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Abstract Review of "From Captain Kidd's Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing *Dramatis Personae* in Early Mormonism" (2003), by Ronald V. Huggins.

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"I Should Have an Eye Single to the Glory of God": Joseph Smith's Account of the Angel and the Plates

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Ronald Huggins, an assistant professor of theological and historical studies at Salt Lake Theological Seminary, claims that Joseph Smith's account of Moroni and the plates originated as a "money-digger's yarn" and was later transformed into "restoration history." Huggins believes that "careful study" allows one "to trace the story's development from its earlier to its later version" (pp. 19, 22).

Huggins's work, however, hardly qualifies as a careful study. In the first place, he does not account for the complex interweaving of faith and folk culture so common in the early 1800s, an interweaving that made it possible for Joseph Smith to initially live in both religious and "treasure-seeking" worlds. Furthermore, Huggins neglects essential primary documents, obscures the timeline, and hides crucial details. A genuinely careful examination of the textual evidence reveals a pattern quite the opposite of that proposed by Huggins: early accounts of Moroni's visit emphasized restoration history, while later versions introduced Captain Kidd and his ghost.

Review of Ronald V. Huggins. "From Captain Kidd's Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing *Dramatis Personae* in Early Mormonism." *Dialogue* 36/4 (2003): 17–42.

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Basic Standards of Good History

Huggins's first failing is not keeping up with current scholarship. Two years before Huggins's "Captain Kidd's Treasure Ghost" appeared, Mark Ashurst-McGee published an important paper entitled "Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?"[1] Since they are dealing with the very same question, it would have been instructive to see Huggins respond point-by-point to Ashurst-McGee's arguments. Huggins, however, does not mention Ashurst-McGee's work. Ashurst-McGee gives attention to historical methodology that is absent in Huggins's discussion. As Ashurst-McGee puts it, addressing the angel/treasure guardian question "requires an application of the basic standards of source criticism and good history."[2] He defines these standards as follows: (1) "Eyewitness testimony is the most important standard of historical reliability"; (2) "sources composed closer to the time of the event" take precedence over "sources composed later on."[3] I certainly agree with these standards and suggest a few others (which are implied by Ashurst-McGee): (3) all relevant sources must be accounted for; (4) corroboration (or a lack thereof) is a key criterion in evaluating sources; and (5) each separate claim within a historical account must be evaluated on its own merits.

Moreover, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon presents some unique challenges for historians. First, not a single document related to the plates has survived from the crucial period of Moroni's visits—that is, from September 1823 to September 1827. Indeed, the written record offers no mention whatsoever of the Book of Mormon until June 1829. Second, the first accounts that are extant are brief mentions in letters or general reports in newspapers, both of which

1. Mark Ashurst-McGee, "Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?" *Mormon Historical Studies* 2/2 (2001): 39–75. Ashurst-McGee also completed a master's thesis on a closely related topic: "A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet" (master's thesis, Utah State University, 2000). Dan Vogel, quite unlike Huggins, is one critic who is well aware of Ashurst-McGee's work. See *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 570 n. 43.

2. Ashurst-McGee, "Angel or Treasure Guardian?" 48.

3. Ashurst-McGee, "Angel or Treasure Guardian?" 49–50.

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lack the detail of subsequent versions. Third, those who had in-depth discussions with Joseph Smith about the plates did not tell their stories until at least the 1830s—after Joseph had became a controversial figure and opinion about him had generally split into either the hostile or friendly camp. (In addition, by the time they related their experiences with Joseph, these individuals had had opportunities to discuss the matter among themselves.) Therefore, any given witness might be presumed to be biased for or against Joseph Smith.[4] Finally, those who talked to Joseph did not record their stories in the same order they heard them, which throws an interesting wrinkle into applying Ashurst-McGee's second standard (i.e., which is an "earlier" source—person A, who talked with Joseph Smith in 1823 but did not record the conversation until 1840, or person B, who did not talk to Joseph until 1828 but made a record in 1835?).

Huggins could have assisted his readers by acknowledging that he is offering a radical revision of Joseph's telling of the angel and the plates that occurred during a period when there is absolutely no documentation available. It is difficult to imagine a parallel issue in nineteenth-century American historiography. It is as if no primary documents of the three-year Lewis and Clark Expedition existed, and yet a modern historian was attempting to claim that Meriwether Lewis said one thing about an 1803 incident on the Ohio River at the time and something quite different about the same incident later on in 1806—with no actual documents available until 1807. The least a historian could do is admit the difficulty of the task and propose a methodology for reaching conclusions. I find it quite revealing that Ashurst-McGee discusses methodology in detail, but Huggins does not raise the subject.

Clearly, the whole issue of what Joseph Smith said and how his explanation possibly changed would be much simpler to analyze if letters, diaries, and other documents written on the spot were available.

4. I don't believe in qualifying—or disqualifying—a source based on whether it is friendly or hostile to Joseph Smith. Asking such questions as whether the account is first- or secondhand, when it was recorded, and whether it can be corroborated will separate the wheat from the chaff.

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But since we have no such sources, we have to do the best we can with what we have. To that end, I have included the following documents in the appendixes following this article:

Appendix A: References to the plates in newspapers from June 1829 to June 1830. Interestingly, newspapers offer the earliest contemporary record of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Appendix B: References to the Book of Mormon in letters and diaries from 1829 to 1831. Listing these, like the newspaper articles, in chronological order allows us to see what was being said about the Book of Mormon and how it may have changed over time.

Appendix C: Both first- and secondhand descriptions of what Joseph Smith said about the plates, from the first reported visit of Moroni in 1823 to the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830. Since Huggins claims that Joseph's account changed from one thing (a money-digger's yarn) to another (the religious story of an angel), the best way to test his thesis is to discover when various people talked to Joseph and compare their reports. These sources are thus listed in the order these individuals talked to Joseph Smith (or someone else).

Appendix D: Key excerpts from Joseph Smith's 1832 and 1838 histories. The first represents not only Joseph's first written record of the plates but indeed the first detailed description offered by anyone; the second is the well-known version now included in the Pearl of Great Price.

These categories represent the best evidence, evidence that deserves thorough and systematic investigation. (Huggins is neither thorough nor systematic.) In terms of the third category listed above, descriptions of what Joseph Smith said—the category where Huggins focuses virtually all of his attention—Ashurst-McGee's standard is quite helpful in determining the historical value of various statements. These statements fall into the following groups: firsthand or secondhand and early or late. Firsthand accounts were recorded by those who talked directly to Joseph Smith—secondhand are from those writers who talked to someone else who had talked to Joseph. I also propose using 1850 as a dividing line between early and late (a division that requires no hair-splitting because we have no documents at all between 1845 and 1862). The most valuable

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statements are those that are both early and firsthand, meaning they were recorded before 1850 by someone who heard of the plates from Joseph Smith himself. I have marked such statements with an asterisk. (By this standard, James Murdock's 1841 interview with William Smith does not qualify because it is secondhand; and although William Smith later recorded his testimony himself, it does not qualify because it is late.) Of course, saying a document has evidential value is not the same as claiming it is accurate. It is always possible that the author of any given document either knowingly or unknowingly misstated the facts. Checking the document for internal consistency and comparing it with other documents therefore become crucial.

"The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting"

Joseph Smith's treasure-seeking activities are, of course, central to Huggins's thesis, so it is important for him to provide a historical context for his discussion. Once again, Huggins should have drawn upon relevant scholarship, particularly Ronald W. Walker's claim that "Mormonism was . . . born within an upstate New York matrix that combined New England folk culture with traditional religion."[5] And although Huggins is aware of this paper (pp. 27, 33), he fails to respond to Walker's view that "magical treasure hunting was . . . part of the culture and religion of the folk . . . , a blend of humankind's deep myths and Christian ideas."[6] Instead, Huggins narrows his discussion of treasure seeking to tales of Captain Kidd, introducing and concluding his article with mentions of the notorious pirate and his legendary plunder.

Focusing on Captain Kidd allows Huggins to ignore the larger context of American treasure seeking and to skew the entire debate. He does this by casting American folk beliefs in a negative light and then linking Joseph Smith to those beliefs. We see this when we contrast Walker's approach with Huggins's. For example, Walker points out that "the cutting ritual [of divining rods] was filled with religious

5. Ronald W. Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 450.

6. Walker, "Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," 451–52.

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imagery" and that a person as prominent as future Massachusetts chief justice Peter Oliver claimed the rod "'exceeded what I had heard'" and could "locate a single Dollar under ground, at 60 or 70 feet Distance."[7] Huggins, on the other hand, characterizes the folk culture of the period by telling us of a spirit nicknamed "Mr. Splitfoot" that "began rapping out answers to questions on the farm of John and Margaret Fox in the little village of Hydesville, New York." As it turned out, two of the Fox daughters admitted forty years later that "they had made the rappings themselves by cracking their toes" (p. 31). This story, of course, has nothing to do with Joseph Smith, but Huggins implies guilt by association by mentioning Joseph Smith in the same paragraph as the Fox daughters.

Again, Walker notes that "Nathaniel Wood, a lapsed Congregational minister, . . . formed a congregation at Middletown, Vermont, which used the divining rod for religious purposes." Walker adds that Wood and his followers used rods as revelatory devices, spoke of the ministry of angels and modern temples, and prophesied the coming of the New Jerusalem.[8] Huggins, however, ignores these religious elements and restricts his discussion of the Wood group to "Winchell, the Vermont money-digger who stayed for a time in the home of Oliver Cowdery's father" and who "included a treasure-guardian spirit as part of his routine" (p. 27). Huggins adds that a nineteenth-century historian suggested a link between Winchell and Joseph Smith Sr. but does tell his readers that subsequent research has effectively demonstrated that allegations of a Winchell-Smith connection are without foundation.[9]

Huggins neglected to even mention Walker's thesis about the close relationship between religion and folk culture and arguments for or against it and hence does not discuss the possible implications for the Joseph Smith story in the process. Instead, Huggins skirts the

7. Walker, "Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," 441.

8. Walker, "Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," 450.

9. See Larry E. Morris, "Oliver Cowdery's Vermont Years and the Origins of Mormonism," *BYU Studies* 39/1 (2000): 113–18. Huggins also neglects to tell his readers that Winchell stayed briefly at the Cowdery home *three years* before the treasure-seeking incident and that a contemporary witness of the affair made no mention of Cowdery.

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entire issue, creating the false impression that the treasure seeking of Joseph Smith's day had everything to do with Captain Kidd and little to do with Christian religiosity. Alan Taylor, by contrast, argues that "treasure seeking lay at the murky intersection of material aspiration and religious desire; it possessed a dual nature: functioning at once as a supernatural economy (an alternative to a disappointing natural economy) and as a materialistic faith (an alternative to unsatisfactory abstract religion)."[10]

A Muddled Timeline

Relying on this limited treatment of nineteenth-century folk culture, Huggins concludes that "ultimately only two basic versions of the story [of the plates] exist. The first is a fairly typical preternaturalistic money-diggers' yarn while the second has become an integral component of the story of the restoration of authentic primitive Christianity" (p. 19). Huggins never spells out an exact chronology of how Joseph Smith's story allegedly changed, but he places the Willard Chase version at one end of the spectrum and the Henry Harris version at the other end, with a progression that apparently looks something like this:

Willard Chase > Joseph Knight Sr. > Lewis brothers > Henry Harris

Looking at each of these steps in order helps us understand Huggins's theory:

Step 1: Willard Chase. Calling the Chase account "the one preserving the earliest version of the story," Huggins notes that Chase includes the following treasure-seeking elements:

- A "spirit" that appears to Joseph and tells him of the record
- Instructions to Joseph to wear black clothes and bring a black horse
- Instructions to "demand the book in a certain name" and "neither lay it down nor look behind him"

10. Alan Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780–1830," *American Quarterly* 38/1 (1986): 8. Taylor is a prominent scholar of early American history. His book *William Cooper's Town* received the Bancroft, Beveridge, and Pulitzer prizes for American history.

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- "Something like a toad, which soon assumed the appearance of a man"
- Three unsuccessful attempts to retrieve the record, with the spirit striking Joseph "on the side of his head," knocking him "three or four rods," and hurting him "prodigiously"
- Instructions to bring Alvin Smith (p. 22)

Step 2: Joseph Knight Sr. According to Huggins, "Joseph Knight's account appears to reflect a stage soon after Emma replaced Lawrence as the person Joseph would know" (p. 24). In the Chase account, Samuel Lawrence replaces Alvin as the one who must accompany Joseph to obtain the plates (information that Chase apparently got from Lawrence himself). Joseph Knight Sr., on the other hand, names Emma Hale as the "right person."

Step 3: Joseph and Hiel Lewis. Emma Smith's cousins Joseph and Hiel Lewis tell a story that is, according to Huggins, "still clearly related to Joseph Smith's earlier money-digging yarn, and the links between this version and that related by Willard Chase are numerous and obvious" (p. 25). A key difference is that the Lewis brothers describe "'a man standing over the spot, which to [Joseph Smith] appeared like a Spaniard, having a long beard coming down over his breast . . . with his throat cut from ear to ear, and the blood streaming down,'" apparently a reference to Captain Kidd's ghost (p. 25). (Huggins mentions that "the significance of the cut throat is made explicit in Fayette Lapham's account" [p. 26] but does not include the account by Lapham as an actual step in the story's progression.)

Step 4: Henry Harris. "In the affidavit of Henry Harris," writes Huggins, "the transformation to the later, Christianized version . . . is almost complete; Joseph learned of the plates via a 'revelation from God,' and he received his instructions about getting them from 'an angel'" (pp. 24–25).

There is no doubt that this timeline, as outlined by Huggins, reveals radical changes in the story of the recovery of the Book of Mormon—indeed, only one "treasure-digging" detail mentioned by Chase is present in the Henry Harris account. Huggins's explanation might seem convincing to someone not familiar with the primary

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documents. A close look at Huggins's timeline, however, reveals a multitude of problems.

Reconstructing the Chronology

Take, for example, the Chase document, which was recorded in December 1833. Huggins calls it "the earliest account" of the story of the plates (p. 22). This isn't true. Joseph Smith recorded his first account of the plates more than a year earlier. Second, newspapers began reporting on the plates as early as 1829 (see appendix A). Third, between 1829 and 1831, a host of people discussed the plates in letters or other documents. This list includes Jesse Smith, Diedrich Willers, Eli Bruce, W. W. Phelps, David Burnett, James Gordon Bennett, and others (see appendix B).

Calling the Chase affidavit the earliest account is also problematic because it implies that Willard Chase was the first person to hear a detailed account of the plates. Again, not true. Chase states that he heard the story from Joseph Smith Sr. in June 1827. Lucy Mack Smith, William Smith, Lorenzo Saunders, Joseph Knight Sr., and Joseph Knight Jr. all heard the story prior to that time (see appendix C). A reasonable timeline places these accounts before the Chase version. (And even for Huggins's timeline, Joseph Knight must come before Chase.) Chase's statement is important, but it is not the prime piece of evidence Huggins makes it out to be. It is secondhand.[11]

Huggins's preoccupation with the Chase affidavit is inexplicable in light of his failure to call the best witness of all to the stand: Lucy Mack Smith. The entire Smith family heard the story of the plates directly from Joseph, but Lucy was the first to record the experience, and she did so with a wealth of detail, covering her son's four-year quest to obtain the plates in a way unmatched by any other source. Huggins ignores her. This is a glaring omission, and it is compounded by Huggins's neglect of other key primary documents from the likes

11. Chase's statement does qualify as "earliest" in one sense: it was recorded before any of the other statements in appendix C.

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of Jesse Smith, Diedrich Willers, William Smith, Lorenzo Saunders, Joseph Knight Jr., and Orlando Saunders.

The next problem has to do with the dating of the Harris document. If it really represents a later stage of the story, it would have been written after the other stages. But it is not possible to determine exactly when Henry Harris talked to Joseph Smith. As Huggins himself notes, the conversation between Harris and Joseph Smith took place sometime between February 1828 and March 1830, a span of more than two years. By contrast, the Lewis brothers date their conversation with Joseph by saying it took place "at the commencement of his translating his book, in Harmony,"[12] or in April 1828 (when Joseph Smith, with Martin Harris, began translating). This means that Joseph could have told Harris a religious story before telling the Lewis brothers a "Captain Kidd" story, which would result in a timeline that looks like this:

Joseph Knight Sr. > Willard Chase > Henry Harris > Lewis brothers

Such a possibility, of course, flies in the face of Huggins's thesis and has Joseph's story bouncing back and forth from religious to magical. But Huggins avoids the difficulty of discussing such a scenario by never providing a systematic timeline (and exploring the implications).

An accurate timeline of the persons hearing the story (see appendix C) actually looks like this:

Lucy Mack Smith > William Smith > Lorenzo Saunders > Joseph Knight Sr. > Joseph Knight Jr. > Willard Chase > Benjamin Saunders > Orlando Saunders > John A. Clark > Lewis brothers > Oliver Cowdery > Henry Harris > Fayette Lapham

The Fayette Lapham version also throws a wrench in the works for Huggins. Lapham talked to Joseph Smith Sr. between July 1829 and early October 1830, but he did not record his experience until 1870 (making his account both late and secondhand). Lapham thus heard of the plates quite late in the game, more than two years after Chase and most likely after Harris (since the time span for Harris

12. Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003), 4:303.

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begins seventeen months earlier than that for Lapham and ends seven months earlier). Not only that, but Lapham's story is in many ways the *archetypal* Captain Kidd story, emphasizing all of the following:

- A seer stone discovered in a money-digging context
- A "very large and tall man" dressed in ancient, bloody clothes, who appears in a dream
- Strict instructions that will allow Joseph to obtain "a valuable treasure, buried many years since"
- A supernatural power that assists Joseph in dislodging the boulder covering the treasure
- A supernatural power that causes the boulder and artifacts to slide back into place and that also strikes Joseph with considerable force
- The disclosure that the treasure guardian had been "murdered or slain on the spot"
- Instructions that Joseph should bring his oldest brother with him
- A reference that "a host of devils began to screech and to scream" when Joseph arrived to retrieve "the hidden treasure"

Regardless of exactly when Lapham talked to Joseph Sr.—and Lapham himself says, "I think it was in the year 1830"[13]—the account does damage to Huggins's theory because it sounds more like a Captain Kidd yarn than even Chase's version, giving the impression that Joseph's story was taking on more treasure-seeking elements as time passed, not fewer.

Hide and Seek

Along with obscuring the timeline and neglecting key primary documents, Huggins suppresses important details. For example, Huggins quotes Benjamin Saunders thus: "'I heard Joe tell my Mother and Sister how he procured the plates. . . . When he took the plates there was something down near the box that looked some like a toad that rose up into a man which forbid him to take the plates'" (p. 27). Huggins uses

13. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 1:456.

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ellipsis points to indicate missing words, something scholars do from time to time. But consider the words Huggins deletes (marked by italics): "I heard Joe tell my Mother and Sister how he procured the plates. *He said he was directed by an angel where it was. He went in the night to get the plates.* When he took the plates there was something down near the box that looked some like a toad that rose up into a man which forbid him to take the plates."[14]

Saunders had this conversation with Joseph Smith in the autumn of 1827 (see appendix C.7), just a few months after Chase talked to Joseph Sr. and several months before the Lewis brothers heard their "bleeding ghost" account. So what does Huggins do in discussing an account of the plates that comes right in between two of his key "Captain Kidd" accounts? He conveniently includes Saunders's mention of "something down near the box that looked some like a toad" (p. 53, which helps establish his point) and conveniently deletes mention of an angel (which runs contrary to his thesis). Huggins is clearly misleading his readers.

Huggins does something similar in discussing Abner Cole, editor of a newspaper called the *Reflector.* Huggins quotes the following 1831 statement by Obediah Dogberry Jr. (Cole's pseudonym): "It is well known that Jo Smith never pretended to have any communion with angels, until a long period after the *pretended* finding of his book."[15] This claim certainly supports Huggins's view, but he does not tell us the rest of the story. When he first began discussing the Book of Mormon, Cole took a fair-minded, wait-and-see approach. "We do not intend at this time," he wrote early in 1830, "to discuss the merits or demerits of [the Book of Mormon]. . . . The *Book,* when it shall come before the public, must stand or fall according to the whims and fancies of its readers. . . . we cannot discover any thing *treasonable*. . . . As to its religious character, we have as yet no means of determining and if we

14. Benjamin Saunders interview, circa September 1884, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:137, emphasis added.

15. *Palmyra (NY) Reflector,* 28 February 1831, 109, emphasis in original. Thanks to Matt Roper for sharing his copies of original newspaper articles.

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had, we should be quite loth to meddle with the tender consciences of our neighbors."[16]

So, in his first extensive treatment of Joseph Smith, written two months before the Book of Mormon was published, Cole had no criticisms and made no claims about Joseph's prior experience. A short time later, however, Joseph Smith learned that Cole had begun illegally publishing excerpts from the Book of Mormon (which was being typeset at the same Palmyra office—Grandin's—where Cole printed the *Reflector*). Joseph soon arrived from Pennsylvania and demanded that Cole cease violating the Book of Mormon copyright. Lucy Mack Smith described what happened next: "At this Mr. Cole threw off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and came towards Joseph, smacking his fists together with vengeance, and roaring out, 'do you want to fight, sir? do you want to fight? I will publish just what I please. Now, if you want to fight, just come on.'"[17]

Joseph Smith refused to fight Cole, who "finally concluded to submit to an arbitration, which decided that he should stop his proceedings forthwith."[18] *After* suffering this defeat, Cole radically changed his approach to the Book of Mormon and began ridiculing Joseph Smith. "And it came to pass in the latter days, that wickedness did much abound in the land," he wrote in a parody of the Book of Mormon called "The Book of Pukei," "and the 'Idle and slothful said one to another, let us send for Walters the Magician [Luman Walters, claimed by some to have been a treasure-digging associate of the Smiths], who has strange books, and deals with familiar spirits.' . . . Now the rest of the acts of the magician, how his *mantle* fell upon the *prophet* Jo. Smith Jun. and how Jo. made a league with the *spirit,* who afterwards turned out to be an angel, and how he obtained the 'Gold Bible,' Spectacles, and breast plate—will they not be faithfully recorded in the book of Pukei?"[19] Two weeks later, Cole switched from parody to sarcasm: "The

16. *Palmyra (NY) Reflector,* n.s., 2, 2 January 1830, 13, emphasis in original.

17. Lucy Mack Smith's history of Joseph Smith, published manuscript, Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 474.

18. Anderson, *Lucy's Book,* 475.

19. *Palmyra (NY) Reflector,* 3rd ser., 5, 12 June 1830, 36–37, emphasis in original.

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age of miracles has *again* arrived, and if the least reliance can be placed upon the assertions, daily made by the 'Gold Bible' apostles, (which is somewhat doubtful,) no prophet since the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, has performed half so many wonders as have been attributed to that *spindle shanked* ignoramus JO SMITH."[20]

Considering this sequence of events, we have good reason to be suspicious of Cole's claims. But Huggins tells us none of this.

Again, in discussing Captain Kidd and Joseph Smith, Huggins informs us that "Early Danish convert John Ahmanson, reports that 'Joseph Smith found his [plates] while he was digging for treasure which was supposed to have been buried by the notorious buccaneer Captain Kidd in the western part of New York State'" (p. 39). Huggins offers no further details but certainly implies that Ahmanson got his information from Joseph Smith or someone else on the scene. He also implies that Ahmanson is a friendly source by describing him as a "convert." Here again, however, Huggins has violated a basic standard of good history. Born in 1827, Ahmanson converted to Mormonism in 1850 in Denmark and came to Utah with the Willie handcart company in 1857 (and therefore had no direct knowledge of Joseph Smith's activities). He later became disillusioned with the church and wrote a book to warn the Danish people of the dangers of Mormonism. (Huggins neglects to mention this.) More important, a check of the original source shows that Ahmanson makes his "Captain Kidd" claim without giving any source whatsoever. His having reported a rumor therefore has no evidential value, and Huggins has no business bringing it up.

Dressing Joseph Smith in Other Men's Clothes

But this infraction is minor. "Within a month-and-a-half of the Book of Mormon's first public appearance on the shelves of Grandin's bookstore in Palmyra," according to Huggins, "an article appeared in the *Rochester Gem* (May 15, 1830) describing an attempt by one of the Smith sons at finding Kidd's treasure. It is not clear whether the

20. *Palmyra (NY) Reflector,* 3rd ser., 7, 30 June 1830, 53, emphasis in original.

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'oracle' referred to is Joseph or one of his brothers" (p. 40). (See appendix A.5 for the complete text of the article in question.)

Huggins next quotes from the article itself, which tells of a young seer named Smith, who found a stone that "presented to him on the one side, all the dazzling splendor of the sun in full blaze—and on the other, the clearness of the moon." The young man realizes he is to become an oracle, and he tells his tale for money, helping others search for "Kidd's money hid in these parts."[21]

The newspaper article certainly seems to offer support for Huggins's point about the Smiths' treasure-seeking activities and casts the family in a negative light. The trouble is, the article itself states quite plainly that it is not referring to the Joseph Smith Sr. family. After beginning with a description of the Book of Mormon, the author of the article goes on to say: "This story brings to our mind one of similar nature once played off upon the inhabitants of Rochester and its vicinity, near the close of the last war [of 1812]. . . . If we remember aright, it was in the year 1815, that a family of Smiths moved into these parts, and took up their abode in a miserable hut on the east bank of the river, now near the late David K. Carter's tavern. They had a wonderful son, of about 18 years of age."[22]

As noted, the *Gem* article ties the treasure-seeking episode quite specifically to the end of the War of 1812 in the early months of 1815. The Joseph Smith Sr. family was still in Vermont until at least 1816. Nor are they known to have spent any time in the Rochester area.[23] The Smiths described in the article are *not* the Joseph Smith Sr. family, and the article makes that clear. Even Huggins's source, Dan Vogel, states in his introduction, "this early report compares the coming forth of the Book of Mormon with the Rochester money diggers."[24] Huggins manifests a recklessness in handling the documents.

21. *Rochester (NY) Gem,* 15 May 1830, 15.

22. *Rochester (NY) Gem,* 15 May 1830, 15, as cited in Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon,* rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, 1959), 2:47, 48.

23. See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 5:383–84.

24. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 3:271.

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Ironically, the *Gem* article mentioned by Huggins is remarkable for at least two reasons. First of all, this is apparently the first written record—either published or unpublished—of Joseph Smith being mentioned in the same context as the tales about Captain Kidd's treasure—and more particularly, of someone using a seer stone to search for the treasure. Second, the account of the "oracle" bears striking resemblances to tales later told about Joseph: both are from poor families who moved to the area from other locations; both are named Smith; both are in their late teens (Joseph was a few months shy of his eighteenth birthday in September 1823); and both gaze at a stone in a hat and then give directions to money diggers (who draw close to the treasure before it slips out of their grasp). Therefore, the question inevitably comes up, since this article begins by talking about the Book of Mormon and ends by talking about a search for Kidd's treasure, could readers have possibly ended up falsely associating the two? Could that misinterpretation have led to additional misinterpretations? Or, as Francis W. Kirkham put it almost fifty years ago: "Was this ridiculous story the origin of the accusations that were heaped upon Joseph Smith?"[25]

Of course, there is no way of tracing this article's impact on the rumor mill surrounding Joseph Smith. But since this piece appeared three years before Philastus Hurlbut was employed by Howe "to obtain affidavits showing the bad character of the Mormon Smith family,"[26] it is entirely possible that some New York residents confused the two Smiths and ended up, in Hugh Nibley's words, "trying to dress Joseph Smith in other men's clothes."[27] Huggins provides an example of someone who confused things and subsequently misinformed others.

25. Kirkham, *New Witness for Christ in America,* 2:46.

26. E. D. Howe, affidavit, 8 April 1885, Arthur B. Deming collection, Chicago Historical Society, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:13.

27. Hugh Nibley, *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 183; reprinted in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 294. Since certain individuals such as Joshua Stafford and Isaac Butts claimed firsthand knowledge of Joseph Smith's interest in treasure seeking and his use of a seer stone or hazel rod, I believe Nibley overstates the case when he says that the "digging stories" about Joseph "don't fit at all" (ibid., 182). However, a close look at the Hurlbut, Kelley, Thorne, and Deming collections reveals a great deal of hearsay and surprisingly

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Early Newspaper Accounts

Showing Huggins's research to be inadequate does not answer the question of whether the story surrounding the plates changed. To solve that riddle, we need to study the primary documents. Table 1 summarizes seven newspaper articles published between June 1829 and June 1830 (see appendix A).

The first-known newspaper accounts of the Book of Mormon clearly describe Joseph Smith's claims in religious terms. The first "treasure-seeking" element is the mention that Joseph had been commanded to let no mortal see the plates, under the penalty of instant death, which itself is explained in a religious context. The first mention of something approaching magic (in April 1830) merely accuses Joseph Smith of "hocus pocus" in acquiring influence over Martin Harris and implies nothing about a Captain Kidd yarn.

More important, Abner Cole initially proved himself to be quite reasonable in regard to the Book of Mormon's content, reprinting part of it accurately and advising readers to judge for themselves (in January 1830). Nor did he suggest that the book had its origins in treasure seeking. All in all, this issue of the *Reflector* represents one of the fairest hearings given the Book of Mormon by a nineteenth-century press.

As previously noted, the first mention of Captain Kidd came in the section of the *Gem* article (in May 1830) describing the Rochester money-digging fiasco, while the editors acknowledged that Joseph Smith himself offered a religious explanation of the origin of the ancient record. Furthermore, the first mentions of "Walter(s) the Magician," treasure seeking and a treasure guardian, "*witchcraft,*" a "rusty sword," a "*magic* stone," and even a "*stuffed Toad,*" came when Cole launched his "Book of Pukei" attack after being confronted by Joseph Smith over the copyright violations.[28]

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little direct testimony concerning Joseph Smith (see Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:13–214).

28. *Palmyra (NY) Reflector,* 3rd ser., 5, 12 June 1830, 36–37, emphasis in original.

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Table 1. Early Newspaper Accounts

	Reference to magic	Treasure seeking	Treasure guardian	Instant death	Translate through inspiration	Angel	Divine purpose
Wayne Sentinel, June 1829					◆		◆
Palmyra Freeman, Aug. 1829				◆		"spirit of the Almighty"	◆
Reflector, Jan. 1830							
Daily Advertiser, Apr. 1830	◆						
Gem, May 1830	◆			◆	◆	◆	◆
Inquirer, May 1830					◆		◆
Reflector, June 1830	◆	◆	◆				

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The evidence shows that early newspaper accounts consistently emphasized the religious context of the story of the plates; Cole's "Captain Kidd" motif was a later and conspicuous exception.

Early References in Letters and Diaries

Table 2 summarizes ten of the first contemporary references to the Book of Mormon in letters and diaries (see appendix B).

The initial references to the recovery of the Book of Mormon saw it in religious terms, emphasizing the appearance of an angel, a translation accomplished through inspiration, and a divine purpose surrounding the ancient record. In the very first written reference to the Book of Mormon (penned on 17 June 1829, nine days before the *Wayne Sentinel* article was published), Joseph Smith's uncle Jesse Smith vehemently objected to Joseph's claims, protesting precisely *because* they were so thoroughly religious—and in his mind, so blasphemous. "To such as make lead books," Jesse warned, "and declare to the world that they are of the most fine gold, calling on the great & dreadful name of the most High to witness the truth of their assertions, [God] says 'depart from me ye that work iniquity,' and again 'these shall go away into everlasting punishment, they shall be cast into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels' these are the angels that tell where to find gold books."[29]

Almost two years after Jesse Smith wrote this letter, individuals such as David Burnett and James Gordon Bennett began to associate the plates with treasure seeking, a ghost, and a vanishing chest.

Reminiscences of Joseph's Account

Table 3 summarizes the reminiscences of thirteen people who heard substantial details of the plates—either from Joseph or from someone close to him—between the time of Moroni's first visit in September 1823 and the publication of the Book of Mormon in March 1830. Individuals are listed in the order they heard of the plates (as closely as can be

29. Jesse Smith to Hyrum Smith, 17 June 1829, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 1:552.

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Table 2. Early References in Letters and Diaries

	Reference to magic	Treasure seeking	Treasure guardian	Chest vanishes	Translate through inspiration	Angel	Divine purpose
Jesse Smith, June 1829					◆	◆	◆
Lucius Fenn, Feb. 1830					◆	◆	◆
Diedrich Willers, June 1830					◆	◆	◆
Peter Bauder, Oct. 1830					◆	◆	◆
Eli Bruce, Nov. 1830							◆
W. W. Phelps, Jan. 1831					◆		◆
David Burnett, Mar. 1831		◆	◆		◆	◆	◆
A. W. Benton, Apr. 1831	◆	◆			◆		
James Gordon Bennett, Aug.–Sep. 1831	◆	◆		◆			
Ezra Booth, Oct. 1831		◆			◆	◆	◆

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determined; see appendix C). The prime witnesses—those who talked directly to Joseph Smith and recorded their accounts before 1850—are marked with an asterisk.

Certainly a host of people—from Solomon Chamberlain to Stephen S. Harding to Joshua McKune—learned of the plates before the publication of the Book of Mormon. Most of their statements, however, do not bear directly on the ghost/angel question. Furthermore, this list just happens to represent a good cross section of witnesses: four of them can be described as hostile (Willard Chase, John A. Clark, the Lewis brothers, and Henry Harris); four as neutral (Lorenzo, Benjamin, and Orlando Saunders and Fayette Lapham); and five as friendly (Lucy and William Smith, Joseph Knight Sr. and Jr., and Oliver Cowdery).[30]

This graphic representation of the evidence makes several things clear. First, Huggins's thesis that Joseph's story started as a Captain Kidd yarn and evolved into the description of a religious epiphany is wrong. In fact, the 1829 account of Henry Harris (which Huggins calls "the later, Christianized version" [p. 24]) is quite similar to Lorenzo Saunders's 1823 statement, one of the earliest versions. In addition, of the three "Captain Kidd" accounts (Chase, Lewis, and Lapham), the first does not appear until almost four years after Lucy and William Smith heard of the plates. If anything, this list indicates that Joseph Smith's account evolved from a religious story to a treasure-digging one, though the details are more complex than that. In addition, none of the three Kidd tales comes from a prime witness. Another interesting wrinkle is that two of three Kidd versions (Chase and Lapham) claim Joseph Smith Sr. as their source, not

30. Every item on the chart is mentioned by at least two witnesses. That makes it difficult to argue that any of these individuals simply made up one of these details. It is also important to note, however, that three of these people did not talk to Joseph Smith: Chase and Lapham talked to Joseph Sr., and John A. Clark talked to Martin Harris. Furthermore, a close look at the evidence shows that for the three categories on the far left—the toad, the treasure guardian, and the claim that Joseph was instructed to bring a black horse or wear black clothes when he came for the plates—only one person claims to have heard the detail in question directly from Joseph Jr. (His father was the source for the other reports.) Therefore, it cannot be corroborated that Joseph Jr. mentioned a toad, a ghost, or a black horse or black clothes. Just as important, none of the prime witnesses said anything about these details. Finally, since these are all reminiscences, any person on this list could have recorded a version that differed from the one he or she originally heard.

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Table 3. Reminiscences of Joseph's Account

	Toad	Treasure guardian	Black clothes/ horse	Bring someone	Shock	Plates disappear	Angel	Divine purpose
*Lucy Smith, 1823 [1844–45]					◆	◆	◆	◆
William Smith, 1823 [1883, 1884]					◆	◆	◆	◆
Lorenzo Saunders, 1823 [1884]			black horse	◆			◆	◆
*Knight Sr., 1826 [circa 1835–47]				◆		◆	"personage"	◆
Knight Jr., 1826 [1862]							◆	◆
Willard Chase, 1827 [1833]	◆	"spirit"	black clothes and horse	◆	◆	◆		
Benjamin Saunders, 1827 [1884]	◆						◆	
Orlando Saunders, 1827 [1881]							◆	
John A. Clark, 1827–28 [1840]				◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Lewis brothers, 1828 [1879]		Bleeding Spaniard		◆	◆			
*Oliver Cowdery, 1829 [1835]					◆		◆	◆
*Henry Harris, 1829 [circa 1833]				◆			◆	◆
Fayette Lapham, 1830 [1870]		Murder victim	black clothes	◆	◆	◆		◆

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Joseph Jr. Is the Captain Kidd motif actually a reflection of Joseph Sr.'s interpretation of what happened at the Hill Cumorah? Huggins does not consider this possibility.

The most common elements among the thirteen accounts are the mention of an angel and a divine purpose. At least one of these is mentioned in every account except those of Chase and the Lewis brothers (whom Huggins calls as his star witnesses). The pattern is clear: the earliest witnesses emphasized the religious aspects of the story; accounts emphasizing "Captain Kidd" elements were later developments. This is the same pattern revealed with both newspapers and early letters and diaries. In every case, religious elements are included in the first accounts and are more common than the later magical elements.

"An Angel of the Lord Came and Stood Before Me"

Is it possible, then, to reconstruct what Joseph Smith originally said about the plates? I believe the textual evidence indicates that he included the following details when he first described the events of the evening of 21 September 1823 and the subsequent visit to the Hill Cumorah the following morning:

- A prayerful, religious setting surrounding the appearance of an angel from God
- A divine purpose announced by the angel: Joseph had been commissioned to bring forth an ancient record
- The disappearance of the plates after Joseph first removed them from the stone box
- A "shock" that prevented him from removing the plates a second time
- Instructions by the angel that Joseph should bring someone with him to obtain the plates

Part of what may have started Huggins down the wrong track is the fact that some of these elements seem to fall in the "treasure-seeking" category, specifically the disappearance of the plates, the "shock," and instructions that Joseph should have someone accompany him (all three of which are part of Chase's version). As D. Michael Quinn points out, accounts that the plates disappeared are "completely consistent

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with early American treasure-digging beliefs that the treasure would disappear at the slightest breach of the treasure-guardian's requirements."[31] What are we to make of this? And what are we to make of the fact that these elements are not present—or are they?—in the account now included in the Pearl of Great Price?

It is possible, of course, to see these elements—as Huggins does—strictly as part of the nineteenth-century, treasure-seeking mind-set. But it is also possible to see them in a biblical context, for there are strong echoes of the Old Testament—particularly the prophet Moses—throughout Joseph Smith's early history:[32]

- Joseph claimed that the ancient record had been produced by a group of ancient Jews, a remnant of the house of Israel that wandered in the wilderness and sought solace in the example of Moses (see 1 Nephi 4:2; 17:23–33).
- Joseph obtained the plates on Rosh ha-Shanah, the Jewish New Year (which had begun at sundown on 21 September 1827). At Rosh ha-Shanah the faithful were commanded to set a day aside as "a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation" (Leviticus 23:24).
- In 1834, Joseph found with the plates "a curious instrument" consisting of "two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow fastened to a breastplate," to be known as the Urim and Thummim, which means "lights and perfections" in Hebrew. "And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim," the Lord had told Moses, "and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually" (Exodus 28:30).
- In May 1829, a heavenly messenger appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery—then in the midst of translating the Book of Mormon—and ordained them to the "Priesthood of Aaron," said to hold "the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repen-

31. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* rev. and enl. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 160.

32. This was first suggested to me by George L. Mitton.

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tance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins" (Joseph Smith—History 1:69).

This link with Moses in the account of Joseph Smith recovering the Book of Mormon is made even more explicit in a Book of Mormon prophecy that speaks of a "choice seer," whose "name shall be called after me [Joseph]; and it shall be after the name of his father" (2 Nephi 3:7, 15). This seer, proclaims the scripture, "shall be great like unto Moses" (2 Nephi 3:9).

Still, this emphasis on Moses only grew larger after the Book of Mormon was published. In June 1830, as Joseph Smith prepared to commence his work on the Bible, he dictated to a scribe a revelation containing "the words of God, which he spake unto Moses at a time when Moses was caught up into an exceedingly high mountain" (Moses 1:1). The culmination came on 3 April 1836, at the Kirtland Temple, when Joseph and Oliver Cowdery wrote that "the heavens were again opened unto us; and Moses appeared before us, and committed unto us the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north" (D&C 110:11).

The Rod of Aaron

In April 1829, Joseph Smith placed one aspect of nineteenth-century folk culture squarely in the context of the Old Testament when he dictated a revelation directed to Oliver Cowdery. "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart by the Holy Ghost," the Lord said to Oliver, "which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold this is the Spirit of revelation:—behold this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground" (Book of Commandments 7:1–2).

"Now this is not all," the scripture continued, "for you have another gift, which is the gift of working with the rod: behold it has told you things: behold there is no other power save God, that can cause this rod of nature, to work in your hands, for it is the work of God; and therefore whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that will I grant unto you, that you shall know" (Book of Commandments 7:3).

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Oliver Cowdery, like many others in New England and New York at that time, had apparently used a divining rod for various purposes. Young Joseph seems to have been familiar with this practice, for he and his father had both reportedly used rods to search for water or treasure. In the revelation received for Oliver, however, Joseph Smith declared that Oliver was now to use the rod exclusively for religious purposes. "Remember that without faith you can do nothing," the revelation read. "Trifle not with these things. Do not ask for that which you ought not. Ask that you may know the mysteries of God, and that you may translate all those ancient records, which have been hid up, which are sacred, and according to your faith shall it be done unto you" (Book of Commandments 7:4).

In emending this revelation for publication in the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph Smith reemphasized the religious role of the rod—and the connection with Moses—by replacing the phrases "working with the rod" and "rod of nature" with "the gift of Aaron" (see D&C 8:6–7). As Joseph may have known, such phrases as "'rod of Aaron'" and "'Mosaical rod'" had been used since at least the 1700s to describe divining rods.[33] Joseph thus acknowledges that implements used for supposedly "magical" purposes can also be used for what we call religious purposes—or perhaps it is the other way around. This is not at all surprising when Joseph Smith's early religious experiences are compared to those of Moses.

Like Moses, Joseph Smith saw God in a vision. Moses beheld a "flame of fire out of the midst of a bush," and "God called unto him out of the midst of the bush," saying, "Moses . . . I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:2, 4, 6). Joseph saw a "pillar of ~~fire~~ light above the brightness of the sun at noon day," and the Lord spake unto him, saying, "Joseph <my son> thy sins are forgiven thee."[34]

Joseph may have reported plates that disappeared, which is strange in the context of the technological world of the twenty-first century,

33. Quinn, *Early Mormonism,* 38.

34. Joseph Smith history, 1832, in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* comp. and ed. Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 11.

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to be sure, but hardly strange when compared to Moses's hand, which was healthy one moment and leprous the next; Joseph was "shocked" by some unseen power, hardly fantastic when compared to Moses's rod that turned into a serpent. Finally, Joseph reported being instructed to bring someone with him, not unlike the command that Moses be accompanied by his brother Aaron (see Exodus 4).

"And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand," the Lord said to Moses, "wherewith thou shalt do signs" (Exodus 4:17). When Moses and Aaron subsequently entered the royal court, "Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent." But this hardly daunted Pharaoh, who immediately called "the magicians of Egypt," who "did in like manner with their enchantments," turning their rods into serpents just as Aaron had (Exodus 7:10–11). This passage shows how the same implement—a staff—can be used for either what we would now call religious purposes or magical ones. The text, of course, makes it quite clear which miracle was divinely sanctioned because Aaron's serpent swallowed the serpents of Pharaoh's magicians.

A striking parallel can be seen in Joseph Smith's experience. When the Manchester treasure seekers came looking for the plates, they brought divining rods and seer stones to assist them—the same kind of objects Joseph, and later Oliver, used to receive revelation. According to Joseph Knight, Samuel Lawrence and "a [great] Rodsman" came to the Smith home and tried to bargain with Joseph Smith for a share of the plates. When Joseph refused, the rodsman took out his rods and held them up. When they pointed down to the hearth—where the plates were indeed hidden—the rodsman cried out, "There . . . it is under that [hearth]."[35]

Not long after that, wrote Lucy Smith, "a young woman by the name of Chase, sister to Willard Chase," who had "a green glass, through which she could see many very wonderful things," announced that she

35. Joseph Knight Sr. reminiscence, circa 1835–1847, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 4:16; Knight claims the rodsman was Alva Beaman, but I believe he is mistaken because Lucy Smith and Martin Harris both state that Beaman helped the Smiths hide the plates during this same period (Lucy Mack Smith, published manuscript, in Anderson, *Lucy's Book,* 391; Martin Harris interview with Joel Tiffany, 1859, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:307).

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had seen "the precise place where 'Joe Smith kept his gold bible hid.'" At Sally Chase's instructions, a mob ransacked the Smiths' cooper's shed, tearing up the floor—where the plates had shortly before been hidden—and smashing the box that had held the record. The mob left empty-handed, even though the plates were above them in the loft, stowed away in a pile of clothes and flax.[36]

Of course, whether one ultimately believes Joseph Smith was a genuine prophet—or, for that matter, whether Moses was—is an article of personal faith (or an absence of faith). The point, however, is that two powerful currents were moving through Joseph's young life from approximately 1818 (when he was twelve years old and began searching the scriptures and possibly also began using a divining rod) to 1827 (when, at age twenty-one he abandoned treasure seeking and received the plates). One was the folk culture of the day, with its offer of economic reward; the other was faith centered in Christ, with its offer of purely spiritual reward. Any serious study of Joseph's life during this period must account for both currents and the way they may have merged or parted.

"A Wound upon My Soul"

Religion and folk culture seem to have been closely linked for many people living in New England and New York in the early 1800s. According to Richard Bushman, "Christian belief in angels and devils made it easy to believe in guardian spirits and magical powers. The Smith family at first was no more able to distinguish true religion from superstition than their neighbors."[37] This is quite understandable when one considers the sixteenth-century ritual for cutting a divining rod, in which the rodsman prayed, "I ask you o great Adonay,

36. Lucy Mack Smith, published manuscript, in Anderson, *Lucy's Book,* 393; Martin Harris states that an angel warned Joseph to move the plates from beneath the floor of the shop to the loft (Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:307).

37. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 72.

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Elohim, Ariel, and Jehova, to give this rod the force and virtue of those of Jacob, Moses, and the great Joshua."[38]

As Joseph matured, he began to separate religion from treasure seeking. Describing the years from 1820 to 1823—the period in which he apparently first used a seer stone to search for treasure—Joseph confessed that he "fell into transgressions and sinned in many things which brought a wound upon my soul." (It therefore seems perfectly fitting that the first announcement made by the angel was that Joseph had been forgiven of his sins.) When he first saw the plates he could not obtain them because he "had been tempted of the advisary and saught the Plates to obtain riches."[39] He was thinking as a treasure seeker.

Joseph does not explain exactly what prevented him from obtaining the plates, but he does say he was "excedingly frightened" and that he "cried unto the Lord in the agony of my soul why can I not obtain them[?]"[40] According to Lucy, her son took the plates out of the stone box and then set them down, only to have them disappear. When he tried to get them again, "he was hurled back upon the ground with great violence."[41] In Oliver Cowdery's words, Joseph was shocked by "an invisible power."[42] Joseph Knight gave a similar account, saying that Joseph Smith took the plates out of the box and "laid [them] Down By his side . . . [thinking] there might be something else." The plates then disappeared—Joseph found them back in the box but could not "stur" them.[43]

We thus have a fascinating irony: according to money-digging lore, one obtained worldly treasure by strictly following the treasure-

38. This is a sixteenth-century ritual cited in Ashurst-McGee, "Pathway to Prophethood," 140.

39. Joseph Smith history, 1832, in Jessee, *Personal Writings,* 12–13.

40. Jessee, *Personal Writings,* 13.

41. Lucy Mack Smith, published manuscript, in Anderson, *Lucy's Book,* 347.

42. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, October 1835, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:458.

43. Joseph Knight Sr. reminiscence, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 4:12–13. In her account, Lucy Smith is not clear whether she is referring to Joseph's experience at the hill in 1823 or 1824. I believe it more likely she means 1823 because she immediately thereafter discusses Alvin's death (which occurred in November 1823).

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guardian's instructions; Joseph found, however, that he could obtain heavenly treasure (an ancient book of scripture) only by obeying an angel's command to avoid thoughts of worldly treasure, for Joseph states unequivocally—and Lucy and Oliver concur—that notions of gain were precisely what *prevented* him from acquiring the plates. According to Martin Harris, the angel stressed this same theme when he delivered the plates in 1827, warning Joseph that "he must quit the company of the money-diggers," for "there were wicked men among them."[44]

Joseph's 1832 report is thus much more restoration history than money-digging yarn: his guilt over his "transgressions" brings a "wound" to his soul and prompts him to pray; he is shown "a heavenly vision" and visited by "an angel of the Lord"; he learns that the Lord "had forgiven [his] sins"; he hears of a record created by "the servants of the living God . . . and deposited by the commandments of God."[45] True, the details of the plates' disappearance and the shock, which Joseph acknowledges by describing three unsuccessful attempts to get the plates and the intense fright that followed, appear to have been part of a money-digging tale. But the frequent references to God and to commandments and revelations—as well as the overall tone of the writing—make it clear that Joseph experienced these events in a religious setting and with religious meanings and purpose. Furthermore, Joseph's 1832 history is quite compatible with accounts given by those who first talked to him about the plates (including the Smiths, the Knights, and Lorenzo Saunders), offering solid evidence that Joseph was giving substantially the same report in 1832 that he did six to nine years earlier. But Huggins virtually ignores this crucial source, giving the 1832 history nothing more than passing mention in a footnote (p. 21 n. 16).

"The Rise and Progress of the Church"

At first glance, Joseph Smith's 1838 history seems to give quite a different account of the plates than the 1832 history. I believe, how-

44. Martin Harris interview with Joel Tiffany, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:309.

45. Joseph Smith history, 1832, in Jessee, *Personal Writings,* 12–13.

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ever, that the later version is true to the spirit of the former because it expands on aspects of the experience always considered most important by Joseph—the religious setting surrounding the visit of an angel and the divine purpose associated with the restoration of an ancient record. As shown earlier, newspaper articles, letters, and reminiscences all agree that Joseph stressed these elements from the start. So it is no surprise that Joseph describes the angel in detail, tells of each of the three visits during the night, and relates which scriptures the divine messenger quoted.

As for "treasure-seeking" details, Joseph has surely de-emphasized these, but he still alludes to them. He refers to treasure seeking explicitly when he speaks of Josiah Stowell and implicitly when he affirms that he fell "into many foolish errors, and displayed the weakness of youth" (JS—H 1:28); again, his mention that he "made an attempt to take [the plates] out but was forbidden by the messenger" can be seen as a subdued reference to the disappearance of the plates and the shock; finally, in detailing the period between 1823 and 1827, Joseph mentions both Alvin and Emma, the two people the angel reportedly told Joseph to bring with him. In addition, the fact that Joseph took Emma with him when he obtained the plates is consistent with the claim that he was instructed to bring her.

Still, the question remains, why does Joseph merely allude to details that seemed important to him when he first told of the plates? Lucy and William Smith and Joseph Knight Sr., for instance, all heard about the plates disappearing, but there is no indication of this in the 1838 history. Similarly, as late as 1835 Oliver Cowdery described the shock in a letter that was published and widely distributed—apparently with Joseph's approval—but the 1838 history is silent on the subject.[46]

Joseph Smith did not comment on these changes. There are several possible explanations. First, the times were rapidly changing. Treasure seeking in the American northeast gathered momentum in the late 1700s,

46. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, October 1835, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:458–59.

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hit a crescendo in the 1820s, then quickly tailed off.[47] As Enlightenment rationalism spread from the elite to the masses, public opinion—always fickle at best—shifted, and ordinary people who had once practiced the craft felt embarrassed to admit it.

This factor alone could have influenced Joseph Smith, but his difficulties were compounded by acquaintances trying to pin the blame on someone else. As Richard Bushman argues, Joseph's neighbors came up with all kinds of imaginative ways to downplay their own roles in money digging: William Stafford admitted going on "'nocturnal excursions'" but said he did so only because he was curious; Peter Ingersoll claimed he went because it was lunchtime and he was in the mood for some "rare sport"; Willard Chase dictated a lengthy statement ridiculing Joseph Smith's treasure searching but kept mum on his own efforts—nor did he mention that he was among the gang of men who came searching for the plates in September 1827.[48]

At the same time they were minimizing their own treasure-seeking activities, these Manchester neighbors were exaggerating the Smiths' role, claiming, as Ingersoll put it, that "the general employment of the [Smith] family, was digging for money."[49] To hear some of the neighbors talk, one might think that the Smiths were the *only* people seriously looking for hidden wealth. The various affidavits, however, reveal a healthy list of neighbors involved in treasure seeking. This distortion, promoted by E. D. Howe in his book *Mormonism Unvailed* (published in 1834), clearly offered a second possible motivation for Joseph to de-emphasize his own quests for treasure. There are other plausible reasons. In producing the history of the church, Joseph was addressing a generation (and future generations) not well equipped to understand what a divining rod or a seer stone meant to people like the Smiths. And by 1838 his experiences of more than a decade earlier likely meant something different to him than they had at the time. In the 1820s, and even in 1832, he tended to view his religious experiences in a very personal way. He agonized over his sins and pleaded for forgiveness. His failure

47. See Taylor, "Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast," 26–27, table 1.
48. Bushman, *Beginnings of Mormonism,* 72.
49. Peter Ingersoll statement, 1833, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:40.

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to obtain the record in 1823, accompanied by vanishing plates and a shock that hurled him "back upon the ground with great violence," was something he took extremely personally. "When he recovered," Lucy wrote, "the angel was gone, and he arose and returned to the house, weeping for grief and disappointment."[50]

By 1838, however, Joseph Smith was into his thirties and had been the leader of the church for eight years; he had married and had children—and had lost some of them. He had seen a number of people—including apostles—convert, dedicate their lives to the cause, then fall away. His perspective had inevitably changed—just as our perspectives change—and he now offered a public account to "present the various events in relation to this Church,"[51] whereas he had earlier written a personal "account of his marvilous experience."[52] In 1838 Joseph could honestly say of his initial experience with the plates, "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."[53]

Joseph Smith's first account of the plates included some details that could be associated with tales of a quest for Captain Kidd's treasure, and it cannot be doubted that his account of fifteen years later obscured those details. From the start, however, Joseph's narrative was deeply religious, concentrating on "plates of gold upon which there was engravings which was engraven by Maroni & his fathers the servants of the living God in ancient days and deposited by the commandments of God and kept by the power thereof."[54]

50. Lucy Mack Smith, published manuscript, in Anderson, *Lucy's Book,* 347–48.
51. Joseph Smith history, 1838, in Jessee, *Personal Writings,* 226–27.
52. Joseph Smith history, 1832, in Jessee, *Personal Writings,* 9.
53. Joseph Smith history, 1838, in Jessee, *Personal Writings,* 237.
54. Joseph Smith history, 1832, in Jessee, *Personal Writings,* 12.

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Appendix A: Newspaper Articles

1. *Palmyra (NY) Wayne Sentinel,* 26 June 1829

Just about in this particular region, for some time past, much speculation has existed, concerning a pretended discovery, through superhuman means, of an ancient record, of a religious and a divine nature and origin, written in ancient characters, impossible to be interpreted by any to whom the special gift has not been imparted by inspiration. It is generally known and spoken of as the "*Golden Bible*." Most people entertain an idea that the whole matter is the result of a gross imposition, and a grosser superstition.[55]

2. *Palmyra (NY) Freeman,* circa August 1829 (reprinted in the *Rochester [NY] Daily Advertiser and Telegraph,* 31 August 1829)

The Palmyra Freeman says—The greatest piece of superstition that has ever come within our knowledge, now occupies the attention of a few individuals of this quarter. It is generally known and spoken of as the "*Golden Bible*." Its proselytes give the following account of it.—In the fall of 1827, a person by the name of *Joseph Smith,* of Manchester, Ontario county, reported that he had been visited in a dream by the spirit of the Almighty, and informed that in a certain hill in that town, was deposited this Golden Bible, containing an ancient record of a divine nature and origin. After having been thrice thus visited, as he states, he proceeded to the spot, and after penetrating "mother earth" a short distance, the Bible was found, together with a huge pair of Spectacles! He had been directed, however, not to let any mortal being examine them, "under no less penalty" than instant death! They were therefore nicely wrapped up, and excluded from the "vulgar gaze of poor wicked mortals!" It was said that the *leaves* of the bible were

55. The article goes on to quote the title page of the Book of Mormon. In this and the excerpts that follow, any emphasis in the original has been retained. On 25 July, 8 August, and 29 August 1829, *Paul Pry's Weekly Bulletin,* in Rochester, New York, used biblical language to satirize local politics. Vague references were also made to Joseph Smith and the plates.

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plates of gold, about 8 inches long, 6 wide, and one eighth of an inch thick, on which were engraved characters or hyeroglyphics. By placing the spectacles in a hat, and looking into it, Smith could (he said so, at least,) interpret these characters.[56]

3. *Palmyra (NY) Reflector,* 2 January 1830

We do not intend at this time, to discuss the merits or demerits of this work, and feel astonished that some of our neighbors, who profess *liberal* principles, and are probably quite as ignorant on the subject as we are, should give themselves *quite* so much uneasiness about matters that so little concern them. The *Book*, when it shall come before the public, must stand or fall, according to the whims and fancies of its readers. How it will stand the test of rigid criticism, we are not prepared to say, not having as yet examined many of its pages.—We are, however, prepared to state, that from a part of the first chapter, now before us, and which we this day publish, we cannot discover any thing *treasonable,* or which will have a tendency to subvert our liberties. As to its religious character, we have as yet no means of determining, and if we had, we should be quite loth to meddle with the *tender* consciences of our neighbors.[57]

4. *Rochester (NY) Daily Advertiser,* 2 April 1830

The "Book of Mormon" has been placed in our hands. A viler imposition was never practised. It is an evidence of fraud, blasphemy and credulity, shocking to the Christian and moralist. The "author and proprietor" is one "Joseph Smith, jr."—a fellow who, by some hocus pocus, acquired such an influence over a wealthy farmer of

56. A very similar article appeared in the *Rochester (NY) Gem* on 5 September 1829.

57. This editorial, entitled "GOLD BIBLE," followed Cole's reprinting of 1 Nephi 1 and the first three verses of 1 Nephi 2 (reproduced accurately except for one minor error). The editorial was followed by references to "*J****h the Prophet*" and "the Temple of Nephi" in a biblical parody concerned with local politics and Freemasonry. Cole ran articles mentioning Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon on 13 January, 22 January, 27 February, 16 March, 30 March, 19 April, 1 May, and 1 June.

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Wayne county [Martin Harris], that the latter mortgaged his farm for $3000, which he paid for printing and binding 5000 copies of the blasphemous work.[58]

5. *Rochester (NY) Gem,* 15 May 1830

Some months ago a noise was made among the credulous of the earth, respecting a wonderful production said to have been found as follows. An ignoramous near Palmyra, Wayne county, pretended he had found some "Gold Plates," as he is pleased to call them, upon which is said to be engraved characters of marvelous and misunderstandable import, which he, nor no other mortal could divine. These characters he has translated into the English language, and lo! they appear to be no other than the mysticisms of an unrevealed Bible! A person more credulous or more cunning, than him who found the plates, ordered the translation thereof, mortgaged his farm, sold all he had, and appropriated it to the printing and binding of several thousand copies of this pearl, which is emphatically of GREAT PRICE! The book comes before the public under the general title of the "Book of Mormon," arranged under different heads, something as follows. The book of Mormon—containing the books of Nephi, Nimshi, Pukei, and Buckeye—and contains some four or five hundred pages. It comes out under the "testimony of three witnesses," and of "six witnesses," who say they "have seen and hefted the plates," that "they have the appearance of gold," and that divers and strange characters are "imprinted on them." The author, who has the "copy-right secured according to law," says, "that he was commanded of the Lord in a dream," to go and find, and that he went and found. At one time it was said that he was commanded of the Lord not to show the plates, on pain of instant death—but it seems he has shown them to the said witnesses, and yet is alive! At another time it is said that none could see them but he who was commanded;—that though they should lie in the middle of the street beneath the broad glare of the meridian sun, in the presence of

58. Articles mentioning the publication of the Book of Mormon appeared in various newspapers on 19 March, 26 March, 30 March, 31 March, and 27 April.

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hundreds, yet no eye but his could see them! The translator if we take his word for it, has been directed by an angel in this business, for the salvation and the edification of the world! It partakes largely of Salem Witchcraft-ism, and Jemima Wilkinson-ism, and is in point of blasphemy and imposition, the very summit. But it is before the public, and can be had for money, at various places.

This story brings to mind one of a similar nature once played off upon the inhabitants of Rochester and its vicinity, near the close of the last war. During the war, we were subject to many inconveniences at this place, and were in constant danger of attack from the enemy. Those who lived here at that time, can well remember the frequent attempts made by the enemy to land at the mouth of the Genesee, at which point our army had deposited heavy stores. Our village was then young, and the abodes of men were "few and far between." If we remember aright, it was in the year 1815, that a family of Smiths moved into these parts, and took up their abode in a miserable hut on the east bank of the river, now near the late David K. Carter's tavern. They had a wonderful son, of about 18 years of age, who, on a certain day, as they said, while in the road, discovered a round stone of the size of a man's fist, the which when he first saw it, presented to him on the one side, all the dazzling splendor of the sun in full blaze—and on the other, the clearness of the moon. He fell down insensible at the sight, and while in the trance produced by the sudden and awful discovery, it was communicated to him that he was to become an oracle—and the keys of mystery were put into his hands, and he saw the unsealing of the book of fate. He told his tale for MONEY. Numbers flocked to him to test his skill, and the first question among a certain class was, if there was any of Kidd's money hid in these parts of the earth. The oracle, after adjusting the stone in his hat, and looking in upon it sometime, pronounced that there was. The question of where, being decided upon, there forthwith emerged a set, armed with "pick-axe, hoe and spade," out into the mountains, to dislodge the treasure. We shall mention but one man of the money-diggers. His name was Northrop. He was a man so unlike anything of refined human kind, that he might well be called a demi-devil sent forth upon the world

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to baffle the elements of despair, and wrestle with fate. As you will suppose, he was an enemy to all fear. Northrop and his men sallied out upon the hills east of the river, and commenced digging—the night was chosen for operation—already had two nights been spent in digging, and the third commenced upon, when Northrop with his pick-axe struck the chest! The effect was powerful, and contrary to an explicit rule laid down by himself he exclaimed, "d—m me, I've found it!"

The charm was broken!—the scream of demons,—the chattering of spirits—and hissing of serpents, rent the air, and the treasure moved! The oracle was again consulted, who said that it had removed to the Deep Hollow. There, a similar accident happened—and again it was removed to a hill near the village of Penfield, where, it was pretended the undertakers obtained the treasure.

About this time the enemy's fleet appeared off the mouth of the Genesee, and an attack at that point was expected—this produced a general alarm.—There are in all communities, a certain class, who do not take the trouble, or are not capable of thinking for themselves, and who, in cases of alarm, are ready to construe every thing mysterious or uncommon into omens of awful purport. This class flocked to the oracle. He predicted that the enemy would make an attack; and that blood must flow.—The story flew, and seemed to carry with it a desolating influence—some moved away into other parts, and others were trembling under a full belief of the prediction. At this time a justice of the peace of the place visited the oracle, and warned him to leave the country. He gravely told the magistrate that any one who opposed him would receive judgments upon his head, and that he who should take away the inspired stone from him, would suffer immediate death! The magistrate, indignant at the fellow's impudence, demanded the stone, and ground it to powder on a rock near by—he then departed promising the family further notice.

The result was the Smiths were missing—the enemy did not land—the money diggers joined in the general execration, and declared that they had had their labor for their pains—and all turned out to be a

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hoax! Now in reference to the two stories, "put that to that, and they are a noble pair of brothers."

6. *Wayne County (PA) Inquirer,* circa May 1830 (reprinted in the *Cincinnati Advertiser, and Ohio Phoenix,* 2 June 1830)

A fellow by the name of Joseph Smith, who resides in the upper part of Susquehanna county, has been, for the last two years we are told, employed in dedicating as he says, by inspiration, a new bible. He pretended that he had been entrusted by God with a golden bible which had been always hidden from the world. Smith would put his face in a hat in which he had a *white stone,* and pretend to read from it, while his coadjutor transcribed. The book purports to give an account of the "Ten Tribes" and strange as it may seem, there are some who have full in his Divine commission.

7. *Palmyra (NY) Reflector,* 3rd ser., 5, 12 June 1830, 36–37

1. And it came to pass in the latter days, that wickedness did much abound in the land, and the "Idle and slothful["] said one to another, let us send for Walters the Magician, who has strange books, and deals with familiar spirits; peradventure he will inform us where the *Nephites,* hid their *treasure,* so be it, that we and our vagabond van, do not perish for lack of sustenance.

2. Now Walters, the Magician, was a man unseemly to look upon, and to profound ignorance added the most consummate impudence,—he obeyed the summons of the idle and slothful, and produced an old book in an unknown tongue, (Cicero's Orations *in latin,*) from whence he read in the presence of the Idle and Slothful strange stories of hidden treasures and of the spirit who had the custody thereof.

3. And the Idle and Slothful paid tribute unto the Magician, and besought him saying, Oh! thou who art wise above all men, and can *interpret* the book that no man understandeth, and can discover hidden things by the power of thy enchantments, lead us, we pray thee to the place where the Nephites buried their treasure, and give us power over "the spirit," and we will be thy servants forever.

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4. And the Magician led the *rabble* into a dark grove, in a place called *Manchester,* where after drawing a Magic circle, with a rusty sword, and collecting his motley crew of *latter-demallions,* within the centre, he sacrificed a Cock (a bird sacred to Minerva) for the purpose of propiciating the *prince* of spirits.

5. All things being ready, the Idle and Slothful fell to work with a zeal deserving a better cause, and many a *live long night* was spent in digging for "the root of all evil."

Howbeit, owing to the wickedness and hardness of their hearts, these credulous and ignorant knaves, were always disappointed, till finally, their hopes, although frequently on the eve of consummation—like that of [t]he hypocrite perished, and their hearts became faint within them.

7. And it came to pass, that when the Idle and Slothful became weary of their nightly labors, they said one to another, lo! this *imp* of the Devil, hath deceived us, let us no more of him, or peradventure, ourselves, our wives, and our little ones, will become chargeable on the *town*.

8. Now when Walters the Magician heard these things, he was sorely grieved, and said unto himself, lo! mine occupation is gone, even these ignorant vagabonds, the idle and slothful detect mine impostures. I will away and hide myself, lest the *strong* arm of the law should bring me to justice.

9. And he took his *book*, and his rusty sword, and his *magic* stone, and his *stuffed Toad,* and all his implements of *witchcraft* and retired to the mountains near Great Sodus Bay, where he holds communion with the Devil, even unto this day.

10. Now the rest of the acts of the magician, how his *mantle* fell upon the *prophet* Jo. Smith Jun. and how Jo. made a league with the *spirit,* who afterwards turned out to be an angel, and how he obtained the "Gold Bible," Spectacles, and breast plate—will they not be faithfully recorded in the book of Pukei?

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Appendix B: References in Letters and Diaries

1. Jesse Smith to Hyrum Smith, 17 June 1829

Once as I thot my promising Nephew, You wrote to my Father long ago, that after struggling thro various scenes of adversity, you and your family, you had at last taught the very solutary lesson that the God that made the heavens and the earth w[o]uld at onc[e] give success to your endeavours, this if true, is very well, exactly as it should be—but alas what is man when left to his own way, he makes his own gods, if a golden calf, he falls down and worships before it, and says this is my god which brought me out of the land of Vermont—if it be a gold book discovered by the necromancy of infidelity, & dug from the mines of atheism, he writes that the angel of the Lord has revealed to him the hidden treasures of wisdom & knowledge, even divine revelation, which has lain in the bowels of the earth for thousands of years [and] is at last made known to him, he says he has eyes to see things that art not, and then has the audacity to say they are; and the angel of the Lord (Devil it should be) has put me in possession of great wealth, gold & silver and precious stones so that I shall have the dominion in all the land of Palmyra.[59]

2. Lucius Fenn to Birdseye Bronson, 12 February 1830

There is som[e]thing that has taken place lately that is mysterious to us[.] it is this[:] there has been a bible found by 3 men but a short distance from us which is som[e]thing remarkable we think. there was it is said an an angel appeared to these 3 men and told them that there was a bible concealed in such a place and if one of them would go to that place he would find it[.] he went and found as the angel said[.] it was a stone chest[.] what is most to be wondered at is this that the man that found it could not read at all in the english language but he read this bible and nobody else cannot[.] it has been concealed there for fourteen hundred years[.] it is written on a kind of gold leaf[.] it is the same that ours is only there is an addition to

59. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 1:551–52.

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it[.] they are a printing it in Palmyra[.] it is expected that it <will> come out soon so that we can see it[.] it speaks of the Millenniam day and tells when it is a going to take plais [place] and it tells that the man that is to find this bible his name as [is] Joseph and his fathers name is Joseph.[60]

3. Diedrich Willers to Reverend Brethren, 18 June 1830

The greatest fraud of our time in the field of religion is most certainly one Joseph Smith, the professed translator of a book which carries the title, ["]The Book of Mormon, an account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi . . . ["]

[Book of Mormon title page quoted in English]

The publication of the aforesaid work of lies rests on a speculative venture intended to serve the interests of the publisher [Joseph Smith] and of those who are connected to him. Like a Swedenborg of the past century, this man claims to keep company with spirits and angels. Because, according to the claim, the plates on which the original book is supposed to have been written were gold, it is known in this region by the title, The Golden Book. . . .

He [Smith] claimed that the angel of the Lord had appeared and made known to him that in the neighborhood of Palmyra, there were golden plates hidden in the earth on which was written the fate of a Jewish prophet's family, together with many as yet unfulfilled prophesies, and that the Lord had appointed him to translate the same from ancient languages into English. He claimed that a pair of spectacles had been hidden beneath the plates—without which he could not translate the plates—and that through the use of these spectacles he (Smith) was enabled to read these languages which he had never studied and that the Holy Ghost would give him the translation in English. He (Smith) had, therefore, made his way to Manchester Township, Ontario County, and found everything as described, had dug the

60. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 5:268, brackets in original.

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plates and the spectacles next to them out of the earth, and now had almost completed the translation of the work.[61]

4. Peter Bauder's interview with Joseph Smith, October 1830

I will name some of the particular discoveries which through Divine Providence I was favored with in an interview with Joseph Smith, Jr. at the house of Peter Whitmer, in the town of Fayette, Seneca County, state of New York, in October, 1830. I called at P[eter]. Whitmer's house, for the purpose of seeing Smith, and searching into the mystery of his system of religion, and had the privilege of conversing with him alone, several hours, and of investigating his writings, church records, &c. I improved near four and twenty hours in close application with Smith and his followers: he could give me no christian experience, but told me that an angel told him he must go to a certain place in the town of Manchester, Ontario County, where was a secret treasure concealed, which he must reveal to the human family. He went, and after the third or fourth time, which was repeated once a year, he obtained a parcel of plate resembling gold, on which were engraved what he did not understand, only by the aid of a glass which he also obtained with the plate, by which means he was enabled to translate the characters on the plate into English. He says he was not allowed to let the plate be seen only by a few individuals named by the angel, and after he had a part translated, the angel commanded him to carry the plate into a certain piece of woods, which he did:—the angel took them and carried them to parts unknown to him. The part translated he had published, and it is before the public, entitled the Book of Mormon.[62]

5. Eli Bruce's diary, 5 November 1830

November 5th—Not so much pain in my head as yesterday. Had a long talk with the father of *the Smith,* (Joseph Smith,) who, according

61. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 5:271–73; the original letter was written in German.

62. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 1:16–17.

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to the old man's account, is the particular favorite of Heaven! To him Heaven has vouchsafed to reveal its mysteries; he is the herald of the latter-day glory. The old man avers that he is commissioned by God to baptize and preach this new doctrine. He says that our Bible is much abridged and deficient; that soon the Divine will is to be made known to all, as written in the *new Bible,* or *Book of Mormon.*[63]

6. W. W. Phelps to E. D. Howe, 15 January 1831

Canandaigua, Jan. 15, 1831.

Dear Sir—Yours of the 11th, is before me, but to give you a satisfactory answer, is out of my power. To be sure, I am acquainted with a number of the persons concerned in the publication, called the "*Book of Mormon.*"—Joseph Smith is a person of very limited abilities in common learning—but his knowledge of *divine things,* since the appearance of his book, has astonished many. Mr. 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. When the plates were said to have been found, a copy of one or two lines of the characters, were taken by Mr. Harris to Utica, Albany and New York; at New York, they were shown to Dr. Mitchell, and he referred to professor Anthon who translated and declared them to be the ancient shorthand Egyptian. So much is true. The family of Smiths is poor, and generally ignorant in common learning.

I have read the book, and many others have, but we have nothing by which we can positively detect it as an imposition, nor have we any thing more than what I have stated and the book itself, to show its genuineness. We doubt—supposing, if it is false, it will fall, and if of God, God will sustain it.

I had ten hours discourse with a man from your state, named Sidney Rigdon, a convert to its doctrines, and he declared it was true,

63. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 3:4, emphasis in original.

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and he knew it by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was again given to man in preparation for the millennium: he appeared to be a man of talents, and sincere in his profession. Should any new light be shed on the subject, I will apprise you.

Respectfully,
W. W. PHELPS.

E. D. HOWE, ESQ.[64]

7. David S. Burnett's account, 7 March 1831

For a long time in the vicinity of Palmyra, there has existed an impression, especially among certain loose classes of society, that treasures of great amount were concealed near the surface of the earth, probably by the Indians, whom they were taught to consider the descendants of the ten lost Israelitish tribes, by the celebrated Jew who a few years since promised to gather Abraham's sons on Grand Island, thus to be made a Paradise. The ignorance and superstition of these fanatics soon conjured up a ghost, who they said was often seen and to whom was committed the care of the precious deposit. This tradition made money diggers of many who had neither intelligence nor industry sufficient to obtain a more reputable livelihood. But they did not succeed and as the money was not dug up, something must be dug up to make money. The plan was laid, doubtless, by some person behind the curtain, who selected suitable tools. One Joseph Smith, a perfect ignoramus, is to be a great prophet of the Lord, the fabled ghost the angel of his presence, a few of the accomplices the apostles or witnesses of the imposition, and, to fill up the measure of their wickedness and the absurdity of their proceedings, the hidden golden treasure, is to be a golden bible and a new revelation. This golden bible consisted of metallic plates six or seven inches square, of the thickness of tin and resembling gold, the surface of which was covered with hieroglyphic characters, unintelligible to Smith, the finder, who could not read English. However the angel (ghost!) that discovered the plates to him, likewise informed him that he would be inspired to translate the

64. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 3:6–7, emphasis in original.

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inscriptions without looking at the plates while an amanuensis would record his infallible reading; all which was accordingly done. But now the book must be published, the translation of the inscriptions which Smith was authorized to show to no man save a few accomplices, who subscribe a certificate of these pretended facts at the end of the volume. Truly a wise arrangement![65]

8. Abram W. Benton's reminiscence, March 1831

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. Although he constantly failed in his pretensions, still he had his dupes who put implicit confidence in all his words. In this town, a wealthy farmer, named Josiah Stowell, together with others, spent large sums of money in digging for hidden money, which this Smith pretended he could see, and told them where to dig; but they never found their treasure. At length the public, becoming wearied with the base imposition which he was palming upon the credulity of the ignorant, for the purpose of sponging his living from their earnings, had him arrested as a disorderly person, tried and condemned before a court of Justice. But, 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. From this time he absented himself from this place, returning only privately, and holding clandestine intercourse with his credulous dupes, for two or three years.

It was during this time, and probably by the help of others more skilled in the way of iniquity than himself, that he formed the blasphemous design of forging a new revelation, which, backed by the terrors of an endless hell, and the testimony of base unprincipled men, he hoped would frighten the ignorant, and open a field of speculation for the vicious, so that he might secure to himself the scandalous honor

65. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 3:278–79.

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of being the founder of a new sect, which might rival, perhaps, the Wilkinsonians, or the French Prophets of the 17th century.

During the past Summer [of 1830] he was frequently in this vicinity, and others of the baser sort, as [Oliver] Cowdry, Whitmer, etc., holding meetings, and proselyting a few week and silly women, and still more silly men, whose minds are shrouded in a mist of ignorance, which no ray can penetrate, and whose credulity the utmost absurdity cannot equal. . . .

[Joseph Smith] was again arraigned before a bar of Justice, during last Summer, to answer to a charge of misdemeanor. This trial led to an investigation of his character and conduct, which clearly evinced to the unprejudiced, whence the spirit came which dictated his inspirations. During the 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 Cowdry, 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.[66]

9. James Gordon Bennett's account, 1831

A few years ago the Smith's and others who were influenced by their notions, caught an idea that money was hid in several of the hills which give variety to the country between the Canandaigua Lake and Palmyra on the Erie Canal. Old Smith had in his pedling excursions picked up many stories of men getting rich in New England by digging in certain places and stumbling upon chests of money. The fellow excited the imagination of his few auditors, and made them all anxious to lay hold of the bilk axe and the shovel. As yet no fanatical or religious character had been assumed by the Smith's. They exhibited the simple and ordinary desire of getting rich by some short cut if possible. With this view the Smith's and their associates commenced

66. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 4:95–97.

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digging, in the numerous hills which diversify the face of the country in the town of Manchester. The sensible country people paid slight attention to them at first. They knew them to be a thriftless set, more addicted to exerting their wits than their industry, readier at inventing stories and tales than attending church or engaging in any industrious trade. On the sides & in the slopes of several of these hills, these excavations are still to be seen. They would occasionally conceal their purposes, and at other times reveal them by such snatches as might excite curiosity. They dug these holes by day, and at night talked and dreamed over the counties' riches they should enjoy, if they could only hit upon an iron chest full of dollars. In excavating the grounds, they began by taking up the green sod in the form of a circle of six feet diameter—then would continue to dig to the depth of ten, twenty, and sometimes thirty feet.[67]

It was given out that visions had appeared to Joe Smith—that a set of golden plates on which was engraved the "Book of Mormon," enclosed in an iron chest, was deposited somewhere in the hill I have mentioned. People laughed at the first intimation of the story, but the Smiths and [Rigdon] persisted in its truth. They began also to talk very seriously, to quote scripture, to read the bible, to be contemplative, and to assume that grave studied character, which so easily imposes on ignorant and superstitious people. Hints were given out that young Joe Smith was the chosen one of God to reveal this new mystery to the world; and Joe from being an idle young fellow, lounging about the villages, jumped up into a very grave parsonlike man, who felt he had on his shoulders the salvation of the world, besides a respectable looking sort of blackcoat. Old Joe, the ex-preacher, and several others, were the believers of the new faith, which they admitted was an improvement in christianity, foretold word for word in the bible. They treated their own invention with the utmost religious respect. By the special interposition of God, the golden plates, on which was engraved the Book of Mormon, and other works, had been buried for ages in the hill by a wandering tribe of the children of Israel, who found their way to western New York, before the birth of christianity itself. Joe Smith

67. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 3:285.

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is discovered to be the second Messiah who was to reveal this word to the world and reform it anew.

In relation to the finding of the plates and the taking the engraving, a number of ridiculous stories are told.—Some unsanctified fellow looked out the other side of the hill. They had to follow it with humility and found it embedded beneath a beautiful grove of maples. Smith's wife, who had a little of the curiosity of her sex, peeped into the large chest in which he kept the engravings taken from the golden plates, and straightway one half the new Bible vanished, and has not been recovered to this day. Such were the effects of the unbelievers on the sacred treasure. There is no doubt but the ex-parson from Ohio is the author of the book which was recently printed and published in Palmyra, and passes for the new Bible.[68]

10. Ezra Booth to Ira Eddy, 24 October 1831

REV. & DEAR SIR—

. . . [Joseph] Smith is the only person at present, to my knowledge, who pretends to hold converse with the inhabitants of the celestial world. It seems from his statements, that he can have access to them, when and where he pleases. He does not pretend that he sees them with his natural, but with his spiritual eyes; and he says he can see them as well with his eyes shut, as with them open. So also in translating.—The subject stands before his eyes in print, but it matters not whether his eyes are open or shut; he can see as well one way as the other.

You have probably read the testimony of the three witnesses appended to the Book of Mormon. These witnesses testify, that an angel appeared to them, and presented them the golden plates, and the voice of God declared it to be a Divine Record. To this they frequently testify, in the presence of large congregations. When in Missouri, I had an opportunity to examine a commandment given to these witnesses, previous to their seeing the plates [D&C 17]. They were informed that they should see and hear those things by faith, and then they should

68. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 3:288–89.

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testify to the world, as though they had seen and heard, as I see a man, and hear his voice: but after all, it amounts simply to this; that by faith or imagination, they saw the plates and the angel, and by faith or imagination, they heard the voice of the Lord.

Smith describes an angel, as having the appearance of a "tall, slim, well built, handsome man, with a bright pillar upon his head." The Devil once, he says, appeared to him in the same form, excepting upon his head he had a "black pillar," and by this mark, he was able to distinguish him from the former.

It passes for a current fact in the Mormonite church, that there are immense treasures in the earth, especially in those places in the State of N.Y. from whence many of the Mormonites emigrated last spring: and when they become sufficiently purified, these treasures are to be poured into the lap of their church; and then, to use their own language, they are to be the richest people in the world. These treasures were discovered several years since, by means of the dark glass, the same with which Smith says he translated most of the Book of Mormon—Several of those persons, together with Smith, who were formerly unsuccessfully engaged in digging and searching for these treasures, now reside in this county, and from themselves I received this information.

Yours, affectionately,
EZRA BOOTH.[69]

Appendix C: Reminiscences of Early Conversations concerning the Plates

These reminiscences are listed in the order the conversations occurred, with the corresponding date listed first. The date the reminiscence was recorded or published is listed in brackets. Firsthand discussions with Joseph Smith that were recorded before 1850 are identified with an asterisk.

69. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 5:308–9.

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***1. 1823: Lucy Mack Smith's account [1844–45]**

One evening we were sitting till quite late conversing upon the subject of the diversity of churches that had risen up in the world and the many thousand opinions in existence as to the truths contained in scripture. Joseph ~~who~~ never said many words upon any subject but always seemed to reflect more deeply than common persons of his age upon everything of a religious nature.

~~This~~ After we ceased conversation he went to bed <and was pondering in his mind which of the churches were the true one> ~~an~~ but he had not laid there long till <he saw> a bright <light> entered the room where he lay he looked up and saw an angel of the Lord ~~stood~~ <standing> by him The angel spoke I perceive that you are enquiring in your mind which is the true church there is not a true church on Earth No not one ~~Nor~~ <and> has not been since Peter took the Keys <of the Melchesidec priesthood after the order of God> into the Kingdom of Heaven The churches that are now upon the Earth are all man made churches ~~Joseph there is a record for you and you must get it one day get it~~ There is a record for you and Joseph ~~when you have learned to keep the commandments of God~~ but you cannot get it untill you learn to keep the commandments of God <For it is not to get gain> But it is to bring forth that light and intelligence which has been long lost in the Earth Now Joseph <~~or~~> beware <or> when you go to get the plates your mind will be filld with darkness and all manner of evil will rush into your mind To ~~keep~~ <prevent> you from keeping the commandments of God <that you may not succed in doing his work> and you must tell your father of this for he will believe every word you say the record is on a side hill on the Hill of Cumorah 3 miles from this place remove the Grass and moss and you will find a large flat stone pry that up and you will find the record under it laying on 4 pillars—<of cement> then the angel left him[.][70]

70. Lucy Mack Smith, unpublished manuscript, in Anderson, *Lucy's Book,* 335–36.

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2. 1823: William Smith's reminiscences [1883, 1884]

At length [Joseph Smith] determined to call upon the Lord until he should get a manifestation from him. He accordingly went out into the woods and falling upon his knees called for a long time upon the Lord for wisdom and knowledge. While engaged in prayer a light appeared in the heavens, and descended until it rested upon the trees where he was. It appeared like fire. But to his great astonishment, did not burn the trees. An angel then appeared to him and conversed with him upon many things. He told him that none of the sects were right; but that if he was faithful in keeping the commandments he should receive, the true way should be made known to him; that his sins were forgiven, etc. A more elaborate and accurate description of his vision, however, will be found in his own history.

The next day I was at work in the field together with Joseph and my eldest brother Alvin. Joseph looked pale and unwell, so that Alvin told him if he was sick he need not work; he then went and sat down by the fence, when the angel again appeared to him, and told him to call his father's house together and communicate to them the visions he had received, which he had not yet told to any one; and promised him that if he would do so, they would believe it. He accordingly asked us to come to the house, as he had something to tell us. After we were all gathered, he arose and told us how the angel appeared to him; what he had told him as written above; and that the angel had also given him a short account of the inhabitants who formerly resided upon this continent, a full history of whom he said was engraved on some plates which were hidden, and which the angel promised to show him. He continued talking to us sometime. The whole family were melted to tears, and believed all he said. Knowing that he was very young, that he had not enjoyed the advantages of a common education; and knowing too, his whole character and disposition, they were convinced that he was totally incapable of arising before his aged parents, his brothers and sisters, and so solemnly giving utterance to anything but the truth. All of us, therefore, believed him, and anxiously awaited the

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result of his visit to the hill Cumorah, in search of the plates containing the record of which the angel told him. He went, and upon his return told us that in consequence of his not obeying strictly the commandments which the angel had given him, he could not obtain the record until four years from that time.[71]

I well remember the effect produced apon [upon] my father's family, when [Joseph Smith] told them he was to receive the plates; how they looked forward with joy, and waited until the time should come. The circumstances that occurred, and the impressions made on my mind at that time, I can remember better than those which occurred two years ago. We were all looking forward for the time to come, father, mother, brothers, and sisters. He did not receive the plates at the time he expected, but some four years afterward. He had not lived as directed. When he went to get the plates he found them as he was told he should. He took them from the stone box in which they were found, and placed them on the ground behind him, when the thought came into his mind that there might be a treasure hidden with them. While stooping forward to see, he was overpowered, so that he could not look farther. Turning to get the plates, he found they had gone; and on looking around found that they were in the box again; but he could not get them, and he cried out, "Why can't I get the plates as Moroni told me I could?" The angel then appeared to him, and told him it was because he had not done as directed. That the plates could not be had for the purpose of making money. That he could not have them for four years.[72]

3. 1823: Edmund L. Kelley's interview with Lorenzo Saunders [1884][73]

E.L.K. So you saw Rigdon in 1827? A[nswer]. Yes sir. Is not it possible that it was in 1830?

71. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 1:495–96.

72. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 1:504–5.

73. Enoch and Abigail Saunders and their family were close neighbors of the Smiths. Three of the sons—Orlando, Lorenzo, and Benjamin—were interviewed about Joseph and the plates. Lorenzo ("Mr. L.S.") was born in 1811, the same year as William Smith. He was interviewed in 1884 by Edmund L. Kelley ("E.L.K."), of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

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Mr. L.S. No. because it was when Jo. Smith claimed to get the plates. Jo. Smith told the story but he told so many stories, it was a hard thing to get the fact in any way or shape. Now I can tell you what he told to our house respecting this revelation that he had in the very commencement before Alvin died, his brother; Sometime before this he claimed that he saw the Angel & that he was notified of these plates & all that & the time would be made known to him but it was not at that time made known to him but he must take his oldest brother & go <to> the spot & he could obtain them. Before that time his oldest brother died. Jo. Smith got that revelation a year or two before that. I do not know as I can tell what year Alvin died in[.] It was in the summer before Alvin died he told it at our house. perhaps Mrs. Smith has got the date of Alvins death in her record. After that Alvin died; Then Joseph said that he saw the angel again; The Angel told him he must go & get him a wife & then he could take his wife & go & get the plates. & he pretended he must get a black horse or a mule to go & get the plates[.] We went there & we examined the hill all over where he claimed to got the plates & we could not find a place that was broke & there was no plates on the ground where the hill was not broke. Robinson said he tried many times to find the hole where he took them out, that is on the west hill it was ∈ cleared off[.][74]

*4. 1826: Joseph Knight Sr.'s reminiscence [circa 1835–47][75]

[…] From thence he [Joseph Smith] went to the hill where he was informed the Record was and found no trouble[,] for it appeared plain as tho he was acquainted with the place it was so plain in the vision that

74. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:159–60. Saunders insists that he saw Sidney Rigdon at the Smith home in 1827, a claim not corroborated by any other source and not consistent with Rigdon's known history. However, Saunders's claim that Joseph spoke of the angel and the plates before Alvin's death is corroborated by Lucy Mack Smith and William Smith. Saunders pinpoints his first conversation with Joseph about the plates as falling between the first visit of Moroni (22 September 1823) and Alvin's death (19 November 1823).

75. The Knights heard the story from Joseph Smith in November 1826.

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he had of the place[.] he went and found the place and opened it and found a plane Box he onconvered it and found the Book and took it out and laid [it] Down By his side and thot he would Cover the <place> over again thinkinking [thinking] there might be something else here But he was told to take the Book and go right away and after he had Covered the place he turned to take <the> Book and it was not there and he was astonished that the Book was gone he thot he would look in the place again and see if it had not got Back again[.] he had heard People tell of such things and he opened the Box and Behold the Book was ~~gone~~ there he took hold of it to take it out again and Behold he Could not stur the Book any more then he Could the mount[a]in[.] he exclaimed why Cant I stur this Book[?] and he was answer[e]d you have not Done rite you should have took the Book and a gone right away you cant have it now[.] Joseph says when can I have it[?] the answer was the 22nt Day of September next if you Bring the right person with you[.] Joseph Says who is the right person[?] the answer was your oldest Brother But before September Came his oldest Brother Died then he was Disap[o]inted and did not [k]now what to do But when the 22nt Day of September [1824] Came he went to the place and the personage appeared and told him he Could not have it now But the 22nt Day of September nex[t] he mite have the Book if he Brot with him the right person[.] Joseph Says who is the right Person[?] the answer was you will know[.] then he looked in his glass and found it was Emma Hale Daughter of old Mr Hail [Isaac Hale] of Pensylvany a girl that he had seen Before[,] for he had Bin Down there Before with me[.] . . .

[Joseph Smith] had talked with me and told me the Conversation he had with the personage which told him if he would Do right according to the will of God he mite obtain [the plates] the 22nt Day of Septem[b]er Next and if not he never would have them.[76]

5. 1826: Joseph Knight Jr.'s history [1862]

My father bought three other farms and hired many hands; in 1827 [1826] he hired Joseph Smith; Joseph and I worked and slept together.

76. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 4:12–15.

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my Father said Joseph was the best hand he ever hired. we found him a boy of truth, he was about 21 years of age. I think it was in November [1826] he made known to my Father and I, that he had seen a vision, that a personage had appeared to him and told him <where> there was a gold book of ancient date buried, and if he would follow the directions of the Angel he could get it. we were told it in secret; I being the youngest son, my two older brothers did not believe such things; my Father and I believed what he told us, I think we were the first after his father's family; he went to see them, but did not go as he was told so he could not get them; as my Father has given the particulars I will skip over; at last he got the plates, and rode in my Father's wagon and carried them home.[77]

6. 1827: Willard Chase's statement [1833]

In the month of June, 1827, Joseph Smith, Sen., related to me the following story: "That some years ago, a spirit had appeared to Joseph his son, in a vision, and informed him that in a certain place there was a record on plates of gold, and that he was the person that must obtain them, and this he must do in the following manner: On the 22d of September [1823], he must repair to the place where was deposited this manuscript, dressed in black clothes, and riding a black horse with a switch tail, and demand the book in a certain name, and after obtaining it, he must go directly away, and neither lay it down nor look behind him. They accordingly fitted out Joseph with a suit of black clothes and borrowed a black horse. He repaired to the place of deposit and demanded the book, which was in a stone box, unsealed, and so near the top of the ground that he could see one end of it, and raising it up, took out the box of gold; but fearing some one might discover where he got it, he laid it down to place back the top stone, as he found it; and turning round, to his surprise there was no book in sight. He again opened the box, and in it saw the book, and attempted to take it out, but was hindered. He saw in the box something like a toad, which soon assumed the appearance of a man, and struck him on the side of his head.—Not

77. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 4:71–72.

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being discouraged at trifles, he again stooped down and strove to take the book, when the spirit struck him again, and knocked him three or four rods, and hurt him prodigiously. After recovering from his fright, he enquired why he could not obtain the plates; to which the spirit made reply, because you have not obeyed your orders. He then enquired when he *could* have them, and was answered thus: come one year from this day, and bring with you your oldest brother, and you shall have them. This spirit, he said was the spirit of the prophet who wrote this book, and who was sent to Joseph Smith, to make known these things to him. Before the expiration of the year, his oldest brother died; which the old man said was an accidental providence![”][78]

7. 1827: William H. Kelley's interview with Benjamin Saunders [1884][79]

I knew young Joseph just as well as I did my own brothers. went to the Same school ~~together~~ with the younger boys. ~~He was older~~ Joseph was older some what than I was and [mated?] with larger boys. We used to coon hunt together ie with Wm. and Carlos. . . . I heard ~~from~~ <Joe> tell my Mother and Sister how he procured the plates. He said he was directed by an angel where it was. He went in the night to get the plates. When he took the plates there was something down near the box that looked some like a toad that rose up into a man which forbid him to take the plates. He found a big pair of Spectacles <also with the plates>. As he went home some one tried to get the plates away from him. He said he knock[ed] the man down and got away.

78. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:66–67, emphasis in original. The bracketed quotation mark is my addition. Chase uses opening quotation marks to begin his description of his conversation with Joseph Smith Sr. There are two problems with this, however: first, the quotation marks are incorrect because Chase is not actually quoting Joseph Sr.; second, Chase never adds closing quotes. Therefore, it is difficult to know exactly when he intends to stop referring to this specific conversation. I have added the closing quotation mark at the end of the paragraph because the subsequent five paragraphs appear to be based on a conversation with Samuel Lawrence and on neighborhood rumors.

79. Benjamin was born in 1814 and was therefore twelve or thirteen when Joseph recovered the plates. He was interviewed by William H. Kelley, of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

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Had two or three skirmishes on the way. I saw his hand all sweled up and he said it was done in hitting the enemy.[80]

8. Circa 1827: William H. Kelley's interview with Orlando Saunders [1881][81]

[WHK:] How well did you know young Joseph Smith?

"Oh! just as well as one could very well; he has worked for me many a time, and been about my place a great deal. He stopped with me many a time, when through here, after they went west to Kirtland; he was always a gentleman when about my place."

What did you know about his finding that book, or the plates in the hill over here?

"He always claimed that he saw the angel and received the book; but I don't know any thing about it. Have seen it, but never read it as I know of; didn't care any thing about it."[82]

9. 1827 & 1828: John A. Clark's interviews with Martin Harris [1840]

[Martin Harris] then proceeded to remark that a GOLDEN BIBLE had recently been dug from the earth, where it had been deposited for thousands of years, and that this would be found to contain such disclosures as would settle all religious controversies and speedily bring on the glorious millennium. That this mysterious book, which no human eye of the present generation had yet seen, was in the possession of Joseph Smith, Jr., ordinarily known in the neighborhood under the more familiar designation of *Jo Smith*: that there had been a revelation made to him by which he had discovered this sacred deposit, and two

80. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:137–38. Saunders's detail about Joseph's injured hand makes it clear that this conversation took place in the autumn of 1827, after Joseph obtained the plates and before he and Emma left for Pennsylvania (in November or December).

81. Born in 1803, Orlando was two years older than Joseph Smith, and, as noted, lived quite close to the Smiths. It seems safe to assume that Saunders heard of the plates by 1827.

82. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:104.

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transparent stones, through which, as a sort of spectacles, he could read the Bible, although the box or ark that contained it, had not yet been opened; and that by looking through those mysterious stones, he had transcribed from one of the leaves of this book, the characters which Harris had so carefully wrapped in the package which he was drawing from his pocket. . . .

I would remark in passing, that Jo Smith, who has since been the chief prophet of the Mormons, and was one of the most prominent ostensible actors in the first scenes of this drama, belonged to a very shiftless family near Palmyra. They lived a sort of vagrant life, and were principally known as *money-diggers*. Jo from a boy appeared dull and utterly destitute of genius; but his father claimed for him a sort of second sight, a power to look into the depths of the earth, and discover where its precious treasures were hid. Consequently long before the idea of a GOLDEN BIBLE entered their minds, in their excursions for money-digging, which I believe usually occurred in the night, that they might conceal from others the knowledge of the place where they struck upon treasures, Jo used to be usually their guide, putting into a hat a peculiar stone he had through which he looked to decide where they should begin to dig.

According to Martin Harris, it was after one of these night excursions, that Jo, while he lay upon his bed, had a remarkable dream. An angel of God seemed to approach him, clad in celestial splendour. This divine messenger assured him, that he, Joseph Smith, was chosen of the Lord to be a prophet of the Most High God, and to bring to light hidden things, that would prove of unspeakable benefit to the world. He then disclosed to him the existence of this golden Bible, and the place where it was deposited—but at the same time told him that he must follow implicitly the divine direction, or he would draw down upon him the wrath of heaven. This book, which was contained in a chest, or ark, and which consisted of metallic plates covered with characters embossed in gold, he must not presume to look into, under three years. He must first go on a journey into Pennsylvania—and there among the mountains, he would meet with a very lovely woman, belonging to a highly respectable and pious family, whom he was to

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take for his wife. As a proof that he was sent on this mission by Jehovah, as soon as he saw this designated person, he would be smitten with her beauty, and though he was a stranger to her, and she was far above him in the walks of life, she would at once be willing to marry him and go with him to the ends of the earth. After their marriage he was to return to his former home, and remain quietly there until the birth of his first child. When this child had completed his second year, he might then proceed to the hill beneath which the mysterious chest was deposited, and draw it thence, and publish the truths it contained to the world.[83]

10. 1828: Joseph and Hiel Lewis's statement [1879][84]

[Joseph Smith] said that by a dream he was informed that at such a place in a certain hill, in an iron box, were some gold plates with curious engravings, which he must get and translate, and write a book; that the plates were to be kept concealed from every human being for a certain time, some two or three years; that he went to the place and dug till he came to the stone that covered the box, when he was knocked down; that he again attempted to remove the stone, and was again knocked down; this attempt was made the third time, and the third time he was knocked down. Then he exclaimed, "Why can't I get it?" or words to that effect; and then he saw a man standing over the spot, which to him appeared like a Spaniard, having a long beard coming down over his breast to about here, (Smith putting his hand to the pit of his stomach) with his (the ghost's) throat cut from ear to ear, and the blood streaming down, who told him that he could not get it alone; that another person whom he, Smith, would know at first sight, must come with him, and then he could get it. And when Smith saw Miss Emma Hale, he knew that she was the person, and that after they were married, she went with him to near the place, and stood with

83. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:262–64, emphasis in original.

84. Cousins of Emma Smith, Joseph (born in 1807) and Hiel (born about 1817) said they heard Joseph Smith tell about finding the plates "at the commencement of his translating his book, in Harmony"—which was in April 1828. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 4:303.

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her back toward him, while he dug up the box, which he rolled up in his frock, and she helped carry it home. That in the same box with the plates were spectacles; the bows were of gold, and the eyes were stone, and by looking through these sbectacles [spectacles] all the characters on the plates were translated into English.

In all this narrative, there was not one word about "visions of God," or of angels, or heavenly revelations. All his information was by that dream, and that bleeding ghost. The heavenly visions and messages of angels, etc., contained in Mormon books, were after-thoughts, *revised to order.*[85]

***11. 1829: Oliver Cowdery's letters to W. W. Phelps [1835]**

On the evening of the 21st of September, 1823, previous to retiring to rest, our brother's mind was unusually wrought up on the subject which had so long agitated his mind—his heart was drawn out in fervent prayer, and his whole soul was so lost to every thing of a temporal nature, that earth, to him, had lost its claims, and all he desired was to be prepared in heart to commune with some kind messenger who could communicate to him the desired information of his acceptance with God.

At length the family retired, and he, as usual, bent his way, though in silence, where others might have rested their weary frames "locked fast in sleep's embrace;" but repose had fled, and accustomed slumber had spread her refreshing hand over others beside him—he continued still to pray—his heart, though once hard and obdurate, was softened, and that mind which had often f[l]itted, like the "wild bird of passage," had settled upon a determined basis not to be decoyed or driven from its purpose.

In this situation hours passed unnumbered—how many or how few I know not, neither is he able to inform me; but suppose it must have been eleven or twelve, and perhaps later, as the noise and bustle of the family, in retiring, had long since ceased.—While continuing

85. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 4:303–5, emphasis in original. I treat the Lewises as a single witness because they gave a joint statement.

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in prayer for a manifestation in some way that his sins were forgiven; endeavoring to exercise faith in the scriptures, on a sudden a light like that of day, only of a purer and far more glorious appearance and brightness, burst into the room.—Indeed, to use his own description, the first sight was as though the house was filled with consuming and unquenchable fire. This sudden appearance of a light so bright, as must naturally be expected, occasioned a shock or sensation, visible to the extremities of the body. It was, however, followed with a calmness and serenity of mind, and an overwhelming rapture of joy that surpassed understanding, and in a moment a personage stood before him.

Notwithstanding the room was previously filled with light above the brightness of the sun, as I have before described, yet there seemed to be an additional glory surrounding or accompanying this personage, which shone with an increased degree of brilliancy, of which he was in the midst; and though his countenance was as lightening, yet it was of a pleasing, innocent and glorious appearance, so much so, that every fear was banished from the heart, and nothing but calmness pervaded the soul. . . .

But it may be well to relate the particulars as far as given—The stature of this personage was a little above the common size of men in this age; his garment was perfectly white, and had the appearance of being without seam.

Though fear was banished from his heart, yet his surprise was no less when he heard him declare himself to be a messenger sent by commandment of the Lord, to deliver a special message, and to witness to him that his sins were forgiven, and that his prayers were heard; and that the scriptures might be fulfilled, which say—"God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things w[h]ich are despised, has God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are, that no flesh should glory in his presence. Therefore, says the Lord, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder; the wisdom, of their wise shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid; for according to his covenant which he made with his ancient saints, his people, the

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house of Israel, must come to a knowledge of the gospel, and own that Messiah whom their fathers rejected, and with them the fulness of the Gentiles be gathered in, to rejoice in one fold under one Shepherd."[86]

After arriving at the repository, a little exertion in removing the soil from the edges of the top of the box, and a light pry, brought to [Joseph Smith's] natural vision its contents. No sooner did he behold this sacred treasure than his hopes were renewed, and he supposed his success certain; and without first attempting to take it from its long place of deposit, he thought, perhaps, there might be something more equally as valuable, and to take only the plates, might give others an opportunity of obtaining the remainder, which could be secure, would still add to his store of wealth. These, in short, were his reflections, without once thinking of the solemn instruction of the heavenly messenger, that all must be done with an express view of glorifying God.

On attempting to take possession of the record a shock was produced upon his system, by an invisible power, which deprived him, in a measure, of his natural strength. He desisted for an instant, and then made another attempt, but was more sensibily shocked than before. What was the occasion of this he knew not—*there* was the pure unsullied record, as had been described—he had heard of the power of enchantment, and a thousand like stories, which held the hidden treasures of the earth, and supposed that physical exertion and personal strength was only necessary to enable him to yet obtain the object of his wish. He therefore made the third attempt with an increased exertion, when his strength failed him more than at either of the former times, and without premeditating he exclaimed, "Why can I not obtain this book?" "Because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord," answered a voice, within a seeming short distance. He looked, and to his astonishment, there stood the angel who had previously given him the directions concerning this matter. In an instant, all the former instructions, the great intelligence concerning Israel and the last days, were brought to his mind: he thought of the time when his heart was

86. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, February 1835, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:428–29.

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fervently engaged in prayer to the Lord, when his spirit was contrite, and when his holy messenger from the skies unfolded the wonderful things connected with this record. He had come, to be sure, and found the word of the angel fulfilled concerning the reality of the record, but he had failed to remember the great end for which they had been kept, and in consequence could not have power to take them into his possession and bear them away.[87]

***12. Circa 1829: Henry Harris's statement [circa 1833]**

I, Henry Harris, do state that I became acquainted with the family of Joseph Smith, Sen. about the year 1820, in the town of Manchester, N[ew]. York. They were a family that labored very little—the chief they did, was to dig for money. Joseph Smith, Jr. the pretended Prophet, used to pretend to tell fortunes; he had a stone which he used to put in his hat, by means of which he professed to tell people's fortunes.

Joseph Smith, Jr. Martin Harris and others, used to meet together in private, a while before the gold plates were found, and were familiarly known by the name of the "Gold Bible Company." They were regarded by the community in which they lived, as a lying and indolent set of men and no confidence could be placed in them.

The character of Joseph Smith, Jr. for truth and veracity was such, that I would not believe him under oath. I was once on a jury before a Justice's Court and the Jury could not, and did not, believe his testimony to be true. After he pretended to have found the gold plates, I had a conversation with him, and asked him where he found them and how he come to know where they were. He said he had a revelation from God that told him they were hid in a certain hill 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, and that when he saw the woman that was to be his wife, he should know her, and she would know him. He then went to Pennsylvania, got his wife, and they both went together and got the gold plates—he said it

87. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, October 1835, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:458–59.

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was revealed to him, that no one must see the plates but himself and wife.[88]

13. Circa 1830: Fayette Lapham's interview with Joseph Smith Sr. [1870]

[Joseph Smith Sr.'s] son Joseph, whom he called the illiterate, when about fourteen years of age, happened to be where a man was looking into a dark stone and telling people, therefrom, where to dig for money and other things. Joseph requested the privilege of looking into the stone, which he did by putting his face into the hat where the stone was. It proved to be not the right stone for him; but he could see some things, and, among them, he saw the stone, and where it was, in which he could see whatever he wished to see. Smith claims and believes that there is a stone of this quality, somewhere, for every one. The place where he saw the stone was not far from their house; and, under pretence of digging a well, they found water and the stone at a depth of twenty or twenty-two feet. After this, Joseph spent about two years looking into this stone, telling fortunes, where to find lost things, and where to dig for money and other hidden treasure. About this time he became concerned as to his future state of existence, and was baptized, becoming thus a member of the Baptist Church. Soon after joining the Church, he had a very singular dream; but he did not tell his father of his dream, until about a year afterwards. He then told his father that, in his dream, a very large and tall man appeared to him, dressed in an ancient suit of clothes, and the clothes were bloody. And the man said to him that there was a valuable treasure, buried many years since, and not far from that place; and that he had now arrived for it to be brought to light, for the benefit of the world at large; and, if he would strictly follow his directions, he would direct him to the place where it was deposited, in such a manner that he could obtain it. He then said to him, that he would have to get a certain coverlid, which he described, and an old-fashioned suit of clothes, of the same color, and a napkin to put the treasure in . . . ; and when he had obtained it, he must not lay it down until he placed it in

88. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 2:75–76.

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the napkin. "And," says Smith, "in the course of a year, I succeeded in finding all the articles, as directed; and one dark night Joseph mounted his horse, and, aided by some supernatural light, he succeeded in finding the starting point and the objects in range." Following these, as far as he could with the horse without being directed to stop, he proceeded on foot, keeping the range in view, until he arrived at a large boulder, of several tons weight, when he was immediately impressed with the idea that the object of his pursuit was under that rock. Feeling around the edge, he found that the under side was flat. Being a stout man, and aided by some super-natural power, he succeeded in turning the rock upon its edge, and under it he found a square block of masonry, in the centre of which were the articles referred to by the man seen in the dream. Taking up the first article, he saw the others below; laying down the first, he endeavored to secure the others; but, before he could get hold of them, the one he had taken up slid back to the place he had taken it from, and, to his great surprize and terror, the rock immediately fell back to its former place, nearly crushing him in its descent. His first thought was that he had not properly secured the rock when it was turned up, and accordingly he again tried to lift it, but now in vain; he next tried with the aid of levers, but still without success. While thus engaged, he felt something strike him on the breast, which was repeated the third time, always with increased force, the last such as to lay him upon his back. As he lay there, he looked up and saw the same large man that had appeared in his dream, dressed in the same clothes. He said to him that, when the treasure was deposited there, he was sworn to take charge of and protect that property, until the time should arrive for it to be exhibited to the world of mankind; and, in order to prevent his making a improper disclosure, he was murdered or slain on the spot, and the treasure had been under his charge ever since. He said to him that he had not followed his directions; and, in consequence of laying the article down before putting it in the napkin, he could not have the article now; but that if he would come again, one year from that time, he could have them. The year passed over before Joseph was aware of it, so the time passed by; but he went to the place of deposit, where the same man appeared again, and said he had not been punctual in following his directions, and, in

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consequence, he could not have the article yet. Joseph asked when he could then have them; and the answer was, "Come in one year from this time, and bring your oldest brother with you; then you may have them." During that year, it so happened that his oldest brother died; but, at the end of the year, Joseph repaired to the place again, and was told by the man who still guarded the treasure, that, inasmuch as he could not bring his oldest brother, he could not have the treasure yet; but there would be another person appointed to come with him in one year from that time, when he could have it. Joseph asked, "How shall I know the person?" and was told that the person would be known to him at sight. During that year, Joseph went to the town of Harmony, in the State of 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. While there, he fell in company with a young woman; and, when he first saw her, he was satisfied that she was the person appointed to go with him to get the treasure he had so often failed to secure. To insure success, he courted and married her. When his work was ended at Harmony, he returned with her to his father's, in Wayne-county; and, at the expiration of the year, he procured a horse and light wagon, with a small chest and a pillow-case, and proceeded, punctually, with his wife, to find the hidden treasure. When they had gone as far as they could with the wagon, Joseph took the pillow-case and started for the rock. Upon passing a fence, a host of devils began to screech and to scream, and made all sorts of hideous yells, for the purpose of terrifying him and preventing the attainment of his object; but Joseph was courageous, and pursued his way, in spite of them all.[89]

Appendix D: Joseph Smith's Accounts

1. 1832 history

I fell into transgressions and sinned in many things which brought a wound upon my soul and there were many things which transpired

89. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents,* 1:457–61.

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that cannot be writen and my Fathers family have suffered many persicutions and afflictions and it came to pass when I was seventeen years of age I called again upon the Lord and he shewed unto me a heavenly vision for behold an angel of the Lord came and stood before me and it was by night and he called me by name and he said the Lord had forgiven me my sins and he revealed unto me that in the Town of Manchester Ontario County N.Y. there was plates of gold upon which there was engravings which was engraven by Maroni & his fathers the servants of the living God in ancient days and deposited by the commandments of God and kept by the power thereof and that I should go and get them and he revealed unto me many things concerning the inhabitants of the earth which since have been revealed in commandments & revelations and it was on the 22d day of Sept. AD 1822[90] and thus he appeared unto me three times in one night and once on the next day and then I immediately went to the place and found where the plates was deposited as the angel of the Lord had commanded me and straightway made three attempts to get them and then being excedingly frightened I supposed it had been a dreem of Vision but when I considred I knew that it was not therefore I cried unto the Lord in the agony of my soul why can I not obtain them behold the angel appeared unto me again and said unto me you have not kept the commandments of the Lord which I gave unto you therefore you cannot now obtain them for the time is not yet fulfilled therefore thou wast left unto temptation that thou mightest be made acquainted ~~of~~ with the power ~~of~~ the advisary therefore repent and call on the Lord thou shalt be forgiven and in his own due time thou shalt obtain them for now I had been tempted of the advisary and saught the Plates to obtain riches and kept not the commandment that I should have an eye single to the glory of God therefore I was chastened and saught diligently to obtain the plates and obtained them not untill I was twenty one years of age and in this year I was married to Emma Hale Daughtr of Isaach Hale who lived in Harmony Susquehana County Pensylvania on the

90. The year is incorrectly given as 1822—it was actually 1823, which is consistent with Joseph saying he was seventeen years old.

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18th [of] January AD. 1827, on the 22d day of Sept of this same year I obtained the plates.[91]

2. 1838 history

During the space of time which intervened between the time I had the vision and the year Eighteen hundred and twenty-three, (having been forbidden to join any of the religious sects of the day, and being of very tender years and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends, and to have treated me kindly and if they supposed me to be deluded to have endeavoured in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me) I was left to ~~all kinds of~~ temptations, and mingling <with> ~~all kinds of~~ society I frequently <fell> into many foolish errors and displayed the weakness of youth and the ~~corruption~~ <foibles> of human nature which I am sorry to say led me into divers temptations ~~to the gratification of many appetites~~ offensive in the sight of God. In consequence of these things I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections; when on the evening of the abovementioned twenty first of september, after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him. For I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation as I had previously had one. While I was thus in the act of calling upon God I discovered a light appearing in the room which continued to increase untill the room was lighter than at noonday ~~and~~ <when> immediately a personage <appeared> at my bedside standing in the air for his feet did not touch the floor. He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond any<thing> earthly I had ever seen, nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedin[g]ly white and brilliant, His hands were naked and his arms also a little above the wrists. So also were his feet naked, as were his legs a little above the

91. "A History of the Life of Joseph Smith," in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* 12–13. The section prior to this, which describes the first vision, is in Joseph Smith's handwriting; this section is in the hand of Frederick G. Williams.

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ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open so that I could see into his bosom. Not only was his robe exceedingly white but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him I was afraid, but the fear soon left me. He called me by name and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me and that his name was Nephi <Moroni>. That God had a work for me to do, and that my <name> should be had for good and evil among all nations kindreds and tongues. or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people. He said there was a book deposited written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it as delivered by the Saviour to the ancient inhabitants. Also that there were two stones in silver bows and these (~~put~~ <stones fastened> ~~in~~to a breast plate) ~~which~~ constituted what is called the Urim & Thummin deposited with the plates, and <the possession and use of these stones> ~~that~~ was what constituted seers in ancient or former times and that God <had> prepared them for the purpose of translating the book. . . .

I left the field and went to the place where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited, and owing to the distinctness of the vision which I had had concerning it, I knew the place the instant that I arrived there. Under a ~~stound~~ stone of considerable size, lay the plates deposited in a stone box, This stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all round was covered with earth. Having removed the earth ~~off the edge of the stone,~~ and obtained a lever which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up, I looked in and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummin, and the Breastplate, as stated by the messenger The box in which they lay was formed by laying stones together in some kind of cement, in the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box, and on these

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stones lay the plates and the other things with them. 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, but he told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year from that time, and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so untill the time should come for obtaining the plates. Accordingly as I had been commanded I went at the end of each year, and at each time I found the same messenger there and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our interviews respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days. . . .

At length the time arrived for obtaining the plates, the Urim and Thummin and the breastplate. On the twentysecond day of September, One thousand Eight hundred and twenty-seven, having went as usual at the end of another year to the place where they were deposited, the same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me with this charge that I should be responsible for them. That if I should let them go carelessly or <through> any neglect of mine I should be cut off, but if I would use all my endeavours to preserve them untill <he> (the messenger) ~~called~~ should call for them, they should be protected.[92]

92. Joseph Smith, "History of the Church," vol. A–1, in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* 232–34, 237–39. This excerpt is mostly in the hand of James Mulholland.