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Title How Much Weight Can a Single Source Bear? The Case of Samuel D. Tyler's Journal Entry

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Abstract In 1838 a group of Latter-day Saints passed through Randolph County, Missouri, on their way to join the Saints at Far West. A journal entry by Samuel D. Tyler, a member of the church who traveled with this group, has led some students of the Book of Mormon to conclude that the Prophet Joseph Smith revealed the location of the ancient city of Manti spoken of in the Book of Mormon. A careful examination of the Tyler journal and other historical sources suggests that this conclusion is unwarranted.

HOW MUCH WEIGHT CAN A SINGLE SOURCE BEAR?

The Case of Samuel D. Tyler's Journal Entry

MATTHEW ROPER

Manti Utah Temple, about 1915. Many settlements that the Latter-day Saints laid out were named after Book of Mormon places. Manti, Utah, was one of these, but it was not the site of the Book of Mormon Manti. Warren S. Snow reported that Brigham Young told him that Moroni had "dedicated this piece of land for a temple site." See Moses S. Farnsworth (Manti Temple recorder) to George Teasdale, 2 July 1888, in "Spiritual Manifestations in the Manti Temple," *Millennial Star* 50 (13 August 1888): 521. Courtesy Church History Library and Archives.

FROM THE EDITOR:

One of the fundamental constituents of responsible scholarship is the ability to determine how much weight a single piece of evidence should receive. The Hebrew Bible teaches, "At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15). This article discusses how much weight can be put on a single witness, especially when that witness is contradicted by an equally plausible second witness.

In 1838, the Kirtland Camp traveled from Kirtland, Ohio, to Far West, Missouri.[1] Two historical references associated with that group's activities as they passed through eastern Missouri have led some to conclude that the ancient city of Manti, spoken of in the Book of Mormon (Alma 56:14; 57:22; 58:1, 13, 25–28, 39), was located in that region or that the Prophet Joseph Smith had learned of this by revelation. A closer look at these sources sheds light on the question.[2]

The first reference is an entry from the journal of Samuel D. Tyler, an early member of the church who traveled with the Kirtland Camp. The Tyler journal entry for 25 September 1838 reads as follows:

> We passed thro Huntsville, Co. seat Randolph Co. Pop. 450 & three miles further we bought 32 bu. of corn of one of the brethren who resides in this place (66) There are several of the brethren round about here & *this is the ancient site of the City of Manti, which is spoken of in the Book of Mormon* & this is appointed one of the Stakes of Zion and it is in Randolph Co. Mo. 3 miles west of the Co. seat.[3]

The first issue is the source of Tyler's information. If that source was Joseph Smith, then this could be significant, but if Tyler himself came to this conclusion or if he was merely reporting local hearsay, this would be less so. In this case, the source could not be Joseph Smith directly because the Prophet was not with the Kirtland Camp. At the time Tyler recorded this information in his journal Joseph Smith was already in Far West several counties away, having previously fled Kirtland months before with other church leaders.[4] What then was the source of this idea? Was it based upon something Joseph Smith had said at another time, or did it reflect speculation among the local brethren in Randolph County or the Kirtland Camp? How accurately was it reported? The Tyler journal does not provide an answer to these questions.

The Manuscript History of the Church might seem to lend support to the information in the Tyler journal entry. The relevant entry for 25 September 1838 can be found on page 829 of that document and reads as follows:

> The camp passed through Huntsville in Randolph County which has been appointed as one of the stakes of Zion, and *is the ancient site of the City of Manti* and pitched tents at Dark Creek, Salt Licks, seventeen miles. It was reported to the camp that one hundred and ten men had volunteered from Randolph and gone to Far West to settle difficulties.[5]

This entry, however, was actually written down after the events in question by Willard Richards, who used the available sources. Comparative evidence strongly suggests that the 25 September 1838 entry of the Manuscript History was based on the account in Tyler's journal. Evidence of this is italicized in the two documents below.

TYLER JOURNAL 25 SEPTEMBER 1838	MANUSCRIPT HISTORY, 1843?
We *passed thro Huntsville*, Co. seat *Randolph Co.* Pop. 450 & three miles further we bought 32 bu. of corn of one of the brethren who resides in this place (66) There are several of the brethren round about here & this *is the ancient site of the City of Manti*, which is spoken of in the Book of Mormon & this is *appointed one of the Stakes of Zion* & it is in Randolph Co. Mo. 3 miles west of the Co. seat. We progressed on 3 miles further to *Dark Creek, Salt Licks, & pitched . . . 17 miles*. 733 + 17 = 750 Miles. . . . *We hear that 110 men have volunteered* to save being drafted *& have* gone from this Co. *to Far West to settle some disturbances* between the Missourians & Mormons & that they are collecting forces from many other Co's to settle perhaps they know not what themselves.	The camp *passed through Huntsville in Randolph County* which has been *appointed as one of the stakes of Zion*, and *is the ancient site of the City of Manti* and *pitched* tents at *Dark Creek, Salt Licks*, *seventeen miles*. It was reported to the camp that *one hundred and ten men had volunteered* from Randolph *and gone to Far West to settle difficulties*.

Manti public school, another example of modern places receiving a name from the Book of Mormon.

The Manuscript History entry is clearly dependent on Tyler's journal entry; however, as a later, derivative source, it has no primary evidentiary value in supporting Tyler's 1838 statement. When this portion of the Manuscript History was first published in the *Millennial Star* in 1854, the entry read essentially the same as it did in Richards's earlier handwritten manuscript.[6] When church historian Andrew Jenson later published it in his *Historical Record* in 1888, he added, without explanation, the words *which the Prophet said* immediately before the part of the sentence about Manti, making it read "*which the Prophet said* was the ancient site of the city of Manti" although this was not in the original manuscript.[7] This has puzzled some subsequent students of the Book of Mormon. In 1892 George Reynolds's *A Dictionary of the Book of Mormon: Comprising Its Biographical, Geographical and Other Proper Names* was published with appendices written by Janne Sjodahl. Sjodahl cited the Manuscript History passage from Jenson's *Historical Record* and then noted, "Whether 'the ancient site of Manti' refers to the Manti in the Book of Mormon is a question that has been debated. Some prefer to regard it as reference to a later city of Manti, built by descendants of Nephi in Missouri" rather than the original city mentioned in the Lehite record.[8] In 1938, Joseph Fielding Smith published an article in the *Deseret News* in which he cited the passages from the Tyler journal and the Manuscript History in support of a Missouri location for the Book of Mormon city of Manti, which was subsequently reprinted in a compilation of his earlier writings.[9]

All subsequent editions of the *History of the Church* say that the village of Huntsville, Missouri, was "near the place where the city of Manti is to be built" and omit any suggestion that the location of the Book of Mormon city was known.

In contrast to the Tyler journal, another independent contemporary source provides a different view. Elias Smith, a cousin to Joseph Smith, also kept a journal of the travels and activities of the 1838 Kirtland Camp. On this same day, he recorded:

> We came through Huntsville the county seat of Randolph where we were told before we arrived there we should be stopped but saw nothing of the kind when we came through the town and heard no threats whatever, but all appeared friendly. 1½ miles west of Huntsville we crossed the east branch of Chariton and 1½ miles west of the river we found Ira Ames and some other brethren near the place *where the city of Manti is to be built* and encamped for the night on Dark creek 6 miles from Huntsville.[10]

Elias Smith, significantly, did not equate the land near Huntsville, Missouri, with the *ancient* location of Manti but indicated that this was the place where a *future* settlement named after the ancient one was *"to be* built."

When B. H. Roberts prepared the *History of the Church* for publication, he reviewed original sources upon which the Manuscript History was based and revised parts of the narrative accordingly. Roberts was able to utilize the Elias Smith account instead of the portion of the Manuscript History that had been based upon the Tyler journal. The entry for 25 September 1838 as first published in 1905 and all subsequent editions of the *History of the Church* says that the village of Huntsville, Missouri, was "near

This map shows the last portion of the route of the 1838 Kirtland Camp in Missouri; it highlights Randolph County, where Huntsville is located. The source map is from H. S. Tanner, "A New Map of Missouri with Its Roads & Distances," in *A New Universal Atlas Containing Maps of the Various Empires, Kingdoms, States, and Republics of the World* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1844), 32. Map produced by Brandon Plewe.

the place where the city of Manti *is to be* built" and omits any suggestion that the location of the Book of Mormon city was known.[11]

Based on the Smith account, in light of the above, it would appear that the Missouri Saints in 1838 anticipated, at least initially, the establishment of a future stake and a settlement in the region that they *would* call Manti. The original sources upon which this idea is based, however, do not attribute these plans to Joseph Smith, nor do they sustain the view that the name of the proposed future settlement was based upon any revelation on the question of Book of Mormon geography.

Readers of the Book of Mormon, in the absence of prophetic revelation on the location of this Book of Mormon city, must, as always, ground their interpretations in the Book of Mormon text itself, "drawing all the information possible from the record which has been translated for our benefit."[12] ■

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NOTES

1. The Kirtland Camp refers to a company of Kirtland Saints who traveled to Missouri in 1838 and should not be confused with the 1834 Zion's Camp.
2. See Matthew Roper, "Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography," *FARMS Review* 22/2 (2010): 58–62.
3. Journal of Samuel D. Tyler, 25 September 1838, MS 1761, Church Historians Department, Salt Lake City, emphasis added.
4. Joseph Smith Journal, 25 September 1838, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals Volume 1: 1832–1839,* ed. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Richard Jensen (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 329.
5. Manuscript History, 25 September 1838, 829, emphasis added.
6. "History of Joseph Smith," *Millennial Star* 16/19 (13 May 1854): 296.
7. "Kirtland Camp," *Historical Record* 7/7 (July 1888): 601, emphasis added.
8. George Reynolds, *A Dictionary of the Book of Mormon: Comprising Its Biographical, Geographical, and Other Proper Names, Together with Appendices by Elder Janne M. Sjodahl* (Salt Lake City: Parry, 1892), 304.
9. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Where Is the Hill Cumorah?" *Deseret News,* Church Section, 10 September 1938, 6; Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 3:239.
10. Elias Smith, "Journal of the camp of the Seventies during their journey from Kirtland to Far West," 25 September 1838, MS 4952, folder 2, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, emphasis added.
11. *History of the Church*, 3:144.
12. George Q. Cannon, Editorial, *Juvenile Instructor* (1 January 1890); reprinted in the *Instructor* 73/4 (April 1938): 160.