



1-31-2007

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### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Morris, Larry E. (2007) "The Conversion of Oliver Cowdery," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 16 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol16/iss1/3>

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**Title** The Conversion of Oliver Cowdery

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**Reference** *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16/1 (2007): 4-17, 81-83.

**ISSN** 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

**Abstract** Shortly after arriving in New York and beginning employment as a schoolteacher in 1828, Oliver Cowdery first learned about Joseph Smith and the gold plates through rumors and gossip. Through the sincere investigations of Oliver and his newfound friend, David Whitmer, and his time as a boarder with the Joseph Smith family in Palmyra, Oliver continued to learn about Joseph and the plates. He received a personal witness and traveled with Samuel Smith to visit Joseph in Harmony. Several events involving Martin Harris, David Whitmer, Joseph Knight Sr., and the Smith family all played a role in Oliver's conversion, and on April 7, Joseph and Oliver began the translation of the Book of Mormon.





THE  
CONVERSION  
OF  
*Oliver Cowdery*



## Larry E. Morris



**D**uring the monumental—and exact—year that began on April 7, 1829, when Joseph Smith began dictating the inspired text of the Book of Mormon, and ended on April 6, 1830, when the Church of Christ was organized, no one was more involved in the key events of the restoration than Oliver Cowdery. He was present for the translation of the Book of Mormon—accomplished in an amazing ten weeks through the gift and power of God; he was with Joseph when John the Baptist and later Peter, James, and John appeared as resurrected personages and restored the priesthood through the literal laying on of hands (with Oliver becoming the first person baptized in this dispensation); and he was one of three witnesses called to see the angel and the plates and to testify of the truth prepared the printer's manuscript assisted with the printing at a ally not present. Clearly, it Oliver the cofounder of of the book. Not only that, but he also of the Book of Mormon and time when Joseph was gener- is no exaggeration to call Mormonism.



What makes Oliver's story even more fascinating is that he gained a testimony of the truthfulness of the work even before meeting Joseph Smith, while David Whitmer and Martin Harris were also being prepared to testify of the Book of Mormon. This occurred during a crucial time for the Joseph Smith Sr. family, when, in the midst of divine manifestations, they were also bombarded by earthly pressures that included the death of an infant grandchild, the loss of an invaluable document, serious illness, a lawsuit brought by a former friend, rumormongering among their neighbors, and eviction from their

home because of financial hardship. Joseph Sr.'s and Lucy's faithfulness during these trials—and their respective testimonies of their son's prophetic calling—had a profound effect on Oliver, prompting him to pray and decide for himself what he thought about the story of the gold Bible. The powerful confirmation that resulted convinced him the restoration was genuine and that he should be a part of it. By the time he met Joseph Smith—about six months after meeting Joseph's parents—Oliver Cowdery was thus prepared to start immediately on the translation. And that is precisely what happened.



## Oliver's Arrival from Vermont

Sometime in the mid-1820s, young Oliver Cowdery left his native state of Vermont and joined a constant stream of immigrants heading west to upstate New York. Lucy Cowdery Young, Oliver's half sister, said he made the move when he was twenty years old, which would mean in 1826 or 1827, since Oliver was born October 3, 1806. Western New York seemed like the natural place to go because Oliver's older brother Warren, as well as other brothers and sisters, had already relocated to the Empire State.<sup>1</sup>

Two contemporary records indicate that Oliver may have lived near Newark (also called Arcadia) or Lyons, about seven and thirteen miles east of Palmyra, respectively. The *Lyons Advertiser* newspaper offers the first-known New York record mentioning Oliver by name. "List of letters remaining in the Post Office at Newark, Oct. 1st, 1827," the notice read, and the list of fifty-nine names that followed included both Oliver and his father, William.<sup>2</sup> The list, which ran for four consecutive weekly issues, indicates that *someone* thought the Cowderys were in the area; still, the exact whereabouts of both Oliver and his father remain a mystery.<sup>3</sup> Oliver was definitely in the vicinity by the next summer, however, because he and his brother Lyman signed a twenty-two dollar note to a Lyons grocer by the name of David Adams on August 11, 1828.<sup>4</sup>

## The Loss of the 116 Pages

The summer of 1828 had been a traumatic one for the Smith family. On June 15, Joseph and Emma, then living in Harmony, Pennsylvania, near Emma's parents, lost their firstborn child, a son named Alvin, who died shortly after his birth. For two weeks, Joseph nursed Emma, who seemed "for some time," wrote Lucy, "more like sinking with her infant into the mansion of the dead, than remaining with her husband among the living." With Emma slowly recovering, Joseph traveled to the Smith farm in Manchester, New York, only to discover that Martin Harris had lost the 116 transcribed pages of the Book of Mormon. The entire family was plunged into despair, and when Joseph departed for Harmony, Lucy wrote, "We parted with heavy hearts, for it now appeared that all which we had so fondly anticipated, and which had been the source

of so much secret gratification, had in a moment fled, and fled for ever."<sup>5</sup>

About two months later, apparently in late August or early September, Joseph Sr. and Lucy traveled to Harmony because they had heard nothing from Joseph and were worried about him. To their surprise, he met them "with a countenance blazing with delight."<sup>6</sup> Although the plates and the Urim and Thummim had been taken from Joseph, they had now been restored because of his penitence. He had also received a revelation (now section 3 of the Doctrine and Covenants) in which the Lord told Joseph that he was "still chosen" and "again called to the work" (v. 10). Furthermore, reported Joseph, "the angel said that the Lord would send me a scribe, and I trust his promise will be verified."<sup>7</sup>

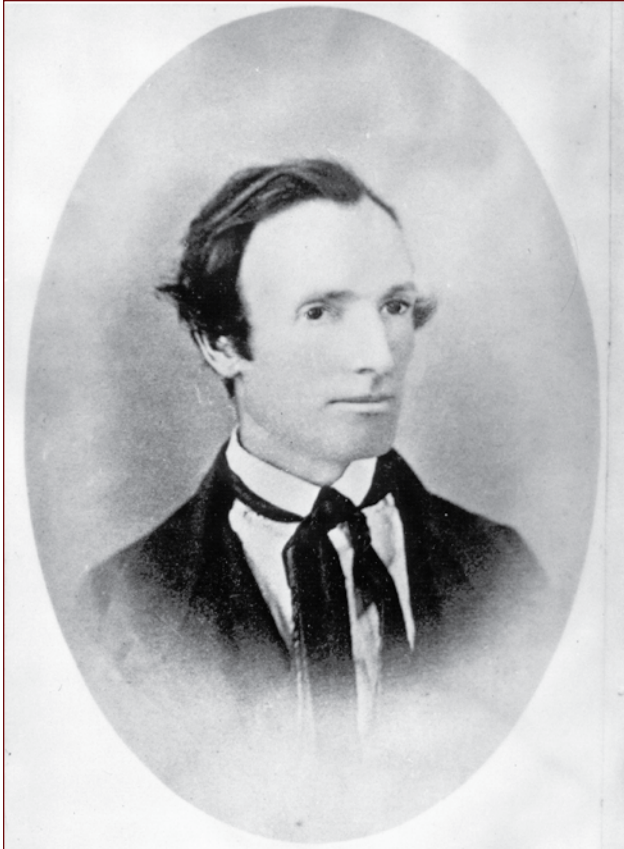
## Oliver the Schoolteacher

Joseph Sr. and Lucy arrived back in Manchester and found their children Sophronia and Samuel "lying at the point of Death,"<sup>8</sup> so sick that Hyrum (now married) "had left his own house, and quit- ted business, in order to take care of them during our absence."<sup>9</sup> Palmyra physician Gain C. Robinson visited the Smiths on September 11 and charged Joseph Sr. for medicine given to "Boy Harrison" (Samuel).<sup>10</sup> Lucy added that Sophronia "lay very sick for 2 months in which time she was dreadfully salivated by the Dr. who attended her."<sup>11</sup>

About this same time, the elder Joseph and Lucy met Oliver Cowdery for the first time. His brother Lyman had applied to teach school in the Manchester district and had spoken first with twenty-eight-year-old Hyrum, a trustee of the district, who called a meeting of the other trustees. They agreed to employ Lyman and settled on the terms. But, as Lucy later recalled, "the next day [Lyman] brought his brother Oliver and requested them to receive him in the place of himself." Whether because of coincidence or providence, Lyman Cowdery was unable to fulfill his obligation; Lucy remembered that "business had arisen" that would oblige him to disappoint them.<sup>12</sup> Whatever this unnamed business was, it set Oliver Cowdery's life on a startling new course.

Lyman assured the trustees that Oliver, who had just turned twenty-two, could do the job. Presumably, the trustees interviewed Oliver, discover-





Oliver Cowdery. Photograph, c. 1848, C. W. Carter Collection.

Page 4: Oliver Cowdery. Daguerreotype Courtesy Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Page 5: *Joseph Smith Baptizes Oliver Cowdery*, by Del Parson. © 1996 IRI.

ing for themselves that he “had acquired a good common school education.”<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the trustees were impressed by his serious manner; they likely found him rather articulate for a young man. Whatever the exact details, “all parties were satisfied,” and Oliver was given the assignment.<sup>14</sup>

Like Oliver’s home state of Vermont, New York had made excellent provisions for education. By 1820, New York’s schools were said to be among the best in the nation.<sup>15</sup> Oliver labored in New York’s Joint District 11, teaching in a small frame schoolhouse about a mile south of the Smith home on Stafford Road. During his five-month, six-day tenure—which began late in October—he taught a total of 107 “scholars” (although the attendance on any given day was probably a fraction of that). Sixty-one of them, including Katharine, Don Carlos, and Lucy Smith, were older than five years old and younger than sixteen. Oliver taught spelling, arith-

metic, reading, grammar, and geography, and he frequently asked his students to read from the New Testament.<sup>16</sup> His reputation was good: one student remembered him as “a man of good character”;<sup>17</sup> another called him “a peaceable fellow.”<sup>18</sup>

## Oliver and David Whitmer Investigate the Gold Bible

Oliver had barely begun teaching when he started to hear rumors about Joseph Smith and the gold plates. Neighbors had known about the “gold Bible” for more than a year, and some of them had ransacked a Smith shed in search of the plates in September 1827, not long after Joseph obtained them. Oliver quite possibly heard a variety of tales about the plates from both his students and their parents. If later affidavits are any indication, hearsay and gossip were the order of the day. All kinds of people in the area claimed some kind of knowledge of the gold book, but very few of them had talked directly to young Joseph.<sup>19</sup>

About this same time—possibly in November 1828—twenty-three-year-old David Whitmer made a business trip from his home in Fayette Township to Palmyra (thirty miles away), a bustling borough of “very considerable business” according to a contemporary description. Strategically situated along the Erie Canal—which had been completed just three years earlier—Palmyra boasted an academy, two or three schools, thirteen dry good stores, three inns, three druggist shops, and two tanneries, “one of which is so extensive as to employ 40 hands.” Well over one thousand people lived in Palmyra, taking advantage of a post office, a printing business, several “mechanical establishments,” a number of mills, and Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches.<sup>20</sup>

David later recalled that while in Palmyra, he “stopped with one Oliver Cowdery.” The details of how the two young men became acquainted are unknown, but they quickly struck up a friendship, taking a mutual interest in the stories being told about Joseph Smith. “A great many people in the neighborhood were talking about the finding of certain gold plates by one Joseph Smith, jr.,” David recorded. “Cowdery and I, as well as others, talked about the [plates], but at the time I paid but little attention to it, supposing it to be only the idle gossip of the neighborhood.” David’s reminiscences of



more than five decades later indicate that he visited Palmyra more than once (or remained there for some time) and had multiple conversations with Oliver, who “said he was acquainted with the Smith family, and he believed there must be some truth in the story of the plates, and that he intended to investigate the matter.”<sup>21</sup>

Neither David nor Oliver ever explained why they took a sincere interest in Joseph Smith while so many in the area viewed him cynically. (It is worth noting, however, that several of the neighbors, such as those who had ransacked the Smith shed, were convinced that Joseph had plates, but their interest was monetary, not religious.) From the start, David and Oliver seemed to have been taken with the religious implications of a gold Bible rather than thoughts of worldly treasure, a motivation that several neighbors freely acknowledged. However, the family backgrounds of both the Whitmers and the Cowderys likely influenced this course of events.

David’s father, Peter Whitmer Sr., faithfully attended the German Reformed church in West Fayette, New York, where his sons Christian, Jacob, and John were all confirmed. Based on interviews with the David Whitmer family in 1885, a reporter characterized Peter as “a hard-working, God-fearing man, a strict Presbyterian [who] brought his children up with rigid sectarian discipline.”<sup>22</sup> Even minister Diedrich Willers, who believed Joseph Smith eventually duped the Whitmers, depicted Peter as “a quiet, unpretending, and apparently honest, candid, and simple-minded man.”<sup>23</sup> Oliver likewise grew up in a religious environment. His grandfather William Cowdery Sr., who was still alive when Oliver was a boy, served as a deacon in the Congregational Church, preaching sermons after the death of the minister.<sup>24</sup> And Oliver’s stepmother, Keziah Pearce Austin Cowdery, was also a member of the Congregational Church who took her faith seriously.<sup>25</sup> Their upbringings may well have prepared both David and Oliver to focus on “Bible” rather than “gold” when they first heard of Joseph and the plates.

Although the exact sequence of events is not known, Oliver soon asked Joseph Smith Sr. to take him as a boarder “at least for a little while” until he became acquainted with other patrons in the district.<sup>26</sup> Joseph Sr. agreed, and Oliver took up residence with Joseph and Lucy and their children Samuel (known as “Sam” or “Harrison”—his

middle name), 20; William (“Bill”), 17; Katharine, 15; Don Carlos (“Carlos”), 12; and Lucy, 7. Sophronia, 25, and her husband, Calvin Stoddard, may have also been living with the family at this time. Samuel and Sophronia were most likely still recovering from their illnesses when Oliver moved in. The family lived in comfortable quarters in the two-story frame home begun by Alvin in 1823 and completed about two years after his death (he had died November 19, 1823).

Perhaps prompted by his discussions with David Whitmer, Oliver asked Joseph Sr. about the plates. Lucy recalled that Oliver asked several times, “but he did not succeed in eliciting any information from him.”<sup>27</sup> Joseph Sr. was likely reluctant to discuss his son’s experiences because of the hostility of several of the neighbors—and the frenzy shown by some of them to steal the plates. About this same time, David Whitmer was conducting his own investigation and may have even talked to some of the same neighbors. “I had conversations with several young men who said that Joseph Smith had certainly gold plates,” David said, “and that before he attained them he had promised to share with them, but had not done so, and they were very much incensed with him.”<sup>28</sup>

Whether on horseback or on foot, the inquisitive David Whitmer continued to travel through the area, interrogating one person after another until he learned that “one night during the year 1827, Joseph Smith, jr., had a vision, and an angel of God appeared to him and told him where certain plates were to be found and pointed out the spot to him, and that shortly afterward he went to that place and found the plates which were still in his possession.” David was impressed because “these parties were so positive in their statements”—like Oliver, he began to feel there must be “some foundation for the stories.” David pondered what he had heard “for a long time,” then spoke again with Oliver, and the two of them agreed to stay in contact and share any information they obtained about the gold plates.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, Oliver struggled to get by financially. A distinct disadvantage of teaching school was that schoolmasters had to wait until the end of the term to be paid, making it understandably difficult for them to pay debts in the interim. In January 1829 David Adams filed a complaint before a justice of the peace in Lyons for the debt that Lyman and Oliver owed him. After being served a summons,







Oliver Cowdery lived in this frame house on the Smith family farm in Manchester, New York, while he was boarding with the Smiths as a schoolteacher. Courtesy IRI.

Lyman sent a representative to admit owing money on the note. Justice of the Peace Hugh Jameson rendered judgment against Lyman and Oliver, finding them liable for the balance of \$17.65 owed on the \$22.00 note (plus court costs of \$1.76, for a total of \$19.41).<sup>30</sup> In the fragile economy of the New York frontier—where actual currency could be quite hard to come by—such a situation was not uncommon.

### “The Field Is White Already to Harvest”

About the same time these legal proceedings were taking place, Joseph Sr. and Samuel made a trip to Harmony to visit Joseph and Emma. The details of the journey are not known, but they presumably traveled most of the 130 miles on foot, enduring harsh conditions during midwinter in upstate New York. “In January [Joseph Sr.] and Samuel [Smith] Came from Manchester to my

house when I was Buisey a Drawing Lumber,” wrote family friend Joseph Knight Sr., who lived in Colesville, about twenty-two miles from Harmony. “I told him they had traveled far enough I would go with my sley and take them Down [to Harmony] to morrow[.] I went Down and found them well and the[y] were glad to see us[.] we conversed about many things. in the morning I gave the old man a half a Dollar and Joseph a little money to Buoy paper to translate[,] I having But little with me. The old gentleman told me to Come and see him once in a while as I Could[.]”<sup>31</sup>

Samuel and his father must have relished riding in a sleigh after their exhausting trek from Manchester. Joseph Knight Sr.—who had been one of the first outside the Smith family to believe Joseph’s account of the plates and who just a month or two earlier had given Joseph and Emma some provisions, a pair of shoes, and three dollars—had once again shown what a valuable friend he was.







Aerial view of Hale and Smith homesteads. Looking toward the west, one can see the Harmony Church history sites as they appear today. From left to right: (1) Susquehanna River winding past the homesteads; (2) area near where the Aaronic Priesthood was restored; (3) present-day railroad tracks separating the river from the Smith and Hale homesteads; (4) Hale homestead; (5) site of the Smith home; (6) site of Aaronic Priesthood Restoration Monument; (7) State Highway 171 running between the Smith and Hale homesteads; (8) the McKune Cemetery and grave sites of Isaac Hale and some other family members. Courtesy IRI.

While Joseph Sr. and Samuel were staying in Harmony, the Prophet received a revelation directed to his father, one that is particularly beloved by missionaries—Doctrine and Covenants section 4. “Now behold,” it begins, “a marvelous work is about to come forth among the children of men. Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day” (D&C 4:1–2).

Is it possible that this revelation motivated Joseph Sr. to finally tell Oliver Cowdery the details about the plates and the visits of Moroni? Although the participants never discussed this issue, the timing and wording of the revelation are both quite consistent with such a scenario. First, Joseph Sr. and Samuel’s visit to Harmony apparently took place in late January and early February 1829. As noted

above, Joseph Knight said the Smiths arrived at his home in January. Joseph Smith, on the other hand, wrote that “in the month of February Eighteen hundred and twenty nine my father came to visit us at which time I received the following revelation for him.”<sup>32</sup> If Joseph Sr. confided in Oliver when he and Samuel returned to Manchester, perhaps in mid- or late February, that time frame would fit quite well with Lucy’s observation that Oliver did not succeed in obtaining information from her husband “for a long time”<sup>33</sup> and that Oliver at last “gained my husband’s confidence, so far as to obtain a sketch of the facts relative to the plates.”<sup>34</sup>

As for the wording of the revelation, consider this passage: “Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work; For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in



store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul” (D&C 4:3–4). Although Joseph Sr. had previously told neighbor Willard Chase (in June 1827) of his son’s experiences,<sup>35</sup> he appears to have done so in a rather matter-of-fact way, not as one “called to the work.” This revelation given specifically to him, however, could certainly be interpreted as admonishing him to bear serious testimony of the “marvelous work,” and who was a more likely recipient of that testimony than Oliver?

### Oliver Seeks a Personal Witness

Lucy wrote that not long after obtaining this “sketch of facts,”<sup>36</sup> Oliver returned from school one day “in quite a lively mood.”<sup>37</sup> As soon as he was able to talk to Joseph Sr., he said he had been in a “deep study all day and it had been put into his heart that he would have the [privilege] of writing for Joseph.” The next day was memorable because of a tremendous thunderstorm. “The rain fell in torrents,” Lucy said, making it “almost impossible to travel the road between the school house and our place.”<sup>38</sup> The weather was so bad that Lucy assumed Oliver might stop with a neighbor who lived close to the school and spend the night there. But Oliver was determined to get back to the Smith home—he likely arrived at their door shivering from the chill and drenched with rain. He had barely entered when he made an announcement: “I have now resolved what I will do[,] for the thing which I told you seems working in my very bones insomuch that I cannot for a moment get rid of it.”<sup>39</sup> He explained that as soon as the school term ended in March, he intended to travel to Pennsylvania to talk to Joseph Jr. He would go with Samuel, who was already planning another trip to Harmony. “I have made it a subject of prayer,” Oliver added, “and I firmly believe that it is the will of the Lord that I should go. If there is a work for me to do in this thing, I am determined to attend to it.”<sup>40</sup>

Along with telling the Smith family of his decision, Oliver also informed his new friend David Whitmer, apparently when the two saw each other in Palmyra. “Cowdery told me he was going to Harmony, Pa.—whither Joseph Smith had gone with the plates on account of persecutions of his neighbors—and see him about the matter,” David wrote.<sup>41</sup>

Joseph and Lucy had advised Oliver to continue to seek his own personal witness of the truth of

Joseph Jr.’s work. Oliver did just that, and although he did not describe it himself, he clearly experienced a spiritual epiphany that powerfully convinced him of the rightness of his course. A revelation received in April 1829 specifically discussed this conversion experience: “Verily, verily, I say unto you [Oliver], if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things. Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God? And now, behold, you have received a witness; for if I have told you things which no man knoweth have you not received a witness?”<sup>42</sup>

The Prophet Joseph explained that “he [Oliver Cowdery] stated to me that after he had gone to my father’s to board, and after the family communicated to him concerning my having got the plates, that one night after he had retired to bed, he called upon the Lord to know if these things were so, and that the Lord had manifested to him that they were true, but that he had kept the circumstance entirely secret, and had mentioned it to no being, so that after this revelation having been given, he knew that the work was true, because that no mortal being living knew of the thing alluded <to> in the revelation but God and himself.”<sup>43</sup>

In his 1832 history, Joseph described Oliver’s conversion in even more concrete terms, recording that the “Lord appeared unto a young man by the name of Oliver Cowdery and shewed unto him the plates in a vision and also the truth of the work and what the Lord was about to do through me his unworthy servant[;] therefore he was desirous to come and write for me to translate.”<sup>44</sup> So it was not at all surprising that “from this time,” as Lucy succinctly wrote, “Oliver was so entirely absorbed in the subject of the record that it seemed impossible for him to think or converse about anything else.”<sup>45</sup>

### Losing the Frame Home

Once again, however, the temporal world encroached on the spiritual. The Smith family found themselves about to be evicted from the frame home they had occupied for more than three years, the home Alvin had begun to construct with the hope of providing a “nice pleasant room for father and mother to sit in,”





with “everything arranged for their comfort.”<sup>46</sup> Although Joseph Sr. and Lucy had been unable to pay their rent late in 1825—and had been threatened with eviction—a Quaker named Lemuel Durfee had purchased the property and allowed the Smiths to stay in exchange for Samuel’s labor. That arrangement ended early in 1829, however, when Durfee’s daughter and her husband were scheduled to move into the house. Lucy wrote: “We now felt more keenly than ever the injustice of the measure which had placed a landlord over us on our own premises, and who was about to eject us from them.”<sup>47</sup>

The family now faced the dreary prospect of returning to the cramped log cabin they had occupied before the frame home was completed. A Palmyra resident described the cabin as a “small, one-story, smoky log-house,” explaining that it was “divided into two rooms, on the ground-floor, and had a low garret, in two apartments,” and that a bedroom wing constructed of sawed logs was later added.<sup>48</sup> The cabin, barely capable of housing one family, was about to house two—Joseph and Lucy

and their five children, as well as Hyrum and his wife, Jerusha, and their eighteen-month-old daughter, Lovina, with another child just months away. (Hyrum and Jerusha had lived in the cabin since their marriage in November of 1826.)

“In consequence of these things,” Lucy explained to Oliver, who had spent much, if not all, of the school term with the Smiths, “we cannot make you comfortable any longer, and you will be under the necessity of taking boarding somewhere else.”

“Mother,” said the intent young man, apparently unaware he was speaking to a blood relative of his own mother, Rebecca Fuller, and showing how the Smiths’ faithfulness had impacted him, “let me stay with you, for I can live in any log hut where you and father live, but I cannot leave you, so do not mention it.” And so, on the brink of the key event of the restoration, ten Smiths and one surrogate Smith crowded into the humble log cabin, giving up convenience, as Lucy said, “for the sake of Christ and salvation.”<sup>49</sup>



Shortly before Oliver left for Pennsylvania, the Smith family was forced to move back into the log home on their family farm. This replica of the log home stands on the site today. Courtesy IRI.



## Lucy Harris's Lawsuit

Within weeks—or possibly even days—of the move, a former friend compounded the family's tribulation. According to Lucy, Martin Harris's wife (also named Lucy) “undertook to prove, that Joseph never had the Record which he professed to have, and that he pretended to have in his possession certain gold plates, for the express purpose of obtaining money.” Although Martin's wife had originally offered to help finance the work of translation, she had quickly grown hostile to her husband's involvement. Now she stepped up her opposition after learning that Martin had made plans to visit Joseph and Emma in Harmony. Encouraged by Samuel's news of Joseph's success, Martin had a “great desire to go down to Pennsylvania to see how [Joseph and Emma] were prospering.” (Samuel may have explained that Joseph Knight was helping Joseph and that Samuel and Emma had both acted as scribe for Joseph.) Determined to prevent Martin from going, Lucy Harris “mounted her horse, flew from house to house through the neighbourhood, like a dark spirit, . . . stirring up every malicious feeling which would tend to serve her wicked purpose.”<sup>50</sup>

The upshot of all this was that Lucy Harris had a complaint filed against Joseph Jr. before a magistrate in Lyons.<sup>51</sup> A hearing was scheduled, and Oliver's brother Lyman, a lawyer who possibly held a position in the county, was called on to assist in Joseph's arrest if he were found guilty. Oliver would have been well aware of this sequence of events, but whether he attended the hearing—or whether he talked to Lyman about the case—is unknown. The historical record is also silent on whether Oliver met Martin Harris at this time.

On the day of the hearing, Lucy Smith learned that several neighbors had departed for Lyons to testify against Joseph. She was worrying about the outcome when Hyrum came into the room of the cabin where she was sitting. She asked him what could be done.

“Why, mother,” he said, “we can do nothing, except to look to the Lord; in him is all help and strength; he can deliver from every trouble.”<sup>52</sup>

Comforted by Hyrum's faith, Lucy found a secluded spot and poured out her “whole soul in entreaties to God.” A powerful feeling of peace fell upon her, and she heard a voice say, “not one hair

of his head shall be harmed.”<sup>53</sup> She returned to the cabin and tried to read but found herself overcome with emotion.

When Hyrum's wife, Jersuha, came into the room, she asked what was the matter. “I told her, that I had never felt so happy before in my life,” wrote Lucy, “that my heart was so light, and my mind so completely at rest, that it did not appear possible to me that I should ever have any more trouble while I should exist.”<sup>54</sup>

That evening the Smiths heard what had happened at the hearing. Three witnesses (not identified by Lucy) had testified: the first reported hearing Joseph say that the box that supposedly used to hold the plates had held nothing but sand; the second claimed Joseph had said the box contained lead; the third “declared, that he once inquired of Joseph Smith what he had in that box, and Joseph Smith told him that there was nothing at all in the box, saying, that he had made fools of the whole of them, and all he wanted was, to get Martin Harris's money away from him.”<sup>55</sup>

Not surprisingly the next witness was Lucy Harris herself, who proclaimed her belief that Joseph was out to defraud her husband and had never possessed any gold plates. Before hearing any other witnesses, the magistrate then called Martin Harris to the stand. “I can swear,” Martin reportedly said, “that Joseph Smith never has got one dollar from me by persuasion since God made me. I did once, of my own free will and accord, put fifty dollars into his hands, . . . and I can tell you, furthermore, that I have never seen, in Joseph Smith, a disposition to take any man's money without giving him a reasonable compensation for the same in return. And as to the plates which he professes to have, gentlemen, if you do not believe it, but continue to resist the truth, it will one day be the means of damning your souls.”

According to the Smiths' informant, the magistrate then “told them they need not call any more witnesses, but ordered them to bring him what had been written of the testimony already given. This he tore in pieces before their eyes, and told them to go home about their business, and trouble him no more with such ridiculous folly.”<sup>56</sup>

Nor did Lucy Harris succeed in keeping her husband away from Joseph Smith. Martin and a man by the name of Rogers promptly left for Harmony. Rogers had heard of the plates and wanted to





see if Joseph really had them. Only later did Martin discover that Rogers had pledged to give Lucy Harris \$100 if he verified that the plates were real.<sup>57</sup>

News of the magistrate's reaction brought the peace Lucy Smith had confidently expected. Still, the family continued to battle illness, just as they had done most of the fall. On March 11 and again two weeks later on March 25, Dr. Robinson stopped at the log home to check on Jerusha—and possibly other sick family members—and leave medicine.<sup>58</sup>

### Oliver and Samuel Depart for Harmony

A few days later, in what had turned out to be a momentous few months, the school term ended and Oliver received his pay of \$65.50, possibly in a lump sum.<sup>59</sup> On Tuesday, March 31, Oliver and Samuel apparently traveled to Lyons, where Oliver made a thirteen dollar payment on the debt to David Adams. The next day, April 1, Oliver and Samuel departed for Harmony.<sup>60</sup>

Lucy remembered that “the weather, for some time previous, had been very wet and disagreeable—raining, freezing, and thawing alternately, which had rendered the roads almost impassable, particularly in the middle of the day.”<sup>61</sup> Traveling on foot, Oliver and Samuel trudged through the mud, heading east. The most prominent road in the area was the Seneca Turnpike, a sixty-four-foot-wide thoroughfare paved with logs and gravel, running south of the Erie Canal but north of the Finger Lakes, accessing Canandaigua on the west and Utica on the east. Mile markers helped travelers chart their progress. Tolls were collected every ten miles—a man on horseback might be charged four cents; a teamster with four horses and a wagon, eighteen and a half cents. Cart, wagon, and stagecoach traffic was interspersed by the sound and smell of livestock—with droves of cattle, hogs, and even turkeys being driven to market.<sup>62</sup>

When they reached the town of Waterloo, Oliver and Samuel likely asked directions to the Peter Whitmer farm, which lay three miles south and one mile west, across the Seneca River and between two of the Finger Lakes—Seneca and Cayuga. Making their way through hills and vales, through fertile farmland spotted with clumps of forest, the two young men reached the one-hundred-acre Whitmer

farm, possibly passing through a grove that would take on sacred significance three months in the future.

Oliver and Samuel must have been cold and tired and hungry by the time they arrived at the twenty-by-thirty-foot, one-and-a-half story log home where David, the fourth of eight children, lived with his parents, Peter and Mary Musselman Whitmer, both in their fifties. “[Oliver] did go [to Harmony],” David later wrote, “and on his way stopped at my father’s house and told me that as soon as he found out anything either truth and untruth he would let me know.”<sup>63</sup> The Whitmers were respected members of the Fayette Township, with Peter serving as a school trustee and oldest son Christian as a constable. Subsequent events indicate that Oliver and Samuel were welcomed into the home, where they may have told what they knew about the ancient record while savoring a warm meal. They were likely introduced to three or four of David’s brothers and sisters, including his youngest sister, fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Ann, the young woman Oliver Cowdery would marry almost four years later.<sup>64</sup>

Continuing their journey despite the driving wind and rain, Oliver and Samuel trekked on, averaging an impressive twenty to twenty-five miles a day for five days, despite the mud and muck. A contemporary traveler recalled that progress during rainstorms “was neither pleasant nor fast; for the mud in some places reached nearly to [my horse’s] knees, and the small streamlets, which I was obliged to cross, were swelled to the size of turbid, angry brooks.”<sup>65</sup> The two possibly stopped at inns the second and third nights, boarding with a throng of fellow travelers—some arriving after midnight and others departing before dawn. A typical course would have taken them through the pleasant hills of Ithaca and past “two of the prettiest Falls imaginable,”<sup>66</sup> then east-southeast toward Chenango and Broome Counties. Lucy recalled that both of them “suffered much” from the miserable weather and from fatigue, which in Samuel’s case was complicated by his lingering illness. Oliver also endured a frostbitten toe.<sup>67</sup>

It is possible that the two of them stopped at Joseph Knight Sr.’s farm in Colesville, just as Joseph Sr. and Samuel had done two months earlier. Knight, who had befriended Joseph Smith in 1826, owned a 142-acre farm with “two dwelling

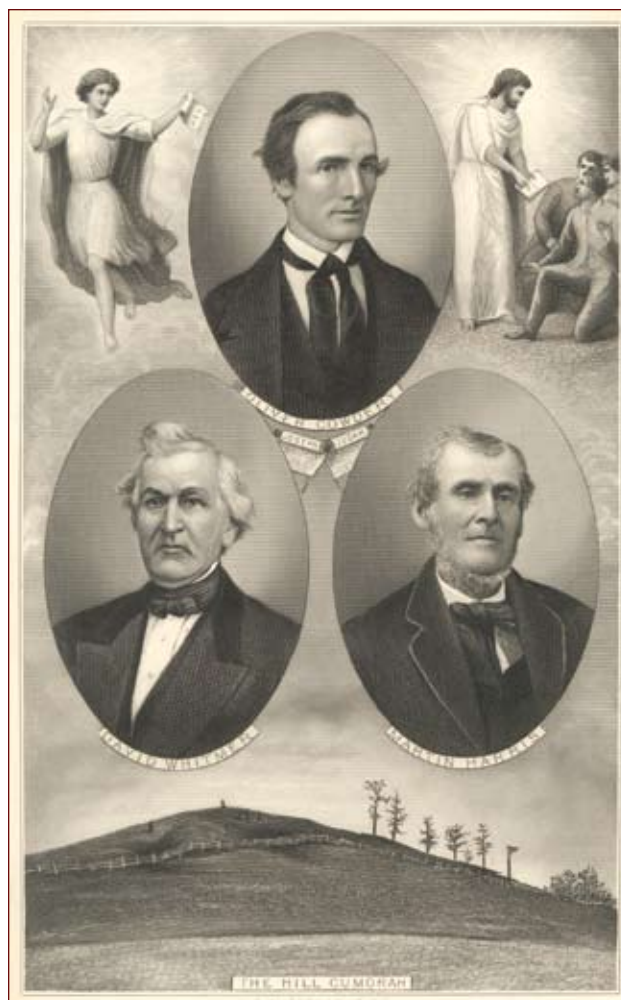


houses, a good barn, and a fine orchard,”<sup>68</sup> and he also operated a gristmill. Joseph Knight had just made a visit to Harmony himself, going “the last of March.” He may have given Oliver and Samuel the same report he later recorded in his own hand: “We [Knight and his wife, Polly] went Down and found [Joseph and Emma] well and ware glad to see us Joseph talked with us about his translating and some revelations he had Received.”<sup>69</sup>

## A Warning and a Promise to Martin Harris

One of the revelations mentioned by Joseph Knight concerned Martin Harris, who, like Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, was experiencing events that would prepare him to serve as a special witness of the Book of Mormon. Martin and his associate Rogers had visited Joseph shortly before the Knights did. Harris and Rogers asked to see the plates, and, as Martin later put it, Rogers “had Whet his [knife] to cut the covering of the Plates.”<sup>70</sup> But they were not allowed to see the plates—nor did Rogers have opportunity to view them surreptitiously. Instead Martin, who eight months earlier had “set at naught the counsels of God” (D&C 3:13) and had lost the 116 pages, now asked Joseph to inquire of the Lord. The revelation that followed (now D&C 5) warned Martin to humble himself and then spoke of “the testimony of three of my servants, whom I shall call and ordain, unto whom I will show these things [the plates], and they shall go forth with my words that are given through you.” In addition, Martin was promised that if he were humble, the Lord would “grant unto him a view of the things which he desires to see.”<sup>71</sup>

Harris and Rogers then headed north by stage-coach. Apparently encouraged by the revelation, Martin told his fellow passengers that Joseph Smith “had found a gold bible & stone in which he looked & was thereby enabled to translate the very ancient chara[c]ters.” Saying he had just visited Joseph, Martin explained that Joseph “was poor & was living in a house which had only one room” and that “Smith had a sheet put up in one corner & went behind it from observation when he was writing the bible.” Martin added that Joseph “would not let him see the bible but let him feel of it when it was covered up.”<sup>72</sup>



This frontispiece for the October 1883 *Contributor* shows the Three Witnesses over an engraving of the Hill Cumorah. This was the first LDS publication of Oliver’s portrait. Courtesy Edward L. Hart.

Along with Martin and Rogers, the coach likely carried four or five others, along with a load of mail. Strong leather springs offered reasonable comfort, but passengers were still “kept in constant motion,” as one traveler recalled, “jolting and bumping about in high style, all taking it in good humour, and enjoying our laugh in turn, as each came in contact with his neighbour’s head.”<sup>73</sup> In the midst of this constant jostling, at least one passenger listened attentively as Martin Harris—one of the first missionaries of the Book of Mormon—told of the gold Bible. “Smith read to him a good deal of the bible & he repeated to those in the Stage verse after verse of what Smith had read to him.”<sup>74</sup>



## The Translation Begins

As the driver maneuvered the team of horses up and down hills and around bends, the northbound stagecoach, winding its way from Bainbridge to Geneva, had possibly crossed paths with southbound Oliver and Samuel. By Sunday, April 5, the two of them neared the end of their exhausting journey, finally crossing the border into Pennsylvania. Just as the sun was setting, they made their way through the wooded hills near the Susquehanna River and approached the home where Joseph and Emma lived.<sup>75</sup>

Lucy recalled that “Joseph called upon the Lord, three days prior to the arrival of Samuel and Oliver, to send him a scribe, according to the promise of the angel; and he was informed that the same should be forthcoming in a few days. Accordingly, when Mr. Cowdery told him the business that he had come upon, Joseph was not at all surprised.”

After meeting each other, Joseph and Oliver “sat down and conversed together till late. During the evening, Joseph told Oliver his history, as far as was necessary for his present information, in the things which mostly concerned him.”<sup>76</sup>

Oliver wrote that he and Joseph took care of temporal business on Monday, April 6. That business was an agreement between Joseph and his father-in-law, Isaac Hale, in which Hale agreed to sell Joseph a thirteen-acre parcel of land that included a house and a barn. The price was \$200, and Joseph made a down payment of \$64; Oliver and Samuel were witnesses.<sup>77</sup> (It is unknown if Oliver contributed all or part of what remained from his teaching salary to this down payment.)

In a brief six-month period, Oliver Cowdery had met the Smith family, come to know them well and shared in their hardships, investigated the story of the gold Bible and deliberated it, and sought and received his own witness of the truthfulness of




The Susquehanna River, near the home where Joseph and Emma lived while the plates were being translated. This river provided the location for several of the events in early Church history, including the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood to Joseph and Oliver on May 15, 1829. Courtesy IRI.





After a year of preparation, Oliver was prepared to begin assisting with the translation of the Book of Mormon only two days after meeting the Prophet Joseph Smith. *Oliver Writing with a Feather Pen*. © 1984 Robert Barrett.

the work. Less than two days after meeting Joseph Smith for the first time, he “commenced to write the book of Mormon.” Considering what had led to this moment, it comes as no surprise that Oliver added: “These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the *inspiration*

of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated, with the *Urim* and *Thummim*, or, as the Nephites [would] have said, ‘Interpreters,’ the history, or record, called “The book of Mormon.””<sup>78</sup> 





## ENDNOTES

### The Conversion of Oliver Cowdery

Larry E. Morris

Thanks to the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History for funding the research associated with this article.

1. Oliver was born in Wells, Vermont, to William and Rebecca Fuller Cowdery. He was the youngest of eight children. The others were Warren (b. 1788), Stephen (b. 1791), Dyer (b. 1793), Erastus (b. 1796), Sally (b. 1799), Lyman (b. 1802), and Olive (b. 1804). Oliver's mother died on September 3, 1809, and his father married Keziah Pearce Austin, a widow, on March 18, 1810. William and Keziah had three daughters: Rebecca Marie (b. 1810), Lucy Pearce (b. 1814), and Phoebe (b. 1817). Lucy Cowdery Young wrote that "Oliver was brought up in Poultney Rutland County Vermont and when he arrived at the age of twenty he went to the State of New York where his older brothers were married and settled and in about two years my father moved there" (Lucy Cowdery Young to Brigham H. Young, March 7, 1887, Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [hereafter Church Archives]). Lucy also claimed Oliver was born in 1805, however (the correct year is 1806), so Oliver's arriving in New York as early as 1825 would be partially consistent with her account. See Larry E. Morris, "Oliver Cowdery's Vermont Years and the Origins of Mormonism," *BYU Studies* 39/1 (2000): 106–29, for more information on Oliver's early history.
2. *Lyons Advertiser* (New York), October 17, October 24, October 31, and November 7, 1827. A lost-letter notice could mean any number of things. For example, it could simply mean that the writer of a letter falsely believed the intended recipient to be living in the area in question. It could also mean that the recipient had moved from the area—or had not yet moved to the area. Again, it could mean that the recipient did live in the area but had failed to pick up—and pay postage for—mail waiting at the post office. Interestingly, the name listed after William Cowdery's is that of Solomon Chamberlain, a Lyons cooper who became convinced of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon in 1829 and used proof sheets of the not-yet-published book to preach in Canada. He was baptized in April 1830, endured persecutions in Missouri, crossed the plains as part of the original 1847 pioneer company, and died in Utah in 1862 or 1863. Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 809–10. Thanks to Dale Broadhurst for informing me of the *Lyons Advertiser* lost-letter list.
3. Oliver's whereabouts during the mid-1820s have become a matter of controversy. Some critics, such as Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Arthur Vanick (*Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Spalding Enigma* [St. Louis: Concordia, 2005], 1237–82) speculate that Oliver arrived in New York around 1822, became involved in the printing business, conspired with Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon to produce the Book of Mormon, and even served as a scribe to William Morgan, a former Mason who threatened to reveal Masonic secrets and was apparently murdered as a result. There are no documents from the 1820s supporting such claims, however, only late reminiscences that are dubious at best. See Matthew Roper's detailed response in "The Mythical 'Manuscript Found,'" *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 7–140. On the other hand, a critic like David Persuitte (*Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon* [Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1985]) argues that Oliver stayed in Poultney, Vermont, until 1825—long enough to become friends with Poultney minister Ethan Smith, obtain a copy of his book *View of the Hebrews* and a hypothetical, unpublished romance also written by Ethan Smith, and deliver both to Joseph Smith (who supposedly used them to produce the Book of Mormon). Again, none of this guesswork can be backed up by primary documents. See Morris, "Vermont Years," 118–21.
4. Manuscript, Lyons, New York, Hugh Jameson Docket Book (January 1, 1828–July 21, 1829), 309, Lyons, New York, town offices. Hugh Jameson was a justice of the peace in Lyons. Thanks to Richard L. Anderson and Scott Faulring, who located and transcribed this document, for generously sharing their research.
5. Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool, England: Richards, 1853), 122 [hereafter *Biographical Sketches*].
6. Lucy Mack Smith, Preliminary Manuscript [1844–45], Church Archives (hereafter Preliminary Manuscript), in Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 424.
7. *Biographical Sketches*, 126. Reconstructing a precise chronology for this time period is problematic because of differences in Joseph Jr.'s and Lucy Mack Smith's accounts. Joseph said that "immediately" after his return to Harmony, in July 1828, the heavenly messenger returned the Urim and Thummim (which had been taken in consequence of Joseph "having wearied the Lord in asking for the privilege of letting Martin Harris take the writings"). Joseph then received the revelation now recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 3 through the Urim and Thummim. "After I had obtained the above revelation," recorded Joseph, "both the plates, and the Urim and Thummim were taken from me again, but in a few days they were returned to me" (Joseph Smith, Manuscript History of the Church, Book A-1, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Archives [hereafter "Manuscript History"], in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003], 1:72–73 [hereafter *EMD*]). Lucy, on the other hand, said in one portion of her reminiscences that the Urim and Thummim was returned on September 22, 1828, and that sometime after that, she and her husband visited Joseph (see *Biographical Sketches*, 126). Complicating the matter even further, she said in another part of her history that "nearly two months" had passed when she and Joseph Sr. decided to go to Harmony. Since Joseph apparently returned to Pennsylvania the first week of July, such reckoning places Joseph Sr. and Lucy's trip south around the beginning of September rather than at the end of the month. I believe Lucy was simply mistaken about the September 22 date and that the plates and Urim and Thummim were returned to Joseph in July and that his parents visited early in September, arriving back in Manchester on or before September 11, the date when Gain C. Robinson visited the Smith family and charged Joseph Sr. for medicine (see note 10). This is one of a number of instances where a third-party account confirms details of Lucy Mack Smith's history—rather impressive considering the fact that she dictated it in 1844–45.
8. Preliminary Manuscript, 431.
9. *Biographical Sketches*, 128.
10. Gain C. Robinson Day Book, 1827–1830, in *EMD*, 3:439.
11. Preliminary Manuscript, 431. As Anderson explains, "'Salivation' was a medical treatment that employed mercury to generate an abnormal flow of saliva" (*Lucy's Book*, 431 n. 194). Sophronia lived to the age of seventy-three and died in 1876.
12. Preliminary Manuscript, 431.
13. William Lang, *History of Seneca County: From the Close of the Revolutionary War to July, 1880; Embracing Many Personal Sketches of Pioneers, Anecdotes, and Faithful Descriptions of Events Pertaining to the Organization of the County and Its Progress* (Springfield, OH: Transcript Printing, 1880), 364. Lang

- was a friend and associate of Oliver's in Ohio during the 1840s.
14. Preliminary Manuscript, 432.
  15. See Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Educational History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 97, cited in Stanley R. Gunn, *Oliver Cowdery: Second Elder and Scribe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), 27.
  16. Manuscript, Manchester Commissioners of Common Schools, report "To the Superintendent of Common Schools of the State of New York," July 1, 1829, Manchester Town Office, Clifton Springs, New York, Public School Records, 1828–1915. Thanks again to Richard L. Anderson and Scott Faulring for sharing their research.
  17. John Stafford interview, 1881, in *EMD*, 2:123.
  18. Lorenzo Saunders interview, 1884, in *EMD*, 2:134. In an 1887 interview, Saunders claimed he saw Cowdery "writing, I suppose the 'Book of Mormon' with books and manuscripts laying on the table before him" (in *EMD*, 2:213). A much more reasonable explanation is that Cowdery was simply preparing his school lessons—he had not yet met Joseph Smith, and there is no evidence that he contributed to the content of the Book of Mormon.
  19. A close look at the Hurlbut, Kelley, Thorne, and Deming collections, for example, reveals a multitude of statements about the plates, very few of them based on firsthand conversations with Joseph Smith. See *EMD*, 2:1–214.
  20. Horatio Gates Spafford, *A Gazetteer of the State of New York* (Albany: Packard, 1824), 400–401, cited in Larry C. Porter, "A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1971, published by the Joseph Fielding Institute for Latter-day Saint History and BYU Studies, 2000), 15.
  21. David Whitmer interview with the *Kansas City Journal*, June 1, 1881, in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* [hereafter *Whitmer Interviews*] (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 60. David Whitmer wrote a letter to the editor of the *Kansas City Journal*, June 19, 1881, correcting several items in the published interview but making no corrections to the sections discussing Oliver Cowdery (see *Whitmer Interviews*, 71–73).
  22. "The Book of Mormon," *Chicago Tribune*, December 17, 1885, p. 3, cited in Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Whitmers: A Family That Nourished the Church," *Ensign*, August 1979, 35.
  23. Diedrich Willers to Ellen E. Dickinson, January 19, 1882, in *EMD*, 5:282.
  24. Mary Bryant Alverson Mehling, *Cowdrey-Cowdery-Cowdray Genealogy: William Cowdery of Lynn, Massachusetts, 1630, and His Descendants* (n.p.: Frank Allaben Genealogical, 1911), 79.
  25. See Morris, "Vermont Years," 118–20.
  26. Preliminary Manuscript, 432. Although Lucy indicates that Oliver immediately moved in with the Smiths, David Whitmer recalled that Oliver initially said he was acquainted with the Smiths, with no mention of his boarding with them at that time. Since David takes greater pains to draw distinctions, I tend to conclude that Oliver knew the Smiths for a period of time before moving in with them.
  27. Preliminary Manuscript, 432.
  28. *Whitmer Interviews*, 60. As noted, the exact sequence of events is uncertain, particularly so because Lucy did not mention Oliver's relationship with David Whitmer, and David did not mention Oliver moving in with the Smith family—and because neither of them provided specific dates for various events. My speculative timetable attempts to take the statements of both David and Lucy into account. As for claims that Joseph Jr. had promised to share the plates with others, it is perfectly possible, given the popularity of treasure seeking throughout New York and New England during this time, that Joseph and various neighbors had agreed to split the profits of any treasure that any of them found. Although Joseph viewed the plates in religious terms, quite apart from the kind of treasure he had sought while working for Josiah Stowell, the neighbors made no such distinction.
  29. *Whitmer Interviews*, 60, 61.
  30. Hugh Jameson Docket Book.
  31. Joseph Knight Sr. reminiscence, "Manuscript of the History of Joseph Smith," circa 1835–47, in *EMD*, 4:19.
  32. Manuscript History of the Church, *EMD*, 1:73. Joseph Jr. did not mention that Samuel had accompanied his father to Harmony, while Lucy did not mention the trip at all. Section 4 was first published as chapter 3 of the Book of Commandments in 1833.
  33. Preliminary Manuscript, 432.
  34. *Biographical Sketches*, 128. There are three other factors to consider when asking when Joseph Sr. first told Oliver about the plates. First, Lucy's phrase "a long time" is ambiguous, to be sure. However, given the general tone of her explanation, I believe a late February time frame is more probable than early January, or earlier. Second, Lucy strongly implies that Joseph Sr. was continually on the scene after telling Oliver—not possible if Joseph Sr. had told him and then departed for the three or four weeks required to complete a trip to Harmony. Third, as discussed below, Lucy mentions a tremendous rainstorm that occurred shortly after Joseph Sr. and Oliver had their discussion. In upstate New York such a storm seems much more likely in late winter than in midwinter.
  35. See the Willard Chase statement, in *EMD*, 2:64–74.
  36. *Biographical Sketches*, 128.
  37. Preliminary Manuscript, 432.
  38. Preliminary Manuscript, 432.
  39. Preliminary Manuscript, 432.
  40. *Biographical Sketches*, 129.
  41. *Whitmer Interviews*, 61 (see also James H. Hart's March 10, 1884 interview, *Whitmer Interviews*, 114). Since David Whitmer seems to distinguish between conversations with and letters from Oliver, his words "Cowdery told me" indicate that he learned of Oliver's plans while on another visit to Palmyra.
  42. Doctrine and Covenants 6:22–24. Section 6 was first published as chapter 5 in the Book of Commandments in 1833.
  43. Manuscript History of the Church, *EMD*, 1:74.
  44. Manuscript, Joseph Smith, "A History of the Life of Joseph Smith," in Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 14 (written in the hand of Frederick G. Williams; my punctuation added in brackets).
  45. Preliminary Manuscript, 434.
  46. *Biographical Sketches*, 87.
  47. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 14 (written in the hand of Frederick G. Williams; my punctuation added in brackets).
  48. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: Appleton, 1867), 13.
  49. *Biographical Sketches*, 130; Preliminary Manuscript, 437.
  50. *Biographical Sketches*, 132; see *Lucy's Book*, 395, for Lucy Harris's offer to help Joseph. The date of this incident is not certain because Lucy Mack Smith says it took place in August of 1829. She links it with Samuel's return from Harmony, however, and it seems quite certain that Samuel did not remain in Harmony after Joseph and Oliver left in June. (Nor would it have made sense for Martin to go to Pennsylvania after Joseph had already returned to New York.) I believe the court hearing took place in March 1829 because Martin Harris himself gives the month as March, strongly implying the year was 1829 (Testimony of Martin Harris



- dictated to Edward Stevenson, September 4, 1870, in *EMD*, 2:332). Martin and Lucy Harris, who were first cousins, separated when Martin followed Joseph Smith to Ohio in 1831. After Lucy's death in the summer of 1836, Martin married Caroline Young, Brigham Young's niece. Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan, *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 469. (Vogel, however, dates Lucy's death to 1837 [*EMD*, 2:34].)
51. New York law at the time may not have allowed Lucy Harris to file the suit herself. (The legal scholars I consulted did not agree as to whether this was the case.) If not, her brother Peter may have filed on her behalf.
  52. *Lucy's Book*, 442.
  53. *Lucy's Book*, 442–43.
  54. *Biographical Sketches*, 133. The fact that this incident took place in the cabin indicates that the Smiths had already moved from the frame home.
  55. *Biographical Sketches*, 134. The first witness may have been Peter Ingersoll, who claimed in an 1833 statement that Joseph had confessed to filling his frock with sand and then telling his family that the frock contained the plates (see *EMD*, 2:43–44).
  56. *Biographical Sketches*, 134. The magistrate tearing up the testimony is certainly a possible explanation of why no record of the hearing has been found (although several historians, including those involved in the Joseph Smith Papers project, have searched). Martin Harris confirmed that a hearing had been held when he said, “in March [1829] the People Rose up & united against the Work gathering testimony against the Plates & Said they had testimony Enough & if I did not Put Joseph in Jail & his father for Deseption[,] they Would me” (Harris testimony, in *EMD*, 2:332).
  57. Harris testimony, in *EMD*, 2:332–33. The excerpt in question reads as follows: “So I went from Waterloo 25 mls [miles] South East of Palmyra to Rogerses [in] [Suscotua?] [Seneca?] Co[unty] N.Y. & to Harmony Pennsylvania 125 [miles] & found Joseph. Rogers unknown to me had agreed to give my wife 100 Dollars if it was not A Deseption & had Whet his Nife to cut the covering of the Plates as the Lord had forbid Joseph exhibiting them openley[.]”
  58. Gain C. Robinson Day Book, in *EMD*, 3:439.
  59. Manchester Commissioners of Common Schools, report.
  60. Hugh Jameson Docket Book. The court record for March 31, 1829, simply reads “Recd \$13.00,” not explaining who made the payment. Since Oliver may have still been in the area to make this March 31 payment, and since he and Samuel are known to have arrived in Harmony on April 5, it is likely, but not certain, that they departed Lyons on April 1.
  61. *Biographical Sketches*, 130.
  62. Alexander C. Flick, ed., *History of the State of New York*, vol. 5, *Conquering the Wilderness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 263, 267–68, 278.
  63. *Whitmer Interviews*, 61.
  64. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 122–34, for background on the Whitmer family.
  65. Roger Haydon, *Upstate Travels: British Views of Nineteenth-Century New York* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 50.
  66. Haydon, *Upstate Travels*, 247.
  67. Preliminary Manuscript, 438.
  68. *Broome County Republican*, May 5, 1831, as cited in William G. Hartley, *Stand By My Servant Joseph: The Story of the Joseph Knight Family and the Restoration* (Provo, UT: The Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History and Deseret Book, 2003), 5.
  69. Joseph Knight Sr. reminiscence, in *EMD*, 4:19.
  70. Harris testimony, in *EMD*, 2:333.
  71. Doctrine and Covenants 5:11, 24. Section 5 was originally published in 1833 as chapter 4 of the Book of Commandments.
  72. William S. Sayre to James T. Cobb, August 31, 1878, in *EMD*, 4:145. As Vogel points out, Sayre calls Rogers “Richards” and reverses the identities of Martin Harris and Rogers/Richards. In other respects, however, his memory seems surprisingly accurate. As for the order of events, Joseph Knight's mention of “revelations” (possibly referring to sections 4 and 5 in the Doctrine and Covenants) and his specifying that he went to Harmony “the last of March” indicate that the Knights arrived in Harmony shortly after Martin Harris and Rogers (Joseph Knight Sr. reminiscence, in *EMD*, 4:19). Martin Harris's statement that he went in March, accompanied by Sayre's recollection that he was traveling on the stagecoach in April, indicates that Harris and Rogers may have arrived the last week in March and left a day or two before the Knights arrived (Harris testimony, in *EMD*, 2:332; Sayre to Cobb, in *EMD*, 4:144). It could have been April by the time they boarded the same stage as Sayre—somewhere between Bainbridge and Geneva. As for Sayre's mention of a one-room house, the home occupied by Joseph and Emma originally had two rooms on the ground floor and one room upstairs (Porter, “Origins,” 51). Martin may have been referring to the upper story, where Joseph worked on the translation.
  73. Haydon, *Upstate Travels*, 19.
  74. Sayre to Cobb, in *EMD*, 4:145.
  75. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, September 7, 1834 [Letter 1], *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834): 14. See *EMD*, 2:416–21.
  76. *Biographical Sketches*, 131. Lucy, Joseph, and Oliver all make it clear that Joseph and Oliver met for the first time on April 5, 1829. Those who argue that they actually met before that time have provided undocumented speculation but no real evidence. See note 3.
  77. See *EMD*, 4:424–31, for details on the land transaction.
  78. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, September 7, 1834, 14, emphasis in original. See *EMD*, 2:419, and Joseph Smith—History 1:71 note. Statements from David Whitmer, Emma Smith, and others indicate that Joseph used the seer stone to translate during this time. Both Joseph and Oliver, however, apparently used *Urim and Thummim* generically, sometimes referring to the apparatus delivered by Moroni and sometimes referring to the seer stone (which was purportedly discovered by Alvin, Joseph Jr., and Willard Chase when the three of them were digging a well in 1822—see Chase statement, in *EMD*, 2:65).
- Straight (Not Strait) and Narrow**  
John S. Welch
1. See Joshua 23:6; compare Alma 56:37, “They did not turn to the right nor to the left, but pursued their march in a straight course.”
  2. Cyprian *Treatise* 12.3.6 (“Three Books of Testimonies against the Jews,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 534).
  3. *Epistles of Cyprian* 6.3 (in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5:284).
  4. Origen, *Commentary on John* 10.28 (in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 10, ed. Allan Menzies [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969], 408).
  5. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Harvard Classics, ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1910), 15:32.
  6. Accessible at [www.worldwide-school.org/library/books/hst/european/CriticalandHistoricalEssaysVolume2/chap29.html](http://www.worldwide-school.org/library/books/hst/european/CriticalandHistoricalEssaysVolume2/chap29.html) (accessed 31 August 2007).
  7. For examples, see William Penn, *Advice of William Penn to His Children* (London: Assigns of F. Sowle, 1726), “the straight and narrow Way that leads to Life Eternal” (image no. 7 in the online version in the database “Eighteenth Century Collections Online,” accessible at [infotrac.galegroup.com](http://infotrac.galegroup.com) with a subscription); Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: Laing and Matthews, 1789), 472, “the strait and narrow way which leads to life”; and Jane E. Leeson, “Prayer to the Good Shepherd,” *Hymns and Scenes of Childhood* (London: 1842), 25 (hymn no. 17), “Loving Shepherd ever near, / teach thy lamb thy voice to