7-31-1999

All My Endeavors to Preserve Them: Protecting the Plates in Palmyra, 22 September-December 1827

Andrew H. Hedges

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After Joseph Smith received the gold plates from the angel Moroni, he had to take great measures to protect them from people who wanted to steal them for their monetary value. Although Joseph did not leave much documentation of such experiences, the people who were closely associated with him at the time did. Using what records still exist, Hedges pieces together some of the stories of Joseph’s challenges in obtaining and protecting the gold plates.
“That I should be responsible for them; that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off...”

“...but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected.”
All My Endeavors to Preserve Them
In the evening of 21 September 1823, seventeen-year-old Joseph Smith retired to his bedroom in the loft of his parents’ log home on the family farm some two miles south of Palmyra, New York. Concerned about the “many foolish errors” into which his “native cheery temperament” had drawn him over the course of the past three years of his life (JS—H 1:28), Joseph poured out his heart in prayer. While asking the Lord for forgiveness “of all my sins and follies and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him” (JS—H 1:29), the angel Moroni appeared and informed Joseph of the existence of the Nephite record buried in the hill Cumorah. 1 Several hours and three additional interviews with Moroni later, Joseph stood “on the west side of the hill” toward its north end, “not far from the top.” There he obtained his first view of the plates and received additional instructions. 2 Relating his experiences to his family the following day, Joseph reported, “the angel of the Lord says that we must be careful not to proclaim these things or to mention them abroad, for we do not any of us know the weakness of the world, which is so sinful, and that when we get the plates they will want to kill us for the sake of the gold, if they know we have them.” 3
Keeping the sacred record out of harm’s way required his constant surveillance and the help and ingenuity of his family and closest friends and gave the young prophet relatively little time and safety in which he could translate.

This warning of Moroni’s was not an idle one. Word of the plates’ existence did manage to leak out, and even before Joseph received them four years later, various people were plotting how they might obtain them. Those plans took a violent turn when Joseph was physically attacked the day he brought the plates home. In following months several more attempts were made to wrest the plates from Joseph’s care. Keeping the sacred record out of harm’s way required his constant surveillance and the help and ingenuity of his family and closest friends and gave the young prophet relatively little time and safety in which he could translate. Relief came only after Joseph and Emma moved to Pennsylvania.

Joseph’s own record contains relatively little information on his efforts to keep the plates safe. In his 1839 recital of events, for example, Joseph noted that “the most strenuous exertions were used to get [the plates] from me,” and that every “stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose” (JS—H 1:60). He concluded his account of this period by noting that the “persecution . . . became so intolerable that I was under the necessity of leaving Manchester” (JS—H 1:61), having given no details as to the nature of these stratagems and the measures he took to counter them. The prophet’s silence on this point is curious but understandable. Writing this and other accounts years after the events they describe transpired, Joseph apparently felt that his brief overview of this persecution was sufficient for his purposes and that his time would be better spent discussing the first vision, Moroni’s visits, the restoration of the priesthood, and the organization of the church than it would be in detailing the activities of thieves.

Many who were associated with Joseph during this period, however—including Lucy Mack Smith, Martin Harris, Joseph Knight Sr., and others—have left us with a rich record detailing Joseph’s struggle to keep the plates out of the wrong hands. As with all historical sources, caution must be observed when trying to piece together from these various accounts all that Joseph experienced during
this period. While some of these individuals were eyewitnesses to at least some of the events they describe, others were not, and it is clear that in many cases the authors of these sources were getting their information secondhand at best. A related problem is that all of these sources were recorded some time (even years, in some cases) after the events they describe transpired, introducing the possibility of error through faulty memory. That some of these accounts contradict one another at certain points indicates that somewhere in their transmission errors did indeed manage to creep in. For the most part, however, the records do corroborate one another on their major points, and one is able to reconstruct this period’s chain of events without doing major violence to any of the accounts. The story that emerges from these records is one of faith and perseverance on the part of the Prophet and his associates, and it constitutes one of the most interesting, yet often unappreciated, events of the restoration.

Obtaining the Plates

Precisely how news of the plates leaked out is unclear. It is important to note, however, that the Smith family apparently did not take Moroni’s warning about discussing the plates “abroad” to mean that they could not mention them to trusted friends. Lucy reported that Joseph Sr. had mentioned them to one of his “confidential friends [Martin Harris] . . . some two or three years before” Joseph actually received them. Similarly, Joseph Knight Sr. and Joseph Knight Jr. claimed that Joseph had told them sometime within the year preceding his obtaining the plates when he was supposed to get them. That Josiah Stowell was at the Smith home with Joseph Knight the night Joseph and Emma went to the hill Cumorah to get the plates suggests that he, too, had been let in on the secret. No record exists of any of these men divulging the secret, but the possibility exists that, over the course of the several years they may have known about the Nephite record, one of them might have made a slip of the tongue.

Word of the plates’ existence might have gotten out through a more sinister source. According to Joseph Knight, one Samuel Lawrence in the neighborhood was a “Seear” who “had bin to the hill and knew about the things in the hill and . . . was trying to obtain them.” Joseph Smith apparently was concerned enough about Lawrence that “near nightfall” on 21 September he sent his father to Lawrence’s house “to see if there was any signs of his [Lawrence’s] going away that night.” Knight reported Joseph telling his father “to stay till near Dark and if he saw any signs of his going you till [tell] him if I find him there [at the hill Cumorah] I will thrash the stumps with him.” Lawrence, fortunately for himself, chose to stay home that night, and Joseph Sr. “came a way” from his vigil having seen no preparations on the before. Photographs, illustrations, and diagrams are not included in the text.
“Seear’s” part for a midnight foray to Cumorah. If Knight’s account is accurate, it could be that Lawrence and perhaps others had learned of the plates’ existence through “revelation” from illegitimate sources. Whatever the story behind the leak, the fact remains that by 22 September 1827, several unsavory characters knew of the plates’ existence, knew roughly of their whereabouts, and knew that the time was approaching for Joseph to obtain them. Joseph, however, was apprised of those people’s knowledge and their determination to obtain the record for themselves and took precautions against such an event. According to Lucy, Joseph came to her about midnight on the night of 21 September 1827 and asked her if she had a chest with a lock and key. Aware that Moroni had instructed Joseph earlier to obtain “a chest or trunk having a good lock and key” where he could hide the plates once he got them, Lucy knew what Joseph’s question portended even though he did not tell her what he was about to do. On learning that Lucy did not have such a trunk, Joseph reassured her that all would be well. He and Emma then left the house with Joseph Knight’s horse and wagon, having told no one, including Joseph Sr., that they were going.

No account exists detailing exactly what transpired that night at the hill Cumorah. From Joseph’s own record, we know that Moroni met Joseph there and “delivered” the plates to Joseph with the warning that he “should be responsible for them,” adding that “if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off; but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, . . . they should be protected” (JS—H 1:59). Lucy, no doubt getting her information from Joseph, recorded Moroni’s words in greater detail:

Now you have got the record into your own hands, and you are but a man, therefore you will have to be watchful and faithful to your trust, or you will be overpowered by wicked men, for they will lay every plan and scheme that is possible to get them away from you. And if you do not take heed continually, they will succeed. While they were in my hands I could keep them, and no man had power to take them away, but now I give them up to you. Beware, and look well to your ways, and you shall have power to retain them until the time for them to be translated.

No other details about how Joseph obtained the plates exist.

As he was jumping over a log [wrote his mother], a man sprang up from behind and gave him a heavy blow with a gun. Joseph turned around and knocked him to the ground, and then ran at the top of his speed. About half a mile further, he was attacked again in precisely the same way. He soon brought this one down also and ran on again, but before he got home, he was accosted the third time with a severe stroke with a gun.
After receiving the plates at the hill, Joseph hid them nearby in a hollow birch log whose tough bark had resisted the forces of decay better than the wood itself. Cutting a hole in the bark and peeling it back, he placed the plates in the cavity of the log thus exposed, then replaced the bark and “laid across the log in several places some old stuff that happened to lie near, in order to conceal, as much as possible, the place in which they were deposited.” All this—his receiving the plates from Moroni and his hiding them in the log—was apparently done in the absence of Emma, who presumably was waiting in the wagon nearby. Nor did Joseph apparently tell her all that he had done when he finally returned to her. If he did tell her, he must have told her to keep it all absolutely secret, for when Joseph Sr. asked her the next day “if she knew anything of the record—whether Joseph had taken them out of their place of deposit or where they were,” she answered that “she did not know.”

The only thing we know for certain that Joseph brought back from the hill Cumorah that night was the Urim and Thummim, which, wrapped in a silk handkerchief, he allowed his mother to hold the next day. After handling the instrument, Lucy told Joseph to go to a cabinetmaker she knew and ask him to make a chest in which Joseph could hide the plates when he brought them home. Concerned about how he would pay the cabinetmaker, Joseph accepted employment the next day (23 September) to build a wall in the well of a widow living in Macedon. Although the job required Joseph to stay in Macedon for several days, he evidently felt secure enough about the plates in the log to leave them there for the time being.

Shortly after Joseph left for Macedon, Joseph Sr. learned of “ten or twelve men” who, under the direction of Willard Chase (a Methodist class leader in the neighborhood) and Samuel Lawrence, had sent sixty miles for a “conjuror” to help them find the plates. The following morning, Joseph Sr. went to Samuel Lawrence’s home where he found the men “devising many plans and schemes to find ‘Joe Smith’s gold bible,’ as they termed it.” Sitting down near the door and pretending to read a paper, Joseph Sr. overheard Lawrence’s wife caution the men to speak more quietly, at which the conjuror “bawled out at the top of his voice, ‘I am not afraid of anybody. We will have the plates in spite of Joe Smith or all the devils in hell.’”

Satisfied that he had heard enough, Joseph Sr. slipped away. Reporting the whole affair to Emma, he asked her if she knew where the plates were, to which question, as we have seen, she gave a rather unsatisfactory answer. Emma then offered to ride to Macedon and tell Joseph of the men and the “conjuror,” to which Joseph Sr. consented. Emma subsequently met her husband at the widow’s well where she related everything to him and was no doubt relieved to hear him tell her that “the record was perfectly safe, for the present.” Joseph nevertheless accompanied his wife home to the Smith farm, where he made preparations to immediately retrieve the plates from the log. After reassuring his father—who was pacing back and forth by this time—that all was well, Joseph asked Hyrum to have a chest with a good lock “ready by the time I get home.” The time to bring the plates and the gospel they contained “out of the wilderness” had come.

**Bringing the Plates Home**

Joseph apparently went to retrieve the plates immediately after arranging for the chest. Considering all that had already transpired that day, it must have been well after noon by the time Joseph removed the plates from their hiding place in the log. Once they were out of the log, Joseph wrapped them in his linen frock and started for home along the Canandaigua road, the record tucked under his arm. Leaving the road after “a short distance” for the safety of the woods, he eventually came to a “large windfall” where several trees had blown down.
As he was jumping over a log [wrote his mother], a man sprang up from behind and gave him a heavy blow with a gun. Joseph turned around and knocked him to the ground, and then ran at the top of his speed. About half a mile further, he was attacked again in precisely the same way. He soon brought this one down also and ran on again, but before he got home, he was accosted the third time with a severe stroke with a gun.22

Joseph struck this third and final attacker with such force that he dislocated his own thumb. He continued running, “being closely pursued until he came near his father’s house,” at which time his assailants, “for fear of being detected,” broke off the chase.23 Reaching a fence corner, he “threw himself down . . . to recover his breath,” then rose and continued running until he reached the house.24

His mother and sister Catharine (or Katharine) were there when he came in. Catharine said he “entered the house running,” the plates “clasped to his side with his left hand and arm, . . . his right hand . . . badly bruised from knocking down at least three men who had leaped at him from behind bushes or fences as he ran.”25 “Speechless from fright and exhaustion,” Joseph reportedly allowed Catharine to take the plates from him and set them on the table. Then he lay on the couch while he recovered his breath. Catharine also helped revive him, and later treated his right hand “for the bruises on his knuckles.”26

Once Joseph regained his strength, he asked his mother to have his father, Joseph Knight, and Josiah Stowell pursue his attackers and also to have Hyrum bring the chest. Hyrum, as it turned out, had indeed located an appropriate chest but had neither emptied it of its contents nor remembered his appointment with Joseph. Reminded of his duty by Don Carlos, Hyrum dropped the cup of tea he was drinking, dumped the contents of the chest on the floor, and quickly went to find Joseph, the chest on his shoulder, leaving his house guests—two of his wife’s sisters—convinced by his sudden actions that he was “positively crazy.”27 After Hyrum arrived, Joseph immediately locked up the record and, after a further rest on the bed, met with his father and the others who had returned after an unsuccessful search for his assailants. Joseph told them all that had happened, then asked his father to put his dislocated thumb back in place.28

The chest Hyrum had found had initially belonged to Alvin. It had been used to store small tools, and, with the lid on, also functioned as a lap desk. It was 14 inches wide, 16 inches long, and 6 1/4 inches deep in the back, sloping to 4 inches deep in the front. The lid and bottom were made out of 3/4 inch walnut, and the sides out of 1/4 inch boxwood.29

Further Problems

With the plates secured for the moment, Joseph Sr. asked his son if he and the family could see them. Joseph told them that his instructions were to show them to no one until they were translated, but he did allow his family...
to touch them and lift them as they were wrapped up.\textsuperscript{30} Sometime over the course of the next several days, Joseph also allowed his mother to handle the breastplate as it was wrapped in a "thin muslin handkerchief," the material of which was so fine that Lucy could reportedly "see the glinting metal and ascertain its proportions without any difficulty." Following her examination of the breastplate, Joseph placed it "in the chest with the Urim and Thummim."\textsuperscript{31}

With the arrival of the plates, life in the Smith home became increasingly difficult. Word quickly spread that Joseph had the plates in his possession, and numbers of people, some offering "Money and Property" to sweeten the deal, dropped by to see them.\textsuperscript{32} Joseph refused, of course, for which he and his family were "persecuted and abused."\textsuperscript{33} Part of this unwanted attention may have stemmed from October 1825 when Joseph, in company with several other men, worked for Josiah Stowell as he looked for a purported lost Spanish silver mine in Harmony Township, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. At that time, according to one uncertain source, Joseph and eight others signed an "Articles of Agreement," wherein they agreed to divide among themselves whatever they found of value while digging.\textsuperscript{34} The alleged "Agreement" was limited to "a certain place in Pennsylvania." Although none of the other eight men who signed it were ever identified by name as being part of the mob in Palmyra that was trying to get the plates from Joseph,\textsuperscript{35} both David Whitmer and Martin Harris claimed that Joseph's persecutors at this time were largely treasure hunters who felt that Joseph had agreed at some point to share with them whatever articles of value he obtained.\textsuperscript{36} It was under these conditions that Joseph rushed to the house one day and asked his mother if "a company of men" had been by in his absence. When his mother told him that no one had come, he told her that "a mob would be there that night, if not before, to search for the record, and that it must be removed immediately."\textsuperscript{37} With the help of a trusted neighbor, Joseph "carefully and speedily" removed part of the hearth in the west room, buried the plates and the breastplate in a box,\textsuperscript{38} and reset the hearth over the box. Moments later "a large company of armed men came rushing up to the house," at which Joseph opened the door and called out "as if he had a legion at hand, giving the word of command with great importance." He, his father, eleven-year-old Don Carlos, and perhaps others rushed outside toward the mob at the same time. The ruse worked. Joseph's authoritative call to arms and the aggressive appearance he and his family made apparently convinced the mob that the house was heavily guarded, and they "fled . . . away into the woods, where they dispersed themselves to their several homes."\textsuperscript{39}

It was probably shortly after this that Samuel Lawrence made yet another attempt to get the plates. Joseph Knight recorded that Lawrence and "one Beeman a grate Rodsman,"\textsuperscript{40} showed up at the Smith home, wanting to talk with Joseph. Joseph took them into the west room (the room in which the plates were hid), where they "Proposed to go shares with him and tried every way to Bargain with him But Could not." Beeman then reportedly "took out his Rods and hild [held] them up and they pointed Dow[n] to the harth where they ware hid," at the same time exclaiming that he had found them.\textsuperscript{41} Knight did not record what happened next, but it is probably safe to assume that Joseph breathed a sigh of relief once the two men left the house.\textsuperscript{42}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Smith_family_home.jpg}
\caption{The Smith family home}
\end{figure}

\begin{center}
\textbf{THE MOB THAT NIGHT TORE UP THE FLOOR OF THE COOPER’S SHOP AND SMASHED THE WOODEN BOX, BUT LEFT THE PLATES AND BREASTPLATE UNDISTURBED IN THE LOFT A FEW FEET ABOVE THEIR HEADS.}
\end{center}
The plates’ hiding place having been discovered, Joseph did not keep them under the hearth for long. Martin Harris said that a compounding problem with the hearth hiding place was that the wall in that room was partly torn down, making it easier for someone on the outside to “get under the house and dig them out.” To make matters worse, the mob about this time enlisted the help of Willard Chase’s sister Sally in their efforts to obtain the plates. Sally Chase reportedly had a “green glass through which she could see many wonderful things” and had begun, as the Smiths soon learned, to apply her talents on behalf of her brother’s efforts to locate and obtain the plates. Thus, after “but a few days rest,” when Joseph “received another intimation of the approach of a mob and the necessity of removing the record and the breastplate again from their hiding place,” he dug them up.

Accounts vary as to what Joseph did next, but it seems that he hid the plates and the breastplate, housed together in the same box, under the floor of a cooper’s shop located just across the road. After a “short time,” Joseph dug them up again, removed the plates and breastplate from their box, reburied the box, and hid the plates and breastplate, now wrapped in some clothing, in “a quantity of flax” being stored in the shop’s loft. The decoy worked. Following Sally Chase’s directions, the mob that night tore up the floor of the cooper’s shop and smashed the wooden box, but left the plates and breastplate undisturbed in the loft a few feet above their heads.

After this harrowing experience, Joseph placed the plates in a third box. This one was made from an “old Ontario glass-box,” the ends of which an obliging neighbor cut off in order to “mak[e] the box the right length to put [the plates] in.” By this time the “excitement in the village upon the subject [of the plates] had become such,” Martin Harris reported, “that some had threatened to mob Joseph, and also to tar and feather him.” Several went a step further and actually took shots at Joseph, while his parents’ home “was frequently beset by mobs and evil designing persons” intent on getting the record. Realizing that he would never be able to translate the record while both he and the plates were in such jeopardy, Joseph wrote to Emma’s brother Alva, requesting him to come to New York to help him and Emma move to Harmony, Pennsylvania, where Emma’s parents lived. Alva quickly complied with Joseph’s request, while Martin Harris, in the meantime, gave the prophet some money with which he could pay his debts and finance the move to Pennsylvania.

When they learned that Joseph would shortly be moving to Pennsylvania, the mob in Palmyra and Manchester redoubled their efforts to obtain the plates. After threatening Joseph that “he should never leave until he had shown the plates,” some fifty men began laying plans for how they might follow Joseph and rob him on his way to Harmony. Seeking leadership for the enterprise, the mob approached the Smiths’ family doctor, one Dr. McIntyre, and requested him to “take the command of the company.” McIntyre, who had known and attended the Smith family for years, told the group that “they must be a pack of devilish fools” and refused their offer, thereby bringing the expedition to a close before it even got started.

No doubt hearing rumors of the mob’s plans, Joseph and his associates went to great lengths to see that the plates would make it to Harmony safely. First, they nailed the plates and breastplate in a box. Then they placed the box in a “strong cask,” which they then filled “about one-third” full of beans to conceal the box. On the advice of Martin Harris, Joseph and Alva each armed themselves with stout clubs. As a final precaution, they apparently made it known that they would be leaving Manchester on a Monday, then left two days earlier, on Saturday.

In spite of their precautions, the trip did not go without incident. Orson Pratt reported that Joseph, Emma, and Alva “had not gone far, before [they were] overtaken by an officer with a search-warrant, who flattered himself with the idea that he should surely obtain the plates.” When the search produced nothing, the three travelers were allowed to continue, only to be stopped a little later by another officer “on the same business.” After enduring another thorough but unsuccessful search of the wagon, Joseph and the others pressed on. They arrived at Emma’s parents’ home without further incident.

Thus ended the first difficult phase of Joseph’s guardianship over the plates. Little, if anything, had been accomplished by way of translating the record, pressed as Joseph and his family had been by the mobs. Yet the record was safe, and in his struggles to preserve them Joseph no doubt had learned much about the ways of God and man that would serve him well in the time to come.
ENDNOTES

Leroy Robertson and the Oratorio from the Book of Mormon: Reminiscences of a Daughter
Marian Robertson Wilson

1. As a musical form, oratorio resembles opera in that it is a dramatic story set to music, with singers portraying characters of the plot while the orchestra provides instrumental color and commentary; the subject is usually taken from scripture. Oratorio differs from opera in that it is presented in concert form, i.e., without staging, costumes, or acting. Larger than most, the Oratorio from the Book of Mormon is scored for two large choruses, a children’s chorus, soloists, and full orchestra compiled from critics and kept letters sent to him about the Oratorios. For the citations in the first paragraph, see respectively: the Provo Herald, 20 February 1953; the Denver Post, 14 January 1962; Billboard Music Week (New York City, 30 October 1961); Washington (D.C.) Star, 10 December 1961; Apostle Mark E. Petersen, letter to Leroy Robertson (Salt Lake City, 19 February 1953); Dr. David Reiser, letter to Leroy Robertson (Salt Lake City, 18 February 1953); Dr. L. MaRue Barrus, interview with Marian Robertson Wilson (Rexburg, Idaho: 28 September 1981). For all these materials, see the Leroy J. Robertson Collection, Special Collections, Department, University of Utah Libraries, Salt Lake City (hereinafter LJR Collection) and the Addendum thereto (hereinafter Addendum).

2. Robert Cundick, conversation with Marian Robertson Wilson (Salt Lake City, early February 1990). At the risk of omitting important Mormon works that followed Robertson’s Oratorio, one may cite, for example: Robert Cundick’s The Song of Nephi, and The Redeemer; Darwin Wolford’s Behold, He Cometh; K. Newell Davis’s Immortal; Crawford Gates’s Visions of Eternity; and most recently, Merrill Jensen’s Come unto Christ.

3. After this 1919 encounter, Elder Ballard—soon to become president of the Church’s General Music Committee—would keep an abiding interest in Leroy Robertson. For more details about their relationship, see Marian Robertson Wilson, Leroy Robertson: Music Giant from the Rockies (Salt Lake City: Blue Ribbon Publications, 1996), 35, 85, and 267–92. For details of Robertson’s boyhood and youth, see ibid., 7–40.

4. The children born to Leroy and Naomi (née Maggie Naomi Nelson) are Alice Marian, Retree, Karen Naomi, and James Leroy (Jr.). For more details about Leroy’s years in Boston and the years following (1920–1948), see Robertson Wilson, Leroy Robertson, 41–56. For a list of his compositions from this period, see Marian Robertson Wilson, Register of the Annotated Bibliography of the Compositions of Leroy Robertson (Salt Lake City: Special Collections Department, University of Utah Libraries, 1990), 49–50.

5. Not all the enclosed and otherwise marked passages found their way into the final libretto. For example, next to the report of the discovery of the Nephites upon Christ’s death one finds penciled in the margins of Robertson’s Triple Combination, p. 417, a striking musical motif and this lament:

O O this great and terrible day
The tempest, the thunder, the lightning
Our brethren are burned
Our children are buried.
However, only the first line (from 3 Nephi 9:24) appears in the final version of the libretto, neither is the musical motif to be hoard in the Oratorio.


7. For more details about the music of the Book of Mormon Oratorio, see ibid., pp. 894–96.

8. Robertson’s Oratorio is scored for two large choruses, a children’s chorus, soloists, and full orchestra, i.e., a combination of orchestral and choral forces.

9. For more details about the music of the Book of Mormon Oratorio, see ibid., pp. 898–99.

10. Particularly well established during the German Reformation, these melodies are heard prominently in various parts of the Oratorio’s subthemes may well be (1) the musical motif and this lament:

Our brethren are burned
Our children are buried.
(2) the musical setting to the Lord’s Prayer, as Martin Harris.

11. For penciled details about the music of Robertson’s setting to the Lord’s Prayer, see Robertson Wilson, Leroy Robertson, 124–26, and for another account of its composition, see Charles J. Calman and William J. Kaufman, The Mormon Tabernacle Choir (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1979), 120.

12. This eventful dinner took place 26 February 1946. For more details about the invitation, see The First Presidency: George Albert Smith, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., David O. McKay, letter to Leroy Robertson (Salt Lake City: 17 December 1945), in the LJR Collection.

13. For more details of Robertson’s long query into the Nephites upon Christ’s death one finds penciled in the margins of Robertson’s Triple Combination, p. 417, a striking musical motif and this lament:

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14. For more details about this move to Salt Lake City and Robertson’s relationship with Maurice Abravanel, see Robertson Wilson, Leroy Robertson, 143–44 and passim.

15. Maurice Abravanel, interview with Marian Robertson Wilson (Salt Lake City: 5 October 1981); for the tape of this interview, see the Addendum.

16. David O. McKay had sustained President of the Church 9 April 1951 following the death of President George Albert Smith five previous days (4 April).

17. This joint effort by the Tabernacle Choir and Utah Symphony could not have occurred save for the goodwill of Maurice Abravanel, Choir Director Jerold Ottley, the Choir and Symphony managements, and and Herbert L. Gregory, who served as the unsolicited linchpin holding it all together.

18. The concert in Independence, Missouri, came about due to the dedicated diplo- macy of Dr. Marian Peterson, a former Robertson student and highly respected faculty member in the Conservatory of Music of the University of Missouri Kansas City. Her father, Apostle Mark E. Petersen, was in attendance, as were other General Authorities of the LDS Church along with their counterparts in the RLDS Church. It should be noted that from the time of the Oratorio’s 1953 premiere, the RLDS community has embraced this work as part of its own tra- dition. The program in Berlin, Germany, was prepared and directed by young David Raatz, then studying at the Berlin Hochschule fur Musik (Conservatory of Music).

“All My Endeavors To Preserve Them”: Protecting the Plates in Palmyra, 22 September–December 1827
Andrew H. Hedges

1. According to Oliver Cowdery, Joseph’s prayer this evening may have been several hours in length, which would place Moroni’s first visit in the early hours of 22 September rather than on 21 September. Oliver wrote of the incident to W. W. Phelps that “hours passed unnum-bered—how many or few I know not, neither is he [Joseph] able to inform me; but [he] supposesthe must have been eleven or twelve, and perhaps later, as the noise and bustle of the family, in their excitement, had long since ceased” when Moroni appeared. Oliver noted as well that Joseph had “other things to hide” who were sleep- ing during his interview with the angel. Latter-day Saints Messenger and Advocate 175 (1853): 79.


4. Proctor and Proctor, eds., History of Joseph Smith, 140. See p. 151 for Lucy’s identification of this “confidential friend” as Martin Harris.


6. Ibid., 145.

7. Proctor and Proctor, eds., History of Joseph Smith, 137. One might argue that Stowell and Knight, as friends of the fam- ily, just happened to be with the Smiths on the night of 21 September. Knight, however, recorded how, in “the forepart of September” of 1827, he “went to Rochester, and returned by Palmyra to be there about the 22nd of September,” suggesting he knew the sig- nificance of the date (Jesse, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection,” 32, emphasis added).

8. Knight was apparently using the word see to refer to someone who had the abil- ity to see or find objects hidden from nat- ural sight (ibid.).

9. Ibid., 32–33.

10. Lucy herself felt that Satan was involved with such efforts, “stir[ring] up the hearts of those who were in any way gotten a hint of the matter, to search into it and make every possible move towards preventing the work.” Proctor and Proctor, eds., History of Joseph Smith, 140.

11. Ibid., 123, see p. 137.

12. Ibid., 137.

13. Ibid., 145.

14. Lucy said Joseph held the plates “about three miles from home” (ibid., 142), which was roughly how far the Hill Cumorah itself was from the Smith’s home. This and the presumption that Emma was waiting for him in the wagon suggest that Joseph did not travel any appreciable distance before hiding the plates in the log.

15. Ibid., 142–44. Martin Harris said Joseph had the plates in the hollow top of an oak tree. See Joel Tiffany, “Mormonism—No. II,” Tiffany’s Monthly 5 (1859): 165; see also Richard L. Bushman, Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 217 n. 5.
Proctor and Proctor, eds., History of Joseph Smith, 144.

19. Ibid., 141–42.

20. William Smith identified this garment as a "towndock" and Joseph had not brought it "especially to wrap the plates in," but that it was "his every day dress and was and is held where it was, but did not know its value."


24. Martin Harris reported that "the money-diggers claimed that they had as much right to the plates as Joseph had, as they were in company together. They claimed that Joseph had been traitor, and had appropriated to himself that which belonged to them."


26. This was probably the glass box men referred to when they said they had the boxes stored and transported. See also Lynn M. and Hope Hilton, The Book of Mormon: The Restoration of the Ancient Records within a Very Short Period after its First Composition, 1840.


30. Nahman Avigard, Discovering Jerusalem (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1983). Some scholars believe this date represents the birth of Jeremiah, who was called from the womb—in which case he would be about 30 when the Book of Mormon opens, younger than Lehi.


32. When Nephi and his brothers were sent back to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates, they found it necessary to "go down to the land of our father's inheritance" (1 Nephi 3:16) in order to retrieve their property and "up again unto the house of Laban" (1 Nephi 3:22) to bargain with Laban for the plates (see 1 Nephi 3:22–24). Some Latter-day Saint scholars believe this language indicates Lehi and his family lived "outside" of Jerusalem. Nibley, Liahona in the Desert, 7 n.12. See also Lynn M. and Hope Hilton, In Search of Lehi's Trail (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1996). 34–35.


35. See 75:5, 180–81.

36. The translation of Mormon's abridgment of the large plates for the period from the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. to the birth of King Josiah in 640 B.C. (see 1 Nephi 1:1–28; 3 Nephi 1:1–10) for a discussion of Lehi's record, see S. Kent Brown, "Recovering the Missing Record of Lehi," in From Jerusalem to Zarahemla, 28–54.

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1. Besides Jeremiah and Lehi, from this we know the prophets Huldah and the prophets Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Uriah of Kiriath-jearim (see Jeremiah 26) in Judah, and Ezekiel and Daniel in exile.

2. Some interpret the Book of Mormon evidence that the Jaredites were in Jerusalem within a very short period after his call. Others have argued that he may have prophesied for ten years in Jerusalem before he left. See Randall P. Spackman, The Jewish/Nephite Lunar Calendar, JBMS 71(1):57.


4. Nahman Avigard, Discovering Jerusalem (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1983). Some scholars believe this date represents the birth of Jeremiah, who was called from the womb—in which case he would be about 30 when the Book of Mormon opens, younger than Lehi.


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