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The Book of Mormon and the Spaulding Manuscript

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Abstract: This article presents a concise historical overview of Solomon Spaulding's *Manuscript Found* and its purported connection to the Book of Mormon, and concludes that the two writings are so different that they bear no relationship.

THE BOOK OF MORMON AND THE SPAULDING MANUSCRIPT.

BY SEYMOUR B. YOUNG, OF THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE SEVENTY.

The following article appeared in the *Boston Herald* of July 18th, 1897:

The appearance of the Book of Mormon awakens in the memory of certain persons, who heard chapters read by the author of a work called the Manuscript Found, and detected an extraordinary resemblance between the two.

The well attested fact was revealed that about 20 years before Smith made his discovery, an highly educated clergyman of Cherry Valley, New York, married and with his wife settled at Salem, Ohio, where, his health giving way, he was obliged to leave work as a preacher.

He was deeply interested in the theory then much discussed that the North American Indians were descendents of the lost tribes of Israel, especially as in the vicinity of New Salem were many mounds erected by the early settlers of the country, and he conceived the idea of writing a kind of a religious novel, having that theory as its basis.

He therefore devoted the leisure of three years to the preparation of the work, which was written in the quaint style of language to be found in King James' authorized version of the English scriptures.

In order to give it the antique character claimed for it, it was entitled the Manuscript Found, and in the preface, was said to have been made from a record made by one of the lost nations and recovered from the earth where ages before it had been deposited by Moroni, the son of Mormon, the prophet in the manuscript, and in it was given most of the pretended history found in the Book of Mormon, and there is unquestionable testimony that the author read many chapters of it to his wife and neighbors as early as 1813.

The possession of the manuscript by Smith and Rigdon is as clearly proved as the strongest circumstantial evidence can establish a fact.

During the early years following the organization of the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 6th, 1830, there was one man who received some notoriety. That man was Solomon Spaulding. Although several years dead, his writings known as "The Manuscript Story" brought him, for the time, some local fame. Solomon Spaulding, the gentleman above referred to, lived during the latter part of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries. His death occurred about the year 1816. A few years prior to his death his mind seemed to run on ancient and archaic subjects, and under the influence of these thoughts he wrote what he himself designated, "Manuscript Story;"—as a short history of the ancestors of the American Indians, which in his romance he represents as having deciphered from ancient characters, found on rolls of parchment which he had discovered in a stone cave, in an excavation near his home on Coneaugh Creek, Ashtabula County, Penn. With the parchment were Indian bows and arrows and other relics. At his death he left this romantic, or historic production, in possession of his widow. In 1834, nearly five years after the publication of the Book of Mormon, an apostate, by the name of D. P. Hurlburt, learned of the existence of this "Manuscript Story" by Mr. Spaulding, and conceived the idea of publishing it in connection with a book that he was about to issue as an expose of Mormonism, under the title, "Mormonism Unveiled." The contents of this volume were to be dedicated entirely to statements in opposition to the divinity of the mission of the Prophet Joseph, and also against the truth of the Book of Mormon. Mr. Hurlburt, therefore, visited the widow Spaulding and requested the loan of her husband's manuscript, stating to her that he wished to make it a part of the book he was about to publish in opposition to the Mormon Church; and as he expected to make it appear that the "Manuscript Story," written by her husband, was the origin of the Book of Mormon, he was convinced that a ready sale would be found for the book, and that the manuscript would contribute to that ready sale, and he would share with her the profits emanating therefrom. Mr. Hurlburt obtained possession of the manuscript, and in connection with E. D. Howe & Co., with whom he had contracted for the publication of "Mormonism

Unveiled," examined the Spaulding production, but not finding it to resemble, in any particular, the Book of Mormon, they suppressed it, and Mr. Hurlburt informed Mrs. Spaulding that her husband's manuscript had been destroyed in a fire which had recently occurred in the Painesville printing office, where the document was deposited, awaiting publication.*

Although an agreement of copartnership was entered into between D. P. Hurlburt and the Howe Publishing Co., of Painesville, Ohio, the Messrs. Howe soon learned of the unreliable character of Mr. Hurlburt, and shook him off entirely, and they themselves continued in the disreputable labor of manufacturing falsehoods concerning the Mormon Church and the Book of Mormon in particular, and finally published the volume, "Mormonism Unveiled," retaining all the falsehoods that Hurlburt had been the author of, but discarding the author. In this volume Mr. Howe tried to make it appear that the Spaulding story or "Manuscript Found" was indeed the original from which the Book of Mormon was written; but instead of publishing "Manuscript Found," thus enabling the public to judge regarding its similarity to the Book of Mormon, Mr. Howe procured affidavits from apostates and bitter enemies of the Mormon Church, who stated that they were witnesses to the fact that the two books were identical. Among the statements sent forth by the authors of "Mormonism Unveiled" were the following: Sidney Rigdon, who had formerly resided at Pittsburg where Mrs. Spaulding had lived for a short time, had procured the dead clergyman's production from Lambdin and Patterson, printers of that city, and had enlarged and amplified the original, and with the help and cunning of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, added the religious portions, and palmed it off on the public as an ancient and inspired record. This false and insinuating statement found many believers, and even to this day among non-Mormons generally, is accepted as authentic and reliable.

*The manuscript was not destroyed at that time, however, nor at any time subsequent, but was providentially preserved until fifty years later, when it was brought forth through the efforts of President Joseph F. Smith, after its long seclusion, and published by the *Deseret News* Company, in 1886. It is a pamphlet of 113 pages.

Now, let me here state, in regard to the associations of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, that these two men never met until some time after the translation of the Book of Mormon, and not until 3,000 copies of the same had been published, and distributed. Sidney Rigdon himself states that he was converted to the principles of Mormonism by reading the Book of Mormon, and at the same time he became convinced of the divinity of the record and of the divine mission of its translator.

In the year 1884, fifty years after the alleged destruction of the Spaulding manuscript, Mr. Jas. H. Fairchild, president of the Oberlin College—one of the most prominent institutions of learning in the state of Ohio—spent his summer vacation at Honolulu, in the Sandwich Islands. Here he met an old friend, formerly the publisher of the *Painesville Telegraph*—Mr. L. L. Rice, who had taken up his abode in Honolulu, with his daughter and son-in-law, Mrs. and Mr. Whitney. On the occasion of a visit to Mr. Rice, President Fairchild suggested to him that he look through his numerous papers, thinking that he might find some anti-slavery documents that might be of some historic value.

The search began and ere long their attention was attracted to a good sized squarely folded package of papers tied securely together with an old-fashioned tow string. The following descriptive sentence was written on the outside covering of the package: "Manuscript Story—Conneaut Creek."* The title of the paper struck these gentlemen with amazement, and they finally concluded that this was the very manuscript which was supposed to be the origin of the Book of Mormon; and with this belief, though Mr. Fairchild and Mr. Rice, being more honest than others who had come to the same conclusion, sent to the Mormon missionary headquarters for a Book of Mormon, and with the help of Mr. Whitney and also of a Mr. Bishop, a very influential gentleman residing at Honolulu at that time, began the reading of the Book of Mormon on the "Manuscript Story" of

*The following was also endorsed on the wrapping:

THE WRITINGS OF SOLOMON SPAULDING, PROVED BY ARON WRIGHT, OLIVER SMITH, JOHN MILLER, AND OTHERS. THE TESTIMONIES OF THE ABOVE GENTLEMEN ARE NOW IN MY POSSESSION. . D. P. HURLBURT.—EDITORS.

Solomon Spaulding, and continued the same until they had read and carefully compared them from beginning to end; and they then and there came to the conclusion, and so stated, that the two productions were entirely unlike. Mr. Rice, although loathe to part with the old manuscript, gave it to President Fairchild, only reserving the original long enough to have it copied word for word, and line for line, bad spelling and bad grammar included. President Fairchild brought the manuscript of Solomon Spaulding home with him, and deposited it among the relics of Oberlin College, Ohio—where it now is—and with it the following statement:

“The Story of the Origin of the Book of Mormon in the Traditional Manuscript of Solomon Spaulding, will probably have to be relinquished. Mr. Rice, myself and others, compared it (the Spaulding manuscript) with the Book of Mormon, and could detect no resemblance between the two, either in general or detail. There seems to be no name nor incident common to the two. The solemn style of the Book of Mormon, in imitation of the English Scriptures, does not appear in the manuscript. Some other explanation of the origin of the Book of Mormon will have to be found if any explanation of its origin is necessary.”

Mr. Rice could only account for his having come into possession of the Spaulding Manuscript in that it was among the old papers and other property which he had purchased with the Painesville printing office. The manuscript had evidently lain in this office since D. P. Hurlburt deposited it there in the year 1834. President Fairchild, evidently desirous that the truth should be widely known in regard to his conclusions concerning the two productions, published in the *New York Observer*, of February 5th, 1885, a facsimile of his statement above given. This statement in the *New York Observer* attracted the attention of President George Reynolds, soon after its publication, and he clipped it from the paper and mailed it in a letter to President Joseph F. Smith, at Honolulu, who was at that time on his third mission to the Sandwich Islands. President Joseph F. called upon Mr. Rice, and after much persuasion, won the consent of that gentleman to a loan of the copy which Mr. Rice had made of the Manuscript Story, with the promise from President Smith that he would publish the same in book form,

and would return the copy to Mr. Rice after the publication, and with it, twenty-five copies of the book. This contract was sacredly kept by President Smith; for he immediately forwarded the manuscript to the Deseret News Publishing Co., and they at his request, published a small edition of it. This pamphlet, the exact wording of the Spaulding Manuscript Story, is now on sale at the Deseret News office at Salt Lake City.

The testimony of Mr. Fairchild and his confreres, coming as it does from men who are not believers in anything pertaining to Mormonism, is the kind of evidence the world is bound to accept. Their testimony on this matter, they being unbelievers in the sacredness of the Book of Mormon, cannot be controverted; and stands as a complete refutation of the slanderous reports of Hurlburt, Howe and others, that the Solomon Spaulding Manuscript was the source from whence came the Book of Mormon. In addition to this we have the testimony of tens of thousands of believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, devout followers of the Prophet Joseph, all uniting in testimony of the truth of the Book of Mormon. And now I will close this writing by adding my humble testimony to the divinity of that book; and I testify to all the world that I know of its truth, and proclaim to all the divine mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith.