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The Editor's Notebook

John L. Sorenson

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>The Editor’s Notebook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>John L. Sorenson</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Introduction to the current issue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some people see great potential for research to turn up new ways of seeing and thinking about the world. Others tend to feel that everything important must already have been discovered. For the latter, “research” means finding authorities who offer a confident answer to each question that occurs to us to ask. For the former, the best part of any question is the quest part.

Brigham Young once observed, “A spirit and power of research is planted within [humans], yet they remain undeveloped.”1 He also said, “If I do not learn what is in the world, from first to last, somebody will be wiser than I am. I intend to know the whole of it, both good and bad.”2

Book of Mormon studies is one special manifestation of that general curiosity that Brother Brigham recommended. Simply treading the same mental and spiritual ground year after year as we examine the scripture may not advance our understanding as much as it puts us to sleep. For us to read scripture doggedly time after time may yield little new insight or appreciation of what the text contains that might inspire. We might well gain more by pausing to ask, “Why did the Lord make this statement at this historical moment?” or, more specifically, “Why did Book of Mormon writers use the name Jehovah only twice in the entire text—and one of those in the last verse of the book?” Just as challenging is seeking new depth in a word we have read so many times that we no longer think about its meaning—for example, what does it mean to “harrow up” a person’s soul (2 Nephi 9:47; Mormon 5:8)?

All the authors whose work we publish offer us new views of expressions that may have become commonplace in our reading. That is what research is about—to crack open previously closed windows of our minds. This issue of the Journal offers a new tool to help us do so. Dr. Cynthia Hallen, a linguist at BYU, starts a new department entitled “What’s in a Word?” As she pursues her own quest for new understanding, she will share items of interest that will extend and enrich our grasp of scripture.

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Guidelines for preparing and submitting articles for publication in the Journal are available on the FARMS Web site (farms.byu.edu), by e-mail request to jbms@byu.edu, or by mail from FARMS. In general, authors should submit a detailed outline or abstract to the editors for approval before submitting a completed manuscript.
“What Meaneth the Words That Are Written?” Abinadi Interprets Isaiah
Ann Madsen


2. The brass plates version of Isaiah prefaces, Isaiah 52:7. . . . “How beautiful are the feet of them that bring good tidings—literally, are the legs of the runner who brings good news and who caused us to hear that there is peace . . . Abinadi is announcing that from the other side of the mountain, from the other world, comes the good news. This is revelation. It’s the welcome messenger from the other world, the angel who brings us the gospel—who brings to the message of salvation, who brings us the message of peace, which you don’t find on this side of the mountain.” (“The Mountain of the Lord’s House,” lecture 16 of Ancient Documents and the Pearl of Great Price [series of videotaped lectures from a 1988 honors class at Brigham Young University on the Pearl of Great Price], transcript pp. 8–9).


4. In Alma 32, Alma expounds the method whereby this change can occur.

How Witnesses Described the “Gold Plates”

Kirk B. Henrikson

The descriptive material for this article was compiled by Kirk Henrikson, of the staff of the Museum of Church History and Art in Salt Lake City, who kindly offered it for use in the Journal.

1. Joseph Smith Jr., “Church History, Times and Seasons, 1 March 1842 (also known as the Wentworth Letter),” The Testimony of Eight Witnesses, Book of Mormon; and Orson Pratt, in a pamphlet titled An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records (Edinburgh, Scotland: Ballantyne and Hughes, May 1840), 12–13. The Wentworth Letter, the Prophet Joseph Smith’s sketch of the history and faith of the Latter-day Saints written for the editor of the Chicago Democrat, utilizes much of the same language found in Pratt’s pamphlet. Although Pratt did not see or handle the plates, he learned much about them through his close association with Joseph Smith.

2. Nowhere in the documentary evidence did the witnesses or other key participants in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon describe the plates as being made of solid or pure gold.


5. Orson Pratt, in Journal of Discourses, 5:347, 13 April 1856. Orson Pratt was not eyewitness of the plates.

6. Ibid., 19:211–12, 9 December 1877.


9. David Whitmer interview, Iowa State Register, August 1870, as quoted in Backman Eyewitness Accounts, 226.


13. Orson Pratt, I will be reasoning! He may have turned to read at that moment from a scroll, a plates, or book of some kind containing Exo-


15.bid. 19:211–12, 9 December 1877.


18. Orson Pratt, in Journal of Discourses, 5:347, 13 April 1856. Orson Pratt was not eyewitness of the plates.

19. Ibid., 19:211–12, 9 December 1877.


22. Pratt’s description is slightly different, adding, for example, the following italicized words: “[The plates] were filled on both sides with . . . Egyptian characters . . . The characters on the unsealed part were small, and beautifully engraved” (Eyewitness Accounts, 226).


28. David Whitmer interview, Iowa State Register, August 1870, as quoted in Backman Eyewitness Accounts, 226.


31. David Whitmer interview, Iowa State Register, August 1870, as quoted in Backman Eyewitness Accounts, 226.


36. Orson Pratt, in Journal of Discourses, 5:347, 13 April 1856. Orson Pratt was not eyewitness of the plates.

37. Joseph Smith Jr., “Church History” (Wentworth Letter), Pratt, An Interesting Account, 13. John Whitmer’s description is slightly different, adding, for example, the following italicized words: “[The plates] were filled on both sides with . . . Egyptian characters . . . The characters on the unsealed part were small, and beautifully engraved” (Eyewitness Accounts, 226).


41. See Joseph Smith, The Saints’ Herald, 4 October 1884, 644.


45. It is also possible that other metallurgical treatments such as a hammered copper-silver-gold alloy could have fur-