

Joseph Smith uses Stone in a Hat

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Manchester, New York Story

The story of Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-44) receiving a visionary experience in September 1823, with instructions to visit a nearby hill about a mile away each year, was expressed outside the family as early as the fall of 1826. The final outcome regarding the visit to the hill occurred in the fall of 1827. At this time Joseph Jr. related to neighbor and fellow treasure-seeker Willard Chase (1798-1871) that he had taken a book of plates from a hill. In a statement that Chase made in his 1833 affidavit, and published in 1834, he describes elements of the earliest story of Joseph Smith's claim of going to the hill, later known as the Gold Bible Hill, and further concealing the record from prying eyes. Chase recalled that Joseph Jr. explained to him:

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 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.¹

Lucy Smith (1775-1856) heard that her son Joseph “went to bring the record which he had deposited in a cavity in a birch log 3 [*sic*] miles distant and covered it with the bark of the same he took the plates from their place and wrapping them in his linen frock put them under his arm and started for the house.”²

¹Affidavit of Willard Chase, Manchester, Ontario County, New York, before Justice of the Peace, Frederick Smith, December 11, 1833, in E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville [OH]: Printed and Published by the Author, 1834), 245-46, emphasis omitted.

²Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 385, crossed through words omitted, cited

Martin Harris (1783-1875), interviewed thirty years later, stated: “These plates were found at the north point of a hill two miles north of Manchester village. Joseph had a stone which was dug from the well of Mason Chase (1795-?), twenty-four feet from the surface. In this stone he could see many things to my certain knowledge. It was by means of this stone he first discovered these plates.” Harris’s understanding of the events is that Joseph Jr. “went to the place where the plates were concealed, and while he was obtaining them, she [Emma] kneeled down and prayed. He then took the plates and hid them in an old black oak tree top which was hollow.”³

As Martin Harris understood the story:

The plates remained concealed in the tree top until he got the chest made. He then went after them and brought them home. While on his way home with the plates, he was met by what appeared to be a man, who demanded the plates, and struck him with a club on his side, which was all black and blue. Joseph knocked the man down, and then ran for home, and was much out of breath. When he arrived at home, he handed the plates in at the window, and they were received from him by his mother. They were then hidden under the hearth in his father’s house. But the wall being partly down, it was feared that certain ones, who were trying to get possession of the plates, would get under the house and dig them out. Joseph then took them out, and hid them under the old cooper’s shop, by taking up a board and digging in the ground and burying them.

Harris indicated: “I had the account of it from Joseph, his wife, brothers, sisters, his father and mother. I talked with them separately, that I might get the truth of the matter.” Martin mentioned that Lucy Smith came and visited the Harris home. Among other things, “She wished my wife and daughter to go with her; and they went and spent most of the day. When they came home, I questioned them about them. My daughter said, they were about as much as she could lift. They were now in the glass-box, and my wife said they were very heavy. They both lifted them. I waited a day or two, when I got up in the morning, took my breakfast, and told my folks I

hereafter as *Lucy’s Book*. This work includes a textual history, the manuscript draft of 1844–45 and a comparison of the final revised manuscript, completed in 1845, with the 1853 printing. Manuscripts in Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (cited hereafter as LDS Church History Library).

³ In late January 1859, Martin Harris, who resided at Kirtland, Ohio, was interviewed by Joel Tiffany. “He [Harris] says that Joel Tiffany, well known as a leading Spiritualist some time since, has been out from New York lately on a visit to him, Harris, and that for four successive days without intermission, he unfolded the mysteries of godliness to Joel, which the latter copied at the time and is about to publish.” “Mormon Times in Kirtland,” *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer* 15 (May 18, 1859), Cleveland, Ohio. The interview by Tiffany was titled, “Mormonism—No. II,” and printed in *Tiffany’s Monthly: Devoted to the Investigation of the Science of Mind, in the Physical, Intellectual, Moral and Religious Planes Thereof* 5 (August 1859): 163–70, New York City. An original copy is located at the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

was going to the village, but went directly to old Mr. Smith's." Harris continued:

I found that Joseph had gone away to work for Peter Ingersol[l] to get some flour. I was glad he was absent, for that gave me an opportunity of talking with his wife and the family about the plates. I talked with them separately, to see if their stories agreed, and I found they did agree. When Joseph came home I did not wish him to know that I had been talking with them, so I took him by the arm and led him away from the rest, and requested him to tell me the story, which he did as follows. He said: "An angel had appeared to him, and told him it was God's work." ... Joseph had before this described the manner of his finding the plates. He found them by looking in the stone found in the well of Mason Chase. The family had likewise told me the same thing. Joseph said the angel told him he must quit the company of the money-diggers.

Harris was at the Smith home after Joseph Knight Sr. (1772–1847) and Josiah Stowell Sr. (1770-1844) had left to return to their homes in southern New York. Lucy Smith outlined the time frame from when Joseph Jr. allegedly went to the hill, hid the plates, and brought them home. It appears that the day Joseph Jr. reportedly retrieved, ran through the woods, brought something home, and talked to his family was on Monday, October 1, 1827.⁴ Joseph Jr. explained in the Preface to the 1830 Book of Mormon: "I would also inform you that the plates of which hath been spoken, were found in the township of Manchester, Ontario county, New-York."⁵

Lucy Harris (1792-1836), wife of Martin Harris, stated: "About a year previous to the report being raised that Smith had found gold plates, he [Martin Harris] became very intimate with the Smith family, and said he believed Joseph could see in his stone any thing he wished."⁶

Joseph Smith Jr. and Treasure Digging

The possibility of finding buried treasure fascinated many in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America. Reports of searching for such riches were widespread in the Palmyra area,⁷ and extant accounts show that treasure was generally sought through supernatural

⁴ Lucy Smith on October 8, 1845 said "it was eighteen years ago last monday since she commenced preaching the gospel, being cal[l]ed upon by Joseph to go & tell Martin Harris & family that he [Joseph Smith] had got the plates." Ronald O. Barney, ed., *The Mormon Vanguard Brigade of 1847: Norton Jacob's Record* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), 53.

⁵ Preface to Joseph Smith, Junior, *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra: Printed by E. B. Grandin, for the Author, 1830), iv, cited hereafter as 1830 Book of Mormon.

⁶ Statement of Lucy Harris, November 29, 1833, Palmyra, New York, printed in Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville [Ohio]: E. D. Howe, 1834), 255.

⁷ Newspaper articles mention unnamed individuals who claimed to have found vast treasures. The *Orleans Advocate* published in Albion, New York, contains the following: "A few days since was discovered in this town, by the help of a mineral stone, (which becomes transparent when placed in a hat and the light excluded by the face of him who looks into it, provided he is

means. Locations for buried wealth and lost Spanish mines were sometimes claimed through dreams. Treasures could also be sought by using divining rods, often made from “witch hazel,” or by looking in special stones or crystals. Sometimes when a stone was used, the person would place a stone in a hat and then conjure the guardian treasure spirit. After finding a spot where the cache was supposedly hidden, the seekers would draw a magic circle on the ground around the hidden treasure. Sometimes they would maintain absolute silence, but at other times they would recite magical charms or religious verses used as charms. Whatever the means, money-diggers claimed the need to overcome the guardian spirit who had enchanted the treasure; otherwise the treasure would slip back into the earth.

Willard Chase explained that the stone returned by Joseph Jr. was borrowed this time by Hyrum Smith with a promise to return it to Chase when requested. Chase wrote:

I believe, some time in 1825, Hiram Smith (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.⁸

Joseph Capron (1791–1874), a neighbor living south of the Smith family on lot 1, who had met Joseph Smith Sr. in 1827, also reported on the use of the stone:

The family of Smiths held Joseph Jr. in high estimation on account of some supernatural power, which he was supposed to possess. This power he pretended to have received through the medium of a stone of peculiar quality. The stone was placed in a hat, in such a manner as to exclude all light, except that which emanated from the stone itself. This light of the stone, he pretended, enabled him to see any thing he wished. Accordingly he discovered ghosts, infernal spirits, mountains of gold and silver, and many other invaluable treasures deposited in the earth. He would often tell his neighbors of his wonderful discoveries, and urge them to embark in the money digging business.⁹

Joseph Jr. continued to work for Josiah Stowell and to attend school. He also worked with his peep-stone to find lost objects. On March 20, 1826, he was brought before Justice of the

fortune's favorite,) a monstrous potash kettle in the bowels of old mother Earth, filled with the purest bullion." Reprinted in *Wayne Sentinel* 3 (December 27, 1825):2. Also published in the *Livingston Register*, December 28, 1825, Geneseo, New York.

⁸ Affidavit of Willard Chase, December 11, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 241.

⁹ Statement of Joseph Capron, Manchester, Ontario County, November 8, 1833, in *Ibid.*, 259. Capron died in Manchester and was buried in the Palmyra Cemetery.

Peace Albert Neely (ca. 1798–1857) of Bainbridge, Chenango County, on a charge of disorderly conduct or being a “glass looker.” His docket book recorded the examination of Joseph Smith and witnesses, including Josiah Stowell:

Prisoner [Joseph Smith] examined: says that he came from the town of Palmyra, and had been at the house of Josiah Stowel[l] in Bainbridge most of time since; had small part of time been employed in looking for mines, but the major part had been employed by said Stowel[l] on his farm, and going to school. That he had a certain stone which he had occasionally looked at to determine where hidden treasures in the bowels of the earth were; that he professed to tell in this manner where gold mines were a distance under ground, and had looked for Mr. Stowel[l] several times, and had informed him where he could find these treasures, and Mr. Stowel[l] had been engaged in digging for them. That at Palmyra he pretended to tell by looking at this stone where coined money was buried in Pennsylvania, and while at Palmyra had frequently ascertained in that way where lost property was of various kinds; that he had occasionally been in the habit of looking through this stone to find lost property for three years, but of late had pretty much given it up on account of its injuring his health, especially his eyes, made them sore; that he did not solicit business of this kind, and had always rather declined having anything to do with this business.

Josiah Stowell Sr. testified:

[Stowell] says that prisoner [Joseph Smith] had been at his house something like five months; had been employed by him to work on farm part of time . . . that prisoner had looked for him sometimes; once to tell him about money buried in Bend Mountain in Pennsylvania, once for gold on Monument Hill, and once for a salt spring; and that he positively knew that the prisoner could tell, and did possess the art of seeing those valuable treasures through the medium of said stone¹⁰

Another witness McMaster [either Cyrus or David McMaster]: was sworn and said that prisoner [Joseph Smith Jr. “pretended to him that he could discover objects at a distance by holding this white stone to the sun or candle; that prisoner rather declined looking into a hat at his dark coloured stone, as he said that it hurt his eyes.”¹¹

¹⁰ Charles Marshall, “The Original Prophet. By a Visitor to Salt Lake City,” *Fraser’s Magazine* (London, England) 7 (February 1873):229; reprinted in the *Eclectic Magazine* (New York) 17 (April 1873). Neely’s docket book is not extant.

¹¹ Charles Marshall, “The Original Prophet. By a Visitor to Salt Lake City,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 7 (February 1873):229-30.

Justice Albert Neely considered Joseph Smith guilty and notified two other justices. No formal trial was held. Emma Hale married Joseph Jr. in South Bainbridge, Chenango County, on January 18, 1827, and returned with his wife to the Manchester farm.

In the spring of 1828 Martin Harris arrived at Harmony to assist Smith as a scribe during the process of “translating.” Surviving accounts of the translation process suggest that Smith worked without directly using the plates—this despite all of the difficulty in obtaining, hiding, and bringing the plates along. When it came to translating the crucial plates, they were no more present in the room than was John the Beloved's ancient parchment, the words of which Joseph also dictated the next year.¹² Richard Van Wagoner and Steven Walker in their study observe:

The plates could not have been used directly in the translation process. The Prophet, his face in a hat to exclude exterior light, would have been unable to view the plates directly even if they had been present during transcription. A mental picture of the young Joseph, face buried in a hat, gazing into a seer stone, plates out of sight, has not been a generally held view since the early days of the Church. The view raises some difficult questions. Why, for example, was such great care taken to preserve the plates for thousands of years if they were not to be used directly in the translation process?¹³

Isaac Hale (1763-1839), Joseph Smith's father-in-law stated in 1834:

I first became acquainted with JOSEPH SMITH, Jr. in November, 1825. He was at that time in the employ of a set of men who were called "money-diggers;" and his occupation was that of seeing, or pretending to see by means of a stone placed in his hat, and his hat closed over his face. In this way he pretended to discover minerals and hidden treasure. ... The manner in which he pretended to read and interpret, was the same as when he looked for the money-diggers, with the stone in his hat, and his hat over his face, while the Book of Plates were at the same time hid in the woods!¹⁴

David Whitmer (1805-88) of Fayette, New York, an early disciple of Joseph Smith who became acquainted with him in 1829 while the book was still being dictated, recalled in 1881:

¹² H. Michael Marquardt, *Joseph Smith's 1828-1843 Revelations* (Maitland, Florida: Xulon Press, 2013), 30-31; BC 6; LDS and RLDS D&C 7 (April 1829).

¹³ "Joseph Smith: 'The Gift of Seeing,'" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Summer 1982):53.

¹⁴ Affidavit of Isaac Hale, given at Harmony Township, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania on March 20, 1834. "Mormonism," *Susquehanna Register, and Northern Pennsylvanian* 9 (May 1, 1834):1, Montrose, Pennsylvania; reprinted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 262-66; Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 4:284, 287.

"He [Joseph] had two small stones [corrected to: one stone] of a chocolate color, nearly egg shaped and perfectly smooth, but not transparent, called interpreters [corrected to: seer stone], which were given him with the plates. He did not use the plates in the translation, but would hold the interpreters to his eyes and cover his face with a hat, excluding all light, and before his eyes would appear what seemed to be parchment" on which he would see the characters on the plates and the translation. Joseph would then read the words that he saw to his scribe..."¹⁵

In an 1885 interview, Whitmer said that Joseph used a seer stone "placed in a hat into which he buried his face, stating to me and others that the original Character[s] appeared upon parchment and under it the translation in english which [enabled him] to read it readily."¹⁶

It is not clear from the early accounts whether Smith used a single seer stone or, in another tradition, two seer stones as a pair of spectacles to read the meaning of the text. Either way the various accounts emphasize Smith's continued use of a seer stone.¹⁷ In Joseph Smith's 1832 account, he mentions that there were spectacles "to read the Book."¹⁸ Joseph Knight, who visited Smith in Harmony, wrote:

Now the way he translated was he put the urim and thummim into his hat and Dark[e]ned his Eyes then he would take a Sentence [Sentence] and it would appe[a]r in Brite Roman Letters then he would tell the writer and he would write it then <that would go away> [and] the next Sentence would Come and so on. But if it was not Spelt rite it would not go away till it was rite. So we See it was marvelous thus was the hol [whole] translated.¹⁹

¹⁵ *Kansas City Daily Journal*, June 5, 1881, 1; reprinted in the *Deseret Evening News*, June 11, 1881; *Saints Herald* 28 (July 1, 1881):198; *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 43 (July 4, 1881):423; and Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 5:76; for corrections see *Ibid.*, 5:81-82..

¹⁶ Interview of David Whitmer by Zenas H. Gurley, Jr., January 14, 1885, typescript, LDS Church History Library. The bracketed words "enabled him" came from *Autumn Leaves* 5 (1892):453, Lamoni, Iowa. See Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 157-58.

¹⁷ On the method by which the Book of Mormon was said to have been translated, see, under various titles, James E. Lancaster in *Saints Herald* 109 (November 15, 1962):798-802, 806, 817; reprinted in *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 3 (1983):51-61; *Restoration Studies III* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1986), 220-31; and Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 97-112. James Lancaster wrote, "An examination of the eyewitness testimony produces the following consensus on the method of translation of the Book of Mormon: . . . the plates were not used in the translating process and often were not even in sight during the translation." *Restoration Studies III*, 226.

¹⁸ Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:9.

¹⁹ Joseph Knight, *Reminiscences*; see Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection," 35. Regarding the Urim and Thummim, see Kenneth Sowers Jr., "The Mystery and History of the Urim and Thummim," *Restoration Studies II* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1983), 75-79.

The biblical term "Urim and Thummim" in Knight's account seems to be a later term used to apply to the seer stone and sometimes to two magical stones in frames like spectacles. Lucy Smith remarked, "Joseph kept the urim and thum[m]im constantly about his person," even having it with him while he was working down in a well.²⁰ It was by the "Urim and Thummim," according to Lucy, that Joseph received a commandment that he should baptize Oliver Cowdery and that Cowdery should baptize him.²¹ At one time an intimation "was given through the urim and thum[m]im" as Joseph "one morning applied the latter to his eyes to look upon the record, instead of the words of the book [of Mormon] being given him, he was commanded to write a letter to one David Whitmore."²²

Accounts also differ about what supposedly happened to the gold plates.²³ David Whitmer told an interviewer in 1884 that the plates "were taken away by the angel to a cave, which we saw by the power of God while we were yet in the Spirit."²⁴ William Smith said in 1841 that Joseph "was directed by a vision to bury the plates again in the same manner; which he accordingly did."²⁵

Brigham Young (1801-77), who joined the church in 1832, spoke of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (1806-50) going to the Hill Cumorah: "The hill opened, and they walked into a cave." Orson Pratt (1811-81) referred to "numerous records of the ancient nations of the western continent," in another area of the hill."²⁶

Concerning the seer stone in a hat, see J. L. Traugher, Jr., "Testimony of David Whitmer," *Saints Herald* 26 (November 15, 1879):341; and David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: Author, 1887), 12, 30, 37.

²⁰ Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 384.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 439. See Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 46; BC 15:6-7; LDS D&C 18:7; RLDS D&C 16:2.

²² Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 446.

²³ Folklore has it that Joseph returned the gold plates to a cave in the Hill Cumorah in Manchester, New York. For a collection of these stories, see Paul Thomas Smith, "A Preliminary Draft of the Hill Cumorah Cave Story Utilizing Seven Secondary Accounts and Other Historical Witnesses," March 1980, privately circulated.

²⁴ Interview of David Whitmer by Edmund C. Briggs, in *Saints Herald* 31 (June 21, 1884):396; and Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 127.

²⁵ William Smith interview, *The Congregational Observer* 2 (July 3, 1841):1.

²⁶ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 19:38, June 17, 1877; quoted in *The Contributor* 3 (February 1882):137; *The Juvenile Instructor* 31 (September 1, 1896):514; and Reed A. Benson, "Sword of Laban," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism: The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992), 3:1,427-28. Young remembered that "Joseph Smith said that Cave Contained tons of Choice Treasures & records." Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833-1898*, typescript, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983-85), 6:509, entry for December 11, 1869, original in CHL. Orson Pratt's comments are in the *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 28 (July 7, 1866):417.

Taken together, these earliest accounts about the gold plates place the event within the larger context of treasure hunting. Smith reported that he obtained the gold plates from the ground where they had been hidden for 1,400 years. Like his earlier attempts to locate lost objects and valuable treasures in the earth, he located the plates by means of the stone.²⁷ He removed his find from its depository and laid it down. After laying it down, however, it suddenly disappeared and went back into the box. This is similar to another treasure dig he participated in, with the guardian standing by and protecting the item.

The guardian spirit is a consistent focus of these early stories. Whether the guardian of the plates was a spirit or angel, its purpose was to watch over the buried box and its contents. Smith went to great lengths to obey the spirit's commands. He wore special clothes. He was given a simple command not to lay the plates down. When he did, the spirit struck him and kept him from obtaining the treasure. Because he did not do as he was instructed, Joseph was told to come in another year and bring his brother Alvin (1798-1823) with him.

Many aspects of the story told in New York and Pennsylvania were later revised. This included Joseph Smith's looking into the stone and seeing that he should bring Emma Hale to the hill, and especially details that linked the gold plates and treasure hunting. Rodger I. Anderson commented on why such details were omitted from Smith's historical accounts:

His earlier story of the mobile plates which vanished and reappeared so mysteriously was not mentioned because of its similarity to the elusive treasures he was accused of hunting; the spirit's command to bring Alvin to the hill and after Alvin's death, Emma, was deleted because it smacked more of ritualistic magic than religion "pure and undefiled"; and Joseph Knight's recollection that Smith had "looked in his glass" to find the right person was discarded because of its resemblance to the glass looking charge he had been convicted of in 1826. Smith had learned from bitter experience that not all regarded such activities as divine.²⁸

In the 1832 retelling of the gold plates story, Smith was not given elaborate tasks to break the spell but was simply informed by the angel that in "due time thou shalt obtain them."²⁹ By the time of Smith's 1838-39 account, he was instructed from the very start that there would be a four-year waiting period: "I made an attempt to take them out but was forbidden by the messenger and was again informed that the time <for> bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would untill four years from that time."³⁰

²⁷ Interview of Martin Harris, *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (August 1859):163, 169.

²⁸ "Joseph Smith's Early Reputation Revisited," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 4 (1980):98; see also Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 47.

²⁹ Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:8.

³⁰ Manuscript History, Book A-1:7, CHL; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:281; Joseph Smith-History 1:53, Pearl of Great Price.

The early story as Joseph Smith related was important since it established the belief that he had a record. His immediate family was also essential to him as they were among the first to believe him.

Stone in a Hat

In Joseph Smith's Manuscript History he told about searching for a lost mine in 1825 for Josiah Stowell. [fn] But Joseph Smith did not mention his association earlier with a special stone located on a neighbor's property in 1822. As Joseph Smith told about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon he mentioned to earlier followers and others that he was able to find and later translate the Book of Mormon by having a stone in a hat. This peep stone has since been called a seer stone. This seer stone would be placed in a hat.

One definition of translation is "The act or process of translating, esp. from one language to another."³¹ In the 1828 Webster's Dictionary one of the meanings under the word translate is, "To interpret; to render into another language; to express the sense of one language in the words of another."³²

What is the meaning of “translating” with a stone in a hat?

This means that what is represented as the Book of Mormon is not a product of Joseph Smith's linguistic ability. Smith produced a text with no knowledge of an ancient language. No one translates a real language by looking at a peep stone (seer stone) or interpreters (spectacles) or Urim and Thummim in a hat. To translate a person needs to correctly know the language from which he or she is translating. Also there is a need to know, in this case, the English language. There is no shortcut method in spending time learning a language before making a translation. The fact is if you do not know the language you are translating you cannot translate.

Contemporary records suggest that money-digging activities (treasure hunting) had been one of the Smith family occupations in the Palmyra/Manchester, New York area since the early 1820s. Willard Chase, a friend of the family recalled:

I became acquainted with the Smith family, known as the authors of the Mormon Bible, in the year 1820. 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 Alvin and Joseph Smith 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

³¹ *The American Heritage Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., Second College Edition, 1985), 1,287.

³² *An American dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828).

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.³³

During the month when the church was organized Willard Chase said he talked to Hyrum Smith, older brother of Joseph Smith: "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."³⁴

Plates Found with a Stone

A story was told by Joseph Smith Jr. that with the gold plates were found a pair of spectacles for the purpose of translating. These spectacles were called interpreters in the Book of Mormon, which also mentioned two stones put together into two rims of a bow, like being set in eye frames. These spectacles would soon be identified as the biblical Urim and Thummim. Peep stones which were in the possession of Smith were called by the faithful seer stones. These stones were also called a Urim and Thummim and may have confused people who were trying to understand what instruments were claimed to have been used to to translate the Egyptian language on the plates of gold. As Joseph Smith wrote in 1832, "but the Lord had prepared spectacles for to read the Book."

Willard Chase said he talked with Joseph Smith in the fall of 1827 and that Smith "then observed that if it had not been for that stone, (which he acknowledged belonged to me,) he would not have obtained the book."³⁵ This stone was the stone (he had more than one stone) through which Joseph Smith discovered the ancient record engraved in Egyptian hieroglyphics on plates of gold. Among those who heard the story of finding the plates by the Chase stone were the following individuals:

Martin Harris became one for the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon. In 1859 he was interviewed and reported that Joseph told him that he found the gold plates by this stone. Harris said, "Joseph had a stone which was dug from the well of Mason Chase [brother of Willard Chase], twenty-four feet from the surface. In this stone he could see many things to my certain knowledge. It was by [the] means of this stone he first discovered these plates"³⁶ Later Harris explained, "Joseph had before this described the manner of his finding the plates. He found them by looking in the stone found in the well of Mason Chase. The [Smith] family had likewise told me the same thing."³⁷ [repeated?]

Henry Harris was another individual who spoke with Joseph Smith. Harris related that Joseph Smith Jr. "said he had a revelation from God that told him they were hid in a certain hill

³³ Affidavit of Willard Chase, circa December 11, 1833, Manchester, Ontario County, New York in E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville [Ohio]: Printed and Published by the Author, 1834), 240-41, emphasis omitted; also in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 2:65-66, cited hereafter as *EMD*.

³⁴ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 247; in *EMD* 2:73.

³⁵ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 246; in *EMD* 2:71-72.

³⁶ *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (August 1859):163; in *EMD* 2:302.

³⁷ *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (August 1859):169; in *EMD* 2:309.

and he looked in his stone and saw them in the place of deposit; that an angel appeared and told him he could not get the plates until he was married."³⁸

Joseph Smith Inspired to Translate the Reformed Egyptian Hieroglyphics by Looking into a Stone or Two Stones

The *Rochester Gem* told about Martin Harris visiting Rochester about June 1829 and reprints the following information:

A man by the name of Martin Harris was in this village a few days since endeavouring to make a contract for printing a large quantity of a work called the Golden Bible. He gave something like the following account of it. "In the autumn of 1827 a man named Joseph Smith of Manchester, in Ontario County, said that he had been visited by the spirit of the Almighty in a dream, and informed that in a certain hill in that town was deposited a Golden Bible, containing an ancient record of divine origin. He states that after a third visit from the same spirit in a dream, he proceeded to the spot, removed earth, and there found the bible, together with a large pair of spectacles. He had also been directed to let no mortal see them under the penalty of immediate death, which injunction he steadfastly adheres to. The treasure consisted of a number of gold plates, about 8 inches long, 6 wide, and one eighth of an inch thick, on which were engraved hieroglyphics. By placing the spectacles in a hat and looking into it, Smith interprets the characters into the English language.

Harris states that he went in search of some one to interpret the hieroglyphics, but found no one was intended to perform that all important task but Smith himself. Smith has interpreted the whole, and it is now in press in Palmyra, Wayne Co. The subject attracts a good deal of notice among a certain class, and as it will be ere long before the public, we shall endeavor to meet it with the comment it may deserve.³⁹

Josiah Jones, a resident of Kirtland, Ohio, described the visit of the first church missionaries who arrived in that town:

In the last part of October, 1830, four men appeared here by the names of [Oliver] Cowdery, [Parley P.] Pratt, [Peter] Whitmer [Jr.] and [Ziba] Peterson; they stated they were from Palmyra [Manchester], Ontario county, N.Y. with a book which they said contained what was engraved on gold plates found in a stone box, in the ground in the town of Manchester, Ontario Co., N.Y., and was found about three years ago by a man named Joseph Smith Jr. who had translated it by looking into

³⁸ Affidavit of Henry Harris, no date [circa 1833], in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 252; in *EMD* 2:76.

³⁹ "Golden Bible," *Rochester Gem* 1 (September 5, 1829):70, Rochester, New York, emphasis omitted.

a stone or two stones, when put into a dark place, which stones he said were found in the box with the plates. They affirmed while he looked through the stone spectacles another sat by and wrote what he told them, and thus the book was all written.

Continuing Jones mentions that he and a few others talked to Oliver Cowdery:

A few days after these men appeared again, a few of us went to see them and Cowdery was requested to state how the plates were found, which he did. He stated that Smith looked onto or through the transparent stones to translate what was on the plates. I then asked him if he had ever looked through the stones, to see what he could see in them; his reply was that he was not permitted to look into them. I asked him who debarred him from looking into them; he remained sometime in silence, then said that he had so much confidence in his friend Smith, who told him [Cowdery] that he must not look into them, that he did not presume to do so lest he should tempt God and be struck dead.⁴⁰

What the Book of Mormon says about how it is to be “translated”

Reformed Egyptian is mentioned in LDS Mormon 9:32. The title page states, "To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof." The explanation later, but not always given, is that the Book of Mormon was translated by the Urim and Thummim.

The term Urim and Thummim is a post-1829 development and is not mentioned in the Book of Mormon. In a short time it replaced interpreters (spectacles) or seer stone in a hat. The following are some early statements on how the Book of Mormon was claimed to be "translated." Early stories mention that an object was put in a hat and Smith interpreted or read the words from what appeared in the hat. The idea to discover or interpret things by looking in a hat was the way Joseph Smith developed into one who claimed he could locate hidden treasures and also discover the meaning of a lost language without the object actually being in his presence.

The Book of Mormon told about its production: "And blessed be he [Joseph Smith Jr.] that shall bring this thing to light; for it shall be brought out of darkness unto light, according to the word of God; yea, it shall be brought out of the earth, and it shall shine forth out of darkness, and come unto the knowledge of the people; and it shall be done by the power of God" (LDS Mormon 8:16). The character King Mosiah translated or interpreted engravings on plates "by the means of those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow. Now these things were prepared from the beginning, and were handed down from generation to generation, for the purpose of interpreting languages" (LDS Mosiah 28:13-14; the stones were known as "interpreters," verse 20). These two stones (said to be spectacles) were to be used to read the

⁴⁰ 1831 Account by Josiah Jones published as "History of the Mormonites," in *The Evangelist* 9 (June 1, 1841):134-35 as cited in *Brigham Young University Studies* 12 (Spring 1972):307-308); also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 2:413-15.

inscriptions on the plates, "wherefore thou shalt read the words which I shall give unto thee" (LDS 2 Nephi 27:20).

The term Urim and Thummim is a post-1829 development and is not mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Over time it replaced spectacles, stone(s), and interpreters. The following are some early statements on how the Book of Mormon was claimed to be "translated." Early stories mention that an object was put in a hat and Smith interpreted or read the words from what appeared in the hat.

The idea to discover or interpret things by looking in a hat was the way Joseph Smith developed into one who could locate hidden treasures and also discover the meaning of a lost language without the object actually being in his presence.

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King Mosiah translated some plates "by the means of those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow. Now these things were prepared from the beginning, and were handed down from generation to generation, for the purpose of interpreting languages" (LDS Mosiah 28:13-14). The claim was that the spectacles were to be used to read the inscriptions on the plates, "wherefore thou shalt read the words which I shall give unto thee" (LDS 2 Nephi 27:20).

Abram Willard Benton (1805-67) who was a physician and lived at South Bainbridge, New York at the time, commented on what he had learned concerning the activities of Joseph Smith:

For several years preceding the appearance of his book, he was about the country in the character of a glass-looker: pretending, by means of a certain stone, or glass, which he put in a hat, to be able to discover lost goods, hidden treasures, mines of gold and silver, &c.

Writing about a court appearance in the summer of 1830 Benton wrote:

During the [1830] trial it was shown that the Book of Mormon was brought to light by the same magic power by which he pretended to tell fortunes, discover hidden treasures, &c. Oliver Cowdery, one of the three witnesses to the book, testified under oath, that said Smith found with the plates, from which he translated his book, two transparent stones, resembling glass, set in silver bows. That by looking through these, he was able to read in English, the reformed Egyptian characters, which were engraved on the plates"⁴¹

⁴¹ Letter by A.W.B. [Abram W. Benton] to editor, March 1831, "Mormonites," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 2 (April 9, 1831):120, Utica, New York. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 4:95, 97.

These two transparent stones would soon become the biblical Urim and Thummim.

Addison Austin (1796-1872) testified that Joseph Smith told him he could not see with the stone. At a time when Josiah Stowell Sr. "was digging for money, he, Austin, was in company with said Smith alone, and asked him to tell him honestly whether he could see this money or not. Smith hesitated some time, but finally replied, 'to be candid, between you and me, I cannot, any more than you or any body else; but any way to get a living.'"⁴²

William W. Phelps (1792-1872) who was the editor of the *Ontario Phoenix* published in Canandaigua, Ontario County, New York, south of Manchester, where the Smith family lived for more than seven years, wrote a letter in January 1831:

Mr. [Martin] Harris, whose name is in the book, is a wealthy farmer, but of small literary acquirements; he is honest, and sincerely declares upon his soul's salvation that the book is true, and was interpreted by Joseph Smith, through a pair of silver spectacles, found with the plates. The places where they dug for the plates, in Manchester, are to be seen.⁴³

While preaching in Boston, Massachusetts, questions were asked of missionaries Orson Hyde (1805-78) and Samuel H. Smith (1808-44). It was apparently Hyde who answered the questions. This presently is the earliest use of the term Urim and Thummim. This would indicate that its use would have been even earlier, at least by January 1832 before they left Ohio on their mission.

Q.-In what manner was the interpretation, or translation made known, and by whom was it written?

A.-It was made known by the spirit of the Lord through the medium of the Urim and Thummim; and was written partly by Oliver Cowdery, and partly by Martin Harris.

Q.-What do you mean by Urim and Thummim?

A.-The same as were used by the prophets of old, which were two crystal stones, placed in bows something in the form of spectacles, which were found with the plates.⁴⁴

Orsamus Turner (1801-55) wrote in 1851 what he learned through his investigations regarding the Joseph Smith Sr. family:

⁴² Letter by A.W.B. [Abram W. Benton] to editor, March 1831, "Mormonites," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 2 (April 9, 1831):120, Utica, New York. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 4:98.

⁴³ W. W. Phelps to "Dear Sir" [E. D. Howe], January 15, 1831 as quoted in *Mormonism Unveiled*, 273.

⁴⁴ "Questions proposed to the Mormonite Preachers and their answers obtained before the whole assembly at Julian Hall, Sunday Evening, August 5, 1832," *Boston Investigator* 2 (August 10, 1832).

Legends of hidden treasure, had long designated Mormon Hill as the depository. Old Joseph had dug there, and young Joseph had not only heard his father and mother relate the marvelous tales of buried wealth, but had accompanied his father in the midnight delvings, and incantations of the spirits that guarded it. ...

That on the top of the box containing the plates, “a pair of large spectacles were found, the stones or glass set in which were opaque to all but the Prophet,” that “these belonged to Mormon, the engraver of the plates, and without them, the plates could not be read.” ...

They said it was by looking at this stone, in a hat, the light excluded, that Joseph discovered the plates. This will be observed, differs materially from Joseph's story of the angel. It was the same stone the Smiths' had used in money digging, and in some pretended discoveries of stolen property.⁴⁵

Joseph Smith's 1832 earliest account said “the Lord had prepared ~~spectieke~~ spectacles for to read the Book.”⁴⁶ Smith's 1838-39 manuscript history mentioned “two stones in silver bows and these put into a breast plate ~~which~~ constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim deposited with the plates ... prepare them for the purpose of translating the book.”⁴⁷ The “two stones in silver bows” would be like spectacles. Did Joseph Smith use spectacles to read the wording of the book of plates? Did Smith ever write that he used a stone to dictate the text of the Book of Mormon?

Recent Developments

In 2015 the LDS Church Historian's Press published photographs of a stone that is claimed to have been used by Joseph Smith in reading the text of the religious Book of Mormon. Most writers are considered in some way as inspired to produce their own writings. It doesn't matter if any physical object was used in producing a text. Usually just using one person's own imagination produces the best in writing.

If people need to know how this is done then they may need a crutch. We can give an example that someone wrote an article, booklet or book using a shoe as a physical object that in some way helped in making the text available. It doesn't matter whether the work is fiction, historical, or religious.

The way Joseph Smith dictated the text of the Book of Mormon has been a topic since it was published in 1830. The use of a medium like a stone was considered the way Joseph Smith was able to write the Book of Mormon. This was only one artifact that was claimed to have a relationship to events in the Book of Mormon. That the book was inspired is claimed on the title

⁴⁵ O. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase* (Rochester: Published by William Alling, 1851), 214-16; Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 3:50-53.

⁴⁶ Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark-Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:222; Joseph Smith-History 1:35.

page with the words “by the gift and power of God.” As early as 1832 the biblical term Urim and Thummim was used to explain the way the text of the book came forth. This is a matter of faith if considered that a physical artifact was needed.

1826

In March 1826 it was mentioned that Joseph Smith Jr. had two stones; a white stone and a dark colored stone and that he “declined looking into a hat at his dark coloured stone, as he said that it hurt his eyes.”⁴⁸

1828-1829

David Whitmer understood that the revelations given during the period the Book of Mormon was written were “given through the ‘stone,’ while the Book of Mormon was being translated.”⁴⁹ Though he may have been in error as to when the stone was given to Oliver Cowdery.

At the time the Manuscript History of the Church was compiled, over half of the revelations were said to be given through the Urim and Thummim. The dates of the revelations would cover from July 1828 to June 1829. (see below) The texts that are the same, except for the recipient’s name, were evidently given through the stone. One revelation was changed before it was copied into the Kirtland Revelations Book. [in KRB 119-20] LDS D&C 17 original text would have read interpreters or directors, since Urim and Thummim was not an 1829 term. For the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants the words “Urim and Thummim” were added to a revelation. Below is a comparison of a revelation that was modified.

BC 9; LDS D&C 10:1

Book of Commandments 9:1 - which you had power to translate

Changed to read for Doctrine and Covenants:

1835 D&C 36:1 (italic words are the added words) which you had power *given unto you* to translate, *by the means of the Urim and Thummim*

Those who were recipients [sp?] of the revelations believed in the power of the stone. Martin Harris, and members of the Smith, Whitmer and Knight families.

Urim and Thummim, meaning a seer stone: July 1828-June 1829

Manuscript History “the former messenger appeared and handed to me the Urim and Thummim”; “I inquired of the Lord through it” (Book A-1:10; LDS History of the Church 1:21 [cited as HC]) The early revelations were said to have been given through a stone that Joseph

⁴⁸ Charles Marshall, “The Original Prophet. By a Visitor to Salt Lake City,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 7 (February 1873):229-30.

⁴⁹ *Address to All Believers in Christ*, 55.

Smith had in his possession which he placed in a hat. Nine out of 15 revelations were received (July 1828-June 1819) this way according to the Manuscript History of the Church.

1 revelation July 1828 (LDS D&C 3) Book A-1:10; HC 1:21

2 revelation April 1829 (LDS D&C 6) Book A-1:13; HC 1:33 wording starts: A great and marvelous work OC

3 revelation April 1829 (LDS D&C 7) Book A-1:15; HC 1:36

4 revelation May 1829 (LDS D&C 10) Book A-1:11; HC 1:23 [starts with previous 1828 event of lost pages]

5 revelation May 1829 (LDS D&C 11) Book A-1:19; HC 1:45 wording starts: A great and marvelous work HS

6 revelation June 1829 (LDS D&C 14) Book A-1:22; HC 1:49 wording starts: A great and marvelous work DW

7 revelation June 1829 (LDS D&C 15) Book A-1:22; HC 1:49 wording starts: Hearken my servant JW

8 revelation June 1829 (LDS D&C 16) Book A-1:22; HC 1:49 wording starts: Hearken my servant PW Jr.

9 revelation June 1829 (LDS D&C 17) Book A-1:23; HC 1:53

does not state:

1 LDS D&C 4 February 1829

2 LDS D&C 5 March 1829

3 LDS D&C 8 April 1829

4 LDS D&C 9 April 1829

5 LDS D&C 12 May 1829 wording starts: A great and marvelous work JK Sr.

6 LDS D&C 18 June 1829

The reception of the Canadian copyright revelation (circa January 1830), according to David Whitmer, “Joseph looked into the hat in which he placed the stone, and received a revelation” for some brethren to go to Canada to sell the copyright of the Book of Mormon.⁵⁰

On November 4, 1830 Joseph Smith used a stone in a hat to receive a revelation for recent convert Orson Pratt. This is now LDS D&C 34. See under the year 1878 for further information on the reception of this revelation.

Newel K. Whitney, Bishop at Kirtland, was given a prophetic blessing “through the Urim and Thummim” by Joseph Smith Jr. on October 7, 1835. (Newel K. Whitney Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University; Patriarchal Blessing Book 1:33-34)

Interpreters, spectacles, and Urim and Thummim were said to be used to “translate” an ancient script called “reformed Egyptian” on plates of gold. Joseph Smith also had in his possession seer stones (small egg shaped stones) of which one was placed in a hat and used besides what was to be used to interpret the record. In addition Smith would read what had been

⁵⁰ *Address to All Believers in Christ*, 31.

written on “parchment,” and he used the stone for receiving religious messages. Believers appear to have had no problem with the Book of Mormon text or revelations coming from looking at a stone in a hat.

1834

Oliver Cowdery wrote the following in September 1834:

Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his [Joseph Smith’s] mouth, as he translated, with the *Urim and Thummim*, or, as the Nephites would [would] have said, “Interpreters,” the history, or record, called “The book of Mormon.”⁵¹

1837

It may have been in 1837 when the Printer’s Manuscript and a seer stone that Joseph Smith used for the Book of Mormon came into the possession of Oliver Cowdery. Another stone was evidently retained by Smith.

1838-39

According to his history an angel informed Joseph Smith that

there were two stones in silver bows and (<stones fastened> to a breast plate) constituted what is called the Urim & Thummim deposited with the plates; and <the possession and use of these stones> was what constituted seers in ancient or former times and that God <had> prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.⁵²

1841

Joseph Smith showed his “Urim and Thummim,” which was a seer stone to members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Wilford Woodruff wrote in his journal for the date of December 27, 1841 the following:

27th The Twelve or a part of them spent the day with Joseph the Seer & he unfolded unto them many glorious things of the kingdom of God the privileges & blessings of the priesthood &c. I had the privilege of seeing for the first time in my day the URIM & THUMMIM.⁵³

⁵¹ [Letter 1], Oliver Cowdery, letter of September 7, 1834 to William W. Phelps, *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (October 1834):14, emphasis in original.

⁵² Manuscript History of the Church Book A-1:5, crossed out words omitted Joseph Smith-History 1:35.

⁵³ Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898*, typescript, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–85), December 27, 1841, 2:144.

Years later when the History of Brigham Young was compiled he also mentioned seeing Smith's seer stone at the same time.

[Joseph Smith] explained to us the Urim and Thummim which he found with the plates, called in the Book of Mormon, the interpreters. He said that every man who lived on the earth was entitled to a seer stone, and should have one, but they are kept from them in consequence of their wickedness, and most of those who do find one make an evil use of it: he showed us his seer stone.⁵⁴

1849

The following is recorded in the History of Brigham Young:

I met with President W. Richards and the Twelve on the 6th. We spent the time in interesting conversation upon old times, Joseph, the plates, Mount Cumorah, treasurers and records known to be hid in the earth, the gift of seeing, and how Joseph obtained his first seer stone, the driving from Missouri, angels visiting the earth, Joseph's death, place of burial, and resurrection.⁵⁵

1850

Oliver Cowdery died on March 3, 1850 at Richmond, Missouri.

1853

In 1853 LDS Church President Brigham Young (1801-77) indicated that Joseph Smith at one time had five seer stones. No description of these stones was provided by Young. The minutes of a meeting held on April 17, 1853, which includes shorthand, contains what Young said:

BY ... Joseph put [the] U. T back [with the] plates when [he?] [h]ad done translating [?] Josephs 1st Seer Stone [?] as [?] O. C. one found [?] well by [?] got [the] plates [of] B [of] Mormon Joseph [?] which Emma [?] 2 small ones [?] 1 large one⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Manuscript History of Brigham Young, Book G, p. 72, December 27, 1841, CR 100 150, LDS Church History Library

⁵⁵ Manuscript History of Brigham Young, Vol. 19 (1849), 75, entry of May 6, 1849, LDS Church History Library.

⁵⁶ General Church Minutes, April 17, 1853, CR 100 318, Box 2, folder 45, LDS Church History Library [2:664]

The meaning of the above appears to be: Brigham Young ... Joseph put the Urim and Thummim back with the plates when he had done translating. Joseph's 1st Seer Stone gave to Oliver Cowdery, one found in a well by which he got the plates of the Book of Mormon. Joseph's others which Emma had 2 small ones and one large one.

1855

Two years later on September 30, 1855 the minutes recorded Brigham Young saying:

B. Y. [:] Oliver . . . he died at Far West Oliver sent me Joseph's first Seer Stone, Oliver always kept it until he sent it to me- the second Seer Stone Dr. Williams had- the third one was a very large. & Joseph found two <small ones> on the beach in Nauvoo. a little larger than a black walnut without the shack on. Joseph said there is a Stone for every person on the Earth. I dont no [know] that I have ever had desire to have one.⁵⁷

A couple of things are inaccurate. Oliver Cowdery died in Richmond, Missouri not Far West and it was Phineas Young who gave the stone which Cowdery had to Brigham Young.

1856

Hosea Stout reported in his journal a meeting held on February 25, 1856. Stout may not have been present when Brigham Young showed the seer stone as he wrote "It is said to be" in his entry:

Monday 25 Feb 1856 Court met but done no business and adjourned till to morrow at ten a.m. The Regents met at dark on th[e] subject of th[e] Deseret First First Reader. The committee is progressing finely on th[e] subject To night th[e] subject of accent was taken up for th[e] first time President Young exhibited th[e] Seer's Stone with which The Prophet Joseph discovered th[e] plates of th[e] Book of Mormon, to th[e] Regents this evening. It is said to be a silecious granite dark color almost black with light colored stripes some what resembling petrified poplar or cotton wood bark It was about th[e] size but not th[e] shape of a hen's egg.⁵⁸

1859

On September 11, 1859 Wilford Woodruff recorded a different variation of Joseph Smith obtaining his first stone:

⁵⁷ General Church Minutes, September 30, 1855, CR 100 318, Box 3, folder 7, LDS Church History Library [2:1004]

⁵⁸ Hosea Stout Papers, 1829-1870, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

Preside[n]t Young also said that the seer stone which Joseph Smith first obtained He got in an Iron kettle 15 feet under ground. He saw it while looking in another seers stone which a person had. He went right to the spot & dug & found it.⁵⁹

1870

In 1870 Emma Hale Smith Bidamon wrote a letter to Mrs. Emma S. Pilgrim:

Now the first that my <husband> translated was translated by the use of the Urim and Thummim, and that was the part that Martin Harris lost, after that he used a small stone, not exactly, black, but was rather dark color. I can not tell whether that account in the Times and Seasons is correct or not because some one stole <all> my books and I have none to refer to at present⁶⁰

1872-1881

William E. McLellin stated that he had a number of certificates indicating the use of a stone in translating the Book of Mormon. McLellin in a letter to Joseph Smith III said that Joseph Smith “translated the entire Book of M[ormon]. by means of a small stone. I have certificates to that effect from E. A. Cowdery (Oliver’s widow,) Martin Harris, and Emma Bidamon. And I have the testimony of John and David Whitmer.”⁶¹ To John L. Traugher he wrote: “As to the means, or Interpreter, or stone by the use of which J. Smith read off the translation, or the words as they appeared before him: I have the written certificates of Martin Harris[,] Emma Smith and Elizabeth Cowdery, Oliver’s widow; besides, the statements of David and John Whitmer, all agreeing substantially in one. I always understood from the first that J.S. read off the 116 pages by means of the Interpreters found with the plates, and thereafter used a small stone. I have many times seen that peculiar stone; but I could not see anything with it.”⁶²

John L. Traugher wrote: "In [April] 1881, Dr. McLellan showed the writer a certificate signed by Martin Harris, in which it was stated that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by means of a dark brown stone, about the size and form of an egg."⁶³

1878

⁵⁹ *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5:382-83.

⁶⁰ Emma Bidamon to Mrs. Emma S. Pilgrim, March 27, 1870, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

⁶¹ Letter William E. McLellin to Joseph Smith III, July-September 1872 in Stan Larson and Samuel J. Passey, eds., *The William E. McLellin Papers 1854-1880* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007), 492, emphasis retained.

⁶² Extract of letter January 5, 1879, *Ibid.*, 516 .

⁶³ J[ohn]. L. Traugher Collection, Box 2, folder 39, 31, Manuscript Divisions, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

James R. B. Vancleave explained to Joseph Smith III the recent visit of Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith with David Whitmer:

Regarding seers and seer stones I am completely at sea, but am glad that you have given me the information you have: Three weeks ago today Elders Orson Pratt, and Joseph F. Smith (Your Cousin) of Salt Lake were here to see David Whitmer, . . . During Mr. Pratt[']s visit I inquired of him regarding his belief in the seer stone and he answered that he knew they were of God: He says that after he was ordained an Elder in the Church of Christ, he was anxious to know what his mission was, and would be and at Peter Whitmer Sr's residence he asked Joseph whether he could not ascertain what his mission was, and Joseph answered him that he would see, & asked Pratt and John Whitmer to go upstairs with him, and on arriving there Joseph produced a small stone called a seer stone, and putting it into a Hat soon commenced speaking and asked Elder P[ratt]. to write as he would speak, but being too young and timid and feeling his unworthiness he asked whether Bro. John W[hitmer]. could not write it, and the Prophet said that he could: Then came the revelation to the Three named given Nov. 4th 1830 as can be found in the book of D. & Covenants⁶⁴

Three years later John L. Traugher also wrote about the same visit:

John C. Whitmer, a son of Jacob, told me that when O[rson]. Pratt and J[oseph]. F. Smith were at Richmond to see "D. C." [David Whitmer], in 1878, he asked Orson how he first understood the B. of M. was translated, and Orson said 'twas by means of the Seer-stone. He said he asked Orson if he ever knew of the stone's being used after the translation, and he answered that he did; and that Joe took him upstairs at Whitmers, in Fayette, N. Y., after meeting, one Sunday [*sic*], and sat down and put the stone in his hat, and the hat over his face, and read off to him a revelation, as John Whitmer wrote it down. This was in November, 1830, as you can see by turning to section 33, D. & C.

J. C. Whitmer also said that J. F. Smith seemed much affected by Orson's narration, and, when he had finished, jumped to his feet and said, "Brother Pratt, why, in the name of God have you never told me these things before ?" Orson said that he had not thought it worth while[.] I believe Whitmer told me the truth, or something near it, for he has not invention enough to have fabricated the story, nor education enough to have told it in the language he used, if he had not heard it from some one. So much for Orson's Urim & Thummium!⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Letter, James R. B. Vancleave to Joseph Smith III, September 29, 1878, Community of Christ Library-Archives, P13, fd 255.

⁶⁵ Letter, [John L.] Traugher to "Dear Friend," October 10, 1881, A. T. Schroeder Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Box 2, fd. 3.

1879

In February 1879 Emma Smith Bidamon was interviewed by her son Joseph Smith III and he wrote her answers to questions he asked her: “In writing for J[oseph]. S[mith]. I frequently wrote for day after day, often he sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it and dictating hour after hour, with nothing between us.”⁶⁶

1881

Edward Stevenson cited the *Deseret Evening News* of September 5, 1870 when the *News* reported that Harris addressed the congregation. Then Stevenson wrote the following:

Martin Harris related an incident that occurred during the time that he wrote that portion of the translation of the Book of Mormon which he was favored to write direct from the mouth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He said that the Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone.

Martin explained the translation as follows: By aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, “Written,” and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the on the plates, precisely in the language then used.⁶⁷

1882

Franklin D. Richards wrote in his journal that he saw the seer stone while visiting Church President John Taylor on March 9, 1882:

Had a pleasant visit with Prest. Taylor . . . Saw the Seer Stone that Oliver Cowdery gave Phineas Young & Phineas gave it to Prest. Taylor. The pouch containing it was made by Emma.⁶⁸

There are a couple of things not correct. Oliver Cowdery did not give Phineas Young the seer stone. Phineas Young gave the stone to Brigham Young and not John

⁶⁶ Interview notes of Joseph Smith III, Community of Christ Library-Archives reproduced in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 1:539.

⁶⁷ Edward Stevenson to Editor, *Deseret News*, November 30, 1881, *Deseret Evening News* 15 (December 13, 1881): [4]; reprinted in “One of the Three Witnesses. Incidents in the Life of Martin Harris,” *Millennial Star* 44 (February 6, 1882):86-87; Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 2:320-21.

⁶⁸ Franklin D. Richards Journal, MS 1215, LDS Church History Library.

Taylor. Richards mentions a pouch being made by Emma Smith but he does not indicate where he obtained this information.

In December 1882 Joseph F. Smith wrote to William E. McLellin:

The little Stone you refer to is in care or possession of Pres. John Taylor. He having received it after the death of Pres. B. Young, who had it in his possession, he having received it from Oliver Cowdery after he rejoined the church.⁶⁹

1885

Questions were asked of David Whitmer on January 14, 1885, and he responded that Joseph:

was allowed to go on and translate by the use of a “Seers stone” which he had, and which he placed in a hat into which he buried his face, stating to me and others that the original Character[s] appeared upon parchment and under it the translation in english, which [enabled him] to read it readily.⁷⁰

On December 15, 1885 an interview was conducted by a correspondent of the *Chicago Tribune* with David Whitmer. It was published two days later.

[Joseph] Smith was given by the angel a Urim and Thummim of another pattern, it being shaped in oval or kidney form. This seer’s stone he was instructed to place in his hat, and on covering his face with the hat the characters and translation would appear on the stone.⁷¹

1886

Another interview was conducted in October 1886 with David Whitmer and sent to various newspapers. He again mentioned Joseph Smith’s seer stone:

By fervent prayer and by otherwise humbling himself, the prophet, however, again found favor, and was presented with a strange oval-shaped, chocolate-colored stone about the size of an egg, only more flat, which, it was promised, should serve the same purpose as the missing urim and thummim . . . With this stone all of the present Book of Mormon was translated.⁷²

⁶⁹ Letter of Joseph F. Smith to William E. McLellin, December 24, 1882, in Joseph F. Smith Letterpress Copybooks, 1875-1917, Box 30, folder 4, p. 438.

⁷⁰ Interview of David Whitmer with Zenas H. Gurley Jr., in Vogel *Early Mormon Documents* 5:138.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5:155.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 5:179.

1887

In January 1887 Maria L. Cowdery Johnson, daughter of Oliver Cowdery, wrote to David Whitmer. She could not remember if her mother gave the seer stone to Phineas Young or whether he just wanted to see it and then he kept it.

South West City
M^cDonald Co. Mo.

Dear Uncle David Jan. 14th[?] 1887

. . . You ask did we consent to Give the Seer Stone to Phineas Young - He came in to Grand Father House while my Father lay dead - and asked my Mother to let him see this stone - she got it - & let him take it[.] when he kept it - she felt so bad and troubled at the time[.] did not think what we were about - My Mother says she cant remember whether he asked her to give it to him or not- I do not remember that he asked to keep it - but do not think he did only to see it - and then kept it - I remember - his coming in and asking to see this stone - as well as though it were only yesterday- but do not recollect that my Mother gave it to him to keep- . . .

With love &
remain as ever
M. L. Johnson⁷³

David Whitmer published a booklet titled *An Address to All Believers in Christ* in which he discussed the seer stone. Whitmer mentioned that Smith save the stone to Cowdery during the spring of 1830. It is possible that this is incorrect as Smith used a seer stone for receiving a revelation for Orson Pratt in November 1830..

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man.⁷⁴

⁷³ Extract of letter of Maria L. (Cowdery) Johnson to David Whitmer, January 1887, holograph, P10, fd 16, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

⁷⁴ David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Missouri: author, 1887), 12.

After the translation of the Book of Mormon was finished, early in the spring of 1830, before April 6th, Joseph gave the stone to Oliver Cowdery and told me as well as the rest that he was through with it, and he did not use the stone any more. He said he was through the work that God had given him the gift to perform, except to preach the gospel.⁷⁵

Samuel Bateman in August 1887 wrote in his diary:

On Sunday last I saw and handled the seer stone that the Prophet Joseph Smith had. It was a dark, color, not round on one side. It was shaped like the top of a baby's shoe, one end like the toe of the shoe, and the other round⁷⁶

1888

Wilford Woodruff was in Manti, Utah Territory for the purpose of setting in order and attending the dedication of the Manti Temple. It appears that when copying his notes of May 18, 1888, that he inadvertently entered the following into his journal for the date of March 18 (same date, the 18th but the wrong month) rather than the correct date of May 18, the following, angle brackets indicates shorthand writing:

< I consecrated a seers stone that Joseph> Joseph <found in a well>⁷⁷

Woodruff recorded for the date of May 18, 1888:

18 We Met in the upper room & I set Daniel H Wells Apart to Preside over the Temple. L Snow set apart A. H. Lund to be his Assistant. After Considerable Conversation we bid ade [adieu] to All in the Temple. Before leaving I Consecrated upon the Altar the seers Stone that Joseph Smith found by Revelation some 30 feet under the Earth Carried By him through life.⁷⁸

If this was “Carried By him through life” then would not be the seer stone that Oliver Cowdery retained until his death in March 1850.

“David Whitmer,” *Historical Record* 7 (October 1888):623 “This stone was confided to Oliver Cowdery and preserved by him until his death in 1850. After that event, Phineas Young succeeded in getting it from Cowdery’s widow, and it is now among the sacred relics preserved at Salt Lake City.”

⁷⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁶ Diary of Samuel Bateman, August 17, 1887, page 69 of typed copy.

⁷⁷ *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, entry for March 18, 1888, 8:489.

⁷⁸ Ibid., entry for May 18, 1888, 8:499-500.

1896

On July 31, 1896, Zina Young Williams Card, daughter of Zina Diantha Huntington Young (a plural wife of Brigham Young), of Cardston, Canada wrote to Apostle Franklin D. Richards in Salt Lake City. The letter mentioned that she and her mother purchased after the death of Brigham Young in 1877 “two seer-stones and an arrow point.” No description is given in this letter of either of the stones.

There is a matter that I wish to lay before you, that weighs upon my mind, and seems very important to me. I refer to some very sacred articles I bought at the sale of my father’s personal effects,- articles that never should have been given up to the idle gaze; but being brought out, my mother and myself felt it a wish of our hearts to get them, that their sacredness might not be sullied.

They are: two seer-stones and an arrow point. They are in the possession of President Woodruff now, and very properly too, but I feel, dear cousin, that they should ever be the property of the President of the Church, and not of individuals; that at his demise, they are not retained as they were before among “personal effects,[”] but considered ever the legitimate property of God’s mouth-piece.⁷⁹

Franklin D. Richards wrote in his journal that he received the above letter from Zina Young Card on August 11, 1896 “Zina Young Card. about the 2 Seer Stones – She thinks they should ever be the property of and descend to successors in the Presidency of the Church.”⁸⁰

1899

Frederick Kesler wrote the following in his diary:

February 1, 1899: I call on Pst [President] Lorenzo Snow who I found in his office alone, he was feeling well, we had an extremely interesting interview, he showed me the Seerers [sic] Stone that the Prophet Joseph Smith had by which he done some of the Translating of the Book of Mormon with. I handeled [sic] it with my own hands. I felt as though I see & was handling a very Sacred thing. I trust & feel that it will work in his hands as it did in the Prophet Joseph Smiths hands.

I felt that I had been verry Greatly priviledged in seeing & of handling that sacred stone. May it yet prove a verry Great blessing to the church at Large as well as individuals: its color was mahogany: it was verry smoothe⁸¹

⁷⁹ Journal History of the Church, typed copy, July 31, 1896, LDS Church History Library.

⁸⁰ Franklin D. Richards Journal, MS 1215, LDS Church History Library.

⁸¹ Frederick Kesler Diary, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

1901

Stories continued to be passed on about historical events showing confusion on what Phineas Young gave Brigham Young. The reference to the revelation for Oliver Cowdery was received in April 1829 not May 1829. This story includes a stick and not a stone. It is incorrect when it says that Brigham Young used a stick when “he pointed out where the Temple should be built.” Thomas Bullock recorded in his journal: “President Young waived his hands and said, ‘Here is the forty acres for the Temple Lot.’”⁸² The reference to Emma Smith should be Lucy Mack Smith. The following is from the diary of Anthon H. Lund, dated July 5, 1901, brackets added by editor:

In the revelation to Oliver Cowdery in May 1829, Bro. Roberts said that the gift which the Lord says he has in his hands meant [a divining] stick which was like Aaron’s Rod. It is said Bro. Phineas Young got it from him and gave it to President [Brigham] Young who had it with him when he arrived in this valley and that it was with that stick that he pointed out where the Temple should be built. Bro. D[aniel]. F. Collet said that Bro. Franklin D. Richards had him copy an old manuscript written by Jos. Knight, Sen. concerning the manner in which Joseph first obtain the plates. Some of what he writes corresponds with what Emma Smith relates about the life of Joseph and some of it seems fabulous.⁸³

1912

In January 1912 George F. Gibbs, Secretary to the First Presidency, wrote to Zina Young Card about a conversation he had with her. He mentioned the Zelph arrowhead and a stone. There seems to be some dispute relating the ownership of these relics.

You will doubtless remember a conversation I had with you about the Zelph arrow head and seer stone presented by you to the President of the Church, also my suggestion that you see Sister Wooduff in regard to these sacred relics.

I was exceedingly pleased today to learn that you had seen Sister Woodruff in regard to these things, and that Sister Woodruff had turned them over to you.

Now my dear sister, as I told you, I am witness to the fact that these sacred relics were presented by you to the President of the Church, to become the property of the Church and not the property of any individual, and I am writing

⁸² Will Bagley, *The Pioneer Camp of the Saints: The 1846 and 1847 Mormon Trail Journals of Thomas Bullock* (Spokane, Washington: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1997), 241, entry of July 28, 1847; the forty acres was reduced to ten acres a few days later.

⁸³ John P. Hatch, ed., *Danish Apostle: The Diaries of Anthon H. Lund, 1890-1921* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with the Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2006), 130-31.

now to express the hope that it is your intention yet to see that this is done, and that there shall be no misunderstanding as to their ownership.⁸⁴

1923

John J. Snyder wrote to Paul M. Hanson about David Whitmer's description of the seer stone:

6- Yes, David Whitmer described the stone used in translating the Book of Mormon. He said it was a chocolate colored stone, about the size of an egg, and as for the shape of it, it would resemble an egg partly flattened out.⁸⁵

1926

John J. Snyder again discussed David Whitmer and the seer stone:

David Whitmer ... he was furnished by the heavenly Messenger who had charge of the work with a chocolate colored Stone, and was told by the Messenger that he would be enabled to finish the translation of the book by means of this Seer Stone. David Whitmer said it was about the size of an egg, and was shaped like an egg somewhat flattened out.⁸⁶

1933

B. H. Roberts in a letter said he saw the seer stone, not sure what year (circa 1919-1930) and it had been in possession of the Smith family:

The Prophet continued in possession of the Seer Stone which evidently at the last <he> gave to Oliver Cowdery, at Richmond, Mo. In [sic] 1848, who gave this seer stone to Lorenzo Young, brother of Brigham Young to deliver to the Prophet Brigham Young and he retained it throughout his life. From him it passed to President John Taylor and from John Taylor to Wilford Woodruff, and when the Manti Temple was dedicated, Wilford Woodruff took this Seer Stone and placed it on the altar and dedicated it to the Church. From President Woodruff the Seer Stone passed into the hands of President Joseph F. Smith and I had several interviews with him concerning it and at one time he promised to bring it to his office so that I might see it. But some circumstance or other prevented him from

⁸⁴ George F. Gibbs, Secretary to the First Presidency, to Zina Young Card, January 25, 1912, MS 4780, Box 4, folder 8, [13], LDS Church History Library.

⁸⁵ John J. Snyder to Paul M. Hanson, January 31, 1923, Hanson Papers, P12-1, f18, Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri.

⁸⁶ Snyder, *The Solution of the Mormon Problem* (author, 1926), 5, copy at Utah Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Call no. PAM 1407.

doing this. Having traced the Seer Stone to his possession of it I made further inquiries wondering where it might be. Since it had been dedicated by President Woodruff to the Church I thought it could be expected to be in possession of President Grant. This, however, at the time I made the inquiry was not the case. But inquiring of representative members of the Smith family I was informed that they were still in possession of it and it was brought to my office by one of them and President Ivins was present. We both examined it for sometime and wondered about it. While handling it – it is a small stone of chocolate color with milkish white strata running through it and apparently specks of gold here and there – while handling it I had the impression that doubtless it was radium or it had been made radio active by contact with radium and hence its power to become luminous when placed in the dark.⁸⁷

1934

Richard M. Robinson wrote "The History of a Nephite Coin[,] A Personal Experience of Elder Richard M. Robinson of Grantsville, Utah." He indicated that he visited church president Lorenzo Snow in January 1900.

In the office of the First Presidency there were resident Lorenzo Snow, President Joseph F. Smith, President Lyman M. Lyman and _____

He [President Snow] then went and got the money purse or leather bag that President Brigham Young had brought to the Rocky Mountains with him, also the Seer Stone and said, "This is the Seer Stone that the Prophet Joseph Smith used. There are very few worthy to view this, but you are." He handed the Seer Stone to me and I couldn't express the joy that came to me as I took that stone in my hands. Words are not equal to the task of expressing such a sublime joy." He then told me to hand the Seer Stone to my wife and I handed it to her. He then blessed us with the greatest blessing I have ever heard fall from the mouth of man."

Description of the Seer Stone

The Seer Stone was the shape of an egg though not quite so large, of a gray cast something like granite but with white stripes running around it. It was transparent but had no holes, neither in the end or in the sides. I looked into the stone, but could see nothing, as I had not the gift and power of God that must accompany such a manifestation. . . .

⁸⁷ B. H. Roberts, Letter to C. M. Dewsnup, March 30, 1933, Scott G. Kenney Research Collection, MSS 2022, Box 4, fd. 19, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

President Snow blessed us that day [handwritten in a space underlined: the first week in January, 1900] and to this day, his promise that we should never suffer for bread has been valid.⁸⁸

2015

A number of photographs of a seer stone and a pouch were printed in *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3, Part 1: Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon 1 Nephi-Alma 35*. It gave a description of the stone: "Brown stone measuring, at its outermost points, 5.5 by 3.5 by about 4 cm. This stone matches some descriptions of the seer stone used by Joseph Smith during the translation of the Book of Mormon." Also was mentioned "The box in which the stone pictured here is stored contains a handwritten note, on which is written the name of Zina Williams Card."⁸⁹

As of April 11, 2016, at the LDS Church History Museum in Salt Lake City, one of the description plaques has the following wording:

Joseph Smith used a seer stone, as well as the interpreters he received from Moroni, as aids in the process of translating the Book of Mormon. According to Joseph's mother, Lucy, this stone gave Joseph the ability to "discern things that could not be seen by the natural eye." The pouch was made by Emma Smith for the protection of the stone.

LDS Apostle James E. Talmage wrote:

It is noticeable that we make no reservation respecting the Book of Mormon on the ground of incorrect translation. To do so would be to ignore attested facts as to the bringing forth of that book. Joseph Smith the prophet, seer and revelator, through whom the ancient record has been translated into our modern tongue, expressly avers that the translation was effected through the gift and power of God, and is in no sense the product of linguistic scholarship.⁹⁰

This means that what is represented as Mormon's book - the Book of Mormon - is not a product of Joseph Smith's linguistic ability. Joseph Smith produced a text with no knowledge of an ancient language.

⁸⁸ "The History of a Nephite Coin"[,] A Personal Experience of Elder Richard M. Robinson of Grantsville, Utah, December 30, 1934, 3-5, MS 5147, LDS Church History Library.

⁸⁹ Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3, Part 1: Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon 1 Nephi-Alma 35* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2015), xx-xxi.

⁹⁰ *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 15 (October 23, 1917):261, Independence, Missouri.

As a treasure seer, could Joseph Smith see in a stone?

Peter Ingersoll (ca 1789-1867) of Manchester, New York, about forty-four years old

Location: Harmony, Pennsylvania

Time: 1827

Ingersoll reported that Isaac Hale said to Smith:

[“]You spend your time in digging for money--pretend to see in a stone, and thus try to deceive people." Joseph wept, and acknowledged he could not see in a stone now, nor never could; and that his former pretensions in that respect, were all false. He then promised to give up his old habits of digging for money and looking into stones.⁹¹

Joseph Addison Spencer Austin (1796-1872) of Colesville, New York, thirty-four years old

Time: 1825-26

Addison Austin testifying during a summer 1830 trial of Joseph Smith and mentioned that Smith told him he could not see with the stone. At a time when Smith was working for Josiah Stowell Sr., he was asked if he could really see where some money was hidden:

Addison Austin was next called upon, who testified, that at the very same time that Stowell was digging for money, he, Austin, was in company with said Smith alone, and asked him to tell him honestly whether he could see this money or not. Smith hesitated some time, but finally replied, "to be candid, between you and me, I cannot, any more than you or any body else; but any way to get a living."⁹²

Joel K. Noble, the Justice of the Peace for the above trial in 1830 wrote:

At the instance of the people, *Joseph A. S. Austin* was by me duly sworn, and says "that he had been acquainted with Smith, the prisoner, for several years; that prisoner pretended to look in a certain glass, or stone, and said he could tell where stolen goods were, and could discover mines of gold and silver under ground; made some pretence at telling fortunes, but he, witness, never knew of prisoner's finding any thing by his pretended art. Once witness asked prisoner to tell him if he, prisoner, could tell any thing by looking in said glass, and wished a candid and true answer. Prisoner told witness frankly, he could not see any thing, and in answer, prisoner likewise observed to witness, *any thing you know for a living*: says, two years before this present time, he saw prisoner drink a certain quantity

⁹¹ Affidavit of Peter Ingersoll, December 2, 1833, published in E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville [Ohio]: E. D. Howe, 1834), 234-35; Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:43

⁹² Letter by A.W.B. [Abram W. Benton] to editor, March 1831, "Mormonites," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 2 (April 9, 1831):120, Utica, New York.

*of distilled liquor, and was drunk, as he does believe; for he could not stand up, but lay in the woods for some hours.*⁹³

The word “hat” is not found in the Book of Mormon.

No one translates a real language by looking at a seer stone or spectacles in a hat. To translate a person needs to correctly know the language he or she is translating. There is no shortcut method to spending the time to learn a language before making a translation. The fact is if you do not know the language you cannot translate.

It appears that at times Joseph Smith would have his face in a hat. At other times he would be reading from the King James Bible. The “plates” would not be in his possession but away from the building where he was composing the Book of Mormon, i.e. hidden in the woods. If the “plates” were not needed to dictate the writing of the book then an important inquiry would be why Smith would need an ancient record in the first place.

Did Joseph Smith really bring the “plates” home from the Manchester Hill and hide them or was it a story to assist those who believed in him? The scribes who wrote the text of the religious book did not say they saw the “plates” while was taking dictation. The story of going to the hill once a year, for the years 1823, 1824, 1825, 1826, and 1827 is certainly questionable. Did an angel or a guardian spirit appear to Joseph Smith to reveal where the “plates” were hidden? What good are the plates?

Joseph Smith using a hat indicates that he had no need to the plates. It is a faith story. Joseph Smith claimed to have found buried in the ground gold plates with writing engraved on them which he supernaturally interpreted by a stone placed in a hat. This method was like some who pretend to find treasured hidden in the ground by the same way.

⁹³ “Mormonism,” *Morning Star* 7, no. 20, November 16, 1832, (Limerick, Maine), emphasis in original. Reprinted from the *Boston Christian Herald*, circa November 1832, Boston, Massachusetts.