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## The 1841 Bernhisel Letter: Joseph's or Wilford's?

Adapted from Chapter 7 of *The Editors: Joseph, William, and Don Carlos Smith* by Jonathan Neville



A LETTER TO JOHN BERNHISEL, DATED NOVEMBER 16, 1841, AND WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF JOSEPH SMITH, is at the core of the long-held assertion that Joseph Smith took a personal interest in Central America. No one knows who wrote the letter. The handwriting remains unidentified, and there are no mentions of this letter in any contemporary journals—with one exception I'll discuss below.

The letter—essentially a brief thank-you note—expresses appreciation to Dr. Bernhisel for the gift of a two-book set written by Stephens and Catherwood titled *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, published in 1841. Extracts from the books were published anonymously in the *Times and Seasons* when Joseph was the nominal editor of the newspaper in 1842.

This Bernhisel letter is the sole direct link between Joseph Smith and the Stephens books. For decades, scholars have assumed Joseph dictated the letter,<sup>1</sup> which would imply that he had read the Stephens books and therefore believed the ruins in Mesoamerica were evidence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. That, in turn, would support the claim that Joseph was the impetus behind the publication of the anonymous articles in the *Times and Seasons*. This is the standard interpretation, reflected this way in the Joseph Smith Papers' Historical Introduction to Orson Pratt's 1840 missionary pamphlet, *A[n] Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*:<sup>2</sup>

Pratt's association of Book of Mormon peoples with the history of all of North and South America matched common understanding of early Latter-day Saints. Shortly thereafter, when John Lloyd Stephens's *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* became available in Nauvoo in about 1842, JS **greeted** it **enthusiastically** and church members used it to map Book of Mormon sites in a Central American setting.<sup>3</sup> (emphasis added)

Thanks to the Joseph Smith Papers project, new information has been brought to light that suggests a different reality. In this article, I offer evidence showing that 1) the thank-you note originated with

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<sup>1</sup> Some authors once asserted that John Taylor wrote the letter, but that has been ruled out by the note in the Joseph Smith Papers that the handwriting remains unidentified. See <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-john-bernhisel-16-november-1841>. Through personal correspondence with the Church History Department, I have verified that the signature remains unidentified as of this writing.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/appendix-orson-pratt-an-interesting-account-of-several-remarkable-visions-1840>. The Historical Introduction cites two of the three anonymous articles from the *Times and Seasons* and the 16 November 1841 Bernhisel letter that is the focus of this article. It also cites Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). The JSP citation does not give the page number, but presumably the reference is to pp. 101-102, in which Givens writes, "Joseph was quick to see how the Book of Mormon had arrived on the scene of this mystery [Stephens' question about the origin of the Mayans] with impeccable timing. Responding immediately to the Stephens account, Joseph wrote back to Bernhisel."

<sup>3</sup> A 2013 article published by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute uses similar language: "Latter-day Saints also **greeted** these discoveries **with enthusiasm**" (emphasis added), Roper, Fields and Nepal, "Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons*, and Central American Ruins," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22/2 (2013): 84-97.

Wilford Woodruff, 2) Joseph never read the Stephens books, and 3) Joseph had nothing to do with the anonymous articles in the *Times and Seasons*.



To understand the 16 November letter in context, it is important to review the relationship between John Bernhisel and Joseph Smith. Dr. Bernhisel (1799-1881) was a physician in New York City who was baptized into the LDS church by November 1840 when he was ordained an elder.<sup>4</sup> He moved to Nauvoo by 1843 and then on to Utah, where he became a prominent political figure, serving as Utah's non-voting delegate to Congress for many years in Washington D.C. He is also known for his important copy of the inspired version manuscript of Joseph's translation of the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

While living in New York, Bernhisel desired to purchase real estate in Nauvoo and had been corresponding with Joseph Smith on that subject since at least March 6, 1841. Seven letters between the two men have been found and are included in the Joseph Smith Papers. The exchange gives us insight into the practical realities of Joseph's life during this period in Nauvoo; although Bernhisel asked Joseph to purchase property for him and sent him the money in July 1841, Joseph didn't actually purchase the property until January 1842.

The following summary of the letters shows how the relationship between the two men developed. The full text of the letters is included as an appendix to this article.

13 April 1841 – letter to John Bernhisel (handwriting of Robert B. Thompson, two pages)<sup>6</sup>

This letter refers to “Yours of the 6<sup>th</sup> ultimo” meaning March 6<sup>th</sup>. Bernhisel had inquired about purchasing land in Nauvoo. Joseph told him there were “plenty of opportunities” in Nauvoo and that if Bernhisel would send money, he would make a “suitable purchase” for him.

12 July 1841 – letter from John Bernhisel (handwriting of John Bernhisel, 3 pages)<sup>7</sup>

Bernhisel encloses a certificate of deposit for \$425 and asks Joseph to purchase “as large a tract of good land, with a sufficient quantity of timber, in a healthful location, and within a convenient distance, say one two or three miles of Nauvoo” for \$500, with the balance of \$75 to be paid by July 1 1842.

3 August 1841 – letter to John Bernhisel (handwriting of Robert B. Thompson, 1 page)<sup>8</sup>

Joseph acknowledges the receipt of the \$500 deposit but explains that “If a purchase could have been made early in the spring it could have been done to much better advantage than at present.”

18 August 1841 – letter from John Bernhisel (handwriting of John Bernhisel, 2 pages)<sup>9</sup>

Not having heard from Joseph (because Joseph's 3 August letter had not yet arrived in New York), and having heard that land prices were rising, Bernhisel asks Joseph to purchase a parcel within ten

<sup>4</sup> John Milton Bernhisel Biography, Joseph Smith Papers, available online here: <http://josephsmithpapers.org/person/john-milton-bernhisel?p=1>

<sup>5</sup> Robert J. Matthews, “The Bernhisel Manuscript Copy of Joseph Smith's Inspired Version of the Bible,” *BYU Studies* 11:3 (1971), online at <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/bernhisel-manuscript-copy-joseph-smiths-inspired-version-bible>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-john-bernhisel-13-april-1841>

<sup>7</sup> <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-from-john-bernhisel-12-july-1841>

<sup>8</sup> <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-john-bernhisel-3-august-1841>

<sup>9</sup> <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-from-john-bernhisel-18-august-1841>

miles of the city, but defers to Joseph's judgment because "a small piece of ground near the city may be better than a larger one at a greater distance."

8 September 1841 – letter from John Bernhisel (handwriting of John Bernhisel, 1 page)<sup>10</sup>

Bernhisel gives this letter to Wilford Woodruff, along with the Stephens books, to deliver to Joseph Smith. Bernhisel acknowledges receipt of the 3 August letter and reminds Joseph he promised to purchase property on his behalf.

16 November 1841 – letter to John Bernhisel (unidentified handwriting, 1 page)<sup>11</sup>

This is the letter thanking Bernhisel for the Stephens books that is the focus of this article. Joseph still has not purchased land and instead hopes Bernhisel will visit Nauvoo to select property for himself.

4 January 1842 – letter to John Bernhisel (handwriting of Willard Richards, who copied the original letter into JS Letterbook 2)<sup>12</sup>

This letter acknowledges a letter from Bernhisel dated 11 December which is not extant. Presumably that letter urged Joseph to buy the land because Bernhisel could not come to Nauvoo for a while longer. Joseph informs Bernhisel that he purchased "this day" 60 acres of land "about 2 miles east by south of the Temple" that "was the best chance which presented itself to me at present." At the end, Richards wrote that he "omitted all but the business Part."

Bernhisel moved to Nauvoo in 1843 and lived in Joseph Smith's Mansion House. He became a trusted companion of Joseph's, attending meetings and acting as physician. He wrote the letter to Governor Ford of Illinois, dated June 14, 1844, that vouches for Joseph Smith's character: "He is a man of calm judgment, enlarged views, and is eminently distinguished by his love of justice... his heart is felt to be keenly alive to the kindest and softest emotions of which human nature is susceptible."<sup>13</sup> He signed the affidavit of 20 June 1844 that described threats against the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo and delivered it to Governor Ford with John Taylor.<sup>14</sup> After the martyrdom, Bernhisel prepared the bodies of Joseph and Hyrum for burial. Almost five months later, he delivered David Hyrum Smith, the last child of Joseph and Emma Smith.<sup>15</sup>

There is no question that Bernhisel had a close relationship with Joseph Smith, yet apart from the 16 November note, I have found no reference in Bernhisel's papers to the Stephens books.



Wilford Woodruff and other members of the Twelve returned from their mission to England in 1841, arriving in New York City on May 20th. Woodruff spent a few days visiting and touring the city with Dr. Bernhisel, who was then the Bishop of the Church in New York. Woodruff left to visit Boston and other

<sup>10</sup> <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-from-john-bernhisel-8-september-1841>

<sup>11</sup> <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-john-bernhisel-16-november-1841>

<sup>12</sup> <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-john-bernhisel-4-january-1842>

<sup>13</sup> Letter, John Bernhisel to Thomas Ford, quoted in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, B.H. Roberts, ed., (Deseret Book 1957), 6:467-8, online at <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/volume-6-chapter-22>.

<sup>14</sup> See Affidavit, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/affidavit-from-john-p-greene-and-john-bernhisel-20-june-1844>.

<sup>15</sup> Lynn M. and Hope A. Hilton, "Bernhisel, John Milton," Utah History Encyclopedia, online at [http://www.uen.org/utah\\_history\\_encyclopedia/b/BERNHISEL\\_JOHN.html](http://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/b/BERNHISEL_JOHN.html).

places and spent 41 days with his father and other relatives in the East before returning to New York City in August. (The other members of the Twelve had gone ahead to Nauvoo.) Woodruff met with Bernhisel on August 24<sup>th</sup>. He left New York on September 1<sup>st</sup> to preach on Long Island and returned to the city on the 6<sup>th</sup>. On September 9<sup>th</sup>, he met with Bernhisel again. He recorded, “I recieved \$40 dollars of Dr John M Bernhisel for President Joseph Smith also Stephens travels in central America in 2 volums also one letter.”

The full text of the letter Bernhisel gave Woodruff explains the gift and the money:

New York September 8th. 1841.

Dear Brother

You will herewith receive a copy of Stephen’s Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan, which I hope you will do me the favor to accept, as a small testimony of my gratitude to you for the valuable services you are rendering me, and as a token of my regard for you as a Prophet of the Lord.

With sentiments of the highest consideration, I am yours in the bonds of the New and Everlasting Covenant.

J. M. Bernhisel

P.S. I have had the pleasure to receive your favor of the 5th ultimo, acknowledging the receipt of the certificate of deposite for four hundred and twenty five dollars, and kindly saying that you would expend it to the best advantage. In addition to the above Elder Wilford Woodruff will hand you forty dollars, and the balance I will endeavor to remit you soon after you inform me that you have made the purchase, but certainly before the first of May next. On the genuineness of the bills you may place the most implicit reliance, for one of them I obtained at the bank from which it was issued, and the other at the Greenwich bank. I sincerely condole with you on the death of your brother Don Carlos Smith.

A few hours after meeting with Bernhisel, Woodruff, his wife Phebe and four others boarded a boat at 6 p.m. and “departed for Albany on our road for Nauvoo.”

Neither Bernhisel nor Woodruff explain what accounted for Bernhisel’s interest in the books or why they were considered a suitable gift for Joseph Smith. Presumably Bernhisel had read or heard about the books, inasmuch as they were bestsellers at the time. The June 15, 1841, *Times and Seasons* contains an editorial introduction to the Stephens books, along with an extract from the *New York Weekly Herald* about lectures given by Stephens and his illustrator Catherwood. Based on this editorial alone, Bernhisel could naturally conclude that Joseph Smith would be interested in the Stephens books.<sup>16</sup> His reference to “valuable services” suggests he intended the gift as a way to prompt Joseph to finally purchase the property as he had requested in the July 12 letter.

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<sup>16</sup> The source of the extract from the *Weekly Herald* is unknown. To a considerable extent, the *Times and Seasons* relied on submissions. I suspect the extract was sent from Philadelphia because of a short, out-of-context note that immediately follows the extract. This reads, “On Friday last eleven wagons passed through this place with families for the City of Nauvoo, Illinois, the Mormon city. More, we learned from one of them are to follow soon. They are all from Chester co. Pa.-Journal.” Chester co. is adjacent to Philadelphia. This raises two possibilities; either the editors extracted the material from two separate papers, or the *Pa.-Journal* included both the extract from the *Weekly Herald* and the brief mention of the Mormon wagons. Original editions of either paper that contain these articles would likely answer the question, but I have not been able to locate any. However, the June 15 issue of the *Times and Seasons* contains other items from Pennsylvania: a letter from William Smith, writing from Pennsylvania, and a notice from John Bills, Tailor, who “has just received the latest fashions direct from Philadelphia (through the politeness of President Hyrum Smith).” Because William Smith was a traveling agent of the *Times and Seasons* at the time, he could have sent the articles from the *Pa.-Journal*. The next issue of the *Times and Seasons*, July 1<sup>st</sup>, recognizes the receipt of the *Gospel Reflector* from Philadelphia and reprints an article from that publication.

There are no news items from New York in the *Times and Seasons*, a point Bernhisel raised in his 12 July 1841 letter. He had been sending the *New York Evangelist* to the editors and asked Joseph to inquire whether the editors found it of any service so he could cancel it if they weren’t going to use it. His mention of this and no other paper implies that he was not sending other papers.

Bernhisel does not indicate when he purchased the books, but Woodruff does not mention them in connection with his visit on August 24<sup>th</sup>. This suggests Bernhisel purchased the books after August 24<sup>th</sup>. Perhaps another factor was the late August visit of Benjamin Winchester to New York on his way from Philadelphia to Salem, Massachusetts, where he had been assigned to serve as a missionary with Erastus Snow. Winchester, a well-known Mormon who had visited New York previously, would probably call upon Dr. Bernhisel, the presiding authority in New York. A few months previously, Winchester had published an article in the March 15, 1841, *Gospel Reflector* that linked the Book of Mormon to popular books about ancient American archaeology. This was before the Stephens book was published in June or July 1841, but given his *Gospel Reflector* article, it seems likely Winchester would be interested in these popular books and would have discussed them with Bernhisel during his visit to New York.

At any rate, on September 9, 1841, Bernhisel gave a copy of the Stephens' books, *Incidents of Travel*, to Woodruff to deliver to Joseph. Woodruff read them during the journey to Nauvoo and was highly impressed with what he learned. He made two journal entries (emphasis mine, spelling and punctuation original):<sup>17</sup>

Sept. 13, 1841 – “I spent the day in reading the 1<sup>st</sup> vol. of INCIDENTS OF TRAVELS IN Central America Chiapas and Yucatan BY JOHN L STEPHEN’S... I felt **truly interested** in this work for **it brought to light a flood of testimony in proof of the book of Mormon** in the discovery & survey of the city Copan in Central America A correct drawing of the monuments pyramids, portraits, & Hieroglyphics as executed by Mr. Catherwood is now presented before the publick & is truly a wonder to the world. Their whole travels **were truly interesting.**”

Sept. 16, 1841 – “I perused the 2d Vol of **Stephens travels** In Central America Chiapas of Yucatan & the ruins of Palenque & Copan. It is truly **one of the most interesting histories I have ever read.**”

Woodruff arrived in Nauvoo on October 6, 1841, after more than two years' absence. He stayed with Brigham Young that night. The next night he stayed at Heber C. Kimball's house and remained there until October 11<sup>th</sup> when he moved to a house he bought. He spent the rest of the month mowing hay and gathering his family's effects that had been stored in Iowa.

The first time he mentioned seeing Joseph Smith was on October 31<sup>st</sup>, at the council in which Joseph “severely reprov'd Benjamin Winchester.” (Winchester had traveled to Nauvoo seeking work in the printing business.) While it's possible Woodruff saw Joseph before this, there are no records of such a meeting. Therefore October 31<sup>st</sup> may have been his first opportunity to transfer the Stephens books.

From November 1-4, Woodruff records that he was sick, but getting better. On November 5<sup>th</sup> he records only one activity for the day: “I wrote a letter to Dr Bernhisel & also one to Father & Mother Carter.” Neither of those letters has been found. Instead, we have the letter from Joseph to Bernhisel, dated Nauvoo November 16, 1841, written in unidentified handwriting and mailed on the 23d.<sup>18</sup>

The one-page letter consists of 185 words on one side of a single piece of paper.

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<sup>17</sup> All references to Woodruff's journal are to the typeset version published by Signature books, Scott Kenney, editor. <http://signaturebooks.com/wilford-woodruffs-journal-1833-1898-typescript/> . Portions of the journal are available online here: [http://www.ristow.us/foswiki/pub/Genealogy/WilfordWoodruffsJournalKrautsPioneerPress/Woodruff\\_Wilfords\\_Journal\\_-\\_Krauts\\_Pioneer\\_Press.pdf](http://www.ristow.us/foswiki/pub/Genealogy/WilfordWoodruffsJournalKrautsPioneerPress/Woodruff_Wilfords_Journal_-_Krauts_Pioneer_Press.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Although the envelope has no postmark, it bears the notation, “Nauvoo Nov 23d” suggesting this is the day it was mailed or sent by courier. The numeral looks more like 25, but the “d” suggests 23. The letter is available in the Joseph Smith Papers here: <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-john-bernhisel-16-november-1841?p=1&highlight=bernhisel>



Figure 1 - Bernhisel letter 16 Nov. 1841

Kauwao November 16, 1841

Dear Sir

I received your kind present by the hand of Er. Woodruff & feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem & friendship which to me is the more interesting as it unfolds & develops many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of The Book of Mormon; I have read the volumes with the greatest interest & pleasure & must say that of all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprehensive. —

In regard to the land referred to by you I would simply state that I have lands both in and out of the City some of which I hold deeds for and others bonds for deeds when you come which I hope will be as soon as convenient you can make such a selection from among those as shall best meet with your views & feelings. In grateful remembrance of your kindness I remain your affectionate Brother in the bonds of the

Eternal Covenant  
Joseph Smith

So Dr Bernhisel }

Transcript:  
Dear Sir

I received your kind present by the hand of Er. [sic] Woodruff & feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem & friendship which to me is **the more interesting** as it **unfolds** & develops [sic] many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of The Book of Mormon; I have read the **volumnes** [sic] with the greatest interest & pleasure & must say that **of all histories that have been written** pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous &

comprehensive.—

In regard to the land referred to by you I would simply state that I have land both in and out of the City some of which I hold deeds for and others bonds for deeds when you come which I hope will be as soon as convenient you can make such a selection from among those as shall best meet with your veiw[sic] & feelings. In gratefull[sic] remembrance of your kindness I remain your affectionate Brother in the bonds of the

Everlasting Covenant  
Joseph Smith



The letter stands on its own; there are no entries in any known journals or any other document that corroborate any connection between Joseph and the note or its origins. Because the handwriting has not been identified (but Joseph's known scribes and associates have been excluded as possible authors), the origin of the note remains a mystery.

Certainly it is possible that Joseph dictated the note to an unknown person. Alternatively, he may have directed someone to write a thank-you note, giving anything from specific to no instructions. If this case, Joseph may or may not have reviewed it before it was mailed.

The note claims Joseph “read the volumnes [sic] with the greatest interest & pleasure.” Because there are no sources that describe Joseph doing so, and because he never personally mentioned the books or their content, we must consider extrinsic evidence and probabilities.<sup>19</sup>

First, it is somewhat surprising that Woodruff does not record that he gave the books to Joseph. Because of Woodruff's personal interest in them and his deep respect for the Prophet, one would expect Woodruff to note the Prophet's reaction to the Stephens books, but his journal is silent on the matter. Neither he nor anyone else mentioned that Joseph read them or discussed them with anyone—let alone that Joseph *greeted* them *enthusiastically* as suggested by the note in the Joseph Smith Papers.

In fact, Woodruff's own enthusiasm about the books contrasts with his silence about Joseph's reaction—assuming Joseph *had* a reaction.

It would have been an extraordinary accomplishment for Joseph to read the Stephens books at all. Vol. I is 424 pages, plus illustrations, and Vol. II is 486 pages, plus illustrations and index. On top of that, the letter compares these books to “all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country,” a comparison that, if honest, would have required considerable additional reading beyond the Stephens books themselves.

Joseph's life in 1841 was not conducive to leisurely study. The historical record shows him reading exactly one book, beginning in December 1841. Joseph began re-reading the Book of Mormon, a project that took him several months. The Book of Mormon is shorter than Stephens' Vol. 1.

The exchange of letters between Joseph and Bernhisel offer insight into the time pressures Joseph faced during this period. He noted in the 13 April letter that “Yours of the 6th. ultimo is received, **which should have been answered before, had not I been so much engaged in the business of the**

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<sup>19</sup> One author, citing no evidence other than the letter itself, concludes “Based upon current information it appears that Smith either dictated the letter to a scribe, or that he directed him to write to Bernhisel on his behalf using the words he deemed proper. In either case, it would be unlikely for Taylor or any other of his scribes to knowingly attribute to Smith views and opinions that were not his own or that were inconsistent with revelatory teachings of the Prophet. As with several other letters of this kind, it is reasonable to see the content of the letter to Bernhisel as an accurate representation of Joseph Smith's intent, if not his own words. Joseph Smith's comments are notable in that they constitute a very brief but informative book review expressing the Prophet's personal evaluation of what he had read.” Matthew Roper, “John Bernhisel's Gift to a Prophet: Incidents of Travel in Central America and the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 207-253. Of course, that argument simply assumes the conclusion that the letter originated with Joseph, a begging the question logical fallacy.



**conference.”** He added this postscript: “The Brethren in New York wrote to me sometime ago on the subject of Babtizm [baptism] for the dead please to inform them **I well attend to it as soon as I possibly can.** J. S.”

An earlier letter, dated Dec. 15, 1840, in the handwriting of Robert B. Thompson but designated as a letter from Joseph Smith to the Council of the Twelve in England, is another example.

Having several communications laying before me from my brethren the Twelve, some of which ere this have merited a reply, but from the multiplicity of business which necessarily engages my attention, I have delayed communicating with you to the present time.<sup>20</sup>

In that letter, Joseph explained that he necessarily delegated authority to people and trusted them to do the right thing. If he had such difficulty finding time to correspond even with the Twelve on important matters, it is plausible that he would delegate the writing of a thank-you note that he would never even see.

As previously discussed, on July 12, Bernhisel requested that Joseph purchase land and deposited \$425 toward the \$500 purchase price. Joseph replied on August 3, promising to buy a property “**the first opportunity I have.**” Joseph didn’t purchase the land until January 4, 1842. This delay of five months, particularly when Joseph had already warned Bernhisel that land prices were rising rapidly, is consistent with other external evidence of the many demands on Joseph’s time and attention.

Consider the note itself. Would Joseph Smith take the time to read these two lengthy books when he didn’t have time to write, or even sign, a simple thank-you note?

Apart from the thank-you note, the sole evidence that Joseph ever saw these books is a receipt from the Nauvoo Library in 1844,<sup>21</sup> showing that Joseph donated a copy of the Stephens books along with many others. Here is the list of books he donated:

Review of Edwards on the Will  
 Life of Tecumseh  
 Whepleys Compend  
 Scotts Poetical Works in 5 vols  
 Gillmores Lectures  
 Merrills Harmony  
 Epicureo  
 Krumanachers Works  
 Catholic Piety  
 Home Physician  
 Apochryphal Testament  
 Bruns’ Travels  
 Rebel & other Travels  
 Browns’ Appeal. gram  
 Browns English Syntascope  
 Studies in Poetry & Prose  
 Old World & the New – Vol 1st

<sup>20</sup> <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-the-council-of-the-twelve-15-december-1840>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/The-Complete-Record-of-the-Nauvoo-Library-and-Literary-Institute.pdf>

Voyage & Travels of Ross Perry & others  
 Bennetts Book Keeping 2 Copies  
**Incidents of Travel in Yucatan by Stephens**  
 Stephens Travels in Central America  
 Mosheims Church History 1 Vol  
 Times & Seasons 1 2 & 3 Vol also Vol 1 & 2  
 Dick's Philosophy  
 Millenium & other Poems  
 Beaumonts Experiments  
 Dictionary of the Holy Bible  
 Parkers Lectures on Universalism  
 Sanders Discourse  
 Metropolitan  
 Goodrich's History of the United States  
 Doddridges Sermons  
 Catholic Manuel  
 Whelpleys Compend  
 Herveys Meditations  
 Historia de Charles  
 Rollin 2 Vol  
 Book of Mormon

This would be a formidable reading list for anyone, but in the context of 1840s Nauvoo, where Joseph functioned in multiple demanding capacities and often commented on how pressed he was, claims that Joseph read any of these books would require specific and unambiguous evidence that does not exist. His journals show him reading only two books: The Book of Mormon and his own history.

The assertion that Joseph read the Stephens books is consistent with similar assertions by critics of Joseph Smith who have suggested he was so well-read that he drew from multiple sources to compose the Book of Mormon and develop his unique theology.<sup>22</sup> In both cases, the assertions suffer from a lack of factual support.

Historical interpretation requires a weighing of evidence and probabilities in context; i.e., in light of all the known circumstances, personalities, and practical realities of life in the time and place under consideration. In this case, we have the bare fact of the 16 November letter. Juxtaposed with the totality of the circumstances of Joseph Smith's life in 1841 Nauvoo, the probability that Joseph read the Stephens books—not to mention all the other histories with which they compared—is de minimus.



The implausibility of Joseph Smith actually reading the Stephens books leads us to consider alternative explanations. Who else might have written the thank-you note?

The evidence points to Wilford Woodruff.

As previously mentioned, Woodruff read the books on his journey to Nauvoo from New York and

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<sup>22</sup> E.g., compare D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Signature Books, 1987), and Grant Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Signature Books, 2002) with Roper, Fields, Nepal, cited previously.

wrote a letter to Bernhisel on November 5, 1841. Could this be the letter that was eventually dated November 16, 1841?

I think it is, for several reasons.

Although later letters from Woodruff to Bernhisel have been found,<sup>23</sup> no letter dated November 5, 1841, is extant.<sup>24</sup> There is no record of prior correspondence between the two men. It is possible that Woodruff wrote his own thank-you letter to Bernhisel, but what is the likelihood that he would thank Bernhisel personally for a gift made to Joseph Smith? Quite low, if only for the presumptiveness of such an act.

Nevertheless, Woodruff's enthusiasm for the books—an enthusiasm that would persist for years as we will see—would motivate him to thank Bernhisel somehow.

Recall that Woodruff wrote the letter after several days of illness that immediately followed his first mention of seeing Joseph Smith on October 31<sup>st</sup>—his first opportunity to give the Stephens books to Joseph. (More likely, given the Winchester proceeding on that date, he merely showed them—or mentioned them—to Joseph on the 31<sup>st</sup>.)

Assuming Woodruff gave the books to Joseph, there are two possible outcomes. Either Joseph read the books and dictated the 16 November letter, or he didn't read them and asked someone to write a thank-you note on his behalf. We've seen that, apart from the letter itself, there is no evidence that Joseph ever read the books. On the other hand, we've seen that, at his earliest opportunity after meeting with Joseph, Woodruff wrote a letter to Bernhisel. A closer look at the letter suggests it was Woodruff's interpretation of what Joseph would want him to write.



The letter has two paragraphs. The first is the expression of appreciation for the Stephens books that reflects Woodruff's own reaction to the Stephens books as he read them. The second paragraph relates to the ongoing land transactions between Bernhisel and Joseph that were the topic of previous correspondence between the men. However, the note marks a distinct difference in the relationship.

In the previous correspondence, Joseph had agreed to purchase land on behalf of Bernhisel. In response, Bernhisel sent him the \$425, followed by the \$40 and the Stephens books. Now, instead of purchasing property for Bernhisel, Joseph is telling him to come to Nauvoo soon and select a property himself.

Here's how I envision the scene. Woodruff comes to the Winchester disciplinary council on October 31<sup>st</sup>, the Stephens books in hand. He shows them to Joseph, along with Bernhisel's letter. Joseph asks Woodruff to read the letter. The dialogue goes something like this:

Joseph: "Brother Bernhisel wants me to buy property for him, but I don't have time. He has to live on it; he should pick it himself. Would you tell him to come to Nauvoo and select the property he wants?"

Woodruff: "Should I mention the books?"

Joseph: "Did you read them? What did you think?"

Woodruff: "They're most interesting."

Joseph: "Then thank him for them on my behalf."

Joseph then proceeds with the Winchester council and doesn't think about the Stephens books again.

<sup>23</sup> I discuss these later in this article.

<sup>24</sup> The discovery of such a letter would clarify what happened among Woodruff, Joseph, and Bernhisel.

The next day, Woodruff is sick. He doesn't feel good enough to even write a letter until November 5<sup>th</sup>, when he writes to Bernhisel and the Carters.

I realize this is conjecture, but it is a hypothesis based on the evidence that makes sense under the totality of the circumstances, and it offers a complete explanation for the available evidence.

One obvious objection to Woodruff being the source of the 16 November letter: it is not in Woodruff's handwriting. He did not physically write that letter. The handwriting remains unidentified.

A second obvious objection is that Woodruff wrote to Bernhisel on November 5<sup>th</sup>, but the letter attributed to Joseph was dated November 16<sup>th</sup> and mailed on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

These two facts actually help explain what happened. I propose that Woodruff drafted the letter but had it written out by someone else before sending it.

Before addressing that point, a closer look at the letter itself is in order.



The wording of the thank-you note is not exceptional; terms such as *generation*, *antiquities*, *luminous* and *comprehensive* are common in the *Times and Seasons* and other contemporary sources, including Woodruff's journal. However, there are some anomalies in the 16 November note that offer some clues.

First, the thank-you note is addressed "Dear Sir." The three other letters from Joseph to Bernhisel, dated April 13, 1841, August 3, 1841, and January 4, 1842, are all addressed "Dear Brother," as are the letters from Bernhisel to Joseph dated July 12, 1841, August 18, 1841, and September 8, 1841.<sup>25</sup>

Of the seven extant letters between Joseph and Bernhisel, only the 16 November letter is addressed "Dear Sir," as if the author was not aware of the pattern of correspondence. It seems unlikely that Joseph would have dictated "Dear Sir" when the pattern he and Bernhisel otherwise followed was "Dear Brother."

A series of Woodruff's letters from the 1840s all start with "Dear Sir" or "Sir."<sup>26</sup> A letter dated May 8, 1849, starts "Elder Saml Dam Sir I have just..." A letter dated Nov. 27, 1849, starts "Hon A W. Babbit Dear Sir The deep..." I have looked at several examples of Woodruff's correspondence with Bernhisel and in every case, the letters start with "Dear Sir."

Here are two letters sent on consecutive days:

<sup>25</sup> <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-from-john-bernhisel-8-september-1841?p=1&highlight=bernhisel#!/paperSummary/letter-from-john-bernhisel-8-september-1841&p=1>

<sup>26</sup> The letters are found in MS 1352: Wilford Woodruff journals and papers 1828-1898, Wilford Woodruff letters, 1849, online at [https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE6378228](https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE6378228)

Figure 2-Woodruff letter to Bernhisel 4 Dec. 1849

New York Dec 4<sup>th</sup> 49

Brother Bernhisel

Dear Sir

I have just arrived in this City & obtained your letter, your will of course follows the instructions you have recd from head quarters if you fail in a slab & go in for a Territory

Figure 3-Woodruff letter to Bernhisel 5 Dec. 1849

Boardtown N.J. Dec 5<sup>th</sup> = 49

Brother Bernhisel

Dear Sir

I sent you a few lines last <sup>evening</sup> night written in great haste as the boat was about to start but one item which I intended to have mentioned was omitted which I consider quite essential and which I did not think to mention when I

Ms 1352  
6x6  
A14  
#5

A letter dated March 26, 1850, starts the same way.

Figure 4-Woodruff letter to Bernhisel 26 Mar. 1850

Cambridgeport Mass

March 26<sup>th</sup> 1850

Brother Bernhisel

Dear Sir

I received your interesting letter of the 22<sup>nd</sup> inst and nothing but a crowd of business has prevented me from replying to the subject of which you speak even before I received yours. I was gratified

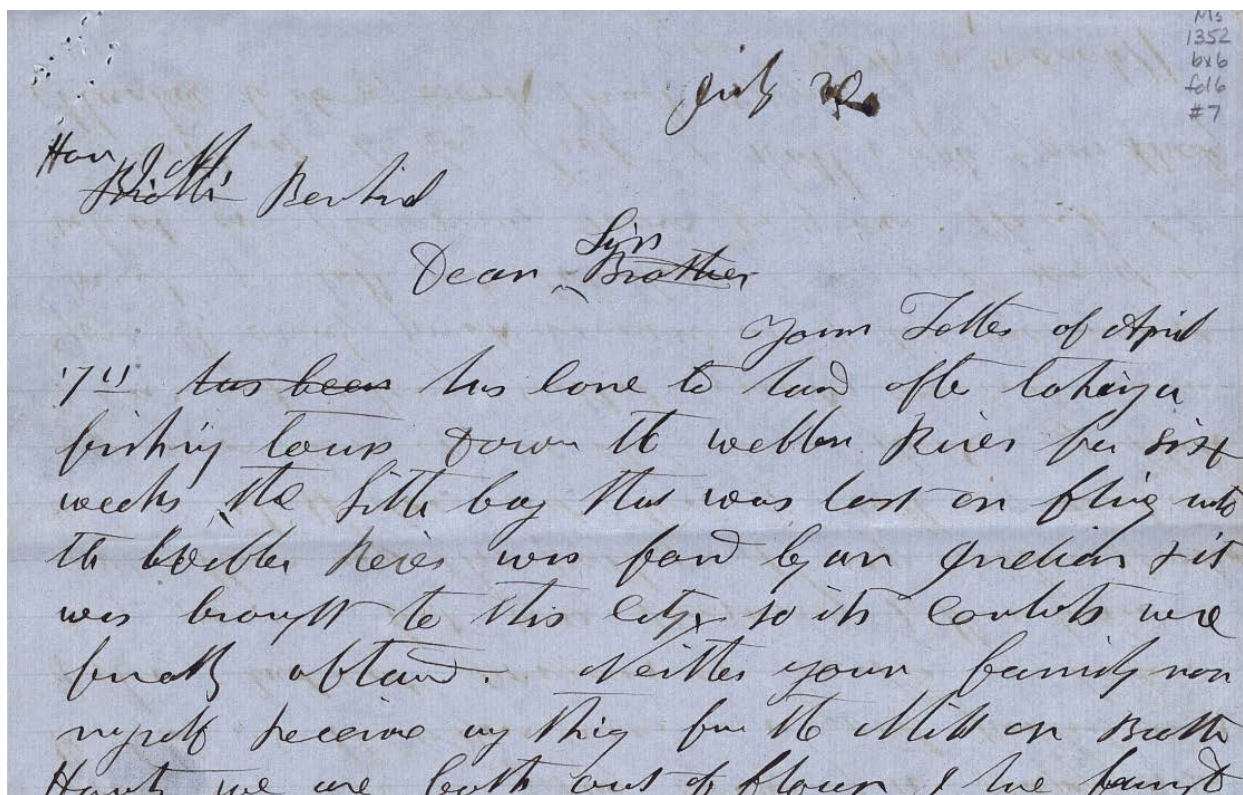
Copy of H. Barker  
to W. M. Bernhisel  
March 26<sup>th</sup> 1850

Ms 1352  
6x6  
A15  
#2



A letter dated July 20 from the 1856 folder, shows “Dear Brother” replaced with “Dear Sir.”<sup>27</sup>

Figure 5-Woodruff letter to Bernhisel 1856



Because this July letter is in the folder of retained copies, presumably this is a draft of a letter, prepared by Woodruff for someone else to write out formally—without the editing changes—and then send. It is anyone’s guess why the first draft read “Brother Bernhisel” and “Dear Brother,” compared with the final version “Hon. J. M. Bernhisel” and “Dear Sir,” but I suggest this change reflects Woodruff’s sign of respect to Dr. Bernhisel.

Other letters in this folder show similar signs of editing. Of course, it’s a normal practice to draft letters and make changes before finalizing them. This practice assures that the finalized letter does not contain mark-outs and insertions. Combined with Woodruff’s pattern of using “Dear Sir” as the salutation generally and with Bernhisel specifically, the draft/revision practice explains why the 16 November 1841 letter to Bernhisel has not signs of edition. This evidence therefore corroborates the theory that Woodruff drafted that letter and had someone else write it cleanly before sending it.



A second anomaly is the spelling in the letter, which includes some unusual features. “Comprehensive”

<sup>27</sup> Wilford Woodruff journals and papers: Wilford Woodruff Outgoing Correspondence (retained copies), 1831-1861, Wilford Woodruff letters, 1856. Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, MS 1352, box 6, folder 6, item 17. [https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE6361996](https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE6361996)



is a unique misspelling. Close examination suggests the writer may have dotted an original “e” for some reason. I haven’t found any other examples of this spelling. However, the spelling of “volumnes” may be significant. While it is true that spelling was not uniform in 1842, this spelling with the “n” is not a recognized variant in the 1828 Webster’s dictionary. It appeared in Early Modern English but is not found in the Bible. It appears to be unique to Woodruff, with only a single exception noted below. Woodruff uses variant spellings in his journal from 1841 through 1884. Here are the variant spellings Woodruff used in 1841 (Vol. 2, 1841-1845):

April 3<sup>rd</sup> – p. 80: Moved by Elder Young seconded by Elder Richards that Elder Parley P. P. Pratt Conduct the Publication of the Millennial Star as Editor and Sole proprietor of the same after the Close of this present **volumnn**.

April 14<sup>th</sup> – p. 88: I spent the day counting out the Millennial Stars. I obtained for my share 76 whole **volums**.

April 16<sup>th</sup> – p. 90: Baptized more than 5,000 souls Printed 5,000 Books of mormon 3000 Hymn Books 2,500 **Volumes** of the Millennial Star & about 50,000 tracts, & gatherd to the land of Joseph 1,000 Souls

June 4<sup>th</sup> – p. 105: 4th I wrote a letter to D.C. Smith. Sent for the second **volumnn** of times & Seasons to be sent to Aphek Woodruff from Commencement to Ezra Carter from 13th No.

September 7 – p. 124: I recieved \$40 dollars of Dr John M Bernhisel for President Joseph Smith also Stephens travels in central America in 2 **volums** also one letter.

In 1845, Woodruff made these entries:

July “28th Monday In company with Elder Hedlock I counted all of John Taylors Times & Seasons IV & Vth **volumns** & found the following to be the exact number now remaining:”

September “23d I wrote three letters to friends. I recieved by Amos Fielding 7 letters from Nauvoo from Kimball Webster Ells & Br Young And the remainder of the Times & Seasons from Br John Taylor to finish out the whole of the Vth **volumnn**.”

November 2<sup>nd</sup>, “This Publication has continued from that time untill the present month Just five years being now on the VI volumn... The Nauvoo Neighbor was published commencing on the 1st of May 1843 & has continued untill the present time. Is now in its third **volumnn**.”

Woodruff continued this spelling throughout his journal. Notice how often he refers to his interest in history, which is also reflected in the Bernhisel thank-you note.

July 10, 1848 (Vol. 3) – p. 357 “I bought the six **volumns** of the Times & seasons of Babbit for \$7.”

October 21, 1865 (Vol. 6) – p. 254 “My Journal is Continued in 2d **volumnn** red Covered Book.”

June 2, 1866 (Vol. 6) – p. 287 “I signed with Parley Pratt for the History of the Rebellion in two **volums** for the H.O. for \$5.”

Sept. 16, 1881 (Vol. 8) – p. 51 “O Pratt was appointed Historian May 9, 1874, making his labor as Historian for 7 years up to May 7, 1881. During this time He has got up a history documentary [p.52] for 22 years, Making 34 **volums** of 41,259 Pages, averaging 1,213 1/2 pages each vol, at a cost of \$12,377.70. There was 54 pages of indexing for Each vol as title page, making \$400 per **volumnn** including Binding, paper, ruling pens and ink and indexing. Total \$13,600. But none of this work has been Compared with its Copy.”

Sept 22, 1884 (Vol. 8) – p. 277 “I spent my last day with Mr H. H. Bancroft the great Historian of the last days. He is writing up the western Country in 32 **volums** and devotes one vol to Utah and the Mormons and he has been spending some 3 weeks in our office searching our histories and looking to us for information that he may make a Correct record as a true historian.”

This spelling is significant because the word is never spelled this way in the Journal of Discourses or in a database of John Taylor, Parley P. Pratt, Benjamin Winchester, Oliver Cowdery, Orson Pratt, William Smith, and Joseph Smith.

It is spelled this way in three places in the *Times and Seasons*:

Vol. 1:9, p. 137 (July 1840) ... I shall not attempt to fathom the depths of our persecution, though **volumns** be written on the subject which would tell a tale that would make the savage of the wilderness blush, or the barbarian hide his head for shame.

This is an undated letter written by A [Alanson] Ripley, Bishop, to the saints. It is the only example of this spelling I could find outside of Woodruff's writings.

By coincidence, Brother Ripley is connected to an unrelated example of how Joseph Smith directed others to write in his name. On 26 March 1841, William Clayton recorded in his diary, "Friday. I went over the river to see Brother Ripley and ask his council. I called at the store and made Joseph acquainted with the circumstance who ordered Brother Thompson to write a few lines to Bishop Ripley in his name requesting him to take the matter into his own hands and appear with me before the justice. I saw Brother Ripley who said I need trouble myself no further he would see to it."<sup>28</sup>

Another example of Joseph's pattern occurred two years later, on 9 November 1843, when he received a letter from James Arlington Bennet. His journal records that he "gave instruction to have it answered." The following Monday, 13 November, the journal entry says "called at the office A M. with Hyrum and heard Judge [William W.] Phelps read letter to Jas A Bennet & made some corrections."<sup>29</sup>

In the first case, there is no record that Joseph reviewed the letter, but in the second case, he did. The difference is the importance of the letter. Bennet's letter announced he intended to run for Governor of Illinois. Joseph refused to assist him. Both letters were published in the *Times and Seasons*. Obviously, Joseph would take care to get the wording just right under these circumstances. It took Phelps four days to draft the letter for Joseph's review.

Here is the second unusual spelling of *volume* in the *Times and Seasons*:

Vol. 3:12, p. 761 (April 15, 1842): NOTICE. On looking over our subscription list we find many who have paid but one dollar, on the present **volumne**, which pays for six months; and as that time expires with this number, all who wish the paper continued to the end of the **volumne** would do well to forward the money immediately.

Woodruff was in charge of the business aspects of the printing shop so this notice would naturally come from him. The third and final misspelling is another example of a business-related notice of the type Woodruff would be responsible for.

Vol. 5:9, p. 519 (May 1, 1844) TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS. We take this opportunity of informing our subscribers that the present number of the *Times and Seasons* (No. 9.) closes the year with a considerable portion of our readers, we therefore acquaint all those who have honored us with their patronage, that we have adoped [sic] one uniform plan, without respect of persons. viz.-That the *Times and Seasons* will be discontinued, in every case (where the time has expired) should the subscriptions not be renewed before our next publication. Our friends will therefore see the necessity of making arrangements without delay. Should any of our readers be in want of any of the back numbers they can be supplied by calling at the office. Also the first, second, third, and fourth **volumns** may be obtained.

It is also noteworthy that the boilerplate at the end of the issue reads thus: "JOHN TAYLOR, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR. Terms.-Two Dollars per annum, payable in all cases in advance. Any person procuring five new subscribers, and forwarding us Ten Dollars current money, shall receive one **volume** gratis. All letters must be addressed to John Taylor, editor, POST PAID, or they will not receive

<sup>28</sup> William Clayton diary, available online at <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/clayton-diaries>

<sup>29</sup> *Journals*, Vol. 3, May 1843—June 1844, Joseph Smith Papers, (The Church Historian's Press, 2015), p. 128.

attention.”

John Taylor used the term *volume* three times in his *Mediation and Atonement*, all spelled v-o-l-u-m-e. I can find no example of him spelling the term any other way.



While there is no evidence that Joseph ever read or cared about the Stephens books, Woodruff took great interest in them. Here are his journal entries that mention Stephens.

- Sept. 13, 1841 – “I spent the day in reading the 1<sup>st</sup> vol. of INCIDENTS OF TRAVELS IN Central America Chiapas and Yucatan BY JOHN L. **STEPHENS**’S... I felt truly interested in this work for it brought to light a flood of testimony in proof of the book of Mormon in the discovery & survey of the city Copan in Central America A correct drawing of the monuments pyramids, portraits, & Hieroglyphics as executed by Mr. Catherwood is now presented before the publick & is truly a wonder to the world. Their whole travels were truly interesting.” (emphasis mine, spelling and punctuation original)
- Sept. 16, 1841 – “I perused the 2d Vol of **Stephens** travels In Central America Chiapas of Yucatan & the ruins of Palenque & Copan. It is truly one of the most interesting histories I have ever read.”
- August 17, 1843 [in New York] – “Elder O. Pratt addressed the people concerning the Book of Mormon. He spoke in an edifying manner concerning the Book of Mormon its history what it was &c. That it was a History of nearly one half of the globe & the people that inhabited it, that it gave a history of all those cities that have been of late discovered by Cartherwood & **Stephens**, that it named those cities That it spoke of the esestablishing of our goverment & what is more highly interesting it reveals its final fate & destiny, so that by reading the Book of mormon you can clearly see what will befall this nation, and what will be its final end.”
- October 2, 1843 [in New York] – “I Bought all of **Stephens** works for J Taylor. Paid cash. \$8.00”
- October 17, 1843 – A cold day among the mountains. We had a slight squal of hall or snow. I have been for the last two days reading **Stephens** works & travels in Yucatan his second work. I red his first work on my Journey to Nauvoo with family in 1841. I found them highly interesting & also the present work. It is a great proof of the truth of the Book of Mormon. I read them with the highest degree of interest.
- 18th We continued to Clime the mountains by locks. It is more mild than it was yesterday. I spent the day reading **Stephens** works. We came to the end of the canal east of the Allegany mountain in the evening. The road during the day was vary mountaineous. Was 47 locks in 30 miles. A good deal of the way was in the Juneatta river.
- 22d Sunday Left Beaver & rode to wheeling & spent the night. I finished reading **Stephens** travels & found them highly interesting.
- January 18, 1844 – It was A rainy day. I visited & administered to several sick but I spent most of the day in reading the first vol of **Stephens** travels in Egypt, Arabia, Petrea and the Holy Land, and I was highly edified with it.
- 19th I parted with Elder Wm. Smith in the morning who went to Lowell. I spent the day with Br Little. I read during the day the second vol of **Stephens** travels in Egypt Arabia & the Holy Land &c. And I was exceedingly interested in the same Thinking that perhaps I might follow his footsteps over some of the same ground in some of my travels in the earth. It was interesting to trace him in his travels through Edom among the Palaces Cut out of the Solid rock and through the Holy land, visiting the Holy sepulcher and all places spoken of in the scripture.

A few years later, in February 1846, Woodruff was crossing the Atlantic on his way home from England when he recorded more evidence of his fascination with history.

February 18, 1846 – I have spent most of the last two days reading the travels of Edward Daniel Clark, L.L.D. through Russia Tartary and Turkey which I found to be highly interesting. His style of writing is quite similar to that to **Stephen**[s]. He draws however a Horrid picture of the whole Russin [sic] Nation.

These excerpts from Woodruff’s journal show that he had a long-lasting and extensive interest in

history. An overview of Woodruff's later contributions as Church Historian includes this observation:

Woodruff began to love history as he came of age. Biographer Matthias Cowley wrote that though Woodruff hated to read as a child, he soon came to describe the act of reading as "most exalrant" and "most delightful." Before joining the church, he had already read "histories of the United States, England, Scotland, Greece, and Rome," as well as the works of Josephus, which were popular during the period.[6] Thus, he came into the church with the importance of historical work already planted in his mind.<sup>30</sup>

For example, on September 12, 1840, Woodruff wrote "a lengthy historical letter" to Heber C. Kimball, the first letter he wrote to Kimball.<sup>31</sup> In it, he describes visits to the Tower of London, St. Paul's Cathedral, etc. He recorded in his journal that August 21, 1840: "This was the most interesting day of my life as far as viewing the splendid works of man was concerned."

On March 6, 1841, Woodruff was at a member's home in England where he spent the day "reading the history of Rome" by Edward Coxe. He wrote four pages of notes in his journal.

On May 14, 1841, while crossing the Atlantic, he records "I commenced reading the History of England by the Rev John Adams."

Woodruff's extensive reading of history is consistent with the comment in the 16 November 1841 thank-you note: "of all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprehensive." It was Wilford Woodruff, not Joseph Smith, who was familiar with "all histories that have been written."

Under the totality of these circumstances, the unlikelihood that a busy Joseph Smith would read the Stephens books in the first place is matched with the likelihood that Joseph, knowing of Woodruff's interest in history, would ask him to send a thank-you note to Bernhisel. It's even possible that Woodruff suggested such a note. Woodruff had personally accepted the gift from Bernhisel and had read the volumes with pleasure. His enthusiasm later led him to purchase copies for John Taylor—which is another interesting point.

Woodruff purchased the copies for Taylor in October 1843. Joseph donated copies to the Nauvoo Library only a few months later, sometime between January and April 1844 (along with numerous other books). Woodruff doesn't explain why he needed to buy copies for Taylor if Joseph already had them. If Joseph was going to donate them to the library anyway, surely he would have loaned them to Taylor upon request.

Maybe Woodruff wanted copies—particularly of the latest set of Stephens' travels in Yucatan, published in 1843—to read on the way home from New York. It's also interesting that on August 27, 1843, at a conference in New York attended by some of the Quorum of the Twelve, John Page and Orson Pratt discussed the Book of Mormon. Woodruff records that Pratt

spoke in an edifying manner concerning the Book of Mormon its history what it was &c. That it was a History of nearly one half of the globe & the people that inhabited it, that it gave a history of all those cities that have been of late discovered by Cartherwood & Stephens, that it named those cities That it spoke of the esestablishing of our government & what is more highly interesting it reveals its final fate & destiny, so that by reading the Book of

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<sup>30</sup> Benjamin E. Park, "Developing a Historical Conscience: Wilford Woodruff and the Preservation of Church History," chapter 5 in *Preserving the History of the Latter-day Saints*, Richard E. Turley Jr. and Steven C. Harper, editors (Religious Studies Center, BYU, Provo, Utah, and Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2010), available online here: <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/preserving-history-latter-day-saints/front-matter-0> Footnote 6 in the original is to Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 25.

<sup>31</sup> Scott H. Faulring, "Wilford Woodruff's Historical 'Address,'" *Mormon Historical Studies* (Fall 2000), p. 111, online at <http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/mhs1.2FaulringFall2000.pdf>

mormon you can clearly see what will befall this nation, and what will be its final end. In that Book you will find recorded the pure principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by himself on the continent of America so plain that no two persons could disagree as to the points of doctrine set forth.

Did Orson Pratt read the Bernhisel copies of these books, or did he own his own?

Pratt's claim that the Book of Mormon "named those cities" is quite interesting. Perhaps he had been making similar claims earlier that led to the Zarahemla article in the *Times and Seasons*. Woodruff's comments seem deferential to Pratt's expertise; Woodruff never made a similar claim of his own, even though he, too, had read the Stephens books.

I've tried to track down the actual books donated to the Nauvoo Library, so far to no avail.



So far, the evidence shows these facts connected to the 16 November 1841 letter:

1. It is the only one in the series between Joseph and Bernhisel that begins with "Dear Sir" instead of "Dear Brother."
2. All known correspondence between Woodruff and Bernhisel begins with "Dear Sir."
3. There are other examples of draft letters in Woodruff's files, including a draft letter to Bernhisel that changes "Dear Brother" to "Dear Sir."
4. The spelling of "volumnes" in the letter is unique, except for in the other writings of Woodruff.
5. Woodruff had a great interest in history generally.
6. Woodruff had a special interest in the work of John Lloyd Stephens.
7. There are other examples of Joseph Smith directing people to write letters on his behalf.
8. In October and November 1841, Joseph was busy with numerous responsibilities.
9. Apart from the letter itself, there are no contemporary accounts of Joseph reading or even acknowledging the Stephens books. Not even Woodruff mentions giving the books to Joseph, Joseph's reaction to them, etc.

As previously mentioned, Woodruff did not write the 16 November letter because it is not in his handwriting. Plus, he wrote a letter to Bernhisel on 5 November. If Woodruff wrote the original draft for the letter on 5 November, what accounts for the discrepancy in dates?

Here is the sequence of events in November 1841 that Woodruff recorded in his journal. The detail helps put the evidence in context:

5 November: "**I wrote a letter to Dr. Bernhisel & also one to Father and Mother Carter.**"

6 November: "I attended the city counsel [sic] for the first time.

7 November: "Sunday. I first called upon Br. Joseph with some of the Twelve."

8-13 November: [He worked on his house.]

14 November: "Sunday. I met in counsel with the Twelve... Joseph preached to a large congregation at the Temple."

15 November: "I laid a floor in my bedroom."

16 November: "I run 12 bushels of lime for plastering & rode in company with J. H. Hale 2 ½ miles on the prairie to Br Zerah Pulsiphers. I bought for acres of land of him in section 32 for \$44 dollars. I paid him \$20 dollars in silver & am to pay him the other \$24 dollars in a year. The ground is ploughed. I met in the evening with the company owning the land. They appointed me to sell some of the land to raise the money to pay Brother Daniel S. Miles Part on the land."

17 November: "I sold 5 acres of Daniel S. Miles land in section 32 for \$10 per acre to Sister Mary Pitt for which

she paid me \$50 dollars in gold which money I delivered to Zerah Pulsipher as one of the committee of the company. He gave his receipt [sic] for the Same.”

18th I spent the day in lathing.

19th I assisted Daniel S Miles in Selling 16 acres of land in Section 32 for \$10 dollars per acre. I also bought of Daniel S Miles 5 acres of land in Section 32 at \$10 dollars per acre. Am to give my notes when I get a bond for a deed.

20th I spent the day making lime mortar &c. I attended the city council at night.

21 st Sunday I met in Council with the Twelve at Elder B. Youngs. Then attended the general Assembly near the Temple. Heard a discours by Elder Taylor followed by President Hiram Smith. I then met the Twelve at B. Youngs untill 4 o'clock at which time we repaired to the Baptismal Font in the Temple for the purpose of Baptizing for the dead, for the remision of Sins & for healing. It was truly an interesting scene. It was the first FONT erected for this glorious purpose in this last dispensation. It was dedicated By President Joseph Smith & The Twelve for Baptizing for the Dead &c & this was the first time the font had been prepared for the reception of candidates. On the sabbath a large Congregation assembled. Elders B. Young H C Kimball & J Taylor went forward & Baptized about 40 persons. Elders W Richards, G. A. Smith & myself assisted in confirming them. I then Spent the evening with the Twelve at Br Kimball.

Nov 22d I got my Bedroom plastered by J. Hodson.

23d I spent the day to work at home.

24th I Commenced taking charge of the provision store for the committee of the Nauvoo House. I also cut & drew two loads of wood to my door.

25th I spent a part of the day at the store. We have a severe snow storm. About 200 Saints have just landed at warsaw from England. It is bad for them in this snow storm.

26th A Cold morning. I spent the day at home. **I mailed a letter to father Carters family.**

This record shows that two days after writing to Bernhisel on the 5th, Woodruff met with Joseph Smith. It's possible he discussed the letter, or even gave it to Joseph to review, but there is no evidence one way or another on that point. He could have simply told Joseph he'd written the thank-you note. Maybe the topic never arose again between the two men.

Obviously, a discovery of Woodruff's letters to the Carters from November 1841 would clarify the sequence of events. Currently, the Wilford Woodruff collection of correspondence at the Church History Library has a gap between May 24, 1841, and March 12, 1846.<sup>32</sup> The collection of retained copies of outgoing correspondence has a gap between September 12, 1840 and May 1845.<sup>33</sup> We are left to interpret the evidence in light of all the circumstances.

Woodruff spent the next week working on his house. His journal doesn't mention Bernhisel or the letter again, as might be expected whether he had mailed the letter or had drafted the letter and gave it to someone to write with good penmanship and send. Again, the evidence is equivocal.

However, a detail from Woodruff's journal may help explain the time delays. When he wrote a letter to Bernhisel on November 5<sup>th</sup>, he also wrote a letter to "Father and Mother Carter," (the parents of his wife Phebe). Then, in the 26<sup>th</sup>, Woodruff records "I mailed a letter to father Carters family." It's odd that he doesn't mention *mailing* the 5 November letter or *writing* the 26 November letter. Woodruff rarely mentions mailing letters; in Volume 2 of his journal (1841-1845), he only recorded mailing letters twelve times, despite having written hundreds of letters. When he does refer to mailing letters, he usually wrote about writing them first. For example, on January 13 and 14, 1841, he wrote a letter to Phebe that he mailed on the 18<sup>th</sup>. On February 19, 1841, Woodruff wrote "I mailed the two letters to Phebe & Father Woodruff" that he described writing the day before. Later, in August 1844, he recorded that he wrote a letter to Azmon Woodruff on the 20<sup>th</sup> but didn't mail it until the 24<sup>th</sup>, when the boat he was on arrived in

<sup>32</sup> Wilford Woodruff collection: Correspondence. Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, MS 19509.

<sup>33</sup> Wilford Woodruff journals and papers: Wilford Woodruff Outgoing Correspondence (retained copies), 1831-1861, Wilford Woodruff letters, 1845-1846. Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, MS 1352.



port. On April 1, 1845, he wrote “one large sheet” to Brigham Young, which he mailed on the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Woodruff recorded writing only the two November 5<sup>th</sup> letters for the entire month of November. He was conscientious about keeping track of his activities; at the end of each year, he listed the number of miles traveled, the number of meetings he held, the number of people he baptizes, etc. At the end of 1841, Woodruff recorded “Wrote 100 Letters & Received 67 Letters.” (In his journal for 1841, Woodruff mentioned writing 93 letters, but some of these references could have meant multiple letters, such as this one: “I wrote a letter to Br Azmon & Thompson W.”). It would be uncharacteristic of Woodruff to write a second letter to the Carters in November without noting that fact.

His prolific letter writing argues against the idea that Woodruff would have someone else copy a letter he drafted, but there is good reason to think the letter to Dr. Bernhisel would be an exception. Most of the letters Woodruff wrote were to family and friends. The 5 November 1841 letters were the first letters he records writing after he returned to Nauvoo, and the only letters he wrote that month. Because we don’t have the 5 November letter, we don’t know what Woodruff’s handwriting looked like on that day, after he’d been sick for several days, but based on the documents we do have, including other letters and his journal, we would expect there to be some corrections on his first draft of this letter. Although Woodruff wrote often, his penmanship was not good. His journal is written in cramped printed characters,<sup>34</sup> while his correspondence is mostly written in cursive that is often difficult to decipher. The person who wrote the 16 November letter used straight lines and consistent style.

A letter to Dr. Bernhisel would be different from other letters he wrote. Woodruff was explicitly enthusiastic about and impressed by the Stephens books. He would want to make a good impression on the New York doctor, particularly because he was writing on behalf of Joseph Smith. This would require no line outs or corrections on the letter itself, as well as clear, legible writing. Perhaps he would have thought it inappropriate to send a letter written in his own hand when he was referring to himself in the third person, again on behalf of Joseph.

What would account for the delay between writing the Carter letter on the 5<sup>th</sup> and mailing it on the 26<sup>th</sup>? Maybe Woodruff had someone write that one out as well, although that seems unlikely given the long history of correspondence between Woodruff and the Carters. It is possible he wrote the letter to the Carters and set it aside, forgetting about it until the person who wrote out the Bernhisel letter returned it to him for approval and mailing. The Bernhisel letter wasn’t sent until the 23<sup>rd</sup>, so whatever caused the delays for that letter may have caused the delay for the Carter letter.

As for who actually wrote the 16 November letter, additional research may answer the question. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, Woodruff rode out to the home of Zera Pulsipher, the man who baptized Woodruff near Richland, NY, on December 31, 1833. Woodruff purchased property on that occasion. There does not appear to be any connection between Woodruff’s land transactions and the land purchased for Bernhisel as indicated in the letter to Bernhisel dated January 4, 1842, but it is possible that whoever wrote the letter to Bernhisel was involved with the real estate business in Nauvoo.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Two pages of Woodruff’s journal are visible here: <https://history.lds.org/exhibit/foundations-of-faith?lang=eng#mv28>.

<sup>35</sup> There is another possibility. While working on another project, I noticed some similarities between the 16 November handwriting and the handwriting of Orson F. Whitney. Orson wasn’t born until July 1, 1855, so I wondered who taught him how to write. I looked at his parents and found that his father, Horace K. Whitney, had changed his handwriting considerably over the years. The reverse side of a letter he wrote to his wife, Helen Mar Kimball, was full of what appear to be practice letters, as if Horace was experimenting with different writing styles. He was a printer by trade—he worked at the *Times and Seasons* under Don Carlos and set type for the original publication of the *Deseret News* in Utah—and perhaps he could have written the 16 November letter for Woodruff. His experiments with different writing styles may account for the failure to recognize the handwriting.



Further research may bring more light to the question of authorship of the 16 November 1841 letter to Dr. Bernhisel. I hope it does. In the meantime, the evidence points to Wilford Woodruff as the author and an unknown person as the scribe.

One objection to consider is whether Wilford Woodruff would have represented to Dr. Bernhisel that Joseph had read the Stephens books, when in fact it was Woodruff and not Joseph who read them. In the context of a private thank-you note that Joseph didn't even sign, this objection is overly technical. In the first place, the letter is vague.<sup>36</sup> It refers to the "kind present" that "unfolds & developes many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon." That can be taken in any number of ways, including the idea that the descendants of the surviving Lamanites migrated southward to Central America (an interpretation that would actually correspond to the dating of the ruins Stephens describes, which are not from the Book of Mormon era). In the second place, it is not only the claim that Joseph read the Stephens books that is problematic, but worse is the assertion that he had compared the Stephens books to "all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country." This embellishment is of a kind with the rhetorical style of the day found elsewhere in the letter: "I feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem & friendship" and "In grateful remembrance of your kindness I remain your affectionate Brother in the bonds of the Everlasting Covenant." No one read such rhetoric literally; it was merely customary language. In my view, Woodruff as an overly enthusiastic author makes much more sense than Joseph in that role, particularly where Joseph never shared this enthusiasm with anyone.

Finally, the question often arises about whether, even given its lack of specificity, the letter accurately reflects Joseph's views on the underlying question of Book of Mormon geography and historicity. There is a pervasive assumption that Joseph's close associates, including Wilford Woodruff, knew what he thought about every topic. Woodruff himself dismissed that assumption.

On November 1, 1844, just months after the martyrdom, Woodruff recorded this in his journal:

I also had another dream. Was in the Presence of Br Joseph Smith. Was conversing about his death. Told him I felt bad about it & If I had known he would have been taken away so soon I should have conversed more with him & asked him more questions. Said it was not his fault that I did not.

In 1892, Woodruff was asked about what Joseph thought on an important topic. He said, "'I have heard representations that the doctrine [on marriage] as put into the book of doctrine and covenants . . . by Oliver Cowdery . . . was represented as being contrary to the wishes of Joseph smith, but I couldn't swear that that was the fact.'"<sup>37</sup> The assumption Joseph's closest associates knew what he thought about every topic is more wishful thinking than a historically verified, or even supported, reality.

The historical fact remains that, even including the 16 November 1841 note to Bernhisel, not a single reference to the Stephens books—or Central America—has been found with Joseph's signature or explicit approval. The historical evidence indicates that the letter is Wilford Woodruff's.

<sup>36</sup> I discuss the contents of the letter in more detail in *The Lost City of Zarahemla*.

<sup>37</sup> Brian C. Hales, "'Guilty of Such Folly'? Accusations of Adultery or Polygamy against Oliver Cowdery," in *Days Never to Be Forgotten: Oliver Cowdery*, Religious Studies Center, BYU, available online at [https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/days-never-be-forgotten-oliver-cowdery/10-guilty-such-folly-accusations-adultery-or#\\_edn34](https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/days-never-be-forgotten-oliver-cowdery/10-guilty-such-folly-accusations-adultery-or#_edn34), citing Wilford Woodruff, testimony given at the Temple Lot Case, Part 3, Question 769, 70 (complete transcript).

## Appendix: Correspondence between John Bernhisel and Joseph Smith

The seven letters between John Bernhisel and Joseph Smith are shown below with key points emphasized in **bold**.

**13 April 1841**

City of Nauvoo April 13, 1841

**Dear Brother,**

Yours of the 6th. ultimo is received, **which should have been answered before, had not I been so much engaged in the business of the conference.**

In reply, I have to say, that I always feel glad to do all I can for the interest of the church and for individuals.

I think it will be impossible to enter any land at Congress price excepting prairie, about 4 or 5 miles from town. But there is frequently persons who want to sell lands in the neighborhood and who, would be induced to sell very low for cash.

If you were here; I think you would have plenty of oppertunities of making good bargains if you were here, but if you cannot come I will endeavour to obtain a suitable place for you if you advise me so to do.

If you were to send what means you can conveniently spare for that purpose to me, I will lay it out to the best advantage for you, and if I should not meet with a suitable purchase soon, I will allow you good interest for the same, but I have no doubt but I shall have plenty of oppertunities of laying out your money to good advantage.

I approve of your place of letting out the land you purchase, as it must soon be verely valuable indeed, and at the same time be doing a favor to some of the poor brethren whose property has been taken away from them by a ruthless mob.

Our conference is just over; we have ad a glorious time indeed; the particulars **you will see in the Times and Seasons which will be out in a few days.**

The health of the people is good, and we are expecting great blessings and enjoyments, and are anxously looking for, and expecting our eastern friends to come and share in the toils and blessings

With sentiments of respect  
I am yours &c in the gospel  
Joseph Smith

J. M. Berishall. [John Bernhisel] M.D.

P.S. If you should send any means on, you can send it by Elders [Samuel] Bent or [George W.] Harris who I expect are somewhere in your neighborhood or with any of the twelve when they come, or a draught on New York by mail. J. S.

The Brethren in New York wrote to me sometime ago on the subject of Babtizm [baptism] for the dead please to inform them **I well attend to it as soon as I possibly can.** J. S.

**12 July 1841**

New York July 12, 1841.

**Dear Brother,**

I have received your favor of the 13th of April, informing me that it would be impossible to enter any land except prairie at Congress price, and kindly offering to procure a suitable place for me if I should advise you to do so. Enclosed you will receive a certificate of deposite for four hundred and twenty five

dollars on the Greenwich bank in this city, and **you will have the goodness to purchase as soon as a a favorable opportunity offers** (for **I presume it will advance rapidly in price**) as large a tract of good land, with a sufficient quantity of timber, in a healthful location, and within a convenient distance, say one two or three miles of Nauvoo, as you can for about five hundred dollars, the remaining seventy five I will remit to you on or before the 1st of July of next year. Be pleased to have the deed recorded and retain it in your possession until the balance is paid, for I suppose it will not be necessary to execute a mortgage on the property for so small an amount. Of the value of the improvements I care but little as my object is to procure as large a tract of land as I can with my limited means. When you have made the purchase, you will please to rent it to such a tenant and on such terms as you would if it were your own. You will greatly oblige me by immediately acknowledging the receipt of the enclosed certificate, and writing me when you have effected a purchase.

I have delivered your Message to the Bretheren here respecting your reply to their letter on the subject of baptism for the dead. We were rejoiced to here that you were delivered out of the hands of wicked and ungodly men. It was reported that you designed making us a visit about the latter part of May, we therefore anxiously expected you, but it is superfluous to add that were disappointed. **I have for several weeks past transmitted the New York Evangelist to the Editors of the Times & Seasons, if it is of no service to them, please say to them if they will return a no. I will discontinue sending it.** Elder John E. Page arrived in this city on the 6th instant, on his way to Jerusalem, and will sail for Liverpool in a few days. Elder [Wilford] Woodruff has not yet returned from the state of Maine. We have had the pleasure of a flying visit from Elders Hiram [Hyrum] Smith, Wm [Law] & Wilson Law. I tender to you my grateful acknowledgments for your kind offer to attend to this affair, but **it is with some reluctance that I accept it, for your are no doubt almost overwhelmed with business.**

With sentiments of the highest  
Regard I am yours in the Gospel  
John M. Bernhisel  
176 Hudson street

P. S. Elder Page delivered three discourses yesterday to crowded congregations, and requests me to present his best respects to the authorities of the Church and desires that you would inform his family that he is in the enjoyment of good health. He gives exceedingly flattering accounts of the progress of the work where he labored during the past winter & Spring and this summer. J. M B.

### 3 August 1841

City of Nauvoo. Aug. 3, 1841

**Dear Brother,**

Your certificate of deposit of \$500.— came Safe to hand a few days ago. **It shall be applied on the most advantageous purchase I can find.** If a purchase could have been made early in the spring it could have been done to much better advantage than at present, owing to the vast number of the Saints who are continually pouring in to this county— all, of course. want locations, consequently the land in the immediate vicinity had been taken up— However, I have no doubt, but that for Cash a good bargain can be had, which **I shall endeavour to effect— the first oppertunity I have, and shall write you on the subject as soon as I do**

With sentiments of esteem

I am Yours in the bonds  
of the E. [verlasting] Covenant  
Joseph Smith

J[ohn] M. Bernhisel M. D.

**18 August 1841**

New York August 18th. 1841

**Dear Brother,**

I wrote you about the 12th. Ultimo enclosing a certificate of deposite on the Greenwich bank in this city for four hundred and twenty five dollars, and **requested that you would do me the favor to purchase land for me** to the amount of about five hundred [hole in page] [d]ollars, and stated that I would remit you the remaining [s]eventy five dollars by the 1st of July next, but I shall probably be enabled to do so in the course of the ensuing winter, certainly by the first of May next. **Not having received an acknowledgment of the receipt of the certificate of deposite,** and supposing that **you were probably prevented from acknowledging <it> by the pressure of other business,** I wrote a few days since to Elder [Heber C.] Kimball, requesting him to make the inquiry and write me, as **I felt anxious to know** whether it had reached you in safety. **In my last I desired you to make the purchase within two or three miles of Nauvoo,** but I have very recently been informed that the price of land is very high in the immediate vicinity of that city, I should therefore obtain a very small tract for five hundred dollars. If this be the case, **you will have the goodness to purchase land, (if you have not already done so)** at any distance within ten miles of your city, but **you will please to act in this matter as if you were purchasing for yourself,** for you are on the spot and perfectly well acquainted with all the advantages and disadvantages of location &c &c and a small piece of ground near the city may be better than a larger one at a greater distance from it **You will greatly oblige me by writing immediately after making the purchase, if time and other avocations will permit.** Elder Henry Moore arrived here from England some ten or twelve days ago, and intends to take his departure for the west about the middle of next month— I hope you will have the kindness to excuse <me> for again trespassing on your precious time—

[W]ith perfect respect

I am yours in the Gospel

John M. Bernhisel

176 Hudson street

**8 September 1841**

New York September 8th. 1841.

**Dear Brother**

You will herewith receive a copy of Stephen's Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan, which I hope you will do me the favor to accept, as a small testimony of my gratitude to you for the valuable services you are rendering me, and as a token of my regard for you as a Prophet of the Lord.

With sentiments of the highest consideration, I am yours in the bonds of the New and Everlasting Covenant.

J[ohn] M. Bernhisel

P.S. I have had the pleasure to receive your favor of the 5th ultimo, acknowledging the receipt of the certificate of deposit for four hundred and twenty five dollars, and **kindly saying that you would expend it to the best advantage.** In addition to the above Elder [Wilford] Woodruff will hand you forty dollars, and the balance I will endeavor to remit you **soon after you inform me that you have made the purchase,** but certainly before the first of May next. On the genuineness of the bills you may place the most implicit reliance, for one of them I obtained at the bank from which it was issued, and the other at the Greenwich bank. I sincerely condole with you on the death of your brother Don Carlos [Smith].

**16 November 1841**

Nauvoo November 16, 1841

**Dear Sir**

I received your kind present by the hand of Er. [Wilford] Woodruff & feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem & friendship which to me is the more interesting as it unfolds & develops many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon; I have read the volumes with the greatest interest & pleasure & must say that of all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprehensive.—

In regard to the land referred to by you I would simply state that I have land both in and out of the City some of which I hold deeds for and others bonds for deeds **when you come which I hope will be as soon** as convenient you can make such a selection from among those as shall best meet with your views & feelings. In grateful remembrance of your kindness I remain your affectionate Brother in the bonds of the

Everlasting Covenant

Joseph Smith

To Dr. [John] Bernhisel

**4 January 1842**

Copy of a letter to Dr John M. Burnhisel [Bernhisel].

176. Hudson Str N. York  
Nauvoo City January 4. 1842

**Dear Brother**

Yours of the 11th Dec. post Marked 13th. is received & **I have this day made a purchase according to your request,** of 60 acres of land off the South Side, of the south east quarter, <of> Section 9. of Township six north, of range 8 west, of the 4th principal Meridian in the tract appropriated for Military bounties, for the Sum of \$480. I.E. \$8. per Acre, which is less than its present value, & that on account of Previous advances on your part.

The land is situated about 2 miles east by south of the Temple, and of an excellent quality though perhaps not quite so great a proportion of timber as you would have preferred, yet it was the best chance which presented itself to me at present, We do not long expect to be dependent on wood, from this immediate vicinity for firing our city, there are, unquestionably, inexhaustible mines of coal in the



neighborhood, not far beneath the surface, which we expect will shortly be opened, furnishing an abundance of fuel at a moderate price, & also lights for the City, as soon as means can be brought in requisition to establish Gas works.

The purchase I made of Mr Peter Hawes [Haws] & have his deed to you for the Land, & I shall improve the earliest opportunity. to forward it to the Recorders Office, for entry, and after that is accomplished I will file it away with my Deeds, holding it subject to your order.

The certificate of deposite referred to in your letter, July 12— 1841 for— \$425,  
together with the 8th Sept for Mr [Wilford] Woodruff. of 40

\$465,

deducted from the, ——— ——— ——— ——— ——— 480

paid for the land, leaves a balance in my favor of \$15

concerning which you will act your pleasure or or convenien[c]e. I would rather it should be forwarded by the brethren, or some private conveyance, than risque it in the Post office, &c  
&c—

I remain yours in the N. C.

Joseph Smith.

pr W[illard] Richards Scribe

omitted all but the business Part.

## Appendix: Note from Joseph Smith to Newel K. Whitney

This letter is in Joseph Smith's handwriting. <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-newel-k-whitney-12-december-1840>

Nauvoo Dec. 12th 1840

Brother Whitney

Dear Sir

I am at work  
in my office am under the ne-  
cessity to have some help from  
time to time to help me along  
in my calling I therefore desire  
you to let the bearer of this hav[e]  
<some> of that dry wood to burn in the  
stove of my office and oblige  
your hum[b]le servant

Joseph Smith