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## The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon

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**Abstract:** This article refutes a claim made in an article printed in the *St. Louis Republic* concerning the whereabouts of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon by arguing that the manuscript was placed in the southwest corner of the Nauvoo house. They alleged that David Whitmer had possession of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, and that elders from the Church visiting him in Richmond, Missouri, offered him \$100,000 for it.

## EDITOR'S TABLE.

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### THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT OF THE BOOK OF MORMON.

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Much has been said, at different times, as to the whereabouts of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, but very little of a definite character has been said respecting this topic. Quite recently an article on this subject was reprinted in the *St. Louis Republic*, from a Richmond, Missouri, correspondent, and copied by the Troy, N. Y. *Press* and reproduced from the latter paper by the *Deseret News* of September 27th, with appropriate comment. That the readers of the ERA may more clearly see the puerile, but malicious character of this article, which is a fair sample of many others published in the press of the country, on this subject, it is here reproduced:

The original manuscript of Joseph Smith's "Book of Mormon," the Bible of the "Mormon" Church, is kept in a bank vault in this town. The Elders of the "Mormon" Church, in Utah, made different attempts, in past years, to get possession of it, but failed. Once they offered \$100,000 in cash for the old and yellow manuscript, but its keeper, David Whitmer, one of the founders of the Church refused the offer because he believed the Utah branch of the Church wished to get hold of the manuscript to insert into it, by forgery, a clause that would authorize and sanction the practice of polygamy. Last week, two representatives of the "Mormon" Church of Utah were here making another attempt to buy the manuscript. This original manuscript, written at the dictation of Joseph Smith, is now in the possession of George W. Schweich of this town, a retired merchant, the grandson of David Whitmer who was one of the three witnesses to the writing of the manuscript. The manuscript of the "Book of Mormon" contains six hundred large sheets of linen paper, the size of foolscap, written closely on both sides. The

paper is yellow with age, and the ink is faded to brown. The pages are bound together with strings of yarn. The manuscript contains three hundred and fifty thousand words. It was written in 1829.

The fact of the matter is that the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon never was "kept in a bank vault" in the town of Richmond nor in that of any other town, in Missouri. Neither has the original manuscript ever been in the possession of David Whitmer nor that of any of his kindred. Neither has the "Mormon" Church in Utah through any of its Elders or otherwise attempted at any time to get possession of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, "and failed." The Church in Utah has not at any time, through its Elders or otherwise, offered a hundred thousand dollars nor any other sum of money for the original manuscript, nor for the "old and yellow" copy of it which was left by Oliver Cowdery, at his death at Richmond, Missouri, March 3rd, 1850, in the possession of David Whitmer, which copy is said to be now "in a bank vault" in Richmond, Missouri. The story about David Whitmer refusing "the offer" of one hundred thousand dollars for his copy of the manuscript, "because he believed the Utah branch of the Church wished to get hold of the manuscript to insert into it, by forgery, a clause that would authorize and sanction the practice of polygamy," is ridiculous twaddle. The fact, however, that such a story is told, and published in some of the leading newspapers of the country, would make it appear that there are people blind enough to give credence to it.

First, let it be said that David Whitmer's "belief," if he ever entertained such a belief, together with the whole story, is without the least shadow of truth. How could it be possible for such a thing as forgery to be perpetrated! Up to the date of the alleged offer hundreds of thousands of copies of the Book of Mormon had been published and scattered broad-cast over the world, and, besides, translated into more than a dozen foreign languages. Therefore, even if David Whitmer or the agents of the "Mormon" Church of Utah, might desire to alter the manuscript, how could they hope to call in and change the tens of thousands of the printed book? Comment is unnecessary. A grain of common sense will show how imbecile the thought.

The statement that "last week two representatives of the 'Mormon' Church, of Utah, were here making another attempt to buy the manuscript," is a falsehood of the same class. However, there may have been occasionally an Elder of the Church, not posted on this subject, who, for some purpose known to himself, might have tried to ascertain the value in which this manuscript is held by its possessors. But no man, Elder or Apostle, is, nor ever has been, authorized by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to offer any sum of money for the manuscript now in the possession of the heirs of David Whitmer. In September, 1878, in company with Apostle Orson Pratt, the writer visited David Whitmer, at Richmond, Ray County, Missouri. In the presence of David C. Whitmer, the son of Jacob, Philander Page, David J. Whitmer, son of David Whitmer, George Scheweich, Col. James W. Black, J. R. B. Van Cleave and some others, Father David Whitmer was asked if the three witnesses signed their own names to their testimony to the Book of Mormon? Father Whitmer unhesitatingly replied with emphasis:

"Yes, we each signed his own name."

"Then," said the questioner, "how is it that the names of all the witnesses are found here, (in D. W's manuscript) written in the same hand-writing?"

This question seemed to startle Father Whitmer, and, after examining the signatures he replied:

"Oliver must have copied them."

"Then, where are the original documents?" was asked.

He replied, "I don't know."

Knowing as we did with what sacredness this manuscript was regarded by Father Whitmer, both Elder Pratt and the writer sounded him to see if he could be induced to part with it, and we found him determined to retain it. We were not authorized to offer any money for the manuscript, neither did we make any offer of money or other consideration for it. But notwithstanding this fact, it was soon rumored about and published abroad that we had offered large sums of money for it.

In July, 1884, the writer received the following enquiries, by letter, from L. J. Traughbar, Jr., of Mandeville, Carrol County, Missouri:



“Did Mr. Pratt and you offer David Whitmer \$10,000 for the manuscript of the Book of Mormon? Did you offer him \$100,000? Did you make him any definite offer for them?”

To each question there can be but one reply, No, not those amounts and not one dollar!

Now let us see what became of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon. The following is copied from the history of the Prophet Joseph Smith by his mother: (pp. 142 and 143.)

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 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. After giving these instructions, Joseph returned to Pennsylvania.

This is sufficient to show that the original manuscript was copied by Oliver Cowdery.

The following letter may be interesting here:

Further facts in relation to the manuscript of the Book of Mormon. I saw the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr., hide up the above manuscript unto the Lord in the south-east corner of the Nauvoo House, Illinois. I stood within eight or ten feet of him, heard and saw what he said and did, on that important occasion, which I freely testify to all the world.

[Signed]      FREDERICK KESLER, SEN.,

Bishop of the Sixteenth Ward,

October 12, 1878.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

From the history of Joseph Smith, *Millennial Star*, Vol. 18, page 693, (See also *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 2, page 576), we copy: “Conference met in the grove. The Presidency being absent laying the corner stone of the Nauvoo House, the meeting was called to order by President B. Young.” This is under date of October 2, 1841.

Many years ago, the writer copied the following statement from the early records of The Church, which were kept by his private secretary under the immediate direction and supervision of the Prophet Joseph Smith himself:

The corner stone of the Nauvoo House was laid by President Joseph Smith on the 2nd of October, 1841, and the following articles were deposited therein by the President, to-wit:

A Book of Mormon; a revelation given January 19, 1841; the *Times and Seasons*, containing the charter of the Nauvoo House; Journal of Heber C. Kimball; the memorial of Lyman Wight to the United States Senate; a Book of Doctrine and Covenants, first edition; No. 35 of the *Times and Seasons*; THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT OF THE BOOK OF MORMON; the Persecutions of the Church in the State of Missouri, published in the *Times and Seasons*; the Holy Bible. Silver coins as follows: one half-dollar, one quarter-dollar, two dimes, two half-dimes, and one copper coin."

Thus we see that the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, which had up to this time remained in the possession of Joseph himself, was on October 2nd, 1841, by his own hand, deposited in the south-east corner of the Nauvoo House, with other things, and that it never was at any time in the possession of David Whitmer. The copy taken was used for printing by E. B. Grandin, of Palmyra, New York. Oliver Cowdery read the proofs, and when the book was printed retained possession of the copy which, at his death, in Richmond, fell into the hands of David Whitmer. These are the facts. And, in further proof, the writer avers that he is now in possession of a portion of the original manuscript, and "The Memorial of Lyman Wight to the United States Senate," which were taken from the Nauvoo House about the year 1884, by L. C. Bidamon, when he removed that portion of the house which contained the records.—JOSEPH F. SMITH.

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#### COLLECTION OF ANECDOTES.

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We ask the readers of the ERA to write anecdotes.  
The Latter-day Saints, through their missionary system, have