALID WAS THE ANTHON-MITCHELL COMMENTARY?

Now for the most important question. How valid was the testimony of Anthon and Mitchill respecting the transcription and translation of ancient Nephite-Egyptian records? According to Martin Harris, Dr. Anthon said that "the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian." Dr. Mitchill is reported to have "sanctioned what Professor Anthon had said." It is important that we realize that even though the statement of Martin Harris is now contained in the Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith was only reporting what Martin Harris said happened and was not neces-

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[23]See article on him in *DAB,* Vol. 13, p. 71.

[24]The famous scientist's biographer has noted, "The misspelling of the name means little, as few people, either then or now, spell Mitchill's name correctly." (Courtney Robert Hall, *A Scientist in the Early Republic: Samuel Latham Mitchill,* New York, 1934, p. 104.) It seems conclusive, then, that the "Dr. Mitchell" was really Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill.

sarily vouching for what Dr. Anthon and Dr. Mitchill reputedly had said.

There are at least three possible interpretations of the Martin Harris statement regarding his visit with Dr.'s Anthon and Mitchill:

The first is that Martin Harris fabricated the whole story. But this is hardly tenable. He was skeptical in the first place—that is why he went to New York City; and he certainly had nothing to gain by falsifying evidence to support the almost fantastic story of the impoverished and persecuted Prophet. If Martin Harris was thinking about making money from the Book of Mormon. it was not necessary for him to have gone to the trouble and expense of visiting New York City.

The second is that Dr.'s Anthon and Mitchill made up their stories, or at least pretended knowledge that they did not have. This is, unfortunately, not too difficult to believe. The learned are prone to pontificate. Anthon's interest in the matter may have gone deeper. Did he wish to share some of the wealth and fame that exploitation of the golden plates might bring? This is possible, for the Book of Mormon itself says, ". . . And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them. And now, because of the glory of the world and to get gain will they say this, and not for the glory of God."[25]

However, a third interpretation, that Anthon and Mitchill merely recognized the characters as some form of Egyptian and so stated this, I believe, is most probable. Many books had been published by 1828 containing facsimilies of Egyptian characters and Anthon and Mitchill could easily have been acquainted with at least the appearance of the various styles of Egyptian writing. Whatever they said respecting the correctness of the translations cannot be taken too seriously. Even a reincarnated Egyptian could not have translated the characters because the "reformed Egyptian" had been so changed that "none other people knoweth our language."[26] It is entirely possible, of course, that they said nothing at all about the translation, but only remarked that the *transcription* was correct, for in 1828 neither Anthon, Mitchill (nor anyone else in the world for that matter) had seen much translated from the Egyptian. It is not difficult to understand how a man of Harris' background could

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[25]2 Nephi 27:15-16.
[26]Mormon 9:34.

have mistaken transcription for translation. Perhaps Harris was so intent on fulfilling a scriptural prophecy that he heard only what he wanted to hear. Certainly any notion that he had been an instrument in God's hands in fulfilling prophecy would have helped convince him that he should sell his farm and finance the publication of the Book of Mormon.

The simple supposition, however, that Anthon and Mitchill were able to recognize various styles of Egyptian writing is nothing very remarkable or important, and certainly no evidence that they were in any position to say that either the translation or transcription was correct. We must go deeper than this to place any weight on their judgment. Two standard ways of deepening such an investigation are an examination of the *Nachlasse,* or literary remains, and the publications of a given individual.

In the case of Dr. Mitchill, aside from the above mentioned facts that he was in his youth a student of the classics and had at least a reading ability of several languages, no other possible evidence of a competence in Egyptian studies has come to light. His biographer mentions nothing, his papers in the East Hampton Free Library (and elsewhere) reveal nothing, and a ten-page bibliography of his writings indicates he never published anything regarding any language. It appears then that Mitchill could have given Harris only a very superficial opinion regarding the transcript.

In respect to Anthon, fortunately, we have more to investigate. While there is nothing germane to this study in his papers at Cornell University,[27] a study of his publications is most rewarding. We have noted that he produced many volumes and was considered "the principal classical bookmaker of his time."[28] Most of this enormous output was, however, after February 1828 and therefore, of little help in evaluating Anthon's acquaintance with the Egyptian language in 1828. But one very significant book was published in 1825 and went through six or more editions by 1828; in fact, this was the book that established Anthon's reputation as one of the foremost classicists in America. The work was *A Classical Dictionary* by John Lempriere (first published 1788), corrected and improved by Charles Anthon.

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[27]Letter of Herbert Finch, Curator and Archivist, Cornell University, to author, November 13, 1969.

[28]Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship,* Vol. 3, p. 466.

Our interest in Lempriere's work is not important. It is to the four thousand Anthon additions to the *Dictionary* mentioned in the preface that we now turn our attention,[29] because they may be used legitimately as a criterion of Anthon's learning and acquaintance with various subjects. But in which of Anthon's four thousand added subjects are we interested, and which have value in determining Anthon's acquaintance with Egyptian? Reading through his reference to Egypt is most disappointing. It is only a short geographic sketch of the country. In the preface, however, Anthon states, "The articles on which the most labour has been bestowed are the following: . . . . Memnonium . . . Nilus . . . Pyramides . . . Thebae . . . ." Turning to these and other entries in this *Classical Dictionary,* we find Anthon referring to many writers and authorities, including Bruce, Davison, Montagu, Salt, Belzoni, Lacrose, Denon, Jablonski, and Mannert. He also cites Champollion's "elaborate treatise on Hieroglyphics of Egypt"[30]—definite evidence that Anthon was aware of the early works of the French scholar, Jean François Champollion (1790-1832), the greatest student of the Egyptian language of the period, and the man upon whose work much of subsequent advance in Egyptology was made. Anthon does not identify the exact title of this book by Champollion, but the latter had written only one book by 1827 that could fit the above description, his famous *Précis du système Hiéroglyphique des Anciens Égyptiens* (Paris 1824). The writer has been successful in locating Anthon's copy of the *Précis* (at Cornell University). Hopefully I searched it for marginalia in any way connected with Harris' visit, but nothing was found—only Anthon's signature on the flyleaf.

HARRIS SUFFICIENTLY CONVINCED

Such is the story of the Harris-Anthon-Mitchill encounter. In spite of the limited ability of Anthon and Mitchill (or anyone else in the world at that time) to pronounce judgment on the transcription, and despite the ridicule of Anthon regarding the story of angels and the destruction of Anthon's certificate, Harris was sufficiently convinced to go into debt and devote his full time to the support of the young prophet. As soon as pos-

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[29]J[ohn] Lempriere, *A Classical Dictionary,* corrected and improved by Charles Anthon, sixth American edition (New York, 1827), p. vi.

[30]*Ibid.,* p. 480.

sible, probably in April, Harris went to Harmony and served as Joseph's scribe until June 14, 1828.[31]

A year later in June 1829 his faithfulness and support earned him the privilege of becoming one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon in Fayette, New York, whence Joseph Smith had moved in 1829 at the generous and friendly invitation of David Whitmer, a friend of Oliver Cowdery who succeeded Harris as Joseph's scribe in the work of translating the Book of Mormon. The following August Harris mortgaged his farm to guarantee the $3,000 necessary to print 5,000 copies of the Book of Mormon, which was finally published in Palmyra during March 1830. The Church was organized April 6 of that year, and Martin was one of the first to be baptized.

HOW RELIABLE IS HARRIS' ACCOUNT OF WHAT HAPPENED?

As far as the official account (published in 1842 as noted above) of what transpired, it must be carefully noted again that Joseph Smith is not vouching for what Harris said; he is simply reporting what Harris told him. Since there were no witnesses to the event, we have only the many statements of Martin Harris and two statements from Anthon to go on.

That the event took place pretty much as Harris reported it is substantiated by Anthon's previously cited letters to Howe and Coit.[32] Much has been made of the fact, however, that these two letters, which are very critical of the Mormons, insist that "the paper contained anything else but Egyptian Hieroglyphics," and they are widely quoted by anti-Mormon writers. Why should Harris' story be accepted above that of the pro-

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[31]By this date he had transcribed 116 pages of foolscap. With considerable misgivings Joseph Smith allowed Harris to take these pages back to Palmyra to show his wife. Somehow the material was lost or stolen with the result that both Joseph and Martin were severely chastized by the Lord and for some time Joseph was not allowed to continue translating. Thereafter either Emma Smith or Oliver Cowdery served as scribe to the Prophet. Apparently Harris had little connection with Joseph Smith until a year later when he became one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon.

[32]Since Anthon lived for twenty years after the publication of the second letter and since there is no recorded denial of his letters having been forged or misquoted, we may assume (even though we do not have the original letters) that he did actually write them—a fact which proves that the interview did indeed take place. Should further evidence be desired one could cite Henry Drisler, *A Commemorative Discourse* (New York City, 1868). Since this booklet is really a short biography of Anthon written immediately after his death, the reference in it (pp. 21-22) to the Howe letter should settle any doubt regarding the interview having taken place and the letter having been written.

fessor? One good reason is that the two letters contain glaring inconsistencies.[33] Aside from Anthon's acknowledged brilliance, the sources reveal him as also a rather crochety bachelor, a pettry taskmaster with no outside interest, and a man of no religious association. The two letters were not written by the detached scholar, but by an uncritical, emotional man trying to rid himself of any connection with people he did not and could not understand.

As far as the truthfulness of the Harris statements concerning what occurred, we have no evidence whatsoever beyond his character. Richard L. Anderson has done extensive research on Harris' life in Palmyra and has proved that "none of his townsmen exceeded his established reputation as a responsible and honest individual," and that during his "almost 40 years' residence in Palmyra he was admired for his integrity. . . ."[34]

The integrity of Harris can further be substantiated by the facts that though his connections with Joseph Smith cost him money, his domestic tranquility, and brought upon him much ridicule; that in spite of having been severely censored for losing the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript; that after the trials of Kirtland his "mind became darkened" to the extent that he was formally excommunicated in December 1837; that he remained in Ohio after the Church left for Missouri, Illinois, and finally for the Valley of the Great Salt Lake; that he eventually joined various other churches, including the Strangite (for which he did some missionary work in England in 1846); and that he was pilloried in the *Elders' Journal* of August 1838 as a "lacky . . . beneath contempt," and also in the *Millennial Star* (an official Church publication in England) on November 15, 1846 in an article entitled "Sketches of Notorious Characters," and described as one having "yielded to the spirit and temptation of the Devil," and a "bitter enemy" of Joseph Smith, that despite all this, there is no record of his ever having denied his testimony to the truth-

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[33]Both letters are reprinted in full with analysis in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1930), Vol. 1, pp. 102-109, and also in Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America,* Special Fourth Edition (Salt Lake City, 1967), Vol. 1, pp. 414-422.

[34]Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Martin Harris: The Honorable New York Farmer," *The Improvement Era,* Vol. 72, No. 2 (February 1969), pp. 18, 21; see also the same author's "The Certainty of the Skeptical Witness," *The Improvement Era,* Vol. 72, No. 3 (March 1969), pp. 62-67.

fulness of the Book of Mormon and his experiences connected with it.

While it can be argued that the foregoing reveals instability in Harris' character, the fact remains that not only did he not try to rid himself of the stigmata of being a deluded person and a religious fanatic, or strike back at his critics in the Mormon camp, but he continued to his death to affirm his testimony. He was interviewed many times on the subject before and after his disaffection and always told the same story. This is impressive evidence of his inner conviction of the reality of his various spiritual experiences connected with the Book of Mormon.

Once the background of this whole incident is explored and assessed, we are still left with some nagging questions among which are: What was the meaning and significance of the event? Would the Restoration have been significantly altered in any way if the Harris-Anthon incident had never taken place? Since, as will be shown, the incident apparently did not become an important missionary tool, and was not especially trumpeted abroad to impress investigators, this author does not think the incident had any great practical value—especially when we conclude, as we must, that the opinions of Anthon and Mitchill were not conclusive in any way.

The standard answer regarding the why and purpose of the Harris-Anthon incident is that it was necessary to fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah and Nephi.[35] Such an answer, however, is really begging the question, for then one must ask why the prophecies were made in the first place. It could be argued that the prohecies represent nothing more than the fact that God rewarded two faithful servants with a glimpse of the future, and that these two men dared not leave unrecorded such a vision.

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[35]2 Nephi 27:15-18: "But behold, it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall say unto him to whom he shall deliver the book: Take these words which are not sealed and deliver them to another, that he may show them unto the learned, saying: Read this, I pray thee. And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them. . . And the man shall say: I cannot bring the book, for it is sealed. . ."
Isaiah 29:11: "And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed."
B. H. Roberts went no deeper than this interpretation, and even as profound a thinker as Orson Pratt pursued the question no further in his *Divine Authority of the Book of Mormon* (Liverpool, 1850) as reprinted in *Orson Pratt's Works* (Salt Lake City, 1945), Vol. 1, pp. 107-289, especially pp. 271-279.

Perhaps the real reason behind the event lies in an "ecclesiastical imperative" that through sufficient witnesses to truth mankind will be left without excuse for having rejected God's word. That such a divine imperative exists is suggested by many scriptures—among the most clear being that "In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established," and "In the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word." (Matt. 18:16 and 2 Nephi 27:14) According to Oliver Cowdery, the Angel Moroni told Joseph Smith that ". . . the scripture [Isaiah and Nephi] must be fulfilled before it is translated, which says that the word of a book, which were sealed were presented to the learned, for thus has God determined *to leave man without excuse*. . . ." [italics mine][36] Apparently Moroni was the source of the belief that prophecy was about to be fulfilled and apparently this 1835 publication was the first public statement to that effect.

Joseph's mother adds a little to our understanding of this. She records that, in reference to Joseph's preparation prior to translation, "The first step that he was instructed to take in regard to this work was to make a facsimile of some of the characters, which were called reformed Egyptian, and to send them to some of the most learned men of this generation and ask them for a translation thereof."[37]

Turning from the philosophy and rationale of the event itself, let us now consider the concrete results. To what use was this unique incident put? How was the story disseminated? The story spread undramatically by word of mouth, through newspapers, periodicals, at least one tract, and by books. Martin Harris told the story in Palmyra immediately after he returned from New York City; by 1840 missionaries had carried the story to New Rochelle, New York, and to England before 1849; at least four newspapers carried the story between 1829

[36]In a series of letters published in the *Messenger and Advocate* in 1834 and 1835 from Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps—especially in the fourth letter of February 1835—Cowdery claims that he had the help of Joseph Smith in the preparation of the letters. Such a claim lends authority to these letters. A similar statement is made by Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City, 1893), pp. 28-29: "It was manifested to the Prophet that a facsimile of characters must be copied and sent to the most learned professors of the country, and that Martin Harris should be the bearer of them."

[37]Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph,* p. 114. Martin Harris claimed that the "Lord had shown him that he must go to New York with some of the characters. . . ." Paul R. Cheesman, "An Analysis of the Accounts Relating Joseph Smith's Early Visions," unpublished Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1965, p. 131.

and 1831. The first book to mention the incident was published in 1834; in 1840 two denominational journals carried the story; also in 1840 the first semi-official Church reference to the matter was made in a tract; in 1842 the story was officially released by the Church in Nauvoo and Liverpool, England; between 1842 and 1890 at least nine books made mention of it; and in 1844 the first reproduction of the "Anthon transcript" and the first published reference to the connection between the event and the prophecy of Isaiah appeared. (As has been noted above, the incident was even mentioned in a commemorative discourse following the death of Anthon.)

More or less chronologically these references to the consultation are as follows: We have already cited above what Harris reported to Joseph Smith in Harmony. Harris related the incident to at least two citizens of Palmyra—John H. Gilbert recorded that "Martin returned from his trip east satisfied that 'Joseph' was a 'little smarter than Professor Anthon'."[38] The Rev. T. A. Clark in Palmyra wrote that "After his return he came to see me again, and told me that, among others, he had consulted Prof. Anthon, who thought the characters in which the book was written very remarkable, but he could not decide what language they belonged to."[39] Harris was also an energetic missionary for the Church. He and his brother Elmer baptized a hundred converts by 1833.[40] It is difficult to imagine that both Martin and his brother did not relate the experiences in New York City. (It might also be well to point out that after Martin Harris became one of the Three Witnesses and saw the plates and the Angel Moroni, he tended to stress this remarkable experience more than the visit with Anthon and Mitchill.)

Perhaps the first newspaper account is in the *Palmyra Freeman,* August 1829, but this is known only through a quotation reprinted in the Rochester *Advertiser and Telegraph* of August 31, 1829—"So blindly enthusiastic was Harris that he took some of the characters interpreted by Smith and went in search of someone, besides the interpreter, who was learned enough to English them; but all of whom he applied (among the number was Professor Mitchell of New York) happened not to be

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[38]Gilbert, Memorandum, p. 4.

[39]Clark, *Gleanings,* p. 229.

[40]Anderson, "The Certainty of the Skeptical Witness," p. 63.

possessed of sufficient knowledge to give satisfaction."[41] About a week later the *Rochester Gem* of September 5, 1829 reported the incident as follows: "Harris states that he went in search of someone to interpret the hieroglyphics, but found no one was intended to perform that all-important task but Smith himself."[42]

Some time later the *Canandaigua* (New York) *Morning Courier and Enquirer* of September 1, 1831 reported the incident:

> Harris with several manuscripts in his pocket went to the city of New York and called upon one of the professors of Columbia College for the purpose of showing them to him. Harris says that the professor thought them very curious, but admitted that he could not decipher them. Said he to Harris, 'Mr. Harris, you had better go to the celebrated Dr. Mitchell and show them to him. He is very learned in these ancient languages and I have no doubt he will be able to give you some satisfaction'. . .Harris says that the Doctor. . .looked at his engravings—made a learned dissertation on them—compared them with the hieroglyphics discovered by Champollion in Europe, and set them down as a language of a people formerly in existence in the East, but now no more.[43]

The first known reference to this incident in book form was made in 1834 by Eber D. Howe in his publication *Mormonism Unvailed [sic].* Howe, after serving in the War of 1812, became a printer's apprentice in Buffalo, New York, on the *Buffalo Gazette.* In 1817 he moved to Cleveland, and in 1822, removed to nearby Painesville, or nine miles from Kirtland, to start his own newspaper, the *Painesville Telegraph,* which he edited until 1835. Thereafter, though his brother took over the paper, he remained in Painesville for many years, engaged in the printing business and the manufacture of woolen goods.[44]

Howe's interest in Mormonism probably originated from the missionary activities of Parley P. Pratt in and around Mentor, Ohio, in October-November, 1830, which resulted in the

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[41]As cited in Kirkham, *A New Witness,* Vol. 1, p. 151.

[42]*Ibid,* p. 152.

[43]For this newspaper article in full see "James Gordon Bennett's 1831 Report on 'The Mormonites,'" by Leonard J. Arrington in this special issue of *BYU Studies.* Apparently, Anthon did compare the transcript with the prints in his copy of Champollion's *Précis.*

[44]Eber D. Howe, *Autobiography and Recollections of a Pioneer Printer* (Painesville, Ohio, 1878).

conversion of Pratt's friend, Sidney Rigdon, a Campbellite minister, most of his congregation, and the establishment of a small branch in Mentor, which was not far from Painesville. Shortly thereafter, on January 11, 1831, Howe wrote to William Wines Phelps for answers "to some enquires touching the origin of Mormonism. . . ."[45] Phelps (1792-1872), born in New Jersey, had been active in New York politics, edited a newspaper, was in 1831 a printer in Canandaigua, near Palmyra, and was seriously investigating Mormonism.

The probable reason Howe chose to write to Phelps was that the latter was a fellow printer near the place of origin of Mormonism. Or it may be, however, that Howe learned of Phelps from Sidney Rigdon, since prior to January 11, 1831, Rigdon and Phelps had discussed Mormonism "for ten hours."[46] In any event, on January 15, Phelps answered Howe, reporting, among other things, that "When the plates were said to have been found, a copy of one or two lines of the characters were taken by Mr. Harris to Utica, Albany, and New York; at New York they were shown to Dr. Mitchell, and he referred to Professor Anthon who translated and declared them to be the ancient short-hand Egyptian."[47] Phelps had apparently heard this story or had read about it in the various newspaper accounts cited above.

After the Mormons moved into the Kirtland area during early 1831, Howe reported on their activities and recorded in his autobiography, "All their vain babblings and pretensions were pretty strongly set forth and noticed in the columns of the Telegraph."[48] These articles became the basis of his book, *Mormonism Unvailed.* It was in the preparation of this book that Howe decided on February 9, 1834, to write to Anthon and "took the liberty to inform Mr. Anthon of the vile use that was made of his name in the country; and to request of him a statement of the facts respecting it."[49] Anthon, obviously incensed by what Howe reported, answered him immediately in the above cited letter.

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[45]Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed,* p. 273.
[46]*Ibid.,* p. 274.
[47]*Ibid.,* p. 273.
[48]Howe, *Autobiography,* p. 44. This autobiography reveals a man incapable of interpreting sensitively the Restoration and one who would have considered it as "vain babblings." Up to the age of 40 (1838) he found it "easier to concure in the opinion of others." He then became a skeptic, and finally an adherent of "modern Spiritualism." (pp. 44-45.)
[49]Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed,* p. 270.

The first semi-official Mormon account of this event is contained in a missionary tract written by Orson Pratt (one of the original Twelve Apostles) in 1840 in Liverpool, England. He wrote that:

> . . .a few of the original characters were accurately transcribed and translated by Smith, which, with the translation, were taken by a gentleman by the name of Martin Harris to the city of New York, where they were presented to a learned gentleman of the name of Anthon, who professed to be extensively acquainted with many languages, both ancient and modern. He examined them, but was unable to decipher them correctly; but he presumed that if the original records could be brought, he could assist in translating them.[50]

In 1841 we get some idea of how the Harris-Anthon incident was being spread slowly by word of mouth and by missionaries. In September 1841 the *Times and Seasons* in Nauvoo printed a letter from Charles W. Wandell (1819-1875), a New York convert then laboring as a missionary in New Rochelle, New York. In this letter, written July 27, Elder Wandell reports that

> The Episcopal D.D. [T.W. Coit] at this place had the curiosity to write to Professor C. Anthon of New York to know if our statement concerning the 'words of the book' were correct. Professor Anthon answered him by letter with permission to publish it, which he did. You will find it in a periodical entitled 'The Church Record,' Vol. I, no. 22.[51]

(Wandell then added an extract from this letter.)

This is the best and earliest reference we have regarding the use missionaries made of the Anthon-Harris story. According to Coit, some of the Mormons in New Rochelle "were claiming the patronage of Professor Anthon's name in behalf of their notions," [and he] "took the liberty to state the fact to him, and ask in what possible way they had contrived to associate him with themselves."[52] The Reverend Dr. Thomas Winthrop Coit (1803-1885), an Episcopal clergyman and author of several learned theological works, was at that time (1839-1849) rector of Trinity Church in New Rochelle and

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[50]Orson Pratt, *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (New York City, 1841), pp. 6-7.

[51]*Times and Seasons,* Vol. 2 (September 5, 1841), pp. 544-545.

[52]Coit, *The Church Record,* p. 231; see also Clark, *Gleanings,* p. 232.

thereafter professor of church history at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.[53]

In 1842 there were at least four published references to the Harris-Anthon visit—including Clark's *Gleanings,* and Daniel P. Kidder's *Mormonism and the Mormons.* By far the most important, however, was in the May 2 issue of the *Times and Seasons* which contained the fourth installment of what was then called "Church History." (Cited above) The chief significance of this publication was that it was the first official reference to the event. (It is rather strange that the Prophet waited fourteen years to publish the story. No mention whatever was made to the incident in the *Morning and Evening Star* (1832-34), the *Latter-day Saints Messenger and Advocate* 1834-36), or in the *Elders' Journal* (1837-38).) That same year the story was reprinted in the *Millennial Star* in October as the "History of Joseph Smith."

In late 1844 two important dimensions to the Anthon story are added: the first publication of what the transcript looked like and the first explicit allusion to the event having been a fulfillment of Isaiah 29:11-12. This information was presented to the public in two ways—by newspaper and by placard. On Saturday, December 21, Samuel Brannan, the presiding Elder of the branch in New York City and publisher and editor of a semi-official Church publication, *The Prophet,* published in this newspaper a three-line reproduction of the "Anthon transcript." With no introductory remarks or any indication of source, this illustration was printed under a headline reading, "The Stick of Joseph taken from the hand of Ephraim." He then added that . . . "The following is a correct copy of the characters taken from the plates which the Book of Mormon was translated from: the same that was taken to Professor Mitchell, and afterwards to Professor Anthon of New York, by Martin Harris in the year 1827 *[sic]* in fulfillment of Isaiah 29:11-12." (The quotation was given in full.)

Although Brannan gave no source or any further information about this illustration of the "Stick of Joseph," we can divine its probable origin. Sometime prior to December 1844 (probably earlier in the same year) someone printed a black

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[53]*DAB;* Robert Bolton, *History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the County of Westchester* (New York 1855), p. 481; *Trinity Church, New Rochelle, N. Y., 1688-1938* (New Rochelle, New York, 1938), pp. 9-10.

and gold placard titled "The Stick of Joseph taken from the Hand of Ephraim: A correct copy of the characters taken from the plates [of] the Book of Mormon!! Was translated from—the same that was taken to Professor Anthon of New York by Martin Harris in the year 1827 *[sic]* in fulfillment of Isaiah 29:11-12." Since the wording and the three lines of the transcript printed in *The Prophet* on December 12 are almost identical with that printed on the black and gold placard, it seems more than likely that this placard was the source of Brannan's story in *The Prophet*.[54]

Very little, however, is known about the provenance of the placard. We conclude, of course, that it existed before December 21, 1844, and from the only extant copy known, in the LDS Church Historian's Office, we learn the following from what is written on its back: There is the signature of Mrs. Hyrum Smith (who died in 1852) and a statement, "1844 placard Stick of Joseph. This was formerly owned by Hyrum Smith and sent to the Historian's Office March 22, 1860, by his son, Joseph Fielding Smith." (One obvious assumption would be that it was printed in Nauvoo on the *Times and Seasons* press, but preliminary comparison of the fonts indicates that it was not.)

Now to the questions regarding the fate of the *Urtext,* or original copy of the transcript and the pedigree of the transcript in possession of the Reorganized Latter Day Saints Church today (hereafter cited as the RLDS transcript). About the first question we know almost nothing. Harris probably kept his copy for many years, but there is nothing known about what he finally did with it. (As we shall soon note, many years later David Whitmer claimed to have the original transcript. There is, unfortunately, no additional evidence for this claim.) The situation is further complicated by a statement of the Prophet's mother that Mrs. Martin Harris obtained a copy of the characters her husband took to New York City.[55] Until new information is brought forth about the final disposition of the original transcript and the alleged second copy, we can only deepen the study of the RLDS transcript and its background.

According to the RLDS Church, "the paper itself is old, and of the same quality and appearance of the paper of the [Book

[54]All subsequent issues of *The Prophet* were searched for further information regarding the "Stick of Joseph," but none was found.

[55]Smith, *History of Joseph Smith,* p. 121.

of Mormon] manuscript and of early revelations, manuscripts undoubtedly made before 1833."[56] While such an observation is helpful, it is by no means conclusive. Until an expert in diplomatics is called in and paper and ink tests are run,[57] we must concentrate on the pedigree of the document.

The RLDS transcript was given to the Church in 1903 by the heirs of David Whitmer, fifteen years after his death in 1888.[58] The first account of Whitmer's possession of this document was made by Edward Stevenson (later a member of the First Presidency of Seventies) who visited Whitmer in 1871 and made a copy of the document.[59] Later, the March 25, 1881, edition of the Richmond (Missouri) *Conservator* reported that Whitmer had the original transcript, a claim which Whitmer made again in 1887 when he wrote, "I have in my possession the original paper containing some of the characters transcribed from one of the golden plates, which paper Martin Harris took to Professor Anthon of New York. . . ."[60] In 1884 a committee of the RLDS Church conversed with Whitmer and were shown the transcript. Unfortunately we lack any further information regarding how, when, or why Whitmer acquired this document. Though inconclusive, it is of interest to note that Martin Harris neither confirmed nor denied Whitmer's claim.

Reasoning by analogy we can surmise a little about the transcript from the wandering of one of the two manuscript copies of the Book of Mormon translation. As protection against loss or theft while it was being printed, Joseph Smith had Oliver Cowdery make a copy of the translation, which copy Cowdery later kept in his possession. (Joseph Smith placed the original translation in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo

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[56]From a letter of Frederick M. Smith, May 9, 1941, to John A. Widtsoe as cited in Kirkham, *A New Witness,* Vol. 1, p. 176.

[57]Of course, even such an examination would not be conclusive, for it is quite possible to have either a genuine document containing false information or a faked document with true information. This is just one of the many reasons why God prefers to work through faith rather than knowledge. Facts and knowledge are often debatable, a private testimony is not.

[58]The donation was probably made by Whitmer's grandson, George Schweich of Richmond, Missouri. There is some evidence that the RLDS transcript (or some copy of it or the original transcript) was in the possession of a William Evarts Benjamin of New York City around 1901. See I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism* (New York, 1902), p. 80.

[59]This he published in 1893 in his *Reminiscences of Joseph Smith.*

[60]David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Mo., 1938 reprint), p. 12.

House in October 1841, where it was subsequently nearly destroyed by water.)[61] After the death of Cowdery in March 1850, his copy of the translation went to his friend and fellow-witness, David Whitmer. (In 1903 his heirs sold it to the RLDS Church where it remains to this day). For many years, Whitmer believed that his copy of the translation was the original. In 1878, however, Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith proved to him that he really had the Cowdery copy.[62] This is important, for if Whitmer was mistaken about his copy of the Book of Mormon translation, it is equally possible that he was mistaken about the originality of the "Anthon transcript" he claimed to have.

OBSCURITY OF SOURCES

Since we know nothing about how Whitmer acquired his copy of the transcript, we are free to assume that perhaps Martin Harris felt that the transcript ought to be kept together with the Cowdery copy of the Book of Mormon translation and at some time, gave the transcript either to Cowdery or to Whitmer. There is no evidence that he gave it back to Joseph Smith to be deposited in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House. There is always the possibility too, that what eventually came into Whitmer's hand was the alleged second copy, or even a copy of a copy.

One interesting, and possibly very meaningful, detail about the RLDS transcript is the word "Charactors" written across the top. Four students of early Church history, R.D. Webb, Ariel Crowley, Dean Jessee of the LDS Church Historian's Office, and the anti-Mormon writer, I. Woodbridge Riley, think that this word is in the hand of Joseph Smith. If so, the authenticity of the RLDS transcript would be strengthened greatly.

For the time being, however, we must face the conclusion that the three primary sources of the "Anthon transcript"—the

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[61]Richard Howard, Church Historian of the RLDS Church, refers to these two manuscripts as the D MS (dictated manuscript) and the E MS (emended manuscript) which was used by the printer. In the 1880's L. C. Bidamon, second husband of Emma Smith, opened the cornerstone and divided what was left of the D MS between the LDS and RLDS Churches. Only pages 3-22 plus fragments exist today—in Salt Lake City. Those pages given the RLDS Church disintegrated long ago. See Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence, Mo., 1969).

[62]Joseph Fielding Smith, "The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon," *The Improvement Era,* Vol. 10 (June 1907), pp. 572-576.

1844 placard, the 1844 newspaper story, and the RLDS transcript—are all equally obscure. Until we learn more about the origin of any of them, we are in no position to say definitely that any of them is original, a near contemporary copy of the original, or a spurious invention to give credence to the Book of Mormon story.

Circumstantial evidence, however, including the fact that there is a high degree of similarity of the characters on the three sources, suggests that all three are at least closely related to the unknown original, and new information about one will aid in our understanding of the others.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

It is beyond the scope of this paper to say much about the characters. Over the years, however, suggestions and attempts have been made to indicate and prove that the characters are some form of Egyptian, Meso-American, or even Phoenician. The strongest argument that can be made for the ingenious and pioneering efforts of those who favor the Egyptian origin of the characters[63] is the definite resemblance of the RLDS transcript characters to Egyptian characters. But this does not prove that the transcript is authentic, that the characters make connected thought, or are Egyptian. (Indeed, twelve, almost half of our English-Latin characters, appear in the Cyrillic alphabet, but this fact never has given and never will give anyone insight whatsoever into or understanding of Russian, Serbian, or Bulgarian.) Also it must be pointed out that there are so many variant, hieratic, and demotic characters that the affinity of many other writing systems with Egyptian could probably be proved.

If the case for the transcript characters' being Egyptian in origin appears less than absolute, it is, nonetheless, infinitely stronger than any of the other arguments. The only basis for the characters' being somehow connected with Meso-American scripts is, of course, that since some pre-Columbian peoples were descended from some Book of Mormon peoples, it would not be totally unreasonable to expect some connections between their manners of writing.[64] The most far out explanation, how-

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[63]See the works of R. C. Webb, Ariel Crowley, and two RLDS commentators, Harvey Siebel and Paul M. Hanson.

[64]See studies by Augustus Le Plongeon, Crowley, Welby W. Ricks, Jose O. Davila, and especially Carl Hugh Jones.

ever, of the transcript characters is that of a Phoenician origin.[65]

Finally there are two other minor, but interesting, considerations. One pertains to a possible second visit of Harris with Anthon, and the other to an alleged encounter between Michael N. Chandler (the person from whom, at the suggestion of Joseph Smith, the Church purchased some mummies which held some papyri) and Anthon and Mitchill. Neither event, unfortunately, can be supported well. The only evidence we have for the first is in Anthon's letter of 1841 to Coit in which he states that, ". . . one day, when I had ceased entirely to think of the countryman and his paper, this same individual, to my great surprise, paid me a second visit. He now brought with him a duodecimo volume, which he said was a translation into English of the 'Golden Bible.' He begged my acceptance of the volume. . . I declined receiving it however. . . ."[66] No further evidence of this second visit has been found.

The purported visit of Chandler with Anthon and Mitchill rests on an equally tenuous foundation. The only known authority for this information is John Riggs (1812-1902), an early convert whose father ran a hotel in Kirtland during the Mormon period there. He became an M.D. and settled in Provo, Utah, in 1851 where he remained for the rest of his life.[67] An attempt to prove or disprove this connection between Chandler and Anthon and Mitchell has caused this writer weeks of futile effort and considerable grief. Although it is both probable and possible that Chandler took his papyri to Anthon for an opinion, there is no evidence that he did; and until further evidence is available, there is no point and little interest in speculating about it.

The possible visit with "Dr. Mitchill" is, however, worth continued effort. If it can be proved that the "Dr. Mitchill" was really Samuel Latham Mitchill who died in 1831, then we have at least a much clearer idea of when Chandler came into possession of the mummies and a better chance of learning

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[65]Probably first advanced by Le Plongeon. Ross T. Christensen is developing a thesis that the Mulekites were largely Phoenician in their ethnic origin.

[66]Coit, *The Church Record*, p. 232.

[67]"Dr. John Riggs," *Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine*, Vol. 3 (1884), p. 283. See also "The Book of Abraham," *The Academic Review*, Vol. 1 (March 1885), p. 46. A small collection of the private papers of John Riggs was recently acquired by Brigham Young University Library. The six-page typescript of Riggs' autobiography makes no mention of this incident.

more about them and their whereabouts prior to their acquisition by Joseph Smith in Kirtland in 1835. If, on the other hand, it can be proven that this "Dr. Mitchill" was not S.L. Mitchill, we then gain a new lead, an additional opportunity to seek out information about these mummies and papyri by properly identifying this new "Dr. Mitchill" and searching his life and papers for bits of information.

CONCLUSIONS

For a variety of reasons most institutions, especially religious ones, ultimately face the necessity of preparing a detailed history of their own origins. While the early generations are so close to the beginning that their personal knowledge is adequate and their faith strong, succeeding generations have to acquire their knowledge second-hand and therefore require written accounts, not only to buttress their own faith, but to answer the ever present critics and doubters. This generation must now utilize fully the art and science of history to recapture the past and properly narrate and interpret its own origins; we must search out more fully the sources of the Restoration in preparation for a new comprehensive history of the Church alluded to in Dr. Madsen's preface to last year's Institute of Mormon Studies issue of *BYU Studies*.[68]

While there still are, and perhaps always will be, some unanswered questions regarding the "Anthon transcript," this writer would like to think that the above detailed investigation of the whole story, the people involved, and the three primary sources of the transcript has not only answered more questions than it has raised, eliminated much error, and answered some criticism, but also made the story more understandable, credible, and what we like to call, faith promoting.

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[68]Truman G. Madsen, "Guest Editor's Prologue," *BYU Studies,* Vol. 9, No. 3 (Spring 1969), pp. 235-240.