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## A Witness of Divine Truth

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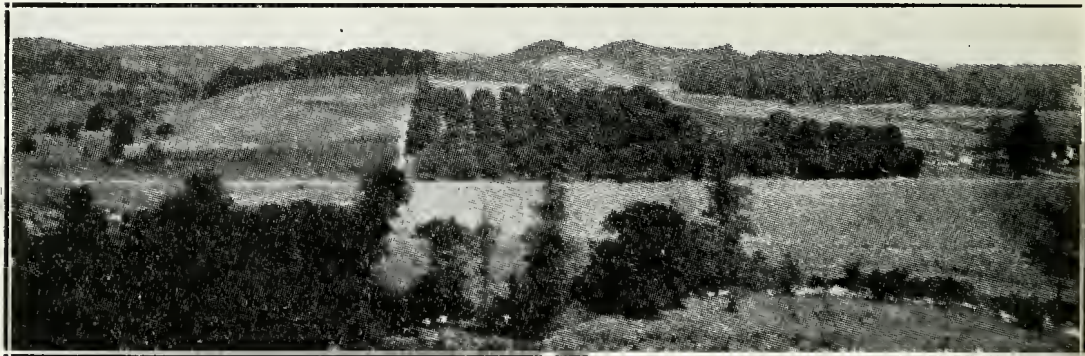
**Abstract:** Martin Harris acted as Joseph's scribe during the translation of the Book of Mormon. He became convinced of the authenticity of the translation upon showing a translation and copies of the original characters to two well-known experts. He was one of the Three Witnesses and never denied his testimony of the Book of Mormon.

## A WITNESS OF DIVINE TRUTH

*By Elder Parry D. Sorensen*

**A** COBBLESTONE farm house near Palmyra, New York, a building rich in traditional significance to Mormonism, was purchased last month by the Church to become a permanent memorial to a man who played an important part in the translation of the Book of Mormon and who furnished the money to print the first edition of that sacred book more than a century ago.

That man is Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, and the cobblestone farm house was his home, which he mortgaged, along with his 240 acre farm, to defray the printing cost of the Book of Mormon. It was sixty-two years ago, on July 10th, 1875, that Martin Harris died in Clarkston, Utah, at the age of 92, thus bringing to close an eventful and unusual life. Let us recall a few of his experiences.



**The Martin Harris Farm near Palmyra**  
*It has now been acquired by the Church.*

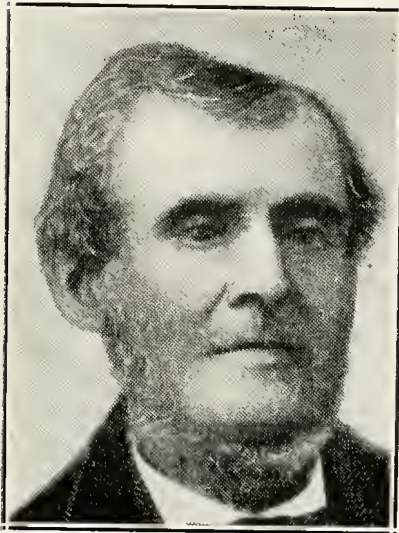
In front of the cobblestone house is a well which was dug by Joseph Smith, Sr., and Hyrum Smith, father and older brother of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It was while the well was being dug that Martin Harris learned of the boy prophet to whom the Golden Plates of the Book of Mormon had been revealed and delivered. He soon went to visit Joseph at Harmony, Pennsylvania, to learn more about his work. Joseph had copied a few characters from the Golden Plates and translated them. Martin Harris took the copied characters and translation to New York City, showed them to two well-known authorities on ancient languages, became convinced of their authenticity, and then returned to Harmony and began to act as the Prophet's scribe in translating the Book of Mormon.

Doubts began creeping into Martin Harris's mind concerning the young prophet and the Golden Plates he was translating. Many had said that the whole business was a fake, and that Joseph Smith merely conjured up the sentences which he dictated to his scribe. But shortly after becoming the Prophet's scribe, he had an opportunity to put these false rumours to rest. Joseph possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate the Plates as well as he could from the Urim

and Thummim, which had been delivered with the Plates.

After the two had translated continually for several hours, they would go down to the river and exercise by throwing stones out into the water. On one occasion, Martin found a stone on the river bank very much resembling the seer stone used for translating. Before he and the Prophet resumed their translating, he replaced the seer stone with the one he had found by the river. Instead of beginning at once to dictate, as he always did, Joseph sat gazing intently at the fake stone, not uttering a word. Finally he exclaimed: "Martin, what is the matter? All is as dark as Egypt!"

Martin then explained what he had done, and the Prophet asked him the reason for doing so. "To stop the mouths of fools who have told me that you have learned those sentences and are merely repeating them to me," came the reply.



Martin Harris

After part of the Book of Mormon had been translated, Oliver Cowdery became the Prophet's scribe, and upon completion of the sacred volume, Martin Harris, along with Cowdery and David Whitmer, was called by revelation to be one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon. Their testimony is contained in the front of every copy. Harris also mortgaged his farm and furnished £600 to defray the cost of printing the first edition.

Shortly after the Church was organized in 1830, Martin Harris was baptized and became an active member. He was ordained a High Priest, and assisted in electing, ordaining and instructing the first Council of Twelve Apostles. But after the Church headquarters had been moved westward from Kirtland, Ohio, to Missouri and Illinois, he remained in Kirtland and became detached from the Church and embittered against it for many years.

Then, about 1870, a Mormon Elder returning from a mission, decided to visit Kirtland and see the temple there, the first one to be built in the latter-day dispensation. Remaining overnight at a little inn, the next morning he told the keeper of his desire to see the temple, and asked to whom he should apply for admittance. He was informed that an old man by the name of Harris—Martin Harris—who lived across the street from the temple, had the key.

The Elder went to the house, and an old man, bent with the years, answered his knock. "I am a Mormon Elder, returning from a mission," he greeted him. "I have a great desire to see the temple and am informed that you have the key.

Somewhat impatient, the old man replied, "I care nothing for you nor your people."

"I am sure you are misinformed," the missionary volunteered.

"Misinformed? Not at all. You should be ashamed of yourself to be associated with such people."

"Really, I had not intended to bring about such a conversation. All I want to see is the temple."

The old man took his visitor across the street and showed him through the temple, continuing to berate the Latter-day Saints to the fullest extent of his ability. As they reached the basement, with the sun sending its rays through the window directly upon Martin Harris, the missionary said to him: "I suppose that inasmuch as you so thoroughly dislike the Mormon people, you are prepared to deny your testimony contained in the Book of Mormon."

Rising to the full height of his stature, the 88-year old man vigorously replied: "Boy, as there is a God in heaven and as the sun shines, every word I have said in that testimony is true."

Their visit completed, the pair returned across the street. "Why don't you come out to Utah and learn for yourself?" the missionary asked him, "You are misinformed." After much discussion, the old man admitted that he did not have the means for such a trip. Asked if he would permit the money to be sent him, Martin Harris finally responded:

"I will go to Utah with the understanding that you send me a return ticket, because I don't propose to stay among the Mormons."

**M**artin Harris got the return ticket, but never used part of it. He came to Salt Lake City, was re-baptized and restored to full fellowship in the Church. Before an audience that filled the great Tabernacle to capacity he spoke at the General Conference and bore his fervent testimony to the Divinity of the Book of Mormon. During the journey from Kirtland to Salt Lake City he stopped along the way to bear similar testimony to large groups of members and non-members alike. In Salt Lake City and Utah he did the same on numerous occasions.

After being re-baptized, Martin Harris received his endowments and also had vicarious work performed for his departed ancestors, that they might reap the benefits of accepting the Gospel in the Spirit World. For the remaining few years of his life, he lived with his son, Martin Harris, Jr., and passed away on July 10th, 1875, in his ninety-third year. On the afternoon of his death, with the Book of Mormon in his hand, he bore his final testimony to all those present at the bedside.

The life of Martin Harris was not unlike those of Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, the other two Book of Mormon witnesses. Both of them strayed away from the Church, but never did either deny the fact that he had been called of God to bear witness to the world that the Book of Mormon was divinely revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith and that its translation was only made possible through inspiration from on High. To-day, nearly one million Latter-day Saints in all parts of the world continue to sing with heartfelt conviction and thanksgiving:

An angel from on high, The long, long silence broke;  
 Descending from the sky, These gracious words he spoke:  
 Lo, in Cumorah's lonely hill a sacred record lies concealed;  
 Lo, in Cumorah's lonely hill a sacred record lies concealed.