



---

10-1-1984

## The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting

Ronald W. Walker

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Walker, Ronald W. (1984) "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 24 : Iss. 4 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol24/iss4/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

# The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting

Ronald W. Walker

He carried a magic divining-rod,  
A miraculous crystal stone  
By which in the darkened crown of his hat  
He could fix a spot unknown.

—Leo Leonard Twinem, “A Ballad of  
Old Pocomack [Vermont]” (1929)

There is . . . only one way of understanding a cultural phenomenon  
which is alien to one’s own ideological pattern, and that is to place  
oneself at its very centre and from there to track down all the values  
that radiate from it.

—Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (1956), 11

Toute vue des choses qui n’est pas étrange est fausse.

—Paul Valéry, as quoted in *Hamlet’s Mill*, 1

## I

The following essay was originally written for a general scholarly audience. Even though it is now being published in a Latter-day Saint context I have chosen to retain its detached tone, reserving a more personal response for another essay which also appears in this issue of *BYU Studies*. I chose such a tone, not so much because of my intended audience, but because I wished to understand treasure digging as a cultural phenomenon, not just as a recurring theme in Mormon historical writing. Past writers who have dealt with Mormon money digging have usually written in a polemical and even combative manner. As a result, in the hundred and fifty years that writers have attacked and defended Joseph Smith’s alleged treasure hunting we have not learned much about the topic itself. My hope in writing this essay was to place money digging at center stage, free from partisan debate, and thereby establish an understandable context for the

Smith family's involvement with the activity. Their actual role, of course, is yet to be examined in detail.

I wish to make another point explicit. Nothing in my study should be taken as suggesting that Joseph Smith was merely a product of his folk culture environment. No English or American village adept ever produced a Book of Mormon. None produced a Vision of Moses, the Olive Leaf, the Three Degrees of Glory, or such magisterial ideas as sections 93 and 98 of the Doctrine and Covenants. At every major point in his career, there were second and third witnesses for Joseph Smith's work. And when he died, he left a church that dwarfed anything that might have been built by a run-of-the-mill village holy man. Some may see this success as simply the work of a "religious genius." My own conviction is that Joseph was a religious genius because of an active and guiding Providence.

Nevertheless, as we come to understand the New England folk culture more fully, we may find that it was not an inappropriate precursor to the Restoration. It is already apparent that this culture tended to be anti-traditional church in orientation. It strongly embraced the idea of personal revelation and the ministry of spirits. At least some of its practitioners believed in a kind of premortal existence, "dispensationalism," and the restoration of ancient texts. For many of its adherents, it seems to have functioned as a visionary and exciting, though not formal, religion. One of the major insights in the field of religious studies during the past decade is the realization that religious faith has been defined too narrowly. By examining what the people actually were doing and believing, we have come to understand that there was, existing side by side with such movements as Episcopalianism or Presbyterianism or Lutheranism, sometimes intermixing with them, an informal people's religion that held the attention of the common man or woman.

## II

From colonial times to at least the Age of Jackson, Americans dug for magical treasure. There were hundreds and probably thousands of these "money diggers," all seeking troves of fabled coins, mines, jewels, and other valued prizes. They worked from the Atlantic Coast to the Mississippi hinterlands and in a few localities heaped up tailings that rivaled those of the later forty-niners. Yet, for all this prodigious toil, their "finds" were as rare as Merlin's transmuted gold. What made them persist? Relying on an immemorial



but now forgotten world view, the money diggers placed faith in conjuring, elemental spirits, thrice-spoken dreams, seeric gifts, and enchanted treasure that could slip and rumble through the earth as easily as a fish moving through the deep. The modern age will probably never fully understand the diggers' strange compound of treasure seeking, religious feeling, and intense psychological devotion to an old but fading way of life. Theirs was another world which we can speak of but hardly enter.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the themes of American digging appear much earlier in mankind's primal myths. For example, in Egypt, where "most of the magic . . . of the [subsequent] world may be found," is told the story of Setnau Khaem-Uast. After offering an appropriate incantation, Setnau found an invaluable book deposited within a cavern. The prize was originally buried in a box, which in turn contained a series of smaller receptacles. The last, a golden box, was guarded by a swarm of serpents and scorpions. The hero killed the last snake three times.<sup>2</sup> The Greeks, in turn, had their own treasure stories, which told of a winged griffin protecting treasure, Jason wresting the golden fleece from the guarding dragon, and Heracles dispatching a snake to obtain the three golden apples.<sup>3</sup>

Tales of treasure also interested the Semites. They spoke of hidden golden plates and other valuable texts buried in places like a cave, mountain, iron box, or under Solomon's throne. One treasure was protected by Qatmir, a guarding dog.<sup>4</sup> None of these reports, however, matched the extravagance of the Qumran community's "Copper Scroll." Apparently a catalogue of Judaeen treasure lore, this early Christian era scroll listed sixty hidden deposits with precious metal weighing two hundred tons altogether.<sup>5</sup> Some of these ideas may have influenced Arabic culture. "The *Rassad*," wrote R. Campbell Thompson, "is generally the guardian of some treasure, and may take the form of a man, colt, cock, or chicken with young; he haunts almost all caves. . . . The idea that devils are guardians of enormous treasure is very prevalent among the Arabs."<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, the ideas of hidden but guarded treasure, with their secondary and accompanying motifs of ancient texts, animals, boxes, devils, caves, gold, incantations, mountains, and even the ratifying number *three*, were an ancient bequest. Later they became a part of the central beliefs of Indo-European folk culture.<sup>7</sup> For the European, buried treasure might be found in barrows and treasure chambers within a mountain. Or it could be deposited near a wayside cross, close to one's home, or under the ruins of a fallen castle or abbey. The



treasure itself, the people realized, was active. It might rise or fall, grow or multiply, and after seven years (some said a hundred years were necessary) “blossum” or “sun” itself near the earth’s surface. At such times, particularly during a full moon, the treasure became “will o’ the wisp,” giving off a bluish flame and therefore especially susceptible to recovery.<sup>8</sup>

But getting the treasure was always difficult and harrowing. If not recovered quickly, the trove sank into the earth’s depths until its next far-in-the-future “blooming.” Further, the digger might have to outwit the man-like elemental spirits. According to some lore, the salamander, after forging minerals in the earth’s fiery furnace, entrusted his newly made ore to his brother spirits, the sylphs, nymphs, and especially the underground gnomes, who then safeguarded it for humankind’s general good.<sup>9</sup> More common, however, were tales involving the devil, who moved treasures about maliciously to prevent their discovery and created distracting spectres to impede digging. For example, he might transform himself into a frightening toad, rooster, dog, bear, snake, or dragon. He could present the digger with a false vision of his burning home or village. Or, more imaginatively, he might dress himself in a bizarre red and green costume and ride either a glowing wagon wheel or a trundling barrel. If such things did not scare the seeker from his booty, they invariably caused him to break the taboo of silence, which ended any chance of success.<sup>10</sup>

Faced with these obstacles, the European treasure seeker tried to narrow the odds. To facilitate his search, he listened carefully to the treasure dreams of a pure or innocent youth, who it was believed had special powers to discern and recover the subterranean bounty. “Earth mirrors,” seer stones, or divining rods crafted from hazel or mistletoe were also thought to be useful searching tools.<sup>11</sup> Many seekers used a magic manual like *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* to secure astrological information, gain a listing of suitable psalms for magic prowess, and learn important prayer and conjuring formulae. The latter was especially important. Treasure seekers and magical practitioners in general tried to “bind to their service, and imprison in a ring, a mirror, or a stone, some fairy, sylph, or salamander, and compel it to appear when called, and render answers to such questions as the viewer should propose.”<sup>12</sup> During the medieval period, the elemental spirits, commonly known as “familiars,” were viewed as the easiest to conjure, a task often left to a preadolescent youth, a cleric, or a professional scryer.<sup>13</sup>

The popularity of treasure digging in Europe is difficult to assess. Certainly the practice was geographically widespread. Money diggers were at work from Iceland to Russia and from Scandinavia to the southern Mediterranean. Germany and especially Hungary had reputations for digging.<sup>14</sup> In England the practice made "hill digger" a common epithet and brought a series of statutory prohibitions. Yet court officials such as John Dee (Queen Elizabeth's physician) or Goodwin Wharton (a seventeenth-century Lord of the Admiralty) sought buried treasure, and as late as the twentieth century hazel rods were frequently used to probe for lead and coal veins in northern England.<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, Walter Scott, Edvard Grieg, Henrik Ibsen, and especially the Germans Goethe and E. T. A. Hoffmann used treasure images in their works. Perhaps as telling, treasure-hunting motifs lodged themselves in popular culture. Everyday folk brandished mistletoe, carried their will-o'-the-wisp jack o'lanterns, told their children about money pots under the rainbow, and read to them of Snow White's troubles with the wicked queen's magic mirror and of the friendly treasure mountain gnomes who rescued her.

At the beginning of the modern era, then, there existed a mature lore of hidden wealth, and some of it was probably not chimera. Both German and English miners claimed that divining rods aided their search for minerals, and the hope of finding treasure beneath a barrow, wayside cross, ruin, or in one of the ubiquitous caches of the countryside was not entirely without foundation.<sup>16</sup> Yet the reality of actual treasure hardly explains the power and tenacity of the treasure myth. "Finds" were never commensurate with actual digging and were more a matter of accidental discovery than conscious magical enterprise. Even the discovery of mines, allegedly the most successful of the diggers' pursuits, evoked skepticism and lacked documented results.<sup>17</sup>

Why did such a nonrational practice persist? While wealth seeking and adventure doubtless played a role, Europeans were as susceptible to the old cultural patterns as the early Semites, Greeks, and Romans. Since at least Neolithic times, the ideas of treasure, capricious spirits, religious quest, and a Mother-Earth who matured precious ores within her hallowed womb have persisted. Like medieval miners who purified themselves with fasting, meditation, prayers, and acts of worship, many treasure hunters saw themselves as working close to the sacred presence.<sup>18</sup> Such religious feeling made their practices tenacious and enduring.



Moreover, treasure digging fit into the prevailing magical-religious culture of the time. Some areas in England, for instance, may have had as many “wise men” and “wise women” as ordained ministers, and they likely commanded as wide a clientele. Drawing their name from the Christian magi, these seers or masters of the arcane claimed not only to locate buried treasure but also to heal the sick, foretell the future, find lost articles, establish criminality, and in some cases perform services that scholars increasingly conclude were religious in character. Their “summoning of celestial beings was a religious rite,” concludes Keith Thomas, “in which prayer played an essential part, and where piety and purity of life were deemed essential. . . . At this level the practice of magic became a holy quest: the search for knowledge, not by study and research, but by revelation.”<sup>19</sup> Some adepts added preachments to their ceremonials, speaking of the lost patriarchal powers of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Joseph, and Solomon, which they saw themselves as preserving.<sup>20</sup>

Most Old World magical practitioners warmly rejected any league with the powers of darkness. Their craft was *beneficium*, the white art, which opposed devilish compacts, consorting with demons, and the works of evil witches. For example, *Egyptian Secrets*, a chapbook (purportedly by Albertus Magnus) that circulated among the German peasantry and later among the Pennsylvania Dutch, advertised itself as an antidote to the “machinations of bad and malicious people” whose sorcery blighted personal happiness, marriages, and on occasion entire villages. To disregard its prescriptions was to “defy the will of God” and risk “eternal punishment and grim damnation.”<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* freely invoked both biblical images and the cabalistic names of deity.<sup>22</sup> In sum, many European adepts were like the Elizabethan John Dee, who told Emperor Rudolph II that, finding no man nor book had adequate truth, he had resorted to the medium of his shew stone and the ministry of holy angels. But his conjuring, he insisted, had never passed the bounds of acceptable and enlightened Christianity.<sup>23</sup> No doubt he saw his magical paraphernalia as no more opposed to religion than the Egyptian divining cup of Joseph, the supernatural rods of Moses and Aaron, or the Urim and Thummim of the High Priest.<sup>24</sup>

Neither Dee nor present-day scholars have been able to draw a distinct line between “the white arts” and religion. Certainly the old nineteenth-century categories, which pejoratively saw magic as primal, practical, and manipulative, and religion as enlightened,

ethereal, and supplicatory, have failed to bear up under recent structural–functional or phenomenological analysis. With a wide range of practices present in all religious movements, including early Christianity itself, scholars have assumed a more tolerant and flexible view.<sup>25</sup>

### III

In retrospect, it was inevitable that treasure digging should persist in Europe and later come to the New World. So deeply ingrained were the traditional folk ideas of hidden and shifting treasure, underground spirits, divination, astrology, and the earth's role in making and perfecting minerals that the practice must have sailed to America with Jamestown's *Sarah Constant*, *Goodspeed*, and *Discovery*. These myths were part of a significant but now largely forgotten belief system which had the strengths of tradition, religion, and even an informal authority structure based on the widespread wise adepts. It offered the folk an alternative or accompanying belief to the remote and at times emotionally sterile dogmas of formal religion. In the American environment, this traditional culture of the people, of which money digging was a part, would prosper for many years. Then it quickly faded, becoming a matter of opprobrium which the collective consciousness of the new society sought to purge from memory.

Bereft of the old European treasure landmarks and the ancient Celtic, Roman, and German races that supposedly placed wealth within them, the early American settlers found new "realities" to justify their renewed money digging. Borrowing on the old lore, the treasure hunters focused on ruins, mounds, caves, or even geological chasms and fissures, which some thought to have been created by the convulsions at the time of Christ's crucifixion.<sup>26</sup> The remains of French fortifications brought fifty diggers to Crown Point near Lake Champlain, while others excavated around Chimney Island in the St. Lawrence River channel fifty miles northeast of Ogdenburg, New York. Rumors of hidden Hessian and British booty, in turn, brought diggers to the Saratoga, New York, battlefield.<sup>27</sup>

Glacial drumlins which rose barrow-like from the upstate New York landscape were also attractions. One of these, the starkly dramatic, one-hundred-and-fifty-foot-high Mormon Hill, or "Cumorah," as Mormons called it, was the site of treasure digging both before and after Joseph Smith's receiving of his golden plates.<sup>28</sup>



Diggers also worked the rampart-crowned Carantouan or Spanish Hill, rising in solitary isolation above the Susquehanna plain near Elmira, New York. Some believed that Carantouan, like Mormon Hill, was a man-made earthen shell that concealed a treasure cavern. Others spoke of the hill's buried wealth, reportedly left by Spanish explorers, Captain Kidd, or perhaps "a prehistoric race as wealthy as the Aztecs."<sup>29</sup>

The cave motif was not restricted to "treasure mountains" like Mormon Hill and Carantouan. Perhaps reflecting the popular Masonic legend of Solomon's many-arched subterranean vault, there were accounts of treasure caves in Vermont's Green Mountains, the Adirondacks, near present-day Rochester, and above the Susquehanna River in northern Pennsylvania.<sup>30</sup> The image also survived in good-natured folklore. According to Henry van Hoevenberg, an early twentieth-century *raconteur*, while still a young man he found an Algonquin parchment telling of a cave that could be seen only in the light of a full August moon. Finding and entering the grotto, van Hoevenberg stuffed his pockets "with wampum and gold and great treasure" until met by a huge and menacing Indian. Though he escaped with a few valuables, the incident left him, according to his story, with "two broken legs, three broken ribs, and one broken arm."<sup>31</sup>

The identity of those burying treasure greatly varied. Encouraged by the area's mysterious mounds and a romantic delight with the antique, some posited the existence of an ancient American race. Gentle and honest Tim Allen, a Rochester seer, told of pygmy miners who buried their treasure in upstate New York to keep it from invading giants.<sup>32</sup> In Chautauqua County, New York, near the Pennsylvania border, several adepts confirmed the presence of a "fabulous buried treasure" left by some "highly cultivated and wealthy" Celtic Indians prior to their destruction by barbaric hordes from the north. A group of communitarian Spiritualists, who supposedly spent \$20,000 digging at the site, had their own revelation about the "Kiantonian" people. They were, the Spiritualists confirmed, none other than the progenitors of the Aztecs.<sup>33</sup> Such notions were apparently widespread. The Palmyra neighbors of Joseph Smith claimed that his family spoke of "large gold bars and silver plates" hidden within the caverns of the region's prehistoric man-made mounds.<sup>34</sup>

However, none of the treasure-burying peoples figured as strongly in the lore as two ever-present images, the Spaniard and the

pirate. Spain and her colonies fascinated the average English settler, and Spanish themes, influenced undoubtedly by Potosi and the Spanish Main, became stock features of the remarkably consistent treasure tales.<sup>35</sup> One of the most detailed stories told of the aged Spaniard DeGrau, who in 1800 suddenly appeared near present-day Bristol, Vermont, and began digging. Eventually the settlers persuaded him to reveal his secret. As a youth he had been part of a successful Spanish mining expedition that had concealed a hoard of silver within a Green Mountain cave. Now as the surviving member of the party, he had come to reclaim his wealth. Unfortunately, neither DeGrau nor several generations of hunters who ravished Vermont's "Hell's Half Acre" found anything besides a strange-looking vessel that some believed was left by the Spanish troop.<sup>36</sup>

The theme of treasure-burying Spanish miners or explorers became a folklore staple. In Vermont, at least twenty towns claimed a returning old Spaniard who failed to find his hidden silver specie.<sup>37</sup> At Pennsylvania's Big Bend of the Susquehanna River, diggers also looked for treasure left by a company of Spaniards, supposedly coined silver sealed within an inevitable cave.<sup>38</sup> With some varying detail, the same chronicle later appeared in Tennessee, Missouri, and even Oregon.<sup>39</sup>

The pirate myth was probably stronger. While having roots in England, the idea of hidden pirate treasure flowered in America.<sup>40</sup> The booty of Captain Low, Harry Main, Thomas Veale, or simply rumored buccaneers plying Lake Ontario, each appeared in the lore.<sup>41</sup> But two names dominated.

The first was the notorious "Blackbeard," the criminally insane Edward Teach, whose forty-gun *Queen Anne's Revenge* preyed on Carolina and Virginia shipping after the War of Spanish Succession in 1713.<sup>42</sup> The Blackbeard legend centered around colonial Philadelphia and the south Atlantic Coast. Believed to have frequented the city's waterfront taverns and to have had "friends . . . lodged among us every where," Blackbeard was thought to have buried money and plate both in Philadelphia and in nearby secluded riverside locations. When a few treasure pots were apparently found in the city's household cellars and the discovery of others was rumored, the idea of buried pirate wealth became "much the expectation and talk of the times."<sup>43</sup> Benjamin Franklin reported that not only were such ideas "mighty prevalent," but money digging itself was widespread: "You can hardly walk half a Mile out of Town on any Side," he wrote, "without observing several Pits dug with that Design, and perhaps



some lately opened. Men, otherwise of very good Sense, have been drawn into this Practice. . . . There seems to be some peculiar Charm in the conceit of *finding* money."<sup>44</sup>

The second name was that of William Kidd. Commissioned as a privateer in 1696 to rid the Indian Ocean of corsairs, "Captain Kidd" was soon rumored to be a pirate himself and was hung for murder five years later at London's Execution Dock. Before his capture in Boston, he had sailed the Atlantic Coast and buried on Gardiner's Island, New York, a hoard worth fourteen thousand pounds, which authorities later reclaimed. These facts were expanded to fill America's most extravagant treasure legend. Men searched from Key West to Halifax for the rest of Captain Kidd's "unfound" treasury. In the northern states alone, excavations were made in New York at Coney Island, Gardiner's Island, and New York City; in Massachusetts at Nantucket, Cape Cod, and in the marshes behind Boston; in Connecticut at Stratford Point, Wethersfield, and Clarke's Island in the Connecticut River; and at such diverse places as South Kingstown, Rhode Island; Weare, New Hampshire; and Penobscot Bay, Maine.<sup>45</sup>

The digging was at times both unlikely and vigorous. Despite living seventy miles up the Hudson River at Green County, New York, young Thurlow Weed remembered embarking on a Kidd treasure expedition which his elders had promised would yield "golden results."<sup>46</sup> Indeed, according to Harold Thompson, there was "not a County on Hudson's River, not an islet in the Sound but has its whispers and hopes of buried treasure, all planted by Kidd on those few nights when he hovered between Block Island and Gardiner's."<sup>47</sup> Even landlocked Vermont had at least three towns that claimed Kidd treasure.<sup>48</sup> And when diggers believed themselves close to a discovery, the result was prodigious. According to one assessment, Penobscot Bay had enough dirt from treasure digging to bank and fill a twenty-mile railroad grade, while some New England beaches were left like scarred and disfigured mining districts.<sup>49</sup>

While much of this money digging may have been nonmagical, other hunters relied heavily on the old lore. For instance, a skilled wise man or diviner was often employed. As in Europe, these white magic practitioners conjured spirits, cast horoscopes, blessed amulets, foretold the future, discovered missing persons and lost property, and blessed the ill with cabalistic charms and sometimes by the "laying on of hands." Some were thought endowed with "the spirit of truth, prophecy, or the power of speaking in tongues."<sup>50</sup>



These American adepts were a diffuse lot, including girls, boys, women, and men. Young Sally Chase found lost articles and treasure in the Palmyra, New York, neighborhood.<sup>51</sup> Seven-year-old Eli Yarnall began his seeric career when in his own house he suddenly laughed at the idea of his father running down a distant mountain chasing a dropped whiskey jug. On returning home, his father confirmed the boy's "second sight."<sup>52</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier, whose New England heritage and rural nativity were probably representative of conditions elsewhere, told of a black "wise woman" who received "hundreds of anxious inquirers"; of the "grave" and "thoughtful" healer whose New England clients petitioned him both by mail and in person; and of the Quaker conjuror Bantum, who, on receiving a request, placed his huge, iron-rimmed spectacles on his face, opened his strange, black-lettered "conjuring book," and after a few moments of meditation, gave the required answers.<sup>53</sup>

Of the scores of adepts that appear in reminiscent accounts and local histories, some left an enduring mark on history. Some suspected that Dr. Robert Child, a wealthy Puritan skilled "in mineralogy and metallurgy" and given to the "searching for mines," was a wizard. Child led the first movement to secure liberty of conscience in Massachusetts.<sup>54</sup> The German Pietist Johannes Kelpius founded on the outskirts of Philadelphia his "Chapter of Perfection," a religious brotherhood that mixed alchemy, astrology, the hermetic arts, and money digging with millennial Rosicrucianism. After his death, Kelpius's influence continued in the communitarian Ephrata settlement and in a series of magic practitioners who mirrored his own interests.<sup>55</sup> The youthful Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of Mormonism, honed his spiritual gifts by finding lost articles, foretelling the future, blessing crops, and digging for treasure.<sup>56</sup> Then there was the far-famed Moll Pitcher (1738–1813), whose name became an American watchword. For more than fifty years, she followed the seeric precedent given her by her grandfather and advised the thousands who entered her Lynn, Massachusetts, cottage. "Many a Vessel has been deserted by its Crew, and waited idly at the Wharves, for Weeks, in Consequence of her unlucky Predictions," noted a contemporary. "To her came the Rich and the Poor—the Wise and the Ignorant—the Accomplished and the Vulgar."<sup>57</sup>

The adepts often played a major role in money digging. The two men who in 1827 sought neatly boxed Spanish dollars below the old pier at New London, Connecticut, were directed by an elderly wise woman. Seeking pirate treasure in Maine, three men imported from



Connecticut a “far-famed and wonderfully skillful rodsman” to assist them. In turn, the treasure-hungry farmers of Rose, New York, sought the help of a “medium,” while the 1825 expedition to the Susquehanna hills began with a “peeper” named Odle, whose power of “seeing under ground” piqued William Hale’s interest. Moreover, the longtime diggers around Bristol, Vermont, made use of expert advice. They consulted a series of “prophets,” including two women, an “old Frenchman” east of the mountains, and finally a conjuror who promised that by removing a few rocks and “shunning the solid ledge” the long-sought cave might be entered. Indeed, one Bristol seer even assayed the value of the Bristol treasure at \$3,100,000 and a few cents.<sup>58</sup>

The first role of the adept was to aid in finding the treasure. Often this involved confirming a rumor or dream, the two primary sources of treasure stories. The latter was especially frequent. Of the fifty treasure sites that Silas Hamilton, a devoted treasure seeker from Whitingham, Vermont, logged in his journal, over twenty owed their origin to a dream experienced by one of Hamilton’s contemporaries. At least one dream was given three times.<sup>59</sup> Drawn from the prevailing biblical and secondary magical culture, both dreams and the ratifying number *three* became an important stimulus to digging.<sup>60</sup> Thus when Deacon Bascom, an early New Hampshire settler, dreamed three times of a silver treasure deposited under a stone, he found the stone but eventually refused to recover the treasure for fear that it might corrupt his children.<sup>61</sup> Those who believed old Mrs. Talmage’s thrice-occurring dream were less wise. According to up-state New York lore, the three men who set out to recover the treasure were never seen again.<sup>62</sup> The number *three* also played a role in proper ritual. When another dream revealed the position of the lost Oneida treasure, the hunter arrived on the site, but failing to turn around the prescribed three times before picking the treasure up, he lost his opportunity.<sup>63</sup>

Continuing the long-standing European tradition, if rumors and dreams failed to mark the specific location of the treasure an adept’s divining rod was often used. Like their Old World counterparts, these were usually freshly grown, Y-shaped twigs about eighteen inches to two feet long. They were taken from apple, beech, cherry, or more commonly hazel trees, although such objects as whalebone or brass and iron wire were also employed.<sup>64</sup> Conflicting lore suggested that the rod’s ceremonial cutting should be on the first night of

Christmas, Twelfth Night, at Tuesday's new moon, or during the St. John's Day celebration of the summer solstice.<sup>65</sup>

"One who does not believe in . . . [the rod] cannot believe in God," claimed an ardent rodsman, "for I call on him to make her successful, when I cuts her, and so she *must* be true."<sup>66</sup> In truth, the cutting ritual was filled with religious imagery. One prescribed formula required the supplicant to use the three "highest" cabalistic names of deity incanted three times.<sup>67</sup> Another clothed its words with traditional Christian phrasing:

I conjure thee, one summer long [old], hazel rod, by the power of God, by the obedience of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, God and Mary's own son, who died on the cross, and by the power of God, by the truth of God arose from the dead; God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who art the very truth thyself, that thou showest me where silver and gold is hidden.<sup>68</sup>

Interpreting biblical passages to their advantage, some adepts saw themselves as having canonical sanction and called their instrument "Jacob's rod" after the patriarch's use of mystical rods while breeding Laban's cattle.<sup>69</sup>

Since a rod's wide-ranging power might include healing, answering religious questions, determining a suspect's criminality, or discovering lost articles, salt licks, underground water channels, and subterranean minerals, some rods were impregnated with nails of "gold, silver, iron, copper, lead, tin, and an amalgam" to heighten their sensitivity to buried treasure. Then, whether the tool was so adorned or not, the practitioner grasped it in his hand, palms facing up, and walked across the suspected treasure terrain, waiting for the rod to twist itself downward.<sup>70</sup> Occasionally there was some variation of procedure. One adept poised a straight rod on his forefinger, expecting the lure of gold or silver to destroy its equilibrium. The Joseph Smith letter to Josiah Stowell counseled the treasure seeker to cleave the hazel stick lengthwise. When laid parallel one inch apart over a prospective site, the two parts would "draw and Join together again of themselves" if actual treasure were present.<sup>71</sup>

Peter Oliver, the future Massachusetts chief justice, found that the divining rod "exceeded what I had heard." It could "locate a single Dollar under ground, at 60 or 70 feet Distance; & to a Quantity of Silver at a Miles Distance."<sup>72</sup> With the device's "water-witching" ability increasingly appreciated, Oliver's opinion was widely shared. "From north to south, from east to west," claimed an



early nineteenth-century observer, “the divining rod has its advocates. Men in various callings, men above the reach of mean arts, men of the soundest judgment, of large information, and of the most exemplary lives, do not disown the art.”<sup>73</sup>

A second treasure-finding device used by some adepts was the “peep” or “seer” stone, whose acclaimed gifts excelled even those of the divining rod. Such stones seemed to be everywhere and were of every possible description. A Rochester, New York, practitioner found his stone lying in a road. The “dazzling splendor” of this three- or four-inch piece of quartz caused him to fall down insensible.<sup>74</sup> Joseph Smith’s various stones reportedly included a smooth, grey, egg-shaped rock found in a neighbor’s well, a second which he reportedly dug up near Lake Erie after spying it in his neighbor’s stone, and still others collected from the Mississippi River sands near Nauvoo, Illinois.<sup>75</sup> Edwin Rushton exhumed his “beautiful Seer Stone, clear as crystal” after dreaming of it three times.<sup>76</sup> Others used unearthed Indian charms which were identified by a hole punctured at one end of the stone.<sup>77</sup> Indeed there were green, yellow, white, and “speckled” stones, opaque and polished stones, and round and oblong stones. Their only common quality was their “unusual” or “peculiar” nature.<sup>78</sup> Borrowing on a long-standing German tradition, some American adepts even used mirrors.<sup>79</sup>

Practitioners were literally “seers,” that is, lookers into the stone. An eyewitness described the process: “Tim placed the diamond—for so we must term the [seer] stone—in his cap, put the cap over his face in such a manner as to exclude every particle of light, and after a long and steady ‘view,’ moved the cap slowly away from his face, his gaze still fixed on the stone.”<sup>80</sup> With most village seers requiring that the light be secluded, this stone-in-the-hat procedure was standard. By this method, an adept could see within the stone crystal a helpful spirit or the precise locality of the underground treasure.<sup>81</sup>

Having determined the treasure site, the seeker still had much to do. “The Astrologers, with whom the Country swarms at this Time,” noted Benjamin Franklin, “are often consulted about the critical Times for Digging, the Methods of laying the Spirit, and the like Whimseys, which renders them very necessary to and very much caress’d by the poor deluded *Money-hunters* .”<sup>82</sup>

To assist their clients, adepts taught the proper times and seasons (most believed that treasure digging prospered during the summer months from midnight until sunrise), the correct position of



the zodiacal seven planets (for instance, a full moon was thought best), and the influence of the directional points of the compass (many adepts faced east while performing their ceremonials). Solstices, equinoxes, and special days such as Shrove Tuesday, Good Friday, and St. John's Eve also played a role.<sup>83</sup> None of this was unique to money digging. Until the middle of the nineteenth century and beyond, Americans typically consulted their ever-present almanac to plant crops, shear sheep, butcher livestock, burn weeds and bushes, and even to wean their children. All such daily tasks must be done by seasonal and astrological routines that had descended from time immemorial.<sup>84</sup> (It is interesting to note that despite his slighting remarks about money digging, Benjamin Franklin published one of the most popular almanacs in colonial America.)

While finding the right moment to dig was important, the need to circumvent the treasure's guardian was crucial. Like its Old World antecedents, the American treasure keeper might be demonic or divine.<sup>85</sup> Or it could be a cat, dog, snake, or some other protecting animal. But generally the American treasure guardian was a murdered youth or man whose body had been left with the buried valuables to ensure their protection. Guardian Indians were a frequent motif, while a murdered pirate (often a black man because they were believed to be "the most honest") protected Captain Kidd's many troves. Whatever their form, they were bound to be clever, and, if surviving folklore can be credited, they were fearsome as well. They might appear on a black horse carrying their own head in their lap. Or they might blow blue flames skyward as a warning to encroaching diggers.<sup>86</sup>

The guardian had two main defenses. First, he might excite the diggers to break the necessary silence. A treasure hunter on Maine's Jewell's Island, for instance, saw a sow and her litter issue from the excavation. Somehow he maintained his quiet until the animal bit his leg and forced him to exclaim, "Damn!" Then, according to the story, "the pigs vanished, the hole filled up, and the treasure trovers found themselves sitting on the ledge . . . with the incoming tide lapping their feet."<sup>87</sup> Other tales were colorful variations on the same theme. As a digger was about to lift the treasure rock that sat atop the deposit, his crowbar slipped on a companion's foot. His consequent profanity brought a blazing, twenty-foot flame that prevented further digging.<sup>88</sup> While such lore persisted into the twentieth century and lost nothing in the telling, few contemporary accounts were



without the diggers' failure to maintain silence, which invariably resulted in the loss of the sought-for prize.

Second, the guardian could move the treasure about. In one repetitious account after another, the diggers claimed to have found their coin-laden chest only to see or hear it rumble away. A dream and a divining rod located a treasure site for a "respectable gentleman" living in Tunbridge, Vermont. After his men excavated a fifteen-foot square hole seven or eight feet deep (six pumps were required to keep the water out), the treasure box proved to be a disappointment. "There is not ten dollars apiece," protested one of the company. But with silence broken, the chest moved through the mud and was never seen again.<sup>89</sup> In another incident, remembered years later, Martin Harris and Porter Rockwell, early Mormon converts, broke off a piece of a chest's lid before the box slid noisily away. This fragment from the chest was cherished as a relic for years.<sup>90</sup> On other expeditions, some diggers even claimed to see the ground rise and fall as the treasure moved away from them.<sup>91</sup>

Probably no firsthand treasure account rivaled John Nutt's colorfully told story of a Rochester, New York, dig. Guided by Hiram Morre, a learned treasure hunter of unknown origins, a group climbed Cobb's Hill. Nutt "tried the ground" with his "magic spear," a pointed iron rod about seven feet long. Apparently striking the top of a box, he pierced the obstruction, and as he moved the rod about he heard the distinct rattle of coins. The treasure hunters then moved quickly:

Having speared the treasure it was his duty to hold the spear firm while his comrades dug the box out. Not a word was spoken but picks and shovels flew fast, and a great hole was dug. The spear and box sank deeper [but] . . . finally the box remained firm. Then the men reached and uncovered it: the box danced about, [and as] the men seized it . . . one remarked—"we've got it at last." Instantly the box was wrenched from their hands and the party heard it move, rattling, away into the hill some thirty feet or more. The night was clear and starlit but a great wind suddenly lifted all the men out of the pit and blew them helter-skelter in a heap in the corner of a fence some distance to the south-east. The hole dug that night can still be seen.<sup>92</sup>

The manual *Egyptian Secrets* had a remedy for these enchantments. With the treasure rising nearly to ground level at the sun's apogee, clever diggers might construct a trench outside and below the chest and approach it from underneath. Such a plan, however, ran the risk of injuring the digger if the peripatetic chest moved down-

ward and fell upon him.<sup>93</sup> Other hunters used magic circles to break the treasure's charm. From antiquity, men had used circles in their devotions,<sup>94</sup> and magicians particularly came to regard circles as "certain fortresses" against demons.<sup>95</sup> Money diggers agreed. They encircled their pits to "keep the devil out" and to protect themselves from the treasure guardian's machinations.<sup>96</sup>

The ritual of the treasure circle was complex. Usually an adept made two circles (in some cases three). The larger one, sometimes as wide as fifty yards in diameter, shielded workers from evil influence while the smaller was apparently intended to prevent the treasure from moving. According to a Vermont formula, nine steel spikes besmeared with fresh hen's blood and hog dung were placed at locations on both circles, with four reserved for the cardinal points of the compass and another placed at the center directly above the prize. Another adept who practiced in New England and later the Ohio River Valley also used nine nails. As he walked around the circle reading Raphael's exorcism of the devil from the Apocrypha, companions dropped the nails at equal distances from the center.<sup>97</sup>

Swords, sacrifices, and the Bible also were used. The common European pattern placed the adept at the center of the treasure circle, sword or wand in hand, where he observed planetary positions and propitiated the treasure demons with Old Testament sacrifices.<sup>98</sup> Some of this practice apparently continued in America. The expedition that young Thurlow Weed participated in sacrificed a black cat.<sup>99</sup> Diggers in Vermont and Pennsylvania reportedly killed dogs at treasure sites, while in Jefferson and Ontario counties, New York, they scandalized some of their neighbors by immolating sheep.<sup>100</sup> As the sole exception to the rule of silence, the officiator invoked the treasure demons by name and sometimes read from the scriptures and the hymnal or intoned a prayer from the often-used *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*.<sup>101</sup>

#### IV

As with most folkways, the full depth and extent of this activity can only be surmised. Yet, money digging, with its fascination with ancient races, mysterious Spaniards and pirates, seers, magical rods and stones, and of course enchanted treasure, was clearly more than a passing or isolated phenomenon. In some areas the practice especially prospered. Philadelphia, for instance, earned the reputation as a money-digging center early in the eighteenth century.<sup>102</sup> There,



“great Numbers of honest Artificers and labouring People . . . voluntarily endure abundance of Fatigue in a fruitless Search after Imaginary hidden Treasure,” complained Franklin in 1729. “They wander thro’ the Woods and Bushes by Day, to discover the Marks and Signs; [and] at Midnight they repair to the hopeful Spot with Spades and Pickaxes.”<sup>103</sup>

Such activity inspired Thomas Forrest’s satirical drama, *The Disappointment, or, the Force of Credulity* (1767). Written in part “to put a stop (if possible) to the foolish and pernicious practice of searching after supposed hidden treasure,” the play might have become the first American-written drama staged by an American professional company. Instead, it never opened. Richard Swan, a prominent Philadelphia hatter whose money digging the play satirized, reportedly warned that if the drama were performed it “might begin a Comedy,” but “he would make it end in a Tragedy.” While *The Disappointment* burlesqued many money-digging ideas and practices, a modern critic believed that Swan and his friends were perhaps too sensitive in their opposition. The play’s money-digging “dupes are not fools,” he observed; “they are merely typical.”<sup>104</sup>

The Dutch community on the lower Hudson shared the money-digging excitement. Washington Irving remembered a boyhood filled with “pirates, ghosts, smugglers, and buried money.” He placed these tales and traditions in *The Money-Diggers* (1825), the best fictional compendium of treasure lore of the time. On three successive nights, Wolfert Webber, “a worthy burgher” and scion of one of New Amsterdam’s first settlers, dreamt of buried treasure. Since “a dream, three times repeated, was never known to lie,” Webber assumed that his fortune was made. However, to ensure his success, he obtained the help of Dr. Knipperhausen, a “high German doctor” with a reputation for astrology, alchemy, and divination. Arriving at the treasure site, the two men with their several companions divined the chest’s precise location, drew a protecting circle, and read Latin and German conjurations. But with spades striking against the treasure chest, Webber predictably uttered a silence-breaking exclamation which quickly produced the pirate guardian’s “grim visage” and a train of threatening demons. Irving’s summary statement was noncommittal: “Whether any treasure was ever actually buried at that place . . . or whether it still remains there under the guardianship of gnomes and spirits until it shall be properly sought for, is all matter of conjecture.”<sup>105</sup>

New England also was a center for digging. The treasure catalogue of Silas Hamilton, a longtime Massachusetts citizen before his move to Vermont, listed the rumors of his old neighborhood. Of the forty-one locations that can now be identified, Massachusetts had twenty-eight sites, Connecticut eight, and New York three. Probably reflecting the prevailing pirate craze, about half lay close to the sea or a navigable river, the Boston–Salem area alone having nine. But central Massachusetts was also reputed to be rich in treasure. There, in a vertical belt running parallel to the Connecticut River, Hamilton noted over fifteen locations, though interior regions sometimes contained mines rather than the more easily accessible chests, tankards, and hogsheads of coin that characterized the coastal areas.<sup>106</sup>

Vermont's embrace of the cunning arts probably exceeded any other region. While Massachusetts and Connecticut "permit no witch to live," wrote poet John G. C. Brainard,

With more of hardihood and less of grace,  
Vermont receives the sisters gray and lean,  
Allows each witch her airy broomstick race,  
O'er mighty rocks and mountains dark with green,  
Where tempests wake their voice, and torrents roar between.<sup>107</sup>

Many Green Mountain men agreed. Judge Daniel Pierce Thompson, whose melodramatic *May Martin, or the Money Diggers* (1835) passed through at least fifty editions, observed that money-digging seers with the "faculty of discovering things hidden or unknown to them . . . prevailed to some extent in many parts of this country. Nor has this alleged faculty [in 1852] by any means wholly ceased."<sup>108</sup> The editor of the Montpelier *Watchman* was more enthusiastic. "We do not hesitate to declare our belief that digging for money is the most certain way of obtaining it."<sup>109</sup>

The Vermont money-digging region lay along the spine of the Green Mountains. Within this area, twenty-seven towns or a tenth of Vermont's communities dug for treasure, with rural areas also joining the pursuit.<sup>110</sup> Here money digging was "very common" and was considered an "honorable and profitable" employment. Indeed, the *Watchman* claimed it could name "at least five hundred respectable men, who do, in the simplicity and sincerity of their hearts, verily believe that immense treasures lie concealed in the Green Mountains, many of whom have been industriously and perseveringly engaged in digging it up."<sup>111</sup>



As Vermont's early nineteenth-century emigration swept into upstate New York, the money-digging frenzy came with it. "Such superstition was frequent in the new settlements," one of James Fenimore Cooper's characters in *The Pioneers* (1823) acknowledged.<sup>112</sup> There were in fact reports of treasure hunting in northern New York in Herkimer, Jefferson, Monroe, Onondaga, Ontario, and Wayne counties and in the southern part of the state in Broome, Chenango, Otsego, Schoharie, and Tioga counties.<sup>113</sup> Some digging was intensive. Guy Markham recalled that "nearly every hill and gully" in Rush township was searched for gold.<sup>114</sup> The *Palmyra Reflector* labeled the New York money hunting "*mania*": "Men and women without distinction of age or sex became marvellous[ly] wise in the occult sciences, many dreamed, and others saw visions disclosing to them, deep in the bowels of the earth, rich and shining treasures."<sup>115</sup>

## V

Generalizing about America's diggers for wealth is difficult. Evidence is limited and impressionistic, generally hostile, and heavily drawn from the limited perspectives of folklore, literature, and local histories written long after the fact. Yet, whether on the Atlantic seaboard or in the lake country of New York, the diggers shared several tendencies. Clearly, they came from a representative social spectrum. Franklin described those in Philadelphia as honest craftsmen and laborers, while Forrest's satire was aimed at several money-digging tradesmen. A similar pattern prevailed in Vermont. Silas Hamilton was a leading land and office holder of Whitingham, Vermont.<sup>116</sup> The Nathaniel Wood family, celebrated diggers in Middletown, Vermont, had "some of the best minds the town ever had" and enjoyed the reputation of "upbuilding" any community in which they resided.<sup>117</sup> The upstate New York diggers were undoubtedly agrarian, probably no different in social profile from their neighborhood at large.

The treasure hunters had a penchant for organization. Probably most digging was an informal neighborhood affair, but occasionally expeditions and "companies" were organized for specific purposes. The Smith Company sought treasure in Wayne and Ontario counties, while the rival Rochester Company tried to wrest from Joseph Smith his golden plates.<sup>118</sup> There were even more ambitious enterprises. A seer's vision of buried West Indian gold stimulated Yankee enterpris-



ers to form a company, while in 1825 northern Pennsylvania diggers formally agreed to share their profits with the widow of Oliver Harper, a wealthy man who had reportedly invested two thousand dollars in the initial stages of the venture.<sup>119</sup> However, the Bristol, Vermont, dig was probably one the largest capitalized projects. Promising local investors a hundred dollars for every dollar invested, a Canadian entrepreneur and treasure hunter, Simeon Corser, raised and spent ten thousand dollars at the "Hell's Half-Acre" diggings.<sup>120</sup> None of this apparently was exceptional. According to Charles Skinner, some money-digging promoters secured salaries as officers of digging companies and thereby gained "the only tangible results [that ever came] from such enterprises."<sup>121</sup>

The diggers' motives were mixed. A major concern, of course, was the securing of wealth. Rumors constantly circulated about a hunter's smiling fortune which excited still others to further digging. Joseph Smith's family reportedly found such miscellaneous objects as a cannon ball, a cache of gold watches, and according to the viewpoint of some of their neighbors, the golden plates which produced the Book of Mormon.<sup>122</sup> The town of Rochester talked about Tim Allen's discovery of several golden wedges.<sup>123</sup> Vermont's rumors were more bold. One determined Vermont digger supposedly found enough wealth to build a house for himself and construct a roadside inn, while another was claimed to have unearthed fifty thousand dollars.<sup>124</sup>

These reports, however, were the exception to the general rule. The prize was almost always lost due to the lack of proper technique, misfortune, or insufficient personal sanctification. "The popular view of the treasure hunter," observed a historian of the Vermont diggings, "is that he is not a praiseworthy industrious type but rather is the kind of person who expects something for nothing. This is a half truth. For while the treasure hunter, the supreme optimist, may hope for large and immediate rewards, as indeed do most of the rest of us, in actuality the ratio of hard work to compensation among these individuals must be one of the most lopsided in labor history."<sup>125</sup>

As in Europe, American money digging obviously involved more than the quest for wealth. Its Old Testament images and ceremonial rituals were appealing, while at a deeper level of human consciousness, its "caves," "circles," "dreams," "gold," and "sacrifices" were the kind of universal symbols that Carl G. Jung described as profoundly religious archetypes.<sup>126</sup> Occasionally this other-worldly content of treasure hunting became explicit. In 1800



Nathaniel Wood, a lapsed Congregational minister from Norwich, Connecticut, formed a congregation at Middletown, Vermont, which used the divining rod for religious purposes. Wood's rodsmen dug for treasure to finance the New Jerusalem. They also used their hazel rods in church meetings as revelatory devices to prove the need for angelic messengers, the Pauline spiritual gifts, modern-day temple building, the gathering of Israel from the prevailing gentile culture, the restoration of Primitive Christianity, and a millennialism that was scheduled to climax on 14 January 1801. When the excitement of that day came and passed, Wood and many of his followers moved to Jefferson County, New York.<sup>127</sup>

Upstate New York saw a similar mingling of treasure hunting with traditional religion. Using an eighteen-year-old minister's son for their adept, the money diggers at Rose, Wayne County, New York, held "mystic meetings" prior to their digs, employed a week-long prayer vigil, and pledged a part of their treasure for charitable purposes. However, their repeated failures to find buried money caused dissension and produced a "church" court during which the minister and his son summoned the spirits of several biblical prophets. The affair disintegrated when the spirit of "Samuel the Prophet" finally confessed to being a devilish impostor.<sup>128</sup>

Mormonism was also born within an upstate New York matrix that combined New England folk culture with traditional religion. Joseph Smith's family and many of his early New York converts were both treasure diggers and fervent religionists. But there is evidence that the Smiths were not always comfortable mixing the two. At young Joseph's 1826 money-digging trial, his father was reported to have claimed that "both he and his son were mortified that this wonderful [seeric] power which God had so miraculously given . . . [to Joseph Smith, Jr.] should be used only in search of filthy lucre." Instead of looking for mere "earthly treasures," Joseph Smith, Sr., "trusted that the Son of Righteousness would some day illumine the heart of the boy, and enable him to see His will concerning him."<sup>129</sup>

Probably the quality which most distinguished the American treasure digger was his acceptance of the old cultural system that rapidly was passing into obsolescence. Almost from the founding of America's first settlements, many community leaders rejected money digging. Seventeenth-century Puritan clerics such as Cotton Mather and John Hale called the wise men "devils' priests and prophets" and their practices "witchcraft."<sup>130</sup> Following European practice, the



clergy's long-standing opposition was given the force of law. A New York statute, for example, enjoined "all jugglers, and all persons pretending to have skill in physiognomy, palmistry, or like crafty science, or pretending to tell fortunes, or to discover where lost goods may be found."<sup>131</sup> While observed lightly or more often in the breach (Joseph Smith was tried at least once for his money digging but was apparently neither fined nor imprisoned),<sup>132</sup> such laws and the clerical animosity that lay behind them created in the minds of many educated men and women a dark and unsavory image of money digging that often became caricature.

American literature reinforced this tendency. While admitting a local adept's "singularly correct hits" and confessing a qualified belief in paranormal phenomena, Daniel Thompson nevertheless drew his *May Martin* money-digging characters in tones of fraud and criminality.<sup>133</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure" told the story of a deranged digger whose obsessive search for hidden treasures caused him to dismantle his own home, and the seers in Solomon Spaulding's *The Manuscript Found*, a romance written in the early nineteenth century but not published until 1886, were unqualifiedly evil.<sup>134</sup> Whether in the poetry of John G. C. Brainard, the humorous sketches of Washington Irving, or the satires of Franklin and Forrest, the result was uniformly the same. Though money digging, like any human endeavor, offered much to scorn and even to pity, the *belles-lettres* of the period conveyed the prevailing values of the intellectual elite by treating the money digger in overblown and often unjustified images.

With educated Americans increasingly arrayed against them, money diggers displayed remarkable tenacity. While seventeenth-century records are sparse and at best suggestive, ample evidence exists that many nineteenth-century Americans dug for treasure. The practice was particularly strong in such areas as Vermont and upstate New York, where severe social dislocation, rapid cultural change, and religious experimentation seemed to give the old culture an extended life.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, in ways that are yet to be explored, money digging may have influenced two of the nineteenth century's major social and religious movements, Mormonism and Spiritualism. Its touch on American society was not light.

Folklorist Harry Hyatt observed that "treasure hunting is something more than monetary value—it is a part of eternal hope, a mystical quest, the satisfaction of an unfulfilled dream."<sup>136</sup> Magical treasure hunting was something more. It was part of the culture and



religion of the folk. For people who were untutored in the emerging new science, it helped to give their everyday life meaning. Theirs was "the higher and hidden" truth, a blend of humankind's deep myths and Christian ideas, the old way that eventually faltered before the onslaught of modern science and the triumph of a new world view.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Historians have a reawakened interest in the old European folk *Weltanschauung* (see Jon Butler, "Magic, Astrology and the Early American Religious Heritage, 1600–1760," *American Historical Review* 84 [April 1979]: 317–46; and Herbert Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment: Occultism and Renaissance Science in Eighteenth-Century America* [New York: New York Univ. Press, 1976]). As this paper went to press, I became aware of Alan S. Taylor's survey of early nineteenth-century money digging, "The Supernatural Economy of the Early Republic, 1780–1830," forthcoming in the *American Quarterly*. While having different focuses, Taylor's and my paper share much common data and several similar conclusions. In preparing my manuscript, I owe a debt to Brent Metcalfe, who assisted in the initial stages of my research.

<sup>2</sup>E. A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1899), xii, 142–46; and *Records of the Past: Being Translations of the Assyrian and Egyptian Monuments*, 6 vols. (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1875), 4:129–48. D. Michael Quinn called my attention to this myth.

<sup>3</sup>Apollodorus, Book I, 129–32, and Book II, 113–21, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. Keith Aldrich (Lawrence, Kan.: Coronada Press, 1975); Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. James Steven Stallybrass, 4 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 3:980.

<sup>4</sup>Hugh Nibley, "Qumran and 'The Companions of the Cave,'" *Revue de Qumran* 5 (April 1965): 177–98.

<sup>5</sup>J. T. Milik, "The Copper Document from Cave III, Qumran," *Biblical Archaeologist* 19 (September 1956): 62–63; Sigmund Mowinckel, "The Copper Scroll—An Apocryphon?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957): 261–65.

<sup>6</sup>R. Campbell Thompson, ed., *Semitic Magic: Its Origins and Development* (London: Luzac & Co., 1908), 62.

<sup>7</sup>Hoffmann-Krayer, "Schatz," *Handwörterbuch Des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, 10 vols. (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter & Co., 1935–36), 7:1002, 1011–12; Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 5 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1932–36), 5:110–19. While no comprehensive survey of these motifs has been undertaken, clearly they extended beyond the Near East and Europe. For instance, Mircea Eliade, in *The Forge and the Crucible* (trans. Stephen Corrin, 2d. ed. [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1956], 54–55), finds some of these themes in ancient Malay mining.

<sup>8</sup>Hoffmann-Krayer, "Schatz," 7:1002–3, 1014; Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 3:970–71; 4:1595–96.

<sup>9</sup>*Four Treatises of Theoprastus Von Hohenheim, Called Paracelsus*, Book IV: *A Book on Nymphs, Sylphs, Pygmies, and Salamanders and on the Other Spirits*, ed. and trans. Henry E. Sigerist (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1941), 220, 251–52; Grillot De Givry, *Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy*, trans. J. Courtenay Locke (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931), 315.

<sup>10</sup>Hoffmann-Krayer, "Schatz," 7:1004; Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 3:971; Charles R. Beard, *The Romance of Treasure Trove* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1933), 16–18; Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology, Comprising the Principal Popular Traditions and Superstitions of Scandinavia, North Germany, and the Netherlands*, 3 vols. (London: Edward Lumley, 1851–52), 2:263.

<sup>11</sup>Hoffmann-Krayer, "Schatz," 7:1005–8; Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 3:974–75, 4:1598; Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 12 vols. (Reprint, New York: St. Martin's Press Reprint, 1966), 11:67, 287–89, 291.

<sup>12</sup>Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (New York: J. and J. Harper, 1831), 128–29, 295. Goethe inserted a direct petition to the elemental spirits in the famous conjuring scene of *Faust*, 1. iii:



First, to encounter the beast,  
 The Words of the Four be addressed:  
     Salamander, shine glorious!  
     Wave, Undine, as bidden!  
     Sylph, be thou hidden!  
     Gnome, be laborious!

Who knows not their sense  
 (These elements),—  
 Their properties  
 And power not sees,—  
 No mastery he inherits  
 Over the Spirits.

(trans. Bayard Taylor [Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1870], 52).

<sup>13</sup>Arthur Edward Waite, *The Occult Sciences: A Compendium of Transcendental Doctrine and Experiment* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1891), 10n; Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 3:971; Reginald Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584; reissued in facsimile by Da Capo Press, New York, 1971), 404–5, 411–12, 415, 417, 425; Beard, *Romance of the Treasure Trove*, 22–23, 48, 56.

<sup>14</sup>Hoffmann-Krayer, "Schatz," 7:1011.

<sup>15</sup>Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 235–37, 442–43; John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities: Chiefly Illustrating the Origin of Our Vulgar Customs, Ceremonies and Superstitions* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913), 761.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 234–35.

<sup>17</sup>For example, Georgius Agricola, *De Re Metallica* (trans. Herbert Clark Hoover and Lou Henry Hoover [New York: Dover Publications, 1950], 38–41), weighed evidence and arguments for the use of mining rods but remained skeptical.

<sup>18</sup>Eliade, *Forge and the Crucible*, especially 56. Both Eliade and C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (2d. ed., trans. R. F. C. Hull [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968]), argue a similar thesis for alchemy. In their view the alchemist's gold seeking was often subordinated to inward religious purification in a rite that was essentially nonrational.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 268–69; incidents of cunning men: *ibid.*, 177, 245, 248; repertoire of activity: *ibid.*, 177–78. Jon Butler, in "Magic, Astrology, and the Early American Religious Heritage," 317–46, similarly defines religion at the root of the wise man's efforts.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 271–72; Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 451; Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science during the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1964), 1:340–42, 344; De Givry, *Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy*, 95–97, 100.

<sup>21</sup>Albertus Magnus, *Egyptian Secrets; or, White and Black Art for Man and Beast* (N.p. [1880?]), iii–iv. The formulae for neutralizing the black arts were themselves grim. For instance, when illicitly charmed by a temptress, "such a person must put a pair of shoes on, and walk therein until his feet perspire, but must walk fast, so that the feet do not smell badly; then take off the right shoe, drink some beer or wine out of this shoe, and he will from that moment lose all affection for her" (*ibid.*, 55).

<sup>22</sup>*The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* (Los Angeles: Llewellyn Publications, 1938).

<sup>23</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 269. Dee's contemporary Sir Walter Raleigh also believed in a compound of magic and religion. "Magic," he argued, "is the art of worshipping God" (*ibid.*, 268–69).

<sup>24</sup>Gen. 44:5–15 (Joseph); Ex. 4:20, 14:16, 17:5 (Moses); Ex. 7:9–12, 15, 20, 8:5, 16–18 (Aaron); Ex. 28:30 and Lev. 8:8 (Urim and Thummim).

<sup>25</sup>The classic statements of the old view are Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, intro. Stanley Edgar Hyman (New York: Limited Editions Club, 1970), 840–41, and Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion*, ed. Robert Redfield (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), 88. For current treatment, see David E. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang Der Römischen Welt* (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1980), 2:1507–57, which is a particularly helpful discussion of the issues and literature. This view is also expressed in the more imaginative Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 69. In this paper I use the terms *magic* and *religion* as differing tendencies within the same general human response—the quest for an ideal life premised in the belief of superhuman powers and beings.

<sup>26</sup>Charles M. Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1896), 2:278.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:279, 283–84; and Franklin B. Hough, *A History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties, New York . . .* (Albany: Little & Co., 1853), 108–9.



<sup>28</sup>Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1867), 34; Orasmus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, N.Y.: William Alling, 1851), 216; Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: By the Author, 1893), 13; *The Visitor, or Monthly Instructor, for 1841* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1841), 63; Ole A. Jensen, "Testimony Given to Ole A. Jensen by Martin Harris," July 1875, p. 3, Library—Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

<sup>29</sup>Louise Wells Murray, *A History of Old Tioga Point and Early Athens, Pennsylvania* (Athens, Pa.: N.p., 1908), 61–64, and Carl Carmer, *The Susquehanna* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1955), 18.

<sup>30</sup>Carmer, *Susquehanna*, 18; Pamela Gee, "The Money Diggings of Pocock," *Vermont History* 28 (October 1960): 302–8; Franklin S. Harvey, *The Money Diggers: The True Story of Buried Treasure in Bristol, Vermont* (Brattleboro, Ver.: Stephen Greene Press, 1970), 18; George H. Harris, "Myths of Ononda," MS, c. 1887, Rochester Historical Society, Rochester, New York.

<sup>31</sup>Harold W. Thompson, *Body, Boots, and Britches* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1940), 300–301.

<sup>32</sup>Harris, "Myths of Ononda," 12–13, 18–19.

<sup>33</sup>Neil Burkhart Lehman, "The Life of John Murray Spear: Spiritualism and Reform in Antebellum America," Ph.D. diss., Department of History, Ohio State Univ., 1973, 155–68; and Ernest Joseph Isaacs, "A History of Nineteenth Century American Spiritualism as a Religious and Social Movement," Ph.D. diss., Department of History, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1975, 249–54. Another source has the Spiritualists describing the Kiantonians as "a prehistoric, web-footed race" (Arch Merrill, *Shadows on the Wall* [New York: American Book—Stratford Press, (1951?)], 141, 144).

<sup>34</sup>E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, Ohio: E. D. Howe, 1834), 187, 233, 237–38.

<sup>35</sup>The Spanish impact on American literary culture is usually treated as beginning in the first decades of the nineteenth century, but, if money digging is an accurate gauge, its influence on the everyday American must have begun much earlier (see Stanley T. Williams, *The Spanish Background of American Literature*, 2 vols. [New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1955], 1:3, 23, 36). The English–American fascination is also documented by the repeated issuing of *Thomas Gage's Travels in the New World*. This exposé of alleged Spanish cruelty and depravity received editions in 1648, 1655, 1677, 1699, 1702, 1711, and an American printing in 1758.

<sup>36</sup>Harvey, *Money Diggers*; Gee, "Money Diggings of Pocock," 302–8; Stephen Greene, "Money Diggers," *Vermont Life* 24 (Autumn 1969): 46–51. As late as 1934, there was digging at the Bristol site.

<sup>37</sup>Greene, "Money Diggers," 49; W. Storrs Lee, *The Green Mountains of Vermont* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1955), 165–66; Harvey, *Money Diggers*, ix.

<sup>38</sup>Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VIII," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (1835), 201; and Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet . . .* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 91n.

<sup>39</sup>Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*, 2:290–93.

<sup>40</sup>For instance, treasure was sought in the house formerly owned by Sir Francis Drake (see Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 317–18).

<sup>41</sup>"History of the Divining Rod: With the Adventures of an Old Rodsman," *United States Magazine, and Democratic Review* 26 (March 1850): 221 (Low); Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*, 2:13, 277 (Main and Veale); Harris, "Myths of Ononda," 44 (Lake Ontario Pirates).

<sup>42</sup>John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time . . .*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: By the Author, 1844), 2:222–23.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 219–20; William M. Mervine, "Pirates and Privateers in the Delaware Bay and River," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 32 (1908): 463.

<sup>44</sup>Benjamin Franklin, "The Busy-Body, No. 8," 27 March 1729, reprinted in the *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1959), 1:137. According to marginal notes of the manuscript, a portion of the article was written by "Breitnal." As a youth, Franklin himself was enough taken with the Blackbeard myth to have composed and published a sailors' song celebrating Blackbeard's capture (see Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania*, 2:211–12).

<sup>45</sup>Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*, 2:267; and Richard M. Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1946), 174–76.

<sup>46</sup>*Autobiography of Thurlow Weed*, ed. Harriet A. Weed (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), 7.

<sup>47</sup>Harold W. Thompson, *Body, Boots, and Britches*, 20.

<sup>48</sup>Greene, "Money Diggers," 50.

<sup>49</sup>Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, 176, and "A History of the Divining Rod," 223.



<sup>50</sup>Aaron C. Willey, "Observations on Magical Practices," *Medical Repository* 2 (1816): 378–80; Earl W. Hayter, *The Troubled Farmer, 1850–1900: Rural Adjustment to Industrialism* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1968), 6–7.

<sup>51</sup>Arthur B. Deming, *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, 2; William H. Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," *Saints' Herald* 28 (1 June 1881): 163, 165, 167.

<sup>52</sup>Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania*, 1:273–74.

<sup>53</sup>John Greenleaf Whittier, *The Supernaturalism of New England*, ed. Edward Wagenknecht (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 84–85, 87, 101.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>55</sup>Julius Friedrich Sachse, *The German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: By the Author, 1895), 4–5, 7–8, 73, 109, 111; Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania*, 1:267–68; Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment*, 108–9, 118–19. Carsten E. Seecamp, in "The Chapter of Perfection: A Neglected Influence on George Lippard," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 94 (April 1970): 192–212, argues that Kelpius and his brotherhood affected the nineteenth-century popular novelist, George Lippard.

<sup>56</sup>While many of the sources that describe young Joseph Smith's money digging carry unmistakable bias and give the details of widespread folk practices he himself may not have used, they are too numerous and diverse in origin to be dismissed out of hand as anti-Mormon untruths. For a sampling of the many that could be cited, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*; Deming, *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, 2; Emily Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen, & Haffelfinger, 1873), 577–82; Statement of Joseph Smith, Sr., in W. D. Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," *Chenango (New York) Union*, 2 May 1877; *History of Seneca Co. New York . . .* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1876), 129; "A Document Discovered," *Utah Christian Advocate* 2 (January 1886): 1.

<sup>57</sup>Samuel G. Drake, *Annals of Witchcraft in New England and Elsewhere in the United States* (Boston: N.p., 1869), xlv–xlvi.

<sup>58</sup>John G. C. Brainard, *The Poems of John G. C. Brainard: A New and Authentic Collection* (Hartford, Conn.: S. Andrus and Son, 1849), 189 (New London); Dorson, "A History of the Divining Rod," 222 (Maine); W. H. McIntosh, *History of Wayne County, New York* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1877), 155 (Rose); *Amboy (Illinois) Journal*, 30 April 1879 (Susquehanna); Gee, "Money Diggings of Pocock," 305 (Bristol); Harvey, *Money Diggers*, 17–19, 31; Jim Smith, "Money Madness: A Story of Buried Treasure in Vermont," *Panorama: Burlington's Magazine of Current Interests* (April 1949), 4–5.

<sup>59</sup>Clark Jillson, *Green Leaves from Whitingham, Vermont: A History of the Town* (Worcester, Mass.: By the Author, 1894), 115–19.

<sup>60</sup>According to the article "Three," *Man, Myth & Magic: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Supernatural*, ed. Richard Cavendish, 24 vols. (New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 1970), 21:2832, "Medieval Christian numerologists remarked on various uses of 3 as a number of completeness in the New Testament, including the 3 gifts of the magi to the infant Jesus, the 3 temptations in the wilderness, the 3 denials of Christ by Peter, the 3 falls on the road to Golgotha, the 3 days between Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, and the 3 appearances of the risen Christ to his disciples. These could all be taken as foreshadowings or reflections of the Trinity." These scriptural examples hardly suggest how deeply involved the ratifying number *three* is in many aspects of Western life—including its common use in nursery rhymes, the legislative requirement to read and pass prospective laws three times, and of course the idiom, "The third time is the charm." The three-dream motif is also preserved in twentieth-century Pennsylvania Dutch folklore (see "Dutch Folk-Beliefs," *Pennsylvania Dutchman* 5 [June 1953]: 12).

<sup>61</sup>Sarah J. Hale, *Traits of American Life* (Philadelphia: E. L. Carry and A. Hart, 1835), 104–5, 110.

<sup>62</sup>Louis C. Jones, *Things That Go Bump in the Night* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1959), 102–3.

<sup>63</sup>George W. Walter, "The Lost Treasure of the Oneidas," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 3 (Autumn 1947): 252–54.

<sup>64</sup>Benjamin Silliman, "The Divining Rod," *American Journal of Science and Arts* 11 (October 1826): 202, 209; Waite, *Occult Sciences*, 151; Emelyn E. Gardner, *Folklore from the Schoharie Hills, New York* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1937), 48–49n.; Dorson, "A History of the Divining Rod," 218.

<sup>65</sup>These procedures were long-standing Old World customs (see Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 11:67–69, 291). That they endured in America is documented from surviving folklore and by custom of calling the instruments "St. John's Rods" (Frederick Starr, "Some Pennsylvania German Lore," *Journal of American Folk-lore* 4 [1891]: 323; Letitia Wrenshall, "Incantations and Popular Healing in Maryland and Pennsylvania," *Journal of American Folk-lore* 15 [1902]: 271; Abby Maria Hemenway, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer: A Magazine Embracing a History of Each Town*, 5 vols. [Claremont, N.H.: Claremont Manufacturing Company, 1877], 3:813).

<sup>66</sup>Starr, "Some Pennsylvania German Lore," 323.

<sup>67</sup>Wrenshall, "Incantations and Popular Healing," 271.



<sup>68</sup>Albertus Magnus, *Egyptian Secrets*, 76.

<sup>69</sup>Gen. 30:37–43. While the dowsing techniques of the European and American rodsman seemingly began in the late Middle Ages, many claimed that such passages as Hosea 4:12; Ps. 125:3; Num. 17, 20:9–11; and Ez. 21:21 gave them sanction (*Jacob's Rod*, trans. T. W. [N.p.]).

<sup>70</sup>*Jacob's Rod*, 7; "History of the Divining Rod," 218, 319, 321; Sachse, *German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania*, 112–13. The use of nails was reserved apparently for mineral treasure.

<sup>71</sup>Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, 180; Joseph Smith to Josiah Stowell, 18 June 1825, printed in "Church News Section," *Deseret News*, 12 May 1985. The authenticity of the Smith letter is currently in question.

<sup>72</sup>Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment*, 114–15.

<sup>73</sup>Silliman, "Divining Rod," 203.

<sup>74</sup>Harris, "Myths of Ononda," 27.

<sup>75</sup>For a sampling of the sometimes incongruous sources dealing with Joseph Smith's stones, see Statement of Brigham Young, Thomas Bullock Minutes, 30 September 1855, Thomas Bullock Papers, LDS Church Archives; Statement of Brigham Young, 11 September 1859, in *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898*, 9 vols., ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–85), 5:382–83; Statement of W. R. Hine, in Deming, *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1885, 2; Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism."

<sup>76</sup>[Edward Rushton], "Testimony of Seer Stone Finding, Nauvoo," untitled and undated typescript, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>77</sup>Hosea Stout, *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1861*, ed. Juanita Brooks, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 1964), 1:62n.; "Journal of Priddy Meeks," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 10 (January–October 1942): 180.

<sup>78</sup>See, for instance, Daniel P. Thompson, *May Martin and Other Tales of the Green Mountains* (Boston: Sanborn, Carter, Bazin & Co., 1852), 46–47n., 49; George W. Cowles, ed., *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Company, Publishers, 1895), 411–12; McIntosh, *History of Wayne County*, 155; Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, 109.

<sup>79</sup>Ann Hark, "Erdspiegel Mystery," *American-German Review* 7 (June 1941): 9–11.

<sup>80</sup>Harris, "Myths of Ononda," 11.

<sup>81</sup>Statements of Isaac Butts and Lorenzo Saunders in Deming, *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, 2; Daniel P. Thompson, *May Martin*, 46–47n.; Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, 180. For an early twentieth-century study of crystal gazing that noted the need for darkness during the use of the stone or crystal, see Frederic W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, 2 vols. (1903; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975), 1:237.

<sup>82</sup>*Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 1:137–38.

<sup>83</sup>Many of these motifs are listed in Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 117. Also see Albertus Magnus, *Egyptian Secrets*, 16, 76; Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 10:160–61, 11:67, 69, 287, 290–91; Jillson, *Green Leaves from Whitingham, Vermont*, 121; Andrew Barton [Thomas Forrest], *The Disappointment, or, the Force of Credulity*, ed. David Mays (Gainesville: Univ. Presses of Florida, 1976), 88.

<sup>84</sup>Hayter, *Troubled Farmer*, 7–8, 267n.; Edward Eggleston, *The Transit of Civilization from England to America in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1901), 5–6; *Medical Repository* 3 (1812): 183–84, 377–82; D. G. Brinton, "Reminiscences of Pennsylvania Folk-lore," *Journal of American Folk-lore* 5 (July–September 1892): 177–85. Andrew Beer, in *Beer's Calendar; or the Utica Almanack: For the Year of Our Lord 1824* (Utica, N.Y.: William Williams [1823?]), n.p., claimed that "the secret [of destroying a weed] consists in cutting off the plant near the ground at the change of the moon, or at the new moon, as near the change as possible, in June or July."

<sup>85</sup>*Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 1:137; *Wayne Sentinel*, 27 December 1825; Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment*, 116; Barnes Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont* (Middletown Springs [?]: Middletown Springs Historical Society, 1975, photocopy of 1867 edition), 48.

<sup>86</sup>Gerard T. Hurley, "Buried Treasure Tales in America," *Western Folklore* 10 (July 1951): 200–202; Jones, *Things That Go Bump in the Night*, 99, 102–3; Wheaton P. Webb, "Witches in the Cooper Country," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 1 (February 1945): 19; Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*, 2:268–71; "A Document Discovered," *Utah Christian Advocate* 2 (January 1886): 1; Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, 174; Harvey, *Money Diggers*, 19; Hough, *History of Jefferson County*, 157–58.

<sup>87</sup>Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, 174–75.

<sup>88</sup>Webb, "Witches in the Cooper Country," 19. For other examples of the need to maintain silence, see Hurley, "Buried Treasure Tales in America," 203.

<sup>89</sup>*Ontario Repository and Messenger*, 9 February 1825, and *Wayne Sentinel*, 16 February 1825. The accounts were originally printed in the *Windsor (Vermont) Journal*, 17 January 1825.



<sup>90</sup>Jensen, "Testimony." Apparently the same incident is confirmed by Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 19:37–39, who clearly believed the recital.

<sup>91</sup>Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, 184.

<sup>92</sup>Harris, "Myths of Ononda," 20–21. For a sampling of other accounts of treasure moving and at times rumbling through the earth, see *Wayne Sentinel*, 27 December 1825; Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, 182; Dorson, "A History of the Divining Rod," 320–21; Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*, 2:270–71; Jones, *Things That Go Bump in the Night*, 103, 144; Frederic G. Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 26 (1880): 200.

<sup>93</sup>Albertus Magnus, *Egyptian Secrets*, 18–19.

<sup>94</sup>Hugh Nibley, "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," *Brigham Young University Studies* 19 (Fall 1978): 41–78. Joseph Gaer, in *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (New York: Mentor Books, 1961), 88, reports the story of Honi, allegedly a great Essene teacher: "His goodness and piety were such that whatever he prayed for was fulfilled. And this is how he prayed: He would draw a circle on the ground, then step into its center. Within the circle he prayed and prayed, vowing not to leave its boundaries until his prayers were granted. He never prayed for himself, nor did he ever pray for anything outside the bounds of God's mercy. He prayed for rain; he prayed for health; he prayed for peace. But he never prayed that a curse befall anyone, not even on the cruellest enemy. Because his prayers were always granted, he gained the reputation of a miracle worker. And he was nicknamed 'the Circle-Maker.'"

<sup>95</sup>Francis Barrett, *The Magus* (London: Lackington, Allen, and Company, 1801), Book 2:105. See also Collin De Plancy, *Dictionary of Demonology*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1965), 112; and De Givry, *Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy*, 104.

<sup>96</sup>McIntosh, *History of Wayne County*, 155. Also see Eric Maple, "Treasure Magic," *Man, Myth and Magic*, 21:2870–71.

<sup>97</sup>Dorson, "A History of the Divining Rod," 225; Jillson, *Green Leaves from Whitingham, Vermont*, 119.

<sup>98</sup>Maple, "Treasure Magic," 21:2870–71.

<sup>99</sup>Weed, *Autobiography*, 7.

<sup>100</sup>Jim Smith, "Money Madness," 4–5 (Vermont); Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania*, 580 (Pennsylvania); Hough, *A History of Jefferson County*, 157–58 (Jefferson County); Statement of William Stafford, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 238–39 (Ontario County).

<sup>101</sup>Hurley, "Buried Treasure Tales in America," 203.

<sup>102</sup>Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment*, 118.

<sup>103</sup>*Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 1:136–37.

<sup>104</sup>Barton, *The Disappointment, or, the Force of Credulity*, 1, 5, 41, 120. Swan's statement was reported by John MacPherson, a contemporary letter-writer.

<sup>105</sup>Geoffrey Crayon [Washington Irving], "The Money-Diggers," in *Tales of a Traveller*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1825), especially 2:198, 236, 251, 253–54, 294, 305–10, 314–17, 321.

<sup>106</sup>Jillson, *Green Leaves from Whitingham, Vermont*, 115–19.

<sup>107</sup>"The Money Diggers," in *Poems of John G. C. Brainard*, 189.

<sup>108</sup>Daniel P. Thompson, *May Martin*, 46–47n.; Greene, "Money Diggers," 49, provides a total of Thompson's editions.

<sup>109</sup>Quoted in the *Susquehanna (Pennsylvania) Register*, 10 August 1827. A portion of the *Watchman's* article was earlier published by the *Palmyra Herald*, 24 July 1822.

<sup>110</sup>Greene, "Money Diggers," 46, 48, 50.

<sup>111</sup>As quoted in the *Susquehanna Register*, 10 August 1827.

<sup>112</sup>James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers: Or the Sources of the Susquehanna, a Descriptive Tale* (New York: International Book Co., 1899), 415.

<sup>113</sup>For example, see Mather, "Early Days of Mormonism, 202–3 (Broome and Chenango); William W. Campbell, ed., *The Life and Writings of De Witt Clinton* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849), 47 (Herkimer); Hough, *History of Jefferson County*, 157–59 (Jefferson); Harris, "Myths of Ononda" (Monroe); Cowles, ed., *Landmarks of Wayne County*, 411–12; *Palmyra Reflector*, 1 February 1831, 92–93 (Wayne); Turner, *Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase and Morris' Reserve*, 213, 216 (Ontario); Webb, "Witches in the Cooper Country," 19 (Otsego); Gardner, *Folklore from the Schoharie Hills*, 13–16 (Schoharie); Murray, *History of Old Tioga Point and Early Athens*, 64 (Tioga). E. D. Howe, in *Mormonism Unveiled*, reports the Smith family digging in various counties.

<sup>114</sup>Harris, "Myths of Ononda," 37.

<sup>115</sup>1 February 1831, 92–93. The longer quotation is instructive:

To facilitate those *mighty* mining operations, (money was usually if not always sought after in the night time,) divers devices and implements were invented, and although the *spirit* was always able to retain his precious charge, these discomfited as well as deluded



beings, would on a succeeding night return to their toil, not in the least doubting that success would eventually attend their labors.

Mineral rods and balls, (as they were called by the impostor who made use of them,) were supposed to be infallible guides to these sources of wealth—"peep stones" or pebbles, taken promiscuously from the brook or field, were placed in a hat or other situation excluded from the light, when some *wizzard* or *witch* (for these performances were not confined to either sex) applied their eyes, and nearly starting their balls from their sockets, declared they saw all the wonders of nature, including of course, ample stores of silver and gold.

<sup>116</sup>Jillson, *Green Leaves from Whitingham, Vermont*, 114; Alice Hamilton, "Hamilton Family History from the Seventeenth Century," MS, Whitingham Historical Society[?], Whitingham, Vermont; Zadock Thompson, *History of Vermont, Natural, Civil and Statistical, in Three Parts . . .* (Burlington, Ver.: Chauncey Goodrich, 1842), part 3, 191.

<sup>117</sup>Frisbie, *History of Middletown, Vermont*, 59–60; Rensselaer Allston Oakes, *Genealogical and Family History of the County of Jefferson, New York*, 2 vols. (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1905), 1:607.

<sup>118</sup>Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 232, 249, 251, 259, and [Joel Tiffany], "Mormonism," *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (May 1859): 164, 167 (Smith Company); Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet*, 13, and Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, 102–3 (Rochester Company).

<sup>119</sup>Whittier, *Supernaturalism of New England*, 99–100. For the Pennsylvania agreement, see "An Interesting Document," *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 23 April 1880.

<sup>120</sup>Bristol, Vermont, Outlook Club, *History of Bristol, Vermont*, 2d ed. (Bristol: Bristol Press & Vermont Silk Screen, 1959), 59.

<sup>121</sup>Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*, 2:276.

<sup>122</sup>Charles C. Richards, "Address Delivered in the Hawthorne Ward, Sugar House Stake, Salt Lake City, Utah," 20 April 1947, transcript in the possession of the author; and Statement of Joshua Stafford, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 258.

<sup>123</sup>Harris, "Myths of Ononda," 16.

<sup>124</sup>Montpelier (Vermont) *Watchman*, as quoted in the *Susquehanna Register*, 10 August 1827.

<sup>125</sup>Greene, "Money Diggers," *Vermont Life* (Autumn 1969), 49.

<sup>126</sup>C. G. Jung, *Psychology and the Occult*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), 131.

<sup>127</sup>Frisbie, *History of Middletown, Vermont*, 43–60. See also Elmer J. Culp, "Early Vermont Roots of Mormonism," unpublished paper based on an address at the Pawlett Historical Society, 6 February 1980, copy in possession of author; Hemenway, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, 3:810–18; H. P. Smith and W. S. Rann, eds., *History of Rutland County, Vermont* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Co, Publishers, 1886), 654–60; Oakes, *Genealogical and Family History of the County of Jefferson, New York*, 1:607 ff. There is circumstantial evidence that the relatives of several early Mormon converts, including William Cowdery, the father of Mormon leader, Oliver Cowdery, had at least a passing acquaintance with the Wood episode.

<sup>128</sup>McIntosh, *History of Wayne County*, 155–56; Cowles, ed., *Landmarks of Wayne County*, 411–12; Laurence A. Johnson, "The 'Money Diggers' of Rose," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 13 (Autumn 1957): 215–17. This activity may have had a relationship to the pentacostal "Neversweats" of Rose (see Alfred S. Roe, *Rose Neighborhood Sketches, Wayne County, New York* [Worcester, Mass.: By the Author, 1893], 180).

<sup>129</sup>Quoted in Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism."

<sup>130</sup>Cotton Mather, *On Witchcraft: Being the Wonders of the Invisible World* (New York: Peter Pauper Press, n.d.), 19, 79–80; John Hale, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft*, 2d. ed. (Boston: Kneeland & Adams, 1771), 119, 126–27, 129–31. For another ministerial Philippic, delivered in 1746 in Salem, Massachusetts, see Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment*, 100.

<sup>131</sup>"An Act for Apprehending and Punishing Disorderly Persons," 9 February 1788, chapter 31, *Laws of the State of New-York*, 2 vols., comp. William P. Van Ness and John Woodworth (Albany: H. C. Southwick & Co., 1813), 114.

<sup>132</sup>See Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism." This reflects the general legal precedent beginning centuries earlier in England (Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 245–46, 461).

<sup>133</sup>Daniel P. Thompson, *May Martin*, 46–47n.

<sup>134</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Twice-Told Tales*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1900), 2:204–37. The Spaulding novel owed its notoriety to the nineteenth-century claim that it was the source of the Book of Mormon. Though not published until late in the century, it nevertheless conveyed early nineteenth-century New England sentiments (see Solomon Spaulding, *The "Manuscript Found" Manuscript Story* [Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Company, 1886], 74–75).

*The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting*

459

<sup>135</sup>In culturally isolated areas money digging continued on a limited basis even into the twentieth century (see Harry Middleton Hyatt, *Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork: Beliefs Accepted by Many Negroes and White Persons, These Being Orally Recorded among Blacks and Whites* (Hannibal, Mo.: Western Publishing, 1970).

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 111.



## Call for Papers: Special Issue on British Isles

*BYU Studies* is pleased to announce a forthcoming special issue devoted to the LDS church in the British Isles. The issue will be published in 1987 in conjunction with the Sesquicentennial of the Church in Britain. Dr. James R. Moss of the Church History Department at Brigham Young University has been appointed guest editor.

Those interested in submitting articles for publication in the special issue should send them to:

Dr. James R. Moss  
136 Joseph Smith Building  
Brigham Young University  
Provo, Utah  
84602

Articles may be on any aspect of LDS church history in the British Isles from the beginning to the present or may focus on current issues of concern to the Church and its members in Britain. Deadline for submission of articles is 31 December 1986.

This special issue will be one of many activities planned by the Church, Brigham Young University, and other organizations to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Church in the British Isles. We encourage your participation in these events and hope many of you will submit articles for publication.