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The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: This article discusses the location and disposition of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon. It remained in the hands of Joseph Smith who put the pages in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo house. These were nearly destroyed by water and time. The only remnants are now in the possession of the Church.

THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT OF THE BOOK OF MORMON.

BY JOSEPH F. SMITH, JR.

The following from the *Saints' Herald* of April 24, 1907, is an excerpt from the minutes of the "Reorganite" conference:

A question was presented by one individual who stated that he had been told that the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon was in the possession of the Utah Church. In reply, President F. M. Smith made the following statement:

The manuscript of the Book of Mormon is in the custody of the presidency, and at the present time is in the hands of the secretary of the presidency, and is in a vault at Independence. The Utah people have not got it.

It is quite true that the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon is not in its entirety in the possession of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; it is equally as true that it is *not* in the custody of the "Reorganized" church, nor in the keeping of the secretary of their presidency (F. M. Smith), nor in a vault in Independence, Mo. This is said merely to correct misrepresentation, and not with the spirit of controversy.

The manuscript which the "Reorganites" for some time have been designating as the original is but the printer's copy which Oliver Cowdery, shortly before his death, gave into the hands of David Whitmer, his fellow witness.

After the plates were translated, the Prophet received a commandment from the Lord that the entire manuscript should be copied, that the copy should go to the printer, and the original manuscript should not be permitted to go out of his hands. An account of this is given in Lucy Smith's history of the Prophet, (ERA edition), pages 142-3, as follows:

Soon after this, Joseph secured the copyright; and before he returned to Pennsylvania, where he had left his wife, he received a commandment, which was in substance as follows:

First, that Oliver Cowdery should transcribe the whole manuscript; Second, that he should take but one copy at a time to the office, so that if one copy should get destroyed, there would still be a copy remaining; Third, that in going to and from the office, he should always have a guard to attend him, for the purpose of protecting the manuscript; Fourth, that a guard should be kept constantly on the watch, both night and day, about the house, to protect the manuscript from malicious persons, who would infest the house for the purpose of destroying the manuscript. All these things were strictly attended to, as the Lord commanded Joseph.

The original manuscript was in this manner carefully guarded, and the copy struck off by Oliver Cowdery was used in the printing of the Book of Mormon. The original was never in the hands of the printer. David Whitmer was not aware of this commandment, or had forgotten it, and without doubt, believed that the printer's copy was the original. It was in this light that he prized it. In September, 1878, he was visited by Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith at his home in Richmond, and on that occasion showed them this printer's copy, marked and scarred with the printer's notes, and was greatly surprised when his attention was called to the fact for the first time, that in his copy all the signatures of the witnesses were in one handwriting, (evidently that of Oliver Cowdery,) when he was most emphatic that each witness had, in the original, signed his own name. The account of this portion of the interview is in the journal of President Joseph F. Smith, as follows:

Next day (Sunday, September 8th,) Mr. Whitmer invited us to his house where, in the presence of David Whitmer, Esq., (son of Jacob), Philander Page, J. R. B. Vancleve, David J. Whitmer, (son of David the Witness), George Schweich, (grandson of David), Colonel Childs and others, David Whitmer brought out the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. We examined them closely and those who knew the handwriting pronounced the whole of them, excepting comparatively a few pages, to be in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery. It was thought that these few pages were in the handwriting of Emma Smith and John and Christian Whitmer.

We found that the names of the eleven witnesses were, however, subscribed in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery. When the question was asked Mr. Whitmer if he and the other witnesses did or did not sign the testimonies themselves, Mr. Whitmer replied that each signed his own name.

“Then where are the original signatures?”

D. Whitmer—“I don’t know, I suppose Oliver copied them, but this I know is an exact copy?”

Joseph F. Smith suggested that perhaps there were *two copies* of the manuscripts, but Mr. Whitmer replied that, according to the best of his knowledge, there never was but the one copy. Herein of course, he is evidently uninformed.

Quite a number of the elders of the Church have examined the manuscript now in the keeping of the “Reorganization,” and all declare that it is most likely, in the main, in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery, and that the signatures of the witnesses are all in the same handwriting. The question would naturally arise: What became of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon? The answer is simple. The original manuscript remained in the possession of the Prophet Joseph Smith and was by his own hand placed in the corner stone of the Nauvoo House, October 2, 1841, in the presence of numerous witnesses. One of these was Elder Warren Foote, of Glendale, Utah, who recorded in his journal under date of October 2, 1841, the following:

October 2, 1841. The semi-annual conference commenced today. After meeting was dismissed a deposit was made in the southeast corner of the Nauvoo House. A square hole had been chiseled in the large corner stone like a box. An invitation was given for any who wished to put in any little memento they desired to. I was standing very near the corner stone, when Joseph Smith came up with the manuscript of the Book of Mormon, and said he wanted to put that in there, as he had had trouble enough with it. It appeared to be written on fool’s cap paper and was about three inches in thickness. There was also deposited a Book of Doctrine and Covenants, five cents, ten cents, twenty-five cents, fifty cents, and one dollar pieces of American coin, besides other articles. A close fitting stone cover was laid in cement, and the wall built over it. I was standing within three feet of the Prophet when he handed in the manuscript and saw it very plainly.

The late Bishop Frederick Kesler of the Sixteenth ward, Salt Lake City, was also present and recorded in his journal that the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon was placed in this corner stone. We have also, in one of the manuscript histories of the Church, under date of December 29, 1841, kept by the Prophet’s clerk at that time, a list of the articles that were placed in this corner stone, of which the following is a reproduction:

1841
December 29th

The corner stone of the Nauvoo House was laid by
President Joseph Smith on the 2nd of October 1841
(at the commencement of the last general conference of the
Church in Nauvoo previous to the founding of the Temple)
and the following articles were deposited there by the President.

- To Wit:—
- 1 Book of Mormon
 - 1 Declaration given January 19th 1841.
 - 1 The Times & Seasons containing the Charter of the Nauvoo House Dec 28 Apr 30, 1841
 - 1 Journal of Oliver C. Cowdrey.
 - 1 The Memorial of Lyman Wight to the United States Senate.
 - 1 Book of Doctrine & Covenants. — 10 Edition.
 - 1 No. 55 of the Times and Seasons.
 - 1 The original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon.
 - 1 The presentation of the Church on the State of Missouri.
 - 1 Publication in the Times & Seasons
 - 1 The Holy Bible
 - 1 Half Dollar
 - 1 Quarter Dollar & Silver Coin
 - 2 Dimes
 - 5 Half Pennies
 - 1 Copper Coin.

The Nauvoo House, which was begun in the days of Joseph Smith, was never finished, and in the course of time the walls were torn down by Mr. Lewis C. Bidamon, second husband of Emma Smith, and the contents of this corner stone, which had so long been exposed to the elements, were found to be nearly ruined. Some of the articles, however, were preserved, and have been widely distributed. President Joseph F. Smith has in his possession Lyman Wight's memorial, and also pages 3 to 22 of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, which are, considering all things, fairly well preserved. Elders Andrew Jenson, Edward Stevenson, Joseph W. Summerhays and others also obtained portions of the original manuscript. Some of it, we understand, was also in the possession of Joseph Smith of the "Reorganization," but only a small fragment. Thus the original manuscript, that portion that was not destroyed by the elements, has been scattered. This is what became of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon,* and the statement of the above mentioned "sec-

* For further particulars in relation to this subject, see the M. I. A. Manual for 1903, No 7, lesson 9.

retary" is a mistake. We trust that he will examine carefully that printer's copy and scrutinize the names of the witnesses and the printer's marks and note the fact that he has deceived himself that he may correct his error and cease to practice this deception on his unsuspecting people.

After all, what does it matter what became of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon? It is valueless, save as a relic. The statement has gone forth that the Church offered a large sum for the printer's copy. No such offer was ever made. The Book of Mormon has been translated into more than a dozen languages, and hundreds of thousands of copies have been published at a price so reasonable that it is within the reach of all—the same as that of the original manuscript. If the Prophet had considered the original manuscript of any value as a work of reference, he would not have placed it in the foundation of the Nauvoo House.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

THE UNKNOWN.

(For the Improvement Era.)

There are songs enough for the hero,
Who dwells on the heights of fame;
I sing for the disappointed,
For those who missed their aim.—*Ella Wheeler Wilcox.*

Some lives have never been written, Some stories have never been told, Grave secrets in proud hearts lie hidden, And sorrows too keen to unfold.	Victories glorious, triumphant, Though no one may witness the fray; And often the jewel most precious, Lies buried in deeps far away.
Some depths have never been sounded, Some heights no mortal can reach; Some questions have never been answered, Some thoughts have never found speech.	But I know there is joy for each sorrow, I know there are smiles for each tear. That when the great Book is laid open, Vexed questions will all be made clear.
There are heroes dwelling in silence, Forsaken and always unsung; And battles are fought in the stillness, Where victories mighty are won—	There are songs for the hero unknown, Far sweeter than music of earth; And he who has conquered in silence, The universe chanteth his worth.

His glory sheds over the ages,
Far out through the limits of time;
To find a famed niche in His Temple,
And radiate with the Divine.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

RUTH MAY FOX.