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## "... Publish It upon the Mountains": The Story of Martin Harris, Chapter III: Activities in Kirtland

Author(s): William H. Homer, Jr.

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**Abstract:** This series reviews Martin Harris' role in bringing forth the Book of Mormon, and discusses Harris' testimony of the Book of Mormon. The third part covers Harris' move to Kirtland with the Saints.

# "...publish it upon the mountains"

## THE STORY OF MARTIN HARRIS

by William H. Homer, Jr.

### Activities in Kirtland

#### CHAPTER III

MARTIN HARRIS was baptized at Fayette by Oliver Cowdery shortly after the Church was organized (April 6, 1830). Also baptized at the same time were the Prophet's father and mother and Orrin Porter Rockwell.<sup>1</sup>

The first recorded ordination of Martin Harris to an office in the priesthood, that of priest, occurred at the first conference of the Church, held at Fayette, June 9, 1830. Joseph Smith, Sr., and Hyrum Smith were ordained priests at the same conference.<sup>2</sup>

The first high priests were ordained at the conference held at Kirtland, June 3-6, 1831. Among those ordained high priests at that time were the Prophet's father, his brother Hyrum, and Martin Harris. Martin was ordained under the hands of Lyman Wight.<sup>3</sup>

During the summer of 1831 Martin Harris was called to accompany the Prophet on a mission to Missouri.<sup>4</sup> The missionaries traveled with companions, and Martin was paired with Edward Partridge. Their destination was the "land of our inheritance, where Zion should be built." Martin Harris was present at the consecration and dedication ceremonies of the land of Zion.

On August 3, 1831, the temple site was dedicated by Joseph Smith. Present also were Sidney Rigdon, Edward Partridge, W. W. Phelps, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and Joseph Coe. The scene was solemn and impressive.<sup>5</sup>

During this same month, August

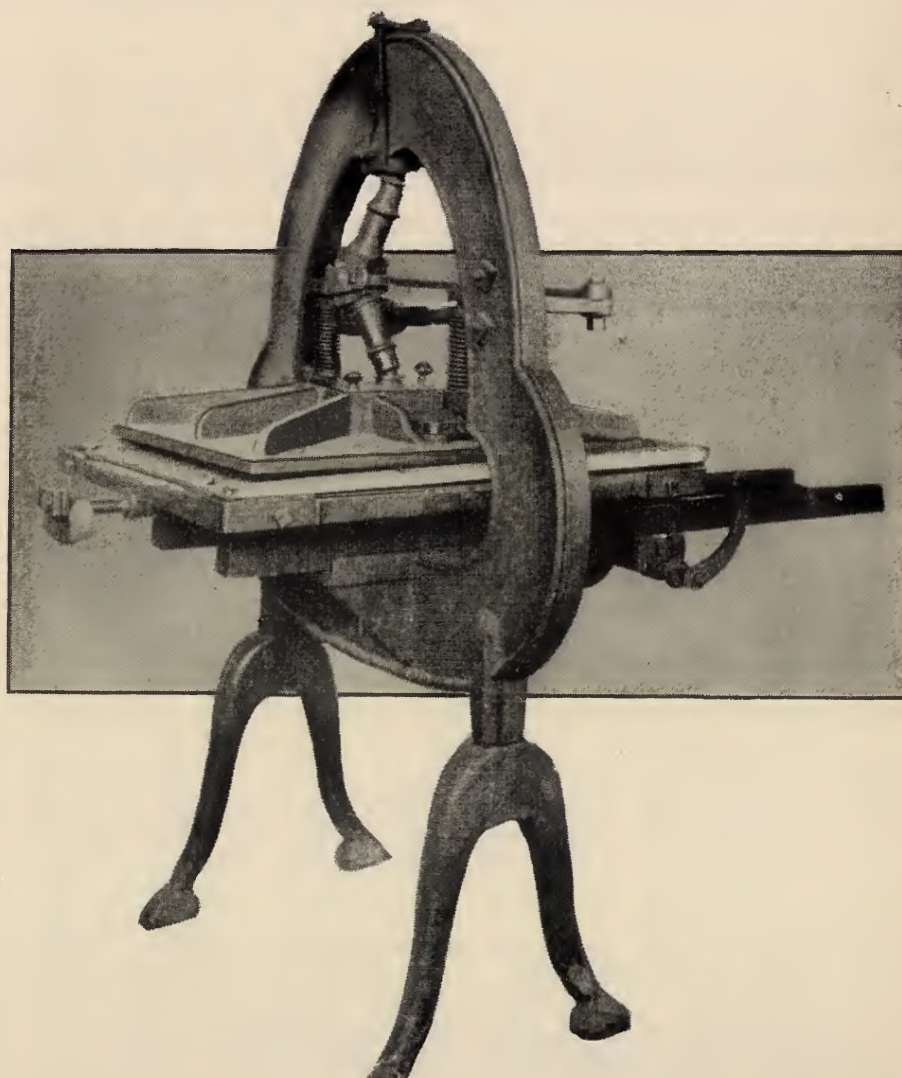
1831, Martin Harris was the first called by name through revelation to obey the law of consecration as an example to the church. "It is wisdom in me that my servant Martin Harris should be an example unto the church, in laying his money before the bishop of the church." (D. & C. 58:35.)

It is said he obeyed cheerfully.

Returning from the mission to Missouri, Martin Harris proceeded to establish his home in Kirtland, which

remained his permanent residence until he went to Utah in 1870.

The reputation of Martin Harris and the esteem in which he was held by his contemporaries at the time he moved from Palmyra to Kirtland, is expressed in a newspaper article published under date of May 26, 1831, stating that Martin Harris was one of about fifty persons to move to Ohio. It went on to say that his character was of the finest, but that his large circle of friends pitied him



The printing press on which the first edition of the Book of Mormon was printed, in 1830.

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City, 1950), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup>*Documentary History of the Church* (Salt Lake City, 1927), 1:188.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:199.



for his delusions in joining the Church.<sup>6</sup>

An important event in the progress of the Church took place in the autumn of 1831, the appointment of a body of stewards over the revelations and commandments. This group of men, of which Martin Harris was a member, was assigned the responsibility of managing the publication of the book of commandments and revelations.<sup>7</sup> The vital importance of this calling was emphasized when the Lord warned the committee of stewards, "And an account of this stewardship will I require of them in the day of judgment." (D. & C. 70:4.)

The fundamental significance and true worth of the revelations are forcefully expressed in the report of Joseph Smith:

My time was occupied closely in reviewing the commandments and sitting in conference for nearly two weeks; for from the first to the twelfth of November [1831] we held four special conferences. In the last, which was held at Brother Johnson's in Hiram, after deliberate consideration, in consequence of the book of revelations, now to be printed, *being the foundation of the Church in these last days*, . . . Therefore the conference voted that they prize the revelations to be worth to the Church the riches of the whole earth, speaking temporally. The great benefits to the world which result from the Book of Mormon and the revelations which the Lord has seen fit in His infinite wisdom to grant unto us for our salvation, and for the salvation of all that will believe, were duly appreciated.<sup>8</sup>

Martin Harris was for a time faithful and energetic in the performance of his duties in Kirtland. However, as early as the beginning of 1834, a spirit of discontent and criticism was made manifest in his attitude. It is recorded that during January 1834 Martin Harris was hailed before the council to answer charges of slander against Joseph Smith.<sup>9</sup>

He confessed that his mind was darkened, and that he had said many things inadvertently, calculated to wound the feelings of his brethren, and promised to do better. The council forgave him, with much good advice.<sup>9</sup>

On the following February 17, 1834, Martin Harris was chosen a member of the first high council to be organized in this dispensation.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Painesville (Ohio) *Telegraph*, cited in Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America* (Independence, Mo. 1942), p. 168.

<sup>7</sup>D. H. C., *op. cit.*, 1:236.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:235-236.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 11:26.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 11:28; D. & C. 102.

When the call went forth asking for volunteers to go to Zion to the succor of the Saints who had been driven from Jackson County, Martin Harris was among the first to offer his services. While a member of Zion's Camp, Martin's perverse nature was again revealed. We quote from the Prophet's journal for Monday, June 16, 1834:



Standing near Monument to Martin Harris at Clarkston, Utah, are two grandsons of Martin Harris. (Left) Walter Harris Davis, son of Julia, daughter of Martin, and (right) Russell King Harris, son of Martin, Jr.

[In Zion's Camp], Martin Harris having boasted to the brethren that he could handle snakes with perfect safety, while fooling with a black snake with his bare feet, he received a bite on his left foot. . . . I [Joseph Smith] took occasion to reprove him, and exhort the brethren never to trifle with the promises of God. I told them that it was presumptuous for anyone to provoke a serpent to bite him, but if a man of God was accidentally bitten by a poisonous serpent, he might have faith, or his brethren might have faith for him; so that the Lord would hear his prayer and he might be healed; but when a man designedly provokes a serpent to bite him, the principle is the same as when a man drinks deadly poison, knowing it to be such. In that case, no man has any claim on the promises of God to be healed.<sup>11</sup>

As early as June 1829, the Lord

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 11:95.

made known his purpose, as of old; to select Twelve Apostles:

And now, behold, I give unto you, Oliver Cowdery, and also unto David Whitmer, that you shall search out the Twelve, who shall have the desires of which I have spoken;

And by their desires and their works you shall know them. (D. & C. 18:37-38.)

The Lord then set forth their qualifications and duties.

It was not until February 14, 1835, more than five years later, that this divine command was complied with. At a special meeting held in Kirtland on this date, Joseph Smith announced that he had been commanded of the Lord to organize the Council of the Twelve, who would constitute a body equal in authority to the First Presidency. All members of Zion's Camp who could be reached were asked to attend, for the Twelve were to be called from among this number. To the two men who had formerly been named by revelation, Joseph Smith now added Martin Harris, and commissioned the three witnesses to choose and ordain the first members of the Council of the Twelve in this dispensation to instruct them in the duties of their new calling. Thus Martin Harris participated in this momentous event.<sup>12</sup> He was entrusted with a divine mission and called to fulfil the purposes of God.

Martin Harris early became the confidant of the Smith family. Joseph's mother, who was nearer Martin's own age, was always solicitous of his welfare. She writes, "I spoke of a confidential friend, to whom my husband merely mentioned the existence of the plates, some two or three years prior to their coming forth. This was none other than Martin Harris, one of the witnesses to the book, subsequent to its being translated."<sup>13</sup>

Joseph Smith himself was ever thoughtful of Martin Harris. Observe the intimate associations: Martin Harris was baptized at the same time as were the Prophet's father and mother; he was ordained a high priest at the same time as were the Prophet's father and brother Hyrum; he accompanied Joseph on the mission to Missouri and was present at the dedication of the temple site. History, in fact, records numerous instances

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 11:186-187.

<sup>13</sup>Lucy Mack Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph* (revised ed. Salt Lake City 1902), p. 109.



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pointing to the deep-seated and true regard the Prophet had for his benefactor.

It must have been a bitter blow, indeed, to Joseph Smith, when Martin Harris joined the Prophet's enemies in attempts to discredit his divine mission and overthrow the Church.

In later life however, when Martin, in deep humility, was reunited with the Church, his esteem for the Prophet knew no bounds. As he lay upon his deathbed, after bearing his final testimony—that he did see the angel, that he did see the plates, that he did hear the voice of God—Martin Harris gave utterance to his last words spoken upon the earth: "*And I do know that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God, holding the keys of the Holy Priesthood.*"<sup>14</sup>

MARTIN HARRIS was intensely human, jealous of Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and others whom he saw placed in positions of trust ahead of him. He was envious; he considered himself Joseph's "right-hand man," to use one of our own expressions; he felt hurt and frustrated when not chosen to positions of leadership, to which he felt he was entitled. The dissention of Martin Harris became so pronounced that he was dropped from the Kirtland high council September 3, 1837.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after the martyrdom of the Prophet, one J. J. Strang claimed to be Joseph's rightful successor, and in support of his claim exhibited a letter purportedly written by Joseph Smith choosing Strang as his successor. Mr. Strang was a man of commanding appearance and persuasive eloquence and attracted quite a following among the discontented Saints. For a time Martin Harris came under the influence of this man. He undertook a mission to England for the avowed purpose of opposing the elders laboring there. But Martin Harris however, soon realized his error and hastily returned to the United States before doing any harm, as Andrew Jenson has expressed, except perhaps, to himself.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>"The Passing of Martin Harris," by William Harrison Homer, THE IMPROVEMENT ERA, (Salt Lake City, 1926), 29:472.

<sup>15</sup>D. H. C., op. cit., 11:510.

<sup>16</sup>Andrew Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia (Salt Lake City 1901), 1:272.

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Mr. Strang's attempt to establish himself in a position of leadership in the Church proved to be an abortive effort and was doomed to failure. He met with a tragic ending, when he was shot and killed by one of his followers.

David Whitmer was deeply angered when the Saints at Far West, in a general assembly held on February 4, 1838, refused to sustain the stake presidency—David Whitmer, W. W. Phelps, and John Whitmer. Another grievance of Whitmer's was that Joseph Smith had altered the original charter of the Church and changed the name from the "Church of Jesus Christ" by adding thereto the words "of Latter-day Saints." David Whitmer was dubious concerning the authenticity of the more recent revelations, saying he was not sure whether they were being received by the Prophet or dictated by Sidney Rigdon. Whitmer was cited formally to appear before the high council on April 13, 1838, to answer charges which had been preferred against him. When he refused to appear, he was excommunicated.<sup>17</sup>

The designation *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* was given by a revelation through Joseph Smith at Far West, Missouri, April 26, 1838, addressed to the presiding officers of the Church and reads as follows:

For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (D. & C. 115:4.)

Martin Harris rejected the spiritual leadership of Brigham Young and in later years harbored a personal resentment against him. He felt that President Young was instrumental in causing Caroline, Martin's second wife, to leave him and go to Utah, a grievance more imaginary than real.

Martin Harris separated from his first wife, Lucy, in 1829 or 1830. The exact date has not been found on record. However, early writers state that they were divorced.<sup>18</sup> Lucy did not move to Kirtland when Martin settled there in 1831, after his mission to Missouri with the Prophet. Martin did not re-marry until 1837, the year after Lucy's death in Palmyra.

He then took to wife in Kirtland an attractive girl thirty-three years

(Continued on following page)

<sup>17</sup>Joseph Fielding Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>18</sup>Preston Nibley, *The Witnesses of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City 1953), p. 111.

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*(Continued from preceding page)*

younger than himself, a niece of Brigham Young, Caroline Young, daughter of John Young. Temporally Martin prospered at this time. Their home in Kirtland was more than comfortably appointed. Here they lived together nineteen years during the period of discord, persecution, and apostasy that marked the Kirtland era in Church history, and here four of their children were born.

Children of Caroline and Martin Harris:

Martin, Jr., born January 28, 1838, Kirtland—died September 27, 1913; Julia Lacothe, born April 29, 1842, Kirtland—died February 6, 1869; John Wheeler, born July 1, 1845, Kirtland—died 1916; Solomon Webster, December 1, 1854, Kirtland—died March 3, 1919; Ida Mae, born May 27, 1856, Iowa—died December 24, 1918.

Caroline was a staunch Latter-day Saint. In desperation, after years of divided loyalties, partly caused by Martin's disaffection with the Church, she made the decision to leave him and departed with her children for Utah. Ida Mae was born in Iowa after the start of the westward journey. Finally, on September 1, 1859, more than three years after leaving Kirtland, Caroline and her five children arrived in Salt Lake City and were welcomed into her father's home.

*(To be continued)*

## Mother of the Year

*(Continued from page 322)*

he had finished his mission. Jeanie, she said, wanted to be a kindergarten teacher and Davy and Judy were too young to know what they wanted to do."

When Miss Ungar asked for her formula for raising children she said: "I'm afraid I haven't any." She pondered a moment as she separated the twins who were fighting over a dilapidated teddy bear. Then as she gave them each a fresh toy, she said, "I just sort of let them go along as they naturally want to as long as they're not doing any harm to them—

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