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# Oliver Cowdery, the Schoolteacher

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In the winter of 1829 the Manchester Ontario New York School Board of Trustees (of which Hyrum Smith was a trustee) had a schoolmaster position available. Twenty-six-year-old Lyman Cowdery of Arcadia, New York, was given the position by the Board of Trustees. Lyman was the Marshal of the Court Martial of the 39<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Infantry in Ontario County, New York. As marshal he would have been handed a warrant from the military court directing him to collect fines, arrest persons as charged, and commit persons to jail. A more clarifying description of Lyman Cowdery's duties was "bounty hunter."

The fact that the Board of Trustees would hire Lyman Cowdery to fill the schoolmaster position may say something about the disciplinary problems in the classroom. Although he accepted the position, the following day Lyman had changed his mind. He appeared before the Board of Trustees with his brother Oliver Cowdery, who had the temperament and skills necessary to take his place. Oliver was hired.

Oliver taught at the Manchester Union School District No. 11. He took his board and room with the Joseph Smith Sr. family. Lucy Mack Smith wrote,

[Oliver] had not been in the place long till he began to hear about the plates from all quarters and immediately he commenced importuning Mr. Smith upon the subject but he did not succeed in eliciting any information from him for a long time—At length however he gained

my husband's confidence so far as to get a sketch of the facts which related to the plates.<sup>1</sup>

Upon learning of Joseph Smith and the golden plates, Oliver Cowdery wrote, "The subject . . . seems working in my very bones, and I cannot, for a moment, get it out of my mind. . . . If there is a work for me to do in this thing, I am determined to attend to it."<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, after the school session ended in the winter of 1829, Oliver journeyed with Joseph's brother Samuel Smith to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to meet the young prophet.

"On the 5<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1829, Oliver Cowdery came to my house, until which time I had never seen him," wrote Joseph. His visit proved providential, for Joseph had "called upon the Lord, three days prior to the arrival of . . . Oliver, to send him a scribe, according to the promise of the angel; and he was informed that the same should be forthcoming in a few days." Joseph wrote, "Two days after the arrival of Mr. Cowdery (being the 7<sup>th</sup> of April) I commenced to translate the Book of Mormon, and he began to write for me."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, p. 140. Joseph Smith Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, Document Transcript, Ch. 28.

<sup>3</sup> *History*, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–August 30, 1834], p. 13. Joseph Smith Papers.