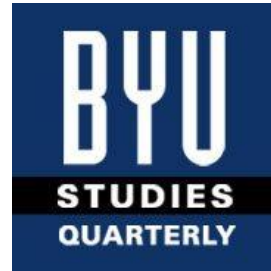




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## The Zelph Story

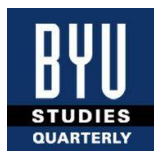
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**Abstract:** When the twenty men who formed the vanguard of Zion's Camp left Kirtland, Ohio, on 1 May 1834, they could not know that one of their most lasting and intriguing contributions to Latter-day Saint history would take place, not on a Missouri battlefield but rather on top of a large mound in Illinois. There, on 3 June 1834, members of Zion's Camp located a few bones, including a broken femur and an arrowhead, approximately a foot below the earth's surface, and these remains became the catalyst for revelation to Joseph Smith regarding the skeleton's identity. Joseph called the land "the plains of the Nephites." They believed that the mounds had belonged to "that once beloved people," and they interpreted the mere fact that skulls and bones were readily found as evidence of the divine authenticity of the book.



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# The Zelph Story

Kenneth W. Godfrey

When the twenty men who formed the vanguard of Zion's Camp left Kirtland, Ohio, on 1 May 1834, they could not know that one of their most lasting and intriguing contributions to Latter-day Saint history would take place, not on a Missouri battlefield but rather on top of a large mound in Illinois.<sup>1</sup> This elevation, located about one mile south of modern Valley City, has been called Naples-Russell Mound Number 8, Pike County. According to historian Stanley B. Kimball, this mound is a "typical prehistoric Middle Woodland mortuary complex of the Hopewell culture."<sup>2</sup> There, on 3 June 1834, members of Zion's Camp located a few bones, including a broken femur and an arrowhead, approximately a foot below the earth's surface, and these remains became the catalyst for revelation to Joseph Smith regarding the skeleton's identity. Subsequently, the information recorded by several of the camp's members would be used by historians, geographers, and other scholars as evidence that Book of Mormon events, especially those reported in its closing chapters, took place in the north-eastern part of the United States.<sup>3</sup> Because this account is cited so frequently, usually as it is given in the *History of the Church*, it seems useful to examine closely the primary sources reporting the details of this extraordinary event.

The day after the finding of Zelph, the Prophet Joseph Smith, "on the banks of the Mississippi River," wrote a letter to his wife, Emma. While he does not mention Zelph by name, Joseph describes the setting in general:

The whole of our journey, in the midst of so large a company of social honest and sincere men, wandering over the plains of the Nephites, recounting occasionally the history of the Book of Mormon, roving over the mounds of that once beloved people of the Lord, picking up their skulls & their bones, as a proof of its divine authenticity, and gazing upon a country the fertility, the splendour and the goodness so indescribable, all serves to pass away time unnoticed.<sup>4</sup>

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Naples-Russell Mound Number 8, Pike County, Illinois,  
where Zeph was found

Photograph, taken March 1989, courtesy of Donald Q. Cannon

Obviously, Joseph and his companions were inspired and elated as they moved closer to their land of promise in Missouri. The territory they were in was vast, rich, and unsettled. The ghostly mounds of former inhabitants, however, reminded Joseph and his camp that the land had once been occupied. As they went, they naturally talked about the Book of Mormon. Joseph called the land “the plains of the Nephites.” They believed that the mounds had belonged to “that once beloved people,” and they interpreted the mere fact that skulls and bones were readily found as evidence of the divine authenticity of the book. Evidently they were most impressed by the evidence that a prior civilization had been destroyed from off the face of this land, for the Book of Mormon similarly reports the destruction of a large group of people on this continent. Simple confirmation of the fact that destructions had taken place was evidence enough for these adventurers that the Book of Mormon was true.

Beyond enjoying this general confirmation of their faith, the members of Zion’s Camp received more specific information about one skeleton in particular. Although Joseph did not mention this particular episode in his letter to Emma, seven others in the camp made records about the finding of Zelph’s bones and what Joseph said about them. These records are generally consistent with one another, but they leave a number of details in doubt. Who was Zelph? Was he a Nephite or a Lamanite? When did he die? What army was he in? As will be seen, the answers to these questions cannot be given with certainty from the complex historical sources that resulted from this event. While this means that Book of Mormon scholars must remain tentative in drawing implications from this notable incident, it does not diminish the fact that Joseph was moved by the spirit of revelation to speak about Zelph and his noble past in connection with Book of Mormon peoples or their descendants.

#### FINDING ZELPH

The seven accounts written or dictated by members of the expedition will be discussed in the apparent order in which they were written. The data they furnish is summarized in a chart as Appendix 1. In quoting from these diaries and journals, minor improvements in some spelling and punctuation have been made to enhance readability.<sup>5</sup>

Reuben McBride’s account is shorter and less detailed than the others, but it may have been the first one recorded, possibly having been written on the day the find occurred, although in no

case are we completely sure when the information was put down in writing. McBride writes:

Tuesday 3 [June 1834] visited the mounds. A skeleton was dug up [by] Joseph, said his name was Zelph a great warrior under the Prophet Omandagus. An arrow was found in his Ribs—[page break; top of next page begins with different, lighter ink, indicated here by italic; it is partly illegible, but appears to read:] *His name was Zelph a warrior under the Prophet Omandagus Zelph a white Lamanite*  
*Crossed the Missipi River on the 4 [th of June] 2 days in Crossing*  
*June 6 resumed our journey [illegible] at Salt River Staid 12 days From Salt River to Richmond Ray County [illegible] that [illegible] the [illegible]*  
 [June] 19 on fishing River  
 [June] 20 went 5 miles meeting held counsel  
*June 24 Colera [illegible]*  
 [June] 23 Arived at Rush Creek  
*Rush Creek Mo Clay Co*  
 Choler [June] 24.

—which he said he suposed ocaisoned his death Said he was killed in battle. Said he was a man of God and the curse was taken off or in part he was a white Lamanite **was known from the atlantic to the Rocky Mountains** [bold type indicates words added inter-linearly].

June, the 4 came to the Missipi River were 2 days in Crossing being very high one mile wide

On the 7th arived at Salt River. Staid their 12 days to recrute and reorganise. Some came from Michigan and joined the company.<sup>6</sup>

According to Reuben McBride, then, Zelph was a great warrior under Omandagus, a man of God, and a white Lamanite known from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains, and the arrow that killed him was found with his remains.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Smith is credited with uncovering the bones, but little more is said.

A puzzling thing about this diary is the way that it duplicates itself. The first entry for Tuesday, 3 June, appears at the bottom of page 3 in dark ink. The top of page 4 repeats in light ink the information that Zelph was a warrior under the Prophet Omandagus and adds that Zelph was “a white Lamanite.” The light ink continues on page 4 to give information about events up to 24 June and then at the bottom of the page the dark ink returns midsentence to the events of 3 June. The account then reports again the events from 4 June to 24 June on page 5. Finally, the information that Zelph “was a man of God” and “was known from the atlantic to the Rocky Mountains” was added above the line, apparently sometime later as an afterthought. This seems to indicate that McBride made entries in his diary about the Zelph incident on perhaps as many as four separate occasions. The information about his name, his status



as a warrior under Omandagus, and his being a white Lamanite appears to be present in the earliest entries. The information surmised about his death, the removal of the curse, and his widespread reputation seems to have been added about three weeks later.

Another member of Zion's Camp, twenty-two-year-old Moses Martin, also kept a diary of his experiences while traveling through Pike County. He reported the incident in the following terms:

This being in the Co of Pike, here we discovered a large quantity of large mounds. Being filled with curiosity we excavated the top of one so[m?]e 2 feete when we came to the bones of an extraordinary large person or human being, the thigh bones being 2 inches longer from one Socket to the other than of the Prophet whi who is upwards of 6 feete high which would have constuted some 8 or 9 feete high. In the trunk of this skeleton near the vitals we found a large stone arrow which I suppose brought him to his end. Soon after this Joseph had a vision and the Lord shewed him that this man was once a mighty Prophet and many other things concerning his people. Thus we found those mounds to have be deposits for the dead which had falen no doubt in some great Batles. In addition to this we found many large fortifications which als[o] denotes sivilisation and an innumerable population which has falen by wars and comotion and the Banks of this Beautiful River became the deposit of many hundred thousands whose graves and fortifications have are overgrown with the sturdy oak 4 feete in diameter.<sup>8</sup>

It appears that Moses Martin was present when the digging occurred, since he reports vividly the party's curiosity that led them to excavate and find the bones. It seems likely that this diary entry was made while the party was still in Pike County, shortly after the event. It is interesting to note that while Martin is impressed with the size of the skeleton and with Joseph's vision of the unnamed prophet, he says nothing about his being killed in battle, about his ancestry, his name, his being a white Lamanite, or his having served under a prophet chief named Omandagus or Onandagus. Instead, in the Martin account, the deceased man was "a mighty prophet." No details are given about who did the excavating.

Wilford Woodruff, who five years later would be called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, recorded in his journal the following account of what transpired:

While on our travels we visited many of the mounds which were flung up by the ancient inhabitants of this continent, probably by the Nephites & Lamanites. We visited one of those Mounds and several of the brethren dug into it and took from it the bones of a man. Brother Joseph had a vission respecting the person he said he was a white Lamanite, the curse was taken from him or at least in part, he was

killed in battle with an arrow, the arrow was found among his ribs, one of his thigh bones was broken, this was done by a stone flung from a sling in battle years before his death, his name was Zelph. Some of his bones were brought into the camp and the thigh bone which was broken was put into my waggon and I carried it to Missouri. Zelph was a large thick set man and a man of God, he was a warrior under the great prophet that was known from the hill Cumorah to the Rocky mountains. The above knowledge Joseph received in a vision.<sup>9</sup>

Sometime later (date unknown), Woodruff added interlinearly in the same paragraph the following information:

considered to be 300 feet above the level of the Illinois river, three persons dug into the mound & found a body, Elder Milton Holmes took the arrow out of the back bones that killed Zelph & brought it with some of the bones into the camp, I visited the same mound with Jesse J. Smith. Who the other persons were that dug into the mound & found the body I am undecided.

Apparently at the same time, he also added the word “Onandagus” after the words “great prophet,” and inserted the words “on East sea” after “Cumorah.”

Woodruff writes that the Prophet “Onandagus” was known “from the hill Cumorah on East sea to the Rocky mountains.” This is the earliest source for this geographical data. (In Reuben McBride’s account it is Zelph who was widely known.) Woodruff also reports that the information about the skeleton came through a vision given to the Prophet Joseph. Two other accounts of this incident were later penned by Woodruff, but their wording is essentially identical to the one above except for omitting the information added interlinearly (see appendix 1).

From the last few lines of the interlinear addition, it seems that Wilford Woodruff visited the mound only after the original group had made the find and that he remained “undecided” about who dug and found the body. While the point is not entirely clear, it appears that he was not with the original party. Thus his value as a witness to the events on the mound is somewhat diminished. He almost certainly was a party to discussions that took place away from the mound, however, since the thigh bone was carried in his own wagon.

The longest and most detailed near-contemporaneous account was written by Levi Hancock, later one of the Presidents of the Seventy. Like Wilford Woodruff, he was not with the group that discovered the remains of Zelph, but he saw the bones and the arrowpoint they brought back to camp. Hancock wrote the following account in his journal:

On the way to Illinois River where we camped on the west side in the morning, many went to see the big mound about a mile below the crossing, I did not go on it but saw some bones that was brought with a broken arrow, they was layed down by our camp Joseph addressed himself to Sylvester Smith, "This is what I told you and now I want to tell you that you may know what I meant; this land was called the land of desolation and Onendagus was the king and a good man was he, there in that mound did he bury his dead and did not dig holes as the people do now but they brought there dirt and covered them untill you see they have raised it to be about one hundread feet high, the last man buried was Zelf, he was a white Lamanite who fought with the people of Onendagus for freedom, when he was young he was a great warrior and had his th[igh] broken and never was set, it knited together as you see on the side, he fought after it got strength untill he lost every tooth in his head save one when the Lord said he had done enough and suffered him to be killed by that arrow you took from his brest." These words he said as the camp was moving of[f] the ground; as near as I could learn he had told them something about the mound and got them to go and see for themselves. I then remembered what he had said a few days before while passing many mounds on our way that was left of us; said he, "there are the bodies of wicked men who have died and are angry at us; if they can take the advantage of us they will, for if we live they will have no hope." I could not comprehend it but supposed it was all right.<sup>10</sup>

Hancock reports different information than do the earlier accounts when he tells us the land was named Desolation and Onendagus was a king and a good man, but he says nothing about his being a prophet. However, he does inform us that Zelph lost all his teeth but one, and he implies that Zelph was relatively aged at death. His account makes no mention of the Hill Cumorah or of Onendagus's wide fame, but it agrees that Zelph was a white Lamanite. Hancock's is the only source to report any specific circumstances surrounding Joseph Smith's statements about the skeleton, and this information may be significant: Joseph spoke about it to Sylvester Smith. This is not a trivial point, for Sylvester Smith was a troublemaker in the camp who "rebelled against the order of the camp," eventually apostatizing.<sup>11</sup> We do not know to what extent others heard Joseph speak about Zelph or whether some of their information was filtered through Sylvester Smith. The possibility seems small, however, that Sylvester Smith had much influence on the story, since no other account mentions him. Joseph's addressing him specifically may have been intended as a warning of evil influences and threats from "the bodies of the wicked men" buried in these mounds who were "angry" at the camp as they marched through "desolation." Such threats surrounding the group required their fullest obedience and alertness in order to escape.



An account by Heber C. Kimball of the discovery of Zelph was published in the *Times and Seasons* in 1845 under the title, "Extracts from H. C. Kimball's Journal." An identical account, except for a lack of editing, is found in the autobiography Kimball dictated to James Sloan after the Saints arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. The version in the autobiography goes as follows:

On Tuesday the 3rd, we went up, several of us, with Joseph Smith Jr. to the top of a mound on the bank of the Illinois river, which was several hundred feet above the river, and from the summit of which we had a pleasant view of the surrounding country: we could overlook the tops of the trees on to the meadow or prairie on each side the river as far as our eyes could extend, which was one of the most pleasant scenes I ever beheld. On the top of this mound there was the appearance of three altars, which had been built of stone, one above another, according to the ancient order; and the ground was strewn over with human bones. This caused in us very peculiar feelings, to see the bones of our fellow creatures scattered in this manner, who had been slain in ages past. We felt prompted to dig down into the mound, and sending for a shovel and hoe, we proceeded to move away the earth. At about one foot deep we discovered the skeleton of a man, almost entire; and between two of his ribs we found an Indian arrow, which had evidently been the cause of his death. We took the leg and thigh bones and carried them along with us to Clay county. All four appeared sound. Elder B. Young has yet the arrow in his possession. It is a common thing to find bones thus drenching upon the earth in this country.

The same day, we pursued our journey. While on our way we felt anxious to know who the person was who had been killed by that arrow. It was made known to Joseph that he had been an officer who fell in battle, in the last destruction among the Lamanites, and his name was Zelph. This caused us to rejoice much, to think that God was so mindful of us as to show these things to his servant. Brother Joseph had enquired of the Lord and it was made known in a vision.<sup>12</sup>

Only Heber C. Kimball says that Zelph was killed in "the last destruction among the Lamanites," and the meaning of this phrase is unclear. "Last" may refer to the final destruction of the Nephites fifteen hundred years earlier, or it may have reference to the last battle of Zelph's people, whoever they were. The battle was "among the Lamanites," which may mean between the Nephites and the Lamanites but may also refer to a battle of Lamanites against other Lamanites, if we assume that the Lamanites may have had prophets among them. Kimball's account is also unique in that he says he went with Joseph Smith to the top of the mound and relates that they felt prompted to dig down into the mound, but first they had to send for a shovel and hoe. The discovery was made after digging about one foot.<sup>13</sup> The other early accounts do not say

that Joseph was present when the bones were dug up; rather they state or imply that he was not involved until some time later. According to Kimball, it was later in the day while continuing on the journey westward that the Prophet made the identification of the person whose bones they had found. This is consistent with Hancock's statement that Joseph spoke "as the camp was moving off the ground." Kimball states further that this was made known by means of a vision to Joseph after he had inquired of the Lord.

Kimball's account has a different tone from the earlier ones, especially those of Martin and Hancock. Instead of mentioning any concerns about death, destruction, evil influences, the angry dead, or thousands of graves, Kimball paints an idyllic scene, pleasantly overlooking meadow and tree tops, and he recalls their "peculiar feelings" as feelings of sympathy for these "fellow creatures" whose bones had been scattered in ages past. His depiction is in keeping with the joyous spirit reflected in Joseph's letter to Emma.

Kimball also speaks of locating certain remains that had "the appearance" of three altars, a detail mentioned in no other primary source. The passage of time may have dimmed Kimball's memory on this point. His account appears to be a later recollection, written possibly around 1843. (See the connection with the work of Willard Richards discussed below.) Moreover, Kimball's account makes no explicit reference to the Nephites, and he sees the value of Joseph's vision primarily not in what it revealed about the ancient inhabitants of that region, but in how it showed that "God was so mindful of" the camp and especially of his "servant, Brother Joseph."

George A. Smith, another member of Zion's Camp who became an Apostle, included the following information in a history prepared in 1857: "Monday, 2 June 1834: Some of us visited a mound on a bluff about 300 feet high and dug up some bones, which excited deep interest among the brethren. The President and many others visited the mound on the following morning."<sup>14</sup> According to this brief version, Joseph's visit to the mound came on the morning after the discovery of the skeleton.

Sometime after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, probably during the 1850s, Wilford Woodruff began writing his autobiography. An examination of the manuscript in his own hand, now in the Church Archives, reveals that when he came to that part of his life when the bones of Zelph were found he added information not found in his journal account. Woodruff's autobiographical account is as follows:

During our travels we visited many mounds thrown up by the Ancient inhabitants of Nephites and Lamanites, this morning we went unto a high mound near the river Joseph & many of the Brethren went up this mound was very high from the top of it—we could overlook the tops of the trees as far as our vision could extend and the scenery was truly delightful. On the top of the mound were stones which presented the Appearance of three Alters having been erected one above the other according to the Ancient order of things & human bones were strun upon the ground. We had taken a shovel along with us Brother Joseph wished us to dig into the mound we dug into it about one foot & came upon the skeleton of a man almost entire and an Arrow was found sticking in his back bone Elder Milton Holmes picked it out & brought it into camp with one of his leg bones which had been brocken He put the leg bones in my waggon & I carried it to Clay County Missouri. Brother Joseph feeling anxious to learn something Governing the man, prayed to the Lord & the Lord gave him a vision in open day while lying in his waggon, this mound & his history was placed before him. His name was Zelph, He was a white Lamanite the curse had been taken off from him because of his faith and righteousness He had embraced the gospel, he was a short stout thick set man, He had been a great warrior, Had joined the Nephites & fought for them under the direction of the great Onandagus who held sway & command over the Armies of the Nephites from the Hill Cumorah & Eastern sea to the rocky mountains though the Book of Mormon does not speak of him, He was a great warrior leader & great prophet Zelph had his thigh bone brocken from the sling of a stone while in battle in the yr of his youth He was killed with the Arrow sticking in his back bone the vision of the great prophet at the time that Zelph was killed was opened to the prophet Joseph & there [word unclear] were heaped upon the earth & that great Mound of near 300 Feet High placed over them. I felt impressed to bury Zelph's thigh bone in Temple Block at Jackson County Missouri but I did not have an opportunity and I brought it to Clay County near the house owned by Colonel Arthur & occupied by Lyman Wight.

At the end of the account, written in a different hand and probably at a later date, are the words, “The arrow head is now in possession of his wife Emma Woodruff.”<sup>15</sup>

In this account, written upwards of twenty years after the event, Joseph Smith is described as lying on his back in his wagon when he received the vision in “open day” regarding not only Zelph but the mound and its history. Zelph is here described as a “short, stout, thick set” man, in contrast to the extremely tall man in the Moses Martin account. According to Woodruff, Zelph had joined the Nephites and fought for them under the direction of the Prophet Onandagus, who “held sway” from the Hill Cumorah and eastern sea to the Rocky Mountains. Zelph’s thigh bone was broken by a stone while in a battle in his youth, and he was killed by the arrow found in his back. We are led to believe that the thigh bone was buried near the Clay County house owned by a Colonel Arthur and

that Emma Woodruff had possession of the arrow, not Brigham Young or Burr Riggs, as in other accounts. This might indicate that President Young did not attach any particular significance to either the arrow or the remains in which it was found. Finally, in this account, Zelph was clearly associated with the Nephites, as was Onandagus.

On 22 February 1893, James E. Talmage reported a visit with Wilford Woodruff during which President Woodruff showed him “a sacred relic then in his possession in the shape of an Indian arrow head.” This arrow was said to have been the cause of the death of the white Lamanite, Zelph. According to Talmage’s account the arrow point had come into Wilford Woodruff’s possession through Zina Young Card, a daughter of Brigham Young, who had formerly had possession of it. At the suggestion of George F. Gibbs, his secretary, President Woodruff then dictated the following account of the finding of Zelph:

While traveling with Zion’s camp, through the State of Ohio, we came to a very high mound, to the top of which we climbed by means of steps over which grass had grown. The steps were very wide, probably about twelve feet. We found the top of the mound to be quite level and to cover a great deal of ground. After overlooking the surrounding country, and descending half way down we were halted by command of the Prophet Joseph. We had taken a shovel with us to the top of the mound, thinking we might have some use for it, and after halting, the Prophet, speaking to the man who had the shovel, told him to throw up the dirt at a certain place to which he pointed. After removing a little more than six inches of soil the skeleton of a man was discovered, from a joint in whose backbone the Prophet drew a flint arrow head which had been the means of taking his life.

The Lord showed the Prophet Joseph that this was the skeleton of a white Lamanite named Zelph, and that he fought under a great chieftain named Onandagus, whose dominion covered an immense body of country. The book of Mormon does not mention the name of this Indian Chief, Onandagus.<sup>16</sup>

In this account, dictated fifty-nine years after the event, Woodruff says that he accompanied the Prophet onto the hill, which was not the case according to his earlier accounts; he also adds details that are absent from his journal and from the other primary sources. He tells us they took the hoe and the shovel with them, while others said they had to send for them after they arrived on top of the hill. He also states that they were halfway down the hill before they began digging and that they commenced at the request of the Prophet himself. President Woodruff also tells us that they found ancient steps which they used to make their way up the hill. According to James L. Bradley, who has visited the mound many times, there are no steps leading to the top, or altars. However, the

writer recently climbed the eastern side of the mound and found in certain places indentations that might be described as steps. Understandably, some details had faded in the memory of President Woodruff and other points had been logically added over the space of many intervening years. Still several basic parts of the story are recognizable in this late recollection.

My purpose in scrutinizing these accounts closely is not in any way to discredit the diligent writers of these diary and journal entries. Given the circumstances under which these records were kept and the independent viewpoint of most of the authors, it is remarkable that they agree in as many respects as they do. There can be no doubt that the men of Zion's Camp were deeply impressed by the discovery on 3 June 1834 of the bones of a man Joseph Smith called Zelph. Nevertheless, the accounts give varying and sometimes conflicting details. Interestingly, the earlier accounts do not expressly identify Zelph with the Nephites, as do the later accounts. Perhaps this is because Joseph's statements to his brethren were not as clear to them at the time they were made as they seemed in retrospect or as we might be inclined to assume today. It also appears that some information couched in somewhat speculative terms in the earlier accounts later came to be understood with greater certainty and specificity. For these reasons, close and cautious examination of these historical records is necessary.

#### THE ZELPH STORY AND THE *HISTORY OF THE CHURCH*

The foregoing examination of the primary sources for the Zelph story has laid the foundation for a comparison of them with the section on Zelph in the *History of the Church*, the most familiar source on this subject. The story is related in this history as if Joseph Smith himself were telling it, but that is not actually the case, of course. How then did the story reach its present form in this history?

In 1842, Willard Richards, as Church Historian, was assigned the task of compiling a large number of documents and producing a history of the Church from them. He worked on this material between 21 December 1842 and 27 March 1843. He himself had not joined the Church until 1836, but he would easily have learned from associates that Joseph Smith had kept no record of the march of Zion's Camp. Therefore, Richards presumably had to rely on the writings or recollections of Heber C. Kimball, Wilford Woodruff, and perhaps others for his information. The McBride and Martin accounts in particular, and perhaps also the Hancock record, may have been unknown to him, as the writers were not prominent Church figures. It is possible that Richards consulted with Joseph



Smith, for the Prophet was overseeing the preparation of the history.

Blending the sources available to him, and perhaps using oral accounts from some of the members of Zion's Camp, but writing as if he were Joseph Smith, historian Richards drafted the story of Zelph as it appears in the "Manuscript History of the Church, Book A-1" (words in *italic* are in the handwriting of Wilmer Benson):

Tuesday the 3rd During our travels we visited several of the mounds which had been thrown up by the ancient inhabitants of this country, ~~Nephites, Lamanites &c.~~ and this morning I went up on a high mound near the river, accompanied by *several* the brethren. From this mound we could overlook the tops of the trees and view the prairie on each side of the river as far as our vision could extend and the scenery was truly delightful.

On the top of the mound were stones which presented the appearance of three altars ~~having been erected~~, one above the other, according to ancient order and *the remains of human* bones were strewn over the surface of the ground. The brethren procured a shovel and hoe, and removing the earth to the depth of about one foot discovered the skeleton of a man, almost entire, and between his ribs *the stone point of* was a Lamanitish arrow, which evidently produced his death. Elder *Burr Riggs* Brigham Young retained the Arrow, ~~and the brethren carried some---~~

The contemplation of the scenery *around before* us produced peculiar sensations in our bosoms and *subsequently* the vision of the past being open to my understanding by the Spirit of the Almighty, I discovered that the person whose Skeleton *we had seen was before us* was a white Lamanite, a large thick set man and a man of God. *His name was Zelph.* He was a warrior *and chieftain* under the great prophet Onandagus who was known from the hill ~~Cumorah~~ or eastern Sea, to the Rocky Mountains, ~~His name was Zelph.~~ The curse was taken from *Zelph him*, or at least, in part. one of his thigh bones was broken by a stone flung from a sling, while in battle, years before his death. He was killed in battle, by the arrow found among his ribs, during a ~~last~~ great struggle with the Lamanites and Nephites: *Elder Woodruff carried the thigh bone to Clay county.*<sup>17</sup>

It is apparent that a number of details were not settled in Richards's mind as he drafted and revised this statement. A close study of the primary accounts enables us to see how Richards probably came to write what he did. Since this was only one small incident in a long narrative, he understandably did not go to great lengths to check for detailed consistency in what he wrote. At any rate, he introduced minor differences or discrepancies into the story. For example, Wilford Woodruff's "inhabitants of this continent" became "the inhabitants of this country" (others would later say "county"), and Woodruff's statement that mounds in the area had been built "probably by the Nephites and Lamanites" became

an implied certainty when Richards left out the word “probably.” The mere “arrow” of the three earliest accounts became an “Indian Arrow” (as in Kimball), and finally a “Lamanitish Arrow.” The phrase “known from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains,” as in the McBride diary, became “known from the Hill Cumorah” (stricken out) or “eastern sea to the Rocky Mountains,” similar to words penned by Wilford Woodruff. The statement that the battle in which Zelph was killed occurred “among the Lamanites” (as in Kimball) became “with the Lamanites.” We cannot tell whether these changes were true to Joseph Smith’s original intent, for they give the account an air of greater precision than may have been originally present.

A second copy of the same material exists, known as “Manuscript History of the Church, Book A-2,” apparently written entirely in the hand of Wilmer Benson. It differs from the Richards version in a dozen details of spelling, punctuation, and phrasing, but only two differences are substantive. Where Richards describes Zelph as “a man of God,” Benson puts “a son of God,” and Richards’s “a great struggle with the Lamanites” reads in Benson, “the last great struggle with the Lamanites.” The second manuscript was written as a back-up in case the first was lost or destroyed.

Following the martyrdom of the Prophet, the *Times and Seasons* published serially the “History of Joseph Smith.” When the story of the finding of Zelph appeared in the 1 January 1846 issue, it read as follows:

We encamped on the bank of the river until Tuesday the 3rd during our travels we visited several of the mounds which had been thrown up by the ancient inhabitants of this county, Nephites, Lamanites, &c., and this morning I went up on a high mound, near the river, accompanied by the brethren. From this mound we could overlook the tops of the trees and view the prairie on each side of the river as far as our vision could extend, and the scenery was truly delightful.

On the top of the mound were stones which presented the appearance of three alters having been erected one above the other, according to ancient order; and human bones were strewn over the surface of the ground. The brethren procured a shovel and hoe, and removing the earth to the depth of about one foot discovered [the] skeleton of a man, almost entire, and between his ribs was a Lamanitish arrow, which evidently produced his death, Elder Brigham Young retained the arrow and the brethren carried some peices of the skeleton to Clay county. The comtemplation of the scenery before us produced peculiar sensations in our bosoms; and the visions of the past being opened to my understanding by the spirit of the Almighty I discovered that the person whose skeleton was before us, was a white Lamanite, a large thick set man, and a man of God. He was a warrior and chieftain under the great prophet

Omandagus, who was known from the hill Cumorah, or Eastern sea, to the Rocky Mountains. His name was Zelph. The curse was taken from him, or at least, in part; one of his thigh bones was broken, by a stone flung from a sling, while in battle years before his death. He was killed in battle, by the arrow found among his ribs, during the last great struggle of the Lamanites and Nephites.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the words crossed out in the Richards manuscript are, for some unknown reason, included in this publication, along with the point that the prophet's name was Omandagus. Brigham Young, not Burr Riggs, is still said to have retained the arrow, and the reference to the Hill Cumorah, from the unemended Wilford Woodruff journal, is still included in the narrative. Further, the concluding sentence in the *Times and Seasons* account reads, "during the last great struggle of the Lamanites and Nephites," whereas both the Richards and Benson manuscripts had crossed off "and Nephites."

The story of Zelph appeared again in June 1888 in the *Historical Record*, a periodical edited and published by Andrew Jenson, the Church's primary historical writer at that time. In this account, Burr Riggs is said to have retained the arrow, and the Hill Cumorah is still mentioned, as are the Nephites.<sup>19</sup> The 1904 first edition of the B. H. Roberts edited, seven-volume *History of the Church* repeats the account as Richards had left it. In 1948, after Joseph Fielding Smith had become Church Historian, explicit references to the Hill Cumorah and the Nephites were reintroduced.<sup>20</sup> That phrasing has continued to the present in all reprintings.

When Reorganized LDS Church historian Heman C. Smith, in 1922, wrote his "History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints 1805–1890," he followed the 1845 *Times and Seasons* account with only minor editing. However, he did not give Zelph's name.<sup>21</sup>

It is obvious, then, that historians in both the LDS and RLDS churches have written the accounts so that the reader believes he is reading the Prophet Joseph Smith's own words. While, as Dean Jessee has shown, this was an accepted practice among nineteenth-century historians,<sup>22</sup> it has misled many readers by conveying the impression that Joseph Smith personally recorded far more about the events in which he participated than was the case. Moreover, the official historians would be faulted by modern scholars both for shaping and modifying the published narratives to agree with particular sources without considering their factual merits and for ignoring several of the earliest sources. I shall not attempt to reconstruct what Joseph Smith may have said to members of Zion's

Camp regarding Zelph on 3 and 4 June 1834. His exact words are beyond our historical grasp. But it seems to me we are warranted in drawing certain conclusions from the available evidence.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ZELPH

It seems obvious that discussion and argumentation about historical and geographical questions in LDS circles has put more weight than is justified on the detailed phrasing of the account of Zelph as it is published in the *History of the Church*. Joseph Smith himself did not write much about the incident. He alluded to it only once, in his letter to Emma of 4 June 1834, when he identified the terrain over which the camp had marched as the “plains of the Nephites.” Evidently these plains were in some respect associated with, or comparable to, the battlefields of the Nephites, but beyond that it is unclear what Joseph meant by this expression.

An examination of the original accounts of the events of 3 June 1834 yields the following general descriptions: The extant accounts vary widely in length (from 40 to about 375 words) and in the range of information they cover. Where they report statements or observations about the same particular point, unanimity is rare; noticeably different “facts” are reported about the same events. Only Hancock’s account makes it perfectly clear that he was not a firsthand witness to the primary happenings. All the others leave it unclear whether the writers saw or heard for themselves some or all of what they report or whether their information came by hearsay. In no case are we certain how much time elapsed before the journal accounts were recorded.

The experience of historians and the experiments of psychologists have established that precise recall of details about a happening fades notoriously rapidly. Differences in the reported facts among the basic sources may owe in part to delays in recording. Certainly Wilford Woodruff’s recollections fifty-nine years after the event were markedly inaccurate, and Heber C. Kimball’s story, which he seems to have put on the record at least a decade after the Zelph affair, contains phrasings only uncertainly supported by other accounts. The earlier accounts are more tentative, including words such as “suposed” (McBride), “suppose” and “no doubt” (Martin), “probably” and “undecided” (Woodruff). The later accounts are more specific and certain. The chart in the appendix at the end of this essay shows the points of agreement and difference in these sources.

While it is impossible with the available evidence to reconstruct the exact process by which the narrative as it appears in the

*History of the Church* was constructed by historical writers, some points are apparent. Practically all elements of the story incorporated into the account by Willard Richards are found in just two sources, Woodruff and Kimball. Kimball's diaries begin with his British mission in 1837, and the journal from which the account of the finding of Zelph is taken was dictated from memory to Robert B. Thompson in 1840.<sup>23</sup> It is probable that Joseph Smith read what his clerks, Willard Richards and Wilmer Benson, wrote about this event for the *History of the Church*. Their manuscript accounts cross out all reference to "the Nephites" and to the "hill Cumorah." We cannot know on present evidence, however, whether the crossing out was at Joseph's instance or with his approval.

That members of Zion's Camp dug up a skeleton near the Illinois River in early June 1834 is certain. Equally sure is that Joseph Smith made statements about the deceased person and his historical setting. It is unclear which statements attributed to him derived from his vision, as opposed to being implied or surmised either by him or by others. Nothing in the diaries suggests that the mound itself was discovered by revelation. Moses Martin indicates that the men dug because they were "filled with curiosity." Levi Hancock simply reports that "many went to see the big mound about a mile below the crossing." Heber C. Kimball seems to say they went to the mound to get "a pleasant view of the surrounding country."

Most sources agree that Zelph was a white Lamanite who fought under a leader named Onandagus (variously spelled). Beyond that, what Joseph said to his men is not entirely clear, judging by the variations in the available sources. Therefore, those who try to support a particular historical or geographical point of view about the Book of Mormon by citing the Zelph story are on inconclusive grounds.

The date of the man Zelph remains unclear. Expressions such as "great struggles among the Lamanites," if accurately reported, could refer to a period long after the close of the Book of Mormon narrative as well as to the fourth century A.D. None of the sources before the Willard Richards composition, however, actually say that Zelph died in battle *with* the Nephites, only that he died "in battle" when the otherwise unidentified people of Onandagus were engaged in great wars "among the Lamanites." Archaeological research in mounds near the one where the bones of Zelph were discovered indicates that the mounds and the artifacts found within them belong to the Middle Woodland Period, dated somewhere between perhaps 100 B.C. and A.D. 500. However, the Zelph skeleton came from a shallow burial near the top of the mound.



Who knows whether it was intrusive, buried there more recently than the period of the main mound construction? Apostle John A. Widtsoe once wrote, “Zelph probably dated from a later time when the Nephites and Lamanites had been somewhat dispersed and had wandered over the country.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, it is unclear when Zelph himself lived.

Zelph was identified as a “Lamanite,” a label agreed on by all the accounts. This term might refer to the ethnic and cultural category spoken of in the Book of Mormon as actors in the destruction of the Nephites, or it might refer more generally to a descendant of the earlier Lamanites and could have been considered in 1834 as the equivalent of “Indian” (see, for example, D&C 3:18, 20; 10:48; 28:8; 32:2). Nothing in this study can settle the question of Zelph’s specific ethnic identity.

Exactly what Joseph Smith believed at different times in his life concerning Book of Mormon geography in general is also indeterminable. Only a few clues remain. For example, while the Church was headquartered in Nauvoo, Joseph read a best-selling book of his day by John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, which John Bernhisel had sent to him from the East. In a letter dated 16 November 1841, the Prophet thanked Bernhisel and wrote of the book that “of all histories that had been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct” and that it “supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon.”<sup>25</sup> Ten months later, the *Times and Seasons* printed an enthusiastic review of the Stephens volume. John Taylor was the editor, although Joseph Smith had shortly before announced his own editorial responsibility for the newspaper. The unnamed writer of the review (probably Wilford Woodruff) stated that “we have just learned . . . the city of Zarahemla . . . stood upon this land” (Guatemala, whose ruins Stephens was reporting). Still, other data seem to reflect a different view and make it uncertain just what geographical conception, if any single one, prevailed among the early Church leaders. Evidently Joseph Smith’s views on this matter were open to further knowledge. Thus in 1834, when Zelph was found, Joseph believed that the portion of America over which they had just traveled was “the plains of the Nephites” and that their bones were “proof” of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity. By 1842 he evidently believed that the events in most of Nephite history took place in Central America. While it is possible to reconcile these two views—for example by believing that the bulk of Nephite history occurred in Central America while only certain battles or excursions took place in Illinois—it is likely that the thinking of the early Church leaders regarding Book of Mormon geography was subject

to modification, indicating that they themselves did not see the issue as settled.<sup>26</sup> When the committee preparing the 1921 edition of the Book of Mormon (composed of George F. Richards, Orson F. Whitney, James E. Talmage, Anthony W. Ivins, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Melvin J. Ballard) met “to give certain brethren an opportunity to state their views regarding the geography of the Book of Mormon,” none of the scholars who spoke to the group used the Zelph story as evidence for their position. That was probably because the quartet who made presentations—Joel Ricks, Willard Young, B. H. Roberts, and President Ivins—generally argued that the Nephite-Lamanite civilization spoken of in the scripture was centered in South or Central America. A quarter of a century later, however, Joseph Fielding Smith used the Zelph story to support his view that the Hill Cumorah in the state of New York “is the exact hill spoken of in the Book of Mormon.”<sup>27</sup> The debate about Zelph’s relation to Book of Mormon geography will likely continue since the facts in hand do not allow for a decisive settlement of the matter.

Daniel J. Boorstin has reminded historians that they are both discoverers and creators, always trying to reduce or remove ambiguity. The successful historian leads his readers to take—or mistake—his accounts for what really occurred and was recorded. The historian’s labor is limited by the reliability of “the remains of the past as clues to what was really there.”<sup>28</sup> In the case of Zelph, the clues are sketchy and in some cases inconsistent. In such circumstances, it is the historian’s responsibility not only to gather and present the evidence but to advise caution in drawing conclusions.

APPENDIX

THE VARIOUS SOURCES AND SOME VARIATIONS IN CONTENT USED TO RECONSTRUCT THE STORY OF THE FINDING OF ZELPH

	McBride 1834	Martin 1834	Woodruff 1834	Hancock 1834	HC A1 1842-43	Kimball 1845	Times & Seasons January 1846	Woodruff 1850	George A. Smith 1857	Jenson 1888	Woodruff 1893	HC 1904 Edition	HC 1948 Edition
Where it took place	Illinois	Pike Co., Illinois	Illinois	west side of Illinois river	Illinois	on bank of Ill. river	Illinois		Illinois		Ohio		
Day of personal visit	3rd		"we visited" but implied not with the large group	"many went: I did not go"		3rd	3rd	3rd	2nd, "some of us visited"				
Day Joseph visited					3rd, morning, with several others	3rd, "with Joseph"	3rd	3rd	3rd, with many others				
Multiple mounds	yes	yes	yes		had visited several		yes	yes					
Who built mounds			probably Nephites and Lamanites				ancient inhab. of this country	ancient inhab. of this country					
Fortifications near		yes											
Land once called				Land of desolation									
Mound height			300 ft. above river	about 100 ft.	"high," overlooking prairie	several hundred ft. above river overlooking prairie		very high, 300 ft.	on a bluff about 300 ft. high		very high	Same as HC A1, 1842-43	Same as HC A1 and HC 1904 editions except where indicated
Bones seen on surface					yes	yes	yes	yes					
Altars seen					stones presented appearance of three altars	appearance of three altars	yes	three altars					
Steps up mound											yes		
Motive in digging		curiosity				felt prompted		Joseph told them to					

Dug at whose insistence								Joseph's			Joseph's		
Who dug	Joseph	we	several of the brethren addendum: M. Holmes and others implied					brethren	we or us				
Were tools sent for					yes	yes	procured	had shovel			had shovel		
Where dug on mound		top					top	top			halfway down		
Dug how deep		about two feet			about one foot	about one foot	one foot	one foot			little more than six in.		
Remains found	a skeleton	the bones of	a body, bones of a man	some bones brought back and a broken arrow	skeleton and arrow	almost entire skeleton, arrow	skeleton	skeleton	some bones		skeleton of a man	Same as HC A1, 1842-43	Same as HC A1 and HC 1904 editions except where indicated
Name of remains found	Zelph		Zelph		Zelph	Zelph	Zelph	Zelph			Zelph		
Was Zelph a warrior	a great warrior		yes	when young, great warrior	yes		yes	yes					
Was Zelph a captain					chieftan	officer	chief						
Was Zelph godly	a man of God	yes	a man of God		a man of God		yes	joined the Nephites					
Who was Zelph fighting under	Omandagus		Omandagus	Ondadages, Omandagus	Omandagus		Omandagus	Omandagus		Omandagus	Omandagus		Omandagus
Was Zelph a prophet	prophet	a mighty prophet	great prophet		great prophet			warrior and prophet					yes
Was Omandagus a chief/king				king and a good man			prophet	great warrior, leader, and prophet					

APPENDIX - Continued

	McBride 1834	Martin 1834	Woodruff 1834	Hancock 1834	HC A1 1842-43	Kimball 1845	Times & Seasons January 1846	Woodruff 1850	George A. Smith 1857	Jenson 1888	Woodruff 1893	HC 1904 Edition	HC 1948 Edition
Omandagus known from	Atlantic to Rocky Mountains		Hill Cumorah on the East sea to the Rocky Mountains		eastern sea to the Rocky Mountains		Hill Cumorah to Rocky Mountains	Hill Cumorah to Rocky Mountains		Hill Cumorah or eastern sea to Rocky Mountains			Hill Cumorah or eastern sea to Rocky Mountains
Cause of Zeph's death	arrow	large stone arrow	arrow		evidently a stone point, a "Lamanitish arrow"	"Indian arrow"	Lamanitish arrow	arrow	flint arrowhead				
Where was arrow point	ribs	in trunk near vitals	among his ribs, out of backbones	breast	between his ribs, among his ribs	between two ribs	between ribs	backbone	a joint in backbone				
Cause of death					during a great struggle with the Lamanites	in the last destruction among the Lamanites	last great struggle of Nephites and Lamanites		a last struggle with the Nephites and Lamanites			Same as HC A1, 1842-43	last struggle with the Nephites and Lamanites
Who removed arrow									Prophet				
Zeph's unusual size		estimate 8 or 9 feet high	large, thickset		large, thickset			short, stout, thickset man					yes
Aged				clearly implied				implied					
Prior broken thigh			yes	yes	yes		yes	yes					
A white Lamanite	yes		yes	yes			yes	yes	yes				
Curse removed	yes, "or in part"		yes, "at least in part"		yes, "or at least in part"			yes					Same as HC A1 and HC 1904 editions except where indicated



When Joseph explained about		soon after		as camp was moving	subsequently	"while on our way"	same day while on mound (implied)	lying in his wagon					
How Joseph learned about		a vision	a vision		visions of the past by Spirit	vision	vision	a vision in broad daylight			Lord showed Joseph		Same as HC A1 and HC 1904 editions except where indicated
Who was Joseph speaking to				Sylvester Smith								Same as HC A1, 1842-43	
How mounds built				they brought dirt and covered dead				by Nephites and Lamanites					
Mound's purpose				bury dead									
Multiple battles, deaths		some great battles, 100,000 dead											
Who kept the bones			W. W. carried thigh bone to Missouri		Elder Woodruff	we	brethren	Milton Holmes and Willford Woodruff					
Who kept arrow					Burr Riggs	Brigham Young	Brigham Young	Emma Woodruff		Burr Riggs			

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Roger D. Launius, *Zion's Camp* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1984), 50.

<sup>2</sup>Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 31. See also James L. Bradley, "The Naples-Russell Mound," unpublished research paper, Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives). A fine discussion of the route of Zion's Camp through Pike County, Illinois, is found in Edward B. Jelks, "Route of the Zion's Camp March across Pike County, Illinois, June 1834," *Bulletin of the Illinois Geographical Society* 28 (Fall 1986): 17–40. See also Charles W. Allen, "Evidence of Zion's Camp Crossing of the Illinois River," unpublished paper, copy in possession of the author. An archaeological survey of the Naples-Russell Mound Number 8 conducted by the National Register of Historic Places includes the following information: "First reported by Henderson in 1884, this mound is among the largest of the existing prehistoric earthworks in the lower Illinois River region. Artifacts recovered from early amateur excavations clearly identify this mound with the Middle Woodland Period (Henderson, 1884). The structure, therefore, reflects mortuary activity of approximately 2,000 years ago. The size of the mound suggests that it should be classed with other large Middle Woodland structures which Struever and Houart (1972) term local centers of the Hopewell Interaction Sphere. However, its location—if it is to be associated with the other earthworks of comparable size—is unique. The mound is located on a loessic bluff approximately three hundred feet above the Illinois River floodplain. In association with numerous smaller and perhaps more typical burial mounds, Naples-Russell Mound no. 8 clearly dominates the landscape. All other mounds of comparable size are located in the valley floodplain." In a letter to Stanley Kimball, Dr. Jane E. Buikstra, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Northwestern University, now at the University of Chicago, makes the following observations: "Archaeologists believe that the Middle Woodland Period is one of great cultural complexity in the eastern United States. During this time both Illinois and Ohio saw extensive population concentrations along the major river systems, with the Illinois River Valley being a major site of this phenomenon. Artifacts were manufactured from 'exotic' raw materials, such as copper, mica, and obsidian, and these artifacts were frequently deposited with the dead. Although there are many mound groups which we think date to this important, yet imperfectly understood, period, the Russell complex is unique due to the presence of the large Naples-Russell no. 8 Mound. This structure, which is much larger than any other bluff crest mound in Illinois, is a monument with special potential for archaeological investigation. A few Middle Woodland mounds of similar large size exist, and some of these have been excavated. However, in all cases the sites were located in the floodplain of the Illinois River, and the soils from which the sites were constructed were of a type which does not allow the preservation of human bones and most perishable artifact types. The potential for Naples-Russell #8 containing unique archaeologically recoverable data is great. Another important aspect of the Napoleon Hollow Complex is the presence of a relatively undisturbed habitation site nearby" (Jane E. Buikstra to Stanley B. Kimball, 4 August 1977, copy in author's possession). Because of the construction of the Central Illinois Expressway, thirteen mounds and several knolls were excavated, including mound number 8, where the members of Zion's Camp found Zelph. A report of these excavations may be found in Douglas K. Charles, Steven R. Leigh, and Jane E. Buikstra, ed., *The Archaic and Woodland Cemeteries at the Elizabeth Site in the Lower Illinois Valley* (Kampsville: Illinois Department of Transportation by the Center for American Archeology, Kampsville Archeological Center, 1988).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, George Q. Cannon, "Biography: Joseph Smith, the Prophet," *Juvenile Instructor* 11 (1875–76): 242; David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1981), 74–78; Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *Cumorah—Where?* (Oakland: Privately printed, 1947); Fletcher B. Hammond, *Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing Co., 1959); Cecil E. McGavin and Willard Bean, *Book of Mormon Geography* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1948); George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Book of Mormon Geography: The Lands of the Nephites and Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957); Joel Ricks, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Lands* (Logan, Utah: N.p., 1940); Norman C. Pierce, *Another Cumorah, Another Joseph* (N.p.: Privately printed, 1954); Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *One Fold, One Shepherd* (San Francisco: Books of California, 1958); J. A. Washburn, *From Babel to Cumorah* (Provo: New Era Publishing Co., 1937).

<sup>4</sup>Dean C. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984), 324.

<sup>5</sup>All primary documents are gratefully used here by permission of the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I also acknowledge the work of John W. Welch, Tim Rathbone, John L. Sorenson, James Treadway, and Brenda Miles at F.A.R.M.S. in helping to prepare this article for publication, and I express gratitude to the Church Educational System for sponsoring my research on this project.

<sup>6</sup>Reuben McBride, Diary, 3 June 1834, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>7</sup>John L. Sorenson, in a letter to the author, observes that the only period when an Indian might be known even approximately from the Rocky Mountains to the eastern part of the continent is likely limited to the Middle Woodland Period or Hopewell culture dating within the limits A.D. 1–500. It is possible, though less likely, that something of the same situation of widespread, interregional communication could date to the Mississippian Period, A.D. 1300–1600. It is of course also possible that the Zelph burial, which was near the surface at the mound's top, dated considerably later than the period of mound construction. For information regarding connections between Mesoamerica and the Hopewell Indians, see James B. Griffin, "Mesoamerica and the Eastern United States in Prehistoric Times," *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, 15 vols. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), 4:111–31; David S. Brose and N'omi Greber, *Hopewell Archaeology* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1979); "Cache in the Corn Field," *Time* 102 (29 October 1973): 123. Onandagus is the name of a tribe of Indians that belonged to the five-nation confederacy of the Iroquois who occupied upper New York state. At the time when 'the Peacemaker' (whom some authorities label as a prophet) came among these tribes, who much later would become known as the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onandaga, and the Cayuga, he found a powerful disciple in Hiawatha, a member of the Onondago society who was grieving at the deaths of his "beloved daughters." The objective of the Peacemaker, Hiawatha, and the other disciples was to make the world safe from irrational behavior. The center of their new world was to be Onandago, which was also to be the capital at which decisions affecting the continent would be made. The league the Peacemaker founded was characterized by many of the principles of democracy now embraced by the West. These people, called the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), furthermore perfected the skill of negotiating a truly peaceful settlement and provided their people with the vision of a totally peaceful future (see John Mohawk, "Origins of Iroquois Political Thought," *Northeast Indian Quarterly* 3 [Summer 1986]: 16–20).

<sup>8</sup>Moses Martin, Diary, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>9</sup>Wilford Woodruff, Diary, LDS Church Archives. This entry is on a page headed "May 8th, 1834." See also Scott Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 1:10.

<sup>10</sup>Levi Hancock, Diary, photocopy in LDS Church Archives. Typically Hancock did not let many days pass without writing in his diary.

<sup>11</sup>Hancock, Diary, 14 and 17 May 1834.

<sup>12</sup>Heber C. Kimball, Autobiography, LDS Church Archives. This was probably written after the Saints had arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. There is evidence that the autobiography was taken from the *Times and Seasons* 6 (1 February 1845): 788.

<sup>13</sup>As to how much time some of the members of Zion's Camp spent on the mound, it has been estimated that it would have taken them at least ten minutes to travel the mile from the camp to the mound—perhaps longer because it is a rather steep climb. Sending for a shovel and hoe would have taken at least another twenty minutes, and some archaeologists estimate it would have taken at least thirty minutes to excavate the almost complete skeleton of a large man. This would mean the group of men were on the mound for at least an hour. See letter of Edward B. Jelks to Warren D. Winston, 13 January 1984, copy in possession of Stanley B. Kimball.

<sup>14</sup>George A. Smith, Journal, 2 June 1834, LDS Church Archives. The following note was appended: "a narrative of which is published in the Church History."

<sup>15</sup>Undated autobiography of Wilford Woodruff, Wilford Woodruff Collection, LDS Church Archives. Wilford Woodruff wrote this autobiography in his own hand through page 50, or through the 25 November 1835 period of his life. After that, probably William Appleby or Robert Lang wrote as he dictated. Woodruff began writing the events in his life after the arrival of the Saints in the Salt Lake Valley.

<sup>16</sup>This account was obtained by Richard L. Anderson on 31 October 1986 from the George A. Smith family papers, MS 36, box 174, folder 1, p. 26, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City. Questions have been raised regarding the arrowhead referred to in the Woodruff account. When shown pictures of the arrowhead, archaeologists have indicated that it is not of a type common in the area of the Zelph mound. However, survey and archaeological work on the Zelph mound will take years to complete. Furthermore, as Donald T. Schmidt, former LDS Church archivist, indicates, "There are no indications however, that this is the same arrowhead spoken of by Wilford Woodruff" (Donald T. Schmidt to James L. Bradley, 3 February 1975, copy in author's possession). The arrowhead that was found in the Church Archives and shown to experts seems to be of the type used by the Plains Indians and is probably not more than a few hundred years old.

<sup>17</sup>Joseph Smith, *Manuscript History of the Church*, Book A-1, 3 June 1834, LDS Church Archives, see n. 1, Addenda p. 5.

<sup>18</sup>*Times and Seasons* 6 (1 January 1846): 1076.

<sup>19</sup>*Historical Record* 7 (June 1888): 581.

<sup>20</sup>Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902), 2:79–80. Compare 1948 edition, pp. 79–80. Fletcher B. Hammond states that Preston Nibley, Assistant Church Historian, had authorized him to say that "the 1904 edition of the *Documentary History of the Church*, vol. 2, pages 79–80, correctly reports the Zelph incident, and that part of the 1934 [sic] [1948] edition of the same history which differs from it is erroneous. That is to say that the Prophet Joseph did not say: 'Onandagus who was known from the hill Cumorah, or eastern sea to Rocky Mountains,' but he did say: 'Onandagus, who was known from the eastern sea to the Rocky Mountains.' He did not say Zelph was

killed 'during the last great struggle of the Lamanites and Nephites,' but he did say Zelph was killed in a battle during a great struggle with the Lamanites." However, as we have shown previously, it is impossible to know exactly what Joseph said on these matters. Therefore, even Preston Nibley's educated statement may attribute more to Joseph Smith than the facts warrant (see Fletcher B. Hammond, *Geography of the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Privately printed, 1959], 481-96).

<sup>21</sup>Heman C. Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 7 vols. (Independence, Mo.: Board of Publications of the Reorganized Church, 1922), 1:460-61.

<sup>22</sup>Dean C. Jessee, "Has Mormon History Been Deliberately Falsified," *Mormon Miscellaneous*, no. 2 (April 1982): 1-6; "The Reliability of Joseph Smith's History," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976): 23-46.

<sup>23</sup>Stanley B. Kimball, ed., *On the Potter's Wheel, The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), xii.

<sup>24</sup>John A. Widtsoe, "Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?" *Improvement Era* 53 (July 1950): 451.

<sup>25</sup>Letter of Joseph Smith to John M. Bernhisel, 16 November 1841, in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984), 501-2. For a discussion of other journal and diary entries concerning the possible location of Book of Mormon lands, see Ross T. Christensen, "The River of Nephi: An Archeological Commentary on an Old Diary Entry," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology* 158 (December 1984): 1-8. Christensen discusses some diary entries of Charles L. Walker, Reuben McBride, and Levi Hancock, and then treats the topic "How Much Did the Prophet Know?" (about Book of Mormon geography and archeological claims).

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co. and F.A.R.M.S., 1985), 8-23; John Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," *Review of Books about the Book of Mormon* 1 (Provo: F.A.R.M.S., 1989): 20-70. Even though the events of most of Nephite history may have taken place within a relatively small area, it is evident that cultural transmissions radiated out from Central America, both to the north and to the south (see "Mesoamericans in Pre-Spanish South America" *F.A.R.M.S. Updates* [November 1986]: 1, and "Mesoamericans in Pre-Columbian North America," *F.A.R.M.S. Updates* [February 1987]: 1).

<sup>27</sup>Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 3:232-36.

<sup>28</sup>Daniel J. Boorstin, "The Historian: 'A Wrestler with the Angel,'" *New York Times Book Review*, 20 September 1987, 1.