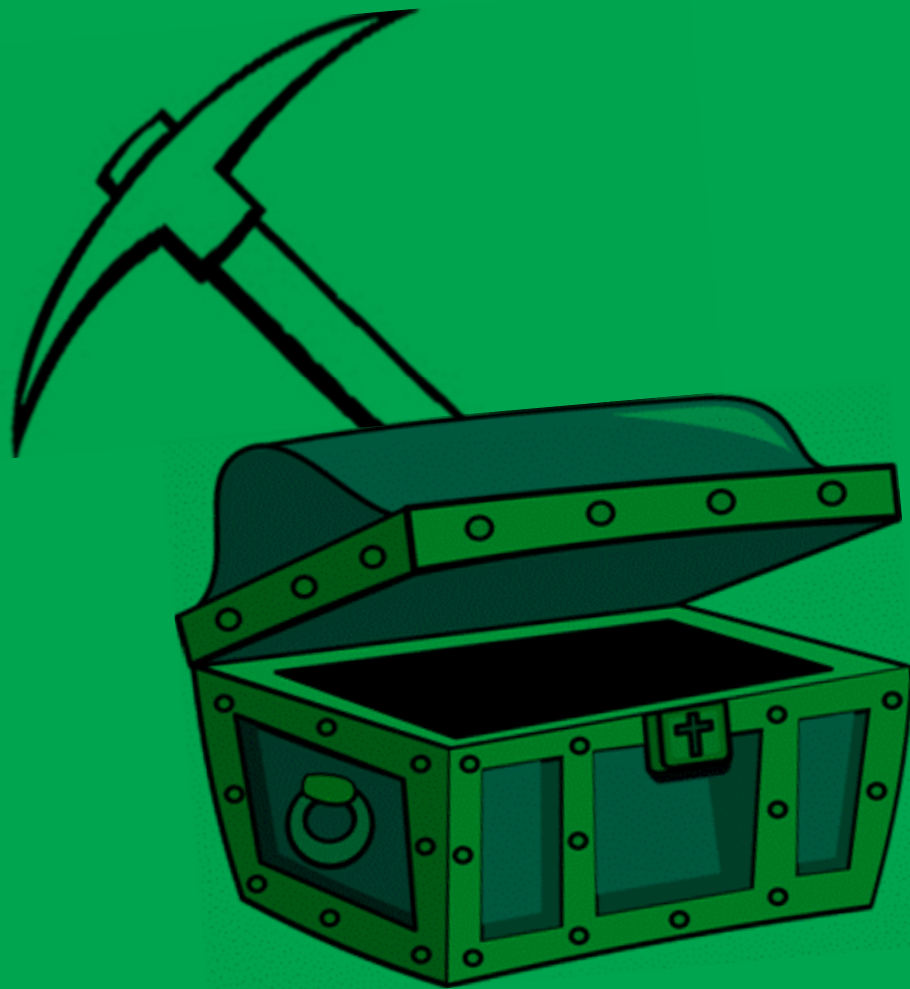


Sample

# JOSEPH SMITH & MONEY-DIGGING



By Jerald and Sandra Tanner

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## Part 1

### TREASURE HUNTING

In the *Pearl of Great Price* (one of the four standard works of the Mormon Church) Joseph Smith made these statements concerning how he obtained the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was supposed to have been translated:

Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario county, New York, stands a hill of considerable size, . . . not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. This stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner toward the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth.

Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked in, and there indeed did I behold the plates, . . . (*Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith 2:51-52)

In a letter to John Wentworth, Joseph Smith stated:

These records were engraven on plates . . . They were filled with engravings, in Egyptian characters, and bound together in a volume as the leaves of a book, with three rings running through the whole. (*History of the Church*, vol. 4, page 537)

It is interesting to note that four years before the Book of Mormon was printed, an English traveler had claimed a somewhat similar discovery in Ohio. Josiah Priest gave this information in his book, *American Antiquities*:

In the neighborhood of Fort Harmer, on the Muskingum, opposite Marietta on the Ohio, were discovered, by Mr. Ash, an English traveller, in the year 1826, several monuments of the ancient nations.

“Having made, (says this traveller,) arrangements for an absence of a few days from the fort, I provided myself with an excellent tinder box, some biscuit and salt, and arming my Indian travelling companion, with a good axe and rifle, . . .

“On traversing the valley between Fort Harmer and

the mountains, I determined to take the high grounds, and after some difficulty, ascended an eminence which commanded a view of the town of Marietta, . . .

“After a very short inspection, and cursory examination, it was evident that the very spot or eminence on which I stood, had been occupied by the Indians, either as a place of observation, or a strong hold. . . . I despaired of gaining any further knowledge, and would have left the place, had I not been detained by my Indian companion, whom I saw occupied in endeavoring to introduce a pole into a small opening between two flat stones, near the root of a tree, which grew on the very summit of this eminence.

“The stones we found were too heavy to be removed by the mere power of hands. Two good oak poles were cut, in lieu of levers and crows. Clapping these into the orifice first discovered, we weighed **a large flat stone**, tilting it over, . . .

“I expected to find a cavern: my imagination was warmed by a certain design I thought I discovered from the very beginning; the manner the stones were placed led me to conceive the existence of a **vault** filled with the riches of antiquity, and crowded with the treasures of the most ancient world.

“A bed of sand was all that appeared under these flat stones, . . . the sand was about a foot deep, which I soon removed.

“The design and labor of man was now unequivocal. The space out of which these materials were taken, left a hollow in an **oblong square**, lined with stones on the end and sides, and also paved on what appeared to be the bottom, with square stones, of about nine inches diameter. . . . With the skeleton was found, first an earthen vessel, or urn, in which were several bones, and some white sediment. . . . Sixth; under a heap of dust and tenuous shreds of feathered cloth and hair, **a parcel of brass rings**, cut out of a solid piece of metal, and in such a manner that the rings were suspended from each other, without the aid of solder or any other visible agency whatever. Each ring was three inches in diameter, and the bar of the rings a half an inch thick, and were square; **a variety of characters were deeply engraved on the sides of the rings, resembling the Chinese characters.**” (*American Antiquities*, Albany, N.Y., 1835, pages 90-93)

At the time the Book of Mormon was printed many people were engaged in searching for buried treasures. On July 24, 1822, the *Palmyra Herald* reprinted the following statements from the *Montpelier (Vt.) Watchman*:

Indeed, digging for money hid in the earth is a very common thing; and in this state it is even considered an honorable and profitable employment. We could name, if we pleased, at least five hundred respectable men, who do, in the simplicity and sincerity of their hearts, verily believe that immense treasures lie concealed upon our Green Mountains; many of whom have been for a number of years, most industriously and perseveringly engaged in digging it up.

On February 16, 1825, the *Wayne Sentinel* (a newspaper published in Joseph Smith's neighborhood) reprinted the following from the *Windsor, (Vermont) Jour.*:

Money digging. — We are sorry to observe even in this enlightened age, so prevalent a disposition to credit the accounts of the Marvellous. Even the frightful stories of money being hid under the surface of the earth, and enchanted by the Devil or Robert Kidd, are received by many of our respectable fellow citizens as truths. . . .

A respectable gentleman in Tunbridge, was informed by means of a **dream**, that a **chest of money** was buried on a small island . . . he started off to enrich himself with the treasure. After having been directed by the mineral rod where to search for the money, he excavated the earth . . . Presently he and his laborers came . . . upon a chest of gold . . . One of the company drove an old file through the rotten lid of the chest, and . . . the chest moved off through the mud, and has not been seen or heard of since. . . . Whether he actually saw the chest, or whether it was the vision of a disordered brain, we shall leave to the public to determine.

Many of the people who were digging for buried treasure in Joseph Smith's time were very superstitious. There were many strange stories connected with these treasure hunts. Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, related the following:

Mr. Stowel was at this time at old Mr. Smith's, digging for money. It was reported by these money-diggers, that they had **found boxes**, but before they could secure them, **they would sink into the earth**. A candid old Presbyterian told me, that on the Susquehannah flats he dug down to an iron chest, that he scraped the dirt off with his shovel, but had nothing with him to open the chest; that he went away to get help, and when they came to it, it moved away two or three rods into the earth, and they could not get it. There were a great many strange sights. One time the old log school-house south of Palmyra, was suddenly lighted up, and frightened them away. Samuel Lawrence told me that while they were digging, a large man who appeared to be eight or nine feet high, came and sat on

the ridge of the barn, and motioned to them that they must leave. They motioned back that they would not; but that they afterwards became frightened and did leave. At another time while they were digging, a company of horsemen came and frightened them away. These things were real to them, I believe, because they were told to me in confidence, and told by different ones, and their stories agreed, and they seemed to be in earnest—I knew they were in earnest. (An interview with Martin Harris, published in *Tiffany's Monthly*, 1859, page 165)

On another occasion Martin Harris admitted that he participated in some money digging activities and that a stone box slipped back into the hill:

Martin Harris (speaking to a group of Saints at Clarkston, Utah in the 1870's): I will tell you a wonderful thing that happened after Joseph had found the plates. Three of us took some tools to go to the hill and hunt for some more boxes, or gold or something, and indeed, we found a stone box. We got quite excited about it and dug quite carefully around it, and we were ready to take it up, but behold by some unseen power, **it slipped back into the hill**. We stood there and looked at it, and one of us took a crow bar and tried to drive it through the lid to hold it, but it glanced and broke one corner off the box. Some time that box will be found and you will see the corner broken off, and then you will know I have told the truth. (Testimony of Mrs. Comfort Godfrey Flinders, *Utah Pioneer Biographies*, vol. X, page 65, Genealogical Society of Utah, as quoted in an unpublished manuscript by LaMar Petersen)

It appears that even Brigham Young, the second President of the Mormon Church, was influenced by the superstitions of his day. In a sermon delivered June 17, 1877, he stated:

But do you know how to find such a mine? No, you do not. These treasures that are in the earth are carefully watched, **they can be removed from place to place** according to the good pleasure of Him who made them and owns them. He has his messengers at his service, and it is just as easy for an angel to remove the minerals from any part of one of these mountains to another, as it is for you and me to walk up and down this hall. . . .

Sometimes I take the liberty of talking a little further with regard to such things. Orin P. Rockwell is an eye-witness to some powers of removing the treasures of the earth. He was with certain parties that lived near by where the plates were found that contain the records of the Book of Mormon. There were a great many treasures hid up by the Nephites. Porter was with them one night where there were treasures, and they could find them easy enough, but they could not obtain them.

I will tell you a story which will be marvelous to most of you. It was told me by Porter, whom I would believe just as quickly as any man that lives. When he tells a thing he understands, he will tell it just as he knows it; he is a man that does not lie. He said that on this night, when they were

engaged hunting for this old treasure, they dug around the end of a chest for some twenty inches. The chest was about three feet square. One man who was determined to have the contents of that chest, took his pick and struck into the lid of it, and split through into the chest. The blow took off a piece of the lid, which a certain lady kept in her possession until she died. **That chest of money went into the bank.** Porter describes it so [making a rumbling sound]; he says this is just as true as the heavens are. I have heard others tell the same story. I relate this because it is marvelous to you. But to those who understand these things, it is not marvelous.

You hear a great deal said about finding money. There is no difficulty at all in finding money, but there are a great many people who do not know what to do with it when they do find it. This is the great defect with the human family. I could relate many very singular circumstances. I lived right in the country where the plates were found from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and I know a great many things pertaining to that country. I believe I will take the liberty to tell you of another circumstance that will be as marvelous as anything can be. This is an incident in the life of Oliver Cowdery, but he did not take the liberty of telling such things in meeting as I take. I tell these things to you, and I have a motive for doing so. I want to carry them to the ears of my brethren and sisters, and to the children also, that they may grow to an understanding of some things that seem to be entirely hidden from the human family. Oliver Cowdery went with the Prophet Joseph when he deposited these plates. Joseph did not translate all of the plates; there was a portion of them sealed, which you can learn from the *Book of Doctrine and Covenants*. When Joseph got the plates, the angel instructed him to carry them back to the hill Cumorah, which he did. Oliver says that when Joseph and Oliver went there, **the hill opened, and they walked into a cave**, in which there was a large and spacious room. He says he did not think, at the time, whether they had the light of the sun or artificial light; but that it was just as light as day. They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room **more plates than probably many wagon loads**; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls. The first time they went there the sword of Laban hung upon the wall; but when they went again it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the gold plates; it was unsheathed, and on it was written these words: "This sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ." . . .

. . . People do not know it, but I know there is a seal upon the treasures of earth; men are allowed to go so far and no farther. I have known places where there were treasures in abundance; but could men get them? No. You can read in the Book of Mormon of the ancient Nephites holding their treasures, and of their becoming slippery; so that after they had privately hid their money, on going to the place again, lo and behold it was not there, but was somewhere else,

but they knew not where. (A Sermon by Brigham Young, delivered at a special conference held at Farmington, June 17, 1877, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 19, pages 36-39)

Brigham Young also tells that even the priests from the various churches were influenced by a fortune teller. He stated:

I never heard such oaths fall from the lips of any man as I heard uttered by a man who was called a fortune-teller, and who knew where those plates were hid. He went three times in one summer to get them, —the same summer in which Joseph did get them. Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist priests and deacons **sent for him** to tell where those plates were, and to get them out of the hill where they were deposited; and he had not returned to his home from the last trip he made for them more than a week or ten days before Joseph got them. Joseph was what we call an ignorant boy; but this fortune-teller, whose name I do not remember, was a man of profound learning.

He had put himself in possession of all the learning in the States,—had been to France, Germany, Italy, and through the world,—had been educated for a priest, and turned out to be a devil . . . He could preach as well as the best of them, and I never heard a man swear as he did. He could tell that those plates were there, and that they were a treasure whose value to the people could not be told; for that I myself heard him say. (Remarks by Brigham Young, July 19, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 5, page 55)

On another occasion Brigham Young stated:

I well knew a man who, to get the plates, rode over sixty miles three times the same season they were obtained by Joseph Smith. About the time of their being delivered to Joseph by the angel, the friends of this man sent for him, and informed him that they were going to lose that treasure, though they did not know what it was. The man I refer to was a fortune-teller, a necromancer, an astrologer, a soothsayer, and possessed as much talent as any man that walked on the American soil, and was one of the wickedest men I ever saw. The last time he went to obtain the treasure **he knew where it was**, and told where it was, but did not know its value. Allow me to tell you that a Baptist deacon and others of Joseph's neighbors were the very men who sent for this necromancer the last time he went for the treasure. I never heard a man who could swear like that astrologer; he swore scientifically, by rule, by note. To those who love swearing, it was musical to hear him, but not so to me, for I would leave his presence. He would call Joseph everything that was bad, and say, "I believe he will get the treasure after all." He did get it, and the war commenced directly. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, pages 180-181)

The early Mormon leaders grew up at a time when people were very superstitious. The Mormon historian B. H. Roberts made these comments:

Credulity: Yes, the Prophet's ancestors were credulous in that some of them believed that they were healed of bodily ailments by the power of faith in God. Others had dreams, as their neighbors had, . . . It may be admitted that some of them believed in fortune telling, in warlocks and witches— . . . Indeed it is scarcely conceivable how one could live in New England in those years and not have shared in such beliefs. To be credulous in such things was to be normal people. (*A Comprehensive History of the Church*, by B. H. Roberts, vol. 1, pages 26-27)

### Peep Stones

At the time the Book of Mormon came forth many people believed in “peep stones.” These stones were sometimes placed in a hat and used to locate buried treasure. The following appeared in the *Wayne Sentinel* on December 27, 1825:

MR. STRONG—Please insert the following and oblige one of your readers.

Wonderful Discovery.—A few days since was discovered in this town, by the help of a **mineral stone**, (which becomes transparent when **placed in a hat**, and the light excluded by the face of him who looks into it, provided he is fortune's favorite,) a monstrous potash kettle in the bowels of old mother Earth, filled with the purest bullion. Some attempts have been made to dig it up, but without success. His Satanic Majesty, or some other invisible agent, appears to keep it under **marching orders**; for no sooner is it dug on to in one place, than it moves off like “false delusive hope,” to another still more remote. But its pursuers are now sanguine of success—they have entrenched the kettle all round, and driven a steel ramrod into the ground directly over it, to break the enchantment. Nothing now remains, but to raise its ponderous weight, . . .

By the rust on the kettle, and the color of the silver, it is supposed to have been deposited where it now lies, prior to the flood. (*Wayne Sentinel*, December 27, 1825, page 2)

Some of the early Mormon leaders believed in peep stones. The Mormon Apostle Orson Hyde claimed that the ability to find metals was a gift from God:

I want to tell a little anecdote which came to my ears. . . . It is said that there is a man in this city, a natural miner, who has a peculiar **gift** to discover metals of value, though **hidden** in the earth at any depth. He can point out the very place where they are. He happened in as gentleman's house in this town one day, and they were discussing his powers to discern any metal in the earth. The lady, doubting his ability, took a piece of lead, and slyly stepped out and buried it, being careful to leave no visible marks by which any other than herself could find it. She returned and told him that in the garden was a piece of lead buried, and wished him to find it if he could. He made the attempt; and after a little rambling, pointed to the very spot where it was; but the lady, thinking to

bluff him off and discourage him, made perfect ridicule of him, and asked what had led him to think it was there. She pretended to regard him as insane, and the poor man came to the conclusion that he might be mistaken, as the lady appeared so sanguine in her ridicule. He gave it up as a mistake, doubting his own **gift**. Since the time that he was bluffed off from the **faith** in the natural **gift that God had given him**—(Pres. H. C. Kimball: And that by a woman!)—yes, and since that, it has been taken away altogether. Before this, he was never mistaken in such matters; but since then, has no more powers of discovering than any other. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 5, pages 16-17)

There is evidence that the Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith possessed a “seer stone.” Willard Chase made these statements in an affidavit dated December 11, 1833:

I became acquainted with the Smith family, . . . in the year 1820. At that time, they were engaged in the **money digging** business, which they followed until the latter part of the season of 1827. In the year 1822, I was engaged in digging a well. I employed Alvin and Joseph Smith to assist me; the latter of whom is now known as the Mormon prophet. After digging about twenty feet below the surface of the earth, we discovered a singularly appearing **stone**, which excited my curiosity. I brought it to the top of the well, and as we were examining it, **Joseph put it into his hat**, and then his face into the top of his hat. It has been said by Smith, that he brought the stone from the well; but this is false. There was no one in the well but myself. The next morning he came to me, and wished to obtain the stone, alledging that he could see in it; but I told him I did not wish to part with it on account of its being a curiosity, but would lend it. After obtaining the stone, he began to publish abroad what wonders he could discover by looking in it, and made so much disturbance among the credulous part of [the] community, that I ordered the stone to be returned to me again. He had it in his possession about two years.—I believe, some time in 1825, Hiram Smith (brother of Joseph Smith) came to me, and wished to borrow the same stone, alledging that they wanted to accomplish some business of importance, which could not very well be done without the aid of the stone. I told him it was of no particular worth to me, but merely wished to keep it as a curiosity, and if he would pledge me his word and honor, that I should have it when called for, he might take it; which he did and took the stone. I thought I could rely on his word at this time; as he had made a profession of religion. But in this I was disappointed, for he disregarded both his word and honor.

In the fall of 1826, a friend called upon me and wished to see that stone, about which so much had been said; and I told him if he would go with me to Smith's, (a distance of about half a mile) he might see it. But to my surprize, on going to Smith's, and asking him for the stone, he said, “you cannot have it;” I told him it belonged to me, repeated to him the promise he made me, at the time of obtaining the stone: upon which he faced me with a malignant look and said, “I don't care who in the Devil it belongs to, you shall not have it.” . . .

In April, 1830, I again asked Hiram for the stone which he had borrowed of me; he told me I should not have it, for **Joseph made use of it in translating his Bible.** (*Mormonism Unveiled*, Painesville, Ohio, 1834, pages 240, 241, 242 and 247)

The Mormon historian B. H. Roberts accepted the story that Joseph Smith's stone was found in a well. He made the following statement in the *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, vol. 1, page 129:

The **seer stone** referred to here was a chocolate-colored, somewhat egg-shaped stone which the Prophet found while digging a well in company with his brother Hyrum, for a Mr. Clark Chase, near Palmyra, N.Y. It possessed the qualities of Urim and Thummim, since by means of it—as described above—as well as by means of the Interpreters found with the Nephite record, Joseph was able to translate the characters engraven on the plates.

The Mormon Apostle John A. Widtsoe stated:

Some use was made also of the seer stone and occasional mention was made of it. This was a stone found while the Prophet assisted in digging a well for Clark Chase. By divine power this stone was made serviceable to Joseph Smith in the early part of his ministry. (*Joseph Smith—Seeker After Truth*, by John A. Widtsoe, page 267)

George Q. Cannon, who became a member of the First Presidency, stated:

One of Joseph's aids in searching out the truths of the record was a peculiar **pebble or rock** which he called a **seer stone**, and which was sometimes used by him in lieu of the Urim and Thummim. This stone had been discovered to himself and his brother Hyrum at the bottom of a well; and under divine guidance they had brought it forth for use in the work of translation. (*Life of Joseph Smith*, by George Q. Cannon, page 56)

Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, made this statement concerning Joseph Smith's "stone":

These plates were found at the north point of a hill two miles north of Manchester village. Joseph had a stone which was dug from the well of Mason Chase, twenty-four feet from the surface. In this stone he could see many things to my certain knowledge. **It was by means of this stone he first discovered these plates.**

In the first place, he told me of this stone, and proposed to bind it on his eyes, and **run a race**, with me in the woods. A few days after this, I was at the house of his father in Manchester, two miles south of Palmyra village, and was picking my teeth with a pin while sitting on the bars. The pin caught in my teeth, and dropped from

my fingers into shavings and straw. I jumped from the bars and looked for it. Joseph and Northrop Sweet also did the same. We could not find it. I then took Joseph on surprise, and said to him—I said, "Take your stone." I had never seen it, and did not know that he had it with him. He had it in his pocket. **He took it and placed it in his hat**—the old white hat—and placed his face in his hat. I watched him closely to see that he did not look one side; he reached out his hand beyond me on the right, and moved a little stick, and there I saw the pin, which he picked up and gave to me. I know he did not look out of the hat until after he had picked up the pin.

"Joseph had had this stone for some time. There was a company there in that neighborhood, who were digging for money supposed to have been hidden by the ancients. Of this company were old Mr. Stowel—I think his name was Josiah—also old Mr. Beman, also Samuel Lawrence, George Proper, **Joseph Smith, Jr.**, and his father, and his brother Hiram Smith. They dug for money in Palmyra. Manchester, also in Pennsylvania, and other places. When Joseph found this stone, there was a company digging in Harmony, Pa., and they took Joseph to **look in the stone for them, and he did so for a while**, and then he told them the enchantment was so strong that he could not see, and they gave it up. There he became acquainted with his future wife, the daughter of old Mr. Isaac Hale, where he boarded. He afterwards returned to Pennsylvania again, and married his wife, taking her off to old Mr. Stowel's, because her people would not consent to the marriage. She was of age, Joseph was not.

"After this, on the 22d of September, 1827, before day, Joseph took the horse and wagon of old Mr. Stowel, and taking his wife, he went to the place where the plates were concealed, and while he was obtaining them, she kneeled down and prayed. He then took the plates and hid them in an old black oak tree top which was hollow. . . .

"The money-diggers claimed that they has as much right to the plates as Joseph had, as they were in company together. They claimed that Joseph had been a traitor, and had appropriated to himself that which belonged to them. For this reason Joseph was afraid of them, and continued concealing the plates. . . ." Joseph had before this described the manner of his finding the plates. He **found them by looking in the stone**, found in the well of Mason Chase. The family had likewise told me the same thing.

"Joseph said that the angel told him he **must quit the company of the money-diggers**. That there were wicked men among them. He must have no more to do with them. He must not lie, nor swear, nor steal. (Interview with Martin Harris, *Tiffany's Monthly*, 1859, pages 163, 164, 165, 167, and 169)

On April 23, 1880, the *Salt Lake Tribune* printed what was purported to be the agreement between Joseph Smith and the other money-diggers:

End of sample pages.  
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