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When a Book of Mormon Witness Passed On

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Abstract: This article gives a brief biography of Oliver Cowdery. He was a special witness for the Book of Mormon and never denied the Book of Mormon even though he was once excommunicated but later rebaptized.

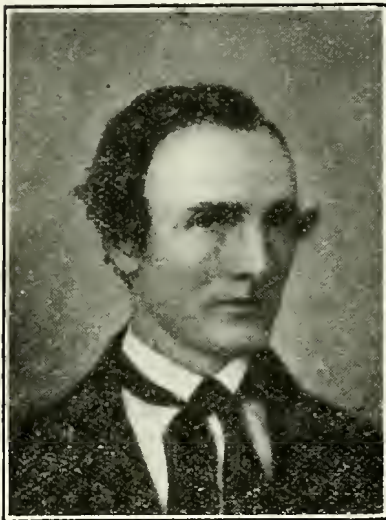
THIS WEEK IN MORMON HISTORY

When A Book Of Mormon Witness Passed On

ALL of the happiness and good cheer that accompanies a family reunion had been transformed into sadness and apprehension in the Whitmer cottage. There was a sick man in the home. More than that, he was dying—of consumption.

His name was Cowdery. . . . Oliver Cowdery.

With his family, he had come to Richmond, Missouri to bid his wife's relatives goodbye before leaving for Salt Lake valley, where the Mormon Pioneers had made their home in the midst of the mountains three years before. Mrs. Cowdery's maiden name was Elizabeth Ann Whitmer. She was the daughter of Peter Whitmer Sr. and the sister of David Whitmer, Oliver's associate. While visiting the Whitmers in Richmond her husband had taken ill.



OLIVER COWDERY

As death cast its shadows over the sick room, the family was called to the bedside. The sick man asked the attendants to raise him up in his bed so that he might talk to his family and friends. Then he uttered his farewell words. He told them to live according to the teachings of the Book of Mormon, and promised them if they would they would meet him in heaven. Up to the last he bore solemn testimony that the Book was

divinely given to the Prophet Joseph Smith and testified of the power of the holy Priesthood which he had received through the administration of heavenly personages.

Oliver shook hands with his family and kissed his wife and daughter. "Now I lay me down for the last time; I am going to my Saviour," he muttered. Then he died with a smile on his face.

The peaceful passing of Oliver Cowdery on **March 3, 1850** has been described by David Whitmer, Elder Phineas H. Young and his wife, Lucy P. Young.

That death-bed testimony of Oliver Cowdery, one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, concerning the divinity of the Book was the same which he held to with all the firmness and vigour of his being throughout his manhood days, although he became a foe of the Prophet for whom he acted as scribe as it was translated, and was excommunicated from the Church. To the last he held to and voiced a testimony, the truth and reality of which he could not deny.

The life of Oliver Cowdery is one of the most convincing of the many evidences certifying the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. While teaching school he met Joseph Smith, and a few days later (April 5, 1829) he became the amanuensis for the Prophet while he translated the Book of Mormon records from the gold plates.

On May 15, 1829 Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith received the Aaronic Priesthood under the hands of a heavenly messenger, John the Baptist. Oliver was the first person baptized into the Church in this dispensation, the ordinance being performed by the Prophet, who in turn was baptized by Oliver. Later they were ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood by Peter, James and John. Oliver was one of the original six members of the Church and delivered the first public discourse of the restored Church in the Peter Whitmer Sr. home in Fayette, New York, April 11, 1830.

But Oliver Cowdery soured toward the Church, and in 1838 was excommunicated for un-Christian-like conduct and insubordination. He retired to Michigan and practised law for a few years. But during his ten years out of the Church not once is there record of his denying his testimony.

On October 21, 1848 he came back. On that day he attended a special conference in Kanesville, Iowa. Before the audience he uttered these words :

I wrote, with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages), as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated it by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urin and Thummin, or, as it is called by that book, the "holy interpreters." I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands, the "holy interpreters."

That book it true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it; Mr. Spaulding did not write it: I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the Prophet.

Then he went on to testify of his divine reception of the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Oliver Cowdery was accepted back into the Church, was rebaptized, and prepared to trek across the Plains to join the saints in Utah. It was at this time he visited the Whitmers, where death overtook him.

Oliver Cowdery's life, like that of each of the other two witnesses to the Book of Mormon, Martin Harris and David Whitmer, is a mighty pillar supporting the story of the divine origin of the Book. Although all three of them left the Church, not one of them denied that testimony. It was on their lips as they breathed their last.

Other Anniversaries This Week

February 27, 1833—The Prophet Joseph Smith received the revelation known as the Word of Wisdom (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 89) at Kirtland, Ohio (see page 132).

February 28, 1835—The first Quorum of the Seventy of this dispensation was organized from men who went to Missouri in Zion's camp.

March 1, 1807—Birth of Wilford Woodruff, fourth president of the Church, at Avon, Connecticut.

March 2, 1873—Apostle George A. Smith, who was visiting in Palestine, held solemn worship on the Mount of Olives.

March 4, 1851—The *Olympus* began its eventful journey from Liverpool to New Orleans. En route fifty passengers were converted and baptized by saints aboard, 21 of them in the open sea from a stage let down from the ship.—WENDELL J. ASHTON,