

Manchester Scryer

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,¹ and extant accounts show that treasure was generally sought through supernatural means. Locations for buried wealth and lost Spanish mines were sometimes located through dreams. Treasures could also be located by using divining rods, often made from "witch hazel," or by looking in special stones or crystals. Sometimes when a stone was used, a person would place the 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 needed to overcome the guardian spirit who had enchanted the treasure; otherwise the treasure would slip back into the earth.

In his official history, Joseph Smith downplayed his experience as a money-digger and sought to cast this activity in the context of manual labor. However, Smith was involved in such endeavors for years in two widely separated areas and enjoyed an established reputation as a gifted seer. He was thought to be able to locate lost goods with a special seer stone and magical religious ceremonies.² Rodger I. Anderson explained some background to this practice and belief:

The practice of money digging by no means originated with Smith. Long before Smith's neighbors accused him of hunting for buried money by occult means, the art of magical treasure hunting was already widespread in America. Accounts of men pursuing enchanted treasures with divining rods appear throughout the eighteenth century, and in combination suggest that the practice had very early become ritualized. The treasure was located by a divining rod, immobilized by charms, magic circles, or special steel rods driven into the ground for that purpose, and incantations recited to protect the diggers from "certain malicious Demons who are said to h[a]unt and guard such Places." Any deviation from these prescribed rituals on the part of the treasure hunters, any "Mistake in the

¹ 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 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, and the *Livingston Register* (Geneseo, N. Y.), December 28, 1825.

² Wayland D. Hand, "The Quest for Buried Treasure: A Chapter in American Folk Legendry," in *Folklore on Two Continents: Essays in Honor of Linda Degh* (Bloomington, IN: Trickster Press, 1980), 112-19; D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

Procedure, some rash Word spoken, or some Rule of Art neglected, the Guardian Spirit had Power to sink it deeper into the Earth and convey it out of their reach."³

Young Joseph was assisted by his father and his older brothers Alvin and Hyrum.⁴ In addition, neighbors of the Smith family were money diggers, including Willard Chase, Samuel Lawrence, as well as John, Joshua, and William Stafford.⁵ Others in the area also claimed to have special stones, including Sarah (Sally) Chase; also Joshua and William Stafford.⁶ Donna Hill wrote, "There is testimony from early Mormons that Joseph had searched for treasure, that to some extent he had accepted the myths which often accompanied belief in buried treasure at that time and that a number of his close friends in the church were 'money-diggers' and rodsmen."⁷

In southern New York and northern Pennsylvania, William Hale, Oliver Harper, and Josiah Stowell also searched for treasures.⁸ Financial support was supplied, among others, by Abraham Fish in Manchester and by Asa and Josiah Stowell in Bainbridge.⁹

³ "Joseph Smith's Early Reputation Revisited," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 4 (1980):77-78; see also Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 12-13.

⁴ In January 1859 Martin Harris, an early Mormon convert then residing at Kirtland, Ohio, was interviewed by Joel Tiffany. This account was subsequently published in *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (August 1859):163-70, a spiritualist publication at New York City. See also the affidavit of Peter Ingersoll, Palmyra, Wayne County, New York, December 2, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 233. Philastus Hurlbut (a former member of the Mormon church) visited Palmyra and Manchester townships during November and December 1833 and obtained, besides two general statements, a number of statements from some Joseph Smith family acquaintances. These were subsequently printed in Howe's compilation *Mormonism Unveiled* in 1834. For a convenient compilation of the statements collected by Hurlbut, see Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 2:13-77.

⁵ *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (August 1859):164; John Stafford in *Saints' Herald* 28 (June 1, 1881):167; and C. R. Stafford, statement of March 1885, in *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1 (January 1888):3.

⁶ Statement of C. R. Smith, March 1885, in *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1 (April 1888):1; interview of John Stafford in William H. Kelley papers, CCLA; see *Saints' Herald* 28 (June 1, 1881):167.

⁷ Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 66. See Dan Vogel, "The Locations of Joseph Smith's Early Treasure Quests," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27 (Fall 1994):198-231.

⁸ Joseph and Hiel Lewis, "Mormon History", *The Amboy Journal* 24 (April 30, 1879):1; Frederic G. Mather, "The Early Mormons," *Binghamton Daily Republican*, July 29, 1880, see also *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* (Philadelphia), (1880), 26:200, 202; *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (August 1859):164.

⁹ Copy of a letter from six leading citizens of Canandaigua, New York, dated January 1832, in answer to a query about Mormons from Rev. Ancil Beach, in the Walter Hubbel papers, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey; Statement of W. R. Hine, in *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1 (January 1888):2; and A. W. Benton, "Mormonites," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 2 (April 9, 1831):120.

When Joseph Smith recalled his money-digging activities, he wrote only about searching for a lost mine in 1825 for Josiah Stowell. But contemporary records suggest that this had been one of the Smith family occupations in the Palmyra/Manchester area since the early 1820s. For example, Joshua Stafford of Manchester recalled that he "became acquainted with the family of Joseph Smith, Sen. about the year 1819 or 20. They then were laboring people, in low circumstances. A short time after this, they commenced digging for hidden treasures . . . and told marvellous stories about ghosts, hob-goblins, caverns, and various other mysterious matters."¹⁰ Willard Chase, another friend of the family, similarly recalled, "I became acquainted with the Smith family . . . in the year 1820. At that time, they were engaged in the money digging business."¹¹

One of the most detailed accounts of this early period was given by William Stafford, a neighbor who lived in Manchester and whose family gave the name to Stafford Road where the Smiths' house still stands.

I first became acquainted with Joseph, Sen., and his family in the year 1820. They lived, at that time, in Palmyra, about one mile and a half from my residence. A great part of their time was devoted to digging for money . . . I have heard them tell marvellous tales, respecting the discoveries they had made in their peculiar occupation of money digging. They would say, for instance, that in such a place, in such a hill, on a certain man's farm, there were deposited kegs, barrels and hogheads of coined silver and gold--bars of gold, golden images, brass kettles filled with gold and silver—gold candlesticks, swords, &c, &c.¹²

Joseph Sr. believed he could locate objects that were lost or hidden from sight under the ground. A neighbor, Peter Ingersoll, recalled that "he requested me to walk with him a short distance from his house, for the purpose of seeing whether a mineral rod would work in my hand, saying at the same time he was confident it would. . . . [H]e cut a small witch hazel bush and gave me direction how to hold it."¹³ In a letter of Jesse Smith, Joseph Sr.'s brother, to "Hiram" Smith written on June 17, 1829, Jesse wrote concerning a person who discussed the Smith family, "he says your father has a wand or rod like Jannes & Jambres who withstood Moses in Egypt—that he can tell the distance from India to Ethiopia."¹⁴ Fayette Lapham, who interviewed Joseph Sr., said that Smith "believed that there was a vast amount of money buried somewhere in the country; that it would some day be found; that he himself had spent both time and money searching for it, with divining rods, but had not succeeded in finding any, though sure that he eventually would."¹⁵

¹⁰ Statement of Joshua Stafford, Manchester, Ontario County, New York, November 15, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 258.

¹¹ Affidavit of Willard Chase, before Justice of the Peace, Frederick Smith, December 11, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 240.

¹² Affidavit of William Stafford, Manchester, New York, December 8, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 237.

¹³ Affidavit of Peter Ingersoll, December 2, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 232.

¹⁴ Copy of letter in Joseph Smith Letterbook 2:60, CHL.

¹⁵ "The Mormons," *Historical Magazine* 7 (May 1870):306.

The younger Joseph learned to work the witch hazel rod from his father. Mrs. S. F. Anderick recalled that Joseph Jr. claimed "he could tell where lost or hidden things and treasures were buried or located with a forked witch hazel." She continued:

Willard Chase, a Methodist who lived about two miles from uncle's, while digging a well, found a grey smooth stone about the size and shape of an egg. Sallie, Willard's sister, also a Methodist, told me several times that young Jo Smith, who became the Mormon prophet, often came to inquire of her where to dig for treasures. She told me she would place the stone in a hat and hold it to her face, and claimed things would be brought to her view. Sallie let me have it several times, but I never could see anything in or through it. I heard that Jo obtained it and called it a peep-stone, which he used in the place of the witch hazel. Uncle [Earl Wilcox] refused to let Jo dig on his farm. I have seen many holes where he dug on other farms.¹⁶

Willard Chase employed Joseph Smith Jr. to help him dig a well on the Chase property where the seer stone was discovered. Willard was twenty-four years old and Joseph was sixteen. Chase gives details of the discovery from his perspective:

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 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. . . . He had it in his possession about two years.¹⁷

¹⁶ Statement of Mrs. S. F. Anderick, June 24, 1887, in *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1 (January 1888):2. See William W. Phelps to E. D. Howe, January 15, 1831, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 273. Benjamin Saunders said, "I have seen Sally (Sarah) Chase peep or look in her seer stone a many a time. She would look for any thing. I have had it in my hand." W. H. Kelley Collection, "Miscellany 1795-1948," CCLA. Sallie (named Sarah) was born on October 20, 1800, to Clark and Phebe Chase. Her father died in 1821. The records of the Clark Chase family are found in William E. Reed, *The Descendants of Thomas Durfee of Portsmouth, R.I.* (Washington, D.C.: Gibson Bros., 1902), 213-14, and George Grant Brownell, comp., *Genealogical Record of the Descendants of Thomas Brownell, 1619 to 1910* (Jamestown, NY, 1910), 200.

¹⁷ Affidavit of Willard Chase, December 11, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 240-41. Smith later borrowed the stone and returned it at Chase's insistence. The stone was subsequently borrowed by Hyrum Smith and never returned. Joseph in his examination before Justice Albert Neely on March 20, 1826, said that he "had occasionally been in the habit of looking through the stone to find lost property for 3 years" or since about 1823. Fayette Lapham learned from Joseph Sr. that after the stone was found when working on a well "Joseph spent about two years looking

The magical stone is now in the possession of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City.¹⁸

William Stafford, who helped Joseph Smith Sr. and team with their digging, later recalled how young Joseph used the stone to search for treasure:

They would say, also, that nearly all the hills in this part of New York, were thrown up by human hands, and in them were large caves, which Joseph, Jr., could see, by placing a stone of singular appearance in his hat, in such a manner as to exclude all light; at which time they pretended he could see all things within and under the earth, —that he could see within the above mentioned caves, large gold bars and silver plates—that he could also discover the spirits in whose charge these treasures were, clothed in ancient dress.

Stafford also recalled that young Joseph "had been looking in his glass" and saw some kegs of gold and silver underneath the earth. He went with both Smiths. The elder Joseph made a circle and said that the treasure was within the circle. Hazel sticks were then put in the ground "around the said circle, for the purpose of keeping off the evil spirits." After putting a steel rod in the center of the circles and digging a trench, the older Smith consulted his son who had been "looking in his stone and watching the motions of the evil spirit." It was determined that they "had made a mistake in the commencem[e]nt of the operation; if it had not been for that, said he, we should have got the money."¹⁹

The Smiths obtained no gold or silver, but witnesses claimed young Joseph helped find other objects. Martin Harris, who became a close friend of the Smith family, was impressed when Joseph used his stone to find Martin's lost toothpick:

I was at the house of his [Joseph's] father in Manchester, two miles south of Palmyra village, and was picking my teeth with a pin while sitting on the bars. The pin caught in my teeth, and dropped from my fingers into shavings and straw. I jumped from the bars and looked for it. . . . I then took Joseph on surprise, and said to him—I said, "Take your stone." I had never seen it, and did not know that he had it with him. He had it in his pocket. He took it [out] and placed it in his hat—the old white hat—and placed his face in his hat. I watched him closely to see that he did not look [to] one side; he reached out his hand beyond me on the right, and moved a little stick, and there I saw the pin, which he picked up and gave to me. I know he did not look out of the hat until after he had picked up the pin.²⁰

into this stone, telling fortunes, where to find lost things, and where to dig for money and other hidden treasure." *Historical Magazine* 7 (May 1870):306. On Joseph Smith's use of seer stones, see Richard Van Wagoner and Steven Walker, "Joseph Smith: 'The Gift of Seeing,'" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Summer 1982): 49-68. For additional information on seer stones, see Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 32-64, 145-46, 158-77, 242-46.

¹⁸ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 243.

¹⁹ Affidavit of William Stafford, December 8, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 237-39.

²⁰ *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (August 1859):164. Joel Tiffany spent "four successive days" interviewing Harris. "Mormon Times in Kirtland," *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer* 15 (May 18, 1859),

An early 1832 letter written at Canandaigua, New York, south of Manchester, reported that Joseph "had been engaged for some time in company with several others of the same character in digging for money . . . and for a time were supported by a Mr. Fish an illiterate man of some property."²¹ Mr. Fish is Abraham Fish of Manchester, New York, a neighbor of the Smith family. Abraham Fish was acquainted with Joseph and his father.²² Fish lived south of the Smith/Durfee farm. That Fish was illiterate is evidenced in the Nathan Pierce Docket Book when he signed his name with an "X" identified as "his mark." A receipt dated March 10, 1827, received by the younger Joseph from the Thayer store in Palmyra reads: "Palmyra, 10th March 1827, Recd of Joseph Smith Jr Four dollars which is credited to the account of A. Fish" and signed J & L Thayer. Joel and Levi Thayer were the owners of the store.²³

Josiah Stowell Sr. was a farmer with substantial holdings in the town of Bainbridge, Chenango County, in southern New York²⁴ and a deacon in the First Presbyterian Church. In the mid-1820s, Stowell organized a money-digging company to search for a mine he believed had been hidden by Spaniards in northern Pennsylvania near the home of Isaac Hale.²⁵ Stowell hired Joseph Smith and his father to help find the hidden mine. It was while digging and boarding at the home of Isaac Hale that Smith met his future wife, Emma Hale. She was born in July 1804 and was a year and a half older than Smith.

Cleveland, Ohio. Lucy Harris, Martin's wife, stated, "About a year previous to the report being raised that Smith had found gold plates, he [Martin] became very intimate with the Smith family, and said he believed Joseph could see in his stone any thing he wished." Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 255.

²¹ Copy of a letter from six leading citizens of Canandaigua, New York, dated January 1832, in answer to a query about Mormons from Rev. Ancil Beach, in the Hubbel papers, Princeton University Libraries, Princeton. See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 3:15.

²² Abraham Fish was born about 1773 and died on July 17, 1845, at the age of seventy-two. *Wayne Sentinel* (July 23, 1845), 2. The probate of the will of Lemuel Durfee, Sr., lists "One note signed by Joseph Smith [Sr.] and Abraham Fish, thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents" with interest of \$1.42. Probate Papers, Surrogate's Court, Wayne County Courthouse, Lyons, New York. After Durfee's death on August 8, 1829 (*Wayne Sentinel* 6 [Aug. 14, 1829]:3), Durfee's son, also named Lemuel, brought suit against Joseph Smith Sr. and Abraham Fish on January 19, 1830, for \$39.92, which was eventually paid. Docket Book of Nathan Pierce, Town Hall of Manchester, Manchester, New York. Pierce was a justice of the peace in Manchester where Joseph Sr. was residing and Durfee was a resident of Palmyra.

²³ Joseph Smith Collection, under Receipts, in CHL.

²⁴ Josiah Stowell was married to Miriam Bridgman. They had eight children, four sons and four daughters: Simpson (or Simson; also listed as Simeon), b. July 29, 1791; Martha, b. September 10, 1793; Horace, b. March 10, 1796; Miranda, b. September 6, 1798; Thomas, b. September 28, 1800; Rhoda, b. March 11, 1805; Miriam (Mary), b. May 22, 1807; and Josiah Jr., b. April 16, 1809. See William Henry Harrison Stowell, *Stowell Genealogy* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Co., 1922), 229-30.

²⁵ Stowell "became infatuated with the idea that he must go in search of hidden treasures, which he believed were buried in the earth." James H. Smith, *History of Chenango and Madison Counties, New York*, 153. This statement was based on the 1877 recollection of William D. Purple. The name "Isaiah Stowel" in the recollection should be Josiah Stowell.

Two of Emma's cousins, Joseph and Hiel Lewis, later recalled how the possibility of a treasure came to light:

We are unable at this time to give precise dates, but some time previous to 1825, a man by the name of Wm. Hale, a distant relative of our uncle Isaac Hale, came to Isaac Hale, and said that he had been informed by a woman named Odle, who claimed to possess the power of seeing under ground, (such persons were then commonly called peepers) that there was great treasures concealed in the hill north-east from his, (Isaac Hale's) house. By her directions, Wm. Hale commenced digging, but being too lazy to work, and too poor to hire, he obtained a partner by the name of Oliver Harper, of [New] York state, who had the means to hire help. But after a short time, operations were suspended for a time.²⁶

Josiah Stowell eventually took up the search. In the fall of 1825 he went north to the Manchester area to visit his son Simpson Stowell. While there he heard about the Smiths' ability to locate buried treasure. Reportedly Joseph Jr. told Stowell that he could see the treasure Stowell had been looking for in Harmony through his peep stone even while still in Manchester. He also, according to Stowell's account, "described Josiah Stowel[l]'s house and outhouses" accurately.²⁷ Stowell was impressed and hired Smith and his father to help locate the treasure.

Oliver Cowdery, who became a friend of the Smith family in 1829, wrote of Stowell's project and of his hiring Joseph Smith:

This gentleman, whose name is Stowel[l], resided in the town of Bainbridge, on or near the head waters of the Susquehannah river. Some forty miles south, or down the river, in the town of Harmony, Susquehannah county, Pa. is said to be a cave or subterraneous recess . . . where a company of Spaniards, a long time since, when the country was uninhabited by white settlers, excavated from the bowels of the earth ore, and coined a large quantity of money. . . . Enough, however, was credited of the Spaniard's story, to excite the belief of many that there was a fine sum of the precious metal lying coined in this subterraneous vault, among whom was our employer [Stowell]; and accordingly our brother [Joseph Smith] was required to spend a few months with some others in excavating the earth, in pursuit of this treasure.²⁸

In his own history Joseph Jr. also mentioned this work with Stowell:

In the month of October Eighteen hundred and twenty five I hired with an old Gentleman, by name of Josiah Stool [Stowell] who lived in Chenango County,

²⁶ *The Amboy [Illinois] Journal* 24 (April 30, 1879):1. See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 4:301-2.

²⁷ See Stowell's 1826 testimony in Charles Marshall, "The Original Prophet. By a Visitor to Salt Lake City," *Fraser's Magazine* 7 (February 1873):229.

²⁸ *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835):201. This account may have been written in response to Isaac Hale's 1834 affidavit, which is mentioned in the article. Although Cowdery's letter claims Smith worked for Stowell as "a common laborer" (200).

State of New York. He had heard something of a silver mine having been opened by the Spaniards in Harmony, Susquahana [Susquehanna] County, State of Pen[n]sylvania, and had previous to my hiring with him been digging in order if possible to discover the mine. After I went to live with <him> he took me among the rest of his hands to dig for the silver mine, at which I continued to work for nearly a month without success in our undertaking, and finally I prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it. Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money digger.²⁹

Smith's father and mother indicated that he was more than a hired hand for Stowell. Joseph Sr. reportedly told Fayette Lapham that his son went to Harmony, Pennsylvania, "at the request of some one who wanted the assistance of his divining rod and stone in finding hidden treasure, supposed to have been deposited there by the Indians or others."³⁰ Similarly Lucy recalled that Stowell had sought her son's help because he heard Joseph "possessed certain keys, by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye."³¹

In other words it was because of Smith's reputation that father and son made the trip of over one hundred miles to Harmony, Pennsylvania, where Stowell employed them to help locate the mine. Smith was then nineteen and his father fifty-four.

On November 1, 1825, soon after their arrival in Harmony and in anticipation of their discoveries, Stowell's treasure-digging company drew up "Articles of Agreement." This agreement stipulated, "If anything of value should be obtained at a certain place in Pennsylvania near a Wm. Hale's, supposed to be a valuable mine of either Gold or Silver and also to contain coined money and bars or ingots of Gold or Silver," each member would receive a share, including a share to Oliver Harper's widow. According to this agreement, Joseph Sr. and his son Joseph (who both signed the agreement) would receive "two elevenths of all the property that may be obtained."³²

It was while they were away in southern New York that the new land agent in Canandaigua agreed to sell the Smiths' delinquent Manchester farm to Russell Stoddard who wanted to add it to his holdings. Only panic-stricken appeals by Lucy and Hyrum Smith to

²⁹ Manuscript History, Book A-1:7-8, CHL; Jesse, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:282. Joseph's account recorded that he worked "for nearly a month," Lucy's book has "by the month," and Oliver Cowdery's account "a few months." Much of Lucy's printed history is similar in wording to the Joseph Smith account published in the *Times and Seasons* 3 (May 2, 1842):772. In the *Elders' Journal* Joseph responded to a question of whether he had been a money digger with this answer: "Yes, but it was never a very profitable job for him, as he only got fourteen dollars a month for it." *Elders' Journal* (Far West, MO), 1 (July 1838):43, Far West, Missouri; see B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1959), 3:29. It is not known whether the fourteen dollars was in addition to his room and board.

³⁰ "The Mormons," *Historical Magazine* 7 (May 1870):307.

³¹ Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 360.

³² *Daily Tribune*, April 23, 1880, 4, Salt Lake City, from the *Susquehanna Journal*, March 20, 1880. See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 4:407-13.

sympathetic neighbors and the return of Joseph Sr. prevented eviction. A kindly Quaker, Lemuel Durfee Sr., bought the land and allowed the Smiths to remain as tenants.³³

In 1834 Isaac Hale recalled the treasure-seeking venture:

[Joseph] Smith, and his father, with several other "money-diggers" boarded at my house while they were employed in digging for a mine that they supposed had been opened and worked by the Spaniards, many years since. Young Smith gave the "money-diggers" great encouragement, at first, but when they had arrived in digging, to near the place where he had stated an immense treasure would be found—he said the enchantment was so powerful that he could not see. They then became discouraged, and soon after dispersed. This took place about the 17th of November, 1825; and one of the company gave me his note for \$12[.]68 for his board, which is still unpaid.³⁴

Others in the area also recalled Smith's activities and placed them within the context of religious and supernatural practice. Michael Morse, husband of Trial (or Tryal) Hale, younger sister of Emma Hale, described the treasure forays around Harmony to an interviewer in 1879:

Joseph came into Harmony with a Mr. Stowell, to dig for treasure - silver in oars [ores] - which was said to have be[e]n mined & hid by Spaniards a long time before. He thinks three different companies had been digging for it in all and that Mr. Stowell with his company were one of the three Says Joseph at that time (about 1825) was a green, awkward, and ignorant boy of about 19 yrs of age Says he <then> made no profession of religion. Said Mr. Stowell was a religious man, as was also Mr. Isaac Hale at whose house Mr. Stowell, Joseph and the other hired men boarded, and that prayers were had of mornings before the company set off to work.³⁵

In 1842 Joel K. Noble of Colesville, New York, placed the money digging within the context of occult ritual. He recalled that young Joseph "came here when about 17-18 Y[ears]. of age in the capacity of Glass Looker or fortune tel[l]er."³⁶ Noble summarized the story of the company's alleged sprinkling the ground with a dog's blood while offering prayers.³⁷

³³ Lemuel Durfee purchased the farm on December 20, 1825 (Deed Liber 44:232-34, Ontario County Records Center and Archives, Canandaigua). The Smith family eventually lost the farm.

³⁴ Affidavit of Isaac Hale, March 20, 1834, in *Susquehanna Register, and Northern Pennsylvanian* 9 (May 1, 1834):1, original newspaper in the Susquehanna County Historical Society, Montrose, Pennsylvania. The testimonies from the *Register* were reprinted in *The New York Baptist Register* 11 (June 13, 1834):68, original in Colgate University Archives. Also published in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 263.

³⁵ William W. Blair Journal, May 8, 1879, CCLA. Blair interviewed Michael Morse in Amboy, Illinois. In his journal Blair wrote Morse's first name as "Gabriel" rather than Michael. Blair also wrote to the editor of the *Saints Herald* about what he learned from Michael Morse. See *Saints Herald* 26 (June 15, 1879):190, letter dated May 22, 1879.

³⁶ Joel King Noble to Jonathan B. Turner, March 8, 1842, in answer to an inquiry from Professor Jonathan Turner of Illinois College, Jacksonville, Illinois. Located in the Turner Collection of the

While Joseph Smith was working for Josiah Stowell, he was brought before a court on charges sworn against him by a nephew of Josiah Stowell, Peter G. Bridgman (or Bridgeman). Apparently Bridgman became concerned that his uncle's money was being spent in the pursuit of elusive treasure.³⁸ Accounts of these charges corroborate Smith's treasure-hunting in southern New York and Pennsylvania.

In 1831 Abram W. Benton, a young man about the same age as Joseph Jr., recalled the arrest for disorderly conduct and the judgment of guilt, adding, "considering his youth, (he then being a minor,) and thinking he might reform his conduct, he was designedly allowed to escape. This was four or five years ago."³⁹ In Noble's 1842 recollection, Smith was charged with vagrancy, condemned, and "whisper came to Jo. off off—took Leg Bail (or Gave [Leg Bail])."⁴⁰

For over a hundred years three different published versions of the actual 1826 court record taken from Albert Neely's docket book have been available as well as an account told by William D. Purple. But because the pages from the original docket book had been lost, the authenticity of these published accounts was questioned. However, in 1971 two itemized bills were discovered which had been submitted by Justice Neely and Constable Philip De Zeng to

Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois. See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 4:107.

³⁷ Ibid. 4:109. William R. Hine, who lived in Colesville at the time, stated that Joseph "claimed to receive revelations from the Lord through prayer, and would pray with his men, mornings and at other times." *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1 (January 1888):2. Compare similar statements by Henry A. Sayer (ibid., 1:3) and Joseph Rogers (ibid., 1 [April 1888]:1). Joseph's use of sacrifice in his Palmyra diggings is referred to in William Stafford's testimony (*Mormonism Unveiled*, 239); Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise and Progress of Mormonism*, 24-25; Stephen S. Harding's letter in Thomas Gregg, *The Prophet of Palmyra* (New York: John B. Alden, 1890), 56; and C. R. Stafford's statement in *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1 (January 1888):3. The same ritual in the Pennsylvania diggings is recorded in Emily C. Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1873), 580; and in Frederick Mather's interviews in *Lippincott's Magazine* 26 (August 1880):200. See also *Binghamton Daily Republican*, July 29, 1880.

³⁸ Within a month after swearing out the warrant, this crusading twenty-two-year-old was licensed as an exhorter by the Methodists and within three years helped establish the West Bainbridge Methodist Church.

³⁹ Letter written by A. W. Benton of South Bainbridge, New York, dated March 1831, in *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 2 (April 9, 1831):120, Utica, New York. Dr. Abram Benton, according to the family Bible record, was born on July 16, 1805. He was later received into the Medical Society in October 1830. James H. Smith, *History of Chenango and Madison Counties, New York*, 100, 144. For a while he lived on the east bank in South Bainbridge just north of the bridge. Chenango County Deeds RR:587. About 1838 he moved to Sterling, Illinois, and then to Fulton, where he died on March 9, 1867.

⁴⁰ Joel K. Noble to Jonathan B. Turner, March 8, 1842. The letter arrived too late to be included in Turner's book, *Mormonism in All Ages*. See correspondence from Absalom Peters, January 1 and July 6, 1842, regarding the printing, in another Turner Collection in the Illinois State Historical Survey Library, Urbana. Noble after 1850 moved to Hartland Township, Huron County, Ohio, where he died on February 19, 1874.

cover costs incurred in the arrest and examination of Joseph Smith, and they confirm many of the details of both the Purple account and the published versions of the record.⁴¹

Because of the multiplicity of documents concerning the March 20, 1826, examination of Joseph Smith, it is possible to reasonably reconstruct the order of events as the young glass-looker would have experienced them. When Smith was arrested, he would have been brought before Justice Neely for a preliminary examination, often referred to loosely as a "trial" but specified by Neely on his bill as an "examination." The examination was to determine whether Smith should be released as innocent of the charges or, if the evidence seemed sufficient, actually brought to trial. During the examination, Smith's statement was taken (not under oath), and witnesses for and against the accused were sworn in and examined and their statements taken down.⁴² Both before and during the examination Joseph remained under guard by Constable De Zeng, who charged the county for "attendance with Prisoner two days & 1 nigh[t]"—the day of the examination and the day and night preceding.⁴³

As indicated, Bridgman had sworn out the warrant. Neely's court record begins with the complaint: "State of New York v. Joseph Smith. Warrant issued upon written complaint upon oath of Peter G. Bridgeman, who informed that one Joseph Smith of Bainbridge was a disorderly person and an impostor."⁴⁴ New York law collected various types of vagrancy under the broad heading of "Disorderly Persons" and included, along with beggars, prostitutes, and men who neglected their wives and children, "all persons pretending to have skill in physiognomy, palmistry, or like crafty science, or pretending to tell fortunes, or to discover where lost goods may be found."⁴⁵ Since Smith had never actually led the diggers to anything of value, Bridgman considered that Joseph was indeed pretending to discover lost items.

According to Neely's court record, as published in *Fraser's Magazine*, Smith first made a statement in his own defense:

Prisoner 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

⁴¹ For a detailed description of each of these documents, see H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, 222-30, and Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 4:239-66.

⁴² "The examination of the prisoner should not be upon oath." *A New Conductor Generalis: Being a Summary of the Law Relative to the Duty and Office of Justices of the Peace, Sheriffs, Coroners, Constables, Jurymen, Overseers of the Poor* (Albany: Published by E. F. Backus, 1819), 142.

⁴³ Compare Constable Redfield's 1829 bill, May 19 re: Jacob Lee, for "keeping him part of two days & one night and attending the Examination."

⁴⁴ *Fraser's Magazine* 7 (February 1873):229. Peter Bridgman was a nephew of Josiah and Miriam Bridgman Stowell. Burt Nichols and Joseph Clark Bridgman, *Genealogy of the Bridgman Family* (Hyde Park, MA, n. pub., 1894), 129, 116, 118-19.

⁴⁵ *Laws of the State of New York, Revised and Passed . . .*, 2 vols. (Albany: H.C. Southwick & Co., 1813), revisers William P. Van Ness and John Woodworth, 1:114, 410, usually cited as Revised Laws, or R.L. See *Conductor Generalis* (1819), 108; also *Revised Statutes* (1829), 1:638.

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[I] several times, and had informed him where he could find these treasures, and Mr. Stowel[I] 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.⁴⁶

Joseph Smith made a passing remark about attending school and Josiah Stowell Jr., who was almost seventeen years old at the time remembered, "I also went to Schoal [School] with him one winter. He was a fine likely young man & at that time did not Profess religion."⁴⁷ The next witness called was Josiah Stowell Sr.:

[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 [in his stone] 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 stone; that he found the [1883 printing: "digging part"] at Bend and Monument Hill as prisoner represented it; that prisoner had looked through said stone for Deacon Attleton for a mine, did not exactly find it, but got a [1883: "piece"] of ore which resembled gold, he thinks; that prisoner had told by means of this stone where a Mr. Bacon had buried money; that he and prisoner had been in search of it; that prisoner had said it was in a certain root of a stump five feet from surface of the earth, and with it would be found a tail feather; that said Stowel[I] and prisoner thereupon commenced digging, found a tail feather, but the money was gone; that he supposed the money moved down. That prisoner did offer his services; that he [Joseph Smith] never deceived him; that prisoner looked through stone and described Josiah Stowel[I]'s house and outhouses, while at Palmyra at Simpson Stowel[I]'s, correctly; that he had told about a painted tree, with a man's head painted upon it, by means of said stone. That he had been in company with prisoner digging for gold, and had the most implicit faith in prisoner's skill.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Fraser's Magazine* 7 (February 1873):229.

⁴⁷ Josiah Stowell Jr., to John S. Fullmer, February 17, 1843, CHL. See Mark Ashurst-McGee, "The Josiah Stowell Jr.—John S. Fullmer Correspondence," *Brigham Young University Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 108, 113; and Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 4:80.

⁴⁸ *Fraser's Magazine* 7 (February 1873):229; Daniel S. Tuttle, "Mormons," *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883), 2:1,576.

Stowell's comment about Smith searching for ore at Monument Hill and looking for salt is confirmed by William R. Hine's recollection that "Asa Stowel[l] furnished the means for Jo to dig for silver ore, on Monument Hill." He also mentions that Smith "and his workmen lived in a shanty while digging for salt. When it rained hard, my wife has often made beds for them on the floor in our house."⁴⁹

Another witness, Jonathan Thompson, also testified in support of Smith's skills in locating treasure:

that prisoner [Joseph Smith] was requested to look for chest of money; did look, . . . that prisoner, Thompson, and Yeomans went in search of it; that Smith arrived at spot first; was at night; that Smith looked in hat while there, and when very dark, and told how the chest was situated. After digging several feet, struck upon something sounding like a board or plank. Prisoner would not look again, pretending that he was alarmed on account of the circumstances relating to the trunk being buried, [which] came all fresh to his mind. That the last time he [Joseph Smith] looked he discovered distinctly the two Indians who buried the trunk, that a quarrel ensued between them, and that one of said Indians was killed by the other, and thrown into the hole beside the trunk, to guard it, as he supposed. Thompson says that he believes in the prisoner's professed skill; that the board which he struck his spade upon was probably the chest, but on account of an enchantment the trunk kept settling away from under them when digging; that notwithstanding they continued constantly removing the dirt, yet the trunk kept about the same distance from them. Says prisoner said that it appeared to him that salt might be found in Bainbridge, and that he is certain that prisoner can divine things by means of said stone. That as evidence of the fact prisoner looked into his hat to tell him about some money witness [Thompson] lost sixteen years ago, and that he described the man that witness supposed had taken it, and the disposition of the money.⁵⁰

William Purple was impressed by Thompson's detailed description of their search:

Many years before a band of robbers had buried on his [Thompson's] flat a box of treasure, and as it was very valuable they had by a sacrifice placed a charm over it to protect it, so that it could not be obtained except by faith, accompanied by certain talismanic influences. So, after arming themselves with fasting and prayer, they sallied forth to the spot designated by Smith. . . . Mr. Stowell went to his flock and selected a fine vigorous lamb, and resolved to sacrifice it to the demon spirit who guarded the coveted treasure. Shortly after the venerable Deacon [Josiah Stowell] might be seen on his knees at prayer near the pit, while Smith, with a lantern in one hand to dispel the midnight darkness might be seen making a circuit around the pit, sprinkling the flowing blood from the lamb upon the ground, as a propitiation to the spirit that thwarted them. They then descended the

⁴⁹ W. R. Hine, in *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1 (January 1888):2.

⁵⁰ *Fraser's Magazine* 7 (February 1873):229-30.

excavation, but the treasure still receded from their grasp, and it was never obtained.⁵¹

Dr. Purple reported that he heard the testimony of Joseph's father, though this testimony is not mentioned in the official record, which only had to "put in writing" as much of the testimony "as shall be material to prove the offence."⁵² Purple stated that "Joseph Smith, Sr., was present, and sworn as a witness" and that "he swore that both he and his son were mortified that this wonderful power which God had so miraculously given him should be used only in search of filthy lucre, or its equivalent in earthly treasures." According to Purple, Joseph Sr. "trusted that the Son of Righteousness would some day illumine the heart of the boy, and enable him to see His will concerning him."⁵³

After hearing the testimony, Justice Neely concluded that there was enough evidence to indicate that the prisoner, Joseph Smith the Glass Looker, had claimed to have the skill to discover lost goods, a misdemeanor under the Vagrant Act, and had not actually found anything. Neely wrote in his court record, "And therefore the Court find the Defendant [Joseph Smith Jr.] guilty."⁵⁴ He ordered the constable, Philip De Zeng, to notify two other justices and prepare for trial. The material witnesses, three in this instance, were put under recognizance to appear at the forthcoming Court of Special Sessions.⁵⁵

At this point the course of events becomes somewhat difficult to trace. Certainly many people found guilty in a pre-trial hearing do not go to trial. The bills of the four justices have been found, and they show that no Court of Special Sessions was held. Justice Noble writes that Joseph took "Leg Bail," an early slang expression meaning "to escape from custody."⁵⁶ What may have happened is that the three justices discussed the case, and considered that, since this was Joseph Smith's first offence, privately made a deal with him. Dr. Purple, who was present at the examination, recalled that Smith was discharged. Years later Smith's co-worker Oliver Cowdery, probably getting his information from Smith, recalled that "some very officious person complained of him as a disorderly person, and brought him before the authorities of the county; but there being no cause of action he was honorably acquitted."⁵⁷ It is true that no penalty was administered. Edwin Brown Firmage and Richard Collin Mangrum have written:

⁵¹ W. D. Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," *Chenango Union* 30 (May 3, 1877):3. See Vogel *Early Mormon Documents* 4:136.

⁵² *Laws of New York* (1813) 2:507.

⁵³ Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," *Chenango Union* 30 (May 3, 1877):3.

⁵⁴ *Fraser's Magazine* 7 (February 1873):230.

⁵⁵ "A bond or recognizance, 25," *Conductor Generalis* (1819), 482. "The fees of a Justice for his services in apprehending, binding, committing, &c for crimes and misdemeanors, are—for every oath, 12 1/2 cents; warrant, 19; recognizance, 25; mittimus, 19; which are audited and allowed by the board of supervisors as county charges." Thomas G. Waterman, *The Justice's Manual: or, A Summary of the Power and Duties of Justices of the Peace in the State of New-York* (Binghamton, New York: Printed by Morgan & Canoll, 1825), 199. On defendant and witness recognizance see *Revised Statutes* (1829), 2:707, Sec. 8; 709 Sec. 21.

⁵⁶ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1967 ed.), 476.

⁵⁷ *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835):201. See Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:95.

Dr. Purple's account suggests that Smith was discharged. The trial [examination] record indicates Smith was found guilty but mentions no sentence. Noble's letter and Benton's article agree that Smith was condemned, but Noble suggests Smith jumped bail and left. Benton, however, suggests that the court took into account Smith's age and hoped his conduct might be reformed, and therefore "he was designedly allowed to escape." In any case, it seems no sanction was imposed, and the court did not pursue the matter any further.⁵⁸

Dale L. Morgan concluded: "From the point of view of Mormon history, it is immaterial what the finding of the court was on the technical charge of being 'a disorderly person and an impostor;' what is important is the evidence adduced, and its bearing on the life of Joseph Smith before he announced his claim to be a prophet of God."⁵⁹

Whatever the outcome may have been, it is clear from the testimonies recorded at the examination and also from other statements by neighbors and witnesses, both from the Bainbridge-Harmony area and also from Manchester-Palmyra area nearly one hundred miles away, that young Smith had for several years earned part of his livelihood by hiring out as a glass looker to locate hidden treasures by gazing into his seer stone. It is also evident that Joseph surrounded his activities with a religious atmosphere flavored with the supernatural, although he himself at this time made no profession of religion. He looked into his peep stone to see: hidden mines and treasures underground; Stowell's house and farm a hundred miles away; a miscreant who stole Thompson's money ten years earlier; the murder of a Native American whose spirit was guarding a treasure; and the location of treasures and ghosts or spirits of dead guardians who moved them around under the ground.

These activities led the two widely separated communities to associate him with divination and necromancy. In fact early adherents of the Mormon faith claim that Joseph located the gold plates from which he dictated the Book of Mormon by gazing into his seer stone. He also used this stone to obtain the text of the book as well as to receive instructions from God for his early followers.

One valuable discovery that Joseph Smith did make during this period was Emma Hale. Smith told her that as soon as he saw her, he recognized that she was the one who had to be with him to enable him to find the treasure which he had been promised.⁶⁰ She was won over, but her father was not. Isaac Hale later stated that "young Smith made several visits at my house, and at length asked my consent to his marrying my daughter Emma. This I refused, and gave him my reasons for so doing; some of which were, that he was a stranger, and followed a business that I could not approve."⁶¹

Without her father's permission, Emma and Joseph eloped and were married on January 18, 1827, by Zachariah Tarble, a justice of the peace in Bainbridge. As she later told the story to their son:

⁵⁸ Edwin Brown Firmage and Richard Collin Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 382n1.

⁵⁹ John Phillip Walker, ed., *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 373n44.

⁶⁰ *Historical Magazine* 7 (May 1870):307.

⁶¹ Isaac Hale, *Susquehanna Register* 9 (May 1, 1834):1; Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 263.

I was visiting at Mr. Stowell's, who lived in Bainbridge, and saw your father there. I had no intention of marrying when I left home; but, during my visit at Mr. Stowell's, your father visited me there. My folks were bitterly opposed to him; and, being importuned by your father, aided by Mr. Stowell, who urged me to marry him, and preferring to marry him to any other man I knew, I consented.⁶²

Joseph had turned twenty-one years old; Emma was twenty-two. Since Isaac Hale did not approve of the marriage, the couple lived with Joseph's parents in Manchester. Emma's parents were Methodists and she was probably also a Methodist.⁶³

Sometime after their marriage, Joseph and Emma hired Peter Ingersoll to help pick up Emma's personal possessions and furniture. Isaac Hale related that "Smith stated to me, that he had given up what he called 'glass-looking,' and that he expected to work for a living, and was willing to do so."⁶⁴

Emma's brother Alva reported that "Joseph Smith Jr. told him that [']his (Smith's) gift in seeing with a stone and hat, was a gift from God,' but also states 'that Smith told him at another time that this 'peeping' was all d—d nonsense. He (Smith) was deceived himself but did not intend to deceive others; — that he intended to quit the business, (of peeping) and labor for his livelihood.'"⁶⁵ Ingersoll described his trip with Smith to Harmony:

I was hired by Joseph Smith, Jr. to go to Pennsylvania, to move his wife's household furniture up to Manchester, where his wife then was. When we arrived at Mr. Hale's, in Harmony, Pa., from which place he had taken his wife, a scene presented itself, truly affecting.

His father-in-law (Mr. Hale) addressed Joseph, in a flood of tears: "You have stolen my daughter and married her. I had much rather have followed her to her grave. 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 ever 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.

Mr. Hale told Joseph, if he would move to Pennsylvania and work for a living, he would assist him in getting into business. Joseph acceded to this proposition.

Peter Ingersoll then returned with Joseph Smith to Manchester and related the following:

Joseph told me on his return, that he intended to keep the promise which he had made to his father-in-law; but, said he, it will be hard for me, for they will all

⁶² *Saints Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879):289. This interview was conducted by her son Joseph Smith III in February 1879.

⁶³ Mary Audentia [Smith] Anderson, *Ancestry and Posterity of Joseph Smith and Emma Hale* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1929), 302.

⁶⁴ Isaac Hale, *Susquehanna Register* 9 (May 1, 1834):1; Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 263.

⁶⁵ Alva Hale, *Susquehanna Register* 9 (May 1, 1834):1, emphasis in original; Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 268.

oppose, as they want me to look in the stone for them to dig money: and in fact it was as he predicted.⁶⁶

Joseph now had a wife to support. He promised his father-in-law he would stop crystal-gazing and labor for a living. About June 1827 Smith's father told his friend Willard Chase that his son had discovered a hidden record written on plates of gold.

⁶⁶ Affidavit of Peter Ingersoll, Palmyra, Wayne County, New York, December 2, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 234-35.