



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 21 | Number 1

Article 9

2009

Myths on Palmyra's Main Street

Donald L. Enders

Jennifer L. Lund

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Enders, Donald L. and Lund, Jennifer L. (2009) "Myths on Palmyra's Main Street," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 21 : No. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol21/iss1/9>

This Book of Mormon is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011 by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title Myths on Palmyra's Main Street

Author(s) Donald L. Enders and Jennifer L. Lund

Reference *FARMS Review* 21/1 (2009): 63-77.

ISSN 1550-3194 (print), 2156-8049 (online)

Abstract Review of *Miracle on Palmyra's Street: An "Old-Time" Printer's Perspective on Printing the Original Copies of the Book of Mormon* (2003), by Gordon L. Weight.

MYTHS ON PALMYRA'S MAIN STREET

Donald L. Enders and Jennifer L. Lund

Review of Gordon L. Weight. *Miracle on Palmyra's Main Street: An "Old-Time" Printer's Perspective on Printing the Original Copies of the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Gordon L. Weight, 2003. ii + 32 pp. \$4.00.

In 2003 Gordon L. Weight, a self-described “old-time printer,” published a short booklet on the Book of Mormon entitled *Miracle on Palmyra's Main Street*. The title is appropriate insofar as it encapsulates his central thesis: the publication of the Book of Mormon was very literally a miracle—one he likens to the Savior’s feeding of the five thousand (see Matthew 14:15–21). Weight writes: “The completion of the printing of the Book of Mormon in a very short time period, so that it could be available to the early saints on the day the Church was organized, comprises one of the most astounding events that ever took place in the history of the Church. To bring forth 5,000 copies of the Book of Mormon in the Lord’s compressed timeframe, a little over six months [*sic*], . . . is an absolute impossibility. It just couldn’t happen—yet it did” (pp. 3–4). A few pages later he makes an astonishing claim: “It’s my conviction, although nothing is written, that Moroni and others from beyond the veil, having been given a spiritual mandate, actually assisted and helped the workers in that little print shop. Their ‘divine intervention’ was the only way, the only explanation, and the only reason that it could have happened” (pp. 11–12). Even more puzzling to us, however, is the fact that this slim, self-published volume

with such bold, perhaps even outrageous, statements should find such wide distribution and acceptance among Wasatch Front Latter-day Saints. Before his death in November 2004, the author presented his claims in numerous lectures and firesides. Although Weight is no longer alive to promote his booklet, there is still substantial enthusiasm for his work. Just recently we were alerted to two instances where his theories were championed in prominent settings. Since this booklet is apparently not going to fade away, it seems that the time has come to publish a review of this seriously flawed work.

Because the author is deceased and unable to respond, we hesitate to critique this work. A review based on rules of logic and evidence obviously outside the author's expertise may come across as harsh. Further, we cannot fault the author for his interest, his sincerity, his testimony, or his good intentions. It is obvious that he desired only to build faith. Yet it is clear that nonspecialist readers stand to benefit from a reliable critique of Weight's claims. The fact that his research is poor, his arguments are based on unwarranted assumptions, and his claims are unsubstantiated may, in the long run, do more to undermine faith than to build it. Testimonies strengthened by a "miracle" that can so easily be disproved are in peril. Therefore, our remarks are based on the rigor that we wish the author himself had employed.¹

Evaluating Credibility

In an effort to establish his qualifications for writing the booklet, Weight informs the reader that he spent most of his life in the printing business. After high school he served a four-year apprenticeship,

1. We have found only one other review of Weight's book: John P. Pratt, an astronomer with some experience as a typesetter and printer, reviewed the booklet in his monthly science column for *Meridian Magazine* in 2005. He focuses primarily on the aspects of printing and is critical of Weight's calculations, some of which are inaccurate. He concludes that the stupendous miracles proposed by Weight were actually unnecessary since the work was accomplished with many small "miracles," such as Grandin's hiring of additional labor to speed the work. See John P. Pratt, "Miraculous Printing of the Book of Mormon?" *Meridian Magazine*, 14 April 2005, republished on Pratt's personal Web site at www.johnpratt.com/items/docs/lds/meridian/2005/printing.html (accessed 3 December 2008).

becoming a journeyman typesetter and working for the *Deseret News* when type was still set by hand. During his lifetime, he worked in many print shops, owned his own printing company, and taught at Salt Lake Trade Technical Institute (pp. 6–8).² This firsthand experience gave him valuable insight. Printing technology had, however, changed dramatically in the 117 years since the Book of Mormon went to press, and Weight's experience does not equate to the experience of those who printed the Book of Mormon from 1829 to 1830.

Weight shows no evidence of familiarity with the most important sources concerning the publication of the Book of Mormon, citing only John H. Gilbert's 1892 "Memorandum" that had been prepared to accompany the exhibit of the unbound proof sheets of the Book of Mormon at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. The fact that *Miracle on Palmyra's Main Street* contains no other documentation makes it difficult to assess the depth of Weight's research. In a few cases a claim is supported only with phrases like "It's recorded that . . ." or "One writer suggested . . ." (p. 17). Much of his evidence hinges on unsupported generalizations such as "It was the practice that . . ." (p. 27), or even on his own presumptions, for example, "Although nothing has ever been written, I believe . . ." (p. 29).

Weight states that many existing studies on the Book of Mormon either give little attention to the actual printing process or make technical errors. He enumerates several examples of "erroneous suppositions" (p. 5) and concludes, "Without amplifying the list, it goes on and on—some of the suppositions are so ridiculous, they're almost humorous" (p. 6). Ironically, we could say the same about Weight's own claims. The errors in this booklet are too numerous to deal with individually, but we have selected the most crucial points and most "ridiculous" suppositions for discussion below.

Central Argument

Weight's central thesis hinges on two assumptions: (1) the Book of Mormon had to be published before the church's organization on

2. See also "Gordon Lee Weight," Obituary, *Deseret News*, 28 November 2004, B07, www.deseretnews.com (accessed 6 October 2008).

the revealed date of 6 April 1830, and (2) it was impossible for a country printer to produce five thousand copies of a 590-page book in just seven months. Yet, under examination, neither assumption holds up.

The date for organizing the Church of Christ was likely revealed to Joseph Smith sometime in the summer of 1829.³ For Latter-day Saints today, it seems logical that the publication of the Book of Mormon should precede the formal organization of the church. However, there is no contemporary evidence to suggest that this was a divine imperative. Letters exchanged between Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith when the Book of Mormon was at press express no urgency about the publication. On 22 October 1829, Joseph Smith wrote to Oliver, inquiring rather nonchalantly, “[W]e want to hear from you and know how you prosper in the good work.”⁴ Two weeks later, Oliver replied that “the printing goes rather slow as yet the type founder has been sick but we expect that the type will be in and Mr. Granden [*sic*] still think[s] he will finish printing by the first of feb[r]uary.”⁵ In a 28 December letter Oliver alluded only briefly to work in the printing office.⁶ None of these letters communicate any anxiety concerning the publication, nor do the reminiscent accounts from Joseph and his associates. There is no evidence that there was a divine imperative that the Book of Mormon had to be published before the church could be organized, nor that Joseph was unduly concerned with the speed of the printing process.

Weight’s second assumption—that it was impossible for a country printer to publish five thousand copies of a 590-page book in just seven months—is also unsupported. Not only was it possible, but Egbert B. Grandin and his associates did just that. In describ-

3. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 109; and Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Autobiographical and Historical Writings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:300.

4. Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery, 22 October 1829, in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed., ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Brigham Young University, 2002), 252.

5. Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith, 6 November 1829, in *Early Mormon Documents*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 2:405–6.

6. Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith, 28 December 1829, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:408.

ing Joseph Smith's attempt to find a printer, Weight gets many of the details wrong and ignores the fact that it was not Joseph who set the timetable for the publication but the printer. When Joseph Smith first approached Grandin about publishing the Book of Mormon, Grandin turned him down. Weight claims that Grandin refused because "his print shop was inadequate, with little experienced help, and he felt it was a work with which he didn't particularly want to be involved" and that "he would not be able to obtain enough paper" (p. 12). No firsthand sources, however, cite such inadequacies in Grandin's shop. In fact, since the purchase of his new Smith Patent Improved Press in March 1829, Grandin had been advertising as a "Book and Job Printer" capable of "[executing] all kinds of *Book and Job Printing* with equal neatness, accuracy, and dispatch to any printing establishment in the country."⁷ Grandin refused Joseph's business because he believed "the whole affair to be a wicked imposture and a scheme to defraud [Martin] Harris."⁸ Joseph next went to Rochester and contacted printers. Elishu Marshall, a book publisher, "gave his terms for the printing and binding of the book."⁹ According to Weight, Marshall agreed to print the book at "an exorbitant price" and commented that "for all the trouble he probably would generate by printing 'Joe Smith's gold bible', he needed extra incentive money" (p. 12). However, this quotation cannot be found in any of the primary sources, and there is no evidence to suggest that Marshall calculated an exorbitant cost.

Joseph returned to Grandin one last time, stating that the book could be published in Rochester but that for convenience Palmyra was his choice. At this point Weight suggests that Moroni became "involved in the process." Although he notes that "nothing is documented," he believes that "the prophet was instructed to once again approach Mr. Grandin" and that this time, perhaps under "Moroni's influence," Grandin decided to take the job (p. 12). In his effort to insinuate Moroni into the process, Weight ignores the fact that both

7. *Wayne Sentinel*, 17 April 1829, 1.

8. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: Appleton, 1867), 51.

9. Tucker, *Origin*, 52.

Pomeroy Tucker and Grandin's grandson said that Grandin had been persuaded to accept the job by his friends.¹⁰ In just a few paragraphs Weight has made numerous errors, used dubious quotations, and, based solely on his personal belief, ascribed action to an angel. Amid all of this, Weight has missed the fact that it was the printer who established the terms of the contract. Before accepting a job, printers calculated exactly how much work was involved, what supplies they would need, how long it would take, and how much they needed to charge to make a profit.¹¹ John Gilbert, a typesetter and printer, recalled that in June 1829 Grandin asked him to "assist . . . in estimating the cost of printing 5000 copies of a book that Martin Harris wanted to get printed, which was called the 'Mormon Bible.'"¹² Gilbert then explained how the job was calculated: "A few pages of the manuscript were submitted as a specimen of the whole, and it was said there would be about 500 pages. The size of the page was agreed upon, and an estimate of the number of ems in a page, which would be 1000, and that a page of manuscript would make more than a page of printed matter, which proved to be correct. The contract was to print, and bind with leather, 5000 copies for \$3,000."¹³

Weight refers to Grandin as a "bumpkin' of a printer" (p. 14). However, Grandin had apprenticed, run his own shop, published a weekly newspaper, and done considerable job work. John Gilbert and Pomeroy Tucker, who assisted him, were both experienced printers. They also had access to printing manuals of the day that gave instruc-

10. Tucker, *Origin*, 52; and Henry Allen as quoted in Larry C. Porter, "Egbert Bratt Grandin," *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 309.

11. Richard-Gabriel Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing Practices and the Iron Handpress* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2004), 2:813, 835–41.

12. John H. Gilbert, memorandum, 8 September 1892, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:543.

13. Gilbert, memorandum, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:543; Tucker, *Origin*, describes the same: "In June, 1829, Smith the prophet, his brother Hyrum, Cowdery the scribe, and Harris the believer, applied to Mr. Egbert B. Grandin . . . for his price to do the work of one edition of three thousand copies. Harris offered to pay or secure payment if a bargain should be made. Only a few sheets of the manuscript, as a specimen, with the title-page, were exhibited at this time, though the whole number of folios was stated, whereby could be made a calculation of the cost" (pp. 50–51).

tions for estimating a job and price guides for various types of jobs, including book publishing.¹⁴ Grandin, who had previously published a textbook, knew the requirements, the resources that were available, and his shop's capacity.¹⁵ He apparently estimated that he could finish the printing by early February, a period of approximately five and a half months. In reality, it took longer—about seven months—because of delays in acquiring type. Nevertheless, according to Tucker, the printing was accomplished satisfactorily, and both the printer and the customer met the terms of the contract.¹⁶

Publication Timetable

In his effort to establish miraculous parameters for the publication of the Book of Mormon, Weight estimates the time required for each part of the process—typesetting, presswork, and binding—and concludes, “It’s clear that the Book of Mormon *should have taken, at a minimum, 17 1/2 months to complete*” (p. 25, emphasis in original). Weight’s estimates depend on several questionable assumptions. For instance, he argues that for the most part the different processes had to take place consecutively rather than concurrently. However, typical pressroom operations often doubled up with the compositor setting type on one form while the pressmen printed another and an apprentice redistributed type from a third.¹⁷ It appears that early in the printing of the Book of Mormon, type was limited. Gilbert describes

14. More than a dozen manuals and price guides were published in the decade between 1818 and 1828. See the chronological list in Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing*, 2:865–66.

15. Grandin published Tobias Ostrander’s *The Mathematical Expositor* (94 pp.) in 1828. In addition to that book and the Book of Mormon (590 pp.), he published in 1830 a work entitled *Notes on Title IV Chapter II of Part III of the Revised Statutes of the State of New York* (98 pp.), in 1831 *The Travels and Adventures of David C. Bunnell* (200 pp.), and in 1832 a second edition of Ostrander’s *The Mathematical Expositor* (168 pp.). Peter Crawley, “The Publication of the 1830 Book of Mormon,” in *The First Mormon Book: A Celebration of the 1830 Book of Mormon with an Original Leaf* (Salt Lake City: Benchmark Books, 2000), 11.

16. Tucker, *Origin*, 53.

17. Lewis Crandall, Crandall’s Historical Printing Museum, Provo, Utah, telephone conversation with Donald L. Enders, 17 June 2009.

setting the type for a form and then working the press alongside J. H. Bortles. By December, however, additional type had arrived, and Grandin hired a second pressman, Thomas McAuley, so Gilbert could devote his full attention to typesetting. Now they no longer had to complete one press run before setting type for the next. At times Grandin also hired additional compositors to assist Gilbert, and even Oliver Cowdery set ten to twelve pages.¹⁸ Weight does not take these changes into consideration in his calculations. He also dismisses the fact that while Gilbert, and sometimes others, set type, someone else redistributed it.¹⁹ These lapses result in serious overestimations of the amount of time required for typesetting.

In a similar manner, Weight has also exaggerated the time required for the actual presswork. He quotes Gilbert as saying, “Mr. J. H. Bortles and myself done the presswork, taking nearly three days to print each form” but assumes that a form refers to only one half of the pressrun and immediately adds “or six days to print an entire signature” (p. 22). Technically, the bed of the press was laid with two forms, each containing eight pages of text. One form contained the text for one side of a signature, and the other form contained the text for the other side. Thus the pressmen could make 2,500 impressions, reverse and turn the paper, and then make another 2,500 impressions, for a total of five thousand copies of the Book of Mormon. This was a very efficient printing method that is still used today. Weight ignores the fact that Gilbert’s 1802 memorandum uses the word *form* to refer to all of the type placed on the press bed.²⁰ Gilbert’s description of three days to print a form

18. John H. Gilbert interview, September 1888, reported in Andrew Jenson, Edward Stevenson, and Joseph S. Black to Editor, 28 September 1888, *Deseret Evening News*, 11 October 1888, quoted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:541; and John H. Gilbert to James T. Cobb, 10 February 1879, quoted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:523. When Pomeroy Tucker notes printing delays resulting from the need to redistribute type before a new form could be set, he is describing the situation in October 1829. The new type that arrived in December and the additional pressman hired at the same time made it possible to redistribute one form while another was being set. Tucker, *Origin*, 55–56.

19. “A Historic Press,” *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star*, 24 September 1894, 56:622–23.

20. Gilbert specifically described the process as “requiring 2500 sheets of paper for each form of 16 pages.” Gilbert memorandum, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:545.

coincides with the usual production rate for handpresses of the period. Pressmen were paid according to the standard of 250 impressions per hour, or approximately four impressions per minute. However, this rate was an ideal that very few pressmen could meet or sustain for long. The actual average rate ranged from 156 to 166 impressions per hour, or 2.6 to 2.8 impressions per minute. Since presses typically ran from ten to twelve hours per day, a single handpress could produce between 4,680 and 5,478 sheets over a three-day period—just the right range for printing a signature from the Book of Mormon as Gilbert described.²¹ For modern printers like Weight who attempt to measure the work through their own experience, this may seem like an impossible task. Yet it was standard fare for nineteenth-century pressmen. Richard-Gabriel Rummonds, a master printer and an authority on nineteenth-century printing, warns that the production rates of modern handpress operators are “irrelevant” when evaluating nineteenth-century printing “since their [modern handpress operators’] patterns of production are not commercially driven and, therefore, would not be comparable to nineteenth-century practices.”²²

Finally, Weight estimates that the binding process should have taken two months to produce the first copies of the Book of Mormon. However, in an 1879 letter Gilbert reported that the printing was completed in March 1830 and that “it was some weeks after this before the binder was able to deliver any copies.”²³ His matter-of-fact statement does not suggest anything unusual for several copies to be bound in just a few weeks, the first copies being advertised for sale on March 26.²⁴

It seems that Weight was so eager to prove his thesis of a truly miraculous production that he grossly overestimated the length of time necessary to publish the Book of Mormon. Neither Joseph Smith and his associates nor Grandin’s staff remarked on anything out of

21. Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing*, 2:835, 847; Gayle Goble Ord, “The Book of Mormon Goes to Press,” *Ensign*, December 1972, 69; and Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790–1840* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 60–61.

22. Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing*, 1:53.

23. John H. Gilbert to James T. Cobb, 10 February 1879, quoted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:523.

24. *Wayne Sentinel*, 26 March 1830, 4.

the ordinary concerning the publication of the Book of Mormon, and none attested to supernatural assistance. The volume was published in about seven months—a month and a half longer than Grandin had originally estimated. This feat was certainly a fine accomplishment, but not a miracle in the sense that Weight uses the word.

Availability of Type and Paper

In addition to the timeline, Weight also sees miracles in the availability of type and paper. He asserts that “type available to local printers at that time came from Germany or China” (p. 16), dismissing contemporary sources that Grandin obtained type from both New York City and Albany. Weight claims that “there was not a printer’s supply house in Albany, much less one that sold moveable type to printers” (p. 17). In the end Weight asks where the type came from and then, without explanation, answers with an emphatic “Another miracle!” (p. 17). The reality is, however, much different. Gilbert tells us that the printing began in August 1829 when Grandin went to New York City and procured “500 pounds of new small pica” type.²⁵ (Weight even claims that “it is recorded that Joseph gave Mr. Grandin a ‘font’ of new type” [p. 17]. There is no evidence to suggest that Joseph provided type.) In a December 1829 letter, Oliver Cowdery notes that the printing was delayed because the type founder was ill, but Cowdery concludes, “[W]e expect the type will be in.”²⁶ This second order of type may have come from a type foundry in Albany, as suggested by Stephen Harding.²⁷ Rather than being unavailable in America, moveable type

25. John H. Gilbert interview, 23 June 1893, in *New York Herald*, 25 June 1893, 12, quoted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:552.

26. Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith, 6 November 1829, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:405–6.

27. Stephen S. Harding, a cousin of Pomeroy Tucker’s, visited the print shop on at least two occasions when the Book of Mormon was at press, including the day the first impression was made. He wrote about new type having arrived from Albany just before his second visit, probably sometime in late September. There may have been another order of type that arrived in September from Albany, or perhaps, with the passage of fifty-two years, he confused the order that arrived in December with his visit earlier in the year. Stephen S. Harding to Thomas Gregg, February 1882, quoted in Thomas Gregg, *The Prophet of Palmyra: Mormonism* (New York: John B. Alden, 1890), 47.

could be readily acquired through more than a dozen type foundries, and Grandin is known to have purchased new type on several occasions.²⁸ In 1829 there were eight type foundries in New York City and two operating in Albany.²⁹

Of all Weight's claims, his suggestion concerning the miraculous appearance of paper at the print shop is perhaps the most outrageous. Although he provides no evidence and acknowledges that it may be a poor explanation, Weight follows an unnamed author in suggesting that the paper "appeared 'mysteriously' one day on the back porch of the Grandin Print Shop" (p. 27). He then proceeds to dismiss any questions that might counter such a claim and even provides a calculation for the height of the stack at 110 feet.³⁰ As in the case of the type, Weight's assumptions are flawed and his research is faulty. He further asserts that Joseph Smith requested that the paper be "white and of a smooth texture, of such quality that one could not read through it, and see the other side of the printed page" (p. 27). Yet the process for making white paper was not yet available, Weight claims, and the technique of making smooth, opaque paper had not yet been perfected. Weight further asserts that books were usually printed on only one side of a leaf, paper was not commonly available in the size required, and Grandin didn't have any money or a line of credit to obtain paper (pp. 27–28). Joseph Smith undoubtedly discussed paper with Grandin, but there is no evidence as to what the Prophet required in terms of its texture and quality, and the quotation Weight provides is dubious. Although the bleaching process to make "white" paper was not yet commonly used, the cream-colored paper on which the Book of Mormon was published was widely available and was actually preferred since bleached paper did not absorb ink

28. *Wayne Sentinel*, 4 July 1828, 3; 24 April 1829, 1; 29 January 1830, 3.

29. Maurice Annenberg, *Type Foundries of America and Their Catalogs* (Baltimore, MD: Maran Printing Services, 1975), 79, 103, 116, 143, 172, 177, 229, 236. Grandin is known to have done business with A. W. Kingsley & Co. of Albany. See advertisements in the *Wayne Sentinel*, 18 October 1825, 2; 5 September 1828, 3; 7 August 1829, 1.

30. John Pratt points out that a stack of paper sufficient to print the Book of Mormon would actually be 30 feet high, not 110 as miscalculated by Weight. See Pratt, "Miraculous Printing," 9 n. 8.

well.³¹ Books were commonly printed on both sides of a leaf, and the paper size was standard.³² Paper was widely available in America at the time, and there were paper mills in Rochester, Ithaca, Shortsville, Waterloo, and even nearby Manchester. At least some of the paper for the Book of Mormon likely came from the firm of Case & Brown in Shortsville.³³ Entries from Grandin's 1831 diary show that Grandin also had credit accounts with Marshall, Forman & Co. of Albany and with Ballou Brown in Manchester.³⁴ There is no intimation in any of the primary sources that there was any difficulty obtaining paper nor any evidence that paper appeared miraculously on the back loading dock of Grandin's print shop.

Folklore

Weight concludes his booklet with an appendix labeled "Folklore or 'Faith-Promoting Rumors'" that features three stories. He admits

31. Dard Hunter, *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft*, 2nd ed. (1947; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1978), 224–25; Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing*, 1:448; and Judith A. McGaw, *Most Wonderful Machine: Mechanization and Social Change in Berkshire Paper Making, 1801–1885* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 74–75.

32. Since the 1400s, printed books have typically featured text printed on both sides of a leaf. This was certainly the case for books published early in the nineteenth century. We have read or examined hundreds of volumes from this era over our careers and have never seen one printed on only one side of a leaf, with the exception of pages containing engravings. For the earliest examples showing printing on both sides of a leaf, see the online version of the exhibit Ink & Blood: Dead Sea Scrolls to Gutenberg, which features leaves from the Gutenberg Bible (1453–1455), the Fust & Schoeffer Bible (1462), and the Luther New Testament (1526–1529) at www.inkandblood.com/the-collection/item-list.php?category=6 (accessed 19 May 2009). For paper sizes see Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing*, 1:450, 457–58. The Book of Mormon was published on paper 32" x 20" known as double post.

33. Charles F. Milliken, *A History of Ontario County, New York and Its People* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1911), 1:415. Larry Porter notes that Milliken incorrectly calls the firm Case, Abbey, & Co. Porter, "Book of Mormon, Printing and Publication of," *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 135. For other Western New York paper mills and warehouses, see the *Wayne Sentinel*, 29 September 1826, 2; 28 December 1827, 3; and *Palmyra Herald*, 15 January 1828, 3; see also Milton W. Hamilton, *The Country Printer: New York State, 1785–1830* (1936; repr., Port Washington, NY: Ira J. Friedman, 1964), 18–19.

34. Egbert B. Grandin, diary typescript, 27 April 1831, 5 May 1831, 3 June 1831 (p. 4), Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, UT.

there is no evidence to support their veracity. The first item is a variation on the miraculously appearing paper story. A Palmyra constable is startled by a loud commotion behind Grandin's print shop. Running to the rear of the building, he finds a large pile of paper on the back porch and footprints and wagon wheel marks in the dirt. The second narrative asserts that John Gilbert wrote a letter to his sister in which he described arriving at the print shop in the morning to find all of the type from the previous day's printing to have been magically redistributed into the type cases, each letter "neatly standing on its feet, face up" (p. 32). (If this were true, it is puzzling that Gilbert never mentioned this fact in any of the statements, letters, or interviews that recount his experiences.) And finally, the most fantastic of all: Ruffians attempted to destroy the press, but the bolts had fused and the press was now one solid mass held together by "angel glue" (p. 32). The troublemakers were unable to slide the press across the floor to the door, so they decided to remove part of a wall and toss it to the street below. However, the building groaned and frightened off its attackers.

If these stories are actually circulating either in Palmyra or among Latter-day Saints as folk narratives, then Weight has done a valuable service by capturing these accounts. However, we have not found these stories documented in the standard Mormon folklore references nor in Brigham Young University's folklore archives. Unfortunately, Weight has not provided the context in which he collected these stories, an element crucial for understanding the circulation of folk narratives.

Miscellaneous Claims

Lastly, Weight makes further assertions about the publication of the Book of Mormon that are intended to support his thesis or to amplify the book's marvelous character. Yet these too are either unsupported or flawed. Here are just a few examples:

- *Edition size.* Weight argues that a five-thousand-copy edition was "a task larger printing companies in other cities wouldn't even consider" and that the Book of Mormon "was a gigantic job, ahead of the book industry by nearly 20 years" (pp. 14–15). It is true that a five-thousand-copy edition was quite large for the time, but to suggest that

other printers would not consider such a job is inaccurate. Such large editions were technically possible, but they were not common because of the limited market. The only work typically printed in such large editions was the Bible, a volume guaranteed a readership in the religiously charged atmosphere of the day. Weight further assumes that book publishing was centered in East Coast cities. However, there was an enormous demand for reading material, and many country printers rose to the challenge. For example, Ebenezer and Dan Merriam of Brookfield, Massachusetts, published at least one book a year, and sometimes several, between 1798 and 1840. These were usually editions of fewer than three thousand; however, in 1815 they published a twelve-thousand-copy edition of the Bible.³⁵

- *Blank pages.* In describing the printing of the Book of Mormon, Weight states that the volume “required 37 forms (fronts and backs) of 16 pages each, 592 pages in all, including 22 blank pages, which were not printed. The blank pages were used at the backs of chapters to complete a signature” (p. 21). However, an examination of an original or replica copy of the Book of Mormon reveals that there are no blank pages between either books or chapters. There are only two blank pages in the entire volume.³⁶

- *Press availability.* Weight argues that the printing of Grandin’s weekly newspaper, the *Wayne Sentinel*, took time away from printing the Book of Mormon. However, Grandin’s shop had two presses. The Ramage press, acquired when Grandin purchased the shop in 1827, was perfectly suited to publishing a newspaper and had in fact long printed the *Wayne Sentinel*. With two presses at hand, Grandin could publish his weekly newspaper and other job work without disrupting the printing of the Book of Mormon.

35. Jack Larkin, “The Merriams of Brookfield: Printing in the Economy and Culture of Rural Massachusetts in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 96 (1986): 45, 59, 61.

36. It appears that rather than examining the book in a library, Weight was relying on John Gilbert’s memorandum, which refers to 570 printed pages—likely a simple error on Gilbert’s part. The actual count of printed pages is 590. Two interviews with Gilbert specify 580 pages. See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:517, 539, 545.

- *Grandin clamp.* Weight claims that during the binding process the bookbinders “devised a locking clamp” to hold the signatures together and that this clamp is still used in small print shops today (p. 24). We were unable to document a “Grandin clamp” in use in the bookbinding or printing industries.³⁷ Besides, Grandin was a printer, not a bookbinder. Any device that may have been developed in the bindery would have most likely been named for Luther Howard, Grandin’s sometime partner in a book bindery.

Conclusion

Miracle on Palmyra’s Main Street introduces a series of claims based on faulty logic, dubious sources, and flagrant errors, all dressed in the rhetoric of promoting faith and strengthening testimonies. It is unfortunate that so many people through the years have accepted the booklet’s assertions uncritically and that a look at the actual evidence may have the opposite effect of what Weight intended. Readers are not always able to distinguish between an author’s unsupportable claims and the actual miracle of a young prophet and printer, both intelligent and able, in the right place at the right time, to bring forth the Book of Mormon.

37. A classic text on bookbinding illustrates several different types of presses used in binderies but does not mention any clamps or, in particular, a “Grandin clamp.” Weight seems to describe the function of a lying press, which, according to this bookbinding text, “in a simplified form . . . dates back to very early times.” See Edith Diehl, *Bookbinding: Its Background and Technique* (1946; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1980), 2:8–12, 19. We reviewed the following additional sources, none of which mentioned a “Grandin clamp”: Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing*, vols. 1–2; and Geoffrey Ashall Glaister, *Glaister’s Glossary of the Book*, 2nd ed., rev. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979).

