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### The Original Book of Mormon Manuscript

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**Abstract:** While much that has been said regarding the origin of the Book of Mormon is beyond the experience of the average searcher, only as he accepts or rejects the credibility of the earliest witnesses, the existence of the book itself provides a common ground for careful investigation. But beyond this, some surviving, badly weathered fragments of the original manuscript permit a consideration of the Book of Mormon from a paleographic standpoint. It is the purpose of this study to review the history, and consider the handwriting and composition of the remaining segments of the original manuscript for what they may contribute to the credibility of early witnesses regarding the Book of Mormon origin.



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# The Original Book of Mormon Manuscript



# The Original Book of Mormon Manuscript

Dean C. Jessee

The one thing that confirmed the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon in the mind of Emma Smith was the method of writing the manuscript. When asked about her belief by her son, she answered:

. . . no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscript unless he was inspired; for, when acting as his scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Smith's own claim for the Book was that he translated it "through the medium of the Urim and Thummim . . . by the gift and power of God," and that it was ". . . the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."<sup>2</sup>

While much that has been said regarding the origin of the Book of Mormon is beyond the experience of the average searcher, only as he accepts or rejects the credibility of the earliest witnesses, the existence of the book itself provides a common ground for careful investigation. But beyond this, some surviving, badly weathered fragments of the original manuscript permit a consideration of the Book of Mormon from a paleographic standpoint. It is the purpose of this study to review the history, and consider the handwriting and composition of the remaining segments of the original manuscript for what they may contribute to the credibility of early witnesses regarding the Book of Mormon origin.

## The Writing of the Manuscript

Joseph Smith records that during the night of September 21, 1823, a heavenly messenger appeared to him, and revealed the location of ". . . a book . . . written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent . . . and that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it . . . also that there were two stones . . . deposited with the plates; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book."<sup>3</sup> Receiving the plates four years later, on September 22, 1827,

Joseph was delayed in his efforts to translate them by persecution which became so intense that “multitudes were on the alert continually” to get the plates from him.<sup>4</sup> This condition became so intolerable that he was forced to leave Manchester, New York, and go to the home of his wife’s parents in Harmony, Pennsylvania, where he arrived in December 1827.<sup>5</sup> By June 14, 1828, he had completed at least 116 manuscript pages of the translation with the help of Martin Harris, a Palmyra “farmer of respectability” who assisted him as scribe. About this time, Harris, “after much solicitation,” was permitted to take the writings to Palmyra and show them to his family. While there, others saw them and “by stratagem . . . got them away” and they were never recovered.<sup>6</sup> Following this loss, the plates and the interpreters were taken by the angel and not returned until September 22, 1828.<sup>7</sup> Little translation was done prior to April 5, 1829,<sup>8</sup> when Oliver Cowdery, a New York school teacher, arrived at Harmony and was engaged as scribe.<sup>9</sup>

The translation progressed with “little cessation” until June of 1829 when David Whitmer, a friend of Cowdery’s came to Harmony with an invitation for Joseph and Oliver to continue their work at his father’s home in Fayette, New York.<sup>10</sup> Whitmer offered them free board and room and the assistance of himself and one of his brothers to aid in writing. Having need for help “in an undertaking so arduous,” Joseph and Oliver accompanied Whitmer to Fayette, where the remainder of the work was completed.<sup>11</sup> According to David Whitmer, the translation at his father’s home in Fayette occupied about one month—from June 1 to July 1, 1829.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Manuscript after Publication**

Upon completion of the translation, precautions were taken for protection of the manuscript during the printing of the book:

First, that Oliver Cowdery should transcribe the whole manuscript. Second, that he should take but one copy at a time to the office, so that if one copy should get destroyed, there would still be a copy remaining. Third, that in going to and from the office, he should always have a guard to attend him, for the purpose of protecting the manuscript. Fourth, that a guard should be kept constantly on the watch, both night and day, about the house, to protect the manuscript from malicious persons, who would infest the house for the purpose of destroying the manuscript. . . .<sup>13</sup>

John H. Gilbert, who set the type for the first edition of the Book of Mormon in the E. B. Grandin Printing office in Palmyra, New York, remembered that the printing “commenced in August 1829 and was finished in March 1830.”<sup>14</sup> Taking into consideration the time spent dodging “persecution” and losing part of the manuscript with its consequences, the actual writing time of the original manuscript covered about three months.

[th]at thou ~~mi~~ mightest be like unto this River continually ~~ru~~ run  
the fountain of  
[in]g into <sup>^</sup> all righteousness & he also spake unto Lemuel saying O that thou  
[m]ightest be like unto this vally firm & steadfast & immovable in keeping  
[th]e commandments of the Lord now this he spake because of the stiffneck  
[e]dness of Laman and Lemuel for behold they did murmur in many thin  
[g]s against their father because that he was a visionary man & that he had lead  
[th]em out of the land of Jerusalem to leave the land of their inheritance &  
[th]eir gold & their silver & their precious things & to perish in the wilder  
[ne]ss & this they said that he had done because of the foolish immaginations of  
[hi]s heart & thus Laman & Lemuel being the eldest did murmur against  
[th]eir father & they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God  
[w]ho had created them neither did they believe that Jerusalem that great city  
[co]uld be destruid according to the words of the prophets & they were like unto  
[th]e Jews which were at Jerusalem which sought to take away the life of  
[my] father & it came to pass that my father did speak unto them in the vally of  
[Le]muel with power being filled with the spirit untill their frames di[d]  
[sh]ake before him & he did confound them that they durst not utter against him where  
[fo]re they did do as he commanded them & my father dwelt in a tent & it came  
[to]rn that I Nephi being exceeding young nevertheless being large in sta[t]  
of God  
[u]re & also haveing great desires to know of the mysteries <sup>^</sup> wherefore I cried  
unto the Lord & behold he did visit me & did soften my heart that I did  
believe all the words which had been spoken by my father wherefore I  
did not rebell against him like unto my Brothers & I spake unto Sam  
makeing known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested  
unto me by his Holy spirit & it came to pass that he believed in my wo  
[r]ds but behold Laman & Lemuel would not hearken unto my words  
[&] being grieved because of the heardness of their hearts I cried unto the Lord for th  
Nephi  
[e]m & it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me saying blessed art thou <sup>^</sup> beca  
[u]se of thy faith for thou hast sought me diligently with lowliness of heart [&]  
in as much as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper ~~in~~ & sh[a]  
ll be lead to a land of promise yea even a land which I have prepared fo[r]  
you a land which is choice above all other lands & in as much as thy Br[e]

(Brackets on the left of the page identify letters that are not visible on the accompany-  
ing photograph but which are legible on the original.)

Little reference is made to the manuscript between the time of the Book of Mormon publication in 1830, and the deposit of the document in the Nauvoo House cornerstone eleven years later. Hyrum Smith was reported as saying that the manuscript “once fell into the hands of an apostate (I [Hyrum] think one of the Whitmers) and they had to resort to stratagem to get possession of it again.”<sup>15</sup>

On October 2, 1841, eye-witnesses declare that Joseph Smith placed the manuscript in the southeast cornerstone of the Nauvoo House, which was then being constructed. Warren Foote stated: “I was standing very near the cornerstone, when Joseph Smith came up with the manuscript of the Book of Mormon and said he wanted to put that in there, as he had had trouble enough with it. It was the size of common foolscap paper, and about three inches thick.”<sup>16</sup> Ebenezer Robinson, one-time editor of the *Times and Seasons* recalled:

After the brethren had assembled at the southeast corner of the foundation, where the cornerstone was to be laid, President Joseph Smith said: ‘Wait, brethren, I have a document I wish to put in that stone,’ and started for his house, which was only a few rods away, across Main Street. I went with him to the house, and also one or two other brethren. He got a manuscript copy of the Book of Mormon, and brought it into the room where we were standing, and said: ‘I will examine to see if it is all here,’ and as he did so I stood near him, at his left side, and saw distinctly the writing, as he turned up the pages until he hastily went through the book and satisfied himself that it was all there. . . . It was written on foolscap paper, and formed a package, as the sheets lay flat, of about two or two and a half inches thick, I should judge. It was written mostly in Oliver Cowdery’s handwriting, with which I was intimately acquainted, having set many pages of type from his handwriting, in the church printing office at Kirtland, Ohio. Some parts of it were written in other handwriting. He took the manuscript and deposited it in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House. . . .<sup>17</sup>

The manuscript remained in the cornerstone until 1882 when it was removed by Lewis Bidamon, who had married Emma Smith following the death of the Prophet, and was living in the house at the time. On September 27, 1882, the *Deseret News* printed a report from the Carthage, Illinois *Republican*, as follows:

Last Tuesday, while Major Bidamon was tearing down the walls of the eastern wing of the old ‘Nauvoo House,’ . . . he came across the corner stone, which was laid by the Prophet. . . at the time the building was commenced, which was in the year 1841. The stone was in the foundation, in the southeast corner, and in the center of it was a square cut chest, about 10 x 14 inches, and eight inches deep, covered with a stone lid, which fitted closely in a groove or shoulder at the top, and cemented around the edge with lead that had been melted and poured in the seam. On removing the lid, which was done with some difficulty, the chest was found to be filled with a number of written and printed documents, the most of them mouldy and more or less decayed. . . .<sup>18</sup>

After removing it from the cornerstone, Bidamon gave portions of the manuscript to Nauvoo visitors on five known occasions. One of these occurred on September 7, 1883, when Mrs. Sarah M. Kimball, a one-time resident of Nauvoo, returned to visit her former home:

I asked the lady friend with whom I was riding to call with me on Mr. Bidamon a former acquaintance; after learning where I was from, he recognized me and seemed pleased, we talked a little of times that were, and of persons gone. . . . I referred to his home which is a temporary four room building on the southwest corner of the foundation laid for the Nauvoo House. I asked why the heavy and extensive foundations around him were being torn up, he replied, that he had bought the premises, and the rock was torn up to sell, as he was poor and otherwise would not have been able to build. I said, I am interested in this foundation, because I remember there were treasures deposited under the chief corner-stone. He said, yes, I took up the stone box and sold it. . . . It had been so long exposed to the wet and weather that its contents were nearly ruined, I gave the coin to Joe and told him he could have the pile of paper. He said it was the manuscript of the Book of Mormon; but it was so much injured that he did not care for it. While we were talking, Mr. Bidamon's wife brought a large pasteboard box and placed it on my lap. It contained a stack of faded and fast decaying paper, the bottom layers for several inches, were uniform in size, they seemed to me larger than common foolscap, the paper was coarse in texture and had the appearance of having lain a long time in water, as the ink seemed almost entirely soaked into the paper, when I handled it, it would fall to pieces. I could only read a few words here and there just enough to learn that it was the language of the Book of Mormon. Above this were some sheets of finer texture folded and sewed together, this was better preserved and more easily read, I held it up, and said, 'Mr. B. How much for this relic?' He said, 'Nothing from you, you are welcome to anything you like from the box.' I appreciated the kindness, took the leaves that were folded and sewed together. . . .<sup>19</sup>

Four months after her return from Nauvoo, Mrs. Kimball wrote Joseph F. Smith: "I procured a relic from the corner-Stone of the Nauvoo House. You can have it if you will take the trouble to call. I am somewhat infirm, otherwise should have reported to you earlier."<sup>20</sup>

The Kimball acquisition is identifiable from a description given by George Reynolds, secretary of the First Presidency, who examined it in 1884 after it had been given to Joseph F. Smith. Reynolds described it as consisting of twenty pages (ten sheets) and containing the Book of Mormon text from 1 Nephi 2: 2 to 1 Nephi 13: 35. Mrs. Kimball's observation that some of the leaves "appeared larger than common foolscap," agrees with Reynolds' page measurement of 16 1/2 inches long by 6 5/8 inches wide,<sup>21</sup> which is longer than but not as wide as foolscap.

The largest known single acquisition of the manuscript occurred on May 21, 1885, when the Assistant Church Historian, Franklin D. Richards, and his son Charles C., visited Lewis Bidamon in Nauvoo:



. . . We were quite willingly shown all that remained of the Book of Mormon manuscript. . . The paper is yellow with age and from the moisture sweated from its own hiding place. It is brittle to the touch. Many of the leaves crumble like ashes and some of them are broken away. It is necessary to handle them with the utmost care. The writing is faint, and is not legible on many continuous lines, but fragmentary clauses, and even whole verses are occasionally discernible. . . .

When the proprietor saw the profound interest with which we regarded these things, he spoke to us about them with great respect and generosity. We talked with him upon the subject of the writings at considerable length, and through his complaisance, when we came away we brought with us all of the manuscripts. . . and have them now in our possession.<sup>22</sup>

The pages of the manuscript obtained by Richards on this occasion comprised two segments of the Book of Mormon text, reportedly covering 1 Nephi 15:5 to 2 Nephi 30; and Alma 2:19 to Alma 60:22. Mr. Richards did not indicate the number of pages he received from Bidamon. However, a comparison of present holdings with his listed references suggests that portions of the manuscripts he obtained have been either lost in transmission and handling, or an error was made in the reporting.<sup>23</sup>

Franklin Richards retained this portion of the manuscript until his death in 1899 when it passed to his son, Charles C. who, on December 13, 1946, presented it to President George Albert Smith.<sup>24</sup> The measurable leaves of the Richards acquisition appear to be foolscap (13 inches by 16 inches) paper folded and sewed to make 8 inch by 13 inch pages.

If Lewis Bidamon readily parted with segments of the document on these two occasions, such was not the case when the Utah businessman, Joseph W. Summerhays visited him on October 3, 1884:<sup>25</sup>

I was introduced to Major L.C. Bidamon. . . I said to him Major they tell me over in Missouri that you have found the manuscript of the Book of Mormon in this house. How is it? He answered: In 1882 I made some alterations in the house and in taking down the east wing in the southeast corner I came across a stone box about 10 x 15—6 inches deep. The box was sealed with a stone cap in it. I found a Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Hymn Book, Times & Seasons, a letter addressed to the Pres. of the United States written by Lyman Wight, setting forth the wrongs of our people, some manuscript and less than one thousand dollars in cash (a joke), all in a bad state of preservation. Then turning to his wife he said to her, 'bring the papers,' which she did. I examined them, especially the Manuscript. I cannot tell what it is, for it is very rotten and the ink is faded but from the more visible, I make the following extracts: 'And again I say unto to you that it is my will that my servant Lyman Wight should continue in preaching in Zion in the spirit of meekness confessing me before the world and I will bear him up as on Eagles wings and he shall beget glory and honor.'<sup>26</sup> I think this is from the Doc. & Cov. I quote further, 'And they said unto me what meaneth the river of water which our father saw and I said unto them that the water which my father saw was filthyness and so much was his mind swallowed up in other things

that he beheld not the filthyness of the water. I said unto them that it was ah awful gulph which seperated the wicked from the tree of life and also from the saints of God and I said unto them that it was a representation of that awful Hell which the Angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked.<sup>27</sup> I think [this] is from the Book of Mormon. Some of the Manuscript was, I think, extracts from the Book of Mormon, and some from the Doc. & Cov. Some of it was in printers takes and had been corrected. The pencil marks being plain and the ink faded. I ask [ed] the Major for some of the manuscript. He refused, but when he left the room his wife gve me one leaf and a few leaves of the Bible. . . .<sup>28</sup>

Mr. Summerhays did not specify which page of the manuscript he received on this occasion.<sup>29</sup> However, of the items he saw and described, three of them—Section 124 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lyman Wight petition, and the page containing 1 Nephi 15:26–29—are found among the Book of Mormon manuscript material in the Historian’s Office. At least two of these (the Doctrine and Covenants Revelation, and the page from the Book of Mormon) were obtained by Franklin Richards in his 1885 visit.<sup>30</sup>

A fourth recipient of a portion of the manuscript was Edward Stevenson, who had accompanied the Book of Mormon witness, Martin Harris, from Ohio to Utah in 1870. In an account of his visit to David Whitmer’s son in Richmond, Missouri, in September 1888, Stevenson recorded seeing the printer’s copy of the manuscript then in the possession of the Whitmer family. He added that the original had been placed in the Nauvoo House cornerstone, that Franklin D. Richards had a portion of it at that time, and “I have a piece of the same and deposit[ed] a portion in the Museum of Salt Lake City. . . .”<sup>31</sup> A year later, addressing a congregation in Provo, Utah, Stevenson remarked that Mr. Bidamon had given him “a small portion [of the manuscript] as a relic, which I now have. . . .”<sup>32</sup> The present location of this segment of the manuscript is unknown.

Another page of the Book of Mormon manuscript was identified on August 8, 1931, when the *Deseret News* printed a photograph showing a part of 1st Nephi 14, with the notation that it represented “nearly a full page of the manuscript which is now in the possession of A. B. Kesler,” a Salt Lake City resident.

A few final pieces of the manuscript were obtained by Andrew Jenson at Nauvoo on October 6, 1888: “I called on Lewis C. Bidamon and while conversing with him on the early history of Nauvoo he brought to me some small pieces of paper, pouring them into my hat remarking, ‘Mr. Jenson, those are the last fragments of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon. If you want them you may have them.’”<sup>33</sup> These fragments, equivalent to about one page, are totally illegible.

The Kimball and Richards acquisitions account for sixty-eight of the seventy-two manuscript leaves of the Book of Mormon now filed in

the Church Historian's Office. Present evidence does not indicate the source of the remaining four.

### **The Preservation of the Manuscript**

Those who described the manuscript after its removal from the Nauvoo House cornerstone were unanimous in observing that it had been severely damaged by the elements. So delicate were the pages that any subsequent handling resulted in further deterioration. Consequently, action was taken to permanently preserve it from further decay. Since portions of the manuscript were almost unreadable, an ultra-violet photograph was taken of each page to increase the legibility. This work was done sometime between 1949 and 1954 by the Genealogical Society microfilm photographer, Ernst Koehler, who was filming records for the Church Historian's Office at the time. These photographs offer the best means for reading the text of the manuscript.

A second step in the preservation process occurred in 1968–1969, when Earl Olson, Assistant Church Historian, took the loose sheets of the manuscript to the W. J. Barrow Restoration Shop in Richmond, Virginia, for deacidification and lamination.<sup>34</sup> Ten sheets, comprising the Kimball acquisition were laminated September 25–26, 1968, and the remainder of the manuscript was completed June 19–25, 1969.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Handwriting of the Manuscript**

At least five scribes aided Joseph Smith during the writing of the original Book of Mormon manuscript. Martin Harris wrote for Joseph during the initial stages of the translation in Harmony, Pennsylvania, prior to the loss of the 116 pages of the manuscript in 1828. There is no definite evidence that he continued to write after that. Emma Smith, in answer to a question in 1879 regarding those who were scribes for Joseph during the translation of the Book of Mormon, named, in addition to herself, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris and her brother Reuben Hale.<sup>36</sup> The bulk of the manuscript was written by Oliver Cowdery after his arrival in Harmony in April 1829. Reuben Miller quoted Cowdery on the subject at the time of the latter's return to the Church in October 1848. "I wrote with my own pen the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the prophet."<sup>37</sup> Following the move to Fayette, New York, in June 1829, Joseph Smith recorded that John Whitmer "assisted us very much in writing during the remainder of the work," and previous to that, David Whitmer had offered his services "when convenient."<sup>38</sup> Reuben Hale most likely wrote prior to the move to Fayette, while Joseph was residing at the Hale residence in Pennsylvania.

laman and lemuel Repent and go with Nephi  
 that i praid unto the lord saying O lord according to my faith  
 which is in me wilt thou deliver me from the hands of my bre  
 thren yea even give me strength that i may burst these ban[ds]  
 with which I am bound and it came to pass that When i  
 had said these words behold the bands were loosed from of my <sup>hands and</sup> feet  
 And i stood before my brethren and i spake unto them aga[in]  
 ware  
 And it came to pass that they <sup>^</sup> angry with ~~me~~ me again ~~and~~  
 and saught to lay hands uppon me but behold one of the  
 daughters of ishmael yea & also her mother and one of the son[s]  
 of ishmael did plead with my brethren insomuch that they  
 did soften their hearts and they did cease striving to take  
 Away my life and it came to pass that they ware sorraful bec  
 -aus of their wickedness insomuch that they did bow down  
 before me & did plead with me that i would forgive  
 them of the thing that they had done against and  
 it came to pass that i did frankly forgive them all  
 that they had done and i did exort them that they would  
 pray unto the lord their god for forgiveness and it came  
 to pass that they did so and after that they had done pray  
 -ing unto the lor ~~the~~ we did again travel on our journ[ey]  
 toward the tent of our father and it came to pass that we did  
 Came down unto the tent of our father and after that i  
 And my brethren and all the house of ishmael had com[e]  
 dow unto the tent of my father they did give thanks  
 unto the lord their god and they did offer sacrifice and of  
 -fer burnt ofrings unto him and it came to pass that we ha[d]  
 getherd to geather all manner of seeds of every king both  
 of grain of every kind and also of the seeds of fruits of  
 every king and it came to pass that while my father  
 tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us saying  
 behold i have dreamd a dream or in other words i  
 have seen a vission and behold because of the thing

## Original Book of Mormon Manuscript Holdings in the Church Historian's Office

Text	Scribe*	Alma 24: 23–25: 5	OC	Alma 47: 23–36	OC
		Alma 25: 6–16	OC	Alma 47: 36–48: 11	OC
<i>Kimball Acquisition 1884</i>		Alma 25: 16–26: 11	OC	Alma 48: 11–23	OC
1 Ne. 2: 2–23	OC	Alma 26: 11–24	OC	Alma 48: 23–49: 9	OC
1 Ne. 2: 23–3: 18	OC/JW?	Alma 26: 24–35	OC	Alma 49: 9–20	OC
1 Ne. 3: 18–4: 2	JW?	Alma 26: 35–27: 12	OC	Alma 49: 20–30	OC
1 Ne. 4: 2–20	JW?/OC	Alma 27: 12–24	OC	Alma 50: 1–12	OC
1 Ne. 4: 20–37	U	Alma 27: 24–28: 6	OC	Alma 50: 12–26	OC
1 Ne. 4: 38–5: 14	U	Alma 28: 6–29: 5	OC	Alma 50: 26–37	OC
1 Ne. 5: 14–7: 3	U	Alma 29: 5–30: 2	OC	Alma 50: 38–51: 8	OC
1 Ne. 7: 3–17	U	Alma 30: 2–17	OC	Alma 51: 8–19	OC
1 Ne. 7: 17–8: 11	U	Alma 30: 17–28	OC	Alma 51: 19–31	OC
1 Ne. 8: 11–27	U	Alma 30: 28–42	OC	Alma 51: 31–52: 8	OC
1 Ne. 8: 27–9: 4	U	Alma 30: 42–53	OC	Alma 52: 8–17	OC
1 Ne. 9: 4–10: 11	U	Alma 30: 53–31: 5	OC	Alma 52: 17–28	OC
1 Ne. 10: 11–11: 1	U	Alma 31: 5–19	OC	Alma 52: 28–53: 2	OC
1 Ne. 11: 1–18	U	Alma 31: 19–35	OC	Alma 53: 2–10	OC
1 Ne. 11: 18–32	U	Alma 31: 35–32: 9	OC	Alma 53: 10–22	OC
1 Ne. 11: 32–12: 8	U	Alma 32: 10–24	OC	Alma 53: 22–54: 11	OC
1 Ne. 12: 8–23	JW?	Alma 32: 24–36	OC	Alma 54: 11–24	OC
1 Ne. 13: 1–18	JW?	Alma 32: 37–33: 5	OC	Alma 54: 24–55: 15	OC
1 Ne. 13: 18–29	JW?	Alma 33: 5–22	OC	Alma 55: 15–28	OC
1 Ne. 13: 29–35	JW?	Alma 33: 22–34: 12	OC	Alma 55: 28–56: 8	OC
		Alma 34: 12–31	OC	Alma 56: 8–22	OC
<i>Richards Acquisition 1885</i>		Alma 34: 31–41	OC	Alma 56: 22–37	OC
1 Ne. 15: 5–15	JW?	Alma 35: 1–14	OC	Alma 56: 38–51	OC
1 Ne. 15: 15–25	JW?	Alma 35: 14–36: 10	OC	Alma 56: 51–57: 6	OC
1 Ne. 15: 25–36	JW?	Alma 36: 11–26	OC	Alma 57: 6–17	OC
1 Ne. 15: 36–16: 14	JW?/OC	Alma 36: 26–37: 8	OC	Alma 57: 17–30	OC
1 Ne. 16: 14–31	OC	Alma 37: 8–19	OC	Alma 57: 30–58: 6	OC
1 Ne. 16: 31–17: 5	OC	Alma 37: 19–30	OC	Alma 58: 6–17	OC
1 Ne. 17: 5–20	OC	Alma 37: 30–43	OC	Alma 58: 18–31	OC
1 Ne. 17: 20–34	OC	Alma 37: 43–38: 8	OC	Alma 58: 33–59: 3	OC
1 Ne. 17: 34–48	OC	Alma 38: 9–39: 7	OC	Alma 59: 4–60: 2	OC
1 Ne. 17: 48–18: 6	OC	Alma 39: 8–40: 3	OC		
1 Ne. 18: 6–18	OC	Alma 40: 3–15	OC	<i>Unknown Acquisition</i>	
1 Ne. 18: 18–19: 3	OC	Alma 40: 15–41: 2	OC	Alma 62: 36–49	OC
1 Ne. 19: 3–12	OC	Alma 41: 2–14	OC	Alma 62: 50–63: 11	OC
1 Ne. 19: 12–20: 1	OC	Alma 41: 14–42: 13	OC	Alma 63: 11–Hel. 1: 5	OC
1 Ne. 20: 1–20	OC	Alma 42: 13–29	OC	Hel. 1: 6–17	OC
1 Ne. 20: 20–21: 14	OC	Alma 42: 29–43: 11	OC	Hel. 1: 18–28	OC
1 Ne. 21: 14–22: 4	OC	Alma 43: 11–22	OC	Hel. 1: 28–2: 8	OC
1 Ne. 22: 4–14	OC	Alma 43: 22–36	OC	Hel. 2: 8–3: 8	OC
1 Ne. 22: 14–26**	OC	Alma 43: 36–47	OC	Hel. 3: 8–22	OC
1 Ne. 22: 26–		Alma 43: 47–44: 5	OC		
2 Ne. 1: 7	OC	Alma 44: 5–14	OC	(Additional fragments)	
2 Ne. 1: 8–18**	OC	Alma 44: 14–45: 2	OC	Alma 11: 20–21	OC
2 Ne. 1: 18–30	OC	Alma 45: 2–17	OC	Alma 11: 37	OC
Alma 22: 22–27	OC	Alma 45: 17–46: 6	OC	Alma 11: 44–45	OC
Alma 22: 30–34	OC	Alma 46: 6–18	OC	Alma 19: 5–7	OC
Alma 23: 1–6	OC	Alma 46: 18–28	OC	Alma 19: 18	OC
Alma 23: 7–24: 3	OC	Alma 46: 28–40	OC	Alma 19: 21	OC
Alma 24: 5–14	OC	Alma 46: 40–47: 10	OC	3 Ne. 26: 5	OC
Alma 24: 14–23	OC	Alma 47: 10–22	OC		

(Pairings indicate the two sides of a single sheet of the Ms.)

\* OC—Oliver Cowdery; JW?—possibly John Whitmer; U—Unidentified scribe. Every sheet of the Kimball Acquisition and the first eleven sheets of the Richard Acquisition were entirely preserved. Of those remaining approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of each sheet is missing.

\*\* Although photographed by Ernst Koehler in 1949–54, these two sheets were missing when the Manuscript was laminated in 1969.

against them to Battle & I Nephi Beheld that  
the gentiles which had gone out of Captivity  
by  
were delivered <sup>^</sup> the power of God out of the  
Hands of all other Nations & it came to pass  
that I Nephi Beheld that they did prosper in the  
Land & I Beheld A Book & it was carried forth  
among them & the Angel saith unto me know  
est thou the meaning of the Book & I saith I  
know not & he saith Behold it proceedeth out  
of the mouth of a Jew & I Nephi Beheld it & he  
saith unto me the Book which thou Beholdest  
is a record of the Jews which contain the covanan  
-ts of the Lord which he hath maid unto the House  
of israel & it also containeth many of the Prophecies  
of the Holy Prophets & it is a record like unto the  
engravings which are upon the plaits of Brass  
save there are not so many Nevertheless they  
the  
contain the covenants of <sup>^</sup> Lord which he hath  
maid unto the Hause of Israel wherefore they  
are of great worth unto the gentiles & the Ange  
l of the Lord said unto me thou hast Beheld  
that the Book proceeded forth from the mou  
-th of a Jew & when it proceeded forth from the  
mouth of a Jew it contained the fulness of the  
the  
Gospel of the Lord of whom <sup>^</sup> twelve Apostles  
Bore record & they Bore record according to the  
truth which is in the Lamb of God wherefore  
these things go forth from the Jew in puri  
ty unto the gentiles according to the truth  
which is in God & after that they go forth by  
the hand of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb  
from the Jews unto the gentiles Behold after  
this thou seest the formation of that great  
& abominable church which is the most



Of the 144 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript in the Church Historian's Office, 124 pages are in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery; eleven were probably written by John Whitmer; and twelve others are the work of an unidentified scribe.

Factors that aid in identifying handwriting presuppose that each person has distinctive writing characteristics from which available samples may vary; and although no two writing samples of an individual are exactly alike, variation is confined more to superficial details than fundamental writing habits. The identification of basic writing characteristics provides the means for detailed comparison and study. Many examples of Oliver Cowdery's handwriting appear in the manuscript sources of early Church history, due, no doubt, to his close association with Joseph Smith, his professional background as a school teacher, his appointment as the first Church Historian, and his ability as a penman. The isolation of basic features of Cowdery's writing permits an accurate identification of his work in the Book of Mormon manuscript.<sup>39</sup>

One characteristic of the Cowdery writing in the manuscript that almost never appears in his other writings is the complete lack of punctuation and paragraphing—a peculiarity that applies to the other two scribes as well. The lack of such detail, however, by one whose usual mode of writing did not preclude this, adds credence to the claim of a dictated text for the Book of Mormon. Available samples of Cowdery's writing show consistent punctuation, with the single exception of Revelation that were apparently dictated to him.<sup>40</sup>

The handwriting on eleven pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript contains similarities to known samples of John Whitmer's writing. However, identification is not positive since existing variations between known samples of Whitmer's writing and the manuscript writing may not be within the limit of acceptable differences. Only further comparison of earlier samples will clarify this point.

The writer of a third portion of the manuscript is unknown. Available handwriting samples of known associates of Joseph Smith during the Book of Mormon translation provide no clue to the scribe of twelve pages of the manuscript. Basic writing characteristics of this person bear no resemblance to known samples of the writing of Emma Smith, Martin Harris, Hyrum Smith, Samuel Harrison Smith, Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer and David Whitmer. Neither do they compare with Joseph Smith's own hand.

Of the three amanuenses whose writing appears on the manuscript, that of the unidentified scribe contains the most error. Since this portion of the manuscript is more legible than the rest, published excerpts have been taken almost exclusively from these pages.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, the analyst who seeks to calculate scribal error for the whole book on the basis of these examples may receive a faulty impression.

The appearance of Oliver Cowdery's handwriting on what appears to be the third page of the Book of Mormon manuscript (the first page of the surviving fragments) raises a question of the beginning point of his work as scribe. If, as evidence indicates,<sup>42</sup> some translation of the Book of Mormon had been done prior to Cowdery's arrival in Pennsylvania in April 1829, such writing would naturally precede Cowdery's. If Oliver commenced writing at the beginning of 1st Nephi, any writing that preceded his could not have exceeded two pages. It may be, however, that his work on the manuscript commenced at a later point in the text. Joseph Smith, after being directed not to retranslate the lost 116 pages of the manuscript, was advised to insert in their place the "engravings which are on the plates of Nephi."<sup>43</sup> This would correspond to the first 133 pages of the printed book, comprising 1st Nephi to the Words of Mormon. The location of the Cowdery writing at the beginning of the text of 1st Nephi followed by the apparent hand of John Whitmer, may indicate that Oliver began writing at a point in the manuscript beyond the loss of the 116 pages, and that the "plates of Nephi" were written after the completion of the rest of the Book.

In conclusion, the history of the original Book of Mormon manuscript shows that many individuals have contributed to the preservation of part of a unique religious document. And while the further identification of handwriting may yet establish particular facts, an analysis of remaining fragments of the manuscript lends support to early statements regarding the origin of the book: (1) that several scribes were employed during the writing process, (2) that the book originated from a dictated text, and (3) that Oliver Cowdery wrote the major part of the manuscript.

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1. Joseph Smith, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *The Saints' Herald*, Vol. 26 (Oct. 1, 1879), p. 290.

2. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City, 1948), Vol. 4, pp. 461, 537 [Cited hereafter as *DHC*.]

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 12.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 18..

5. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

7. Preston Nibley (ed.), *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), p. 135.

8. That some translation was done just prior to Cowdery's coming is indicated from a March 1829 revelation: ". . . when thou hast translated a few more pages thou shalt stop for a season, . . ." Doctrine and Covenants 5:30. See also Sec. 10:41.

9. *Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio), October 1834, pp. 14–15.

10. *DHC*, Vol. I, p. 35.



11. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
12. *Kansas City Journal*, June 5, 1881.
13. Nibley, *History of Joseph Smith*, p. 157.
14. Andrew Jenson and Edward Stevenson, *Infancy of the Church* (Salt Lake City, 1889), p. 37.
15. Letter from John Brown to John Taylor, Dec. 20, 1879.
16. Warren Foote, "Dairy," Oct. 2, 1841, Vol. 1, p. 57. This statement agrees with that of John Brown, who also witnessed the proceedings. He quoted Joseph Smith as saying: "I have had a great deal of trouble to preserve it. I now deliver it up to the Lord and will not have the care of it any longer." Brown to Taylor, letter cited above in note 15.
17. Ebenezer Robinson, *The Return*, Vol. 2, pp. 314–315.
18. "Relics of the Old Nauvoo House," *Deseret News*, September 27, 1882. This date for the removal of the manuscript from the cornerstone is verified in the conversation of Joseph W. Summerhays with Lewis Bidamon on Oct. 3, 1884 in which Bidamon is recorded as saying: ". . . in 1882 I made some alterations in the house and in taking down the east wing in the south east corner I came across a stone box. . . ." Summerhays, "Diary," October 3, 1884.
19. Letter of Sarah M. Kimball to George Reynolds, July 19, 1884, quoted in George Reynolds, "History of the Book of Mormon," *The Contributor*, Vol. 5 (July 1884), p. 366.
20. Letter from Sarah M. Kimball to Joseph F. Smith, October 10, 1883.
21. Reynolds, "History of the Book of Mormon," p. 366.
22. Letter of Franklin D. Richards to the Editor of the *Deseret News*, "Visit to Pueblo, Independence, Carthage, Nauvoo, Richmond, etc.," *Deseret News*, July 1, 1885, pp. 380–381.
23. See listing on p. 273.
24. "An address delivered by Charles C. Richards at the Sacrament Meeting held in the Hawthorne Ward of the Sugar House Stake in Salt Lake City, Utah, Sunday Evening, April 20, 1947," pp. 8–12; also "Book of Mormon Manuscript Original presented to Church," *Deseret News Church News*, December 14, 1946.
25. Joseph William Summerhays, "Diary," October 3, 1884. Change in this quotation is limited to punctuation and spelling.
26. Summerhays was copying from the manuscript of the revelation of January 19, 1841 (D&C 124:18) which inaugurated the building of the Nauvoo House. The revelation had been placed in the cornerstone with the Book of Mormon manuscript.
27. This quotation is from 1 Nephi 15:26–29.
28. Reference to "printers takes" and penciled corrections in regard to the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon would indicate that portions of it may have been used by the printer of the 1830 or the 1837 editions of the book. The preface of the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon states that it had been "carefully re-examined and compared with the original manuscripts by elder Joseph Smith, Jr. . . . assisted by . . . O. Cowdery."
29. Alma B. Summerhays of Salt Lake City, who kindly provided the above quotation from his father's diary, was unaware of the content or location of the page obtained by his father when contacted in January 1970.
30. Franklin D. Richards, *Deseret News*, pp. 380–381.
31. Edward Stevenson, "Diary," September 12, 1888.
32. *Utah Enquirer* (Provo, Utah), August 30, 1889.
33. Statement of Andrew Jenson, March 18, 1938. An additional portion of the original manuscript was obtained by the Reorganized Church at one time, but "for

want of more adequate preservation procedures disintegrated long ago.” Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1969), p. 27.

34. So brittle was the paper, that a preliminary step to lamination required the removal of the binding thread and the cutting of each sheet along the fold.

35. Specifically, the Barrow method of restoration and preservation of the Book of Mormon manuscript consisted of the removal of harmful acidic impurities from the paper by soaking it in a solution of calcium hydroxide followed by calcium bicarbonate. After washing and drying, the document was sandwiched between layers of cellulose acetate film and then placed between layers of transparent tissue paper to provide maximum strength.

36. Joseph Smith, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” p. 289.

37. Reuben Miller, “Diary,” October 21, 1848. Compare *Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, pp. 14–15.

38. *DHC*, Vol. 1, p. 49.

39. Holograph samples of Oliver Cowdery’s writing in the Historian’s Office are found in Volume 1 of the Patriarchal Blessings, Book A-1 of Joseph Smith’s “History of the Church,” and the “Oliver Cowdery Papers.” Other samples are located in the Cowdery Docket Book and Letters at the Huntington Library in California, the printer’s copy of the Book of Mormon manuscript in the possession of the Reorganized Church at Independence, Missouri, and the Newel K. Whitney acquisition recently obtained by Brigham Young University.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Consult *The Improvement Era* (June 1941), p. 342; (November 1960), p. 803; (March 1911), p. 384; and *Deseret Evening News* (Dec. 23, 1899).

42. D&C 5:30; 10:41. Nibley, *History of Joseph Smith*, pp. 135, 141.

43. D&C 10:30, 41.