

AFFIDAVIT OF WILLARD CHASE, CIRCA DECEMBER 11, 1833

Printed in E[ber]. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville [Ohio]: Author, 1834), 240-48.

Manchester, Ontario Co. N.Y. 1833.

I became acquainted with the Smith family, known as the authors of the Mormon Bible, in the year 1820.¹ At that time, they were engaged in the money digging business, which they followed until the latter part of the season of 1827. In the year 1822, I was engaged in digging a well. I employed Alvin² and Joseph Smith³ to assist me; the latter of whom is now known as the Mormon prophet. After digging about twenty feet below the surface of the earth, we discovered a singularly appearing stone, which excited my curiosity. I brought it to the top of the well, and as we were examining it, Joseph put it into his hat, and then his face into the top of his hat. It has been said by Smith, that *he* brought the stone from the well; but this is false. There was no one in the well but myself. The next morning he came to me, and wished to obtain the stone, alledging that he could see in it; but I told him I did not wish to part with it on account of its being a curiosity, but would lend it. After obtaining the stone, he began to publish abroad what wonders he could discover by looking in it, and made so much disturbance among the credulous part of [the] community, that I ordered the stone to be returned to me again. He had it in his possession about two years.—I believe, some time in 1825, Hiram Smith⁴ (brother of Joseph Smith) came to me, and wished to borrow the same stone, alledging that they wanted to accomplish some business of importance, which could not very well be done without the aid of the stone. I told him it was of no particular worth to me, but merely wished to keep it as a curiosity, and if he would pledge me his word and honor, that I should have it when called for, he might take it; which he did and took the stone. I thought I could rely on his word at this time, as he had made a profession of religion. But in this I was disappointed, for he disregarded both his word and honor.

In the fall of 1826, a friend called upon me and wished to see that stone, about which so much had been said; and I told him if he would go with me to Smith's, (a distance of about half a mile) he might see it. But to my surprize, on going to Smith's, and asking him for the stone, he said, "you cannot have it;" I told him it belonged to me, repeated to him the promise he made me at the time of obtaining the stone: upon which he faced me with a malignant look and said, "I don't care who in the Devil it belongs to, *you* shall not have it."

In the month of June, 1827, Joseph Smith, Sen.,⁵ related to me the following story: "That some years ago, a spirit had appeared to Joseph his son, in a vision, and informed him that in a certain place there was a record on plates of gold, and that he was the person that must obtain them, and this he must do in the following manner: On the 22d of September, he must repair to the place where was deposited this manuscript, dressed in black clothes, and riding a black horse with a switch tail, and demand the book in a certain name, and after obtaining it, he must go directly away, and neither lay it down nor look behind him. They accordingly fitted out Joseph with a suit of black clothes and borrowed a black horse. He repaired to the place of deposit and demanded the book,

¹ Willard Chase (1798-1871), a former treasure seeker, was a neighbor of the Smith family.

² Alvin Smith (1798-1823)

³ Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844)

⁴ Hyrum Smith (1800-1844)

⁵ Joseph Smith Sr. (1771-1840), father of Alvin, Hyrum and Joseph Smith.

which was in a stone box, unsealed, and so near the top of the ground that he could see one end of it, and raising it up, took out the book of gold; but fearing some one might discover where he got it, he laid it down to place back the top stone, as he found it; and turning round, to his surprise there was no book in sight. He again opened the box, and in it saw the book, and attempted to take it out, but was hindered. He saw in the box something like a toad, which soon assumed the appearance of a man, and struck him on the side of his head.--Not being discouraged at trifles, he again stooped down and strove to take the book, when the spirit struck him again, and knocked him three or four rods, and hurt him prodigiously. After recovering from his fright, he enquired why he could not obtain the plates; to which the spirit made reply, because you have not obeyed your orders. He then enquired when he *could* have them, and was answered thus: come one year from this day, and bring with you your oldest brother, and you shall have them. This spirit, he said was the spirit of the prophet who wrote this book, and who was sent to Joseph Smith, to make known these things to him. Before the expiration of the year, his oldest brother died; which the old man said was an *accidental providence!*

Joseph went one year from that day, to demand the book, and the spirit enquired for his brother, and he said that he was dead. The spirit then commanded him to come again, in just one year, and bring a man with him. On asking who might be the man, he was answered that he would know him when he saw him.

Joseph believed that one Samuel T. Lawrence⁶ was the man alluded to by the spirit, and went with him to a singular looking hill, in Manchester, and shewed him where the treasure was. Lawrence asked him if he had ever discovered any thing with the plates of gold; he said no: he then asked him to look in his stone, to see if there was any thing with them. He looked, and said there was nothing; he told him to look again, and see if there was not a large pair of specks with the plates; he looked and soon saw a pair of spectacles, the same with which Joseph says he translated the Book of Mormon. Lawrence told him it would not be prudent to let these plates be seen for about two years, as it would make a great disturbance in the neighborhood. Not long after this, Joseph altered his mind, and said L[awrence]. was not the right man, nor had he told him the right place. About this time he went to Harmony in Pennsylvania, and formed an acquaintance with a young lady, by the name of Emma Hale, whom he wished to marry.--In the fall of 1826, he wanted to go to Pennsylvania to be married; but being destitute of means, he now set his wits to work, how he should raise money, and get recommendations, to procure the fair one of his choice. He went to Lawrence with the following story, as related to me by Lawrence himself. That he had discovered in Pennsylvania, on the bank of the Susquehannah River, a very rich mine of silver, and if he would go there with him, he might have a share in the profits; that it was near high water mark and that they could load it into boats and take it down the river to Philadelphia, to market. Lawrence then asked Joseph if he was not deceiving him; no, said he, for I have been there and seen it with my own eyes, and if you do not find it so when we get there, I will bind myself to be your servant for three years. By these grave and fair promises Lawrence was induced to believe something in it, and agreed to go with him. L[awrence]. soon found that Joseph was out of money, and had to bear his expenses on the way. When they got to Pennsylvania, Joseph wanted L[awrence]. to recommend him to Miss H[ale].,⁷ which he did, although he was asked to do it; but could not well get rid of it as

⁶ Samuel Tyler Lawrence (1786-1847), was a treasure seeker.

⁷ Emma Hale (1804-1879)

he was in his company. L[awrence]. then wished to see the silver mine, and he and Joseph went to the river, and made search, but found nothing. Thus, Lawrence had his trouble for his pains, and returned home lighter than he went, while Joseph had got his expenses borne, and a recommendation to his girl.

Joseph's next move was to get married; the girl's parents⁸ being opposed to the match: as they happened to be from home, he took advantage of the opportunity, and went off with her and was married.⁹

Now, being still destitute of money, he set his wits at work, how he should get back to Manchester, his place of residence; he hit upon the following plan, which succeeded very well. He went to an honest old Dutchman, by the name of Stowel,¹⁰ and told him that he had discovered on the bank of Black River, in the village of Watertown, Jefferson County, N.Y. a cave, in which he had found a bar of gold, as big as his leg, and about three or four feet long.—That he could not get it out alone, on account of its being fast at one end; and if he would move him to Manchester, N.Y. they would go together, and take a chisel and mallet, and get it, and Stowel should share the prize with him. Stowel moved him.

A short time after their arrival at Manchester, Stowel reminded Joseph of his promise; but he calmly replied, that he would not go, because his wife was now among strangers, and would be very lonesome if he went away. Mr. Stowel was then obliged to return without any gold, and with less money than he came.

In the fore part of September, (I believe,) 1827, the Prophet requested me to make him a chest, informing me that he designed to move back to Pennsylvania, and expecting soon to get his gold book, he wanted a chest to lock it up, giving me to understand at the same time, that if I would make the chest he would give me a share in the book. I told him my business was such that I could not make it: but if he would bring the book to me, I would lock it up for him. He said that would not do, as he was commanded to keep it two years, without letting it come to the eye of any one but himself. This commandment, however, he did not keep, for in less than two years, twelve men said they had seen it. I told him to get it and convince me of its existence, and I would make him a chest; but he said, that would not do, as he must have a chest to lock the book in, as soon as he took it out of the ground. I saw him a few days after, when he told me that I must make the chest. I told him plainly that I could not, upon which he told me that I could have no share in the book.

A few weeks after this conversation, he came to my house, and related the following story: That on the 22d of September, he arose early in the morning, and took a one horse wagon, of some one that had stayed over night at their house, without leave or license; and, together with his wife, repaired to the hill which contained the book. He left his wife in the wagon, by the road, and went alone to the hill, a distance of thirty or forty rods from the road; he said he then took the book out of the ground and hid it in a tree top, and returned home. He then went to the town of Macedon to work. After about ten days, it having been suggested that some one had got his book, his wife went after him; he hired a horse, and went home in the afternoon, staid long enough to drink one cup of tea, and then went for his book, found it safe, took off his frock, wrapt it round it, put it under his arm and ran all the way home, a distance of about two miles. He said he should think it would

⁸ Isaac Hale (1763-1839) and Elizabeth Lewis Hale (1767-1842)

⁹ January 18, 1827

¹⁰ Josiah Stowell Sr. (1770-1844), was a treasure seeker.

weigh sixty pounds, and was sure it would weigh forty. On his return home, he said he was attacked by two men in the woods, and knocked them both down and made his escape, arrived safe and secured his treasure.—He then observed that if it had not been for that stone, (which he acknowledged belonged to me,) he would not have obtained the book. A few days afterwards, he told one of my neighbors that he had not got any such book, nor never had such an one; but that he had told the story to deceive the d--d fool, (meaning me,) to get him to make a chest. His neighbors having become disgusted with his foolish stories, he determined to go back to Pennsylvania, to avoid what he called persecution. His wits were now put to the task to contrive how he should get money to bear his expenses. He met one day in the streets of Palmyra, a rich man, whose name was Martin Harris,¹¹ and addressed him thus; "I have a commandment from God to ask the first man I meet in the street to give me fifty dollars, to assist me in doing the work of the Lord by translating the Golden Bible." Martin being naturally a credulous man, hands Joseph the money. In the Spring 1829,¹² Harris went to Pennsylvania, and on his return to Palmyra, reported that the Prophet's wife, in the month of June following would be delivered of a male child that would be able when two years old to translate the Gold Bible.¹³ Then, said he, you will see Joseph Smith, Jr. walking through the streets of Palmyra, with a Gold Bible under his arm, and having a gold breast-plate on, and a gold sword by his side. This, however, by the by, proved false.

In April, 1830, I again asked Hiram for the stone which he had borrowed of me; he told me I should not have it, for Joseph made use of it in translating his Bible. I reminded him of his promise, and that he had pledged his honor to return it; but he gave me the lie, saying the stone was not mine nor never was. Harris at the same time flew in a rage, took me by the collar and said I was a liar, and he could prove it by twelve witnesses. After I had extricated myself from him, Hiram, in a rage shook his fist at me, and abused me in a most scandalous manner. Thus I might proceed in describing the character of these High Priests, by relating one transaction after another, which would all tend to set them in the same light in which they were regarded by their neighbors, viz: as a pest to society. I have regarded Joseph Smith Jr. from the time I first became acquainted with him until he left this part of the country, as a man whose word could not be depended upon.—Hiram's character was but very little better. What I have said respecting the characters of these men, will apply to the whole family. What I have stated relative to the characters of these individuals, thus far, is wholly true. After they became thorough Mormons, their conduct was more disgraceful than before. They did not hesitate to abuse any man, no matter how fair his character, provided he did not embrace their creed. Their tongues were continually employed in spreading scandal and abuse. Although they left this part of the country without paying their just debts, yet their creditors were glad to have them do so, rather than to have them stay, disturbing the neighborhood.

Signed, WILLARD CHASE.

On the 11th December, 1833, the said Willard Chase appeared before me, and made oath that the foregoing statement to which he has subscribed his name, is true, according to his best recollection and belief.

FRED'K. SMITH,

Justice of the Peace of Wayne County.

¹¹ Martin Harris (1783-1875)

¹² Spring 1828

¹³ The infant boy died the same day he was born, June 15, 1828.