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## David Whitmer

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**Abstract:** An obituary of David Whitmer that emphasizes his recollections of the emergence of the Book of Mormon.

"Whitmer girls." Of the Eight Witnesses, four were Whitmers, and the fifth (Hiram Page) a Whitmer by marriage. It may therefore be proper to introduce the following, which the editor of the HISTORICAL RECORD gleaned partly from the Whitmer family record during his late visit to Richmond, Missouri:

Peter Whitmer, senior, was born April 14, 1773, and his wife Mary Musselman August 27, 1778. They had eight children, namely:

Christian, born January 18, 1798.

Jacob, born January 27, 1800.

John, born August 27, 1802.

David, born January 7, 1805.

Catherine (wife of Hiram Page), born April 22, 1807.

Peter, born September 27, 1809.

Nancy, born December 24, 1812. (She died April 19, 1813.)

Elizabeth Ann (wife of Oliver Cowdery), born January 22, 1815. (She still lives in South West City, McDonold County, Missouri, with her only living daughter, Mrs. Johnson, wife of Dr. Charles Johnson.)

The elder Peter Whitmer was a hard-working, God-fearing man, a strict Presbyterian, and brought his children up with rigid sectarian discipline. In the early part of the present century he removed with his family from Pennsylvania to western New

York, and settled on a farm in Fayette Township, Seneca County, about three miles south of Waterloo. There he built a one and a half story log house, the one in which the Church was organized on April 6, 1830, and where Joseph Smith received a number of important revelations. The house was torn down many years ago, but when the writer and his companions visited the place in September, 1888, they found several of the logs which once constituted a part of the building lying in a ditch near by; the old family well is also in existence yet. The elder Peter Whitmer and his wife were baptized by Oliver Cowdery in Seneca Lake, April 18, 1830. The following year the family removed to Kirtland, Ohio, and in 1832 to Jackson County, Missouri, where they subsequently suffered during the persecutions. They were also identified with the Church in Clay and Caldwell counties, but in 1838 nearly the entire Whitmer family turned their back upon the Prophet Joseph, and never afterwards became identified with the Church. Peter Whitmer, sen., died in Richmond, Ray County, Missouri, Aug. 12, 1854, and his wife died in January, 1856. Their earthly remains rest in the old Richmond graveyard, side by side of their son Jacob (one of the Eight Witnesses) and their son-in-law, Oliver Cowdery.

## DAVID WHITMER

David Whitmer, the last of all the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, died at his residence in Richmond, Ray County, Missouri, January 25, 1888, aged 83 years and 18 days. From the *Richmond Democrat* of February 2, 1888, a weekly paper published at Richmond, we cull the following,

as an addition to what is published in the HISTORICAL RECORD, pages 203-212:

"David Whitmer was born near Harrisburgh, Pennsylvania, Jan. 7, 1805, and married Julia Ann Jolly Jan. 9, 1831. \* \* \*

"When he was 24 years of age and working on his father's farm near Palmyra, New York, all that section of the country was more or less

excited over the reported discovery by Joseph Smith of the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. Oliver Cowdery, the village school teacher, mentioned the matter to him and announced his determination to visit Smith and investigate the matter for himself, promising Mr. Whitmer, at the latter's request, to advise him of the result. A few days later he received a letter from Cowdery, urging him to join him, which he did, being received by the Prophet with open arms. After remaining long enough to satisfy himself of the divine inspiration of Smith, the three returned to Whitmer's home, where it was agreed that the work of translation could be prosecuted.

"Shortly after his return, and while he was plowing in the field one afternoon, he was visited by Smith and Cowdery, who requested that he should accompany them into the woods on a hill across the road for the purpose of witnessing a manifestation that should qualify him and Cowdery to bear witness to the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, Smith explaining that such procedure was in accordance with explicit instructions he had received from an angel of the Lord.

"Repairing to the woods they engaged in prayer for a short time, when suddenly a great light shone round about them, far brighter and more dazzling than the brilliancy of the noon day sun, seemingly enveloping the wood for a considerable distance. A spirit of elevation seized him as of joy indescribable, and a strange influence stole over him which so entranced him that he felt that he was chained to the spot. A moment later a divine personage clothed in white raiment appeared unto them, and immediately in front of the personage stood a table on which lay a number of gold plates, some brass plates, the Urim and Thummim and the 'sword of Laban.' All of these they were directed to examine carefully, and after their examination they were told that the Lord would demand that they bear witness thereof to all the world. These plates were engraved with characters termed in the Book of Mormon 'reformed Egyptian,' characters unknown to the linguists of the present day, which is claimed as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah:

"'And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed,' etc. (Isaiah, 29: 11.)

"While describing this vision to us, all traces of a severe cold from which he was suffering disappeared for the time being, his form straightened, his countenance assumed almost a beatified expression and his tones became strangely eloquent. Although evidently no studied effort, the description was a magnificent piece of word painting and he carried his hearers with him to that lonely hill by the old farm, and they stood there with him awed in the divine presence. Skeptics may laugh and scoff, if they will, but no man can listen to Mr. Whitmer as he talks of his interview with the angel of the Lord, without being most forcibly convinced that he has heard an honest man tell what he honestly believes to be true.

"The result of this vision was a proclamation setting forth the facts enumerated.

"The 'Urim and Thummim,' mentioned in the account of the vision were a pair of transparent stone spectacles. Smith would put on the spectacles, when a few words of the text of the Book of Mormon would appear on the lenses. When these were correctly transcribed by Cowdery, who acted as his amanuensis, these words would disappear and others take their place. When 116 pages were completed, Smith entrusted them to Martin Harris, to take to his home with a view to convert his family to the new faith. They were placed at night in a bureau drawer and next morning were missing, having been stolen. They were never found and never replaced, so that the Book of Mormon today is short that number of pages of the original matter. As a chastisement for this carelessness, the Urim and Thummim was taken from Smith. But by humbling himself, he again found favor with the Lord and was presented with a strange ovalshaped, chocolate colored stone, about the size of an egg, but more flat, which it was promised should answer the same purpose.\* With this stone all the present book was translated. The Prophet would place the stone in a hat, then put his face in the hat and read the words that appeared thereon. This stone was confided to Oliver Cowdery and preserved by him until his death in 1850. After that event Phineas Young succeeded in getting it from Cowdery's widow, and it is now among the sacred relics preserved at Salt Lake City.

\* \* \*

"David Whitmer bore his long illness with

\*This is somewhat misleading. Both the Urim and Thummim and the seer stone were returned to Joseph, and, according to the best information obtainable, he used both in translating the Book of Mormon.

great patience and fortitude, his faith never for a moment wavering, and when the summons came he sank peacefully to rest, with a smile on his countenance, just as if he was being lulled to sleep by sweet music. Just before the breath left the body, he opened his eyes, which glistened with the brightness of his early manhood. He then turned them toward heaven, and a wonderful light came over his countenance, which remained several moments, when the eyes gradually closed and David Whitmer was gone to his rest.

"On Monday last (Jan. 23, 1888), at 10 o'clock a. m., after awakening from a short slumber, he said he had seen beyond the veil and saw Christ on the other side. His friends, who were constantly at his bedside, claim that he had many manifestations of the truths of the great beyond, and which confirms their faith beyond all shadow of doubt.

"On Sunday evening, at 5:30 (January 22, 1888), Mr. Whitmer called his family and some friends to his bedside, and addressing himself to the attending physician said:

"'Dr. Buchanan, I want you to say whether or not I am in my right mind, before I give my dying testimony.'

"The doctor answered: 'Yes, you are in your right mind, for I have just had a conversation with you.'

"He then addressed himself to all around his bedside in these words: 'Now you must all be faithful in Christ. I want to say to you all, the Bible and the record of the Nephites (Book of Mormon) is true, so you can say that you have heard me bear my testimony on my death-bed. All be faithful in Christ, and your reward will be according to your works. God bless you all. My trust is in Christ forever, worlds without end. Amen.' \* \* \*

"On Friday morning last (Jan. 27, 1888), at 10:30, a number of the friends of the deceased assembled at his late residence, to pay a last tribute of respect to the worthy dead. Mr. John J. Snyder arose and read the first fourteen verses of the 22nd chapter of Revelations, and stated that the deceased had selected the 14th verse, to be read at the funeral service over his remains. It reads as follows:

"'Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree

of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.'

"After the reading, an appropriate eulogy was pronounced by Mr. John C. Whitmer, a relative and intimate associate of the deceased.

"It was then announced that all present who desired to take a last look at the remains would be given an opportunity to do so at the house, as the coffin would not be opened at the grave. All present took advantage of this opportunity to once more look upon the features of the dead.

"The following old and well-known citizens of Richmond acted as pall-bearers: Joseph S. Hughes, Thomas D. Woodson, Dr. H. C. Garner, George L. Wasson, John P. Quissenberry and Col. J. W. Black, who then took charge of the remains and bore it to the hearse.

"Notwithstanding the cold, damp weather, a large number of friends and acquaintances followed the hearse and mourning family to the new cemetery, west of the city, where the body was laid to rest, and all that was mortal of one of the most remarkable men ever connected with the history of Ray County, was forever hidden from view. \* \* \*

"David Whitmer lived in Richmond about half a century, and we can say that no man ever lived here, who had among our people more friends and fewer enemies. Honest, conscientious and upright in all his dealings, just in his estimate of men, and open, manly and frank in his treatment of all, he made lasting friends who loved him to the end. \* \* \* He leaves a wife and two children, two grandchildren and several great-grand-children."

In April, 1887, David Whitmer and his family and friends had printed a pamphlet of 75 pages, with the following title: "An address to All Believers in Christ, by a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon." In this pamphlet David Whitmer explained at considerable length wherein he differed in his religious belief with the Saints in Utah. He denounces polygamy and other advanced doctrines.

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